

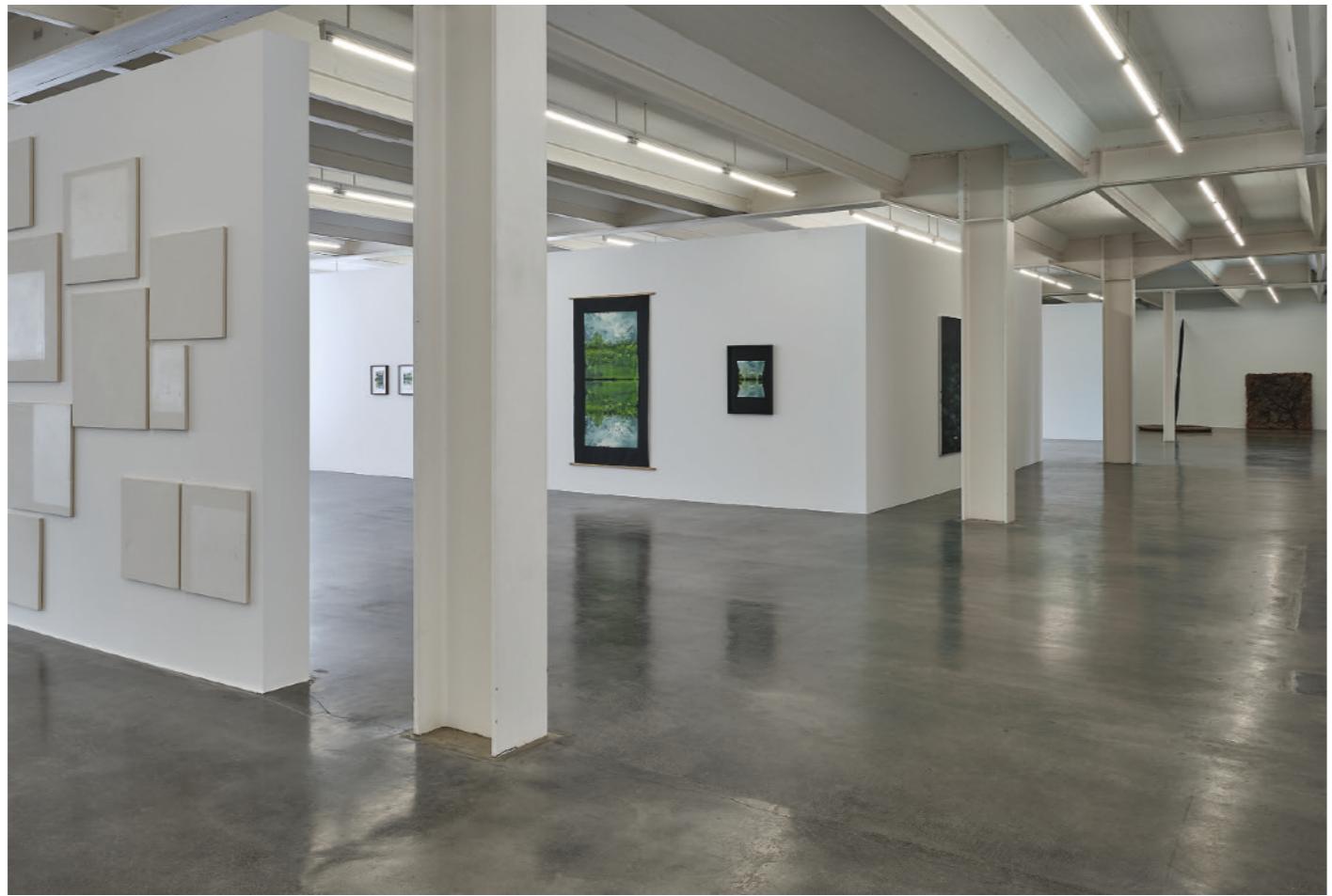
False Marble and Glowing Stars:  
Carrara with Gastini, Spagnulo,  
Zorio.

Kunstmuseum Reutlingen | konkret

Curator: Holger Kube Ventura

The poetic group exhibition *False Marble and Glowing Stars* presents some forty works by four artists from Northern Italy who appeal to both feelings and the intellect, mediating between perception and concept. The artists combine discursive and intuitive methods, uniting emotional and rational approaches. The exhibition juxtaposes works from the 1970s by three renowned artists of a similar generation—some of whom are associated with Arte Povera—with a selection of works by a much younger artist whose oeuvre is developing in the twenty-first century. This allows past trends to be compared with its further developments in the present. In keeping with its program, the Kunstmuseum Reutlingen | konkret once again proposes rethinking the supposedly historical term “Concrete Art” on the basis of neighboring positions.

The art of Linda Carrara (b. 1984) reflects the mimetic dynamics of painting, and her works always seek to evoke an immersive experience. Many of her creations are direct imprints of nature, by which its “material” can be experienced firsthand. Frottages of tree bark, forest floors, and sandy pond bottoms create an “all-over” of “the world” and at the same time have very concrete physical counterparts. While Carrara’s *Esami di realtà* (Reality Tests) actually allow glimpses into the interior of seen landscapes through axis reflection of the painting material, works from the *Sulla superficie* (On the Surface) series create landscapes without scale from streaks of different liquids: They could be microscopically small or infinitely large. Similarly, the *trompe l’œil* works in the *Falscher Marmor* (False Marble) series are not concerned with the visual appearance of this natural stone, but rather with complex mental images that can be permeated by both cultural codes and subjective longings.



Thus, all of Carrara's works reveal, or rather embody, latent realities. What can be seen in them always challenges the cognitive value of "reality." The membrane of nature—the layer between its inner essence and its outer form—has been transformed by the artist into painterly gestures and traces to achieve a deeper understanding of reality.

The other three artists—Marco Gastini (1938–2018), Giuseppe Spagnulo (1936–2016), and Gilberto Zorio (b. 1944)—are from an older generation. They all worked in Milan and Turin around the same time, and they were all influenced by the political and cultural upheavals in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. Following the revolt against institutions, euphoria about progress, and optimism about technology, a multifaceted search for a new place for the individual emerged. The lost unity of body and mind, passion and intellect, culture and nature was to be restored. As Ingrid Rein noted, this seemed impossible within the framework of existing artistic styles, techniques, and means. Therefore, materials came into use which seemed elementary as they were hardly marked by high culture: Earth, iron, wood, cardboard, glass, lead, wax, water, sand, and ash became "embodiments of spiritual-sensual, but not programmatically defined, connections." Artists incorporated "reality" in the form of quotations from nature and culture directly into their works, often entrusting themselves—as Germano Celant, who coined the term *Arte Povera*, described it—to "those dream and myth structures of Italian and European culture that run independently of technological and industrial requirements." Most of the works presented here, all of which are from the museum's holdings, were created between 1967 and 1980, a period that witnessed the gradual replacement of the term *Arte Povera* by the subsequent *Transavanguardia* "Tension," like "energy," was a term Marco Gastini often used to describe his artistic concerns. To him, drawing and painting were always vehicles for pushing pictorial surfaces into the surrounding space and charging them with energy. His serial works in the collection of the Kunstmuseum Reutlingen | konkret, and in particular the monumental wall installation *42.12 m<sup>2</sup> di pittura* (42.12 m<sup>2</sup> of Painting), which is made of thrown lumps of lead, demonstrate his conceptually reflective approach to action painting and his interest in creating unstable spaces.



These and other all-over works by Gastini appear to be excerpts from something on a global scale, as if viewed through a microscope or telescope.

During one of his most important creative phases, Giuseppe Spagnulo—who came from a background in constructivist sculpture and concrete plastic art—addressed universal human themes, such as the longing for lost contact with nature. His artistic exploration of the cultural roots of humanity led him to ancient mythology. For example, his multi-part magnum opus, *Le armi di Achille* (The Weapons of Achilles) evokes the archaic world of Homer and visually expresses the tragic, Apollonian-Dionysian nature of humanity. Man created a spear, shield, and armor out of terracotta and iron with his hands, while the conflict between creative forces is manifested by ash and sand covering the contours of geometric forms.

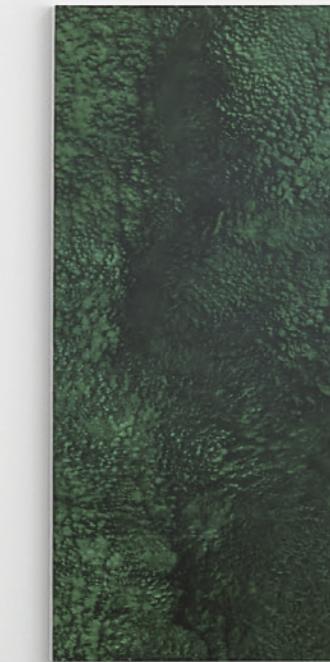
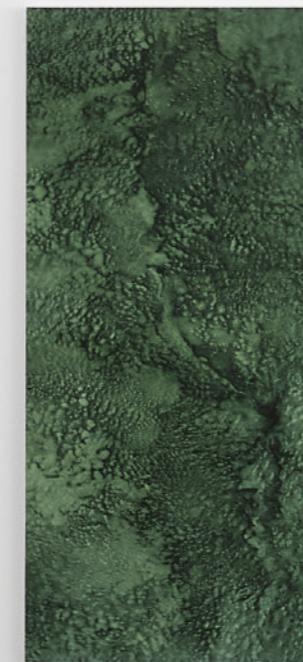
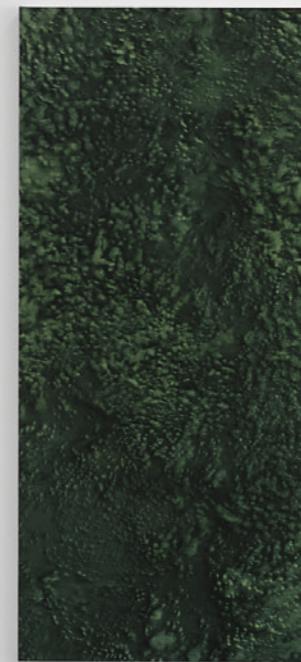
In Gilberto Zorio's art, "energy" is a key concept in terms of physical-chemical as well as emotional and rational processes. Whenever moments of action, change, movement, acceleration, inhibition, or destruction can be read in his works, they are meant as manifestations of energy. Since 1972, the artist's oeuvre has revolved around the pentagram, which has stood for millennia as a magical symbol of universality, wholeness, and endlessness. In *Stella incandescente* (Glowing Star), its shape is formed from a glowing wire, making this installation not only energetic in the truest sense of the word, but also dangerous—all the more so as it also points a spear at its viewers, the first weapon used by humans that was capable of overcoming distance.

The assemblage of works by these four artists creates a kaleidoscopic neighborhood along the themes of nature, energy, myth, and mimesis. In each case, the artistic gesture, the expressive potential of the material itself, and elementary experiences (with earth, water, air, fire, time, and space) play a tangible role. The title, *False Marble and Glowing Stars*, serves as a cipher for this concept. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Linda Carrara for her passionate commitment during the preparation of this extensive project. I would also like to thank my colleague, Jolanda Bozzetti, for her contribution to this volume and for supporting the exhibition in so many ways. The exhibition could not have been realized without the dedicated cooperation of all my other colleagues at the Kunstmuseum Reutlingen.















Naturalis Historia

Linda Carrara. The walks.  
The mirrored landscapes.  
The moon and the sun.

Text by Rossella Farinotti

ph. Ilaria Maiorino and the artist

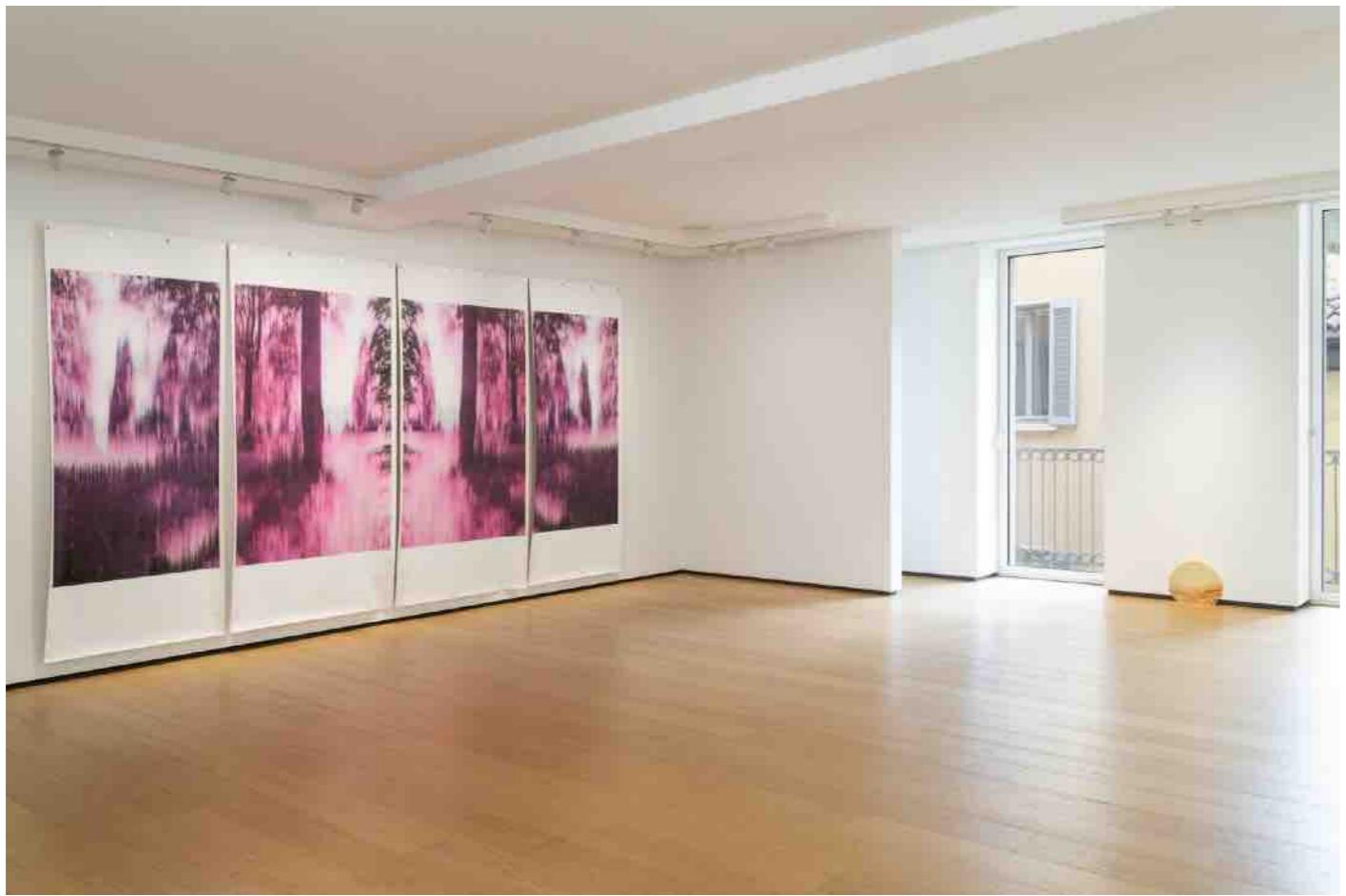
BUILDING GALLERY MILAN 2024

Linda Carrara. The walks. The mirrored landscapes. The moon and the sun.

