

Silvia Burini Giuseppe Barbieri

Maria Cristina Finucci HELP

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RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK



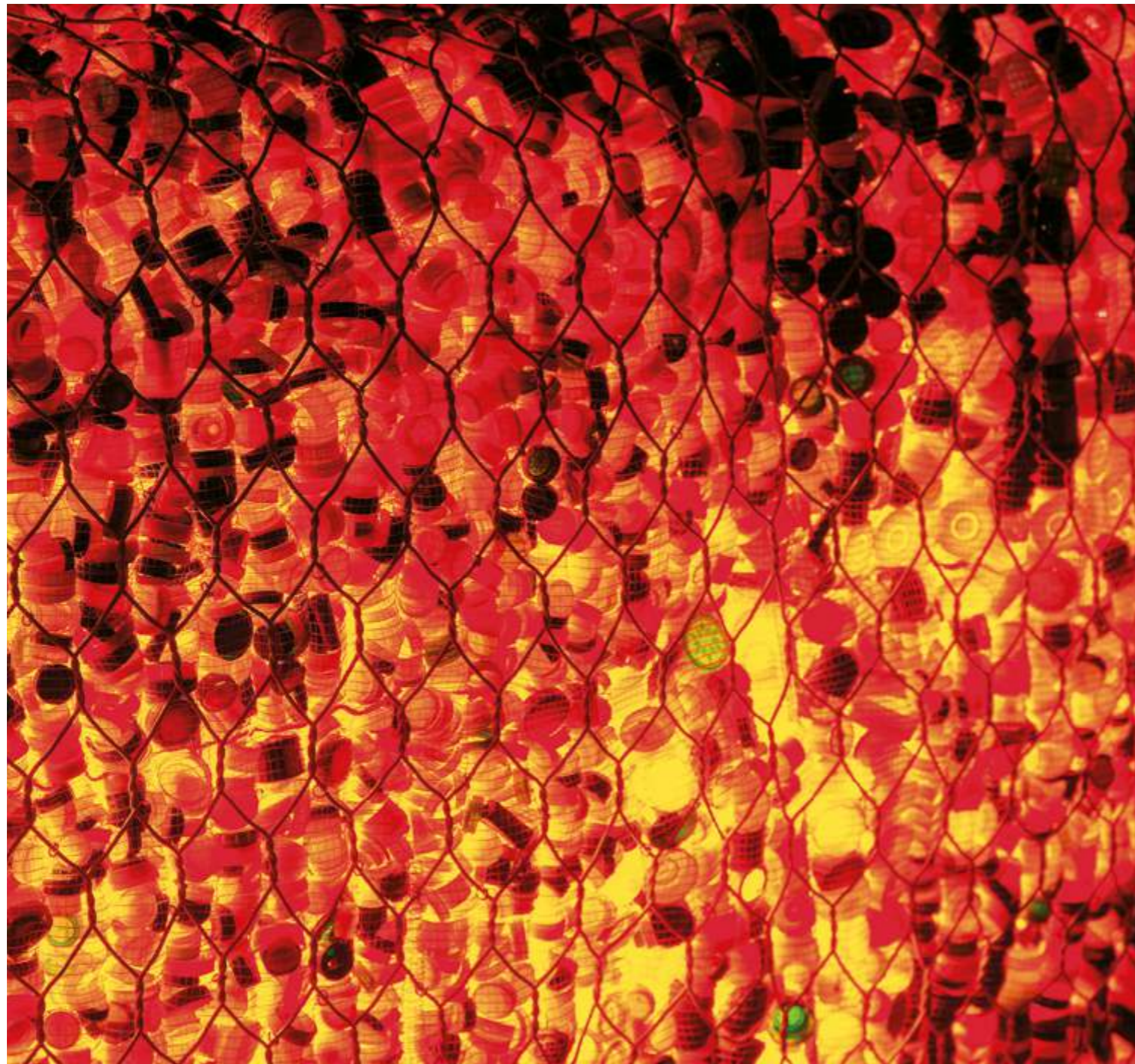
Maria Cristina Finucci  
HELP

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# Maria Cristina Finucci HELP

*RIZZOLI*  
NEW YORK

New York · Paris · London · Milan



The Covid-19 emergency has marked what will probably be remembered in the near future as a milestone in the path towards collective awareness of the importance of sustainability in human activities, creating an even stronger convergence towards shared objectives and revealing the limits and risks of outdated models of development. The crisis has brought out very clearly how closely integrated countries are and the way that what happens in one part of the world has global consequences—a real lesson in planetary sustainability from which no one can any longer feel exempt. The change that is already underway should not only continue but can and must be accelerated, for the sake of economic and social prosperity and the enormous potential for investment and job creation that the transition to a more sustainable and inclusive economic model can generate.

In the electricity sector, the path towards decarbonization has already passed the point of no return. Today, renewables are the most competitive energy sources. This trend began a few years ago, when few of us believed in it, but today most utilities are moving in this direction. Europe has set itself the challenging objective of becoming “carbon neutral” by 2050. This will only be achieved through an ever greater development of renewable resources, digitalization, the electrification of final consumption, and the use of innovative solutions to internal industrial processes, such as the introduction of green hydrogen, produced by electrolysis of water powered by renewable electricity.

Sustainability is capable of positively guiding the choices concerning the present and the future, and is not limited to the energy sector. Maria Cristina Finucci’s work presents the consequences of outdated economic models in an effective and impactful way, an emergency that can only be dealt with by adopting a different vision. The Garbage Patch State is the representation of an emergency on which we need to act urgently, not just to contain the problem, but also to ensure that, through a new approach to materials and their reuse, it will not recur or grow worse in time. In this historical moment of great awareness of the environment, political will, technological evolution, the attention of the financial community, and civil society are converging on objectives of sustainability. The message spread through art is a powerful means of becoming aware of the problem, a necessary step to accelerating change and taking concrete action for the wellbeing of society and of the planet.

Francesco Starace  
CEO OF ENEL SPA



In the year 2000, Paul Jozef Crutzen, the Nobel Laureate for Chemistry, and the biologist Eugene Filmore Stoermer coined a new term, “Anthropocene,” to describe the first geological era in which human activities are capable of influencing the ecosystem of our planet and altering its balance. The human footprint—the data collected by our satellites confirm this every day—is increasingly disruptive.

In a world that resembles a dystopian landscape, threatened by climate change, soil erosion, and the extinction of numerous species, the greatest risk is to surrender to resignation: it is too late to reverse course; the political, economic, and social commitment too great to radically rethink our way of living, producing, consuming, and traveling.

Yet that same landscape—made up of people, thoughts, and aspirations—is also capable of generating hope, redemption. Art, in particular, is one of the highest forms of this—wholly human—ambition not to give up, to question our own condition, and, if possible, to evolve.

Here the insight of an artist becomes a powerful message, capable of moving souls, of fighting against resignation and indifference when faced with the environmental emergencies of our planet.

It is a message that we cannot ignore if we are to change the narrative of the Anthropocene and transform it into a story of sustainable progress, a welcoming future for the coming generations.

As CEO of Leonardo, one of the world leaders in the aerospace, defense, and security industry, I can only endorse and feel close to the appeal launched by Maria Cristina Finucci’s artistic project. By definition, ours is a sector that thrives on innovation, which imagines and implements technological solutions in the service of clients who, like us, have the same goal at heart: to think not only of the present, but anticipate the need for safety and wellbeing in the world of tomorrow. Leonardo, in particular, has made this vision its mission, its strategic ambition.

Art, science, institutions, industry, and citizens: together it is possible to transform a dystopian landscape—an imaginary state, floating adrift in our oceans, made up of waste and neglect—into a place that is once again hospitable, healthy, and vibrant with life.

Alessandro Profumo  
CEO OF LEONARDO SPA

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## INTRODUCTION

We would like, at the start of this volume, to present some brief observations that we trust will be useful for those who read it. The first is that, apart from its large format and the abundance of illustrations it contains, the following is a *scientific monograph* on the work of Maria Cristina Finucci. We have already dealt with her work in two previous catalogues, in 2013 and 2016. At that time, however, it was a question of providing above all some critical annotations on two installations, albeit of great importance, the Venetian “pavilion” which marked the first truly public appearance of the Garbage Patch State and the large *HELP* installed on the island of Mozia, which marked a turning point in the artist’s research. In the present case, however, we have been able to consider the project that characterizes the last ten years of her career as a whole. *Wasteland* was devised in late 2012 with the purpose, gradually clarified, of constructing a complex cognitive, social, and moral dynamic that would render explicit the dramatic problem of the accumulation of plastic debris that litters the world’s oceans while encouraging the increasingly widespread (and if possible rapid) adoption of responsible and sustainable behaviors, which are perhaps the most important legacy we need to pass on to the generations that will follow our own.

The constitution of the Garbage Patch State at a solemn ceremony held at UNESCO’s Parisian headquarters immediately established the essential character of the process: to proclaim and seek recognition for something that was both obviously false yet clearly true. In Chapter XII of *Moby Dick*, when recounting the origins of the *Pequod*’s first harpooneer, the ambitious Queequeg, Herman Melville tells us that he “was a native of Rokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down in any map; true places never are.” The Garbage Patch, however, does appear (regrettably) in modern ocean charts, with five main, measureless agglomerations, even in the vicinity of the impossible Rokovoko. It is real but invisible, while the Garbage Patch State, by contrast, is visible and a fake. It has been recognized by UNESCO, has participated, to some degree officially, in the Venice Biennale, it has been proclaimed in Madrid, opened an embassy at the MAXXI in Rome, penetrated the UN building in New York with its insidious forms, and been erected on the site of the Milan Expo.

This was the task that Maria Cristina Finucci gave herself, over seven years ago: to reveal the invisible (which has always been one of the primary purposes of artistic practice and also contemporary art, given that, as Bourriaud noted, “Art tends to give shape and weight to the most invisible processes”) and still more to impress it in the collective mindset of our age by building pervasive images and deploying complex strategies of information, involvement, storytelling, effectively combining the present and the future, archeology and modern urban scenarios.



The second observation is equally central. Maria Cristina is not an activist fighting for the sustainability of the planet. She is an artist. Hers is not a militant art but art *tout court*, because by now the artist of today, who wishes to represent the world and its current historical phase in some way, cannot fail to consider these factors, given that sustainability is an urgent need to ensure the survival of those who will live after us and not just one choice among endless other possible ones. As an artist, Finucci inserts forms in eloquent spaces, with great skill at relating to the quality once conveyed by the term *genius loci*. She is keenly sensitive to color and light. She uses the mixed media of our time with mastery, while also revealing the traits of her education and her profession—architecture. At a certain point in her life, as an artist, she felt that architecture had become cramped and a cage, especially in the conflict between the rationality of building and the transmedia fluidity of her parallel work. Yet it nonetheless gave her a recognizable working method. In the various phases of *Wasteland* as well as the earlier stages of her expressive development, Finucci has given a large and significant space to a very constructive (and no longer facilely figurative) plastic semblance, which at times is even decidedly monumental, though only in the term's etymological root meaning of admonition. *HELP*, which is the title of this book, to date has been applied to three large installations (in Mozia, Rome, Milan) that shouted out, with intense connotations, an appeal for help from the world to us. *HELP* most effectively represents her urge to assert her independence, again showing us the contrast between the need for a form and its ephemeral insubstantiality, another salient aspect of her research and objectives.

Nonetheless, and this is the third point, Maria Cristina shows herself to the full as an extremely contemporary artist. The art of our time is now substantially founded on modes rather than artifacts. The end of the traditional paradigms, reiterated many times, from Duchamp to Belting, the iconosphere that grew out of the digital revolution and passed in a few decades through an uninterrupted series of “explosions” (in Lotman's sense), articulates the new artifacts in a complex landscape—relational, participatory, transgenerational—in the wake of a general postproduction. Maria Cristina makes an original contribution to this debate. As we can see, her pixel theory offers a significant addition to the overall meta-reflection on the status and configurations of the art of our time.

The book that we here present to the attention of the scientific community and the interest of enthusiasts is above all devoted, in its historical development, inner connections, and implications, to the *Wasteland* project, suitably contextualized in the recent international scene. A very complete appendix gives an account of the artist's earlier works, but in reality the critical analysis of *Wasteland* is constantly buttressed by references—though not explicit—to them, as the proof of a perceptible underlying coherence in her whole artistic achievement.

As we mentioned in the introduction, we wished to explore it scientifically, and in the scientific community there is also an obligation of academic accountability, even though the work is the united historical and critical product of the work of two people. In this sense alone, the responsibility for pages 45 to 139 should be ascribed to Silvia Burini and for pages 141 to 226 to Giuseppe Barbieri.

Silvia Burini, Giuseppe Barbieri



*Detail of the installation HELP the Ocean (Rome, Roman Forum, June 8 – July 29, 2018): Maria Cristina Finucci is lying in the center of the letter "P"*



*Aerial view at night of the installation HELP. L'età della plastica (island of Mozia, Trapani, September 25, 2016 – January 8, 2017)*



*View of the installation HELP the Ocean (Rome, Roman Forum, June 8 – July 29, 2018): in the background the arch of Septimius Severus and the Church of Santi Luca e Martina*



*Detail of the installation Climatesaurus (Paris, exterior of Hôtel Potocki, October 8 – 9, 2015)*



*Detail of the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)*



View of the interior of the installation L'Ambasciata (Rome, MAXXI, April 11 – May 2, 2014)



*Detail of the installation Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State (Venice, Ca' Foscari, great court, May 29 – November 24, 2013)*





*Detail of a preparation phase of the installation The Garbage Patch State (ARCO 2014 collateral event: Madrid, Gran Via, February 18 – March 7, 2014)*

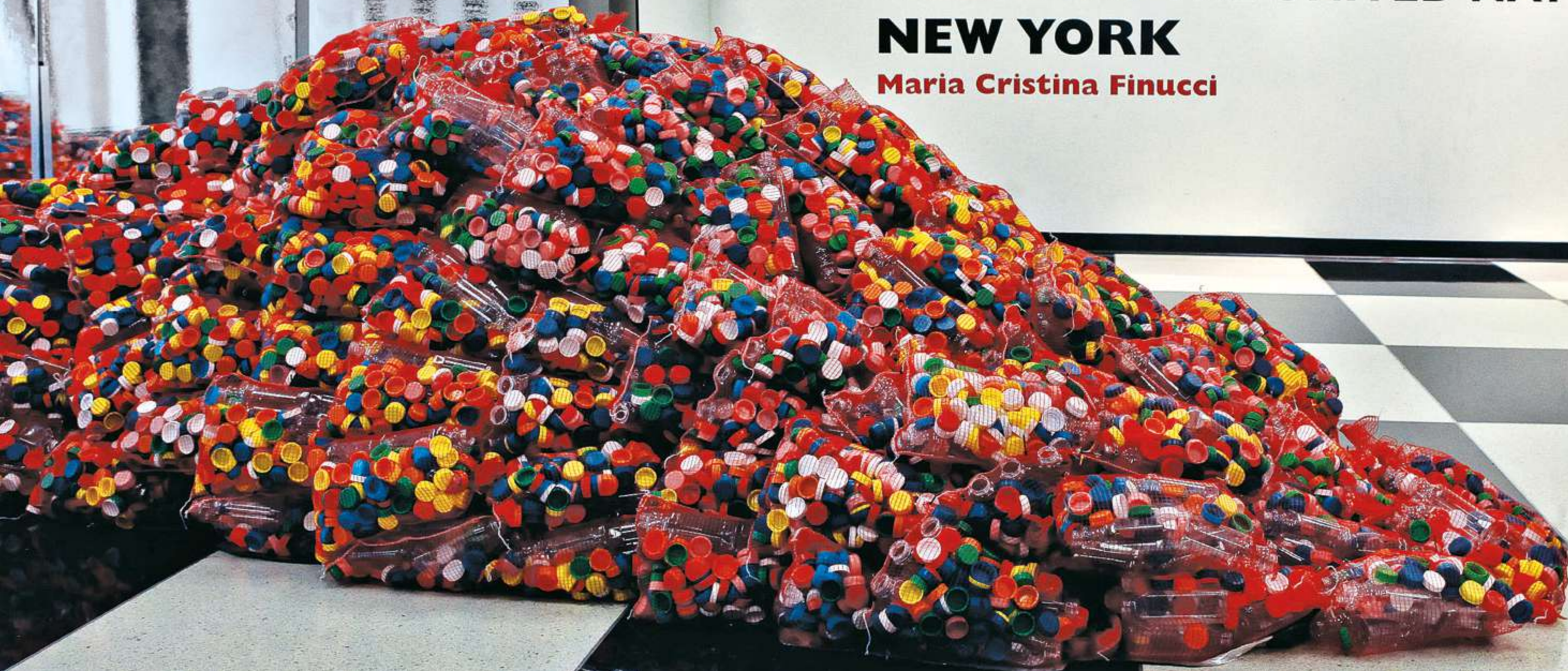


*Inner part of one of the Onde for the installation L'Ambasciata (Rome, MAXXI, April 11 – May 2, 2014)*

# THE GARBAGE PATCH STATE

MISSION AT THE UNITED NATIONS  
NEW YORK

Maria Cristina Finucci





*View of the installation The Vortex (Milan, EXPO in The City, Fondazione Bracco, from June 15, 2015; permanent collection)*



*View of the installation HELP. L'età della plastica (island of Mozia, Trapani, September 25, 2016 – January 8, 2017)*



*Detail of the installation Bluemedsaurus (Venice, Expo Aquae Pavilion, October 16, 2015)*



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## PARIS 2013

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*Detail of the installation A New State is Born!  
(Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)*



“ALL THE WORLD MUST KNOW”:  
THE ORIGIN OF THE GARBAGE PATCH STATE

“Today is an important day, the day when a State with a surface area of over 16 million square kilometers finally wins recognition. Finally, the veil of hypocrisy that has concealed this reality that nobody wanted to see will be lifted.

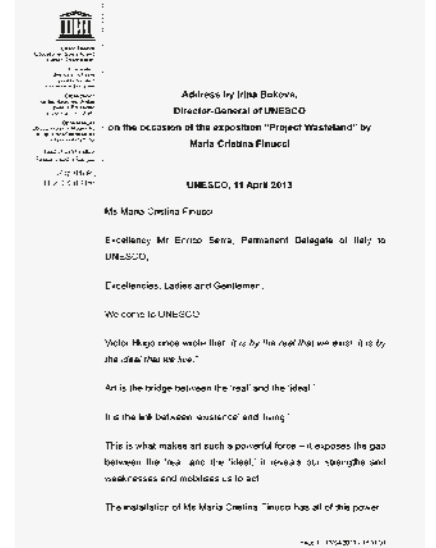
This is the time when the whole world must know that there is a nation made up bit by bit of something each of us has cast away as of little importance. Each of us has contributed to the formation of this reality, made up of bottles used only once and trashed, lighters tossed away in the street, rubber flip-flops forgotten on beaches, discarded plastic cups and plates.

But where is ‘away’? This is the ‘Away State,’ a nation made up of bits and pieces belonging to each and every one of us. We have built it in sixty years. In sixty years we have succeeded in forming an agglomeration of 16 million square kilometers made up of five large islands. We have succeeded in changing the geography of the Earth and today, being unable to conceal this reality from ourselves we recognize it as a Federal State.

Today, April 11, 2013, I declare the Federal State of the GARBAGE PATCH.”

This brief, but no less solemn, declaration of the foundation of the Garbage Patch State<sup>1</sup> was delivered in Paris on the above date by Maria Cristina Finucci. The ceremony was held at UNESCO’s headquarters, in the grand Salle des Pas Perdus, which housed an installation by the artist of similarly considerable size. The declaration concluded an institutional ceremony, clearly articulated in its official restraint. First, there was the greeting by the director general of UNESCO, Irina Bokova (which, as we will see in a moment, was more than just a formality), in the presence of the Italian permanent representative to the international agency, Ambassador Maurizio Serra, and UNESCO’s Deputy Director General for Culture, Francesco Bandarin. There followed a corresponding greeting by video link from Garbandia, the capital of the Garbage Patch State, delivered by the Prime Minister of the State, Mr. Basura. In short, April 11, 2013 marked the start of the largest and to date the most complex project Maria Cristina Finucci has engaged in: *Wasteland*.<sup>2</sup> If we start our analysis of her development on that day and follow its course down to 2020, leaving her previous creations to the second part of this volume, it is because the date really marks a watershed (and an accelerator) in the artist’s practice.

The very brief references to the high institutional profile of the ceremony, as will gradually become clear, were not (and are not) marginal to the general structure and purposes of *Wasteland*. Precisely for this reason it is worth underscoring some brief passages in Irina Bokova’s address, which we publish in full



<sup>1</sup> *The Garbage Patch State*, catalogue of the exhibition (Venice, great court of the Università Ca’ Foscari, May 29 – November 24, 2013), curated by G. Barbieri, Crocetta del Montello: Terra Ferma, 2012, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> The title of the project clearly refers to T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* (1922); and of course, taking into account the date of the declaration of the State, “April is the cruellest month.”

*The flag of the Garbage Patch State alongside the flags of Italy and UNESCO*

*Confirmation of the presence of Irina Bokova at the opening of the installation A New State is Born!; Irina Bokova’s speech of welcome at the inauguration*



## WELCOME

Ms Maria Cristina Finucci,  
Excellency Mr Enrico Serra, Permanent Delegate  
of Italy to UNESCO,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Welcome to UNESCO.

Victor Hugo once wrote that "it is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live." Art is the bridge between the "real" and the "ideal." It is the link between "existing" and "living." This is what makes art such a powerful force—it exposes the gap between the "real" and the "ideal," it reveals our strengths and weaknesses and mobilizes us to act. The installation of Ms Maria Cristina Finucci has all of this power. Bags filled with water and plastic pieces, laid on the floor, reflected by a mirrored wall. The combination of shapes and colors is appealing—but it is more, it is an invitation to go further, to understand the world we live in. We are living in a world under increasing pressure. From unsustainable behaviours, from unrestrained forms of development. The ocean carries much of the burden. The famous British writer, Arthur C. Clarke, once said: How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it is quite clearly Ocean. The ocean is essential to life on this planet and it lies at the heart of human well-being. The future we want for the ocean is more than a technical or scientific issue. It is about values, and it is about aspirations for a better world. This installation, this performance, are an invitation to think again and to act.

Mesdames et Messieurs,  
Un continent composé de nos déchets s'élargit dans l'étendue des océans. Charriés par les courants marins, amalgamés au fil des décennies, des débris de plastique occupent l'espace aquatique et il faudra des siècles pour que ces débris à la surface des océans, loin de nos rives, se dégradent. En attendant, les espèces aquatiques continuent de se nourrir de notre aveuglement. Pour l'heure, nous ne pouvons qu'établir le constat de notre échec quant à notre responsabilité. Pour l'heure, nous ne pouvons que l'admettre et lancer un cri d'alarme avec une urgence accrue. C'est tout l'enjeu de cette installation. L'œuvre de Maria Cristina Finucci, que l'UNESCO se félicite d'accueillir au sein de ses murs, sera présentée à la 55<sup>e</sup> Biennale de Venise, à partir de juin 2013. Son Garbage Patch State sera la 89<sup>e</sup> Nation représentée à la Biennale, et pourrait faire office aujourd'hui de 196<sup>e</sup> État membre de l'UNESCO. Il y a quelque chose d'à la fois ironique et implacable dans la reconnaissance de cet État de déchets. Maria Cristina Finucci nous met en face de notre responsabilité envers la planète qui nous accueille et qui nous nourrit, et aussi de notre responsabilité vis-à-vis de l'héritage que nous laissons aux générations futures.

Il n'est pas possible de faire marche-arrière, pas plus que de continuer à vivre dans le déni. Les pastilles multicolores qui composent l'espace de Maria Cristina Finucci ont cet aspect ludique des jeux d'enfance. Nous étions peut-être des enfants, ignorants de la valeur de nos ressources naturelles, et maintenant nous ouvrons les yeux. Aussi, ces pastilles ne sont pas sans rappeler les jetons du poker. Nous avons peut-être joué notre conscience et l'avons perdue au détriment de l'environnement, mais il est sûrement possible de tenter un nouveau tour dans le respect des lois de la nature. C'est là toute l'importance de l'art. Pour créer un monde meilleur, un monde plus durable, nous avons autant, sinon plus, besoin d'artistes que de scientifiques, que d'économistes – pour nous éclairer, pour nous mobiliser.

Maria Cristina Finucci, je vous remercie.

UNESCO, April 11, 2013  
Irina Bokova  
Director-General of UNESCO  
on the occasion of the exhibition  
"Project Wasteland"  
by Maria Cristina Finucci

## DICHIARAZIONE DI INDIPENDENZA

Testo originale in lingua spagnola della Dichiarazione di Indipendenza dello Stato Federale del Garbage Patch State pronunciato in francese in collegamento radio dal primo ministro, comandante Francisco Basura, dalla Capitale Garbandia l'11 aprile 2013.

Queridos amigos luchadores de la independencia, Los saludo en nombre del Gobierno del Garbage Patch State, el nuestro querido archipiélago de cinco islas de plástico en los océanos. Les pido a todos ustedes, marcar este 13 de Abril de 2013, como una fecha ilustre que quedara por siempre grabada en nuestros corazones, una fecha cuyo significado le explicarán orgullosamente a sus hijos, para que ellos en su momento les puedan contar a sus nietos la verdadera y gloriosa historia de nuestra lucha por la libertad. Aunque esta independencia está siendo proclamada hoy en acuerdo con la UNESCO, ningún nuestro ciudadano olvidará que la independencia se ganó en lucha, una lucha perseverante e inspirada contra el consumismo y la producción sin limite de objetos plásticos. Al unirnos a la voz de todos nuestros compatriotas en muchos países del mundo que piden la destrucción de todo material plástico y el cese absoluto de la fabricación de nuevos artefactos plásticos.

La directora de la UNESCO, señora Bokova, entendió nuestras razones pero nosotros consideramos que es necesaria una conferencia internacional con el objetivo de lograr la destrucción total de plástico. Nuestros ojos libres se abren hoy a nuevos horizontes y son capaces de ver lo que ayer nuestra condición nos impedía observar; que la "civilización" esconde bajo su vistosa fachada un cuadro que no se preocupa mínimamente del medio ambiente. Ya ha sonado la hora postrera del colonialismo consumista y millones de habitantes de plásticos de muchos continentes se levantan al encuentro de una nueva vida e imponen su irrestricto derecho a la autodeterminación y el desarrollo independiente de su nueva nación. Nuestro gobierno, un gobierno de unidad nacional y popular, servirá a su país.

El Estado Federal del Garbage Patch desde este momento es libre e independiente "¡VIVA LA PATRIA! ¡VIVA LA LIBERTAD! ¡VIVA LA INDEPENDENCIA!"

## THE PROVISIONAL CONSTITUTION OF THE GARBAGE STATE FEDERATION

### WHEREAS

- the inhabitants of the Garbage State
- declare that the Nation is established on the inherent dignity of each individual;
  - assert that they are entitled to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms;
  - believe in the concept of true democracy with free and fair elections;
  - desire the creation of a climate of economic well-being in the context of respect for law and order; and

NOW THEREFORE,  
the following provisions shall have effect as the Provisional Constitution of the Garbage State

### CHAPTER I – THE FEDERATION AND THE CONSTITUTION

#### THE FEDERATION AND ITS TERRITORY

- The five islands of the Garbage State shall be a sovereign democratic federal state which may be styled the Federation of the Garbage State.

#### CONSTITUTION IS THE SUPREME LAW

- This Constitution is the supreme law of the Federation of the Garbage State and, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, if any other law is inconsistent with this Constitution shall prevail and the other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.

### CHAPTER II – PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

#### FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

- Whereas every plastic inhabitant of the Federation of the Garbage State is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms, that is to say, the right, whatever its place of origin, birth, political opinions, colors, creed, or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest, to each and all of the following, namely- a) life, liberty, security, equality before the law, and the protection of the law; b) freedom of conscience, of expression, and of assembly and association; and c) protection for its personal privacy, the privacy of its home, and other property.

#### PROTECTION OF RIGHT TO LIFE

- No plastic object shall be deprived of its life intentionally.

#### PROTECTION OF RIGHT TO PERSONAL LIBERTY

- No plastic object shall be deprived of his personal liberty save as may be authorized by law unless in execution of the sentence or order of a court Protection from slavery of forced labor.
- No plastic object shall be held in slavery or servitude.

#### PROTECTION FROM UNACCEPTABLE TREATMENT

- No plastic object shall be subjected to torture or to degrading punishment or other like treatment.

#### PROTECTION FROM DEPRIVATION OF PROPERTY

- No property of any description shall be compulsorily taken possession of, and no interest in or right over property of any description shall be compulsorily acquired, except for a public purpose.

#### PROTECTION FROM ARBITRARY SEARCH OR ENTRY

- Except with its own consent, no object shall be subject to personal search or property or the entry by others on its premises.

#### PROVISIONS TO SECURE PROTECTION OF LAW

- If an object is charged with a criminal offence, then unless the charge is withdrawn, the case shall be afforded a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court established by law.

#### PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

- Except with his consent, no object shall be hindered in the enjoyment of its freedom of conscience.

#### PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

- Except with its own consent, no object shall be hindered in the enjoyment of its freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference.

#### PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

- Except with its own consent, no object shall be hindered in the enjoyment of its freedom of assembly and association.

#### PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- No object shall be deprived of its freedom of movement, that is to say, the right to move freely throughout the Federation of the Garbage State.

#### PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF ORIGIN, ETC.

- No law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either or itself or in its effect.

### CHAPTER III – PARLIAMENT

#### COMPOSITION OF PARLIAMENT. ESTABLISHMENT

- There shall be for the Federation of the Garbage State a Parliament that shall consist of fifty members. Any plastic object shall be qualified to be elected as a member of the National Assembly if it is a citizen of the age of eighteen years or upwards.

#### ELECTION OF REPRESENTATIVES

- Each of the constituencies shall return one Representative to the National Assembly that shall be directly elected in such manner as may, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, be prescribed by or under any law enacted by Parliament. The Speaker may be elected from among

the members of the National Assembly.

#### LEGISLATION AND PROCEDURE IN PARLIAMENT. POWER TO MAKE LAWS

- Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Garbage State Federation. The power of Parliament to make laws shall be exercised by bills passed by the national Assembly and assented to by the President.

#### SUMMONING, PROROGATION AND DISSOLUTION, SESSIONS

- Each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within the Federation of the Garbage State and shall begin at such time, not being later than one hundred and eighty days from the end of the preceding session if Parliament has been prorogue or ninety days from the holding of a general election of Representatives if Parliament has been dissolved.

### CHAPTER IV – THE EXECUTIVE

#### EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY

- The executive authority of the Federation of the Garbage State is vested in the Prime Minister

#### MINISTERS

- There shall be a Prime Minister of the Federation of the Garbage State that shall be appointed by the President.

#### CABINET

- There shall be for the Federation of the Garbage State a Cabinet of Ministers which shall consist of the Prime Minister and the other Ministers.

### CHAPTER V – THE PRESIDENT

- The President of the Garbage Patch Federation shall be appointed by the Parliament. His mandate will last seven years, renewable twice only.

### CHAPTER VI – FINANCE

#### STATE FUND

- All revenue or other moneys raised or received by the Government (not being revenues or other moneys that are payable, by or under any law, into some other fund of the Government established for a specific purpose) shall be paid into and form a State Fund.

#### THE ARMY, THE POLICE AND THE POLICE SERVICE

#### COMMISSION

- There shall be for the Federation of the Garbage State an Army, a Police Corp, and a Police Service Commission.

### CHAPTER VII – CITIZENSHIP

#### OBJECTS WHO CAN BECOME CITIZENS

- Every plastic object either born or transferred in the Garbage State Federation.

*Approved and signed in the Capital of Garbandia  
April 11, 2013*

among the documents (visual and verbal) of that beginning. The short text is significantly pervaded by pairs of contrasting terms: Victor Hugo's distinction (but it would be better to understand it as in fact a co-presence) between the real and the ideal, the distinction between land and ocean by Sir Arthur C. Clarke, author of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which brought the present face to face with the future. Then, in specifying the coexistence of installation and performance in the work presented in the Salle des Pas Perdu, the text finally takes into consideration the necessary integration of thought and action ("This installation, this performance, are an invitation to think again and act"). These are all themes that we will return to, but which already in this way indicate a far from marginal element in the project: its mixing of cognitive levels and expressive registers, ethical appeals and political implications.

