Monumental Art
The Starkness Is Striking

By David Neilsen
Photography by Michael Mundy
the large CorTen
and stainless
steel structures
vary in height and
shape, but they
are all connected
by the same
themes. They are
ordered. They are
architectural. They
are minimalistic,
yet on a far-from
minimal scale. They are the monumental
sculptures of French Sculptor Marino di
Teana (1920-2012), and they are a sight to
behold.

"What I love about the work of [di Teana]
is that he always conceived of things on a
small scale, like the size of this," says
Benoist F. Drut, holding his thumb and fore-
finger a couple of inches apart. "Then they
would grow. From that little sculpture it
could evolve into something for a table, or it
could evolve into a monumental piece. He
would study the work on a small scale, and
then he would do a bigger scale."

Drut is Gallery Principal of Maison Ger-
ard, an art gallery in New York City. Curating
an exhibit of his fellow countryman’s work
has proven a joy beyond his expectations. "I
love monumental sculpture," he says. "But
for me to create an exhibit, I need to have a
connection [to the art] that can translate
into not sleeping all night because ‘Oh my
God I have to have it.’ When I saw [di
Teana’s] work, I immediately, selfishly,
thought it would be perfect for me. I love
these shapes."

Each sculpture is a combination of lines,
angles, and arcs all connected in a precise,
orderly manner. "In a sculpture like Liberté,
you can really appreciate the layers and lay-
ers of the piece," he says, referring to a
seven-foot-tall sculpture included in the ex-
hibition. "You see the depth, how you have
an arch which is brilliant on its own level,
then more in front, more in back. It’s really
complex, and yet when you look at it, it
looks effortless."

In true Marino di Teana fashion, there are
other versions of Liberté in existence rang-
ing in size from just under three feet tall to
one located at the Place Charles de Gaulle
in Fontenay-sous-Bois, France, which tow-
ers an impressive sixty-nine feet above the

ground. Until recently, it was the largest
steel sculpture in all of Europe.

He has many works in public places
throughout France. As a trained architect,
he received many commissions from official
government entities. "He was the darling of

the French Government," explains Drut,
"because you could order something—a
sculpture for the town—and it would be de-
ivered on time. The man would exactly
know the physics, the size, nothing was left
to chance."

Eying his monumental sculptures, it is
easy to see the architect within the artist.
"Every sculpture, or most of them that we
know of, were designed with the idea that
one day [the design of the sculpture] could
be a building," says Drut. "Sometimes you
will see a drawing of one of his sculptures
and there are lines, and the lines corre-
spond to different floors, some of which
even have balconies." As if to prove the ar-
chitectural worth of his sculptures, di Teana
would sometimes stage one of them as a
fully-functioning building, sometimes plac-
ing little figures standing all around it,
bringing it to life.

Di Teana’s life work has been kept alive by
his son, Nicola. "He has basically dedicated
his life to protecting the [warehouse] which
houses all of his father’s work," says Drut.
"It’s also attached to the house where di
Teana lived." Drut walked the corridors of
the warehouse, located some 45 minutes
"In a sculpture like Liberté, you can really appreciate the layers and layers of the piece."

Upcoming show
Maison Gerald will be presenting the work of Marino di Teana at the new to open the "7 Lakes Club" in Stotesburg, NY in the Fall.
outside of Paris, and together Drut and Nicola selected pieces for this exhibit, which will be the first solo exhibition of Marino di Teana's work in the United States.

An exhibition of this magnitude would overwhelm a traditional gallery space. Drut expects to exhibit somewhere between twenty and twenty-five pieces, many of them over six feet tall. Well aware of this, Maison Gerard is presenting the exhibition not at one of their galleries in the city, but off-site on the grounds of the historic Grosvenor Atterbury Mansion in Southampton. Some of the pieces will be set inside the mansion, and others within the landscaped gardens of the estate.

"A friend of mine who is a landscape designer has taken over the grounds with the blessing of [the owner]," explains a very excited Drut. "She moved trucks and trucks of grass and planted 15,400 plants. Once you drop your car off, you will arrive in a sinuous way with flowers going from white to red, interrupted by a fountain in the middle. Then you will arrive at what I call the esplanade, which is a held with seven of the monumental sculptures, the tallest being eleven or twelve feet. There's no path. No proper way to discover [the exhibit]."

The show will run from July 22nd to August 26th, after which, Drut plans to bring it north. "We've not yet finalized everything, but it's going to Rockland County," he insists. He is in discussions with locations in and around Sloatsburg and Tuxedo Park. "Tuxedo Park is really an amazing area. It is so insane, so beautiful. It's really very special, and I think by default it's going to be really dreamy, the perfect setting for these pieces.

www.maison Gerard.com."