It's not like I want the moon  
August 14<sup>th</sup>. Villa d'Adda. Linda Carrara's studio in her hometown is still undergoing renovation. She is taking care of it, as with her laboratory-house in Affori and her studio in Bresso. It is a slow process, which the painter has also undertaken to take stock of the past and present. In one room, in fact, layers of works that are at least ten to fifteen years old are beginning to form. They are sorted by size, and placed in an iron rack. On the walls and on the floor, as well as in some still raw gray cement rooms, or on the newly laid wooden floor, new experiments can already be seen. She took refuge in this place during the summer to study, work, paint. On the unpainted walls, there are even some new color tests; not greens, reds or blues, as I expected from the last frottage, but a series of blacks and grays. Looking around, I understood why. As with every project that restarts, Carrara sticks to a new path with linguistic codes that take new ways while remaining recognizable in the matrix. On the studio floor, there are tondi representing moons, made with the oil frottage technique. This subject is a new landing place for the painter: its spherical shape, three-dimensional matter, and surface reminiscent of the frottages made in recent years are new elements that adhere to past, sedimented and personal research.

The moon is a pure object, which man has taken under siege for centuries, but which still underlies forces and mysteries that we cannot condense into a single narrative. Perhaps, Linda decided to draw it, to paint it as a subject that repeats itself in each of its forms, in each of its moon phases, to control its mutations, perceptions, experiences. The moon, that "celestial earth"<sup>1</sup> in which this world can be mirrored. The moon here represents the night. Night represents the pause from where we begin again.





But how green it is around here. Time and space.

"What a beautiful day. Also, here it's all green, that's why it's beautiful. Today I go, I go further now. I saw a green, a pink and a red. An amaranth married to a white. And the park, two mysterious benches. Without a color they looked gray and were empty"<sup>2</sup>. Again, in the country studio, there are large rectangular windows from which nature can be seen. On the left of one of these slits toward the outside, Carrara hung photographs of landscapes. These are the places near the Adda River—you can tell by its water, by a large very Leonardo-like rock in the center, reminiscing of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, from which the painter was inspired in the past for the first frottages she made in Italy—the rock was seen and photographed by the artist during her walks. *The first walk*, for example, is the title of the polyptych exhibited at Fondazione ICA Milano in 2022, or, the year before, of the large painting representing a pond, installed beyond two large oak beams, also modified by the artist, at The Open Box. The green, the nature, the walk: this is where time and space find the correct balance for Linda Carrara. It is from here that good work can be made, thanks to the experience<sup>3</sup> deepened and absorbed in these places, that, whether through the technique of frottage that directly steals some elements on the place of origin, or, through the photography and, of course, drawing, one can bring home at least a trace of that moment, of that feeling of solitary peace within a walk that becomes a new imaginary. In these landscapes, day and night were ambivalent. The artist did not care to define time; in the meantime, it was enough to outline their space. In *Naturalis Historia* at BUILDING Linda Carrara separates the moments: there is night and then there is day. They are two divided elements, following one another, even interpenetrating one into the other, representing two very different imaginaries, both equal, livable, natural.

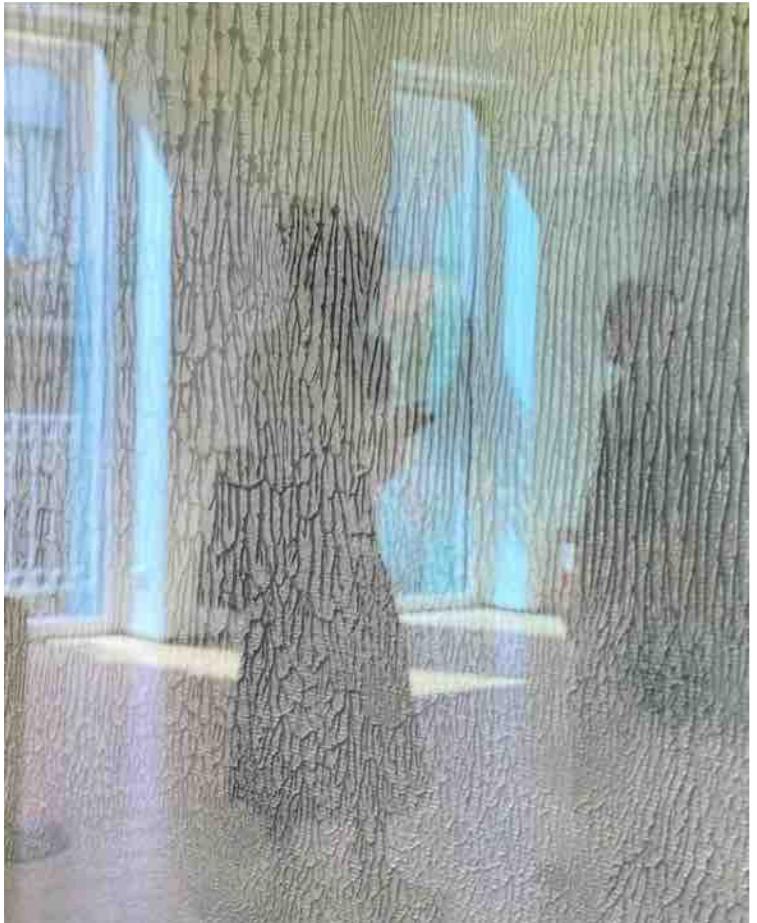


Photo Miyuki Yajima

When an ant is born it already knows what to do with its life. The man does not.

I have always been struck by this statement Linda Carrara said to me many years ago. The certainty of this statement about our condition as humans was a key for understanding the subjects the artist chose to depict. From the figurative style of the first exhibitions, where the human was a recurring subject, especially the female, to the focusing on the frame around, at first architectural, also given by its details such as floors, decorative elements, marbles, and then to still life, of which she was a forerunner in Italian painting for the generation born in the 1980s. I believe that even today for Linda Carrara the confidence and firmness - albeit changing in form - of nature or the object prevails over man, who instead, is in constant search, on a perpetual journey. In this exhibition that spans over two floors of the gallery as well Linda has dedicated her energies to nature, where suns and moons, as anticipated, are protagonists, and where the double becomes a new element of investigation. Two floors then, two elements, two entities - day and night, good and evil - and continuous doublings between aesthetics and materials. Like the well-known Rorschach spots, Carrara has created a series of pictorial works related to landscape. The oil-painted parts develop into each other, in a continuum of colors and perspectives that change from top to bottom. Skies surfacing over green terrain. Fields that underlie skies, sometimes blue, others from moving gray clouds. A dualism that introduces a more complex and mirrored vision.

One floor the night and the other the day. The second floor of BUILDING that keeps Linda Carrara's path represents a nocturnal prelude to the new narrative through images that the artist has undertaken: drawing, painting, sculpture, and stories are explored and put on display. Here is a shape of yellow Siena marble that the artist has identified, chosen and had cut in the manner of her canvases or painted beams: the split part is a moonscape. It needs no other human intervention; it looks like a painting by Linda. "It pretends to be wood," the artist tells me. Like the rocks of the Arizona desert, this stone-cortex is polished on one side, while inside is a jagged landscape, with speckles seemingly drawn in pencil. This sophisticated block is set on a black reflective roundel. The suggested context is reminiscent of Narcissus being reflected in nature, in water. After all, he fell in love with his double. Also, in the nocturne, three black landscapes are installed, made by the artist all together as in a single body of work. The aesthetic impact is that of mirrored environments on a black canvas that dialogue with the eight moons that Linda Carrara has made with frottage. The moons are represented through the different phases: from the wedge, to the quarter moon, to the gibbous, to the full moon. A prelude, in fact, that accompanies the visitor to the second floor, where from night the imagery changes to day. Here the painter accompanies the viewer into the light. The impact given by the fuchsia photographs, a body of work taken in 2004 and exhibited to the public only in London in 2024 at the exhibition *The highest degree of the human wisdom*, is most vivid: the mirrored images look at the audience as they look at each other. The narrative proceeds vertically, the movement is provided by the abstract landscape. These unseen works shore up the visual space, which, thanks to the contrivance of the mirror, make the landscape perceived asymmetrically. And then there are the three suns: the main one is a yellow Siena marble, which echoes the material of the plane below. It appears as an open spot arising from the stone itself. It is the sun rising or setting. And then a roundel in Royal yellow, which for Linda represents the "midi," the in-between moment where sun and moon exchange, the "focal point." The last sun is in green onyx and recalls, instead, an environment where layered green appears.



Indeed, a self-portrait replicated in its double. This gesture of greeting is a delicate return to the figurative, a signature of the artist to seal a moment of reflection. Carrara is a demiurge of space and its connections between different sculptural and pictorial elements. The materials investigated are sometimes treated, in other circumstances, as in the case of marble, chosen and left as they are: the stratifications, the phases of the moon, the doubles, the environments, all make themselves, once the aesthetic and narrative imagery is set.

Rossella Farinotti.

project and text by Linda Carrara

se il paesaggio è simbolico  
di Linda Carrara

Giuseppe Adamo  
Linda Carrara  
Silvia Giordani  
Lorenzo Di Lucido  
Vera Portatadino  
Fabio Roncato

BOCCANERA GALLERY MILANO

## se il paesaggio è simbolico

di Linda Carrara

[Born in Bergamo in 1984, she lives and works between Milan and Brussels.]

This is how biographies begin, and it is how I want to begin the following reflection.

To be precise, I was born in Villa d'Adda, on the banks of the river that flows from the earth in Val Alpisella, in Sondrio. That is the source to which I ascended through the river, which transforms and changes itself, bend after bend and step by step, into different landscapes that follow one another during the ascent. The Adda river is mighty and impetuous in the Tre Corni gorges - the place from which Leonardo da Vinci drew inspiration for the background of his "The Virgin of the Rocks." It gradually narrows until it turns into a stream and, finally, into an uncomplicated expanse of gravel that releases water, ascending the Val Fraele.

It appears as if by magic. Observing those stones seeping a cold and transparent liquid has something that leaves one astonished. The word Adda, which should derive from the Latin verb "abdere" - meaning "to hide" - intrinsically reveals these magical and discovered possibilities in its name. Therefore, Adda is a river that shows itself and hides at the same time, and, above all, it keeps its true nature secret from visible appearances.

It is surreal to be at the source and think that, miles away and in the imagination of my experience, that gentle flow of water will become an impervious river, tamed sometimes by dams but hiding whirlpools and currents with a terrifying force under its apparent calm surface, well-known to those born beside.





I grew up there, along the river that Leonardo da Vinci studied closely to understand the movements of water and the currents under the surface of the visible, in order to penetrate and discover the secrets of nature and explore its matter. It's as if Leonardo were searching for "the Universalsecret" to unveil the elements' very character, and as if his grotesque portraits weren't reserved only for the human soul. In his drawings, Leonardo captures both the amazement of the forms of appearance and the scientific study of nature. He passes down the eras' geological stratifications, the divine sense of light and leaves, the mathematical and geometric structure of the forms. He describes the dynamics, the slow transformations, and the hidden force of nature that can instill serenity and terror simultaneously, as emerges from his sketches about waters that break through and consume everything found in their passage.

The Adda River is not baptismal but wild, almost to excess, and to the point of constantly remin- ding of the symbolism of death. In his radio conversations on the Poetry of Matter, Gaston Bache- lard tells well about this death symbolism by defining the abysses as an "image of the unfatho- mable and the water as the mystery of vertigo which attracts and frightens."

Just think of water, commonly transparent but revealing itself through its imaginary mirroring surface and thanks to the light of the reality that strikes it. On that surface and in this palindrome vision, we get lost as Narcissus did. Through that surface, the world can be observed upside down, fee- ling as if in front of that afterlife which is talked about so much but of which it doesn't have a real imagination.

Facing that fragile reflecting veil separating two dimensions, the real and the unknown depth, an incomparable limbo emerges. A fascinating double upside-down viewing, which is sacred and dia- bolical at the same time, a perfect symmetry image showing perfection and the demonic - whose symbols are turned upside down par excellence. Therefore, the water's surface tells of the images' superficiality and, in doing so, opens the doors to its depth and to what lies beneath the surface.

Something hidden to the eyes but loved and feared by our mind.

Spontaneously and without intentionality, nature does what the artist likes investigating. Nature creates images and imaginaries, mirroring the truth, becoming mimetic or pretending to be bigger and more powerful than it is, like a delicate butterfly that acts to be a fearsome animal because of the two eyes painted upon its wings.

Perhaps its secret is acting without the intention of showing up; and this is what nature does: it changes, adapts to events and, firstly, thinks about its survival.

With his poetics, Bachelard leads us on a journey into the four elements, such as primordial and dominant images of humanity that found humanity's beliefs. Water, Air, Earth, and Fire are described as creative and destructive forces, highlighting their essence and poetical principles. Bachelard pretends a faithful immersion into the founding matter of everything and to rethink our "pre-cultural" origins and innate attachment to matter and, therefore, to the true origin of human beings. As with the four elements, human beings develop, grow, change, act, and disappear.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

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Thanks to a beautiful conversation with an artist friend, I thought back to the earth's motions and the perpetual autophagy of the earth's crust. Moving cyclically and colliding against each other, continents dive back towards the center of the planet, the focal and gravity point, and the fire which everything eats. I found fascinating this cyclical movement of the landscape, which is like a purification.

'Gravity keeps us tied to reality' was the title of a serene and calm work with tenuous colors I realized years ago. This was a 'posed' work, reporting this sentence as a visionary and warning epitaph, a memento mori. That warning 'keeps us grounded' is like a marriage pledged by our birth, till death do us part and until the earth does not digest its bowels and rises in a new version with rediscovered purity.

The landscape changes with incredible slowness for human beings and is unrepresentable in any work of visual art. This is also the reason why the landscape survives human beings, and we will not ever be witnesses to its true mutation.

So what is the landscape's secret today, and how is the artist inclined to see it? For centuries the landscape has been the sublime element of art, the magical and symbolic material of a heavenly place, and it has raised amazement for nature and its beauty.

From the 'horti conclusi' with their geometric calm to the fantasy that has taken possession of the landscape with Bosch or Grünewald. From the harsh reality, the power of nature, and its scientific secrets discovered by Leonardo da Vinci, who could see a throne in the rocks, and up to the sunrises and sunsets realized by Caspar David Friedrich, in which men are, if present, external elements pictured in admiration.

From the waters' reflections, which have given life to uncontaminated pictures, with Constable, up to the vehement madness of Turner who models painting almost as an abstract vision of the landscape.

What is the secret today, and what are artists trying to eviscerate from these age-old visions? I repeatedly ask myself this, and for some time now, I have seen a shared interest in nature and the events of its creation. No longer the observed landscape, the landscape of the horizon that stands out in front of us.

No more the horizontality that places us outside as observers of the scene, but the total immersion in the landscape and our being part of it as a molecule. Thus the main character becomes the landscape's vertigo that puts us inside it as equals or rather as nature's sons, flesh of his flesh, on its womb and from which men draw life and benefit.

To quote a Van Gogh's reverie reported in one of his brother Theo's letters and which underlines the sweetness with which the artist interprets nature, Vincent says: 'Would it be an outstanding achievement painting the land with a piece of land? [...] in the mountain craie\* there is a soul and a life. Instead, in the Conté pencil, I find something dead. I would almost say that the craie understands what you expect. It listens intelligently and obeys while the Conté pencil is indifferent and does not cooperate'.

(\*mountain chalk-clay)

This is precisely what 'Se il paesaggio è simbolico' aims to display. The artists let materials themselves turn into something else, transforming the artistic context into a natural event. Thus erosion, sedimentation, and liquidness are art's expressive means, precisely as the essence of nature is composed of the four elements. The artists' purpose is not to focus on the images' final appearance but to absorb the external natural processes, which become co-authors of the work, 'letting spontaneously be' the materials involved as would happen inside nature.



To quote the profound words by Paolo Spinicci "the infinitely large and the infinitely small" the world is held inside an invisible grain to the human eye, and it is also something composed by the universal and endless matter, thus highlighting as what "is outside us", will survive to human beings, and makes feel lost in an exterminated cosmos.