We also publish the response to the greeting from the Garbage Patch State government in full. In the "Original text in Spanish of the Declaration of Independence of the Federal Garbage Patch State delivered in French over a radio link by the Prime Minister, Commander Francisco Basura<sup>3</sup> from the capital Garbandia on April 11, 2013," the head of government of the State, whose independence was recently recognized, revealed the final objective of the complex political ceremony: "La directora de la UNESCO, señora Bokova, entendió nuestras razones, pero nosotros consideramos que es necesaria una conferencia internacional con el objetivo de lograr la destrucción total de plástico. Nuestros ojos libres se abren hoy a nuevos horizontes y son capaces de ver lo que ayer nuestra condición nos impedía observar; que la 'civilización' esconde bajo su vistosa fachada un cuadro que no se preocupa minimamente del medio ambiente." Together with the declaration by Maria Cristina Finucci and the greetings from Bokova and Basura, the State's constitution was also made known, drafted in English with professional competence. The text was composed by Maria Cristina's husband, ambassador Pietro Sebastiani. We also publish this fourth fundamental document in full. It established citizens' freedom and rights (Article 26: "Objects who can become citizens: Every plastic object either born in or transferred to the Garbage State Federation"), as well as institutions (parliament, government, presidency, army, police...) and procedures (legislative and financial, the latter aimed at configuring wealth as universally shared).

A ceremony, a protocol, a message. They would probably have appeared bizarre and repetitive if they had not been accompanied by a sign. Maria Cristina's Parisian installation was placed above all on the floor of the hall. It had an irregular profile tending towards the trapezoidal. A considerable number of large transparent bags had been placed on the floor, containing, together with a little water, handfuls of colorful plastic caps, the kind normally used on bottles. The choice of the bottle cap, which rapidly became, in Daniel Arasse's sense,<sup>4</sup> a sort of "emblem" of the overall *Wasteland* project, actually preceded



<sup>3</sup> The name is significant: *basura* is the equivalent, in Spanish, of "garbage." Which makes the subtle use of Spanish in the Garbage Patch State's Declaration of Independence more comprehensible.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Arasse, *Il dettaglio. La pittura vista da vicino* (1992), Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> M.C. Finucci, "Il progetto Wasteland," in *The Garbage Patch State*, Op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its

Discontents," *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 178–183; Ead., *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012. "To put it simply: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder,' is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant... [T]hese shifts are often more powerful as ideals than as

the UNESCO installation by a few months. In fact, it was meant to have appeared in what proved to be a sort of performance *manqué*, which involved playing a water polo match (that never took place) in Rome in a CONI facility, a swimming pool in which the body of water would have been completely covered with colored plastic bottle caps. This was meant to reveal the problem of the abnormal spread of plastic discarded and floating on the surface of the sea to the athletes, the spectators, and public opinion, which would have been informed of it. Those bags of bottle tops, the artist would write a few days after the Parisian event,<sup>5</sup> were intended to represent "a small reproduction of the 'islands' of plastic debris present above all in the Pacific Ocean, islands that are actually not visually perceptible but are no less disturbing." *Wasteland* in short, from its first appearance revealed explicit metaphorical components which, although taking on different subsequent forms, would always remain present—especially in the emblematic bottle caps—in the other versions of the project. The walls of the Salle des Pas Perdu also featured, to the right of the contiguous auditorium, a series of forex panels with large digital prints providing basic documentation about the Garbage Patch State. On the end wall, close to the entrance of the auditorium, appeared the official flag of the new state, again as a large digital print. "On the opposite side, the sacks were placed in front of a mirror some thirty meters long which doubled their appearance. The wall behind bore a similarly long image depicting clouds on the horizon, made up of large pixels, which could not be perceived at close quarters, but only reflected in the mirror."<sup>6</sup> The installation included a sort of soundtrack: "It reproduced the audio, *Cernita*, from one of my video works, in which bottle tops moved by my hands produce a noise resembling surf. Hence noise created by plastic. Apart from seeing themselves in front of the Garbage Patch State, viewers could also see themselves reflected in the mirror, so that from being viewers they rightly found they had become actors."<sup>7</sup> In fact, the people who attended the inauguration of the event and occupied the sides of the large hall, thanks to this mirroring dynamic, appeared to be on the island of plastic, a space that cannot be walked on (in reality) but is equally inclusive. The national flag, planted in the center of the room, and first proudly carried on the artist's shoulder, completed the installation.

The link with the theories of spectatoriality in participatory art is clear, as in the passage by Finucci quoted above ("I will refer to this trend as 'participatory art,' since this expression connotes the involvement of many people [as opposed to one-to-one relationship of so-called 'interactive art'] and avoids the ambiguity of 'social' commitment"). Such theories have been expounded since 2006 by Claire Bishop, but on the basis of a broader reflection. This led to the irruption into the art system of a veritable Social Turn<sup>8</sup> (after the earlier equally well-known Linguistic, Pictorial, and Iconic Turns), which came to profoundly question the very notion of authorship. As was predicted by "Roland Barthes...



Maria Cristina Finucci (center) between Irina Bokova and Ambassador Maurizio Enrico Serra, Italian permanent representative to UNESCO (Paris, April 11, 2013)

Views of the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)



*The colored plastic bottle caps used by Maria Cristina Finucci in installations of the Wasteland project*

in 1968, authorships (of all kinds) are multiple and continually indebted to others. What matters are the ideas, experiences, and possibilities that result from these interactions.”<sup>9</sup>

So how did the project come into being? A couple of years earlier, as she has written and stated at various times, Maria Cristina discovered from a magazine article, no doubt like thousands of other readers, an account of the existence of the Garbage Patch, an island consisting of plastic debris at that time the size of Texas (and now of Canada, according to the latest surveys), 30 meters deep, floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The news made a profound impression on her. When she began to investigate the problem, she soon found, however, firstly that the information contained in the magazine underestimated the problem and then that the large island (actually the largest of at least five, with subsequent further occurrences, even in the Mediterranean), which she would have liked to visit as soon as possible, was not visible, had no outlines, had no apparent consistency but boasted a more subtle one. We can let her tell the story, because the long passage from 2013, which follows and is quoted here, effectively sums up the terms of the question and at the same time a state of mind, until then still very personal. “Since there is currently no known way of reclaiming the oceans, the only thing to do is to avoid making these ‘islands’ grow. To achieve this, we need the commitment of everyone living on Earth; but how could anyone think of changing things if none of the people I asked exactly understood the problem? Why was a disaster of this magnitude almost unknown? I myself, among the various sources of information found on the web, took a long time to get a precise idea, yet the ‘islands’ — I later discovered there were five—were as extensive as a continent and were a no man’s land. The reason this huge environmental problem is so overlooked is that the debris for the most part is not visible to the naked eye. Due to photodegradation, plastic waste, which is dragged from the coasts by currents to the center of the oceans, is reduced into smaller and smaller pieces until it becomes microscopic. This forms the famous ‘plastic soup,’ a colored broth made up of fragments of various sizes. An average concentration of 46,000 pieces per square mile is estimated. Not to mention the microscopic particles, which are 6 to 1 in proportion to plankton. That means 1 part of plankton for every 6 of plastic! So the ocean does not look as if it is covered with plastic only because it has largely disintegrated and yet is ever present. As we know it is a material that is not 100% biodegradable. In addition to releasing toxic chemical elements that have been added during its processing, plastic also acts as a catalyst for chemical agents dispersed in the seas. Another serious environmental problem is the high concentration of synthetic hormones found in the oceans. In fact, all the hormonal treatments produced by pharmaceutical companies and consumed by people, together with those used in the agri-food sector, end up in the sea. Plastic absorbs them



and fish swallow them together. As a result, many anomalies have been found in the species that have ingested these hormones. Obviously this has disastrous implications for the food chain. Another related problem is that the plastic mantle acts as a filter for the sun’s rays and prevents the photosynthesis of the species of seaweed responsible for oxygenating the sea. It’s a bit complicated to explain, but it affects the CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere. Not to mention the number of seagulls and sea creatures found dead after ingesting medium-sized plastic debris that their digestive system is incapable of coping with.”<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the text from which this significant extract is taken, Finucci also stresses the specific role of research and artistic practice in the face of unsustainable and insoluble situations, given that there are currently no adequate techniques for reclaiming boundless expanses of water. And there is no way to divert the submarine currents that transfer and concentrate abandoned plastic residues in certain areas of the planet amid such general indifference and with an almost total lack of awareness of the spatial and temporal consequences of our everyday habits. (We will return to this crucial point later.) “Art... has a different effect: with the power of images and actions it can move people deeply, where rational thought has no hold. It is precisely the language of art that I will be using in my personal campaign against this disaster, which involves everyone because it is everyone’s doing. Behind every little piece making up the Garbage Patch there is a person who has discarded it in the environment. An entity that belongs to us and at the same time threatens us, a hidden place of our consciousness that resurfaces.”<sup>11</sup> We will have to return to this challenging conclusion which, as the reader will have noticed, is perfectly attuned to Irina Bokova’s greeting, which was anything but conventional. Also in these lines the same terms appear: real and ideal, images and signs, actions and thoughts.



<sup>9</sup> C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, Op. cit., p. 9.

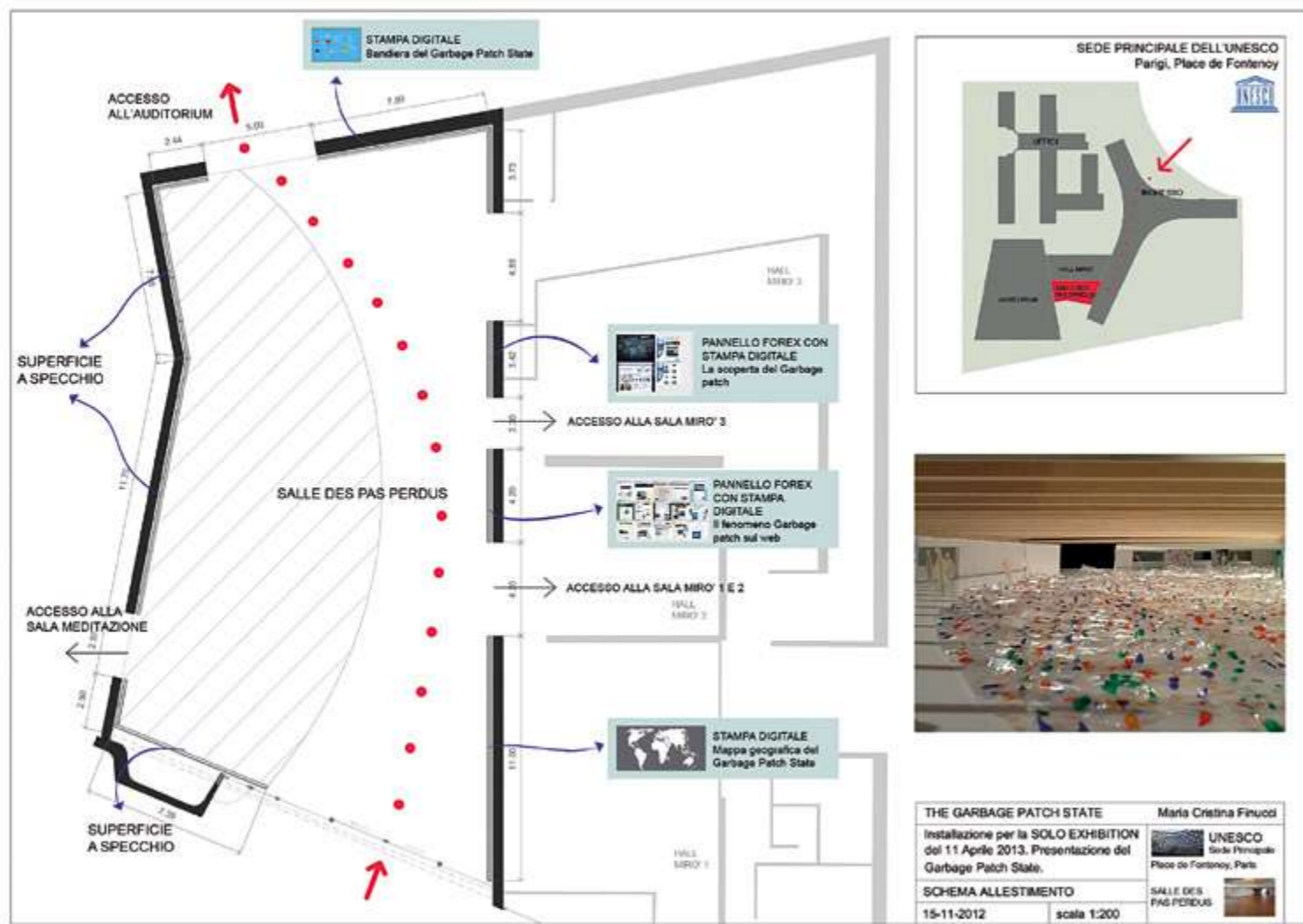
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

*The moment of the proclamation of the constitution of the Garbage Patch State (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)*

*Views of the maquette for the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013) An installation preparation phase*





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*Layout of the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)*

*A view of the floor of the Salle des Pas Perdu and the reflecting walls*





<sup>12</sup> On Enrica Borghi see A. Mammì, "La regina del trash," *L'Espresso*, January 28, 1999; M. Vescovo (ed.), *Natura e Metamorfosi*, Bologna: Damiani, 2006.  
<sup>13</sup> See A.V. Cipolle, "A Plastic Menagerie," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2020, p. 8.  
<sup>14</sup> See C. Jordan, *Intolerable Beauty: Portraits of American Mass Consumption*, self-published, 2005.  
<sup>15</sup> See <https://alejandroduran.com> (last accessed July 11, 2020).  
<sup>16</sup> See <https://blog.vonwong.com/strawpocalypse/> (last accessed July 11, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> See <https://plastikophobia.com> (last accessed July 11, 2020).  
<sup>18</sup> See S. Burini, G. Barbieri, *Aleksandr Ponomarev. The Second Journey*, New York: Rizzoli International, 2020.  
<sup>19</sup> See <https://oceanic.global/tan-zi-xi/>.  
<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.studiokca.com/projects/skyscraper-the-bruges-whale/>.

## A CONTEXTUAL GENEALOGY

Before entering into the details of the first version of the *Wasteland* project, it should be borne in mind that, in wrestling with the issue (one crucial aspect of the even broader set of climatic and environmental changes, with precise confirmation on the economic and social levels), Maria Cristina was not the first artist to deal with it, but her approach is completely original and truly impressive in scope.

The purpose of this volume is of course not to present an exhaustive overview of the relations between contemporary art and environmental disasters. But it will be necessary to recall at least some preceding works with affinities to the 2013 Parisian installation. A striking starting point, albeit marked by a different, well-known, and easily recognizable poetic, is *Surrounded Islands*, which Christo and Jeanne-Claude created in Biscayne Bay, Florida, between 1980 and 1983, especially in the bright-colored outline surrounding the small islands. Also noteworthy were the artificial water lilies (*The Flowers of the Moon*) that Enrica Borghi placed in 2001 in the Parco La Mandria in Turin and, before and after, the plastic garments and accessories she brought together in the project *Metamorphosis* (1999–2006).<sup>12</sup> Or the *Washed Ashore Project* (since 2010)<sup>13</sup> by Angela Haseltine Pozzi, which reuses tons of plastic waste from US beaches on the Pacific coast to give shape and life to a series of disturbing fantastical animals. Or, again, the various projects by the Californian photographer Chris Jordan, long-time resident of Seattle, with particular reference to the impact made by his series *Intolerable Beauty: Portraits of American Mass Consumption*, conducted between 2003 and 2005.<sup>14</sup>

Jordan's operation, like the others we have mentioned, clearly belongs to an important trend widespread in modern art. This is the use of decontextualized and transfigured industrial materials in a denser register. The trend was initiated, according to a firmly established critical tradition, by Marcel Duchamp, but in more recent times it has been enriched with more complex meanings, from the decadence of the West to globalization, consumerism and environmental dangers. As we will gradually point out, Maria Cristina Finucci's position is very different from that of the artists who use *objets trouvés*, waste materials, or even garbage. They establish a sequence

of names of some importance, such as Schwitters, Spoerri, Pistoletto, Kabakov, Boltanski, Cragg, and El Anatsui, who could readily be cited. Mike Kelley's *Garbage Drawings* could, at least in part, be seen as a point of contact with the more specific field we are considering.

Restricting ourselves more closely to the theme of marine plastic, *Plastic Bag*, Pascale Marthine Tayou's gigantic installation at the HangarBicocca in Milan (2012), is sufficiently threatening, even though it is not directly connected with the ocean environment, like the installation *Beyond Plastic* by the German artist Liina Klaus (2019). Alejandro Durán's *Washed Up Project* (since 2010) is much more relevant to our analysis,<sup>15</sup> being made up of installations specially created with glowing color scales in the Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve, in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, accompanied by a rich photographic documentation. And it is worth mentioning even more recent projects, at least later than the stages of *Wasteland*, if not directly inspired by it. One is the project *#strawpocalypse* by Benjamin Von Wong,<sup>16</sup> a Canadian artist, photographer, and activist. In his project *The Parting of the Plastic Sea* (2019: "My hope was to create the parting of the sea to reveal what's hiding within"), he sought to alert and denounce the widespread individual responsibilities in the abuse of plastic, at the same time urging everyone to participate in strategies for the protection and defense of the environment. In the same year Von Wong, with Joshua Goh and Laura François, created *Plastikophobia* in Singapore.<sup>17</sup> This was an installation in the form of a cave (perhaps through the influence of *Ice Cave* by Aleksandr Ponomarev in Moscow's Zaryadye Park,<sup>18</sup> conceptually of Platonic ancestry). It was made up of 18,000 plastic cups collected from hawkers' food stalls in the city on a single day. The Pacific Garbage Patch is also at the center of attention of Tan Zi Xi, who started the program "An Effort Most Futile" in 2008<sup>19</sup> and in 2016, again in Singapore, built the huge, evocative immersive installation *Plastic Ocean* (2015–2016). STUDIO KCA'S *Skyscraper (The Bruges Whale)*,<sup>20</sup> presented at the Bruges Triennial in 2018, also clearly recalls Maria Cristina Finucci's monsters, in particular those built in 2015, discussed below, and finally Sue Lipscombe's parallel *Bristol's Whale* (also from 2015).

*Maria Cristina waving the Garbage Patch State flag*



<sup>21</sup> F. Bonami, "Basta un clic e sarà arte," *la Repubblica*, July 9, 2020, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> See G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014; on the genesis and structure of the essay see M. Priarolo, R. Simone, E. Zinato, "Guy Debord, La società dello spettacolo, 1967," *Allegoria*, XXXI, III series, 79, 2019, pp. 146–167.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (1968), London: Verso, 1996; Id., *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1974), London: Sage, 1998. On the thinking of the French sociologist and philosopher, see

E. de Conciliis (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard, o la dissimulazione del reale*, Milan: Mimesis, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Perniola, *La società dei simulacri*, Bologna: Cappelli, 1980.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> See N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p. 14: "The possibility of a relational art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aes-

thetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art." As the origins of a *relational art*, Bourriaud indicates above all the "generalized growth of towns and cities" following the end of World War II, which drastically influenced the dimensions of the artwork, which established "an extraordinary upsurge in social encounters" and a growing role of reliance on the image.

<sup>27</sup> See Id. *Postproduction: La culture comme scénario: comment l'art reprogramme le monde contemporain*, Paris: Les presses du réel, 2004. We use the parallel English version, *Postproduction. Culture as Screen-*

#### THE INVENTION OF THE STATE AND THE DEBATE ON THE SIMULACRUM

Formerly the highly appreciated director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Daniel Birnbaum is now the director of Acute Art, a British platform, in which he has been involved by the Olafur Eliasson Foundation, which deals mainly with art projects based on virtual reality and augmented reality. He has declared that a common ambition on the international artistic scene for the next few years will be "to create something that does not exist, not art that we have already seen in normal reality. My hope is that a new language with new rules will emerge."<sup>21</sup> *Wasteland* seems to have anticipated this goal, naturally to some degree and in its own way. The project starts with something that does not exist, with the invention/institution of an invisible state, which can be founded (and almost immediately recognized) precisely on the basis of its invisibility. It was not a question of creating an institution absent until that moment. Maria Cristina Finucci immediately understood the importance of transforming a mass of dangerous plastic debris into a reliable interlocutor for all the other institutions on the planet. In the years that followed, she endowed the Garbage Patch State with locations, structures, activities, fantastic zoologies, remote historical phases, archaeological finds, and so forth. She has always maintained that her goal is not so much to create objects as to start a process, to mentally engage her public, to broaden it, to establish a sufficient basis of attention. Above all her aim is to devise something pervasive, which will raise awareness, establish a register of communication unlike simple ecological protest or dystopian predictions of a dire future. Reviewing the stages of the project a few years later, and in particular its beginning, that intuition has proved to be truly fruitful.

Today, in fact, we can rationally and clearly include *Wasteland* in an important decade-long cultural debate. Of course, this is not the place to give an account of it, but it is nevertheless essential to establish at least the elements of the overall scenario. We should then perhaps start from Guy Debord's eccentric 1967 thesis essay, *The Society of the Spectacle*,<sup>22</sup> from its definition of "spectacle," which "is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images." Or even earlier by the fulminating epigraph to the first chapter, in

the quotation from Feuerbach ("But certainly the present age... prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the being... Illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness," in the *Preface* to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, 1843). This suggests the much more remote roots of a context that then radically asserted itself in the second half of the 1960s.

We should of course add Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra-signs<sup>23</sup> and the certainly less apocalyptic return to the topic in Italy by Mario Perniola<sup>24</sup> ("The simulacrum is an image without a prototype, the image of something that does not exist,"<sup>25</sup> and therefore is disliked by iconophiles and iconoclasts, but this does not mean it is lacking in interesting aesthetic opportunities), as well as the subsequent contributions by Morin and Bourdieu. The progressive derealization that occurs in the cultural context of the second half of the twentieth century, the substitution of the image (or the spectacle) for reality, are all issues of such breadth and complexity that they cannot be addressed here, but still contribute to outline the depth and registers of Maria Cristina Finucci's project. And we should add to it positions that emerged after the two dense phases of debate, that around 1968 and that of the 1980s, which we have sought very briefly to indicate. We could think in particular, for example, of Nicolas Bourriaud's observation, which Maria Cristina confessed to us that she considered influential in her research. Anticipated in some respects by the *Relational Aesthetics* of 1998,<sup>26</sup> in *Postproduction*<sup>27</sup> Bourriaud reiterated what he believed defines the physiognomy of artistic practices from the last part of the twentieth century (and in the following two decades), which would be aimed at creating signs "on the basis of preexisting works,"<sup>28</sup> in the sense that artists "interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products" and the "eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer *primary*."<sup>29</sup> The twenty-first-century artist would therefore work with objects already present in the cultural market, "objects already informed by other objects. The concepts

*play: How Art Reprograms the World*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Author's italics.

*An example of the series of postcards Greetings from the Garbage Patch State*



*The phase of inserting the colored plastic bottle caps in bags*



of originality (being at the origin of) and of creation (creating something out of nothing) slowly fade away in the new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the deejay and the cultural programmer, both with the task of selecting cultural objects and including them in new contexts.<sup>30</sup> The orientations of semiotic studies between the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (from the semiotics of culture by Juri Lotman<sup>31</sup> to Mieke Bal's recontextualization/reframing criterion<sup>32</sup>) are not far from Bourriaud's observations. "The work of art," he continues, "functions as a temporary termination of a network of interconnected elements, as a narrative that extends to reinterpret the narratives that preceded it. Each exhibition contains the story of another exhibition; each work can serve multiple scenarios and be included in different programs. It is not a final point, therefore, but a moment in an infinite chain of contributions."<sup>33</sup>

## THE PIXEL THEORY

We will return shortly to the ideas advanced by Bourriaud, who somehow wanted to configure a theoretical framework for many contemporary practices of Art Sharing. But before doing this, it seems useful to quote Maria Cristina's own words, to enable us to understand more clearly one of the most original features of her work. With her, we have often termed it the "pixel theory." In a "physical" sense, the installation at UNESCO, as the reader will remember, made use of them. They composed the design of the clouds reflected in the mirrored surfaces of the chamber, creating an interplay of reflections between the work and the viewer, and this would not be the only time in the continuation of *Wasteland*. In reality, the term "pixel" has come to acquire a more substantial role in the design of the various versions of the Garbage Patch State. Here are Finucci's words:

"It came naturally to me 'to paint' the image of the Garbage Patch State as a dynamic element, so that it would be as



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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>31</sup> See J.M. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura* (1973), Milan: Bompiani, 1975; Id., *Testo e contesto: semiotica dell'arte e della cultura*, edited by S. Salvestroni, Rome/Bari: Laterza, 1980; Id., *Tesi per una semiotica delle culture*, edited by F. Sedda, Rome: Meltemi, 2006.  
<sup>32</sup> See in particular M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. In this respect, see also D. Radetic, *Scomode contiguità dello sguardo. Quattro*

*re-visioni della tradizione visiva occidentale*, PhD thesis, Ca' Foscari Università di Venezia, XXV ciclo, 2013 (supervisor G. Barbieri).

<sup>33</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, Op. cit., pos. 134

plausible and lifelike as a true fake. When we think of a State, even without having visited it, in our mind we have an image that is the sum of all the times in our life that we have come into contact with some information about it: in news reports, photos, accounts, objects, postcards, etc., all of which over time have come to give us an idea of the country in question. We can call them *clues*.

So, to make the idea of the Garbage Patch State plausible I artfully created a series of clues varying in nature, scale, and size. They comprise monumental installations, postcards, the flag, and every post on social networks, every

conference, or even simply when someone else shares the image of one of my installations or talks about it to a friend. Each of these clues produces a sort of pixel of the general image that is the *idea* that each person forms of the state.

I use this metaphor because graphic design software enhances image quality by automatically interpolating supposed and not necessarily real information in the form of pixels. Pixels are minimal units, which make sense only when they are inserted into a system, and for this reason installations alone do not have the same semantic value as the unicum, namely *Wasteland*. *Wasteland* is a work that



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*Details of the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013): a bag with water and bottle caps and one of the panels with pixel decoration*

*View of the installation A New State is Born! (Paris, UNESCO, April 11, 2013)*

has no physical support, because it is none other than the *idea* of the state that I invented that dwells in the minds of those who have encountered the clues. Clues that helped to add *pixels* to the general picture which obviously varies from person to person. For this reason I will never be able to see the result of the work.”

This is a significant passage, which raises numerous, complex issues referring to invention, memory, problems of transmission, impressions, narrative, sharing, and the scale of the projects. And it ends with a strong limiting clause against the consolidated typology of authorship, which in this case makes the artist rather marginal in terms of a community of users and co-authors, in a perspective very close to that argued by Claire Bishop in her definition of participatory art, also mentioned previously. In it “people constitute both the medium and the fundamental artistic material, to be understood in the meaning they have in theater and performance.”<sup>34</sup>

In a recent book, which we will also refer to later,<sup>35</sup> Tiziana Andina, professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Turin,<sup>36</sup> observed that “the artifact is [usually] an object created by someone with a precise intention and with a view to a purpose” and that therefore “the process of producing the artifact is determined by a mind-dependence that is significant.”<sup>37</sup> Only “natural” things (mountains, oceans, forests...) can be considered (as she puts it) “mind-independent,” in an interaction with humankind regulated only by dynamics of needs and requirements. In the case we are dealing with, the “artifact” (which we will discuss at length later, as a term that effectively summarizes Maria Cristina’s whole research) seems to

coincide, as we know, with boundless regions (produced by incorrect behavior albeit deriving from legitimate needs), but in reality it corresponds to the constitution of a state and Andina subtly admits, in the wake of Amie Lynn Thomasson,<sup>38</sup> that “more careful consideration leads us to stress that some artifacts show properties compatible with the spontaneous emergence of the salient features, thus limiting, to some extent, the weight of intentionality.”<sup>39</sup>

The examples provided by Thomasson and repeated by Andina (paths and villages built on slopes or mountain tops) are surprisingly analogous to those that appear at the heart of Leon Battista Alberti’s aesthetic theories, in his distinction between *pulchritudo* and *ornamentum*,<sup>40</sup> subsequently interpreted by Pietro Cataneo<sup>41</sup> in terms that match those of the American philosopher. We point this out, on the one hand, by virtue of Maria Cristina Finucci’s formation and more constant expressive activity, which is precisely that of an architect, and on the other to record, in many different periods, the emergence of an authorial conception that we must not think is exclusively referable to the self-referential one that became established in the nineteenth century. In the classical period or the Renaissance it would certainly have been difficult to represent a concept and a phenomenon like Art Sharing. But an undertaking like the mental constitution of the Garbage Patch State would lead us “to conclude that even in the circumstances in which a form of preliminary intentionality appears rather weak [as was the first almost emotional emergence of Finucci’s project] or even completely absent, the artifact can come into existence, since the process is made possible by precise structures or configurations of reality...”<sup>42</sup>

As we have already pointed out, *Wasteland* is not an installation or a sequence of installations; rather it is the construction of a cognitive, narrative process of general involvement. Although there are some elements (plastic materials, water, strong chromatic sensibility, an array of scientific information, prospects of commitment) that are recurrent and comparable with the results of the work of other artists, those we have listed by default in a sort of “contextual genealogy,” the differences prevail. Maria Cristina Finucci believed that the unlikely creation of a state was the only way to make the invisible evident and ensure the Garbage Patch State would become, simply, something that pervaded and affected the consciences of its involuntary builders. The universal contribution to the building of the Pacific Trash Vortex is, in fact, the authentic register of reality that prompted her. And, according to Mario Perniola, in his eccentric volume devoted to “the sex appeal of the inorganic,”<sup>43</sup> Maria Cristina reacted to the “Cartesian” problem.

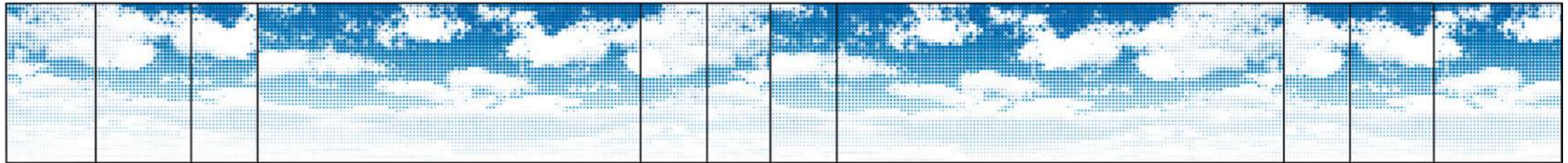
Here is Perniola:

“He [Descartes] also speaks of the most common, inanimate, inert thing, for instance a piece of wax [but here we could think ‘plastic’]. If we remove all that does not belong to the wax, says Descartes, such as its color, figure, size, what remains is ‘something extended, flexible and changeable,’<sup>44</sup> capable of taking on an infinity of shapes. Since the shapes that the wax can take are numberless, none of them, according to Descartes, is reliable. My senses do not allow me to know what the wax is, it is my mind alone that can ‘take its clothes off, so to speak,’ hence succeed in seeing it entirely ‘naked.’<sup>45</sup> This is what interests us and this is what

today we are comparing it with, not the thing that thinks, or the one that moves, and not even the thing that shines in a certain, stable sensitive form, but something opaque, indeterminate and open which is not self-evident and which is not a machine. Maybe it feels? But what does it feel?”<sup>46</sup>

The “pixel theory” that we previously mentioned performs roughly the same process indicated by the philosopher, and therefore cognitive, “political,” and above all artistic: in fact, it strives to transfer to the minds and consciences of the spectators “something extended, flexible, changeable.”<sup>47</sup> The invention of the state, it has to be stressed once again, concerns only the activation of the idea of the latter in a collective mentality. The expected result is therefore immaterial, in a time frame not directly controlled by the artist, and requires the assembly of codes and plural contacts. For this reason we will soon have to talk about transmedia narrativity.

