

INTERVIEW: SIDIVAL FILA

James Barron: When did you start making art for the first time?

Sidival Fila: When I was 16, in Brazil. It is a desire that has always been present in me, to make art, ever since I was a boy.

JB: Tell us about your religious journey and how your art communicates this.

SF: I have been a Franciscan friar for 30 years now. I believe that my religious being expresses itself in my art wherever spirituality is seen.

JB: Describe to us how your artistic practice adapts to your religious practice.

SF: At the beginning of my conversion, the two needs were irreconcilable; in fact I abandoned art, which had until then been inconceivable. Now I express what I am and what I experience through art and I have managed to reconcile the two disciplines. It is a real privilege to live in a convent in the Roman Forum; it is a source of inspiration, but above all an education in beauty. The desire to live in a rich and stimulating cultural environment, as only Europe could offer, is what brought me to Rome.

JB: As a Franciscan Friar, tell us how it felt, after taking the oath of poverty, to influence the lives of so many students from poorer countries. It must have been incredibly rewarding.

SF: I leave only a small part to the convent, the smallest part. The rest I use to help poor children around the world. I have no personal needs and nurture a profound distrust of money, but knowing the fruits of my work can be used to create things which help others makes me happy. My cousin was director of a school for street children in Brazil, and my first donation went to him.

JB: Your work is extremely laborious. Do you find working meditative?

SF: In part it is, but in general the meditative aspect is more present during the part of the day dedicated to my main occupation, as a religious person. More than a meditative practice, it is a feeling of being in the world, of making things.

JB: If you could describe your work with various adjectives, what would they be?

SF: I can't find direct adjectives ... in general, my art can be defined as ontological, where the object must mean what it is. A quest that gives voice to those with no voice. For example, Color has nothing to do with the psychological dimensions of red, yellow or blue. I'm interested in color as color. A piece is finished when I perceive its form, its harmony. Then it's done. That's it.

JB: How do you see your work in relation to Italian Modernism, for example Manzoni, Castellani, Bonalumi and Fontana?

SF: They are artists I discovered later, but rather than being inspired by them I see myself as a fellow traveler. I wasn't inspired by Burri; I saw myself in him.

JB: Tell us about the habit of folding the fabric, whether it be canvas or old fabric, and what does sewing mean to you?

SF: Artistic gesture is important for me, and sewing and folding fabrics are acts that allow me to create bonds. More than just being the expression of a positive attitude towards the world, they result in traction, which animates and energizes matter, allowing it to live again and express itself, moving from flatness to three-dimensionality.

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