No longer a landscape image but the evocation of an imagination of the primordial matter, perhaps innate in the human experience through the senses. Touch, sight, taste, hearing and smell. For all of that, today, artists are called to enter the landscape if the landscape is symbolic.

«we directly imagine matter, beyond shapes and colors...and men imagine more than they think». Gaston Bachelard

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ri' fugo  
curated by Emmanuel Lambion  
at Centrul de Interes  
Cluj-Napoca 2022



ri' fudo

Emmanuel Lambion

Linda Carrara is an Italian painter (b. 1984), based in Milano.

Her body of work is strongly articulated on the dialectical multifold relationships between mankind and its natural and man-made environments.

Deeply tinged with an immersive and pervasive feeling of contemplation and *mimesis*, it plays with subtle to-and-fro's between natural elements and their *trompe-l'œil* pictorial sublimations, whilst sometimes also activating and integrating them at the chore of her creative process.

It is a work of silent and resilient poetry, enhancing the eloquence of each singular element of the inner landscapes or compositions she re/creates.



The present show originates in the aesthetic shock the artist experienced upon discovering and visiting the *Grotta del Genovese* in Levanzo in the Aegadian islands, off Sicily. This Paleolithic cave, discovered in 1949, was inhabited by humans probably between 10 000 and 6 000 bc, and still preserves precious testimonies of Paleolithic civilizations, mostly animal and human portraits alongside more abstract forms. Impressed by the feeling of liminality that pervaded her upon visiting the cave, oscillating between obscurity and light, the intimate discovery of a remote ancestral past of humanity and the external pregnancy of contemporary times, Linda Carrara has endeavored to recreate this experience in the present show whose very title, *ri'fugio*, the phonetic transcription for the Italian for shelter, seems to advocate a retreat to pre- or proto-historical times.

of *In fondo al pozzo* & *La luce tra le foglie*, whilst completing the series of cosmic natural elements directly or indirectly evoked in the show.

Carrara uses the separation wall as a sort of *trompe-l'œil* stone time slab, metaphorizing the transitional feeling she felt upon entering the cave.

On the floor a labyrinthic abstract sign, inspired by old Camunian symbols and made of fudge gathered on a beach closeby, directly evokes cryptic initiatic engravings. Some drawings, similarly suggesting an attempt at tracing primordial alternative labyrinthic signs or paths, are hung in its vicinity.



The main back wall of the space presents a series of six pictorial frottage canvases entitled *La Prima passeggiata* (i.e. *The First Wandering*) envelops the viewer with its deep green vibrant shades. The technique of pictorial frottage, often used by Carrara as a sort of way to convey and transmute the inner expressivity of architectures and textures, evokes in this context the primordial forces implicitly contained by the tactile reliefs of the cave's walls.

The very gesture of frottage, activating natural silent forces at the chore of Carrara's creative process, stands in a delicate counterpoint to the signs that were painted or engraved by our ancestors in their first natural shelters.

The title of the works acts at a double level, as if it were inviting to an inner voyage that would be as much diachronic as spatial, through time and space, triggering, to quote Pessoa (*it is in us that landscapes find a landscape*), a mental landscape that can only exist in the beholder's mind.

Primordial natural light and forces emanating from the animal or vegetal worlds absorb us in the depth



ICA Milano

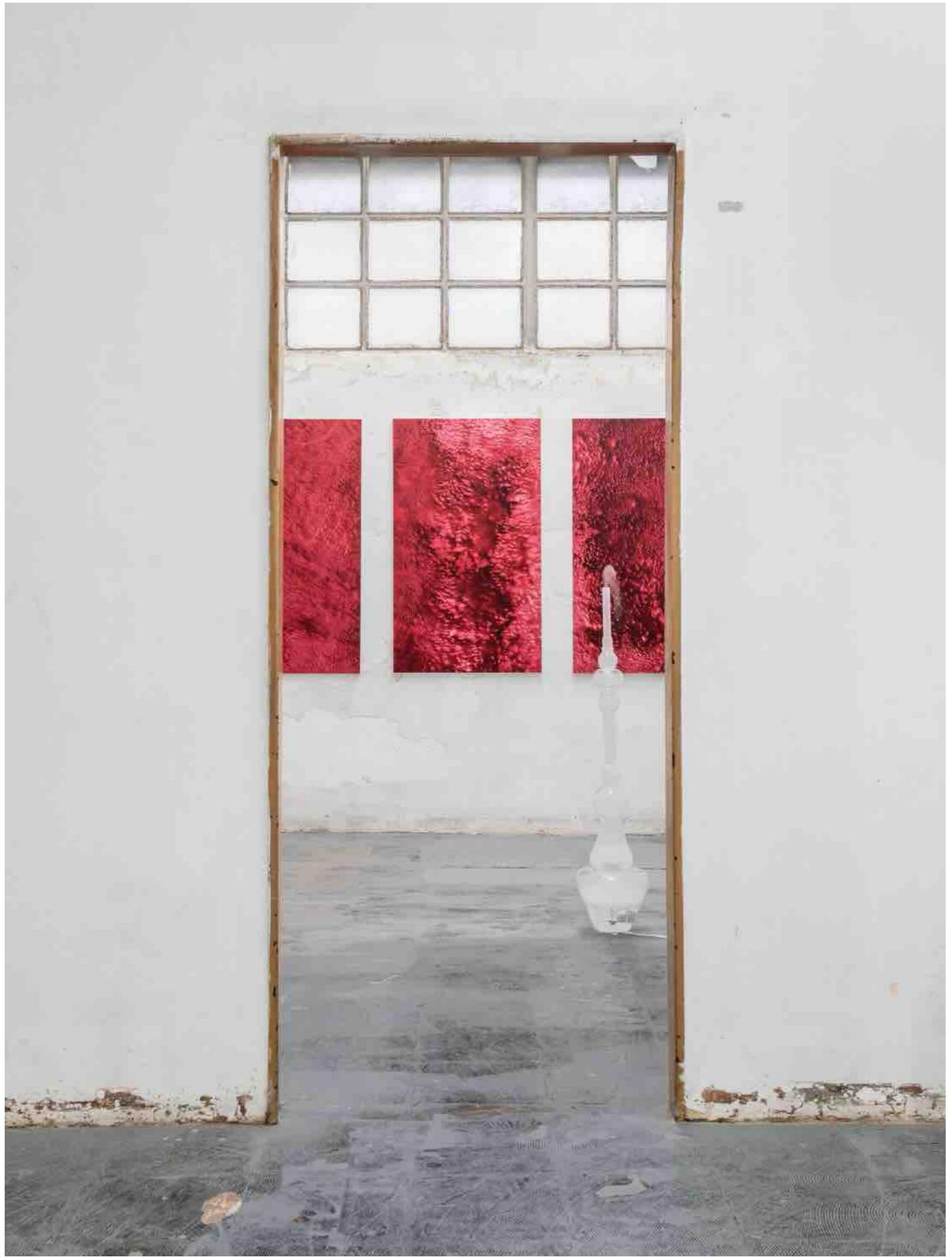
HOW FAR SHOULD WE GO?

collective show by Rossella Farinotti  
Foundation Ica\_Milano  
2022

Linda Carrara  
Lucia Cristiano  
Cleo Fariselli  
Ettore Favini  
Irene Fenara  
Silvia Mariotti  
Giovanni Oberti  
Alice Ronchi



la prima passeggiata | 2022(the first walk) polyptych, oil on canvas on 5 canvases 120 x 70 cm each one - details on previous pages



#### HOW FAR SHOULD WE GO?

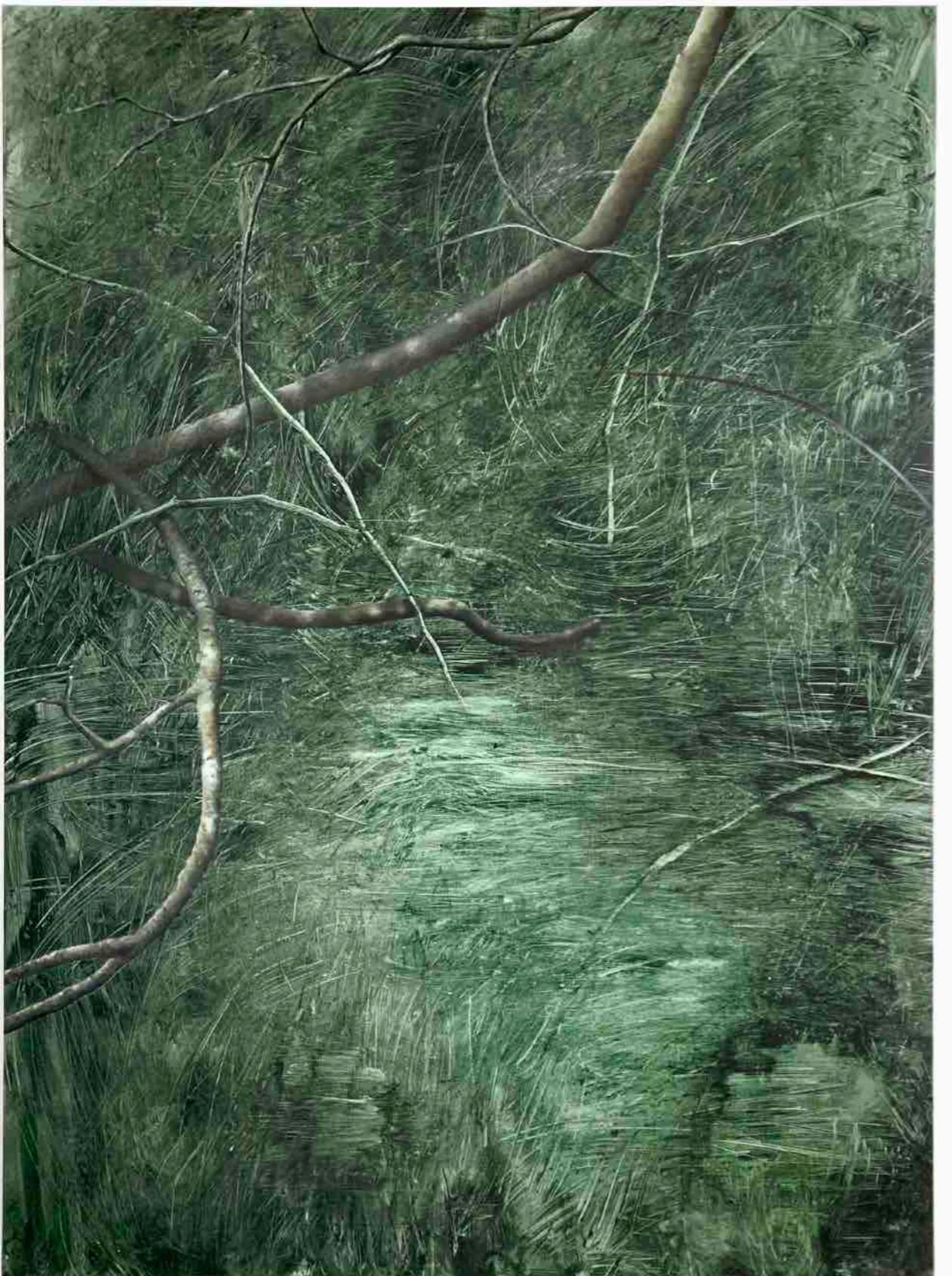
Wherever Yugo, I go

In 2019 Lucia Cristiani created *Wherever Yugo, I go*, an artwork made with the windscreen of a Yugo, a small iconic car from former Yugoslavia, on which the artist had the words "How far should we go to make something of myself?" etched on the glass with acid. Such a question, that I had read in her studio while spying the windscreen laid on the ground, triggered a reflection that encounters a common state of mind for those who embark on a personal path with a certain sensibility. How far should one go to make something of oneself? Does one go on to improve? But then, what does "going on" mean? The project developed at ICA Milano stems from a reflection that brings together visions, practises, styles and actions by artists who have made a research path starting from precise considerations: the attention - visual or emotional - and the fruition of a given environment or landscape, of a habitat that can often be redesigned, revisited and re-constructed, and of the actions that these can trigger.



#### The exhibition.

On such a layered track employing diverse media, a series of traces, fragments, ways of acting and signals emerge. On display one can observe romantic drawings, meticulously executed, of surreal visual impact, created through an intense and unexpected dialogue between the vivid nature of plants, imaginary creatures and a strong human, intimate and feminine dimension (Fariselli). Paintings made using the frottage technique, marked by a very deep red tone and an apparently neverending movement: they tell of the bowels and fires of the earth, as well as still lifes that have actively lived (Carrara). One can move from a river bank sculpted in concrete and laid on the ground, as if it was the fragile testimony of a waterway, a crossroads of passages and gestures (Favini), to bright photographs that, as if they were mirrors, portray cyanotypes which slowly develop in the water, bringing vegetable elements - seeds, plants - back to vision, as in a blurred drawing (Mariotti). Here, too, nature is fluid, but controlled and processed by human activity. And also photographic images taken from unprotected surveillance cameras, detecting natural details: palm trees, a large flower looking blurred, romantic and green. Fragments of spied landscapes that shore up the space such as signs embedded in a map (Fenara). Acting as a counterpoint to the fluidity and movement of this visual flow, is the rigour of a white, solid sculpture. Inspired by urban outdoor elements, specifically by a component used in construction, the work ironically turns it upside down, as in a children's game designed for an interior space (Ronchi). Potentially conceived for a domestic space is also the installation that recreates - through the conceptual action triggered by a mirror, a banal everyday object, water vapour and a pillow on which a nest is placed - an intimate, yet complex and oscillating, perhaps precarious environment (Oberti). Here the human being is an active observer, part of the context. It becomes landscape. And then again, in order to give back to the reader a further fragment of the exhibition, the viewer can interact with an elegant element of connection, installed at the centre of the main space to mark a rite of passage: a handmade tapestry, where refined natural elements blend with materials such as silver, strings and pearls, recalling transparent and precious herbaria (Cristiani).