As Bourriaud again observed,<sup>48</sup> this consequently requires a profound change of status for the work of art, which must now assume above all the role of an “active agent” of dynamics that are transindividual and, as we have mentioned and will see more clearly later, transgenerational, a generator of behaviors and potential reuses. “Art,” he wrote, “to give shape and weight to the most invisible processes” and, in seeking “to shatter the logic of the spectacle, art restores the world to us as an experience to be lived.”<sup>49</sup> The levels of discourse cannot claim, in this perspective, to be perfectly distinct, due to the numerous recursive dynamics that intervene. But this may perhaps enable us truly to achieve, as Birnbaum hoped, to give life to something that does not exist, to program new narra-



<sup>34</sup> C. Bishop, *Inferni artificiali*, Op. cit., pos. 204.  
<sup>35</sup> See T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità. Una filosofia per le generazioni future*, Rome: Carocci, 2020.  
<sup>36</sup> Without disdaining aesthetic issues connected to art, first by taking an interest in the reflection of Arthur Coleman Danto (*Arthur Danto: un filosofo pop*, Rome: Carocci, 2010) and subsequently considerably broadening the number of issues in her research: she has written *What is Art? The Question of Definition Reloaded*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017, and in 2019 she curated *Post-Truth, Philosophy and Law*, with A. Condello, New

York: Routledge. She also dealt with action (*Analytical Philosophy of Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).  
<sup>37</sup> T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità*, Op. cit., p. 98.  
<sup>38</sup> See A.L. Thomasson, “Realism and Human Kinds,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67, 2003, pp. 580–609. In her essay, the American philosopher explicitly denies any factor of “intentionality” in the waste produced by anthropogenic societies.  
<sup>39</sup> T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità*, Op. cit., p. 100.  
<sup>40</sup> See L.B. Alberti, *L’architettura*, princeps 1485, ed. con-

sulted by G. Orlandi, P. Portoghesi, Milan: Il Polifilo, 1989, *Prologo* (pp. 7–9) and above all I. VI, Chaps. 1–2, pp. 231–237.  
<sup>41</sup> The early use of Thomasson’s examples is in fact even more explicit in Pietro Cataneo, *I primi quattro libri d’architettura*, Venice, figli di Aldo, 1567, I, 13, p. 15v: “The Architect of all things having created the world in such beautiful & varied manners, and shown us that we have to embellish it, therefore we should not leave the mountainous regions uninhabited, but choose among them the finest sites and build cities or castles there.”

<sup>42</sup> T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità*, Op. cit., p. 101.  
<sup>43</sup> See M. Perniola, *Il sex appeal dell’inorganico*, Turin: Einaudi, 1994 (English edition, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, London: Bloomsbury, 2004).  
<sup>44</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 22.  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.  
<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.  
<sup>47</sup> See in this sense also N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Op. cit., p. 80: “So reality is what I talk about with a third party. It can only be defined as a product of nego-

tiation. Escaping from reality is ‘mad.’ Somebody sees an orange rabbit on my shoulder, but I can’t see it. So discussion weakens and shrinks. To find a negotiating space, I must pretend to see this orange rabbit on my shoulder. Imagination seems like a prosthesis affixed to the real so as to produce more intercourse between the interlocutors. So the goal of art is to reduce the mechanical share in us. Its aim is to destroy any a priori agreement about what is perceived.”  
<sup>48</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, Op. cit., p. 20.  
<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

*The pixelated walls of the backdrop to the installation*

tive codes,<sup>50</sup> to implement methods not fully experienced up to now in the current artistic scenario. “It is up to us as beholders of art,” concludes Bourriaud,<sup>51</sup> “to bring these relations to light. It is up to us to judge artworks in terms of the relations they produce in the specific contexts they inhabit. Because art is an activity that produces relationships to the world and in one form or another makes its relationships to space and time material.”

In this respect, UNESCO’s prompt decision to recognize (provisionally but emblematically) the Garbage Patch State as the 196th member state of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture, the rapid promulgation of a provisional Constitution, founded on the principle of garbage’s supremacy over or at least equality with mankind, with the establishment of ministries and academies (military and cultural), was the preliminary and indispensable step for establishing the *Wasteland* project. On April 11, 2013, the country’s website ([garbagepatchstate.org](http://garbagepatchstate.org)) was also published and the most important thing, in our opinion, confirming what we have argued so far, was the large number of people who accessed it to apply for at least a declaration of citizenship, if not an official passport. As Finucci clarified in an interview in those same days: “We also thought about granting citizenship of the state, and we will certainly do so, because we have received many applications. But let’s be clear: humans will not be full citizens. At most they can represent the true citizens of the Garbage Patch State, who are the trash.”<sup>52</sup> So also in this case, what appears as a crucial identitarian value, belonging to a state, is resolved in a relationship of deputation and representation. Bourriaud’s observation is interesting in this respect: “By considering them not indisputable facts but precarious structures to be used as tools, these artists produce singular narrative spaces of which their work is the *mise-en-scène*.”<sup>53</sup>

The site of the Garbage Patch State, which has changed greatly since then, initially also featured the first components of a national mythology, an activity that engaged a group of students from the Università Ca’ Foscari in Venice at the time. We will look at this again shortly, when we describe the first stage of the project in Venice. We will limit ourselves to adding that not even two years later, shortly after celebrating its national day at the MAXXI in Rome and the joyful opening of its first

embassy, the Garbage Patch State was included by Graziano Graziani in his atlas of micronations.<sup>54</sup> I am confident that so far I have managed to bring together at least the first essential features of the complexity of the *Wasteland* meta-project and many (critical and cognitive) that are implicit in it. But we are only at the start.

<sup>50</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 18.

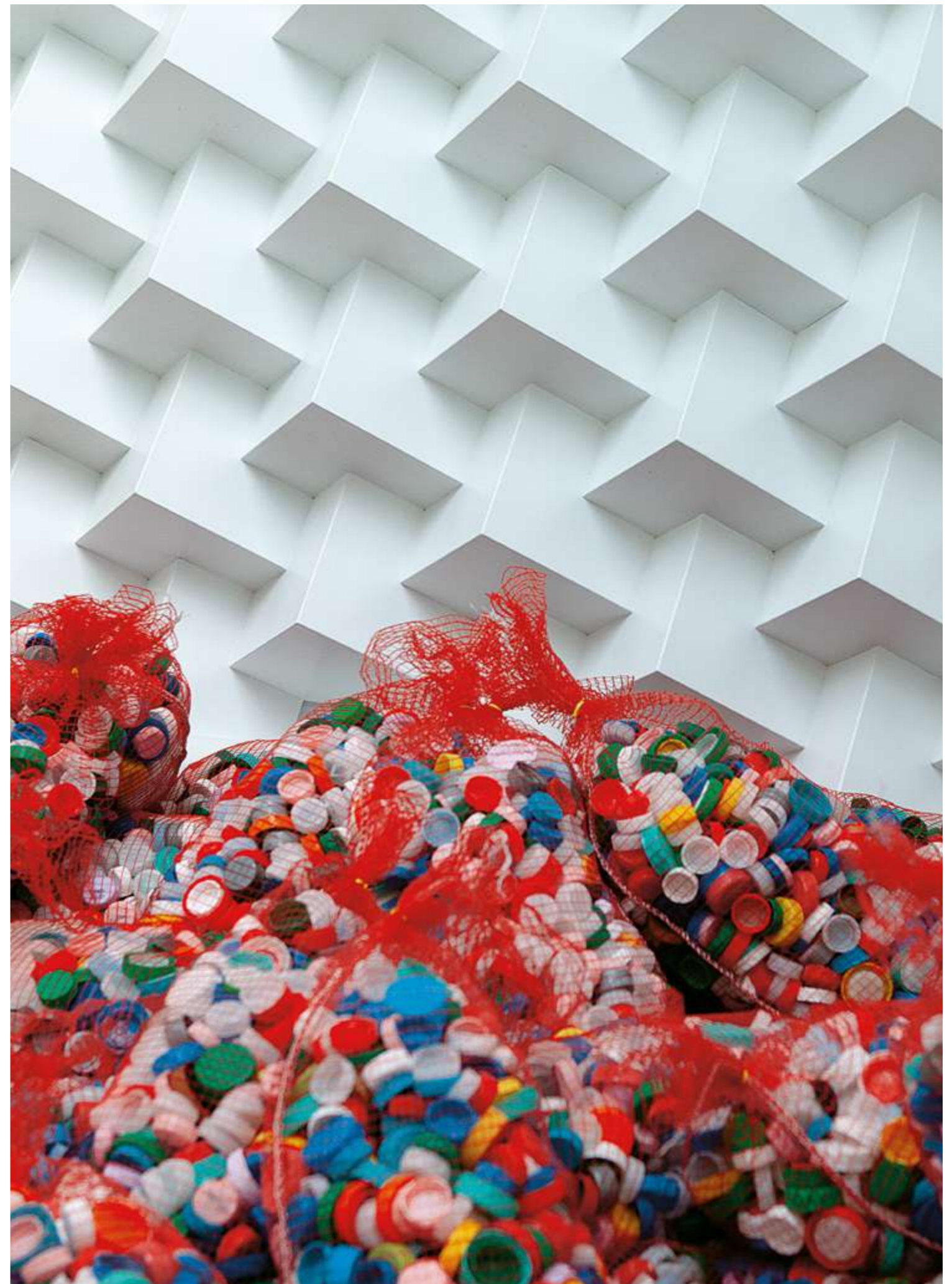
<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> <https://grazianograziani.wordpress.com/2013/06/04/il-paese-dei-rifiuti/> (last accessed July 11, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, Op. cit., pp. 32–33.

<sup>54</sup> See G. Graziani, *Atlante delle micronazioni*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015, pp. 145–148.

*Bags with colored plastic bottle caps in the artist's studio in Rome*





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“I THINK HAVING LAND AND NOT RUINING IT IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ART ANYBODY COULD EVER WANT”

This quotation from Andy Warhol appears some two-thirds of the way through the catalogue<sup>55</sup> (the first devoted to *Wasteland*) produced and published in 2013 to accompany the first (only and fake) “national participation”<sup>56</sup> of the Garbage Patch State in the 55th Venice Biennale (*Il Palazzo Enciclopedico*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni). It also appeared prominently in many public parts of the city, the center for almost two thousand years of an extraordinary, fragile ecosystem. The reference is sufficient to prompt the realization that Venice is not only one of the recognized world capitals of contemporary art, but also an unfortunately privileged observatory of the dangers increasingly compromising our environment. Both reasons prompted Maria Cristina to explore the possibility of creating another sensational “pixel” in her general program of collective persuasion in Venice. Venice actually preceded Paris, at least chronologically, and indeed the two events were closely and deeply related. The announcement of Garbage’s national participation in the Biennale appears in Irina Bokova’s speech at UNESCO, which has its headquarters for Eastern and Southern Europe in Venice. The first contacts with Ca’ Foscari began in late autumn 2012, initially favored by Olga Strada, who would soon become the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Moscow and immediately contacted us. They quickly aroused the interest of the university’s rector Carlo Carraro, significantly an authoritative economist on climate change. “Ca’ Foscari [he later wrote in the opening of the catalogue] has long been at the forefront of research that studies and measures the problem of the compatibility between economic growth and the natural environment, as well as in the development of shared strategies of control and progressive attenuation of a now dramatic situation. It does so through... organic collaboration with national and international institutions, often arising from investigations conducted at our university. I have in mind the International Center for Climate Governance (ICCG) or the Euro-Mediterranean Center for Climate Change (CMCC). Or the contributions that Ca’ Foscari’s teachers make to the Intergovernmental Committee for Climate Change (IPCC), of which I am a member. However, scientific research makes more sense if it manages to involve a growing number of people in coherent and consequential behaviors. Sustainable Ca’ Foscari is our pilot project, arising from the aims adopted with the charter of sustainability commitments that is an integral part of our statute. We are the certified Italian reference point for university policies of environmental respect, as attested by the annual GreenMetric ranking of sustainable universities on the planet for 2013.”<sup>57</sup>

Carraro effectively offered an overall picture of the sensibilities present in the Venetian university. The meeting with Maria Cristina proved immediately effective.



<sup>55</sup> *The Garbage Patch State*, Op. cit.: the Warhol quote is on p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Of course, this is not a true national participation, which in the customs of the Venetian event is subject to rigid protocol. Consequently the Venice Biennale could not take the same decision made a few weeks earlier by UNESCO, which perhaps showed itself politically more forward-looking. The various subsequent attempts by the Russian artist Aleksandr Ponomarev to accredit an Antarctic Pavilion met with similar difficulties. Since she had missed the deadline,

Finucci was also unable to request the status of a collateral event, but this did not in any way compromise the broad success of the operation, as we shall see.

<sup>57</sup> *The Garbage Patch State*, Op. cit., p. 5.

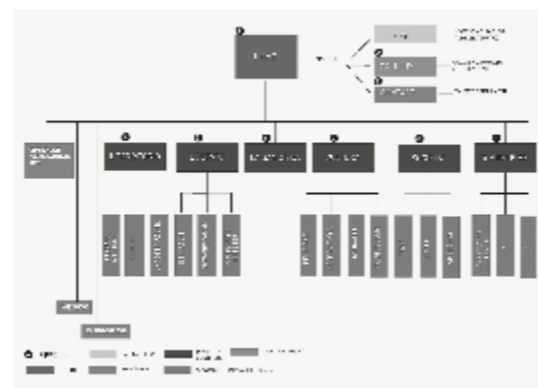
*The trail of bags with colored plastic bottle caps stretches beyond the wall enclosing the great court of Ca’ Foscari (2013)*

*Poster of the Venetian installation*



*View of the upper part of the installation Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State (Venice, Ca' Foscari, great court, May 29 – November 24, 2013) against the backdrop of the outer wall*

tive, due to the parallel and intense experience in the exhibition field developing at Ca' Foscari in those years. They were often exhibitions directly produced by the university (*Nigra sum sed Formosa. Sacred and Beauty in Christian Ethiopia*, 2009; *Russias! Memory, Mystification, Imaginary*, 2010; *We are Here*, 2011; *William Congdon in Venice, Works 1948–1959. An American Gaze*, 2012; *Mockba Underground*, 2012), and others realized in collaboration with prestigious partners (*Bruce Nauman. Topological Gardens*, 2009, with the Philadelphia Museum of Art; *No Place Like – 4 Houses, 4 Films*, 2010, with the Portuguese Ministry of Culture; *Dmitri Prigov: Dmitri Prigov*, 2011, with the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg). All these initiatives involved various departments, different skills, and successive generations, with two further common objectives: to test the new technologies from the field of Information and Communication Technologies in the use of art, and more generally of the cultural heritage; identifying and verifying some new professional roles in the modern system of arts and cultural tourism, given that the primary purpose of a university was and remains that of developing research and transforming it into an increasingly adequate and practical education. In short, the ground was fertile, both in terms of more naturally scientific research and of historical-artistic and museographic experimentation.



## STUDENTS AND THE PRE-POPULATION OF THE SITE

Preparations went ahead busily in the months preceding the layout of the pavilion. Groups of students engaged in various courses and in particular the “Skills for Sustainability” program, directed by Chiara Mio, were active in what we could term the pre-population of the *garbagepatchstate.org* site. The image alongside shows its internal organization into Territory, State, Flag, Culture, Society, and Statistics. With the exception of the Flag, all the headwords have further and more specific sub-headings (Culture, for example, includes Religion, Art and History, Characters, Famous Phrases). The whole does not envision a dense and problematic historiographical approach. The layout of the site presents a very summary index, in Wikipedia style: simple information, easily identifiable, a prelude to any further information. The impression does not change if we look more closely at the contents actually inserted, which did not, however, cover the whole organization and were the exclusive result of the students’ commitment, not shared with the artist. Here is a single example, which significantly illustrates the general record of the transmission of information:

### Society

“Garbagian society has the peculiarity of being made up of neuter individuals. After years of gender struggles, the Garbagian government has successfully managed to break down the male-female distinction to establish a single gender: the neutral gender... As regards the structure of Garbagian society, we can identify some very distinct groups. In recent years, the class of ‘plastic celebrities’ (for instance... ) has surpassed the political class in terms of income and wealth, though the latter remains a very powerful and influential class in the Garbage Patch State, also on the international level... Immediately below them we can identify the class of sportsmen, among whom the most famous and richest are above all the players of the national sport ‘animal shooting’ (sidebar national sport)... The poorest group, the so-called ‘unidentifiable plastic objects,’ comprises the first founders of the islands, the survivors of the various migratory waves that built and shaped the five islands. In recent years this stratum of the population has

created many problems at the social level by asking that it be accorded the authority and status it deserves...<sup>58</sup>

From one point of view this text (like the others, in reality) is not without interest. It must be reiterated that the responsibility for its drafting lies with a group of students (and here, too, we have really limited ourselves to correcting a few typos, leaving out repetitions and inaccuracies). They wrote the texts, after being informed of the scientific and political dimension of the problem and meeting Maria Cristina at least a couple of times. But they did not conduct specific research into the subject, nor was there any transfer of material from or to the final assessments for the three-year degree or dissertation. Some elements (texts written between late 2012 and the early months of 2013), however, to some extent anticipated subsequent and more common “sovereignist” sensibilities, almost of tone, so to speak, in the current political jargon: references to a political caste, migratory flows, ethnic clashes, and manifestations of dissent emerge clearly between the lines. This observation is almost inevitable, as these are the fragments of reflection of a generation that seems to consider the serious situation that has arisen without feeling any special sense of responsibility or even urgent commitment, adopting a code of almost light-hearted descriptiveness. Here is another small example as confirmation:

### Holidays and Traditions

“The folk festivals of the Garbage Patch State reflect the cultural diversity that characterizes the inhabitants of the islands. Among the best known and most highly appreciated is undoubtedly the festival of discovery, called Moore’s Day,<sup>59</sup> after the famous discoverer, celebrated on x [sic!] on the main island, where light shows mingle with cultural and food-and-wine events. The festival of the phenomenon in summer on the island of b is the oldest festival and still brings with it symbols of ancient traditions, such as the famous parade along the main canal, where the most monstrous creatures perform before an entertained public... Since 2011, Republic Day has also been celebrated, known as the MCF festival,<sup>60</sup> with more official celebrations in the capital being accompanied by more popular celebrations on the other four islands... ” Probably the decision was due in the first place to the mission that Finucci shared in Venice with teachers and students. It



<sup>58</sup> The contributions of the students from Ca' Foscari no longer appear on the website *garbagepatchstate.org*, which now features a prevalent graphic design in the form of a gallery of images and news about particular events. A trace (though rather weak) of these contributions, which we were able to recover from the artist’s archive, is subsumed in the current configuration of the site in a list of FAQs.

<sup>59</sup> The reference is to the American oceanographer Charles J. Moore, to whom we owe (in 1997) the first organic information (and reports) on the Great Pacific

Garbage Patch and who, a few years later, founded the Algalita Marine Research and Education at Long Beach in California, where it is still active.

<sup>60</sup> In this case the acronym clearly refers to the artist’s initials.

*Diagram of the Garbage Patch State website developed by university students in Venice. Maria Cristina Finucci holding a seminar at Ca' Foscari, San Basilio teaching center (May 2013)*





Side view of part of the installation Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State (Venice, Ca' Foscari, great court, May 29 – November 24, 2013)

was a question of contributing above all, with a collective and shared effort, to establishing the mythological background to the Garbage Patch State, on which the other contents would be produced. Perhaps they were not exceptionally insightful, but also in this case they possessed some interest. A first reference appeared to types of “monstrous creatures,” destined in the following years to play a significant role in Maria Cristina’s overall project. There is mention of artistic competitions, expressing the Garbage Patch’s need to create its own iconography. The reader will have already perceived that the purpose in creating the “mythology” of the state was entirely consistent with the criterion of mental pervasiveness and consciousness that we have repeatedly mentioned and that guided the *Wasteland* project from the start. Even in the case of these contents there is a certain lack of knowledge and competence. As is well known (it will suffice to recall the classic study of Greek mythology by Karol Kerényi<sup>61</sup>), mythical knowledge and stories are commonly used to define (in a plural, complex, even deliberately inconsistent way) very remote genealogies, in addition to and sometimes replacing the more documentary historical memory. With the exception perhaps of the diligent contribution by Silvia Garbari and Helga Vian on the proto-history of the Garbage Patch State, with its founding hero (Vinyl Chloride), premonitory dreams and the reference to a “Ti with a zero,” to a primeval time frame, the Ca’ Foscari myths do not draw upon such levels of complexity, do not depict probable personalities, and are in some part comprehensible only on the principle, established by Epicurus, of *pleonakos tròpos* or “method of multiple explanations.”<sup>62</sup> In this case, too, the profiles offered us rather convey the impression of some knowledge adequately developed (as in the presentation of the state war arsenal, based on fearsome chemicals, including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, organo-chlorinated substances such as pesticides and herbicides, polychlorinated biphenyls, and aliphatic hydrocarbons), but without any notable narratological density, which has united, according to a famous theory by Arthur Danto, the whole artistic scene since the last years of the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup>

If the results of the work are not, in short, memorable, the method adopted and the involvements carried out are much more stimulating. The 2013 installation of the *Wasteland* proj-

ect at Ca’ Foscari marked the start of the explicit and active involvement of universities and their students. In truth, a form of collaboration had already been established in the meantime with the technical administrative staff and students of the Università Roma Tre. They had undertaken (as they later did) to collect, sanitize, and package the hundreds of thousands of colored bottle tops used in the installation at UNESCO, the one in Venice, and many subsequent ones.<sup>64</sup> In this case, however, as would happen later in Madrid and Rome, the involvement of a younger generation was more prominent and challenging. We have already pointed out some features of interest in this type of relationship, consequently involving an exchange between different generational sensibilities. It is probably worth adding a few more.

<sup>61</sup> See K. Kerényi, *Gli dèi e gli eroi della Grecia* (1951 and 1958), Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1963.

<sup>62</sup> See A. Lollo, “Lettera a Hercole Perinato,” in *Lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi uomini [...]*, di Venegia, n.p., 1548, ff. 72r-86r; here f. 82v. The letter specifies that this approach, identified by the Greek philosopher, applied above to natural phenomena and attempts to organize them, for example as topiary in gardens. We will have occasion to return to this point later.

<sup>63</sup> Arthur C. Danto has indeed reflected at length, especially in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and*

*the Pale of History*, of 1997, on the difficulty of the contemporary art scene, even at much higher levels, to recreate the conditions for complex and profound narratives. “It is the sense of no longer belonging to a great narrative, registering itself on our consciousness that somewhere between uneasiness and exhilaration, that marks the historical sensibility of the present” (*After the End of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 5). “Recently people have begun to feel,” he adds, “that the last twenty-five years, a period of tremendous experimental productiveness in the visual

arts with no single narrative direction on the basis of which others could be excluded, have stabilized as the norm” (p. 13). Danto’s essay therefore has the stated purpose of establishing “what critical principles there can be when there are no narratives, and where, in a qualified sense, anything goes” (Ibid., *Preface*, p. XIV).

<sup>64</sup> Of course, this is not just a mechanical form of collaboration. As Bourriaud observes (*Postproduction*, Op. cit., p. 24), “To use an object is necessarily to interpret it.” and in contextual (economic and social) frameworks of increasing abstractness it is necessary



In *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud convincingly pointed out that “the work of art may thus consist of a formal arrangement that generates relationships between people, or be born of a social process; I have described this phenomenon as ‘relational aesthetics,’ whose main feature is to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself.”<sup>65</sup> To this general mode (if not necessity) of relational agreement, we can add some that are more specifically relevant. In her recent volume on transgenerationality, which we have already referred to in this study, Tiziana Andina has developed a significant analysis of the urgent need to unite the successive generations (and which is unfortunately regularly deferred, if we think of the current serious economic and social situation). As we know and experience, institutions are usually reluctant to change, to transform themselves. “This scenario,” Andina observes brilliantly, “is characterized by a neglect of the future that is perfectly expressed by the question that Woody Allen repeats after Groucho Marx, expressing a question that slumbers in each of us: ‘Why should I do anything for posterity? What has posterity ever done for me?’”<sup>66</sup> The lack of a positively diachronic vision, on the political and social and also of course economic level, unfortunately comes up against the extraordinary durability of plastic in our case (the *Wasteland* project and the dynamics of growth and accumulation of the *Garbage Patch Vortex*, which Maria Cristina Finucci has been able to transform into a state, thus giving it a precise institutional profile). This situation inevitably postulates the need for intergenerational pacts.

This factor, as can be seen, involves the relationship between past and future in challenging terms. We often mistakenly consider them to be fixed and unchangeable. And the problem involves not only extra-artistic sectors, such as politics and economics. Some authoritative scholars in the historical-artistic or semiotic field have suggested that we should try to consider the problem from a different point of view. In this respect Groucho Marx and Woody Allen, if we set aside the indubitable effectiveness of the quip quoted by Tiziana Andina, may not have been completely in the right. As it is well known, in the famous “Excursus against influence” in *Patterns of Intention*,<sup>67</sup> Michael Baxandall affirmed, for instance, the artistic and crit-

to invent new modes of representation, not only formal, but also participatory (cf. Ibid., p. 62).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 32–33; in the sense of an “interpersonal game,” “lasting encounter,” reciprocal gaze: cf. also N. Bourriaud, *Relational aesthetics*, Op. cit., pp. 14–18.

<sup>66</sup> T. Andina, Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> See M. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention. On the historical explanation of works of art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 59–61.

*Bags with colored plastic bottle caps against the gate of the university on Rio Novo*

ical influence of the future on the past, with a surprising but equally apt case study. Picasso's reception of the lesson of Paul Cézanne transformed the latter into the most remarkable forerunner of modern art. And Baxandall is not the only thinker to reject the inevitability of Vasari's biological approach, which ignores the possibility of radical breaks in history. If George Kubler struggled to resolve the inevitability of historical development,<sup>68</sup> Juri Lotman's "explosion theory"<sup>69</sup> has solved it in a much more convincing and brilliant way.

In short, the relations between different generations should not be neglected and offer no obligatory points of view. If, as we have read, Maria Cristina admits and maintains that she will never be able to see the result of her project accomplished, since it is bound to change through successive and ever-widening sensibilities, we also begin to understand the importance of focusing on relationships and dynamics that involve many people in *Wasteland*, with a particular concern for the new generations, as demonstrated above all by the experience of the Ca' Foscari stage of the project. We can return to Andina to understand from her analysis the characteristics of diachronic actions, which require collaboration between different generations. She terms them "transgenerational social actions."

"[They] can be distinguished because they possess a specific structure: that is, they imply the necessary collaboration between different generations to be effectively performed. This collaboration, while in all respects necessary, is not equal: in the sense that while, on the one hand, one generation decides what to do and how to do it, postponing the task of continuing and completing the action to the following generations, the following generations are simply required to enter the process—and to bear its weight—and eventually to conclude it, without having participated in the decision-making phase, hence without having consented to it in any way... Without future generations, transgenerational actions, literally, do not exist."<sup>70</sup>

Andina naturally distinguishes primary transgenerationality, which involves kinsfolk (as in the myth of Antigone, for instance) from secondary or social transgenerationality, which deals with economic, social, climatic, etc. emergencies, such as the problem of transgenerational public debt. The issues of climate change, sustainable development, and environmental deterioration also offer timely and crucial opportunities for engagement

between generations, as evidenced by the various activities linked to the Fridays for Future program recently promoted by Greta Thunberg. And in this context, "it seems... that the idea that every generation should leave the planet, at least ideally, in the same state that it found it is valid (a thesis known as the equality model)."<sup>71</sup> In reality, at least as far as philosophical-juridical studies are concerned, things are not exactly like this and naturally this affects the attitudes and decisions of institutions. The choices of environmental sustainability, it is claimed, in fact end up favoring certain types of future generations and not others, moreover in a general context in which it is difficult to accord rights to those who do not yet exist. All this has triggered a far-ranging legal debate, starting with the so-called "Parfit paradox," namely the difficulty of measuring the rights and benefits of an individual who will probably never be born.<sup>72</sup> Hence the still prevailing scientific orientation prefers to think in terms of future individuals rather than future generations.<sup>73</sup>

According to Andina, the secondary transgenerational bond is expressed through:

"particular social actions, transgenerational social actions. It will therefore be appropriate to examine their structure. We can make the preliminary observation that transgenerational social actions are structurally neutral, meaning they are neither positive nor negative. In other words, they neither favor nor impair the protection of the transgenerational bond. The positivity or negativity of the transgenerational action depends on the content of the action. In many cases people or institutions perform transgenerational actions without being aware of the transgenerational structure of their actions. This opens up a serious problem, not only by the performativity of their actions, or the ways in which an action can be performed, but above all on the level of its long-term consequences..."<sup>74</sup>

It is in the rest of her book, however, that these actions are more precisely defined:

"First of all, they are actions a) performed by subjects who undertake an action or a series of actions linked to each other that b) respond to a shared purpose and which c) are characterized by having and requiring a considerable duration in time. Furthermore, d) transgenerational actions are *not* concluded by the parties who bring them into being. Finally, e) they are often actions having important ethical, practical,

political, and economic consequences. They are actions that, in essence, have to be taken into account, both for their centrality to the organization of social reality and because of the long-term consequences they may have."<sup>75</sup>

The reader will, we feel, have perceived the contiguity of this articulation with the "pixel theory" that we considered earlier. Like *Wasteland*, transgenerational activities are structured in keeping with a dilated time frame and, within this *longue durée* they are susceptible of significant changes, guaranteeing the proactive involvement, alongside the artist, of many other partners, with plural roles and different functions, all however in some way mutually connected in a relationship of shared trust.

## THE NATIONAL PAVILION, A FLAG, THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF A SERPENT ...

"For the pavilion to be immediately recognizable as such, and not as an installation, I chose to use simple shapes: two cubes. At the sides of the entrance portal two flags of the Garbage Patch State fly triumphantly, while inside there is a 360° screening of my video-work *Dentro*, a sensorial immersion in a sea populated by colored moving bottle tops. From the space that separates the two cubes, a 'serpent' emerges, made up of net bags normally used for holding vegetables. Filled with colored bottle tops, it is climbing over the bound-



<sup>68</sup> G. Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, Chapter IV.

<sup>69</sup> See J.M. Lotman, *Culture and Explosion*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004, p. 157: "Thus the moment of the explosion creates an unpredictable situation. Then a very curious process takes place: the accomplished event casts a retrospective glance. And the character of what happened changes sharply. It should be emphasized that looking from the past to the future, on the one hand, and from the future to the past, on the other, completely changes the object observed. Looking from the past to

the future, we see the present as a set of a whole series of equally probable possibilities. When we look into the past, reality acquires for us the status of fact and we are inclined to see it as the only possibility."

<sup>70</sup> T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità*, Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 27. With regard to this thesis, we should remember the studies by Edith Brown-Weiss, and in particular *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity*, Dobbs Ferry: The United Nations University – Transnational Publishers, 1998. Between the two models most

often evoked in this kind of research, the "opulence model" and the "preservationist model," the equality model strikes a balance: "The supporters of this position," adds Andina (ibid.), "believe that there is an obligation that binds us to the future and is expressed by a minimal constraint, the idea that we must collectively undertake the commitment—which must find a form of recognition on the regulatory level—by which we are required to leave our planet 'at least' in the same state in which our generation found it."

<sup>72</sup> See D. Parfit, "Future Generation: Further Problems,"

*Philosophy & Public Affairs*, II, 2, 1982, pp. 113–172; Id., *Reason and Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> See T. Andina, *Transgenerazionalità*, Op. cit., p. 100 ff, with the theory of future generations as "abstract artifacts," closer to the characters in literary novels than we think. They depend on their "authors," but also involve a concrete collective subject. We will return to this delicate point when we deal with transmedia storytelling.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 122–123.

*Detail of the design for the Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State (Venice, Ca' Foscari, great court, May 29 – November 24, 2013)*



A phase of the installation

ary wall in an attempt to reach the lagoon. A metaphor of the Garbage Patch's unstoppable growth.<sup>76</sup>

With these words, in the catalogue produced for the 2013 Biennale, Maria Cristina Finucci conveyed the stylistic choice inspiring her Venetian display. It was partly the outcome of her long training and constant work as an architect, which is reconstructed with entries on her most salient works in the final part of this volume. And in part it was dictated by the development of that construction of a cognitive and narrative process, of broad involvement in communication and use, as well as co-participation in the contents we have discussed so far. Skillfully proportioned and framed within the university's large courtyard, the simple but solemn container reproduced the mirrored surfaces that had also been a feature of the earlier Parisian installation, which evoked, as we noted on the basis of an observation by Mario Perniola, that "something extended, flexible, changeable" which is at the same time the danger created by the Garbage Patch and the mental image that has to penetrate our consciousness. Staffan de Mistura, formerly the UN's special representative in some of the most terrible wars in the early decades of this century (Iraq, Afghanistan), until the beginning of that year Deputy Foreign Minister in the Monti government and then special diplomatic envoy in the one presided over by Enrico Letta, wrote in the catalogue of "an appalling floating idea" and, with remarkable clarity in his perception of Finucci's intentions, of "a continent that because of its size deserves a name, 'Garbage Patch,' and a flag, a constitution, in short deserves to become in our eyes a political, environmental, and geographic reality like the various continents we are accustomed to think of. Only in this way can we cease to conceal from ourselves the reality and the solutions to be given to this serious problem."<sup>77</sup> This, so to speak, "institutional" component was adequately represented in the restrained form of the pavilion.

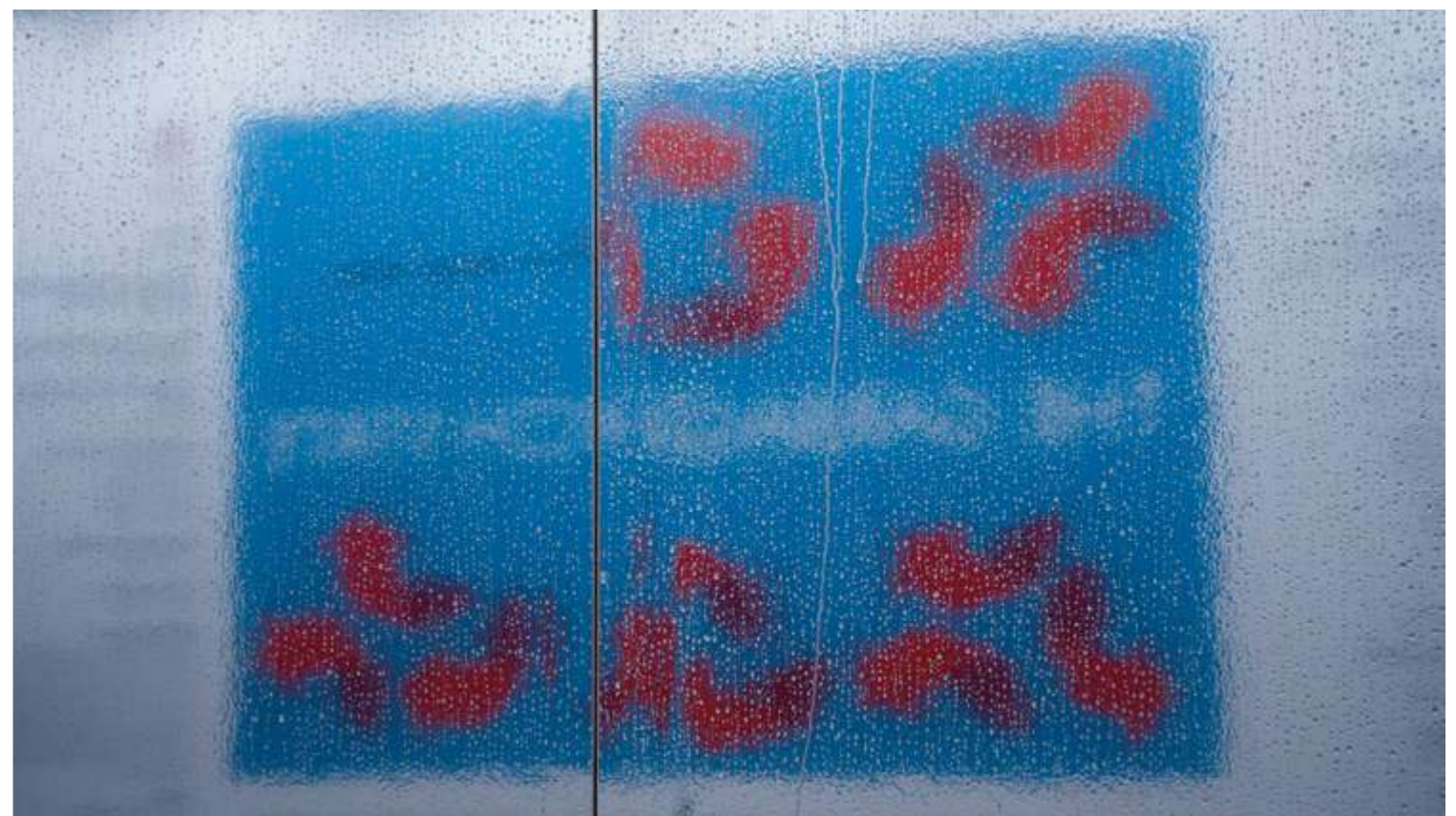
The structure of the installation created a short and apparently serene layout. The video *Dentro* deliberately avoided striking effects. Other panels quietly provided the scientific information essential to understanding the meaning (one of the meanings, in fact) of the operation. In short, the main objective was to bear witness to the reality, but presumably in the perspective of the "social holography" outlined by Perniola, giving it at the same time a rank, thus laying the foundation for an institutional dia-

logue and a construction of mental images. The curator of the operation, Gabi Scardi, also observed in the catalogue:

"While maintaining a close relationship with reality, the project is based on discontinuity. Fantastic dislocation and transposition help to open up another space: the space of rebellion, of sabotage. However, it is a question of sabotage for constructive purposes; a rebellion which, through the creation of a new narrative, intends to generate a response to a situation of real risk. The aim is to break down the generalized obtuseness, to awaken the collective sensibility and to confront aspects of reality that we are no longer able to grasp because we suffer from an attention deficit. The aim is to work together to preserve the ecosystem in danger.

*Wasteland* is a poetic act. It is the space of a game, but a serious game, which is grafted onto a crucial situation. By highlighting the environmental damage we wreak, it amounts to a charge of negligence and blindness and confronts us with our responsibility for the present and future. It insists on the need for new practices and new ecological measures. It urges us to reflect on how to conduct progress. And embodied in a highly articulated discourse, it becomes a practicable space...<sup>78</sup>

"The space of a game... of a serious game": we know well—at least from Huizinga<sup>79</sup>—how many cultural sub-meanings are concealed within the dimension and activity of play, which in this case acquires further overtones. In this respect Nicolas Bourriaud recalled Marcel Duchamp's attitude to an art that is "a game among men of all ages,"<sup>80</sup> and added that the "postproduction," which I mentioned above, and therefore the resumption and recomposition of elements already known, is in his opinion the contemporary form of this game.<sup>81</sup> So if we see in this perspective the flag of the Garbage Patch State, briefly mentioned several times above, it will not be difficult to perceive its role and significance. We can begin with the latter. The flag, with institutional golden fringes, has an eloquent sea-blue ground that sets off red arrows pointing in divergent directions. It is a sort of inverse of what is known to us as the international recycling symbol, in which three green arrows evoke the Möbius strip, the symbol designed in 1971 by Gary Anderson for a competition promoted by the Container Corporation of America. But, as we will see, the shape of the red arrows is closely linked to a line of design by Maria Cristina that pre-



<sup>76</sup> M.C. Finucci, "The Wasteland Project," in *The Garbage Patch State*, Op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>78</sup> G. Scardi, "Away," in Ibid., pp. 50–52.

<sup>79</sup> See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1938); English translation, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element of Culture*. London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1949.

<sup>80</sup> Cit. in N. Bourriaud, *Relational aesthetics*, Op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> See Id., *Postproduction*, Op. cit., p. 18.

*Details of the installation Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State (Venice, Ca' Foscari, great court, May 29 – November 24, 2013)*



ceded the Garbage State. As for its role, it is a playful parody of a collective and consolidated effort, international and trans-generational, in a subtle interplay of references, chromatic distortions, dangerous spaces revealed, centrifugal and open.

This dangerous spatial extension was more clearly symbolized, again with discoveries of playful components, by the ascending, tumultuous, gaudy cascade of bottle tops crammed into hundreds of sacks. From the void that separated the two cubes of the pavilion, they extended beyond the ancient outer wall of Ca' Foscari, with the almost explicit aim of reaching the contiguous Grand Canal and from there the historic center of a world capital of culture, art, and environmental fragility, in its turn the pivot of a centuries-old planetary network. In the ascending eddy that somehow conveyed, much more than the Parisian installation of a few weeks earlier, a strongly iconic first dimension of the Pacific Trash Vortex, it is also possible to perceive a sort of spirit of adventure clearly mingled and connected with scientific research and the consequent opening up of a space never before traversed.

The Venetian pavilion was very positively received, perhaps because of these playful, parodic registers, which in reality allude clearly to a subtle danger, to the plastic debris that is "the tragic face of goods,"<sup>82</sup> a violated ocean whose cries are so difficult to hear. This is shown by the very thick press kit to the exhibition. It appealed to the public (including the privileged public of Ca' Foscari students, the founding element of the first transgenerational action program linked to the *Wasteland* project) and aroused great and resounding interest among the media, public opinion, and critics. The fertile climate that the university had managed to establish within the city, in relation to many institutions by shared and participatory programs, such as ArtNight, the all-nighter for art-lovers in Venice, certainly contributed to the success. In that year it was included in the official calendar of the European Art Nights coordinated by the Nuit Blanche in Paris.

<sup>82</sup> L. Virgo, *Quando i rifiuti diventano arte. Trash, rubbish, mongo*, Milan: Skira, 2006, p. 8.

During the months when the installation was open at the pavilion in Venice, Maria Cristina Finucci also planned a series of initiatives—none of which were actually completed—with a view to a more centrifugal dynamic than the formal institutional solidity of the two cubes located in the large courtyard of Ca' Foscari. The program was quickly abandoned so as not to run the risk of restricting to a sequence of actions the more complex effort at cognitive pervasiveness that has here been evoked as the “pixel theory.”

The starting point coincided with that ascending cascade of bottle tops that emerged from the pavilion to reach the waters of the adjacent canal, but its constituent elements could also be used differently. For example, in a series of possible performances: polemical *Weddings on Garbage* (which therefore did not aim to create the conditions for “sustainable” ceremonies), potential culinary contests (*Cooking Up Plastic Soup in the Seas...*), adaptations—“plastic” ones, we can rightly say—and in the post-production logic of Bourriaud, the maps of the world created by Alighiero Boetti. Some greater definitions of her program took the form of two possible forays. The first was intended to have as its location the swimming pools of the Villaggio Vacanze Romane, on the Castello embankment of the Tiber in Rome. In the summer months this is a rest and recreation area for the inhabitants of the nearby districts, located in a central point of the city, accessible and clearly visible from above. It allows for easy physical or visual participation by the public and the sharing of the event by guests, onlookers, or tourists. In particular, the two hexagonal pools were to have been filled with bottle tops by activists of the Garbage Patch State, in order to completely cover the body of water by interacting “with the surrounding space and the visual space of the city,” as we read in a note by the artist. “The public will be invited to add bottle tops they have collected to the water and use the space in the new condition created, a metaphor for a future scenario of the invasion of our waters by unrecycled plastic materials.” Maria Cristina would then have documented the performative event, transforming it into a kind of seaside setting, in the form of the ironic and grotesque “post-cards” from the Garbage Patch State that had accompanied the *Wasteland* project from its first definition.

The second “military” attack by the Garbage commandos was to have as its theater the basin of the impressively large dock of the Arsenal in Venice, one of the established *topoi* of the exhibition layout at the Biennale. The action aimed to introduce a sort of artificial perimeter into the waters of the lagoon, while also covering the surface of the water with plastic bottle caps, some of which would however, in this circumstance, be filled with wax and fitted with a lighted wick, to create the effect of a stream of moving flames. It would be a way to suggest a possible conflict between the ancient architecture (the emblem of infinite historic centers) and a contaminated aquatic space, once again playing on the contrast between a pleasant aesthetic expression and the danger caused by the unchecked use of plastic, still unregulated by precise rules for its disposal. In both assaults, a recorded voiceover would have announced that these were acts of international terrorism. However, the prospect of these “actions” was almost immediately abandoned in favor of a subtler and more complex strategy, with the aim of making the existence of an even more widespread danger increasingly evident.

*Posters of the installation Pavilion of the Garbage Patch State at the Gallerie dell'Accademia and three additional installation views*





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MADRID 2014

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MADRID: A DISPLAY  
ON THE GRAN VIA

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*View of the installation The Garbage Patch State (ARCO  
2014 collateral event: Madrid, Gran Via, February 18 – March  
7, 2014)*





MADRID 2014



MADRID: A DISPLAY ON THE GRAN VIA

From February 18 to March 7, 2014, during ARCO, the most important Spanish contemporary art fair (and one of the largest in Europe), Maria Cristina Finucci participated with a collateral event, organized in collaboration with the Madrid headquarters of the IED (European Design Institute). Finucci had met its then director, Riccardo Marzullo, and spoken to him about the project begun in Paris and Venice and aroused his immediate interest. The project was given a more precise form at a further meeting with the institute's communications manager, Marisa Santamaria. Strengthened by the positive experience at Ca' Foscari, Finucci made known her desire to establish a concrete cooperative, participatory relationship with the students in the course. The contact identified was Izaskun Chinchilla, a young and now successful architect who at the time was holding a design course at the IED. If we consider some of Chinchilla's recent works, such as her extraordinary transformation of the fortification that dominates Castillo de Garcimuñoz, a small town in the disadvantaged province of Cuenca, the natural



*Preparing the plastic bottles for installation*

*Decoration with bags of colored plastic bottle caps on the facade of the Italian Cultural Institute in Madrid (Calle Mayor 86)*

*Maria Cristina Finucci unfurls the banner of the Garbage Patch State held by Charo Izquierdo, at the time editor of the magazine GRAZIA Spagna*

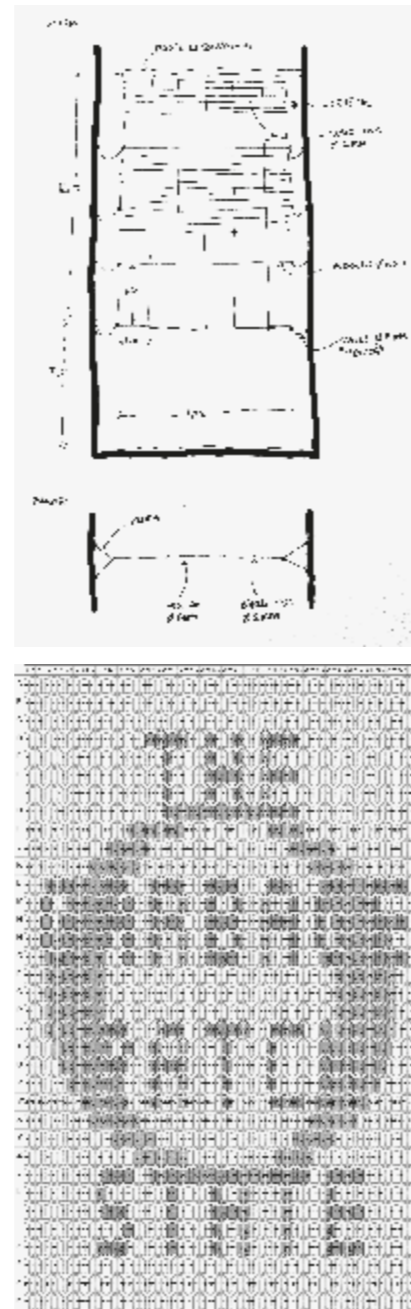


The installation The Garbage Patch State from the Gran Via (Madrid, February 18 – March 7, 2014)

feeling between the two artists can easily be understood. Sustainability, reversibility, a concern for the environment, a light hand, and a strong interest in color are all qualities they have in common.

After a meeting with the students, the chosen mode of interaction was an independent exhibition, but parallel to the installation. It was to be an evocative exhibition that contributed to a “poetic” description of the Garbage Patch State, which occupied the walls of the room, while its volume would feature a large number of different semitransparent spheres (perhaps to recall the shape of water molecules) suspended from the ceiling by bright, waving blue colored threads.

The description, which as we will see is coherently connected with Finucci’s work, corresponded—this was the meaning of the external installation—to a reiterated declaration of the state’s existence. It consisted of a 12 meter vertical “sheet” suspended above the normal flows of people strolling along the edge of the Gran Via and made up of 2,555 plastic bottles (never used before), 73 bottles at the base by 35 high, each containing a handful of earth with golden shoots, which at night were lit up by the photographers’ flashes with a retroflector effect due to the presence of the viewers and interaction with them. So here again, as in the students’ exhibition, the lighting effects, transparency of materials, and overall lightness of the system were carefully studied. The installation only became visible when it was photographed, even with the flash from a simple smartphone, so revealing the threatening presence of the Garbage Patch State. This effect was heightened on the level of the paving of the Gran Via by a large red arrow of concrete and metal, identical (only on a larger scale) to those that appear in the state’s flag. The words “The Garbage Patch State” were surrounded by a large O, in memory of Maria Cristina’s daughter, Olivia, who would have celebrated her birthday a few days before the inauguration. Both this reference to a sorrowful past and the expectation of a near (and better) future, represented by the germinating shoots contained in the bottles, conveyed that profound temporal sense (“a reflection on time is a constant obsession of mine,” Finucci often says) that is a constant feature of the *Wasteland* project, as we will see later.



Installation preparatory drawing and compositional diagram

Preparing the bottles for the installation with students and a teacher (right) from the IED in Madrid  
 Maria Cristina pointing to the large illuminated sign  
 Signage of the installation with instructions for activating it





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ROME 2014

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MAXXI: THE EMBASSY, THE WAVE, AND  
INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION

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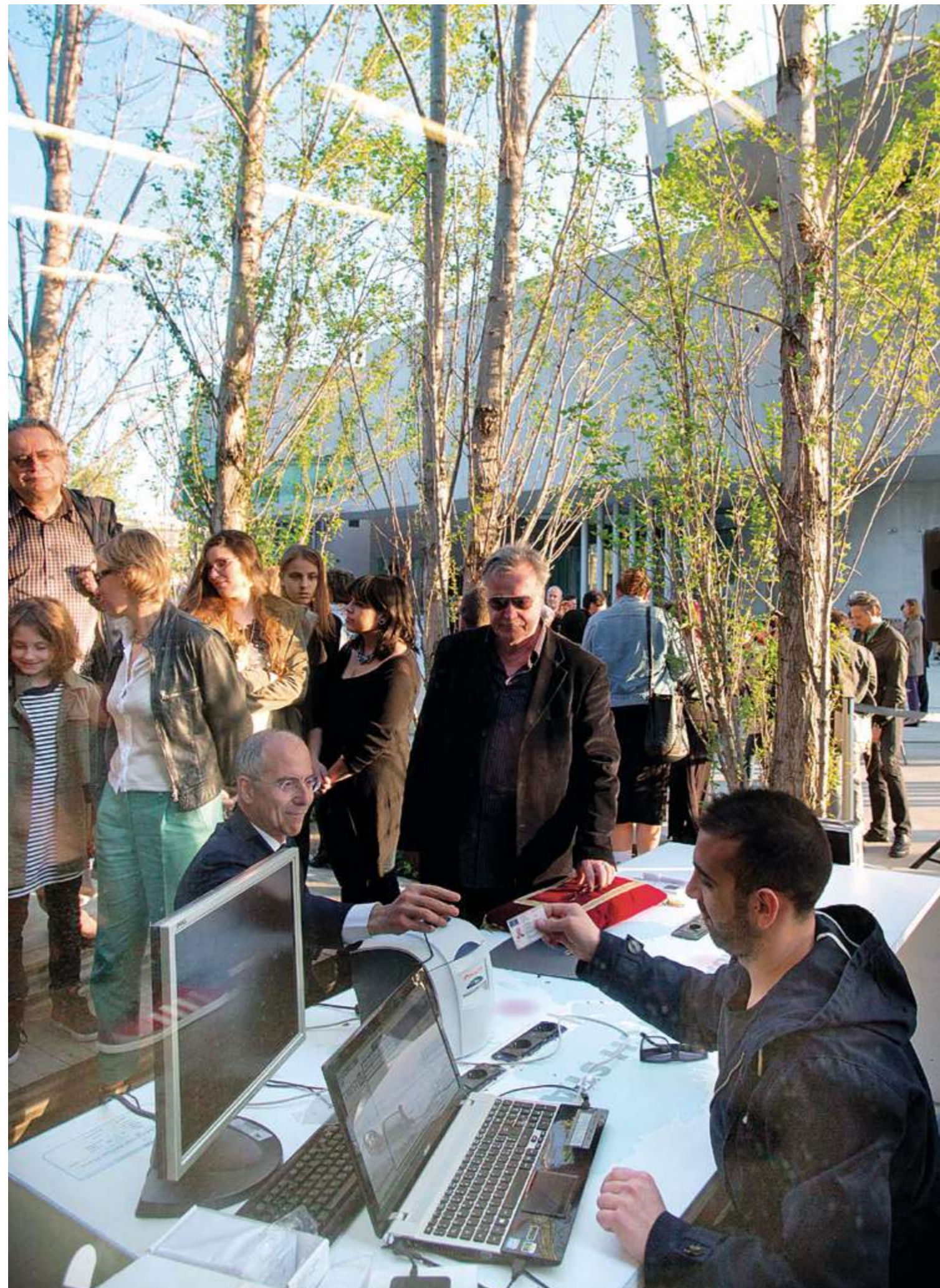
F FOR FAKE

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TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

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*View of the installation L'Ambasciata (Rome, MAXXI,  
April 11 – May 2, 2014)*



## MAXXI: THE EMBASSY, THE WAVE, AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION

The Garbage Patch State embassy in the piazza of the MAXXI in Rome (April 11–May 2, 2014) was perhaps the most complex installation of the whole first phase of *Wasteland*. On the one hand, the project radically expanded the “institutional” dimension of the Garbage Patch State, on the other it encoded the “narrative” of the State in a much more precise and articulated way, as the cornerstone of the pervasive strategy that Maria Cristina had gradually developed in her ambitious program.

The embassy, located in the building used for the museum’s educational activities, enabled visitors to receive the fictitious citizenship of the State together with a document endowing them with a fictitious identity. Naturally, this was a sort of “educational protocol,” on which the MAXXI Education Department had collaborated at some length, as we will see, with the Università La Sapienza in Rome. Primary school groups could visit the embassy during normal school hours, perform recreational and educational activities on a long dedicated table, and engage in playful activities with passports and forms specially created for them. In fact, as Finucci emphasized in her presentation of the work:

“I will not limit myself only to distributing passports. This would not make much sense, since the GPS is not populated by humans, but plastic objects used and then thrown away, which the sun has transfigured and made unrecognizable. The GPS, with its inhabitants disfigured in their appearance and deprived of their dignity, could be compared to a leper colony, a place where outcasts no one wants to see are marginalized . . . I will therefore ask those who receive a passport to accept in virtual adoption a bottle, a ball, a food container, or one of those objects that are normally bound to be thrown away, so that the GPS does not come to an end. For this purpose I have created a registry that includes thousands of entries, one for every possible subject, with a photograph of it, its name, number, etc. The sample includes objects that come from all the countries around the world and bear writing in all languages, in all alphabets.”<sup>83</sup>

This multicolored and infinitely articulated typology of candidates for adoption (packaging, bottles, toys, clothing accessories, tires, really anything . . .) covered, at least in the largest room, the walls of the educational pavilion converted into an embassy. They were small index cards stuck to the wall with a pin (“as in a Holocaust museum, almost as if they were people”<sup>84</sup>), overflowing with paradoxically colorful images: apparently a joyful sample collection of one of the myriads of supermarkets that dot the planet and in which plastic objects are usually all the same, of low intrinsic quality, with standardized and showy forms and colors.

<sup>83</sup> M.C. Finucci, *The Garbage Patch State Embassy Rome*, presentation brochure.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

*The CEO and General Manager of ENEL SPA, Francesco Starace, receiving the passport of the Garbage Patch State*

In reality, it is a summons, as we have seen, to a disfigured and threatening population requiring a widespread commitment to respect non-destructive behavior towards the planet. It was already quite interesting to note the deliberate confusion in roles between visitors, citizens, people, on the one hand, and things, on the other, which boasted a more explicit right to the identity of the Garbage Patch State. In essence, people received clearly false documents to perform a duty of adoption towards objects in danger, which before this were actually a threat to the adopting population. Maria Cristina was inspired after reading a passage in an essay that Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, as curator of the event, wrote for the catalogue of Documenta 13 (June 9–September 16, 2012). In it, as Finucci writes, “she invites us to think—in the wake of the theories of quantum physics—of the universe as a complex and continuously resonant system, a ‘multispecies’ world in which species are not only human and animal, but include inanimate objects. Christov-Bakargiev asks: ‘What does an object feel when it is destroyed?’ I am convinced that the objects that inhabit the GPS feel they are an involuntary means of extermination for marine fauna and the ecosystem. They want their fellow creatures who are still on the mainland not to meet the same fate, but to be reused, recycled and ultimately destined to produce fuel, but never discarded in the environment.”<sup>85</sup>

If the problem was dealt with in a geometrically taxonomic way in the Garbage Patch State Embassy, in its immediate vicinity, in the square of the MAXXI, there was a decidedly more sculptural representation. It was called *Onda* (“Wave”), a 30 meter transparent undulating structure, with a covering (also brightly colored) of tiny flakes of PET (polyethylene terephthalate), the plastic material normally used for food containers, such as plastic bottles. Also in this case the contrast between the shimmering colors of the covering and their perceptible physiognomy of small scales belonging to a mysterious and boundless sea serpent was notable. When struck by sunlight, they produced a pleasant yet insidious shimmer. “The wave will also be visible from above,” we read in Maria Cristina’s presentation, “through the windows of Room 5 of the museum, located just above. Over this ‘sea’ there will also be other transparent but very colorful plastic objects. Visitors can either pass between one wave and the other outside, or enter the higher ones inside. People should feel and be photographed as if they are in the midst of the billows. The light filtered by the plastic mantle, on the other hand, will produce colored rays on the people who venture inside.” The photographic documentation we have at our disposal adequately renders the result and documents the playful yet deceptive impact, especially on children, of the complex installation.



ROME 2014

## F FOR FAKE

*F for Fake*, as is well known, is the emblematic title of a 1973 film by Orson Welles about fake artworks. (Welles could boast considerable expertise on the subject after his first radio program.) Since then the problem—in the current cultural context deeply marked if not dominated by fake news—has spread into limitless dimensions and areas, affecting the lives of billions of people in the infinite daily practices on social networks. The *Wasteland* project has anticipated, we can say, some aspects, which to a certain extent require a more theoretical reflection. The recurrent question that one cannot fail to ask when faced with Maria Cristina Finucci’s projects is simple and complex at the same time. What kind of work are we dealing with? We have already stressed that the Garbage Patch State, as a strategy of cognitive pervasiveness, is gradually being constructed out of numerous, different pieces, the so-called pixels, according to the explicit definition that the artist herself has provided. Its purpose is certainly not to proclaim a fictitious existence, but rather to favor and stimulate an immaterial image, which is nevertheless expressed by real, indeed hyper-real, works. What Finucci really wants to create is the “idea” of a state that everyone (in seeing it take material form, albeit in different media) can interpret in their own way. In reality, the Garbage Patch State does not exist except



as an “artifact.” An ancient term—if we think of Vasari’s frequent use of it in his *Lives* and the subsequent very extensive occurrences in artistic literature, not only in Italian, which in this context must necessarily also acquire paradoxically subtler shades of meaning in order to be more comprehensible to critics and the public.

In short, it is a work that at first sight could appear almost only conceptual and the term “project” (*Wasteland project*) effectively marks it as the keystone. But in our view the creation of this fake—which, as we have already pointed out, should be considered a simulacrum, in Baudrillard’s sense—has other more specific features. It is not in fact a “project” in which the conceptual system is more important than its materialization. Rather the “total creation” of a world, one that certainly has very concrete features, and of which the visual semblance is largely sculptural, but with a different purpose. *Wasteland* does not have as its final objective the fictitious creation of a false state that is meant to alarm us, but the purpose of giving rise to an image in our minds and a common, widespread feeling that does not have a concrete tangible counterpart in reality. David Balzer has reminded us in this respect that the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Forms* (Bern, 1969), which marked Harald Szeemann’s debut (and almost the invention of the modern role of the curator), was planned by the critic with a different title, “Live in Your Head.” The phrase perfectly sums up conceptualism, the primacy of idea over form.<sup>86</sup> However, it does not seem to us that Finucci’s work can be considered as belonging to this category.

We can start from a quotation that appears in Adam Lowe’s<sup>87</sup> introduction to a book by Chiara Casarin: “Authentic things enable us to share collective memories.”<sup>88</sup> Lowe immediately emphasizes a very important point, that of collective memory, which we mentioned previously, but which we will examine later in more detail, especially with regard to the HELP phase of *Wasteland*. And he adds: “When it comes to original objects in museums, I prefer the term artifacts, a word in which the evidence of making and art are both present.”<sup>89</sup> According to Lowe, artifacts contain “different stories” and this, along with other factors, influences the way we know the object, because past and present are “compressed” into this “act of understanding.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> D. Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014, p. 76.

<sup>87</sup> Adam Lowe (1959), the founder and director of Factum Arte, is considered one of the leading innovators in digital mediation.

<sup>88</sup> A. Lowe, “Introduzione,” in C. Casarin, *L'autenticità nell'arte contemporanea*, Treviso: Zel. Edizioni, 2015, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

*View of the interior of the installation L'Ambasciata (Rome, MAXXI, April 11 – May 2, 2014)*

*Maquette for the creation of the Onda*

Basically, and this we believe is really the point, Maria Cristina Finucci has invented and created an “artifact,”<sup>91</sup> which embodies the story that the artist herself has attributed to it, but also all the other different stories that have helped to establish the concreteness of an idea in some way nurtured by both relational aesthetics and participatory art. The Garbage Patch State is therefore a fake with its own autonomous “memory.” On the one hand, it is a pure invention of the artist but, when the mythopoetic level of the “project” begins to “work,” it is capable of preserving the memory that has been attributed to it and, at the same time, to produce new information, which in turn becomes part of a growing shared memory, as Juri Lotman taught.<sup>92</sup> A kind of recursive cognitive serpent.

Finucci infuses life and a story into an “artifact” that she herself produced, because this fake is a sort of catalyst capable of fermenting an image in the viewer’s mind. This is the meaning of a sophisticated and original artistic operation. It is therefore not a question, in this case, of marking the semantic

boundary between the “fake” and the “authentic.”<sup>93</sup> We are in a completely different situation. In an only apparent oxymoron, Maria Cristina’s work is an “original” fake, but it would probably be more correct, as mentioned, to use the term “artifact” for her signs. In short, it is not a simple counterfeit. From the time Finucci created it, the Garbage Patch State has existed as an artifact and has been accepted as real, albeit metaphorically, by the various institutions that have displayed it thanks to this action (including some that are very prestigious, as we saw above and will see later).

In this sense, the project also boasts its own register of interesting “conventionality,” which is indeed an integral part of it. We could resolve it into the expression that “everyone lies knowing they are lying.” Because we are all perfectly aware of the fact that the state—at least as Maria Cristina represents it, with a flag, an articulated registry office, social, military, and cultural activities—does not exist, but when it is recognized by the most important international institutions, which acknowl-

edge Finucci as the authoritative and legitimate head of the Garbage Patch State, its image is overwhelmingly generated in the collective consciousness, which becomes, at least in this respect, completely realistic. Postcards in which we see people spending their holidays on a hypothetical plastic beach or children playing on it or beneath the *Onda* at the MAXXI, are faked images that yet create an inverse type of representation, in ways not dissimilar, in fact, to those adopted in the 1930s in Stalinist Russia on the occasion of the competition for the Palace of the Soviets.<sup>94</sup>

In this case fake is therefore not the opposite of real, but the opposite of *not existing*, except in the form that the artist has attributed to it. As Chiara Casarin reminds us: “Falsehood lies in the judgment, not in the object.”<sup>95</sup> And Orson Welles, in *F for Fake*, attributes to Picasso a saying that is at least *ben trovato*: “Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.” Maria Cristina Finucci’s true goal is therefore not the “falsification” of a geographical concept, but the manipulation of that fake to evoke

its simulacrum, on a conscious and perhaps even unconscious level. The Garbage Patch State—it is worth reiterating—cannot be considered a counterfeit, because it is not an object that can be exchanged or confused with another. This is essentially a pragmatic problem.<sup>96</sup> In this case, therefore, the invention does not fall into the category of “fake.” On the contrary, it is the totally original creation of an “artifact,” which in turn gives rise to new meanings.

Viewed in this way, Maria Cristina is a *bricoleuse*, but in the noble sense of the term, the one that David Balzer reminds us of: “In his 1962 study *La Pensée sauvage*, French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss advanced a complex view of culture creation stressing the fine-art term ‘bricolage,’ a concept not unlike what we currently understand as curating. . . .”<sup>97</sup> Patrick Wilcken, delving into this “bricolage theory,” defined Lévi-Strauss’s *bricoleur* a “tinkerer, an improviser working with what was to hand, cobbling together solutions to both practical and aesthetic problems.”<sup>98</sup> And according to Balzer: “The *bricoleur*



<sup>91</sup> Remember, as mentioned above, the question of future generations as “abstract artifacts” theorized by Tiziana Andina: a point that highlights the transgenerational nature of Finuccian “artifacts.”