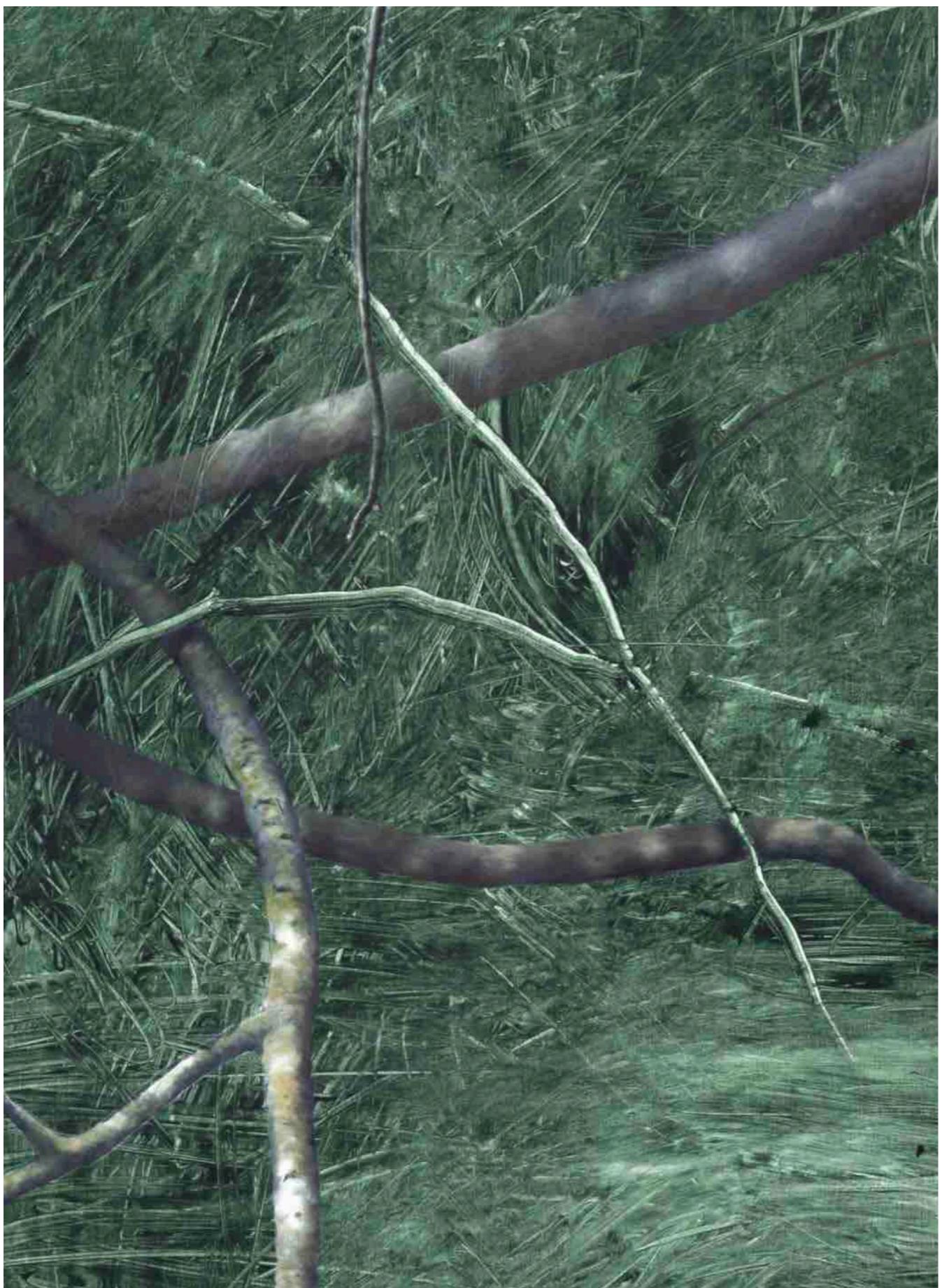


nel ventre della natura | 2021 acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 145 cm  
(in the womb of nature)

Going backwards. The landscape.

Each of the works that have just been briefly mentioned, represents the formalisation of an idea not driven by the urge to inform or educate, but from a need to express and demonstrate the existence of multiple realities and different viewpoints. Hence, the exhibition does not aim to provide solutions, but to disclose possible scenarios within or beyond its surroundings. It's a seductive and romantic action, one made not to divert the attention needed for an improvement or the restoration of a state of peace, but to activate such attention by sharpening sensitivities and energies to move forward. A backward restart? Maybe. A suggestion to take stock by going back a little bit, to then restart forward, to point out "that absent thing", *quelque chose d'absent* (Camille Claudel), that detail that had never been noticed or that wasn't there before, but that is as curious and important as the main way.

*How far should we go?* is ultimately an exhibition about landscape: the purely geographic one, contemplated from a specific point of view; the one dreamed at night or captured from a stolen image; the one that is reconstructed and activated by a specific space and function or the inner one, which is always in the foreground. An exhibition interpreted by the diverse aspect of the practice of eight artists, of different generations and linguistic codes. An exhibition that brings into dialogue artworks and installations that differ in their approach to the real, but with clear common aspects that attempt to break out from a system that, on a daily basis, gets increasingly more complex and unregulated. Or regulated by false rules, to be bypassed through education and new imaginaries. The title of the exhibition is in itself a statement for a new project, one that is not predefined and pigeonholed. *How far should we go?* re-examines a sentence extrapolated from Lucia Cristiani's work, bringing together various thoughts, crafts and visions, especially in the field of contemporary everyday life.



Paradigms. We have lost our garden.

Thus, among the narrated themes the predominant one is the landscape, observed by sophisticated points of view in dialogue not just with the environment and its architectures, but also with its voids<sup>1</sup>. Imaginaries related to still life, to living and moving nature, to stolen frames, streams of water, flaws revisited as virtues, to non-places and their branches are activated. These are some of the protagonists of a collective project where the analytical line expands beyond the socio-political-cultural boundaries of a community, as well as beyond the quick and superficial observation of things. *How far should we go?* specifically analyses the different timeless perceptions of space and movement, displacement and travel. The works that draw the exhibition's path are fragments linked by lines and aesthetics that sometimes match, reworking reality in an autonomous way, exposing aspects that perhaps have not yet been explored.

"Experience per se is but amorphous matter, dimensionless, aesthetically irrelevant" (Emanuele Trevi). Hence, experience must take shape in order to be shown, told, reprocessed. The eight poetics are interpretations capable of widening the gaze, moderating a perception or augmenting an idea. The path moves through them, like a geographical map, making analogies between one work and another, between one concept and another, between action and fruition, between an artefact and an idea. Each work is the translation of a vision, an experience or an aesthetic solution to create a balanced and fluid unicum, where beauty and thinking, complexity and ingenuity, are brought together in a narrative order.

"Man loses his original place, his abode, his habitat"<sup>2</sup> writes Agamben in his reinterpretation of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. We have lost our garden. We'll take it back. We'll rebuild it.

<sup>1</sup> "The empty space, the void, which is never actually empty, prepares, hosts and nourishes all epiphanies. Perhaps, for those who practise the craft of sculpture, being aware of it is inevitable", Gio' Pomodoro (*Sette riflessioni sulla scultura. Materiali per un'intervista*; G. Pomodoro, Laura Tansini, Sculpture XXI, 3 aprile 2002, pp. 26-27).

<sup>2</sup> G. Agamben, *Il regno e il giardino*, Vicenza, 2019, p.10.

li, dove inizia la pittura  
a cura di Davide Dal Sasso

quinto movimento di:  
L'ORA CHE FUGGE  
esposizione in 6 movimenti

Riss(e) Varese

In its Italian version the essay was originally written for the book of the exhibition 'L'ora che fugge' (The Hour that Flees), at riss(e) in Varese (Italy), to which Linda Carrara was one of the artists invited for a personal exhibition.

Linda Carrara

There, where the painting begins  
By Davide Dal Sasso



LINK to the video "still life 2016"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4KB2SGPpHY>

Making the painterly action possible is a matter of gazes and choices. The first ones allow us to scrutinize scenarios and situations, while the second ones serve as the foundation for action. We might suggest that there is a hierarchy between the two. Not only that, but also a composed and recognizable relationship that ensures the discovery of some certainty. Always, we are in search of certainties. In the arts, as in other human activities. For instance, those about their essence: what are those two ingredients of the painterly action? Gazes are not only the actual ways of seeing things but also those for rethinking them, as well as others equally crucial to form some idea of how activities will progress. In one direction or another. Choices will be made each time. Not always after a gaze, but not necessarily before recalibrating it to guide the work. The former mix with the latter. But choices are not as clear-cut as one would like, both in their indispensability and in their manifestation. Placing something elsewhere. Drawing a line instead of a circle. Covering a surface with a single color instead of two. Moving forward, declaring not to want to choose. All of these are choices. We know they exist because of the outcomes they determine.

All that work that nourishes painting, its presentations with signs and images, is not just a visual matter. Rather, it is a set of human industriousness that also animate painterly activities and naturally remain in the background. What matters is the form that will be obtained through painting, not the processes that make it possible. But if the route were somehow reversed, painting could also include the attempt to make manifest that doing. In that case, it would bring to light the stages of composition, the circumstances of anticipation, the ostentations of ornament. The limits and possibilities of decoration. Despite being indispensable, the origin of painting is also marginal. Linda Carrara is aware of this and makes it evident in everything she does.

LINK to the video " I'm a still life 2015"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb4hVrT-9Ak>

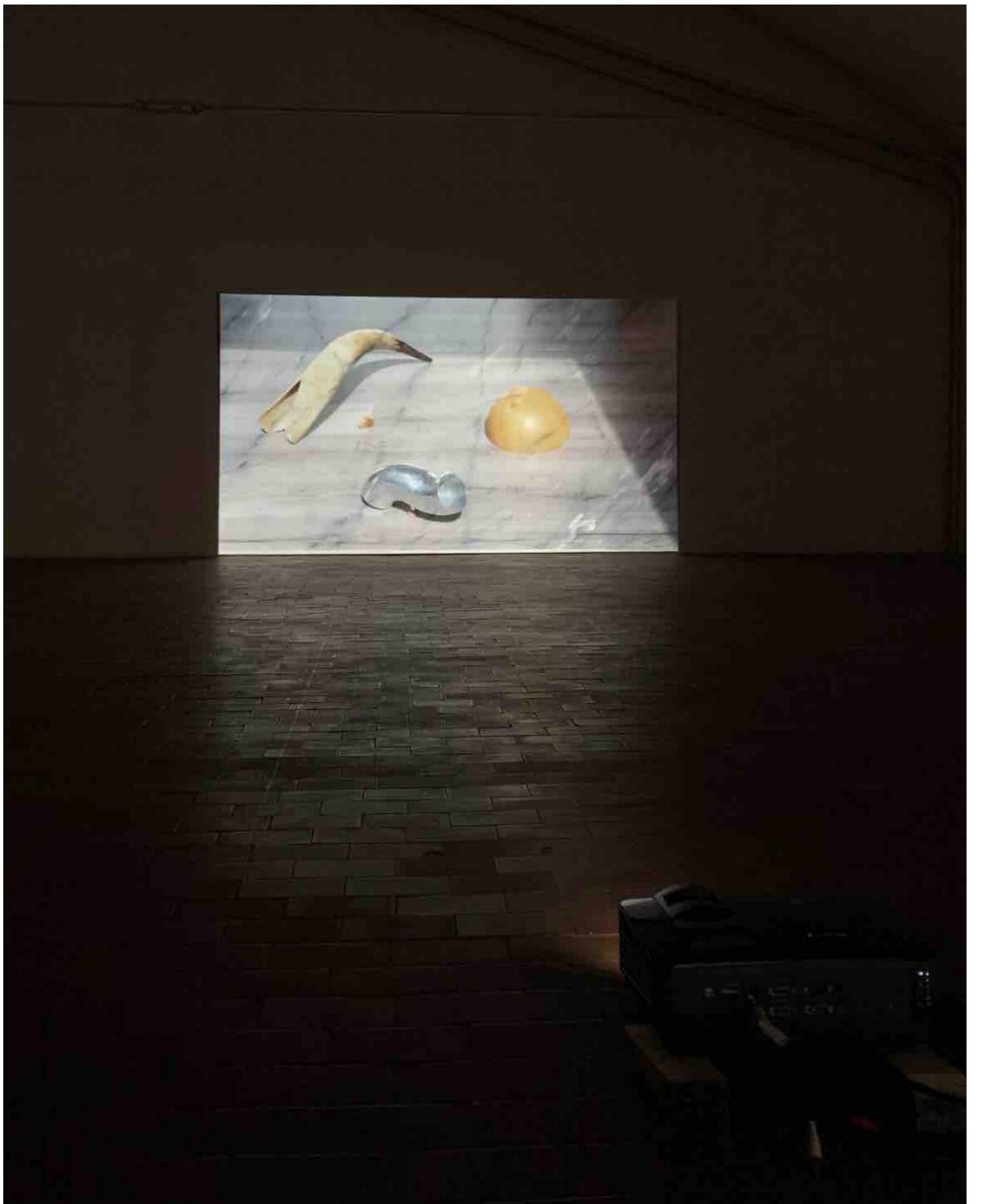


#### Interpositions

Usually, we know very little, if anything at all, about what Carrara does to create her works. What comes before and what comes after is due to her choices. How an image of a piece of paper tape - seemingly present in some of her paintings - comes to be, we do not know. Certainly, we could imagine it or reconstruct it by following the thread of her possible reflections on her work. But in the absence of this, we can only admit that *affirming is not painting*. From a metaphysical point of view, making painting does not immediately mean declaring something, sharing content through an assertion, but achieving it through multiple interpositions. They are the fruits of the limits and possibilities of representation. That is, the work the artist does to replace something with something else. Painterly work consists of substitution: of subjects through painterly traces, of contents through figures and signs. That's why something is not asserted in painting but figured, presented differently. Therefore, making use of these conditions of possibility, Carrara cultivates her poetics through a constant investigation of the very nature of painting.

#### Verifications

Of nature and materials, of earthly and everyday things. Carrara's painting is made of this, and those subjects, before being in the eyes of those who will look at them, are in her paintings. Something that becomes something else. Thus, painting is born. Thus, it develops on the path of tensions, inconsistencies, attempts, and progressions. Carrara conducts her investigation by doing, continuously keeping the right distance from both subjects and their possible positions, as well as surfaces. Doubtful about the impossibility of asserting, Carrara does not give up: she works on other possibilities, those of expression. The possibility of something like 'conceptual painting' convinces her very little, given the difference between painting and asserting. But Carrara aims to open a useful breach to question precisely that disparity. To succeed, it is necessary to work on multiple levels, inside and outside the canvas.



### Weavings

Taking shape is not only a possible image but also questions about ways to elaborate it. Carrara's painting is an interrogative one. An investigation into doing, based on her operational choices, carried out by expanding the possibilities of gazes. Consider two of them: the gaze on nature and that on materials. Through painting, they can be directed and carefully arranged according to the needs that guide it as an artistic practice. Both can also become mnemonic fragments and be shaped over and over again to obtain some image. Given a form, it will be through it that possible subjects represented on the basis of the concreteness of painterly textures can be looked at. Exactly the thing and its presentation space require due attention. For at least two reasons: they reveal the inadequacy of painterly work that Carrara constantly encounters and her attention to the possibility of not stopping at the visible but also at the revealable.

### Tympanums

Rarely is painting mere surface, even less so in Carrara's case. What can be grasped by observing it is only a beginning, the external hint of a much deeper expressiveness. Yet, we cannot do without that extension. One by one. Colors on the surface, one stroke after another. Slowly, the first ones populate the second, which becomes the space that will host a representation. Something recognizable may be in it, or not. Sometimes, just using color is enough. However, 'surface' is the proper name for the first necessary condition for painterly work. Carrara constantly reiterates it, expressing the need to use other tools to carry out her investigation. From within, on painting, by doing it. This means questioning its origin and its developments. On paper or in the mind, looking down or gazing at the horizon. A painting can be born anywhere. In those moments, possibilities manifest themselves, becoming useful resources to face uncertainties. Before being a matter of color strokes on the canvas, that of floating objects is a concatenation of perplexities concerning light and ways of occupying space, the changing dialectic between projects and processes. Carrara explores them with awareness and mastery, admitting that the path is toward another vision.



She changes course to assert, uses video to restore the times of multiple movements: those of object placements for her still lifes, those of light that changes from moment to moment. Ultimately, it is about listening.

#### Approximations

Try and retry. Add and remove. With the other framework, the video, Carrara asserts something about the work that directs painterly representation. That of which, without reversals, we would naturally know nothing. However, her goal is not so much to document its stages but to insist on her investigation into its essential ingredients, on the possibilities that allow her to listen, and on the transformations of gazes. Not only hers but also ours. The industriousness is distributed in a succession of phases that occur during the creative process in which Carrara is involved during the activities she carries out to make her work. How the process unfolded refers to moments and sudden occurrences of which we will have no or partial knowledge. In the latter case, for example, we will try to establish whether the image precedes the background or vice versa: that is, making an inference

to the best explanation to clarify the position of the spines of a hedgehog: if arranged orderly one behind the other, or relative to the background irrigated by the signs of their presence. Similarly, something could be said about a common wooden strip, a stone, a sheet of paper, a branch, or the fragment of a frame. It will be said, as is natural, in a completely approximate way. And it won't be a problem. Rather, it is the basis for all that imaginative and interpretative work that painting - since it is not a statement- encourages and arouses in the context of the deferrals it makes possible. Where we have signs of colors and textures on a surface, our narrative wanderings begin. Between one stroke and another of the brush, there is also the sown space from which shrubs of stories and conjectures will grow.