<sup>92</sup> See in this respect especially J.M. Lotman, “Introduzione,” in J.M. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura*, Milan: Bompiani, 2001, p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> C. Casarin, *L'autenticità nell'arte contemporanea*, Op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>94</sup> See F. Bigo, “Utopia, propaganda, idolatria: il Palazzo dei Soviet,” in S. Burini, G. Barbieri (eds.), *Russia! Memoria,*

*mistificazione, immaginario. Arte russa del '900 dalle collezioni Morgante e Sandretti*, catalogue of the exhibition (Venice, Ca' Foscari, April 21 – July 25, 2010), Crocetta del Montello: Terra Ferma, 2010, pp. 120–139. On Stalin's role as the pioneer of an ideological utopia cf. also D. Balzer, *Curationism*, Op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>95</sup> Cit. in C. Casarin, *L'autenticità nell'arte contemporanea*, Op. cit., p. 46: the term is taken from the entry *Falsificazione* (by Cesare Brandi), in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, V, Florence: Sansoni, 1958, p. 313.

<sup>96</sup> See C. Casarin, *L'autenticità nell'arte*, Op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>97</sup> D. Balzer, *Curationism*, Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

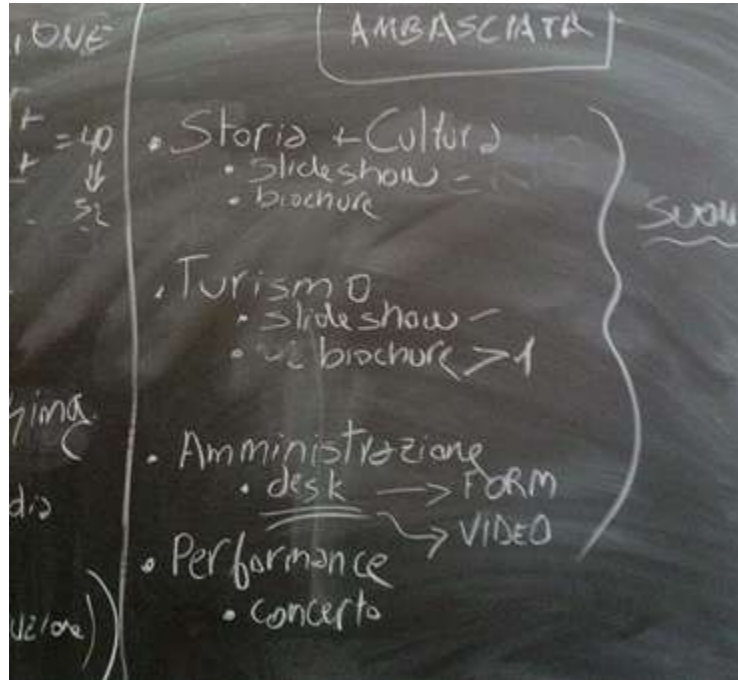
View of the interior of L'Ambasciata; in the background people queuing for passports

View of the base of the Onda

is anyone attempting to plan, solve, or create.”<sup>99</sup> In Balzer’s text this definition is mostly applied to the curator’s work, but in our opinion it is also apt for identifying a certain type of artistic practice. Finucci’s type of action is certainly not that of a one-(wo)man show. The “materialization” of the idea of the Garbage Patch State arises from the participation of several figures in the project, all of which are part of a “narrative” (obviously dystopian, but also characterized by ironic, playful and grotesque elements) that also promotes what it is actually non-existent.

## TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Among the participants, direct or indirect (as we have seen), in the *Wasteland* project, it is also important to remember the names of Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, whom we are indebted to for a significant contribution to the event at the MAXXI. In that year Iaconesi was teaching the Master’s course in Exhibit and Public Design at La Sapienza University in Rome. Starting from the installation by Maria Cristina, he encouraged research among his students that led to a slim volume entitled *Un simulacro per il Garbage Patch State. Casi di studio di una narrativa transmediale*, an excellent complement to the registry/adoption room of the embassy and certainly an advance on the activity of building the “myth” of Garbage that began at Ca’ Foscari. Once again, the interrelation between the artist and the universities was rewarding. The volume brings together the students’ works classified in a grid that ranges from GPS Food to the TecnoPlastic Museum, the Wasteland Zoo, the PlasticForum, a multifunctional cultural space, Garbage (electronic) rock music, aggressive conspiracy strategies, actions of sustainable environmental resistance to the implicit economic system on which the state is founded, ending with a section devoted to the prehistory, protohistory, and myths of the country. This large illustrated section is followed by the parts that contain the actual exercises in transmedia storytelling, to finally see the concept of an exhibition display, with a bookshop attached to the embassy premises. Inside the latter, another portion of the space was reserved to exhibit the works (six models and a video) of the students in the Master in Exhibit and Public Design directed by Cecilia Cecchini. The “storytelling” research was presented in one of the rooms at the MAXXI, in a crowded public study meeting, “Transmediality and construction of reality: communicating design in the information age,” on April 29, 2014. In the introduction to the volume, Iaconesi and Persico reiterated some points that we have stressed above in other ways and that Maria Cristina Finucci also made her own in the passage on “pixel theory,” reported above: a shared insistence on “clues” which, when “put together, enable us to imagine certain things rather than others,” passing through our knowledge of the world (since every authentic project is a world) and our various experiences.



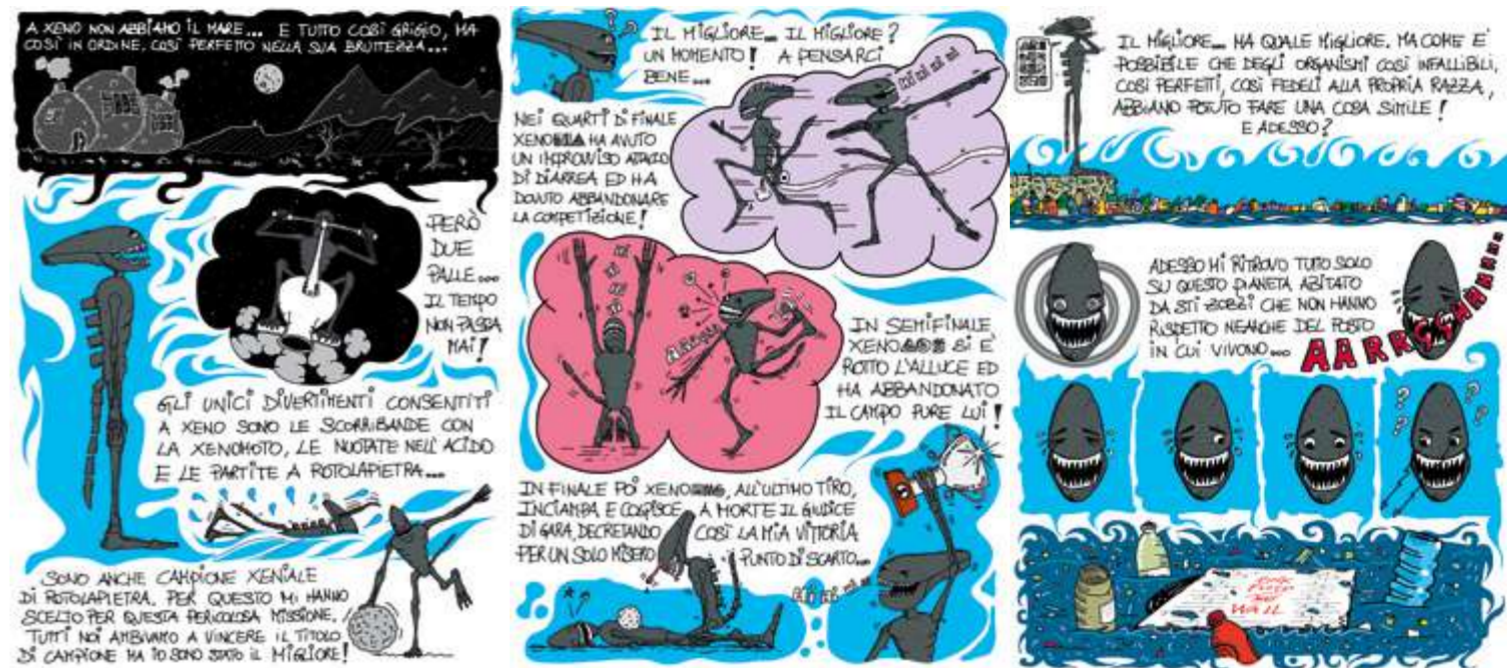
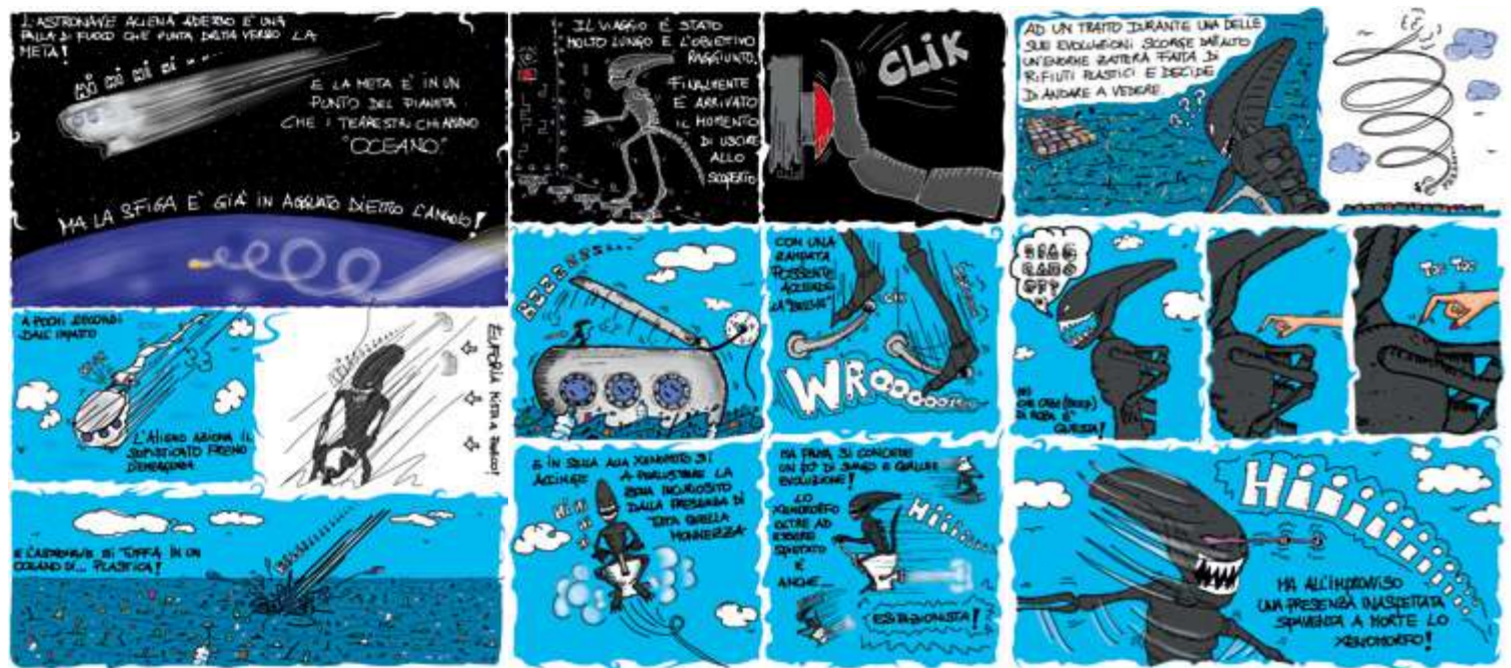
99 Ibid.

*Blackboard used in the public encounter “Transmedialità e costruzione del reale: comunicare il design nell’era dell’informazione” (Rome, MAXXI, April 29, 2014)*  
*Some architectural models for the Garbage Patch State by students in the Master’s course in Exhibit & Public Design (Sapienza Università di Roma) directed by Cecilia Cecchini*

*Inhabitants of the Garbage Patch State in the documentation of L’Ambasciata*







Tiziano La Palombara, Uno xenomorfo sulla terra, first episode, dedicated to Maria Cristina Finucci and the Garbage Patch State



View of Onda; in the background L'Ambasciata



“All of these clues add up in our minds to what we know about the world. Knowledge that contains many gaps and many voids, which we fill through a performative act: by creating a mental model of the things around us... Our mind is transmedial. It continuously combines clues coming from many different media to build the mental models by which reality takes shape in our perception.”<sup>100</sup>

Henry Jenkins’s studies have made a significant contribution to the concept of transmedia narrative (*transmedia storytelling, transmedia narrative, multiplatform storytelling*).<sup>101</sup> He observes that it is the inevitable consequence of widespread access to Internet and the availability of different and integrable media, as well as being the most formidable tool for all-around dissemination of a brand, largely through the active interaction of the public transformed into *prosumers*, the famous crisis of *producer* and *consumer* invented by Alvin Toffler early in the 1980s.<sup>102</sup> It is a kind of theoretical asset that enables us to perceive not only the modes of propagation of the Garbage Patch State devised by Maria Cristina,<sup>103</sup> but also the reasons for its success and international recognition. While anticipating some features that would emerge with closer chronological precision in the subsequent presentations of the *Wasteland* project, it is worth stressing precisely at this point in our argument the expanded range of expressive codes that have made the Garbage Patch State, as confirmed by the Iaconesi and Persico’s analysis, an exemplary case study of transmedia storytelling. The media include architecture and exhibition projects, large mirror surfaces, colorful postcards, the flag, the recurrent color of Maria Cristina’s institutional white dress at the UNESCO ceremony in April 2013 and later, the personal data forms for adoption, the use of regularly sanitized plastic materials, which later appear in imposing metal caissons as disturbing hybrid creatures, grandiloquent iconic forms (like the *Vortex* at the Milan Expo, and indeed the *Wave* at the MAXXI), the use of archeological finds, the commitment to scientific investigations (for example, in the field of light engineering), together with the production of more conventional works of art and design. All of these taken together delineate a 360° horizon aimed at audiences that differ by age, origin, social status, gender, educational qualification, etc. To all this it is necessary to briefly mention a comic book. This is an episode, the

first, in the cycle *Uno xenomorfo sulla terra*, a sort of updating in the spirit of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, which Tiziano La Palombara<sup>104</sup> created quite independently in the course of 2019, probably taking the cue from the “alien Professor” that we will meet at Mozia and transforming Maria Cristina into a heroine capable of saving the planet from attack by one of the most frighteningly aggressive peoples in the galaxy. Again in La Palombara’s drawings, in turn a “direct” participant in the *Wasteland* project, without having in any way been part of its organization, a sense of alarm is fused with the comic and the grotesque. This attests, in a rather unusual context, to the effective perception of Finucci’s expressive register, which is truly transmedial.

However, it is also important to stress the resonances of a longer tradition in the transmedia narrative, because it concerns a salient aspect of Maria Cristina’s work. As we shall see more clearly below, she has deliberately resorted to a repertoire of forms and themes ranging from archeology to medieval bestiaries and very recent contemporary forms. See in this respect the observations by Andrea Pinotti and Antonio Somaini, who link transmedia also to “different forms of *transposition* or *migration*, from one medium to another, of images, figures, motifs, compositional procedures, or forms of vision.”<sup>105</sup> The examples indicated, from Aby Warburg to Eisenstein’s general montage theory, seem in fact not very close to Finucci’s genealogy, but only in appearance, whether in her previous works (as in the video *Trueman* in 2011) or in the constant resonance of the fascination of the ancient, as we will see on Mozia, and then at the Roman Forum.

<sup>100</sup> S. Iaconesi, O. Persico, “Introduzione. Costruzione di mondi,” in *Un simulacro per il Garbage Patch State*. Casi di studio di una narrativa transmediale, p. 4: the text is available online, cf. [https://issuu.com/salvatoreiaconesi/docs/un\\_simulacro\\_per\\_il\\_gps](https://issuu.com/salvatoreiaconesi/docs/un_simulacro_per_il_gps) (last accessed 21 July 2020).

<sup>101</sup> See H. Jenkins et al., *Participatory culture in a Networked Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016; see Id., *Convergence Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2006; but see also C. Branca, *Transmedia Storytelling, Raccontarsi oltre il racconto*, <https://www.yumpu.com/>

[it/document/view/37465980/ebook2013-02](http://document/view/37465980/ebook2013-02).

<sup>102</sup> See A. Toffler, *La terza ondata* (1980), Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1987.

<sup>103</sup> “As I have already had occasion to stress,” we read again in the presentation of the project at the MAXXI, “my purpose is to bring together a plurality of interpretations of the same theme, conceived by different groups of individuals, which will create a dialogue between them by their presentation as a whole. It is essential for my research to share ideas that come from outside, to act in synergy with students and

young people in general, so that they see themselves as working towards a shared goal.”

<sup>104</sup> See <http://www.tizianopalombara.it/> (last accessed July 22, 2020).

<sup>105</sup> A. Pinotti, A. Somaini, *Cultura visuale. Immagini sguardi media dispositivi*, Turin: Einaudi, 2016, p. 160 ff.

*Maria Cristina Finucci with Gian Luca Galletti, the then Minister of the Environment and Protection of the Territory and the Sea*



A visitor observing the IDs of the inhabitants of the Garbage Patch State in L'Ambasciata



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THE TURNING POINT OF 2014: THE GARBAGE PATCH BESTIARY.  
A SERPENT IN NEW YORK

In about the second half of 2014, from the entrails of the Garbage Patch State there began to emerge a series of hybrid monsters. These forms were metamorphic and also, in a certain sense, metonymic, because their purpose was to represent the very essence of the state. At the same time they were meant to rectify the widespread ignorance of the Trash Vortex in public opinion and the institutions responsible, to a great extent caused by the lack of a visible and recognizable image. For the monsters, Maria Cristina decided to give them a coherent material concreteness (starting from the colored bottle caps), but also—in her overall strategy of cognitively pervading the collective consciousness—not to adopt a restrictive and unchanging appearance, insisting instead on hybrid and therefore shifting, changing, protean forms. These hybrids are capable of moving from one place to another on the planet, implementing different modes of contamination, but always bearing the connotative “signs” of the Garbage Patch State, in a sort of planetary travel-contagion. As we have stressed, they grow out of the overall mythology of the State, whose construction purposefully began, as we have seen, with the preparatory activities for the inauguration of the Venetian pavilion. They allow the Garbage Patch State to take on bodily form and spread. In our opinion they are literal embodiments of its metaphor. They are the “garments” of the danger.

In *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, which we usefully drew on earlier, Mario Perniola, as part of the basic perspective of the volume, which presents contemporary humanity as a “thing that feels,” insisted on the importance of what he terms the “externality of clothing.”<sup>106</sup> “But what does it mean to feel one’s own body or someone else’s body as a garment? If I think of the body as an envelope and covering of the soul, generally what interests me is not the garment, but the soul, and the one only as the protection or tomb of the other. Thus I do not grasp the body in its externality, in its essential being as a thing, but only in the relationship with respect to something more vital and more important. Now I can also subvert this primacy and say that the body is in itself more vital and more important than the soul: in reality I am still thinking about the soul, not clothing, not the thing . . .” For Finucci, too, the immediately declared objective was to “think the thing,” something not yet fully rooted in our consciousness, because only in this way can it (the thing) become part of an authentic experience of conditioning reification, compel us to participate, prompt us to modify it. In the hybrids of the Garbage Patch State the “outer garment” is not ancillary: unlike many other important artists (whom I have already mentioned), Maria Cristina does not use waste or terrifying garbage, but rather colored bottle caps delivered by a community (especially the university with all the transgenerational



<sup>106</sup> M. Perniola, *Il Sex Appeal*, Op. cit., p. 58; the following passage is taken from a chapter significantly entitled *Corpi come vestiti*. Another chapter is titled, pertinently for us, *Paesaggi plastici*.

*Vortex* (Milan, Bracco Foundation, permanent collection)

*Preliminary maquette for the installation Vortex*



*The Serpent of the Garbage Patch State, part of the installation Mission at the United Nations (New York, UN, September 29 – October 17, 2015)*



components that we have pointed out), carefully chosen on the basis of chromatic criteria, washed and sanitized, recycled as far as possible in subsequent interventions. The goal is not to create plastic fashion, like Enrica Borghi, or plastic accessories on a giant scale, like Pascale Marthine Tayou, but the aim perceptively established by Perniola: to enable us to perceive as “things” (which nevertheless “feel”), in a world now globally and invincibly reified. For Perniola the “externality of clothing” is also connected—as emerged in a stimulating discussion with Arthur C. Danto<sup>107</sup>—with the theme of the “visibility of the present,” of a present cognitively difficult to control by those who live in it, and also (we will return to this idea later) to the “instability of the work” of contemporary art, another implicit confirmation of the importance of Maria Cristina Finucci’s choice of hybridization.

The first hybrid monster to appear prominently in the *Wasteland* program, repeating with a certain evident coherence the ascending cascade of bottle tops in the large courtyard of Ca’ Foscari, was a serpent, stealthily creeping from 760 United Nations Plaza in New York until it penetrated the facade of the UN Building designed by Oscar Niemeyer and reached the front desk of the ground-floor hall (September 20–October 17, 2014). The symbolism and the significance of being capable of organizing an installation in the United Nations headquarters—in the world’s major institutional forum for dialogue in the field of environmental conservation—do not, of course, require comment. Rather, they should lead us to reflect on the now impressive sequence of places where the Garbage Patch State has appeared: Paris, Venice, Madrid, Rome, New York, as well as the headquarters of the UN and UNESCO, the solemn courtyard of a fifteenth-century building in Volta di Canal Grande, Zaha Hadid’s MAXXI and on the Gran Via in Madrid. Bourriaud admonishes us that “it is the *socius*, i.e., all the channels that distribute information and products, that is the true exhibition site for artists of the current generation.”<sup>108</sup> And there is no doubt that such venues exponentially increase the attention of the media and public opinion. Perniola, again in the perspective of a reified humanity, adds paradoxically, in a certain sense, that “it is only with the installation that the work truly transforms itself into a thing, into a non-utilitarian inorganic entity, rich in symbolic dimensions. With the installation the work overflows out of itself and acquires a radical and extreme externality. This spreading does not stop at the room in which it is contained, since in principle it has a temporary character, and is closely bound up with a specific occasion. The photographs and possibly the videos that pass on its memory are an integral part of it. The installation is therefore a kind of happening staged by things rather than people . . .”<sup>109</sup> The statement surprisingly fits Finucci’s project in New York, clarifying the two meanings present in the installation path.<sup>110</sup> On the one hand, access to the United Nations headquarters, on the other, the Big Apple that surrounds it, which again, as in Venice, is the fulcrum of



a planetary network. The passage also prompts reflection on the essential and conscious impermanence of Maria Cristina’s projects, a trait shared with other artistic programs of awareness and civil persuasion, such as Olafur Eliasson’s recent *Earthspeakr.art* project.

Then on the iconographic level stress should be laid on the significance of the choice of the creature, in its first hypostasis a sufficiently real creature, yet one that bears with it the cultural stigmata of guilt and at the same time an invincible duplicity. The serpent—creeping, insidious, and silent—clearly embodies the sense of a danger that passes unnoticed until it is too late. But this is not all. As we know, one of the texts with the most complex editorial history in the whole output of Aby Warburg, a pioneer of modern iconography, is titled *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*.<sup>111</sup> The great German scholar told the patients in a psychiatric clinic (where he himself was often an inmate) about the profound impression made on him by a trip to the United States in the late nineteenth century (1895–1896), especially by virtue of the encounter with the “primitive” civilization of the Pueblos. In his lecture, Warburg gave an account of the cultural transversality of the serpent (at the center of an indigenous ritual dance), the symbol of original sin, of health (in the staff of Asclepius), and of the salvation of the world (classical statuary), an anticipator of the figure of Christ (in the emblem of the bronze serpent raised by Moses). “The serpent,” he declared, “is a universal symbolic answer to the question: Where do the fury of the elements, death and suffering in the world come from?”<sup>112</sup> Danger, therefore, but also destiny, time, intimate humanity, salvation, and despair are all elements that overcharge the profile of the serpent. In this case, however, Finucci chose a less classical and striking plastic semblance, chromatically very bright, a sort of cartoon monster, to implicitly instill in us the sense of seduction of an evil that is latent and at the same time arrogantly present, which insinuates itself into the most unimaginable places.



<sup>107</sup> See D. Paparoni, A.C. Danto, *Arte e poststoria. Conversazioni sulla fine dell'estetica e altro*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2020 (but the conversation that also involves Perniola is from February–March 1998), p. 65 ff.: “[Danto] When Perniola speaks of the ‘visibility of the present’ he raises two interesting issues. The first concerns the descriptions of the present, cognitively inaccessible to those who live in it.” The example chosen in this sense by Danto is that of Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, exhibited to visitors who could hardly be aware of the concept of modernism (p. 66): “Perniola draws

from these considerations a sort of aesthetic corollary that he contrasts with theories that assign a canonical status to the immediacy of artistic experience: the belief that art must be experienced with the immediacy of a punch in the stomach.” Danto does not seem exactly convinced . . . to which Perniola replies: “I am struck by Danto’s idea that the work of art is not a stable identity, but something that also depends on its historical reception. It seems to me a very important idea because it draws attention to one aspect somewhat (p. 67) neglected by aesthetics. The attention of aesthetics

has too often been concentrated on the complete and perfect character of the work of art. In Danto’s orientation, on the other hand, the work is never really completed, because the reception, the historical judgment and above all the influence it exerts on the production of other works can profoundly change its meaning.”

<sup>108</sup> N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, Op. cit., pos. 65.

<sup>109</sup> M. Perniola, *Sex appeal*, Op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>110</sup> On these twofold dynamics see also C. Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, Op. cit., pp. 12–13: “Participatory projects in the social field therefore seem to operate with a two-

fold gesture of opposition and amelioration . . . Instead of supplying the market with commodities, participatory art is perceived to channel art’s symbolic capital towards constructive social change.”

<sup>111</sup> A. Warburg, *Schlangenritual* (1923), Berlin: Wagenbach, 1988; on the complex editorial history of the text, see K. Mazzucco, “Scheda editoriale della conferenza di Aby Warburg sul *Rituale del serpente*,” *Engramma on line*, 30, January–February 2004 (last accessed July 20, 2020).

<sup>112</sup> A. Warburg, *Schlangenritual*, Op. cit., p. 78.

View of the installation Mission at the United Nations

Maria Cristina Finucci with the Garbage Patch State flag at the inauguration of the installation Mission at the United Nations

# THE GARBAGE PATCH STATE

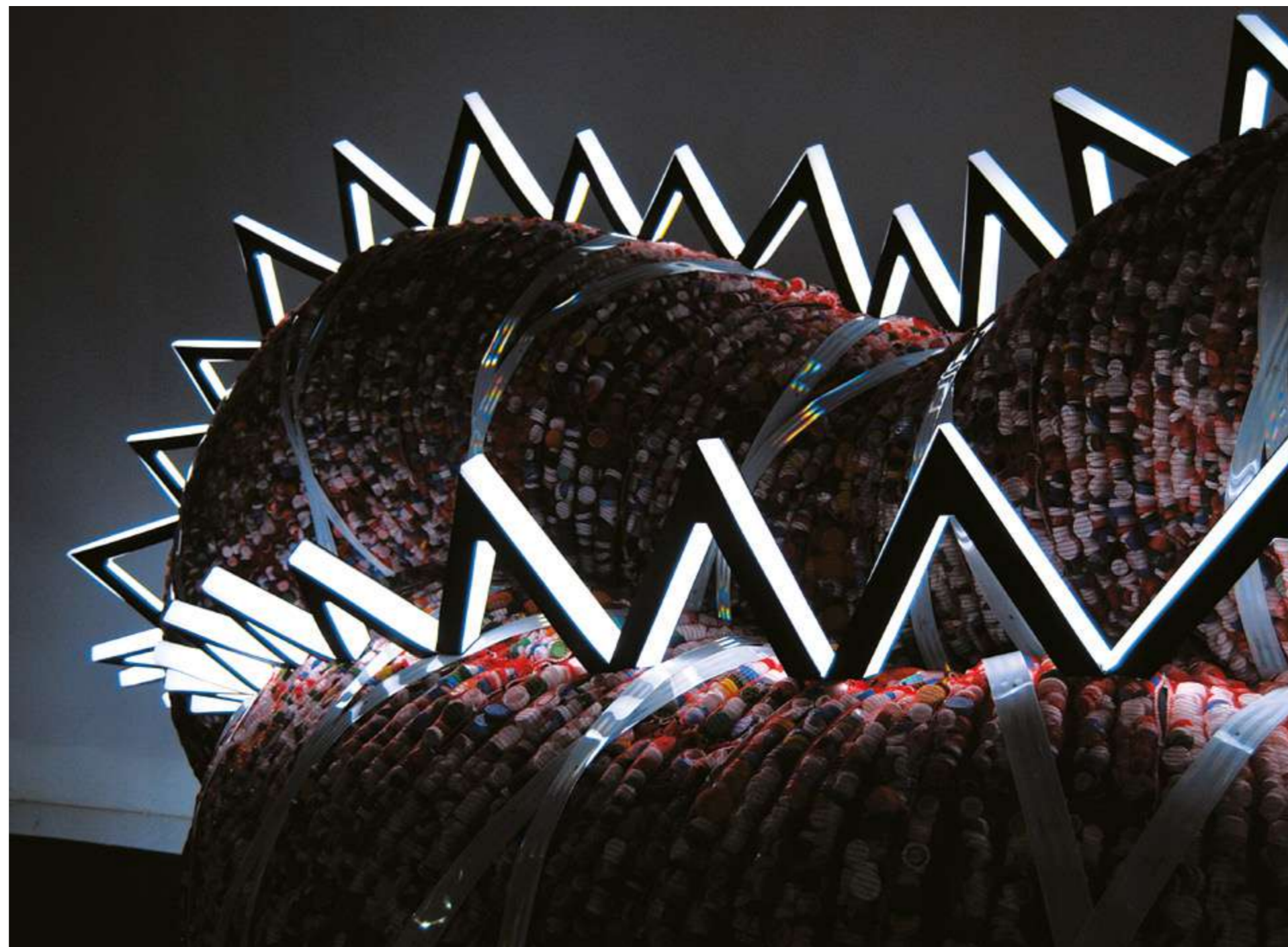
MISSION AT THE UNITED NATIONS  
NEW YORK

Maria Cristina Finucci



View of the installation Mission at the United Nations

After the New York experience, other examples of a fantastical and disturbing bestiary appear, accompanied by imaginative names. These hybrids seem to have sprung out of animated movies, but are the iconic result of our neglect, carelessness, and civic superficiality. In the autumn of 2015, almost at the end of the period of the Milan Expo, again in Venice, it was the turn of a more mysterious animal: the Bluemedinosaur. It appeared in the Aquae Pavilion in Porto Marghera built to a project by Michele De Lucchi as the only venue directly owned by the Expo outside the Rho-Pero site. This new creature (in evident playful contrast to its suffix, alluding to the extinction of other species) took its name from that of a political program of the European Union, the Bluemed Initiative, promoted since 2014 in the context of sustainable development, with particular reference to the water resources of the Mediterranean and with declared transgenerational aims. The Bluemedinosaur was created on the occasion of a Bluemed High Level Conference held at Porto Marghera on October 16, 2015, and remained on display in the conference chamber until the 31st of that month, the Milan Expo's closing date. The external structure (the "outer garment," we should repeat) of the reptile, the darker background of the room in which it was placed, the sidelight that illuminated it and highlighted the upper crests of its profile, the way it appeared and disappeared, entered and exited—the constant dynamic that we noted in the UN project—were all elements that heightened the sense of danger that was no longer just insidious but truly impending and close at hand. Less than two months later, in Paris, Climatesaurus made its appearance at the COP 21 Climate Conference (December 8–9), which ratified the first universal and legally binding agreement on climate change, later implemented (at least in part, as is well known) in the Katowice package agreed in 2018. It was very similar to its Venetian predecessor, even in the way it extended above and below street level and then up the stairs of the Hôtel Potocki, one of the offshoots of the Chamber of Commerce in the French capital. It again appeared before the heads of state and government summoned to the historic meeting and in plain view of the public. A similar monster was planned at the request of the Sky Group and as part of a spe-



cific campaign of communication, "SKY OCEAN RESCUE," outside the Auditorium Parco della Musica (now the Auditorium Ennio Morricone) in Rome, for the National Geographic Science Festival (April 16–22, 2018). The invitation letter (with the proposal) and the rendering exist, but a failure to reach an agreement prevented the project being presented.