*la prima passeggiata  
The Open Box - Milano  
2021-2022*

*curated by Martina Lolli*



*It is only within us  
that landscapes  
become landscapes.*

Fernando Pessoa

In *The Book of Disquiet* Pessoa invites us to reflect on how every visual process considered to be objective is doomed to failure: the landscape is in the eyes and heart of the beholder.

In the landscape in which we daily immerse and distance ourselves it can happen that we are absorbed by correspondences and affinities capable of amplifying the laws of nature, of becoming blood of our blood, of restoring to us a gaze that concerns us. In that position we feel ourselves to be original, we blend in among entities like essences: we immerse ourselves in contemplation, losing ourselves in the scrap of world we have selected. A pacific entity that embraces our moods, the landscape allows itself to be permeated by individuals to the point where it traps us within itself, held that in the infinite play between nature and artifice, listening to the silent calls that are generated on the skin of things, awaiting the blossoming of textures on sections of tree trunks, participating in the magic of the alchemical transformation of materials.



*It is only within us  
that landscapes  
become landscapes.*

Fernando Pessoa

Existing in this *mise en abîme* is to allow thoughts to wander amongst the ricochets of identity, is to diverge infinitely into *différance*, into that deviation of meaning that Jacques Derrida regards as the basis of his philosophical thinking and which he traces in the unbridgeable distance between the expression and the meaning of a thing - between wishing to define it and its signified.

*And just as the height of transparency seems to announce itself, the most implacable opacity breaks in, an opacity that disqualifies any identity in its own right.*

It is perhaps on the crest of this opacity that the work of Linda Carrara (Bergamo, 1984) finds its natural home, as an invitation to an initiatory journey triggered by the discovery of a landscape carrying her *différance*.

Vision - suspended in a prospective directive - provides access to the sublime scenario of vibrating shapes in which we love to founder.



*It is only within us  
that landscapes  
become landscapes.  
Fernando Pessoa*

The work opens to contemplation in the literal sense: the landscape of *La prima passeggiata* ("The First Walk") captures a portion of universe and permits an exploration of a perspective in which the transparency of forms transcends their pacific evidence. It is in this moment that the image becomes icon, acquiring a wholly new opacity: the landscape exhibits its levels of meaning and the palimpsest of signs that lives within it adheres to a dimension in which the pretence-transparency can only refer to something else.

*Would it ever be possible to see  
with still eyes a landscape as if  
the man looking did not exist in a  
given place, but elsewhere?*

The icon is the place in which the *différance* is brief, the eternal minute in which the divergence between form and meaning is reduced to the minimum, an instant in which transparency and opacity are two sides of the same coin. It is to allude to the primordial form of things, where appearance crystallise as a vague purity.

It is within opacity - that unbridgeable gap in meaning - that the landscape lives, where the observer begins to see and pacific contemplation is resolved as the perfection of a vision difficult to replicate.

Martina Lolli



Chôra 2019

Curated by Giuseppe Frangi

Boccanera Gallery - Trento

THE INSIDE IN THE INSIDE  
Giuseppe Frangi

Very few artists of the past have left us the secrets of their studio. But Jan Vermeer is an exception. Many of his masterpieces are, in fact, set in a context that we can recognize every time, and that becomes nearly a point of hinge for his works. We remember that window on the left, or that back wall, often used to complete mysterious reminiscent mechanisms. We remember that floor, with black and white square ceramics, which compose sharp structures and guide our gaze in the Vermeerian "sancta sanctorum". In reality, he always keeps us in the doorway; we see the inside, but we stay outside. The "inside" is a sacred place. In fact, Daniel Arasse writes in one of his books that the dimension of Vermeer's painting is an "inside in the inside". The floor is the noticeable custodian of this dimension, because on the one hand, it endorses its existence with the accuracy of its arrangement, and on the other hand, it shows its inviolability, dividing our gaze. But there is more: for an artist like Vermeer, who has nearly always worked in the micro-space of his studio, the floor would probably end up as a cosmic reference, redrawing the orderly arrangement of the galaxies, like a mirror of the sky. I don't know if Linda Carrara feels such an attraction every time she is in her studio in Milan or Brussels. And I can only imagine how much she would give to paint the frottage of Vermeer's floor, to understand the secret pictorial energy: to go into that "inside in the inside".

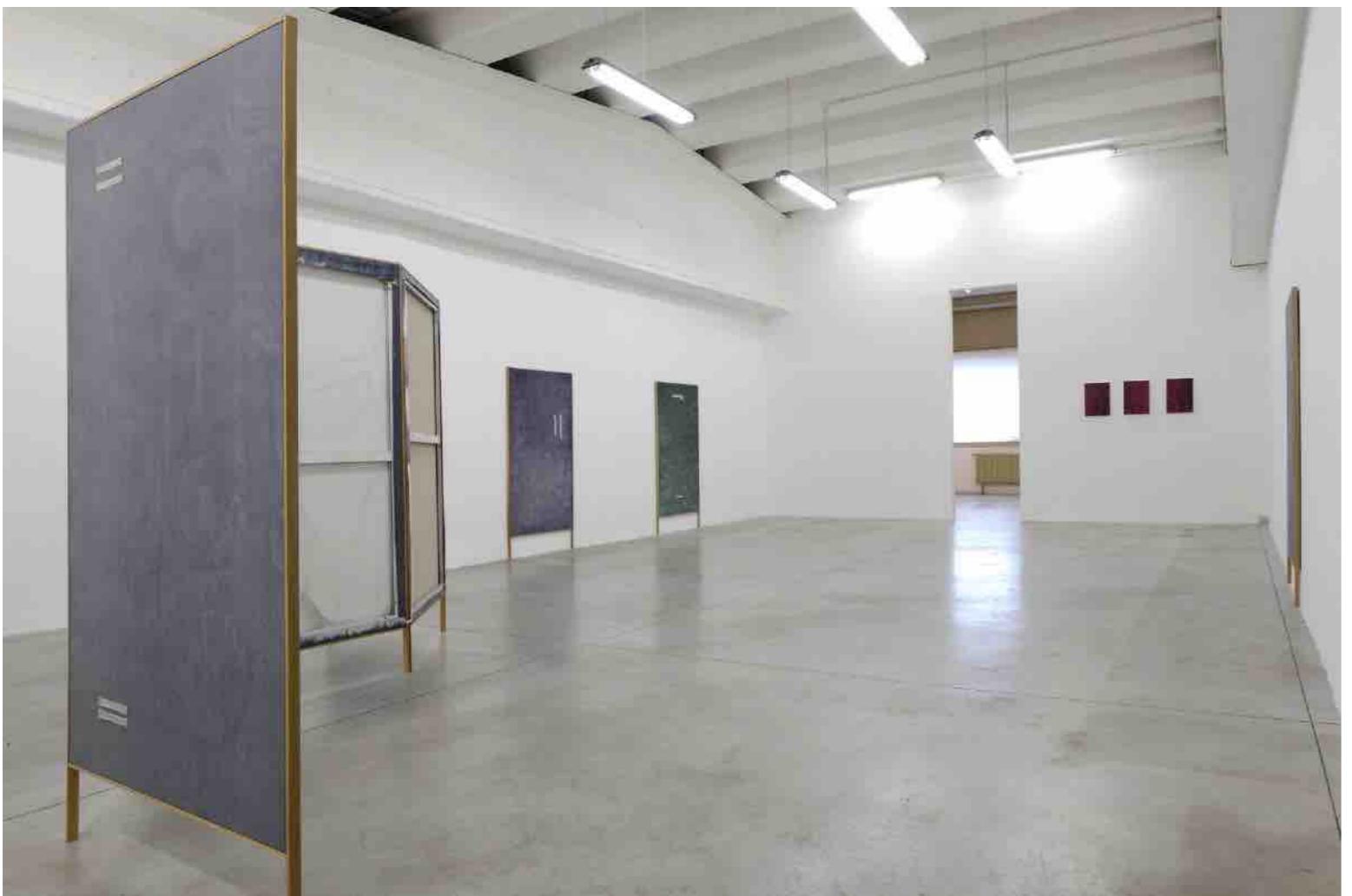
The floor, then, is the representation of a primary dimension to which the artist has been led since the moment when, as Clement Greenberg said, the easel painting was over. Greenberg was the critic who supported Jackson Pollock in his liberating destabilization and made him the prophet of a new painting. Laying the large canvases on the floor of the Long Island studio, and then letting the color drip with controlled randomness gave birth to the horizontal painting.

The floor contains in itself the paradigm of horizontality. Consequently, it means the denial of controlling reality using a gaze (that of perspective) capable of controlling it. I like to think that an ethical dimension also comes into play in this: there is, in fact, a Franciscan component in bending over the floor (it is not by chance that the saint of Assisi was sleeping and asked his family to sleep on the bare ground). One bends over it, arranges the canvas and, in Linda's case, allows it to be symbolically tattooed. The etymology of "floor" comes from "pavire", in Latin "to beat". The earth is beaten to level it and make it habitable. Linda also works using the force on the canvas to take the humble form of the ground. She stares at it, decides what the "painting" is, in the sense that she determines where it begins and ends. In the end, however, her action is to let it happen. In fact, frottage is an exercise that allows freeing painting from intentionality, pushing it, almost stressing it, so that it increasingly bends to become the skin of the real, to become itself a thing and not just a representation of the thing. In this way, Carrara participates in a vast process, because freeing painting from the limits of intentionality has marked the action of artists from the 40s onwards, in their most interesting and radical expressions.

However, she does not want to stay out, she is not discharged from the artist's responsibilities. Rather, it is an exercise of expressive subtraction, which frees the shapes each time, making them rise on her canvases, like images for the first time on the world stage. This is demonstrated by the fact that at the end of the process, what remains attached to the skin of the canvas is not an image, it is not an imprint, but rather a transfiguration: the canvas becomes the place of an event.

Her frottages move toward an indefinite dimension, which holds together the earthly and the otherworldly: windows open wide on another world. Sometimes, Carrara even feels the need to introduce, or rather to make appear, random splinters of objects, in a hyperrealistic way, to give a space in a process of perception that could disorientate.

Exhibition view "Chora" Boccanera Gallery Trento | 2029



The process towards an "inside in the inside" has produced a further development in the works by Linda Carrara; in fact, on the reverse side of the frottage, the canvas is covered with her "false Carrara marble", in this case, enlargements printed on canvas from original drawings. They are exercises in mimetic painting, surfaces in *trompe l'oeil* that insist on the ambiguity of their own substance: liquid marbles or waters with reflections of marble. We are familiar with these works.

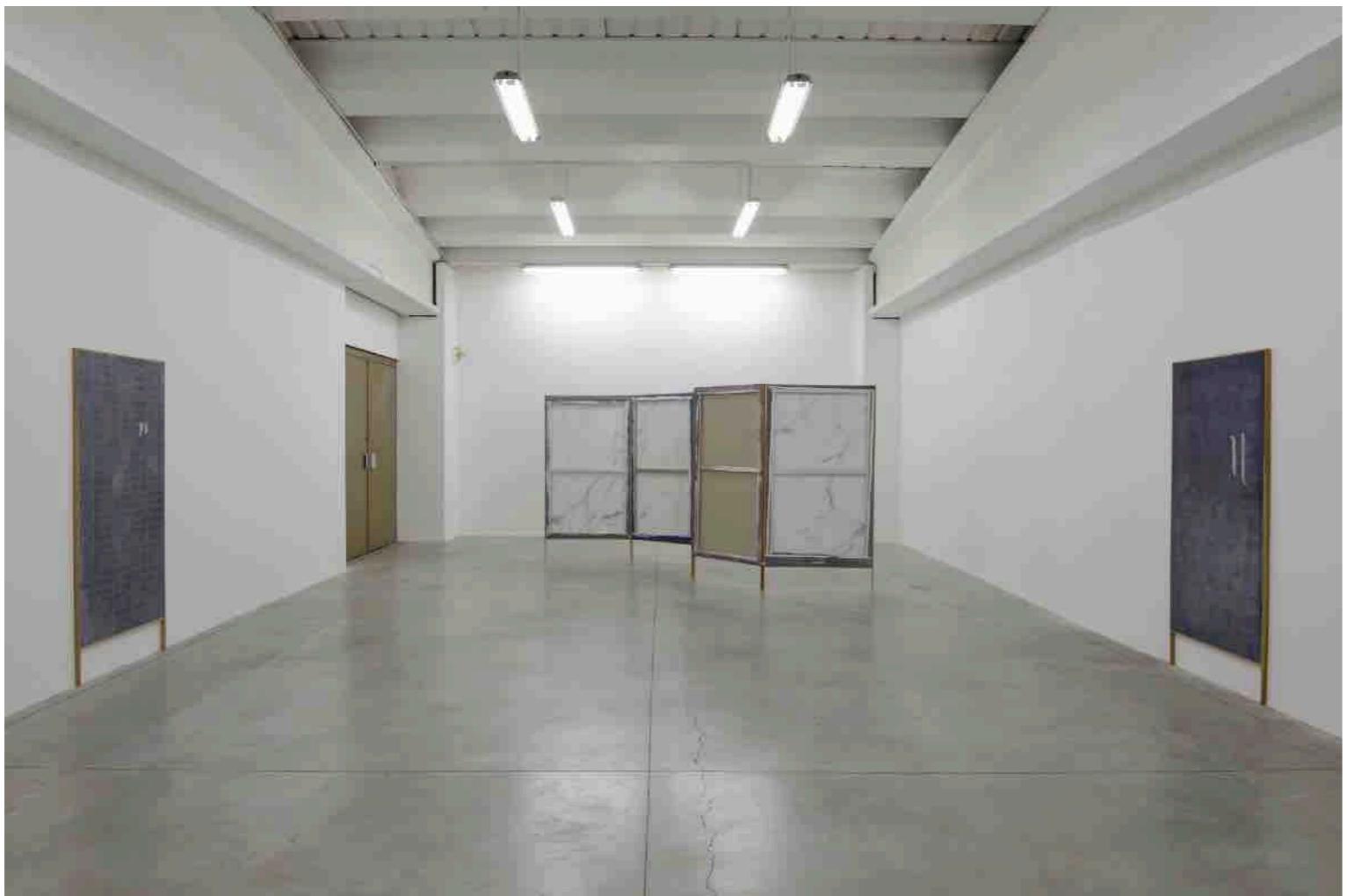
The surprise is to find them there, represented on the verso of the frottage, to indicate us something: a short circuit, a slipping of material identity, a double preciousness because it chooses to stay hidden.

Moreover, for Linda Carrara no surface is neutral, nothing is simple support, starting, as we have seen, from the surface on which we lay our feet and body every moment.

Each surface has a vocation and when the frottages are free from the destiny of becoming wall paintings and are erected like graceful trophies on strips, extensions of the frame, they have necessarily their back exposed. And here I like to think that Linda has been influenced by another great episode in the history of art. Once again, a floor: that of Simone Martini's "Annunciation" at the Uffizi Gallery. The Angel and Mary rest on an amazing marbled surface, with red veins, with curls that seem to be there to sneak out of that amber holder. Some have used those visionary surfaces for apparent fillers, just like Linda: Beato Angelico at the Convento di San Marco has painted a series of fake marbles in the corridor below the fresco with the so-called *Madonna delle Ombre*.

Apparently, a decorative solution, almost a podium for the frescoed figures, in reality, those marbles mean something else as demonstrated by Georges Didi-Huberman in his beautiful book dedicated to the great Dominican artist. He writes that those marbles function as "conversion of the gaze... they introduce the mystery, of what cannot be represented of the figure". But Didi-Huberman also hypothesizes a further explanation, i.e., that even "the marble itself would incarnate", it would participate with its mineral identity in the incarnation. It is a powerful suggestion and I don't know how much Linda knew about it since it happened to her too, without any planning, to arrive in a very similar semantic area. This is demonstrated by one of her frottages, created on the floor of a garage in the Brussels studio, to which she wanted to give the title "Flesh": in fact, on the front, the canvas accidentally left the outline of a small figure hanging, almost like an embryo, the shadow of a crucifix, which emerges, as if by fate, from the turbulence of the surface.

Exhibition view "Chora" Boccanera Gallery Trento | 2029



Linda Carrara wanted to give this exhibition a very cultured and relevant title: "Chôra". It is a term taken from Plato's "Timaeus" and indicates the space, in some ways unspeakable, in which the form unfolds its action. With a play on words, one can say that it is the space of the form in "formation". It is not, however, a mechanic process since, by entering these spaces of creation, Linda Carrara's painting opens up unforeseen possibilities. Painting is absorbed into a process of transfiguration - a transformation that makes the head of an ancient oak beam take on the nature of marble. It is painting on sculpture, another version of the "false Carrara marble": objects that surprise not so much for the illusory effect, but for the simplicity with which they made us believe that the material transformation is the result of a budding and not an artifice. In Chôra's unspeakable space the idea is that at the bottom of reality there are no watertight compartments, but that in the creative space, one nature flows into the other: once again it is marble that sends out a warning with the thin veins that furrow its surface; it is a vital material that sprays the clear white of the stone, skin grown on the beam, which, moreover, does not deny its own mineral nature. Chôra is, therefore, that space in which matter still lives free in its ambiguity.

I believe this is the reason for Linda Carrara's attraction (and also her affection) for a third great reference of the past: Leonardo da Vinci. The rocks object-subject of some frottages are those of Adda, which are the background to the two versions of the Virgin of the Rocks. Linda has literally followed Leonardo's footsteps, in places that are very familiar to her. Going physically to the source, she has made a close exploration of that unreachable attitude of Leonardo to establish continuous and dizzying connections with the creative level of the world. It is a space inhabited by a sublime ambiguity, a space of shadows where life is broken, of stones steeped in mystery, of unstoppable lights, of vibrations that ply the surface of things in restlessness. Linda has arrived there in this phase as an artist. This phase has shown her ability to consolidate her work with determination and consistency. But what moves her and makes her path interesting and completely open is the anxiety that crosses it, on the edge of intelligence and feeling. The anxiety of those who know that to see things appear, they must disappear. "How to disappear" is written, as a note, on her last painting, the one that gives the title to the exhibition. Linda is there; she acts in that narrow space, almost with tied hands; in the wait and with the desire to see herself open each time on the vastness (lately also so physical) of that "inside in the inside".



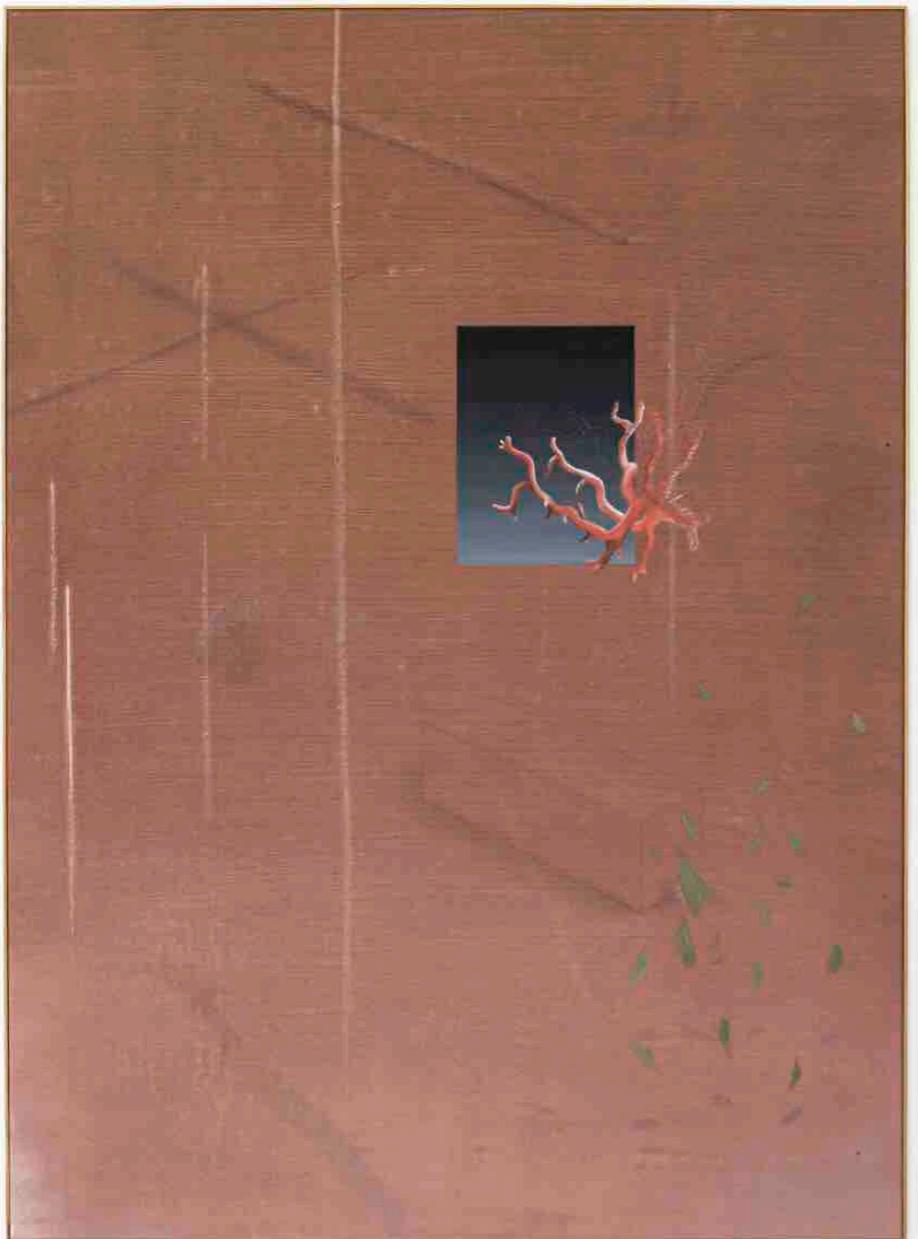
# Reality, suspended angels and metamorphosis

Daniele Capra

Linda Carrara's work arises from a reflection on the conceptual and mimetic dynamics of painting, and questions its representative intentions. It focuses on a free practice based on the creation of new worlds and new realities that produce entirely new visual relationships. In particular, the subject and the compositional structure, which are central elements in figurative practice, are just a pretext in the artist's work, an opportunity to create an imaginative and suspended reality which leads the viewer elsewhere.

In general, differently to what we might generally think, the practice of figuration is not aimed at reality in itself. Its purpose is neither to copy reality (an aspect that Plato found deplorable), nor to represent it (as in Baudrillard's famous *simulacra*). Indeed, this practice works around reality and changes it. In other words, it proposes a new and different reality, an incandescent material that can be understood only by those who have the sensitivity and the skills to interpret its linguistic codes. This situation is the result of two modern trends. The first one is the artist's awareness of their own role, a situation which has gradually developed from the fifteenth century onwards. Thanks to this perception, artists have become aware of the importance of their own art and of their own intellectual work. They are finally free from being solely a vehicle for the content of their work, humble servants to the needs of their customers. The second aspect is a conceptual and anti-realist rift, in opposition to the idea of mimesis, which was seen with some artists from the late sixteenth century. These were the Mannerists, and they continued the strong anti-naturalist tendency that was the first to overcome, in linguistic terms, the limit which, until then, had only been considered as an oddity. We might consider that the twentieth-century avant-gardes, with their indirect way of relating to reality, have carried forward this approach, whether they are aware of it or not.

Linda Carrara's artwork is a tributary of this river. Her painting is not like the work of a meticulous scribe's, compelled to write down what he hears among all the background noise, nor is it the effect of a maverick hero's forceful opposition to the stream of reality. Rather it is the consequence of a completely new, deeper drive that causes a deviation. In her work, painting is no longer either the child or the heir of reality: quite the opposite, it is a new character which increases all possible realities thanks to its own existence.



la ragione è completamente deserta | 2017 (The reason is completely deserted) Oil, graphite and acrylic on canvas, 125 x 97 cm

The objects displayed on the surface of her works are merely an excuse to challenge the cognitive value attributed to reality. In Linda Carrara's research, painting itself is the hidden subject of her work, since it is the *medium* that evokes unconventional features of reality. In this way, her pictures are characterised by a free and precarious syntax, filled with silent poetic bewilderment and genuine contradictions of perspective. Pieces of wood, marble surfaces, sticks and small objects all serve to confirm the fact that they are not themselves, exactly as the writing states under Magritte's famous pipe. The artist's work questions and embarrasses the viewer, encouraging them to talk about or speak of something else, without the need to be consistent with the topic or the nature of the context. In other words, Carrara's artworks function as surreal and process-based devices which lead to a visual and thematic divergence. The title of the exhibition itself, *Il pretesto di Lotto* (The pretext of Lotto), is proof of this attitude. Indeed, her works led to wide-ranging discussions about many questions of art history which were relevant to the painting of Lorenzo Lotto. For example, there was a discussion about the natural/anti-natural sense of flight, as seen in the Trinity at the Bernareggi Museum, where Christ flies through the air illuminated from behind. Or about the Jesi Annunciation, where the Archangel is depicted suspended before he touches the ground. Or, again, about the Martinengo Altarpiece, where the angels hold the Madonna's crown in their hands. I'll not go into what led to this bewildering intellectual pleasure, but, even without discussing Carrara's research (and over cookies and several coffees) to talk about something else was the best way to talk, intensely, about the deepest reasons for her artistic practice. A practice that ultimately encompasses suspension, change of direction, transformation and metamorphosis.

## Through the painting of Linda Carrara

### *Beginning, beginnings*

*This essay begins as a short story.  
But the story immediately stops because a gesture in the center divides it, tears it and bends it.  
A line bends and does not stop bending and folding.  
It seems to multiply and become a multi-dimensional shape.  
There is no context, there is no landscape, only outline.  
Open your eyes, close your eyes. What is it?  
It is in the mind and has many sides.  
You think it is repeatable. You think it looks like something, but you don't see, you don't know, you don't understand.  
You think it can find itself, that it can work like a mold.  
Think of the hands in the mud, near the rivers.  
Think of the hands in the sand, near the sea.  
If you put your hand in the sand, if you put your hand in the mud and then you lift it  
what happens is that a cavity appears on the mud, an empty surface that corresponds to what was removed.  
A void is in the place of the hand, it is the twin of a hand, it is the lost brother of your hand:  
it is the infinite nostalgia of a hand, the immense desire of any hand  
and at the same time the memory of that one and only hand  
that sank, with all its weight, into the mud and sand.  
But you don't know anything. You have no idea what's going to happen.  
Open your eyes, close your eyes.  
It's a game. It is a star.  
It is something that exists in the yoke of the mind.  
Open your eyes, close your eyes.  
Now try to do that, on:  
try to draw it.*

### *1. Limits, epidermis*

Painting is the art of the limit. It exists as an adventure in the land of sensitivity, but at the same time it is situated on its edge, as an exploration of the possible: it is an infinite race along the edge of the sensible. His truest vocation, from prehistoric painting to today, is to make people touch with the hands of the mind. For this reason, each painting is situated in an ambiguous dimension. On the one hand, it is an entirely material exploration, an experimentation of materials in motion, an ancestral sister of alchemy; on the other, paradoxically, the terrain on which its excellence is shown is not the brutal taste of matter, but a dimension more subtle, which has to do with evocation, with the intangible, with the evanescent. Painting evokes matter

with other matter: it is an art of transcription and duality, of engraving, of superimposition: of evaporation.

The experimentation on the materials that painting brings into play is in fact all linked to the exercise of perspiration – hence the sisterhood with the largest organ of the human body, the skin. The sense *par excellence* of painting is touch and the skin is the proper place of painting. Don't be deceived: the look comes later. The central presence of the gaze in painting, especially in Western culture, is only a subsequent specialization of the skin in the ocular sphere, its concentration, its reduction to a point that eventually becomes hypersensitive and representative of an extension. Since its origins, painting has been a business in skin sensitivities, a skin trade. The gaze is already an imitation of the gesture, because painting is above all a movement of surfaces, a backlash of skin on other skin, an exercise in the transcription of multidimensionality: a contact. Man was educated in painting not by looking at the empty and useless game of clouds in the sky, but by scarifying his skin to resemble those torn from dead animals, which he works and tans, wears, reproduces, colors, manipulates and engraves. The first canvas is this stretched and lumpy surface of which the primordial painter – like the contemporary one – tries to revive the lost liveliness, the life of the animal that once was, in a cultic form. It is from this analogy between incised and marked epidermis that the tremendous sense of painting is born, its ambiguous corporeality, its violent transpiration.

In painting, what we feel on the skin of our body must be translated into the skin of an image and what is an image is immediately a spasm of synapses: a vision. The image is our second skin. We are covered with the pictorial image. To draw is to imprint with the finger and then repeat with the pupil and vice versa. What is the impregnable stereometric movement of life (the fleeing animal glimpsed in the prairie) is to be found on the infinite games of stone in the caves and transcribed on a stretched skin, reduced to an imaginary two dimensions plane.

Hence, the infinite deception of painting. Painting has an essential link with illusion. Dead skin must come back to life. Painting is the greatest, most wonderful, sweetest form of deception that man has tended to himself. It is moving, if we think about it for a moment, that the history of pictorial art begins when this deception becomes evident, so evident, that it is accepted as a choral, community dimension: it becomes, in fact, a shared vision. We think of the *trompe-l'œil*, of the great frescoes of Lascaux, Chauvet, we think of the tent of Zeusi, of the grapes of Apelles. Let's think of the melancholy that made this foolish deception pleasant to the human eye: the gaze rests on a place that does not exist, whose painted material is capable of making us believe real what is not real. In this hiatus, here, we see. The gap of painting is this infinite pleasure of being deceived, this being blissfully in the interval between what

is there, materially there, yet it is something else, evokes something else, transpires something else: what was dead, now lives.

All of Linda Carrara's painting is a reflection on this breathable skin. It is no coincidence that among the first images he chose to articulate this work diary, images of surfaces predominate. They are sharp, they are stained, they are cracked. They are dirty, rough, perforated, folded, they are finally drawn, but stubbornly remain surfaces. Carrara asks us, as an introduction to his work, to dwell on the folds and mottling of the surfaces of the world and on the deception that the drawing unfolds, capable of weaving depths and planes, full and empty, where we only have surfaces, epidermis, sheets.

And immediately, from the very first pages of this silent memoir, we encounter another fundamental characteristic of Carrara's painting. If we look carefully at the proposed surfaces, it is clear that they were not chosen to bring out only the mastery of a great illusionist. In Carrara's painting the surface is always a place of revelation. Each surface deceives, evokes, transpires an elsewhere, but at the same time offers the key to its liberation. Deception keeps us bound and, at the same time, we are always provided with the way in which the illusion melts and reveals itself. It seems that Carrara finds painting only in the explicit game between deception and its end: in her, in each of her paintings, there is a hidden smile that cannot obliterate itself. There is an ironic background, an underlying – but expected everywhere – reversal of the parts, an inherent irrepressible desire to blow up the game, to show it as what it is. We see it first of all in the holes, in the lacerations, in the wounds that the surfaces reveal. They are dirty sheets, they are skins that crack, which mean that a beyond is revealed (nothing less metaphysical than this painting), but that the skin of the image itself comes forward as such. It is the ceiling that peels off, it is the fingerprints visible on the sheets, it is the fly that remains trapped between the surfaces: not here or there, but in the midst of a liminal condition that does not know how – and does not want – to resolve itself, but finds his truest figure in this balance, in this irresolution between the enigma and his mockery, between the charm of deception and the clarity. There is an atheism at the center of silence. Painting at the heart of contemplation turns and says: whatever you'll see is nothing more than a game of skin, a goose bumps, a tremor.