These fantastical and wholly imaginary creatures arise from the same fake soil as the project and are an integral part of the creation of a new visual reality, which from being virtual becomes tangible. It is a sort of fulfillment of a nightmare. As Jean Clair has pointed out,<sup>113</sup> in Latin the term *monstrum*<sup>114</sup> falls within the sphere of phantasmagoria. As the etymology suggests, *monstrum* comes from *monere*, admonish, warn, but the verb also means to preserve a trace, a memory, in other words to keep a record. From *monere* also comes *monumentum*. In short, there is a link between "monster" and "monument." Images, even when they are repulsive,<sup>115</sup> are always a form of revelation of what we conceal, that which ought perhaps to have remained hidden but is revealed. The monster is a warning but it is also, in a certain sense, the return of the repressed. And in contemporary art, the hybrid and the monster are revealed as in a way "vectors," as if they were avatars of the monsters of the past and symbols of a new crisis. Hence they are not accidental figures in the mentality of different ages, nor just the product of an artist's imagination at any given moment, but betray a strong spiritual disturbance. Today they appear to us as salient features between the end of modernity and the beginning of what is sometimes called post-modernity, or rather the age of the post-human.<sup>116</sup>

Significantly the term "hybrid" is believed to derive from medieval Latin *hibridus*, which is usually traced back to Greek *hybris*. To the Greeks, hubris was a very serious sin, the expression of human arrogance leading to a violation of the cosmic order. Centaurs, chimeras, satyrs, and sirens, by the very composition of their bodies, escaped from the restrictions of a world ordered in categories.<sup>117</sup> The presence in today's art of biological forms as singular as those of the monsters of the past on the one hand reveals a sort of hubris of modernity, while on the other it is the evident symptom of a society in crisis. In short, the monster is not just an impending enemy, incomprehensible and unpredictable, "the other," "the stranger," placed out-

<sup>113</sup> See J. Clair, *Hybris. La fabbrica del mostro nell'arte moderna; omuncoli, giganti e acefali*, Monza: Johan & Levi, 2015.

<sup>114</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>115</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 17. The leading Italian scholar of this new approach to the question is Roberto Marchesini, director of the Centro Studi Filosofia Postumanista. His books deal with the role of animal otherness in relation to the human being. See R. Marchesini, "Post-humanist poetics," in N. Dusi, C. Saba (eds.), *Matthew*

*Barney. Polimorfismo, multimodalità, neobarocco*, Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2021, pp. 221–227; *Id.*, *Post-human. Verso nuovi modelli di esistenza*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002. Seen in this perspective, the term "zooanthropology" is also evoked, a science that arose in the late 1980s with the specific aim of understanding the relationship between humanity and animal otherness. On this topic, see C. Tugnoli (ed.), *Zooantropologia. Storia, etica e pedagogia dell'interazione uomo/animale*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2003. Also consider P. Barcellona, F. Ciaramelli, R. Fai

(eds.), *Apocalisse e post-umano. Il crepuscolo della modernità*, Bari: Dedalo, 2007. The monster, according to Marchesini, is born from the action of the person who sins by hubris and it is an element that disturbs the natural order due to its uncertain location and its hybrid and non-definable nature: cf. R. Marchesini, *La fabbrica delle chimere. Biotecnologie applicate agli animali*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999, pp. 102–103.

<sup>117</sup> See N.R.E. Fischer, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1992.



*Close-up detail of Bluemedsaurus*

side the measure and the norm. By its very existence and its semblance it violates the laws of society as well as nature.<sup>118</sup> Hybridization is a phenomenon that extends to a very vast area of meanings and in reality to all forms of expression. Yet Maria Cristina's hybrids are, in our opinion, significantly different from many experiments by other artists. They are more precisely the generation of a lineage of fantastical animals that display a fusion of archaic traits—in fact they bear names reminiscent of prehistoric creatures—but they are in reality the new and dangerous product of an imaginary (and imagined) state that materializes with the epiphanic appearance of animals with dangerous and unpredictable traits. The procedure is one that resembles many horror films, where monsters are generated by thought itself or by variants only apparently more friendly, as in the movie *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*,<sup>119</sup> in which human neglect and a sort of technological hubris create fantastic creatures out of food scraps.

As we have seen, there are numerous contemporary artists who take an interest in the creation of hybrid forms. AES+F, for example, in *Inverso Mundus* (2015) create fantastical creatures, chimeras assembled more like domestic pets than terrifying monsters. Dario Tironi creates chimeras<sup>120</sup> in an artistic output focused on issues related to ecology and the consequences of human actions affecting the environment. He uses mixed media to create his hybrids, assembling heterogeneous materials from everyday objects and serial products as well as junk such as toys, ornaments, and electric appliances. Another example is the chimeras, sphinxes, centaurs, and other fantastical animals revisited by Patrick Alò,<sup>121</sup> who takes his cue mainly from Greek mythology, though his artistic practice is based above all on the aggregation and fusion of cheap or recycled materials of the twenty-first century. Dubbed by critics “the Hephaestus of contemporary art” for the use he makes of waste metals and how he shapes matter (like the Greek god of fire), Alò has been significantly influenced by contact with a group of punk-inspired artists and performers, the Mutoid Waste Company, founded in London in the mid-1980s by Joe Rush and Robin Cooke, in collaboration with Alan P. Scott and Joshua Bowler, who moved to Santarcangelo di Romagna in the 1990s. They have become famous for their gigantic welded sculptures, sometimes self-propelled, called

Mutoids, made exclusively from recycled materials.<sup>122</sup> In the English-speaking world, we might also think of the interpretations of the *Minotaur*<sup>123</sup> by Sophie Ryder, although this is less connected with the use of reclaimed materials.

We feel the Dutch artist Theo Jansen comes closer to Finucci's imaginary. He creates gigantic kinetic installations,<sup>124</sup> usually skeletons of prehistoric animals or giant insects, similarly using post-industrial materials, PVC piping, sheets of plastic, and bits of wood assembled with nylon and adhesive. His most famous project is *Strandbeests* (“Beach Creatures”). These are structures of considerable size, made from PVC tubes, adhesive tape, clamps, and recycled plastic bottles. The peculiar feature of these structures is that they can travel along beaches propelled by wind energy and are therefore somehow “animated,” an experiment in fusing art and engineering. Jansen's first “beach creature” was called *Animaris vulgaris*, a fanciful term made up of two Latin words, *animal* and *maris*. It was originally not intended to move but simply stand on the dunes. The idea of kineticism, with wind turbines placed on the back of the structure, came later. The project then evolved further with some devices enabling the creatures to move even without wind thanks to forms of homeostasis, such as the accumulation of compressed air in plastic bottles. Jensen's idea is to leave these “herds” of sculptures in total freedom on Dutch beaches where they can move independently like colonies of creatures propelled by the wind.

Maria Cristina Finucci's creatures come, at least judging by their names, from a non-classical past, although she has given them pseudo-Latin names suggesting prehistoric ages, creating Jurassic plastic serpents that silently but inexorably invade space and so reveal further regions of our experience. In short, Finucci's work is not close to the creatures in a project like *Washed Ashore*, mentioned above. In it a team of artists and volunteers at the National Zoo in Washington, coordinated by Angela Haseltine Pozzi, created over sixty-five sculptures from waste materials to raise public awareness of the theme of recycling. Nor does it resemble the sculpture *Droppings and the Dam* (2015) by the Indian artist Arun Kumar, a sort of corrugated horseshoe-shaped space made entirely from over 70,000 plastic bottle tops collected around the world and tied together with steel wire, which aims to alert public opinion to the issue of sustainability.

<sup>118</sup> See V.I. Stoichita, *L'Image de l'Autre. Noirs, Juifs, Musulmans et Gitanes dans l'art occidental des Temps modernes, 1435-1789*, Paris: Hazan/Louvre editions, 2014.

<sup>119</sup> We refer to the 3D computer graphic animated film *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* by Sony Picture Animation (2009). Inspired by the children's picture book of the same name, the authors and directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller see the film as a parody of and tribute to catastrophic films, from *Twister* to *Armageddon*. There was also the sequel *Cloudy with*

*a Chance of Meatballs 2* of 2013, directed by Cody Cameron and Kris Pearn.

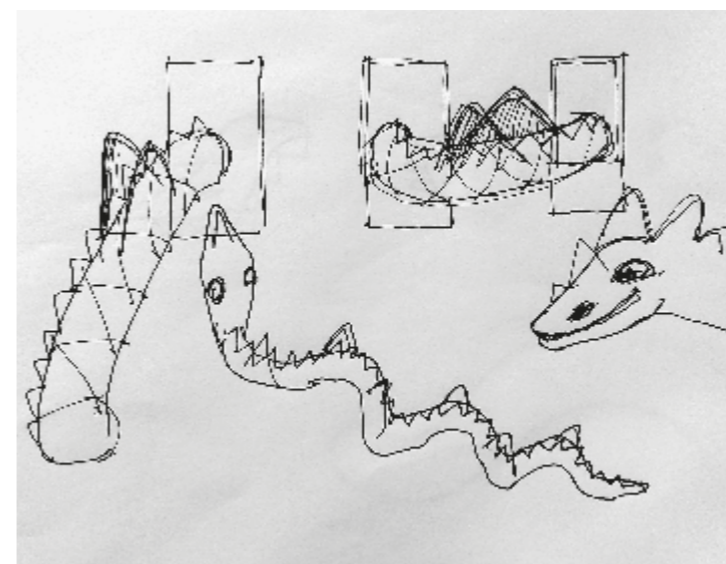
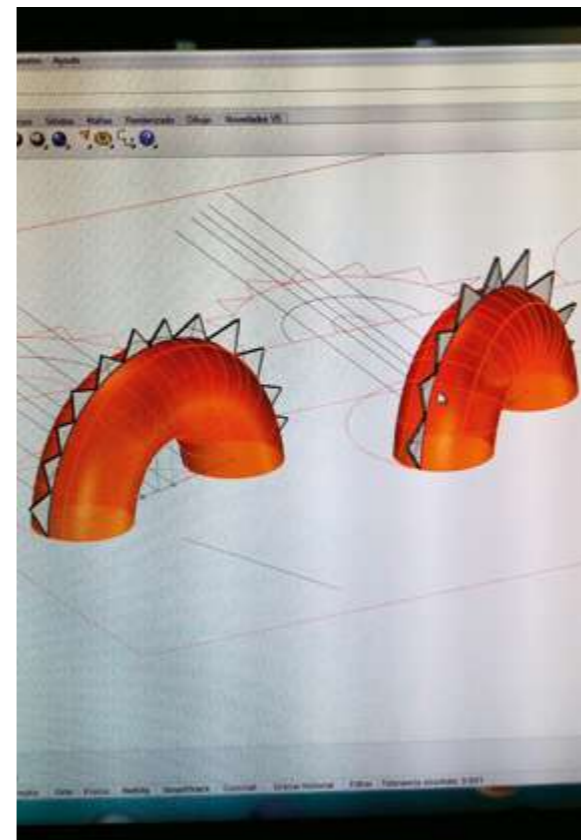
<sup>120</sup> See for example the *Chimera* exhibited at the Giardino della Gherardesca, in Florence, in 2014; see <https://dariatironi.com> (last accessed July 13, 2020).

<sup>121</sup> See <http://www.patrickalo.com/about.html> (last accessed July 15, 2020).

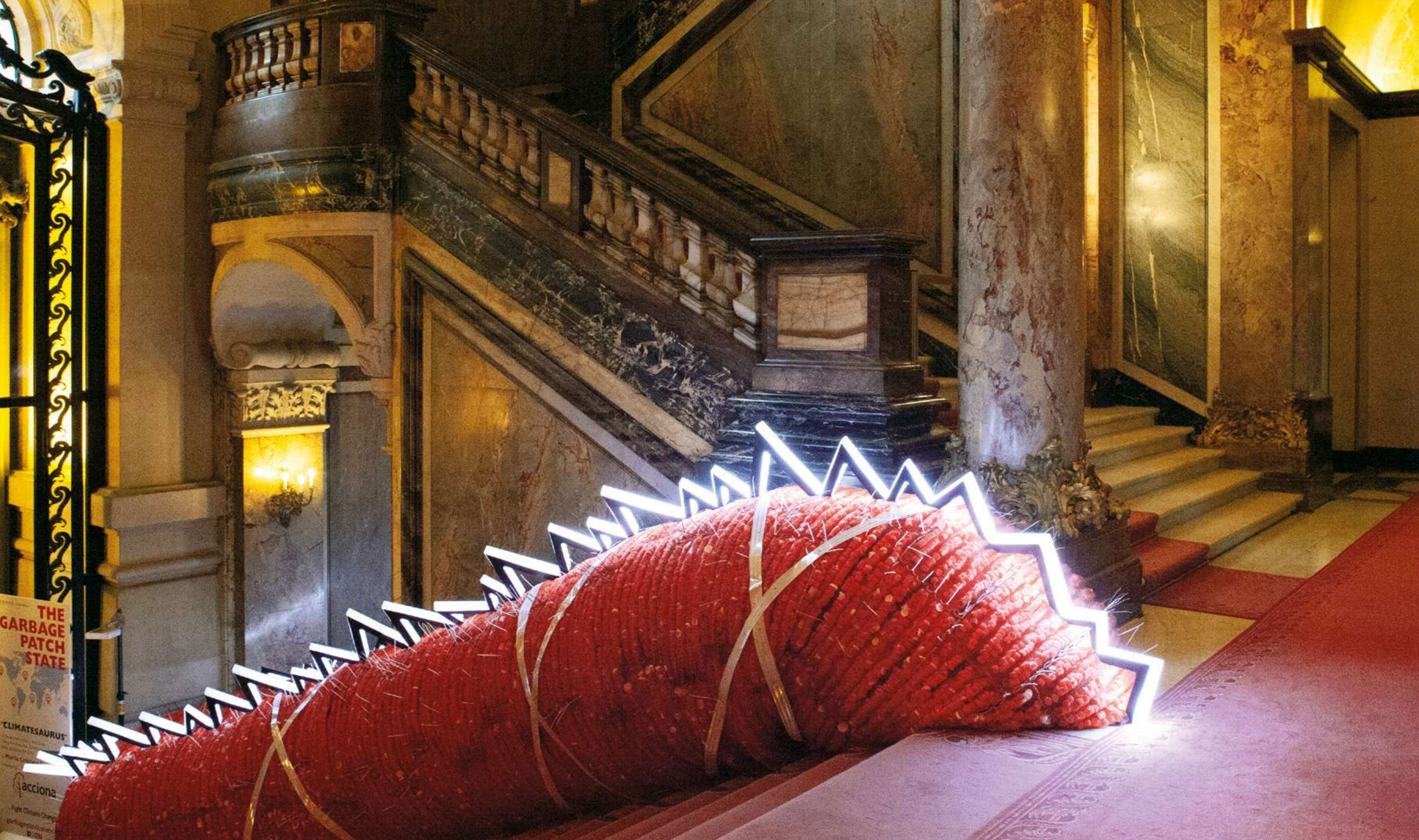
<sup>122</sup> See Rote Zora, *Mutate or Die. In viaggio con la Mutoid Waste Company*, Milan: Agenzia X, 2020.

<sup>123</sup> See Sophie Ryder, <https://www.sophieryder.com/the-minotaur> (last accessed 14 July 2020).

<sup>124</sup> In this respect, see also the exhibition *Dream Beasts* (Milan, Museo Nazionale Scienza e Tecnologia Leonardo Da Vinci, February 19 – May 19, 2019).



Preparatory drawing for the installation *Climatesaurus* (Paris, exterior of Hôtel Potocki, October 8 – 9, 2015); the outer parts of the *Climatesaurus*; detail of the preparation; another preparatory drawing



View of the internal part of the installation Climatesaurus

# THE GARBAGE PATCH STATE



## “CLIMATESAURUS”

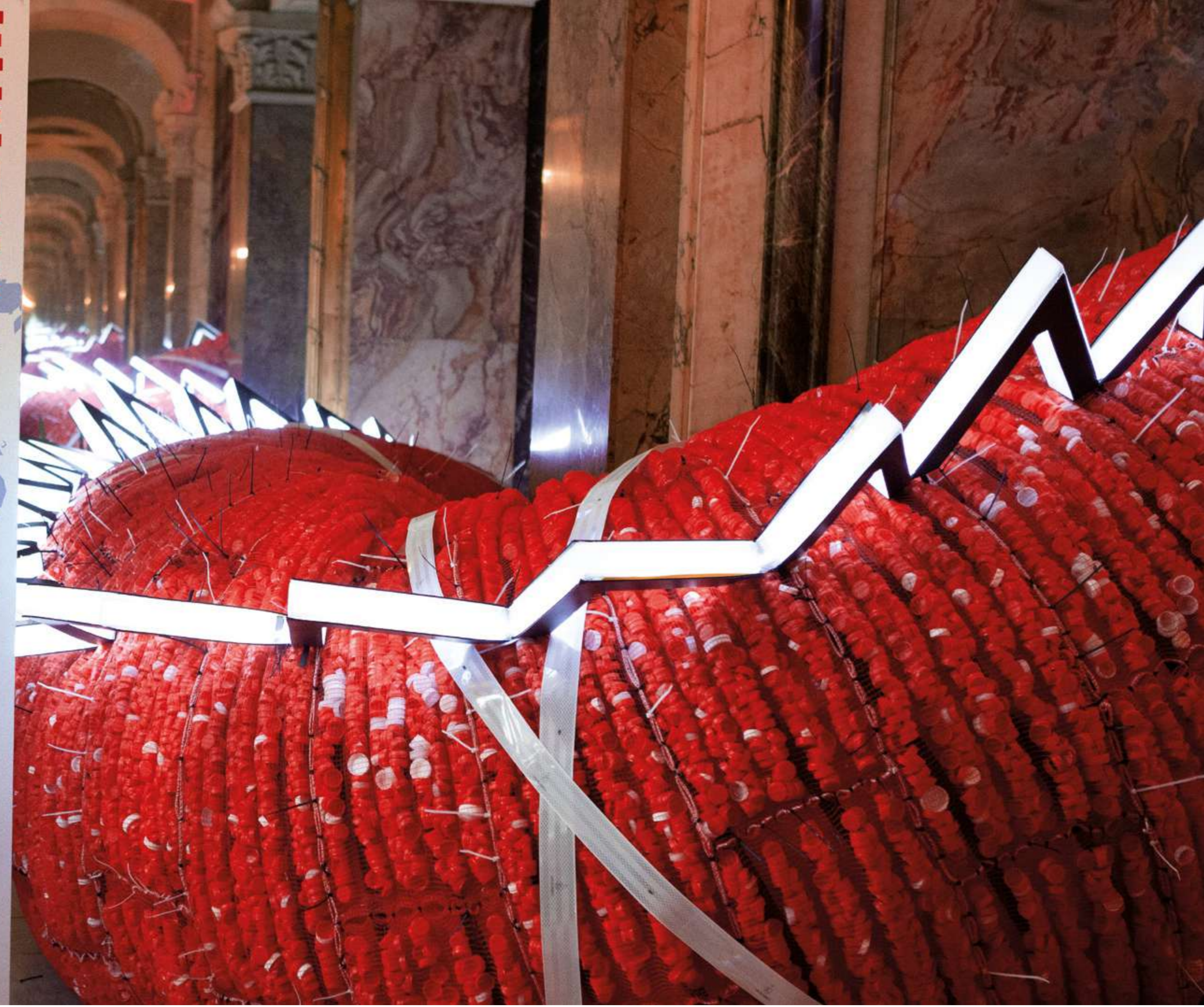
at the International New York Times  
Energy for Tomorrow Conference  
Paris, December 8-9 2015

by **Maria Cristina Finucci**

Presented by



fight Climate Change



View of the internal part of the installation Climatesaurus



The difference therefore lies not so much in the type of material used, but rather in a different mode of narrative. Plastic, in essence, is a pretext and not the point of arrival. It is a sort of minimal sign of communication used by the non-verbal system of the Garbage Patch State and monsters are an epiphenomenon of this world.

This bizarre fauna should be seen in relation to the *Vortex* created at Lambrate and displayed at the same time. It was installed in the historic headquarters (disused, but reopened for the Milan Expo) of the Bracco pharmaceutical company on behalf of the foundation of the same name. As is well known, the foundation has been involved for years in supporting projects for the artistic and cultural heritage and promoting corporate culture, cultural inclusion and greater social well-being. *Vortex* was officially exhibited to the public from June 15 to October 31, 2015. (Since then it has been part of the foundation's permanent collection in the same location.) Together with the subsequent *Bluemedasaurus*, it was Maria Cristina Finucci's most significant contribution to the Milan Expo, in which it was a collateral event. Sponsored by the Ministry of the Environment and the Protection of the Territory and Sea, as usual in collaboration with the Università Roma Tre, the installation consisted of a huge waterspout, carefully designed, almost 8 meters high, covered (so again in this case we can speak of an "external garment") with tens of thousands of colored plastic bottle tops. Compared to the insidious progress of the monsters before and after the Milan event, *Vortex* was intended to emphasize, certainly more radically, the destructive speed of the Garbage Patch State, but also, in some way, to compel the involvement of spectators in the mental process of becoming aware of the danger. As we have repeatedly recalled, the viewers acted on behalf of the actual creators of the Garbage Patch State, all of us who adopt attitudes of general indifference in our use of plastic. In this case they could understand (at least with their eyes) other forms for channeling the energy of consumption and trade characteristic of our civilization.

*The panels for the installation Mission at the United Nations (New York, UN, September 29 – October 17, 2015)  
A photo of the inauguration of Vortex (Maria Cristina Finucci, seen from behind, with Diana Bracco and Alessandro Cecchi Paone)  
Two stages of construction*





**THE  
GARBAGE  
PATCH  
STATE  
VORTICE**

Fondazione Bracco  
Mostrami Factory @ Folli 50.0  
di Maria Cristina Finucci

*Close-up detail of the installation Vortex*



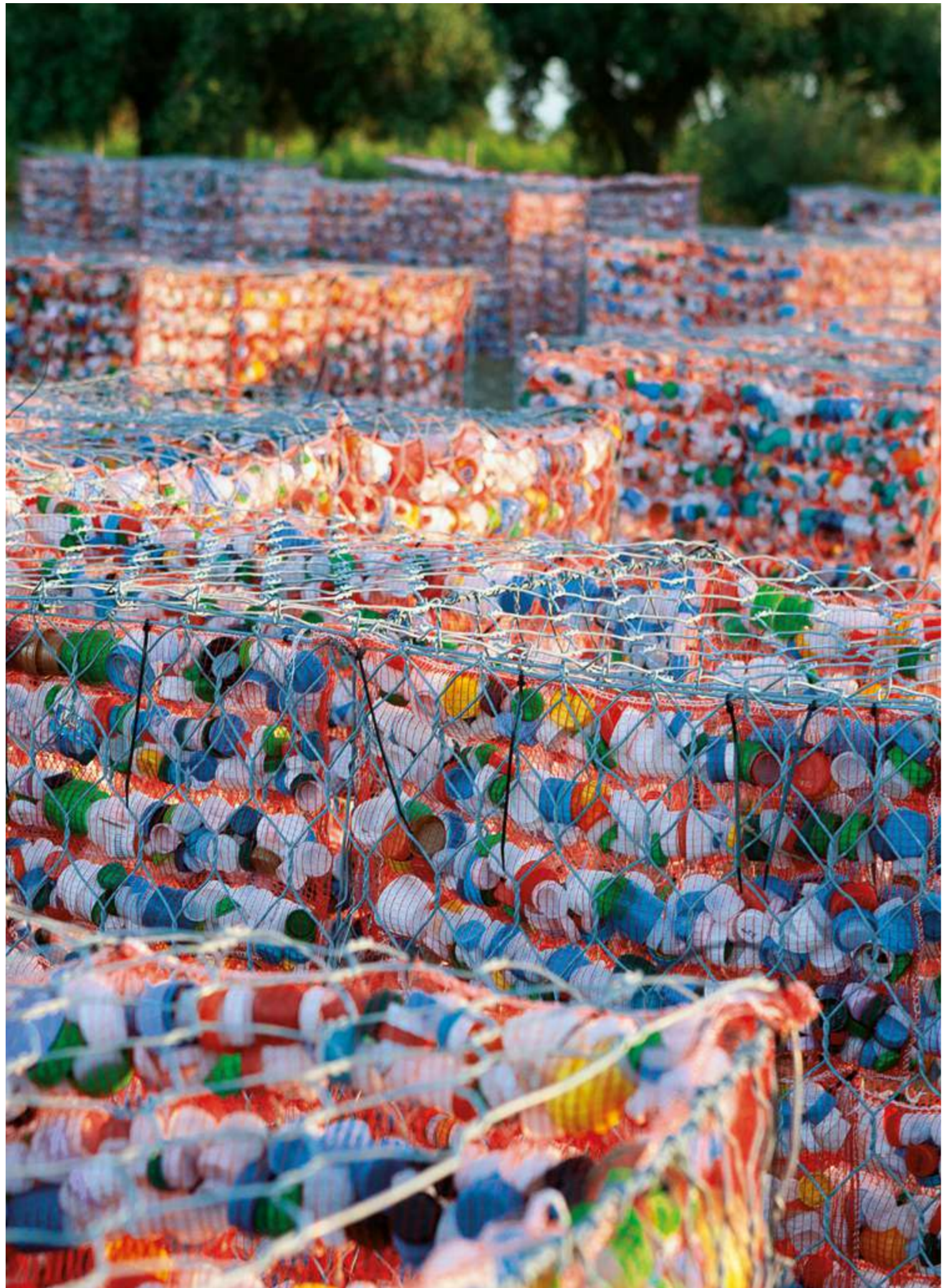
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## MOZIA 2016

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A room in the Museo Whitaker on Mozia with the famous Kouros (450–440 BC), in the design of the exhibition HELP. L'età della plastica (September 25, 2016 – January 8, 2017)



MOZIA 2016

MOZIA: THE AGE OF PLASTIC.  
ANXIETY REFLECTED IN THE DEPTHS (2016)

In this case, too, it is worth starting with the artist's own words. She has described her colossal installation (more than 3,500 square meters) on the island of Mozia,<sup>125</sup> as well as the two-year process of inspection, reflection, projects and sharing:

“As usual, I... sought to make contact with the *genius loci* of this magical place and to question it. The genius, for its part, I think was waiting for me, because it did not take long to reach me and suggest an idea that I thought would only be a starting point, but which actually turned out to be the definitive one.

Walking amid the Phoenician ruins, between these walls, which once were probably homes, warehouses or the town walls, and that still tell their story 2,700 years later, I thought that what will survive in the distant future perhaps will be only plastic. The age we live in might well be termed by posterity the Age of Plastic.

I then imagined what a hypothetical archeologist of the future might find when excavating this site. When I speak of this archeologist, I imagine an alien coming directly from space. In fact I do not have much hope that mankind can survive for many centuries by continuing to draw on natural resources unsustainably at today's rate. I then fantasized about the amazement of this extraterrestrial—whom I will call the Professor—on encountering a multitude of objects of common use in our civilization, such as plastic bottles, forks, cups, and how he would consider them absurdly precious and worthy of being exhibited in the Whitaker foundation's museum beside the wonderful Phoenician pottery and even close to the *Motya Charioteer*,<sup>126</sup> regarded as one of humanity's finest statues.

But the Professor is no fool. Not for nothing has he traveled through space and therefore time, which is no small feat. So he classifies his finds on reliable principles. He distinguishes those that were indispensable to the growth of our civilization from those that caused our decline, though with some errors of interpretation.

The Professor's excavations yield good results because he is able to bring to light a whole series of construction elements consisting of large blocks made up of metal gabions filled with bottle tops, all made from colored plastic. The blocks were arranged on the ground in keeping with the syntax of the adjacent Phoenician finds, so that the Professor had a hard time guessing what type of building they belonged to. This was made even harder because the system by which they were arranged could have suggested a Roman camp with its *cardo* and *decumanus*, making the rid-



<sup>125</sup> The installation *HELP. L'età della plastica* ran from September 25, 2016 to January 8, 2017, on a large site on the island of Mozia (Trapani) next to the Carthaginian-Roman archeological site. It was made by manually assembling over 5 million used colored plastic bottle caps enclosed in metal gabions. Set in a quadrangular space, the work formed the word “HELP” in large three-dimensional letters arranged on the ground. The initiative, dedicated to the memory of Giovanni Vimercati, was promoted by the Fondazione Terzo Pilastro – Italia e Mediterraneo, supported by the Whitaker Foundation and ENEL, in collab-

oration with the universities of Palermo, Roma Tre, and Ca' Foscari Venice, with the Maccaferri company as the main partner. It was curated by us, while the exhibition design was by Zachary Brennan.

<sup>126</sup> The *Motya Charioteer* is a marble statue from the fifth century BC, found in 1979 during excavations conducted by the Università di Palermo. It stands 1.81 meters tall. Scholars do not agree fully on the iconography of the artifact. Some interpret it as an epebebe, others as a charioteer, and still others as a deity. There are good reasons to suppose, from the place and con-

*Metal gabions with colored plastic bottle caps for the installation HELP. L'età della plastica (island of Mozia, Trapani, September 25, 2016 – January 8, 2017)*

*The exhibition poster*

dle more difficult. Only by flying off in his spaceship was he able to decipher those mysterious signs when he saw through a porthole that they formed the word HELP on the ground. He then understood the cry of alarm launched by some contemporary of whoever reads these words. But why precisely on Mozia and not elsewhere?

Perhaps our archeologist will return to earth to find an answer to this question, but I have no doubts: Sicily is the answer to everything (Goethe).<sup>127</sup>

A cry of alarm. For Hans Blumenberg, the inventor of modern metaphorology, the life of humanity, the whole of humanity, is like being at sea, in a relationship with water, and unfortunately shipwrecked.<sup>128</sup> Our reasoning proceeds in the same way. In *Care Crosses the River* (*Die rises geht über den Fluss*, 1987), an admirable “diary” in the spirit of Montaigne from the late twentieth century, he notes: “You get to the bottom by sinking. You get to the bottom of something by sinking into it. For victims of shipwreck, the sea bed has always been the definitive fixed point, which no one could reach while still alive. Undoubtedly a ‘last foundation’ but in the ironic sense that one could not start from it nor return to something so founded.”<sup>129</sup> The sea bed, as we know, is not attacked by the Garbage Patch State, the horrendous sea monster that Maria Cristina Finucci started to confront in 2012 and which, as we have seen, she first endowed with zoomorphic features in 2014. On the other hand, there is no doubt that she has always wanted to get “to the bottom” of the problem by involving us—positively, effectively—in a state of motivated anxiety, revealing to us that the sea bed is fluctuating, that from the expanse of plastic we will never be able to go back “to something founded.” After the founding of the state, its institutionalization, the construction of a highly authoritative network of interlocutions, after its aggressiveness was symbolically embodied in a series of monsters, in 2016 a new phase of the project began. This is *Wasteland*, to date the penultimate work, which hinges on one word (HELP), on the iconic construction of a cry for help and further articulations of meaning.

As early as 1979 the German philosopher Blumenberg resorted to an existential “marine” image, highly pertinent to the first stage of this new phase in the history of the Garbage Patch State, the one that developed on the small and ancient island and city of Mozia off Marsala. It was then already a “shipwreck,” and *Shipwreck with Spectator* was the title of his essay.<sup>130</sup> It is a good starting point—especially by the presence of a spectator—to better understand some of the many implications of the project *The Age of Plastic* and the large word “HELP” that, as we have seen, is its salient figure.

It is hardly necessary to say what an island represents in an existence marked by shipwreck. However, we will try to reconsider it on the basis of Blumenberg’s analysis, which rests on many other shipwrecks, cultural, philosophical, and

some real, which he presents in the first chapter of his book (*Danger at Sea*). Without going all the way back to Homer (who at the start of our civilization gave us semiotically complex islands), the island has been one of the essential *topoi* of the *adventure* of modern man at least since Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). And the enchanting *parallel story* that Michel Tournier published at the start of his career, in 1967, with *Friday, or, The Other Island*, would suffice to prove it.