## 2. To write, to draw

As we continue to leaf through the pages, we come across some words. We are faced with the image of a sheet of paper, undated, typed or with a font that imitates those used in typewriters. At the center, halfway up its height, it bears the conspicuous sign of a long fold. As if it had been stored somewhere else for a long time,

kept in a drawer, in a notebook and only now does it open before our eyes after a long absence. What we find written is an artist's reflection, probably written when she was at the beginning of her artistic path, given the position among the first pages of our diary, probably written following a public meeting. The content and documentary value of the sheet is immediately clear to us: it is a statement of poetics.

It is always interesting to read the pages of artists, especially painters: in the statute of Western art, apart from the brief interlude of the Renaissance, the painter has almost always been illiterate. Not that he was ignorant, the point is another. Giotto does not write: he draws a perfect circle on the ground. The painter who spends his life among signs, engravings and colors, leaves no trace of writing, does not contaminate himself with that fallen form of painting which is the alphabet. If it does, it is significantly crooked, wrong, defiantly nonconforming writing; or, on the contrary, if we find writing in a painting, it is only because he wants to invoke the material and show, to the highest degree, his ability to imitate its support, be it marble or a twisted scroll. It is not snobbish, but it certainly indicates that the painter can only write putting in brackets the pure conceptuality to which the alphabet leads us. If between alphabetic writing and painting it is possible to construct a hypothetical line of continuity, the painter's writing would most of the time finds its place mainly on the side of the painting: close enough to the alphabet (what one reads is understandable), but not far enough from the painting that is impossible to glimpse the design behind the sign. Perhaps the most admirable example of this undecidable position (and which stands out even more because it falls precisely in the autumn of the Renaissance, after an era of outstanding painters-writers) is Pontormo's diary: here sketches, fecal notes, careless notations of melancholy and cooking, coexist with working notes in a wonderfully unclassifiable text.

It is curious that in this text by Linda Carrara painting emerges precisely in the exact way in which the illusion of painting is revealed in the previous images. If the painting is revealed by cracks and holes, slight inaccuracies and stretch marks of the fabric of the surface, on this page we do not find drawings that interfere with writing, but scattered solecism, typing errors and then notes in pen and, here and there, uses that do not conform to grammar. A whole set of docile infringements that reveal the pictorial substrate with respect to the conceptual transparency that the alphabet would like to convey. In short, this text must be read and seen at the same time: read and not read. If the pictorial image is – as Pierre Férida wrote<sup>1</sup> – a silencing of language, the place where the horizon of the sayable stops, the painters' writing is the place of stammering: where alphabetic writing finds the stumbling block of a breath unnatural, which suddenly makes visible the

hand that conceptual writing would like to obliterate. In this sense we must think of the work of Alighiero Boetti: "writing with the left is drawing"<sup>2</sup>.

### 3. Ancestors, mysteries

But what does Linda Carrara write? In these few lines, he outlines a clear genealogy: Egyptian art, Masaccio and Caravaggio; then Dürer, Bosch, Brueghel. Among the ancients, the exclusion of the Greek and the Roman is striking. Among the moderns, it's also relevant on the one hand the attempt to keep together the pictorial schools of northern and southern Europe, on the other, to enhance instead, with Masaccio and Caravaggio, the debut and the decline of Renaissance (even if we can find a fleeting appearance of Botticelli, significantly with his "dangerous frames"). Surely it is a choice that tells us a lot about this painter who aspires to keep such different traditions together in her work.

About the Egyptian world, Carrara is clear: she is interested in the synthetic gesture, capable of summarizing an entire world. Classical Egyptian art is then taken as the epitome of all archaic art, a model for a painting that is not only aesthetic and civilized, which does not want to get lost in the beautiful design and in the worldly pleasantness of the forms, but which is always the vehicle of a meaning, a shared culture, one civilization: "one world". This is an important reminder: when Carrara thinks of art, he thinks of an anthropogenic gesture, a mixture of memory and technique, never a mere expression of an isolated individuality. A peculiar feature of all the mature works of Linda Carrara will in fact be a shrewd economy of means which, from time to time, in order to accurately represent its subject, chooses to emphasize a precise technique. There is never a useless abundance, never a sense of waste in his art; the sign never carries with it the trace of an irrepressible exuberance, nor of a morbid emotional subjectivity. On the contrary, Carrara's painting always has an outline: the boundaries always make the forms haptically perceptible. If it does not explicitly refer to engraving, it often has behind, as an ancestor, the gesture and the economy of the stylus: a material that is always precious has been engraved by a line.

Paradoxically, this ethical dimension of the sign (this prudence of limits and costs) returns about the predilection for Nordic painters. For them, drawing is always at the service of domestic devotion, without any ornamental superabundance. Linda Carrara's painting owes a great deal to this dimension: all her works prepare a private, intimate, circumscribed meditation, far from celebratory glories. The Nordic dimension of his painting is also revealed by his predilection for humble subjects. But be careful: if they recall the tradition of painting, it is not to share the same reasons. Once those subjects were vehicles of religious references: the fish was the Christ, the nails alluded to the passion. Here the intention

with which they are brought to our gaze is completely different. They are treated as subjects of choice and remain charged with a mystery, but it is a mystery without mysticism. I repeat: in Linda Carrara's paintings there is no indulgence for metaphysics or for enigma. Carrara's painting (like those of Burri and Morandi) is literal: what you see is exactly what you see. There is no spirituality that is not perception and immanence. In short, hers is a painting of pure devotion to matter. It is literal as much as it's tautological: matter touching other matter. Precisely for this reason, it is exalted in the predilection for humble objects, where the contrast is more present. Simple jugs, chairs, a bust or an umbrella, a branch, a leaf: everything can become an object of contemplation, withdrawing the mystery of matter and its infinite possibility of being other, remaining on the plan of representation. Mystery, for Carrara, is all in painting; but the mystery of painting is the same as existence.

Hence, the reference to Masaccio and Caravaggio. The first is cited as the one who is capable of transferring in the signs of the pictorial convention the disturbance, "the discomfort", the lack of ease of those who feel they are living in a liminal condition, among the epidermis: like the fly, they are neither here nor there, but poised between the truth of perception and the lie of representation. It is no coincidence that he is the first painter enraptured by the power of perspective and, at the same time, the one who was able to represent with unparalleled strength the expulsion of man from Eden: the man expelled once and for all from innocence and from naivety. Masaccio thus becomes the guiding figure of a primitivism aware of the technique, even an avant-garde explorer of innovative methods, but who does not forget the existential dimension in which it is expressed: the strength of the emotions that stir in the painting, the trembling of the skins. So also for Caravaggio, who with "too real objects", putrescible and dirty, and with his theatrical construction of light, made conventions and the fiction of tradition tremble, showing its cracks and tears.

If we follow this interpretation, the meaning of the expression we find written significantly in capital letters, as if it should be understood well in its paradoxicality, becomes clear: "The subject does not pollute the meaning and the meaning is not the subject". Let's pause for a moment. The pictorial subject does not "pollute" the meaning because the meaning of the representation is completely indifferent to this: in fact, it does not coincide with the subject. To paint is not to represent; and believing that the meaning of painting is exhausted in the representation of an appearance is a priceless naivety. Painting, as we have written, is an action that establishes an ambiguity between the skins, an ambiguity that must be explored and revealed as such. Only if the painter's action is capable of bringing out this ambiguity, showing its cracks, holes, infringements, then we have painting. In this sense, we also better understand the second sentence written

in small caps that we find in this first poetic note. It is a phrase by the great Russian movie director Andrej Tarkovskij which invites us to the malleability, to keep us awake while we're carried away by illusion: otherwise, any gesture that lays it bare would be in vain.

#### 4. Abandonments, hands

So much the painting of Linda Carrara intends to yield to this double motto (to the indifference of the subject and to the malleability), that makes abandonment its initiatory code. In fact, this first writing concludes: "Today I feel lost in a world that does not reflect me except in the sense of abandonment as a place of departure". What does it mean to inscribe the gesture of painting in the condition of abandonment? What should one indulge in? And what exactly does it abandon in this abandonment? The etymology of "abandonment" perhaps puts us on the right path.

The word "abandonment" derives in fact from the practice of selling "by ban": to expose something or someone to the possibility of being purchased publicly. The one who is abandoned is the one who is made available to those who can take it. It is a gesture of radical exposure: those who are abandoned are stripped of all their own power and left totally to the power of others, "at the mercy" of those who want to take them: at their mercy. The condition of abandonment of the one who is exposed to the sale, due to his total passivity and availability to the forces of others, borders the condition of the corpses. It is no coincidence that the abandonment of deceased bodies to wild animals is a very common funeral practice in Eastern cultures; and it is no coincidence that in Italian the reflexive "abbandonarsi" (literally "to abandon himself") can also mean a total relaxation of the muscles in the supine or prone position. "Abandonment" is then a capacity and a power: a power to dispose of the total alienation of what one possesses and an ability to abandon oneself to this power, or to accept, in the full relaxation of the limbs, so to speak, this possibility.

Allowing painting to be inscribed in abandonment means ascribing the world of painted images to an unmedicable condition: everything represented on the canvas will be "banned", radically exposed to the power of others; not given (the gift is a practice that always leads to the blackmail of a responsibility), nor offered, but literally *abandoned* to the figural possibility of the viewer, totally placed in the alterity of a gaze that, meeting it, can make it one's own. Painting in abandonment means no longer being able to trust a system of hermeneutic control of painting, a system of *a priori* shared meanings and practices. Painting "in abandonment" means not being able to prepare, for the painted image, a structure of meaning that supports by itself the iconological meaning of that image and that neither offers, already prepared and ready, a shared sense for the gesture itself of the painting.

It is as if Carrara were showing us that painting no longer has its own place in Western culture. Or rather: it can only have it in abandonment. This brings with it some consequences. The first (extensively explored already in the twentieth century) is that the painter can no longer hierarchically distinguish between appearances: every appearance is in fact, as such, worthy of being "banned" in representation. Each skin can be transferred into the second skin of painting, everything can be in the place of everything: everything can be painted. But there is a second consequence, more ours, closer to us: more contemporary. What is represented, being left in a state of abandonment, must carry its own meaning: no external, extra-aesthetic structure can be delegated to this task, because every link with a shared structure is, in the contemporary, severed, degraded or lapsed. This implies a particular status of the image: its peculiar density. A reminding density: it is as if the painted image must show its own genealogy by itself; it is as if he has to show, in his own *materia signata*, the ancestors who generated it, without expecting someone (a critic? a gallery owner?) to do it for him. Painting in abandonment means, on the one hand, thinking of the image as solitude, on the other, finding ways and techniques so that in it one's genealogy can be present to anyone who comes across it.

It is from this problematic knot that one of the most disturbing peculiarities of Carrara's painting emerges: in front of his paintings one always gets the impression of a solitude populated by ghosts. Someone – mistakenly – may call this subtle impression, this state of uneasiness that anyone has felt in front of his works "mannerism"; but the "mannerism" of Carrara's works is not – so to speak – the son of a sense of powerlessness with respect to fathers who would be considered superior and unattainable, with all the expressionist neurosis that this entails; quite the opposite: it is the only solution of a daughter who is aware of having lost her fathers: of having been abandoned by them.

It is significant that Vincenzo Ferrari is recognized as a teacher precisely because he taught "the drift of art"; and it is significant that he is a "hands-free" teacher, to whom Carrara had to lend his own so that they could learn to make those of the master appear. It is in this exhibition in the hands of others that Carrara forged the sense of abandonment to which painting ascribes. Painting is this exchange of hands: making sure that other fantastic hands appear in one's own hands and that the others return to one's own, like more real hands. And all this transition, from hand to hand, takes place on the canvas, in the painted material, without being able to rely on the extra-aesthetic structures of the critics and the gallery. The image of Carrara is thus always an ancestral image, full of its memory, without ever being either quotationist or mannerist. His paintings abandon themselves to the pasty density of memory, they let themselves be crossed, quietly, by hands that are not their own and which enter the scene of painting with the sweetness of an expropriation.

## 5. *Fecitque in pictura fortuna naturam*

Representation thus emerges as a device of abandonment: it is a procedure by which the tactile imprint of the world, which we always assume in a completely unnoticed way (we do not see, we are not really aware by what we are touched or whom we touch), is rewritten in a surface that is not only, at the end of the process, left "in the hands of others", but whose laborious gestation has the meaning of favoring the emergence, in one's own, of fantastic hands. To paint is to abandon, to leave "banned", to let other hands enter into their own, join, unite, touch and disjoin so that the world is left to itself. It always seems to be a question of leaving the viewer the possibility of contemplating this exercise: contemplating the abandonment of which everything consists; to let him glimpse this conjunction of hands that leave themselves at the mercy of the hands of others. Inscribing painting in the sign of abandonment means believing that painting can be an anadromous, backward mode of knowledge, for which the skin of the world, once painted, comes to meet us "as a precious and immutable relic": a conscious sign of presence of an ancestor, density of ghostly and miraculous hands.

All this implies a certain tendency of Linda Carrara's paintings to appear anonymous. In his work, in fact, it is never the painter's singular style that emerges, his eccentric exuberant personality; if anything, his style is precisely the work put in place to soften these apexes of singularity and smooth them out so that this otherness emerges: so that the canvas, with its veils, its ambiguous holes, its revelations, seems to be made by itself, almost by impression, by contact, by nature. *Fecitque in pictura fortuna naturam*: these words of Pliny the Elder, dedicated to the Greek painter Protogene, could be counted among the mottos of Carrara's painting<sup>3</sup>.

It is told that the famous painter was at work on a portrait of a heroic hunter from Rhodes, named Ialiso, but that, despite having already spent seven years of work, he was still unhappy: he could not represent the jaws of his dog, which he wanted painted with drool as realistically as possible. Pliny the Elder writes that "his own skill left him dissatisfied." Precisely the outstanding hand of the painter made Protogene discontented. Taken by an instinctive movement of anger, he threw a sponge soaked in color on the painted board and the random splashes caused by the impact turned out to be perfect: "he threw the sponge on that hated point of the picture. And it imprinted the removed colors again just as he had desired in his intent, and that was how chance made that picture seem natural."

In Linda Carrara's work this natural randomness is always at work, but no longer – as we have already underlined – aimed at showing a perfect visual and specular correspondence between the forms (we are far from the Greek and then Renaissance idea of painting as a *speculum naturae*), but aimed instead at showing the innate naturality of this transcription trade. Painting imitates nature not because the visual forms resemble

each other, but because Carrara's painting abandons itself, in the exercise of a very precise art, to an uncontrollable randomness: and it is this *clinamen*, this protrusion between the transcriptions that causes the skins (the painted one and the perceived one) finally seen touching.

Also for this reason, Carrara's painting often has a color palette that tends to grisaille, working between shades starting from a single central tonality. The excessive variety of colors, the tonal variety would distract the viewer from the point of investigation. Carrara's painting is always aimed at letting us immerse ourselves in an atmosphere. A good example in this regard are the large sand-colored canvases, exhibited in Ghent in 2015, which represent on a large format some small fragments of wood of different sizes, abandoned on a floor. Here all painting becomes an exploration of this inclination. The diagonal shapes of the anonymous and elementary fragments of wood meet our gaze, each with its own shadow, with a continuous and barely perceptible wrong inclination with respect to the lines of the floor, giving rise to a mismatch between the reality that our mind it would like to simplify and our perceptions that seem to contradict it. In addition, the almost homogeneous tonality also creates a doubt in the viewer between which is the background and foreground: at times they seem to get confused and turn the picture into a great abstract work. Paradoxically, the nature that Carrara's painting tries to imitate lies entirely in this hiatus, in this process by which a difference in height appears. Between the imagined reality and the perceived one, between what our mental schemes lead us to believe and what reality turns out to be, a tiny chasm opens up and the painting is there: the blow of its sponge tends to this gap.

## 6. *Marbles, girders*

Linda Carrara's painting seems to have been assigned to the matter of marble by destiny: right from its proper name. So weird: a painter whose name refers to the most classic material of sculpture. Yet, it is already all there. You just have to be faithful to your own name. In fact, in the proper name there is the *clinamen*, the deviation, the distortion: the irony. The painter is the one in whom all material perceptions collapse and become. The painter is the melting pot of the perceived: the place where natural sensitivities mix like colors and relax in the mind to become similarities.

Thus, the painter has always faked the most varied materials in chromatic pastes. We have seen it, Protogene was yearning to recreate the dog's drool, Piero di Cosimo, on the other hand, as Vasari tells us, saw immense similarities on the walls smeared with the pectoral excretions of the dying: "the battles of the horses and the most fantastic and largest cities countries you would ever see".<sup>4</sup> Painting feigns the most solid materials, sculpture the most impalpable, in a perpetual challenge that Linda Carrara's art does not intend to hide: the ambiguous ridge

of similarity, in her painting, must always be perceptible, never completely subtracted. Nothing is more suitable than marble.

In fact, marble is the material of sculpture *par excellence*; the material that, together with bronze, overcomes time. But marble is not an alloy, it is not a product of human technological artifice, marble is nature: it is born in the underground cavities of the earth, it is the integral fruit of geological time. Man has only the task of extracting it and working it. Marble is – as its etymology says – a “shining stone”: although it comes from the abysmal darkness of the rock, it has the peculiarity of absorbing light and reflecting it, creating a halo around the sculpted figure, a luminous cloud. For the ancient Sumerians, it was called the *melammu*, the halo of fire that surrounded the divinity when it appeared. The more white and less impurities are mixed with calcium carbonate in the very long geological process that led to its formation, the more the marble is capable of capturing light and reflecting it. *Agalma* in Greek was the word that indicated the ornament and thus the statue, whose etymology is derived from *agàomai*, to admire, and from *aglàos*, the brilliant. Thus, the marble is already in itself stone that becomes light: already art, a natural art. Painting could only try to imitate it. The use of painted marble is already attested in Roman times, when it became fashionable to decorate one's home not with slabs of real stone, but with their pictorial reproduction by local decorators. Even today, in the definition of the professional skills of the “Building Painter”, it is indicated that he knows how to simulate marble.

For Linda Carrara, faking marble in painting is on the one hand a reference to the artisan dimension of painting, to her profession: painting has a decorative root, a support to the building, an ornament to a structure. Thus Giotto, in the Scrovegni Chapel, imitated not only the marble statues of the Vices and Virtues, but also the architectural parts: the niches and support structures, the side panels. On the other hand, however, for Carrara, the choice to imitate marble is also a declared challenge to the three-dimensionality and solidity of the stone: there is something playfully titanic in the choice to devote a lot of work to the simulation of marble. And as if Carrara were wondering: is painting capable of pretending the stone *par excellence* of the entire history of art? Linda Carrara's grace is to seriously ask a question that is in itself ironic. The mystery is all here: in this revelation that reveals nothing if not the re-proposition of the mystery. Behind the painting there is still painting, behind the figure there is another one and another one. It is no coincidence that the fiction of marble migrates from the pictorial surfaces into the sculptures.

A portion of a wooden beam, maybe taken from a country barn, is arranged vertically; marble is painted on the short end facing upwards<sup>5</sup>. One of the two bases of the beam is transformed into a pictorial surface, generating for a moment the illusion, the doubt: The natures intersect, pretend, mix each other. The wooden nature seems

to cover the stone and the marble heart is revealed by emerging from the fibers of a poor material, once used to support a house and which now becomes a minimal column that supports the gesture of painting, exposing it in the utmost fiction. It is nature and art, together, but it is also painting and sculpture that blend and quote each other and become an installation. And so Linda Carrara's classicism is overturned, not in an unbridled baroque, but in a subtle game of perceptions and references in which illusion stands alongside disillusionment, in a continuous exchange. One must be the relic of the other, one must be what remains of the other: its residue.

## 7. Veins, relics

In Linda Carrara's painting there is a meditation on the remains. And what remains is always a matter that has been touched, a matter that has been abandoned. Something happened and left behind: a fallen branch, a peel, an imprint, a reflection on the water that memory knows how to hold. Painting is the process by which a remnant emerges and remains imprinted on the skin of the image. Painting is a meditation on contact: a painting by contact. In the homogeneous fabric of nature, here it is: a vein appears. It stands out, it emerges physically. The painter's gesture is to collect the outline of what emerges and to give existence to this rest, to give it shape, consistency: to make the rest remain, to give an image to this arrest, which never becomes immobile, to make it rest in a painted case.

The emerging vein is always the revelation of an elsewhere. The vein is the discontinuity, what severs and therefore unites. It is said that Michelangelo sculpted the Christ of the Minerva in two versions. The first in 1514-1516 is preserved today in the church of the monastery of San Vincenzo in Bassano Romano. The sculpture represents a pre-conciliar Christ, completely naked and slender, holding the cross and holding the instruments of his martyrdom in his hand. While the grip is firm, the whole composition of the weights is made in such a way that the body of Christ appears to be and not abandoning the cross. If the arm holds the wood firmly, the head is however turned on the opposite side, towards another time, towards the place of resurrection and salvation. The sculpture captures in an exemplary way the vortex between the times that evangelical history wanted to show: the point where death is salvation, the end is resurrection: the gaze of pain, turned to the past, is transformed into action towards the heavenly Jerusalem. But why then was this superb masterpiece abandoned? When the work was almost completed, an unpleasant black vein emerged on the face of Christ. Still visible on the monument, the line is a sinuous segment of dark black marble thickens darkly. It looks like a snake: it goes from the base of the nose, licks the right nostril and collapses along the beard, on the sides of the chin. The imperfection was already

in the marble block, but it became visible only when the process was almost completed. The vein emerges only in the work, only in the working of the marbles. This is the unpredictable problem: what denied the absolute candor forced the sculpture to be abandoned. The risen Christ must have no stain.

Linda Carrara's painting seems to respond to all this. His paintings do not hide the vein, on the contrary they seek it: they imitate it, they support it, they reproduce it and follow it. Be it a branch, a reflection on the water, a fragment of wood. Everything that emerges from the surface can be a black vein, the point that is located between the flesh and the blood, the path that erupts unexpectedly and appears between the surface and the abyss beyond every surface. Carrara's painting seems to be, first of all, the predisposition of a space where the black vein can emerge and then be contemplated as a relic. Painting as a place of preparation and capture of the venous *clinamen* of the world.

#### 8. Contacts, ghosts

Hence the habit of some of Carrara's mature works: to start from a canvas that has undergone contact and rubbing with a precise surface of a landscape. Carrara spreads the canvas on the wall of a cave, on a floor, on a shore or on a wall and rubs it. So he performs a frottage that explores the surface, scans it, centimeter by centimeter, and makes a very faithful and partial translation. The two-dimensional skin of the canvas thus shows all the cracks and all the imperfections of the portion of the landscape on which it was placed. It would seem that here Carrara drew inspiration from photography, where the plate is impressed by the very fine texture of photons that pierce the lens. But this is not the case: the surface does not collect the contact of light. Carrara's painting does not start from the impalpable, but from the opposite: from the material solidity of the ground of which it reproduces by direct contact. Thus the canvas becomes once again a tactile device: it reproduces a portion of the landscape epidermally. It's an analogue cutout of the world. It is a portion of the world carnally translated into a figure. It is skin that covers a landscape and bears traces of it, making itself a trace of that gestation, of that having dressed and being clothed. The canvas traces the veins of the ground, becoming itself the support of the trace and allowing itself to be modified by the action of the tracing: it brings the vein shadows onto its own material.

These works, more than the others, seem to mimic the logic of holy objects. The relics, in fact, are not simple objects nor are they reproductions of the figure of the saint: they are adored because they have had contact with his body or because they have been part of it. By virtue of this material contiguity, the holy objects are infected by metonymy and, despite being part, remnant, residual, they still have the strength of the totality of which they consisted.

The holy relic is a "part" that emanates and retains the power of the "whole". Thus the Carrara paintings retain the strength of the terrain to which they adhered. They absorb the qualities of the chosen landscape by material contiguity, by extreme devotion and rubbing.

What space remains for painting? Carrara challenges the traditional artistic divisions, but she remains a painter. The task of painting here is to bring out the veins and fantasize about the forms witnessed by the canvas by contact. Linda Carrara meditates on these traces and with painting she emphasizes some of them, hides others, brings out figures, harmony, similarities. In these series, Carrara's work is more to evoke forms than to paint them. For this reason the paintings produced with this technique are surfaces capable of causing a profound disturbance in those who see them: they have a peculiar and hypnotic charm. They escape any definite similarity, but multiply them. They are visionary, ghostly surfaces. They are *chôra*, portions of territory that become potential matter: unstable and demiurgic supports<sup>6</sup>. On the one hand, they look like portions of human skin or giant animals seen with the microscope, on the other underwater abysses and rocky lands seen from above, perhaps of planets other than terrestrial ones. Their shadows, their reliefs no longer seem elements of a pictorial syntax, but generate an effect of pareidolia whereby we are placed on the trail of images that only we, in us, can see. We are as if looked at by those blood red, emerald green, marble gray surfaces.

In addition, their material and pictorial quality challenge the distinction between artistic languages. They are paintings, yes, but also sculptures, because in them the material remains like a cast in reverse. Yet they are also a performance because in the support of the canvas not only a portion of space is preserved, but its "moment": the unique shape it had at the precise moment in which the frottage was performed. Again, they seem to be the culmination of that search for anonymity that we have already seen in action in previous works. In fact here, the painter seems to limit her art to that of the decal. Here the work is truly and definitively abandoned to the hands of others and the venous *clinamen* of the world is staged in all its phantasmatic power. Painting evokes the veins of the landscape, or rather: it consists only in the fiction of their erratic paths.

#### 9. Metamorphosis, arcanes

A snakeskin, gray and dull green, stretches out on the back of a panel, on the underside. It stretches out on the white painted marble and, just below, we find a painted piece of scotch paper on which we read: «flesh». We do not understand if it is real skin or not: if it is the umpteenth deception of painting or, this time, pure reality. But is there a difference? The snake has left its skin on the painting, has completed its moult; thus the viewer: in front of the image he is touched by a suspicion that transforms him.

In Linda Carrara's painting, after the calibrated compositions of suspended objects and the experience of frottage, an atmospheric and tonal painting makes its way that rediscovers the dimension of the landscape. But it is not the eighteenth-century landscape of the views, it is rather the intimate and circumscribed one of the *locus amoenus*: they are places suddenly torn from the chaos of the forest, they are clearings. Latin language called *lucus* the space that suddenly opened between the branches and, flooded with a fresh and mobile light, was chosen to celebrate sacrifices and the encounter with the divine. Linda Carrara's most recent landscapes are *luci*: the discovery of an internal dimension, the entrance to a spatiality within the space, a gap that, while remaining uterine, makes the light of the outside appear clearer, limpid, terse. Yet here nothing is still, but everything is preparation, is in waiting: it's subtle and imperceptible organic movement. They are landscapes with a snake, we could say: places whose quiet is crossed by the foreboding of an encounter, of a metamorphosis, of a crossing.

They recall the shady cave, strewn with rare ivy, which perhaps the three philosophers of Giorgione discuss in the famous painting. But here no humans are admitted to sight. It seems that they are ponds, pools, bottoms of stillness and impermanence. In old Italian language, "arcano" does not mean only "arcane", something mysterious; this word was also used to technically refer to the floor of the well, the surface where the tiles were placed at the bottom of the horizontal channel to ensure that the water was not completely absorbed by the ground, but remained there and thus could remain, resting, for those who would have tapped into it. The landscape of Carrara is reached as if the viewer had walked for a long path, an imaginary and invisible path. And then, once you've arrived, you still have to proceed: to get to the bottom of the well, to the arcane. You'll get somewhere as long as you have the desire to drink that water.

To get there, it is necessary to go into nature, as in the pictorial installation *The First Walk* (2021). The pond is glimpsed through the two wooden beams that go from floor to ceiling and stand between us and the painting. In the cubic and very white space that surrounds the works, the pond is a numinous apparition: emerald green on lighter green, bottle green on grass green, above which flashes of dusty white chalk trace the image of solar reflections that make their way oblique and grazing between the rushes and the branches. Are we in a dawn? The beams like the trunks of tall trees prevent us from seeing exactly, but they stimulate desire: we want more, we want to get closer.

After passing the barrier of the two beams, we find ourselves very close to the painting and we can now look at it more carefully. We are captivated by the vertical brush strokes at the edges and horizontal at the center that form uneven and very rich portions of color in which we get lost. We are struck by a strange effect. We are no longer able to distinguish the proportions: what previously looked like a pond, now, up close, is a mountain lake

seen from a overlooking hill. What seemed to us, from the distance, leaves of a low lake and grass, now looks like cypresses and pines. The lighter greens now appear to us beaches and rocks, vast coves. The distance that seemed easy to bridge with a step, now turns out to be a very long and perilous journey. We are confused. It seemed to us that the mystery was really close at hand: that we could almost immerse our hands in the freshness of the water and pause in a silent dialogue with the forces of nature. And instead we are still very far from everything, remotely placed. Finally, we turn around as if to look for a way, go around the woods and go down towards the lake or give up and go back defeated, but this is where the work happens.

Turning back, we notice that the long side of the wooden beams is painted as if it were marble. If before we were immersed in a painted nature, in warm green and brown colors, now we are drawn into an abstract space. The white of the marble, the black of the veins, the black of the space between the columns. It was enough to turn around to transform everything. Now our gaze wanders in the interval between the two marble beams and projects forward into the black darkness. We are suddenly in a temple, surrounded by the cubic white of the gallery, next to the room of the rooms, the dark fulcrum of an unspeakable experience. It is still a step away from us. We were looking for the mystery in the pond and instead it had always been behind us, all we had to do was turn back. Yet now, to enter this darkness, we must exit the installation. The entrance is the exit: the point where we enter the blackness of the innermost space of the work is a way out. If before we felt inside something, now the opposite happens: we are about to enter an outside, the vast open space of reality opens up dark in front of us.

We take a step and enter. We suddenly find ourselves beyond painting, into everyday reality. Having finally entered the work, in its most secret heart, in the *lucus a non lucendo*, we left it. The mystery is all in painting, we wrote; but the mystery of painting is the same as existence.

Atri, Agosto 2022

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Férida, *Le souffle indistinct del l'image*, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Alighiero Boetti, *Scrivere con la sinistra è disegnare*, da *Insicuro Noncurante*, 1966-75.

<sup>3</sup> Plinio il Vecchio, *Naturalis Historia*, Liber XXXV, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Vita di Piero di Cosimo pittor fiorentino*, in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (1568).

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the exhibition *Madonna delle rocce* (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the exhibition *chóra* (2019).