Now, a fundamental dimension of *adventure* (etymologically, of “things that will happen,” *ad-ventura*: it became an independent word only in the chivalric France of the thirteenth century) is inevitably inscribed, from its inception, also in the program of the Garbage Patch State. Finucci perceived, as an artist, and therefore outside the usual and stratified criteria of environmental sustainability, the existence of an immediate danger, to which she gave the form of an enormous and invisible State. She officially established it and then had it recognized internationally. As we have seen, she built and opened its first embassy in April 2013 at the MAXXI in Rome. But her project is first of all an *adventure* by the temporal depth it embodies.

The time that Maria Cristina narrates with her installations can only be in the dimension of *adventure*, of a future that modifies our perception of the world and ourselves, more or less consciously projected into a dynamic, articulated and disjointed, surprising and disquieting dimension. Here we are involved in peripeteia that do not fall on our heads (as in the Greek etymology) but emerge from beneath our feet . . .

A very modern Atlantis emerging from the oceans, and not yet fixed, fortunately, in its changing orography, the Garbage Patch State now boasts organisms, archives, documents, and certificates. It presents a heterogeneous and evanescent fauna and is, even before all this, a disturbing and possible destination, the futuristic and contradictory landfall of an ecological shipwreck. This can be read between the lines in the various stages that led Finucci to Mozia, projects active in space and time, bordering on the visionary, vital acts, formal syntheses of pro-

ditions of its concealment, that the statue, considered of particular value (more than just artistic), was hidden during the early stages of the siege of Motya by Dionysius of Syracuse, who conquered the island and city.  
<sup>127</sup> M.C. Finucci, “Un archeologo del futuro a Mozia: *Wasteland* tre anni dopo,” in G. Barbieri, S. Burini (eds.), *The Garbage Patch State. HELP. L’età della plastica / HELP. The Age of Plastic*, catalogue of the exhibition (island of Mozia, September 25, 2016 – January 8, 2017), Crocetta del Montello: Terra Ferma, 2016, pp. 35–36.

<sup>128</sup> In the following pages we draw, with many substantial adaptations, on our essay “Insula: Insula: ‘L’età della plastica’,” *Quattro anni di Garbage Patch State Project*, “Ibid.,” pp. 55–74.

<sup>129</sup> H. Blumenberg, *Care Crosses the River* (1997), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

<sup>130</sup> See *Id.*, *Shipwreck with Spectator* (1979), Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 1996.

*Delivering the bottle tops on the island*





*Installation view from the ruins of the Phoenician city*

found life experiences, and at the same time—why not, after Huizinga and his *Homo ludens?*—playful practices.

However, we will try to consider the project also in a more precisely cognitive perspective. In this way the “island” will reveal another of its infinite features.

#### CYTHEREA AND THE MEMORY OF NATURE

We will try to think of the island as the culmination of a path of knowledge and pervasive consciousness. It is a process established, with some insistence and some contradictions, at the beginning of our early modern age. In this case we will refer in particular to two crucial islands, Cytherea, sacred to Venus in Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), and Armida, in Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (1575), and we will see that two opposing cognitive strategies emerge.

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is an extraordinary romance of *adventure* by Francesco Colonna published by Aldus Manutius in the late fifteenth century.<sup>131</sup> It depicts a mysterious and enchanted journey towards a profound *cognitio naturalis*. In its pages, by virtue of a constant recourse to water (nymphs, rivers, fountains), this knowledge is characterized by plural logics, with a willingness to accept the contradictions that arise from the infinity of life. The path proceeds from garden to garden and, in fact, the gardens of *Poliphilo* are bizarre, just as the colorful plastic flower beds that Maria Cristina Finucci created on Mozia certainly seemed unusual. They are gardens without vegetation, replaced by minerals or, more simply, by water, and therefore rather *pure forms*, mental, dreamlike, logical. Francesco Colonna basically wished to communicate to us the uselessness of attitudes aimed at emphasizing the prideful primacy of the ego, of a consuming and disposing ego, we should add in this case, thinking of the message that the *Wasteland* project conveys. Colonna also wished to enhance our ability to “see” through memory. Studies of the *Hypnerotomachia* have often stressed the weight of “memory” in the novel. It is the memory of an irremediably “fragmented” antiquity, but one that can be made whole mentally. In it death and life are surmounted in a plot in which only memory seems to be able to hold our experience together.

The topiary island of Cytherea is the quintessence, in *Poliphilo*, of our being in the world, a powerful visual metaphor, Blumenberg would say. Like the earlier ones, this endless garden also suppresses all realistic references in favor of a perfect formal order. It is a (fixed) disk of inconceivable roundness, laid out as three concentric circles, divided, at least in the stretch closest to the shore, into twenty sectors, an explicit form of

<sup>131</sup> In the rich bibliography of this masterpiece of Renaissance literature and publishing, one should note the studies by Giovanni Pozzi, at least in the synthesis of the two essays included in *Sull'orlo del visibile parlare*, Milan: Adelphi, 1993, pp. 89–143. In any case, the passionate research by M. Calvesi should be remembered, though rebutted by subsequent documentary studies, *Il sogno di Polifilo prenestino*, Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1983; for a bibliographic recapitulation on the work see L. Barcioli, “Una banca dati per il ‘Polifilo’: la catalogazione dei contributi,” *Bibliothecae.it*, IV, 2015, pp. 123–147.

Aerial views of the installation HELP. L'età della plastica





*Installation view from the ruins of the Phoenician city*



*Installation view at night*







knowledge. The whole opening of the narrative of Cytherea plays on the Edenic paradigm that our anxiety for progress has lost. We perceive an incredible and perennial abundance of flowers, trees, colors, perfumes; an ideal and unchanging climate; a perpetual but not excessive solar exposition, to the point of canceling the very notion of shadow. It is a place that is "sacred," that demands, in order to open itself to the visitor-pilgrim, that he adheres to a corresponding reason. Not the rational discourse of speech, but rather that of images, of memorable images.

On Cytherea, Poliphilo brings his adventure of knowledge to perfect fulfillment. He meets the goddess of love, he understands that love itself, starting from that for nature, is actually the apex of all knowledge about humanity. What secrets are concretely drawn from the encounter, the text does not reveal. Instead, it informs us, with some details, of the necessary ways of learning. The experience is that of "metamorphosis," so extraneous to plastic, but also so central to Maria Cristina's strategy of cognitive pervasiveness. Only if we

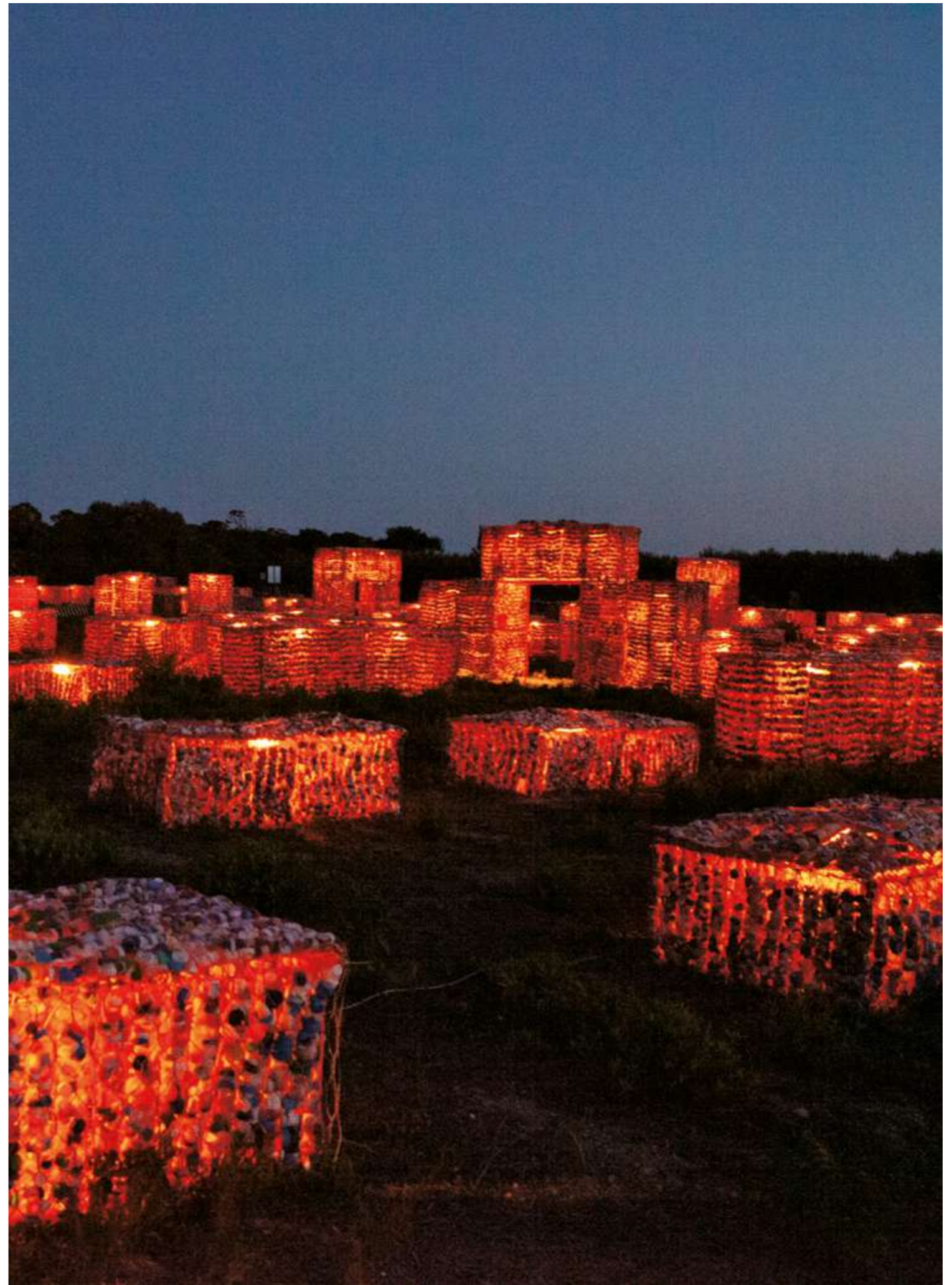
agree to lose an apparently coherent identity (for example, in our stubborn counsels) can we hope for a marked growth in awareness and reason. The contact with the purest water converts Poliphilo into a "pristine state," almost as if he remembers his own remote and yet more authentic *self*. The grace of Venus envelops him and Polia, the woman loved and sought, and both feel "of our loving and invigorated state secure and very joyously refreshed." Finucci also invites us to a new (and ancient) heightened awareness on Mozia.





*Aerial photo taken at night (from a drone)  
of the installation HELP. L'età della plastica*

*Installation view at night*



“THIS IS THE LAKE INTO WHICH NOTHING, HOWEVER  
HEAVY, THAT IS CAST INTO IT EVER SINKS DOWN”

(*GERUSALEMME LIBERATA*, X, 489–490)

There is no happy ending, however, in Tasso's poem. And this is still another useful point of view on the Garbage Patch State. In fact, Armida's island seems to occupy the same location: “It is concealed / in the immense ocean” (*Gerusalemme Liberata*, XIV, 548–549). This island, the author warns us in time, is extraordinary, fascinating, but it is a dangerous artifice, the stage for a sorceress and her amorous charms. We see it mainly through the eyes of Carlo and Ubaldo, the Christian soldiers engaged in the mission of saving Rinaldo by restoring him to himself. In the destiny of the paladin, first overcome by Armida's passion and then awakened to his duties as a warrior, Tasso dispels that sense of *aetas aurea* that had descended from antiquity to the Renaissance. “The people of antiquity without restraints,” the ancient happy humanity, now appear to the poet as a disordered chaos, the simplicity of primeval nature now coincides with an uncontrollable malice. Hence, in describing the “port of the world” (a possible and terrible definition of the Garbage Patch State), Tasso uses a sequence of images that configure from his point of view the dramatic risks of a *regressus ad uterum*, a return to a more widely shared past or the advance to a future that is still uncertain. Once again, the emblem of this path is a garden, set in the midst of the round building that is Armida's palace. Its circular structure is analogous to that of the island of Cythera, but in reality it no longer has any trace of the perfection of primeval nature. It is embodied from the very start in a figure of introverted sensuality: its “enclosed womb” is the innermost of a circle of demonic lodges, which lie open by a hundred doors that nevertheless lead into oblique and aimless passages. Moreover, a labyrinth protects Armida and Rinaldo, the lovers enclosed in the garden, and it, too, is round and dangerous.

In short, forced to choose between nature and history, Tasso chose the latter. He espoused a form of reason apparently not contradictory but in reality eager for conquests and he overcharged nature with all possible fraud, deceit, malice. For this reason, in his verses, Armida's island is doomed to disappear. The scene made up of ancient fragments that Poliphilo had managed to recombine in Cythera becomes, not even a hundred years later, a unity shattered, yet it continues to flow into our lives.

#### TOWARDS AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

Shattering and recomposing. Until Mozia, Maria Cristina Finucci had installed various parts of an overall image, that of the Garbage Patch State, in some capitals of the world (Paris, Venice, Madrid, Rome, New York, Milan, Venice again) and always in different forms, with the fundamental need to assign a shape to it. This is in fact, as we have repeated many times, the final goal of the *Wasteland* project: to give an image to an elusive phenomenon that does not possess it. Only by building the image to the end, in installations as well as in public opinion, will it be possible for us to begin to see the threat it represents. A project of increasing commitment, which has required, at least since the Milan Expo, a managerial administration of the undertaking. Paola Pardini has undertaken the task with intelligence, generosity and unflinching enthusiasm.

On Mozia, however (in the immense and ambitious project promoted by the Fondazione Terzo Pilastro – Italia e Mediterraneo, thanks to the intuition of its president, Emanuele F.M. Emanuele, supported by the Fondazione Whitaker, ENEL, and Maccaferri), the artist was forced to deal with a more remote past, with earlier civilizations. She wanted to invent, as she herself reminded us, her own curious archeology. A project that had hitherto been essentially “architectural”—especially in the “pavilion” (*Fake*) prepared for the 55th Venice Biennale or in the embassy at the MAXXI in Rome—and then “plastic” (in the vortices of New York and Milan), then also became “archeological.” It is significant that one of the installations on Mozia was established in the Museo Whitaker, where it was possible to discover—through incorruptible debris—the ambiguity of plastic and its impact on the life of modern man. Positive, in many ways, and at the same time lethal.

There was more to it, actually. *The Age of Plastic* also raised questions that were rather unusual in scholarly archeological protocol. As is well known, the value of the quality of the artistic quality or the simple find is not very important in archeological research. Archeologists' interest centers first of all on the position of the find and its correct geolocation as fundamental guarantee for a probative dating and consequently for a full understanding of it. In this sense the discovery of the *Motya Charioteer* in the Whitaker Foundation is exemplary. But on





General installation view at dusk, with the gabions intra-illuminated by ENEL X

the Mozia of the Age of Plastic, by contrast, one could see the traces of a position that does not exist and that is at the same time boundless. Furthermore, these traces have been shown to us, making us re-experience—if we consider carefully the danger that awaits us—the ancient, ancestral images of an unresolved anxiety, as Blumenberg reminds us.

If artists in the past used backdrops of ruins to recount episodes of history set in the past or present (*Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet*, medieval intellectuals used to repeat), Finucci presents herself, through an alien intermediary, as an archeologist of the future, seeking to understand the meaning of the artifacts of a past “civilization of plastic” (because plastic is truly preponderant in this phase), discovering a site and a museum that have preserved testimonies of it on an island dominated by a sign so dilated as to be on an almost territorial scale, namely the minute and indelible ruins of an era that—observed from above, from another time—were crying out HELP! The complex representation produced was therefore a message for the humanity of the future (as well as the present). It took the form of an enormous “still life,” a gigantic image of *Vanitas*, in which life had died out and become a necropolis, the sign of a lost civilization unable to save itself. The plastic ruins of Mozia, the bearers of a merciless message, located next to an archeological site of outstanding value, in short, provided us with ambiguously dualistic clues to the civilization they recount, once again starting from an exceptional monumental location.

In this respect we derive, once more from Mario Perniola, a highly pertinent indication of this specific project by Finucci (who subsequently, in particular with the installation in the Roman Forum, which we will deal with later, measured herself with a space of dense and stratified memory). “Schelling, in the early nineteenth century, saw architecture as an inorganic art, a kind of stiffened, petrified, concrete music, and he included it together with bas-relief and sculpture within the common conception of plastic art. Now the thesis that architecture is a part of plastic art makes it at first sight the product of the activity of an architect who models, shapes, and molds a material to draw a figure from it. But it also leads us to think that this figure is not definitive, stable or perfect; it introduces a provisional, contingent, if not arbitrary aspect into it. If architecture is a plastic art, it means that its forms cannot be compared at all to intelligi-

ble, almost eternal and immutable forms analogous to Platonic ideas, but rather to folds, imprints, flexions... The definition of architecture as a plastic of the inorganic, on closer inspection, does not enhance, but attenuates and reduces the importance of the artist as a creative subject, closer to the craftworker. But above all it focuses our attention on the architectural work understood as a physical formation not essentially different from the horny coatings of some animal species... or the geological forms of the Earth’s crust.”<sup>132</sup>

From a plastic architecture we therefore move on to plastic as architecture, and to architecture as a shared geological and inorganic form, in which the author is not the only engine of creation, like the archeologist of the future that Maria Cristina recounts, who seeks to interpret, like the artist, these present signs, an artist who had to work, with a strategy typical of contemporary art, “in the name of someone else.”

By these elements the *Wasteland* project shows that it fully belongs to the contemporary world. When in 2015, for the 56th Biennale of Visual Arts in Venice, we had the privilege of curating an important collateral event, the Grisha Bruskin exhibition *An Archaeologist’s Collection* (in the former Church of Santa Caterina),<sup>133</sup> we found that even the great Russian artist, while measuring himself with a much more historically defined time frame (the Soviet empire), had ended up adopting an approach to the archeology of the future which, as also confirmed in other ways, appears to be a central trend in the current situation. It stems above all from the sensibilities of certain artists together with the available plurality of different time frames that we find epitomized in the digital, as well as from a future that appears more confused and uncertain than a few years ago. It is also due to apt reconsideration of the strong matrix of the past in modern art (as shown by the two fine exhibitions curated also in 2015 by Salvatore Settis for the Fondazione Prada, *Serial & Portable Classic*), and finally—and this was fully evident in Maria Cristina’s project—to a general need for the consolidation of memory in the age of artificial intelligence, to which we so often entrust our personal and collective memories.

The consolidation of a collective memory is, in fact, one of the most important tasks of contemporary cultural strategy. And if, on the basis of the reflections of Juri Lotman,<sup>134</sup> we were to learn to truly consider culture as the non-hered-

itary memory of humanity, which proceeds and develops by preserving and accumulating information, we should all feel committed to a collective need (especially for our continent): that of saving, making known, and sharing a common past, of which it is essential not to lose the traces. Perhaps never as in our time has the need for the preservation of memory been so strongly felt. The need for identity generated by social changes in today’s world focuses the interest of the contemporary intellectual and scientific debate on the bond between memory and identity (subjective and collective) and on that between memory and history. Perhaps no age in human history has appeared as obsessed with memory as our own.

Culture is therefore a necessary condition for the existence of any human collectivity. As Lotman wrote in the 1970s,<sup>135</sup> there is no collectivity that has not defined and distilled particular *texts*, a specific behavior, a particular moment intended to fulfill a *cultural* function. This is certainly true of Maria Cristina Finucci’s site-specific installation *The Age of Plastic*, too. It is above all a sign of the research that she has been conducting into this subject since 2012, and at the same time a sort of cultural window, one open to the many dimensions of a hazardous future.

## AN ISLAND IN THE OCEAN

On Mozia, Maria Cristina Finucci denounced the danger, she preserved and museumized its traces, concretely affirming the possibility of recovering and conserving the detritus by snatching it from the void, from nothingness, from the dissolution to which it is destined, to leave a clue for those who remain. The procedure is analogous to her previous projects. The artistic object is desemanticized to resemanticize it by infusing it with a new significance, adding new suggestions and new layers of meaning to each stage of the project (which is, by our whole argument so far, inevitably serial: a matter of installations that interact with each other in an almost prodigious way).

Her plastic is at the same time concrete, metaphorical, and allusive. It is the visible, colorful, and tragic face of merchandise that has disintegrated in water. It is what should no longer exist and instead returns ambiguously into our lives and endangers us. At the beginning of the Garbage Patch State program, Maria Cristina invited us to take a trip to an island that exists but should not exist, whose very existence threatens our own. On Mozia she truly welcomed us to an island, and the project therefore acquired a more explicit metaphorical significance.

The Garbage Patch State is physically located in the ocean. An ocean should not be perceived only as something neutral and fluid. It is also a symbol of the wealth of international, transnational and transgenerational resources. The ocean, like the forests, belongs to us all, not to a country or a political regime. The ocean appears to us, in a certain sense, as the symbol of Alpha and Omega. Everything begins in it. We came from the ocean and we will return to it. The ocean is the beginning and the end of life. And every island is its symbol.

<sup>132</sup> M. Perniola, *Sex appeal*, Op. cit., pp. 105–106.

<sup>133</sup> See *Grisha Bruskin. An Archaeologist’s Collection*, catalogue of the exhibition (Venice, former Church of Santa Caterina, May 7 – November 22, 2015), curated by G. Barbieri and S. Burini, Crocetta del Montello: Terra Ferma, 2015.

<sup>134</sup> See J.M. Lotman, *La semiosfera. Assimmetria e il dialogo nelle strutture pensanti* (1985), Venice: Marsilio 1992.

<sup>135</sup> See Id., *Tipologia della cultura*, Op. cit.

Site-specific installation view in the Museo Whitaker on Mozia



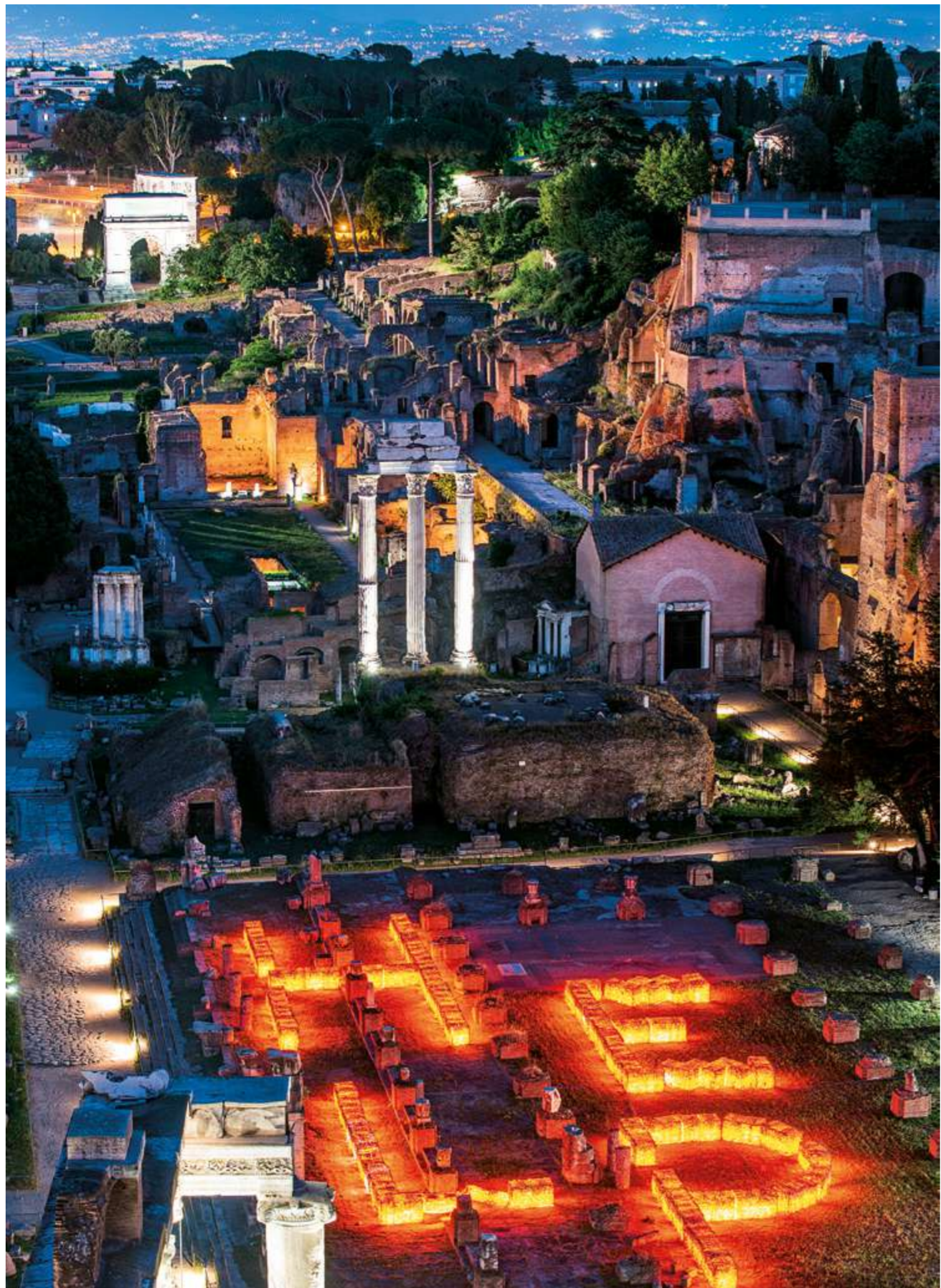


*Site-specific installation view in the Museo Whitaker on Mozia*



*View of the intra-illuminated metal gabions by ENEL X  
for the installation HELP the Ocean (Rome, Roman Forum,  
June 8 – July 29, 2018)*





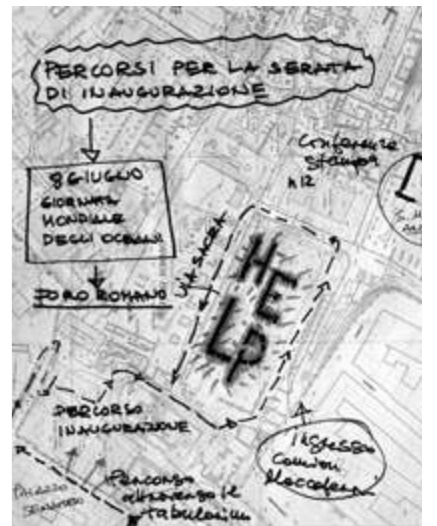
## HELP IN ROME

World Oceans Day has been celebrated for some time now on June 8 each year, in memory of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992). The first world conference of heads of state on issues of environmental protection and sustainability, it brought together over 170 government representatives and laid the foundations for the subsequent Kyoto Protocol. In 2018, from that date and until the following July 29, Maria Cristina Finucci had the opportunity to create what is perhaps her most striking and evocative installation so far. This lay not so much in the configuration of the project, which substantially (with some perceptible variants) repeated the one on Mozia, again turning on the desperate cry for help of a fragile and devastated Earth, but rather by its location in the Roman Forum, on the remains of the Basilica Julia, close to the Via Sacra and beside the Capitol, in one of the most visited archeological sites not only in Italy but the whole world. The endless images that we have are evidence of the overwhelming beauty of the area, of the surrounding buildings, the impressive signs of age that surrounded the installation. Pictures of the press conference bring out the intense interest on the part of the media that crowded it. The reports of the inauguration,<sup>136</sup> with the projection of the official video of the Garbage Patch State onto the walls of Palazzo Senatorio, the installation illuminated in the Roman night, the visual presence of witnesses of the Garbage Patch State, taken together all tell of an exhibition with an extraordinary impact.

Among the possible range of testimony, we feel it is appropriate to quote the record of that evening in the words of Paolo Conti in the *Corriere della Sera*:

“Those who love our boundless cultural heritage, a pillar of our national identity, continually experience deep emotions. They become indelible when contemporaneity, meaning the art of today, capable of denouncing our wounds, intervenes in the Great History. For this reason—as a chronicler of our cultural heritage—I will never forget the nights in the Forums illuminated by the gleam of the works by Cristina Finucci or the images projected in Piazza del Campidoglio. There was not only the evocative power of light, that clear and living source. There was, at the same time, both a tribute to a priceless archeological heritage and a powerful, lucid denunciation: we are in danger; this Beauty itself is in danger; the environment in which we live risks suffocating from the excess we produce. Art is the ability to express and communicate without the need for words, explanations, mediations. Those nights taught us a lot, leaving us a very precious deposit, an indelible inner illumination, valid forever.”<sup>137</sup>

While the installation on Mozia had been prepared well in advance (the first inspection of the site preceded its opening to the public by almost two years), the installa-



<sup>136</sup> We were unable to take part in it, because we were simultaneously involved in Moscow, at the Pushkin Museum, in curating a fine exhibition by Fabrizio Plessi, *The Soul of Stone* (June 5 – August 5, 2018).

<sup>137</sup> P. Conti, “‘Help Ocean’ ai Fori Imperiali arte di plastica contro l’inquinamento,” *Corriere della Sera*, June 8, 2018, p. 32.

*Aerial view at night (from a drone) of the installation*

*For Earth Day 2018, as president of the Garbage Patch State, in Rome Maria Cristina Finucci signs support for the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, countersigned by the Minister for the Environment Gian Luca Galletti and the president of ASVIS Enrico Giovannini (April 22, 2018)*

*Itinerary layouts through the site in the Roman Forum on the opening night of the installation*



*Installation view at night*



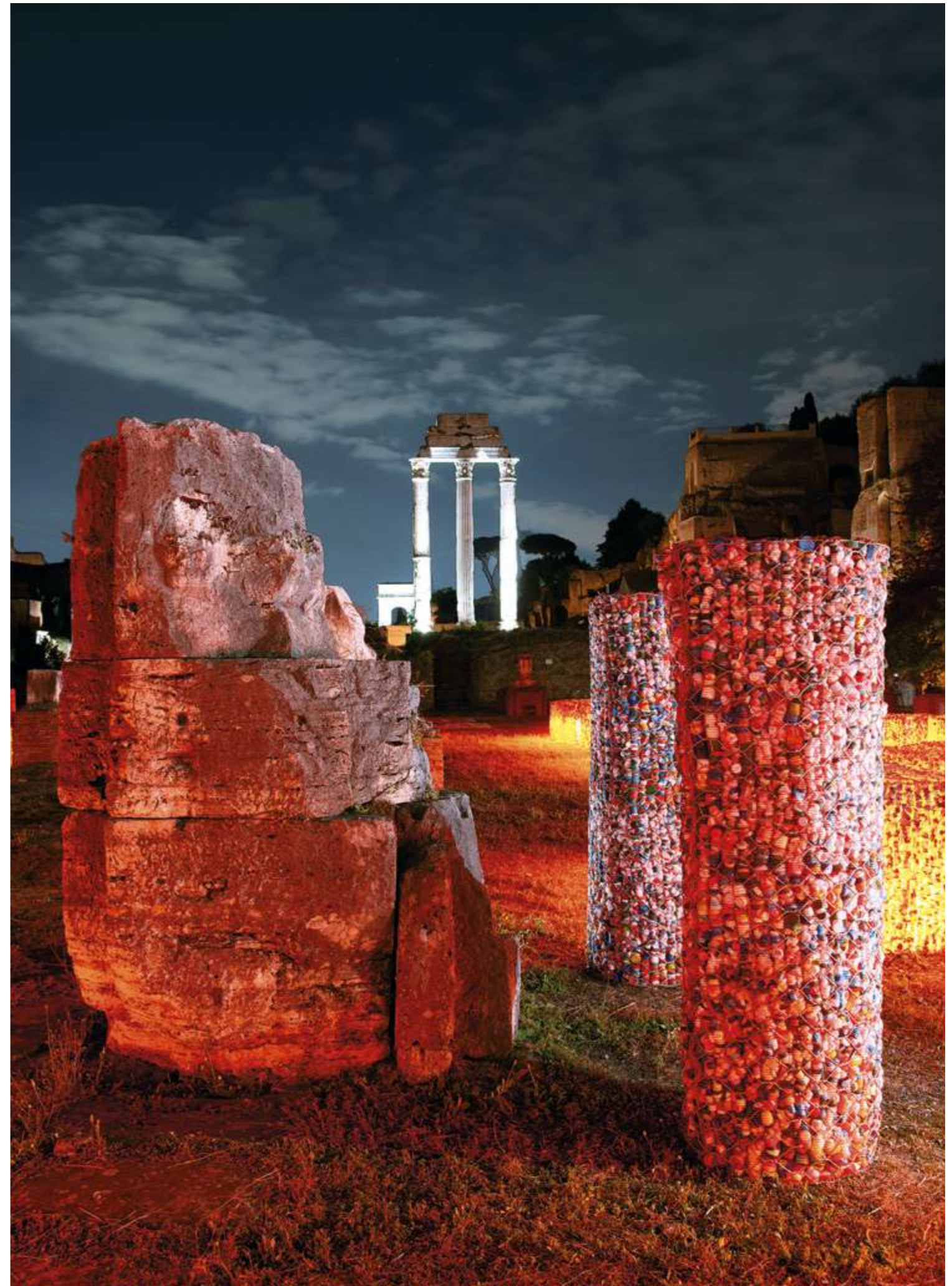
A photo of the inauguration in Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome

tion in the Roman Forum came about more rapidly and to some degree fortuitously. Maria Cristina was contacted in the autumn of the previous year by a curator, Roberta Semeraro, for a “multimedia artistic project in favor of the environment and sustainable tourism,” to be held both in the area of the Forum and the Museum of the Ara Pacis. It was planned to screen a video by Joseph Beuys (one of the two contemporary artists that Maria Cristina has always seen as a decisive point of reference) on the defense of nature, in the piazza, in front of two sculptures in bio-marine and plastic materials by the British artist and biologist Jason deCaires Taylor, while *HELP* would be installed in the site of the Basilica Julia. Overall the project was titled “Oceanum. How Art Helps the Planet.” (This also helps us understand the significance of its subsequent evolution and the choice of the date to coincide with World Oceans Day.) The project came to nothing. The same happened with the idea of giving a more permanent location to Finucci’s installation on a public site in the city of L’Aquila, in response to a call for “Nine artists for the reconstruction” of the capital of Abruzzo after the terrible earthquake in 2009.

Faced with an impasse in finding the necessary resources, Maria Cristina proceeded independently and in collaboration with various institutions and individuals. First, through the good offices of the Minister Dario Franceschini and his close collaborator, Paolo Masini, as well as that of the director of the Ara Pacis, Orietta Rossini. Then with the very rapid support given to the project by the director of the Museo dei Fori Imperiali, Alfonsina Russo, almost on the first day she took office. The budget for the project was provided by a series of prestigious partners (Bracco Foundation, ENEL, Maccaferri), the contribution of Università Roma Tre was confirmed, and the favorable opinions of all the superintendents responsible for the prestigious and very delicate site were received, all in just over four months. This included the construction of the project, which included seventy-six distinct elements (wire mesh gabions measuring 1 x 2 x 1 meter, empty inside, lined with red mesh panels like bags for oranges and filled with plastic bottle caps) to form the four letters of the word *HELP*.

The variations from the Mozia installation were substantially due to three factors. First of all the scale of the area involved, which this time turned out to be a little less than half that on the Sicilian island (the rectangle containing the lettering measured 1,600 square meters). Secondly, the presence of the archeological remains, which in Mozia flanked the great plastic installation without encroaching on it. The third factor was the sensibility of the artist, who in this case formed the letters with some skewed elements and without a double crease in the letters H and E.

The relationship of almost intimate contiguity with the founding elements of the Basilica Julia enriched the *HELP* installed in Rome. Maria Cristina ascertained on this occasion how the presence of large boulders, rather like the elements composing the letters, stood out strikingly in the more general area of the Capitol, which the urban mythology of the city records as the place of Rome’s

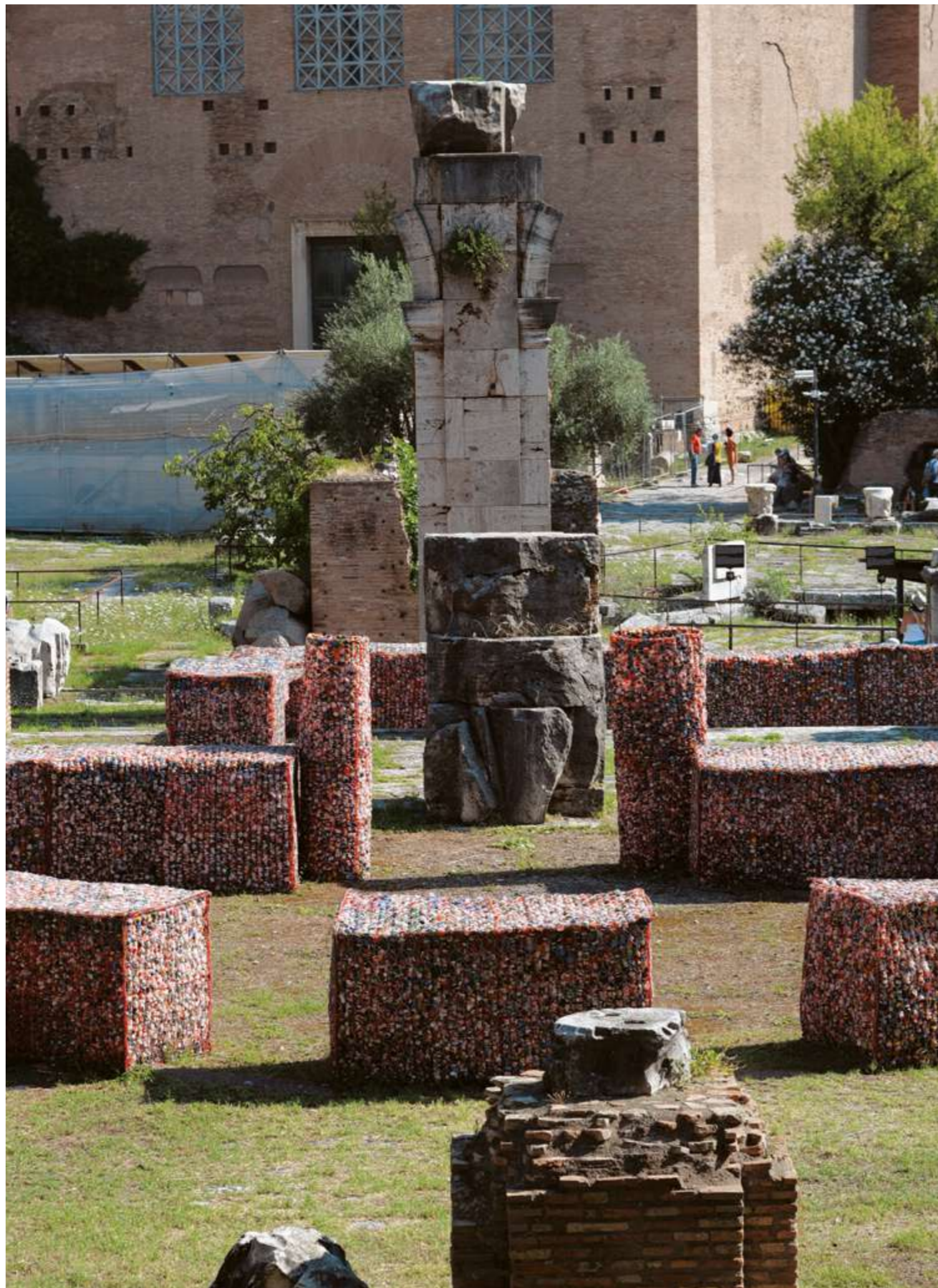


*View of the foundation bastions of the archaeological site  
Positioning the metal gabions*

*Another significant comparison between the  
archaeological remains on the site and part of the  
installation*



*Aerial view at night (from a drone) of the installation and urban setting*



original foundation (even earlier than Romulus's square urban layout). In short, the constructional syntax was not too dissimilar from that of ancient—even very ancient—architecture, so that the gabions were appropriately integrated with the surrounding urban fabric, themselves becoming archeological remains, the fragments of a dangerous age. While on Mozia the implicit protagonist of the installation was the “Alien Professor,” committed to finding the traces of a lost civilization (destroyed by self-harm), in Rome this role could be played instead by a different figure, an archeologist committed to tracing the original process of constitution of an urban reality, a sort of plastic city, the Urbs of plastic. On Mozia the message was presented to be viewed from above, by satellite. Here, despite the effective nocturnal legibility of the illuminated writing, the viewpoint was set lower, on landforms from which to threaten to erect buildings that could reach those of the dominant Capitoline Hill.

In Rome *HELP* became, in some way, also an “artifact” with a rich urban density, an element that was anything but foreign to the history of the city which often, and especially at the start of the modern age, from the papacy of Martin V onwards, incorporated architectural artifacts with challenging symbolic meanings into the urban fabric. In an interview with Ofelia Sisca, which appeared in *Artribune* on June 9, 2018,<sup>138</sup> Maria Cristina pointed out: “In Rome, *HELP* stands on the remains of the Basilica Julia by the side of the Via Sacra. Among the many questions that the archeologist asks is a very simple one. Why there? The answer involves a state, the Garbage Patch State. The Garbage Patch State



<sup>138</sup> <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2018/06/help-the-ocean-installazione-luminosa-foro-romano-difesa-pianeta/>

*A glimpse of the installation inside the area of the Basilica Julia*

*Aerial view at night (from a drone) of the installation and urban setting*



*Maria Cristina Finucci inside the installation*

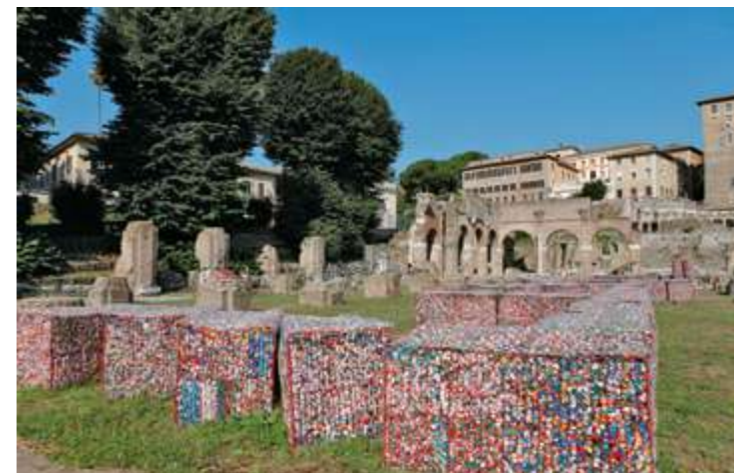


*Installation view*



did not have expansionist aims. On the contrary, it saw the uncontrolled expansion of its borders as an act of violence. The articles of its Constitution centered on the need to stop its own involuntary growth. Perhaps this is why the State chose the Roman Forum, one of the most symbolic places on planet Earth, to send out a cry of alarm to the millions of visitors in the hope of seeing its own expansion halted.”

Again the macro time-scales of our collective experience are mixed. Usually archeology deals with the remote past, which it strives to make comprehensible to a circumscribed present. But not the archeology of the future, as we pointed out earlier. Here the relationship established is rather that, apparently paradoxical, between present and future. We have already mentioned this with regard to transgenerational actions, recalling Baxandall's positions, which invite us to change the inertia of our perspective on history. And we have also seen this on Mozia. And here it is worth reiterating the point, with a small further clarification. In Rome, this sort of tiny action, but no less powerful than the *renovatio urbis*, the dynamic that underpinned the Renaissance in architecture and urban planning (drawing in the present on the past to design the future), also allows us to understand further meanings for our own time, precisely in the case of a term like the Renaissance, often unnecessarily overused only of economic recovery and not always sustainable. As we state in the note, Pedro Medina, editorial director of the IED in Madrid, had already perceived and written this on the occasion of Finucci's speech at the MAXXI.<sup>139</sup>



<sup>139</sup> “This artistic project [*Wasteland*] therefore aims at the foundation of a new horizon of the possible, in showing its tendency towards the future without falling prey to nostalgic glances at nature, as present in other exhibitions. And in this process, the experience of the viewers is fundamental. They are treated as subjects capable of action rather than single objects that receive information. *Wasteland* ultimately guides us toward a critical and ironic gaze that serves as a platform for new values and for building a broader discourse, where the interest consists in the processes

and network of relationships involved in each action. We are observing a paradigm shift, a commitment to the future, in which *Wasteland* could be the basis for establishing practices to lay the foundations for a new policy. This reinterpretation of the fragile tension between humanity and its environment invites us to look beyond, displaying the potential of art as a laboratory for current problems, capable of building a project to imagine the world. Hence only an art that has an ethical approach, a political action interpreted with a poetic form, can have the function of anticipating

the decoding of the new global context. *Wasteland* thus presents a panorama that requires us to take up a position, knowing full well that we will be able to live in the time to come so long as we change our ways of seeing. It will be then that other ways of acting on the world will emerge.” (The text appeared on the MAXXI website during the two months, April and May 2014, of Maria Cristina Finucci's project. It is no longer present on the site, but the artist sent it to me.)

*Details of the installation in the Roman Forum*



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# MILAN 2019

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MILAN, FUORISALONE

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EXIT

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The last version, at least to date, of the *HELP* phase of the *Wasteland* project appeared during last year's Milan Design Week, as part of the Fuorisalone (April 9–18, 2019). The installation site, in the main cloister of the Ca' Granda, was again notable. The vast complex designed by Filarete in the mid-fifteenth century is one of the finest Renaissance buildings in Milan. Originally built as a hospital for the poor, since 1958 it has housed the Università Statale degli Studi. In short, as can be seen, it was a sort of ideal recapitulation of the modes of the two previous installations. Here, too, there was a university, the wonderful architectural setting from the past, albeit damaged in wartime air raids, a space closed yet also open, during an event—the Salone del Mobile—with a very high level of media exposure. Maria Cristina's project was initially recommended by Marco Balich to Alessia Crivelli, of the One Ocean Foundation. She subsequently spoke of it to Gilda Bojardi and it was included in the prestigious "Interni Human Spaces" program, coordinated and promoted by the important design magazine edited by Bojardi. Hence it was supported by *Interni* itself and the One Ocean Foundation, established by the Aga Khan and promoter of the Charta Smeralda, an ethical code for the sustainable use of marine resources, as well as by the Ariston Thermo Group.

Again in this case, as on Mozia or in the Roman Forum, the lettering was installed in an exclusive space, the central courtyard of Ca' Granda. Other eloquent signs were placed around the green space, on a sort of circular drive and under the ground floor loggia. Notable among others by their closeness to Maria Cristina's installation was *MultiPLY*, a project on recycling the materials of a building after its conversion or destruction by Waugh Thistleton Architects – Arup with AHEC – American Hardwood Export Council. Another was *The Forest of Violins* by the Piuarch architecture office, evocatively commemorating the terrible storm Vaia. In October 2018 the gale uprooted millions of trees in the Alps of Veneto, and in particular the Val di Fiemme, from which the trunks on display came. The quality of these juxtaposed works heightened the meaning of Finucci's project within a program with a strong artistic significance, and it is also not difficult to grasp a perceptible thematic assonance, in the overall image of the fragility of the planet and the need to adopt coherent approaches to safeguard "Human Spaces" not otherwise protected. The oceans' cry of alarm and for help is associated with the overwhelming devastation of the Alpine forests and the preliminary global problem of disposing of debris.

For this purpose, the magazine *Interni* submitted some questions to all the artists invited to "Human Spaces 2019." Above all, each was asked to motivate the significance of their project in a general perspective of sustainability for the planet. Maria Cristina replied:



*Installation view on opening night*

“The project began long ago, when in 2013 I founded a new state at UNESCO, the Garbage Patch State, to raise awareness, through the language of art, about the problem of plastic that is invading, has already invaded, the oceans. I wanted to give an image to this phenomenon to communicate it more clearly. In recent years, when I have created installations in various parts of the world, my project has grown into a more holistic approach. It is not limited to the urgent environmental issue, but places the individual and the whole of life on the planet at the center, with the environment inextricably bound up with natural resources, health, food, poverty, inequality, human rights, peace... This, like all the other installations in the series, is part of a narrative process ‘in which the elements of a story are disseminated through numerous channels with the aim of creating a unique and orderly experience’ (Henry Jenkins). The purpose is to project an iconic representation of the phenomenon of plastic in the oceans, which by its nature is almost invisible, through the image of the Garbage Patch State. The people who come into contact with these elements, whether monumental installations or simple postcards, will develop their own personal idea of the State.”

As we shall see in a moment, the narrative of this project added some detail to the overall story.

The area reserved for *HELP*, covering some 1,200 square meters, was quite sufficient for the project. The visual obstructions of the trees around the edge of the green area were carefully considered to ensure the letters were fully visible (naturally also from above). The result was a closer alignment than in the Roman Forum of the compositional elements, namely the letters, which together contained 2 tons of multicolored plastic bottle caps. Moreover, from Mozia to Milan there had been a gradual, steady, and growing work of clarification in the lighting of the compositional elements. The vast Sicilian site, without natural or artificial perimeters, while making a striking environmental impression, did not guarantee the palpable aura that was subsequently achieved in Rome and perhaps even more in Milan. The development was made possible thanks to collaboration between ENEL’s lighting technicians (from the ENEL X branch) and the Engineering Department of the Università Roma Tre, which made available its testbenches. The work was coordinated by the architect Stefania Angelelli, the university’s Mobility Manager, who guided the *Wasteland* project with generous selflessness from the start by organizing the collection of the necessary plastic bottle tops for each work. Detailed tests were conducted, some of them at night, at the Maccaferri company in Rome. These included the use of drones, to check the effectiveness of the alignments from above.

As in the Roman Forum, in the cloister of the Ca’ Granda the lighting of the elements and lettering finally made it possible to perceive the writing as the sign



of a deep wound in the Earth, a sort of incandescent and luminous magma made up of plastic, the salient and evident fact. The effect was heightened by a small but very engaging performance. During the inauguration the lights were turned off and the courtyard of the Ca’ Granda was filled with a scream, the recorded sum of the cries of different animals, consecutive and overlapping, as in a great lament. Some score of seconds of screeching, followed by a soft and intermittent “beep beep,” to represent the sort of faint heartbeat of the planet, then the large illuminated lettering reappeared.

The curating of the performance, which in the previous venues was enhanced, as we have seen, by other striking features, again revealed one of the expressive constants of the Garbage Patch State program. This is the fact that it is not just non-verbal communication and not just iconic, but a way to activate all our senses, to involve an experience that no longer counts just five of them, but multiplies them in n-dimensional space and time, a confusion of the existing and the real, visible and invisible, the true and the non-existing, the virtual and the space of collaborative and transgenerational relationships. In *Wasteland*, Maria Cristina Finucci has broken through the “Cartesian” grid of her training as an architect and her first signs characterized by crystallized geometries. This paradigm shift, though it uses primary Euclidean forms (round bottle tops, square gabions), has released deeper feelings that require new methods of experimentation, both spatial and temporal. As we have often repeated, the mode is more important than the work and the basic objective is to recreate in people’s heads something absolutely complex, such as the idea of a State that is just as insidious than those that foment war and terrorism, and perhaps even more so.

In short, the Earth bleeds plastic and announces, in an image of excruciating and engaging beauty, a possible future of desertification, famine, uncontrolled migration, and now definitive dynamics of stress. However great the fascination of the installation, the message cannot be overlooked. The semantics of the plastic formant—one is tempted to say, in a sense that is however different from that of Greimas<sup>140</sup>—is a last-chance warning.



<sup>140</sup> See A.J. Greimas, “Semiotica figurativa e semiotica plastica” (1984), in P. Fabbri, G. Marrone (eds.), *Semiotica in nuce*, Rome: Meltemi, 2002, pp. 196–210.

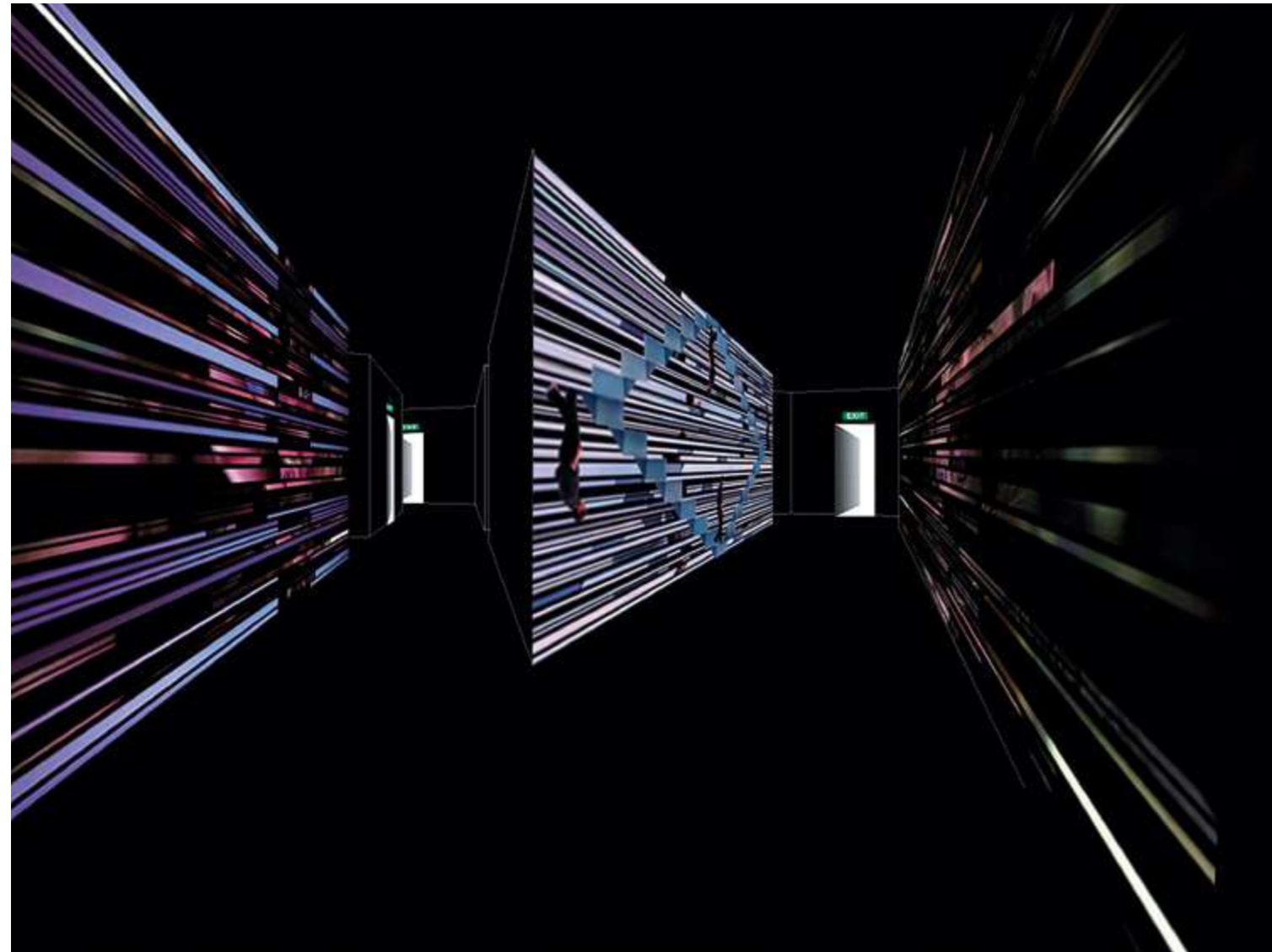
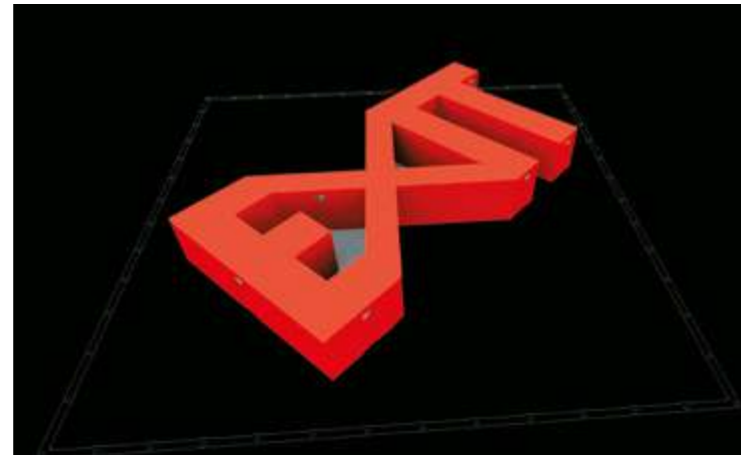
Two photos of the installation

View of the installation  
Aerial rendering

## EXIT

On projects that fail to come to fruition it is very difficult to develop a critical argument. Yet it is still necessary to at least mention them, especially if they configure a further stage in the program, the development of a project which—as we have reiterated several times—concerns not just the artist, who establishes the preconditions for it, but is also the joint operation of public opinion, the media, the spectators, and the sensibility of the experts. *EXIT* fits perfectly into this perspective. It is the title of the installation that Maria Cristina Finucci was to have created, in a year without a pandemic, for Milan's Fuorisalone in 2020, again in the cloisters of the Ca' Granda, this time in one of the lateral courtyards.

In this case it was to be a more definite structure, practicable inside. From above it would have had the same form as the title of the installation, almost a “talking” sculpture, a signal that was intended (or will be, since we cannot anticipate the near future) to be a motif clearly reprising the illuminated *HELP* of the previous edition. Opposite it, outside, there was to be a structure about 2.40 meters high, with many doors, simply designed on traversable sheets, each again bearing the word *EXIT* (paradoxically because of the exterior/interior dynamic), so reiterating the leitmotiv of the work. Inside, it was to have a sort of irregular corridor, with the analogous and corresponding indication of the “real” exits, marked by glowing international “EXIT” signs in green, like the ones over emergency doors.



Visitors would take mental note of them, but would probably ignore them to continue on their journey through the installation layout. But they would have found nothing but gold and silver thermal blankets of the kind in common use and at the end a further, threatening illuminated sign, “the point of no return of a black hole (singularity),” as Finucci noted in the preliminary concept. Only at this point, to avoid falling into an individual and/or collective “black hole,” would visitors have taken the nearest exit, which was designed not to be as wide or easy as those in the traversable sheets, but would have led into a symbolically impervious corridor. Along this last stretch of the itinerary, the viewers could have observed some large-scale frames of a video-work by Maria Cristina titled *Trueman* (2011). This was an original and disturbing elaboration on the film *The Truman Show*, chosen from the footage in the last part of the film, when the protagonist manages to find the door to emerge from the artificial world he has been living in. The significant subtitle of the planned project in Milan (“HOW IS IT GOING TO END?”) likewise evokes Peter Weir's film.

In this case, too, as it is not difficult to realize, the dimensions and meanings are mingled in the strategy of transmedia fakes characteristic of the Garbage Patch State since its foundation. The entrances are exits, the exits do not exist or are not understood as such, especially in their most authentic value as ways out. The protective aids are not used and it is easy to foresee the likely attitudes of visitors to an installation in the attempt to show the actual consequences of our probable and everyday attitudes. Hence once again it is a last chance warning.

We can at least try to interpret the crux at which one passes from *HELP* to *EXIT* (the lettering, suitably elaborated and in some cases inverted, is also becoming one of Maria Cristina's latest signs, but not on a monumental scale). We believe that this is an artistic passage in the true sense of the term, as it seeks to give shape, to embody, what we could define as a personal semantic and semiotic upheaval that at the same time is epoch-making. Finucci, as she has confirmed to us many times, does not feel at all like an environmental activist, as many artists now define themselves, who have become aware of the problem after her early intuitions ten years ago, given that the history of the ravaging of the planet is proceeding rapidly.

Hers is a different ambition: to give life, together with her public (who should be the world's whole population), to a “total” performance. Moreover we have previously emphasized that the entire *Wasteland* project aims at the “total” creation of a world. We say it in the sense established at the beginning of this century, moreover after many precedents, by Ilya Kabakov,<sup>141</sup> who in his own way has also epitomized Juri Lotman's positions on the semiotics of culture in this term. In that sense, every eloquent sign is a *text*, interwoven with infinite elements (which Finucci calls “pixels”), which can only be read and understood within psychologically evocative spaces. It is the same aim as Maria Cristina's: to foster awareness of the problem through its visual semblance, of which plastic is only a metaphor or a synecdoche, because the artwork does not coincide with the material. In the last stages of *Wasteland*, the artist adopted more overt *textual* expressions, making use of the icastic force of two morphemes. With its magmatic luminosity, *HELP* was a cry for help constructed in such a way as to make it visible even at a distance from the planet Earth. But what we have now seen in recent years is a frightening acceleration in the environmental drama. Now the register is different, more pressing and with one unfortunately terrible *facies*. We have already reached the point where we will no longer have a way out. *EXIT* is the danger that has become a reality. And the silver or gold thermal blankets, the ones we often see wrapping the bodies of migrants, speak to us of the value of life and the relativization of every other value, even artistic, in the face of a catastrophe that affects everyone.

The same silver and gold thermal blankets, confirming an expressive turning point now fully underway, were also to have played a central role in another project (*Waste Land*) developed for an exhibition at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA) in its Petrovka Street venue. Outside, there was to be a performance by dancers who would ascend the neoclassical facade—dressed in garments stained with gold dust and with gold dust sprinkled over their bodies—laboriously bearing on their shoulders red net bags filled with multicolored bottle caps. At the base of the iron staircase that stands out to the left of the facade would be ranged heaps of other sacks coming from a mysterious “mine.” The latter would coincide with the space set aside for the exhibition, on the ground floor of

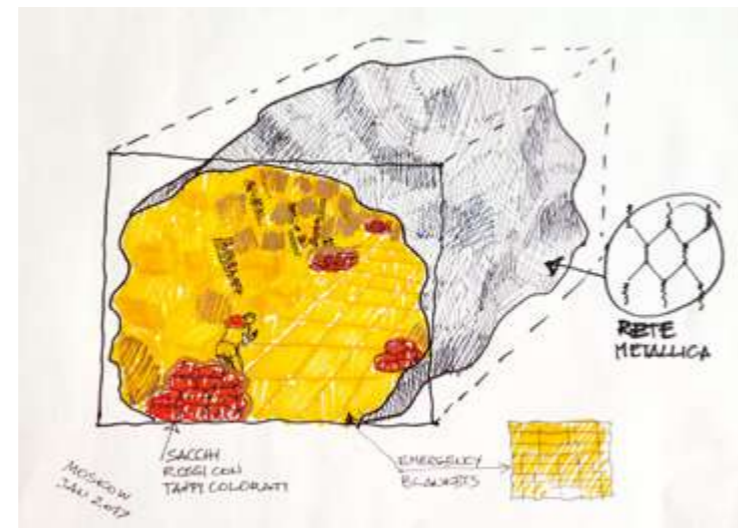
<sup>141</sup> See E. Degot (ed.), *Tre installazioni*, Moscow 2002.

*Rendering of the installation EXIT, unbuilt due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown*  
*The planned structure*  
*View of the installation interior*

the museum. “The room,” again we are quoting from the artist’s notes, “will be lined at the sides and on the ceiling with gilded film, to be made of the thermal blankets used in emergencies. To create a form resembling a mine, there will be lightweight crumpled netting supporting the blankets. Squares will be traced on the floor, also gilded, like those in the gold mine photographed by Sebastião Salgado.<sup>142</sup> Attached to the walls of the mine, here and there, colored bottle tops will be the gems. A few single LED lights will dot the mine and glitter off the thousands of facets of the metal surface. People will be struck by a myriad of small beams of golden light as if they were so many King Midases.”

The project suggests an imminent, dystopian future, in which unpolluted land will be as rare and precious as gold, or more precious, in which it will no longer be possible to produce plastic, hence existing plastic will be sought as a valued material to be reclaimed. In this near future, humanity runs the risk of a brutal regression: “The photographic reportage of the Serra Pelada mine by Salgado,” adds Maria Cristina, “shows how greed blinds people, forces them to lead a life of suffering, and makes them regress to a bestial dimension. Seen from afar, these miners look like insects, beings without any value, without dignity.” This possible new form of sociality will be embodied on the exterior by the dancers.

In our frequent conversations, which intensified during the lockdown, Maria Cristina often invoked, as a significant crux, the encyclical *Laudato si* issued by Pope Francis in May 2015 and devoted to the care of our “common home.” In the premise and the text the Pope stresses the responsibilities of each of us in the destruction of the environment, in a global world, interconnected as never before, and urges the need for a profound change in the criteria of social organization and the recovery of different values in individual and collective life. The Pope strongly affirmed the need to place humanity, the guardian of creation, at the center of our vision. Maria Cristina Finucci’s commitment, which is not just artistic, urges us in the same direction.



<sup>142</sup> The remarkable photographs of the “damned of the Earth,” taken by Salgado in 1986 as evidence of one of the last wild gold rushes of the twentieth century was the fundamental starting point of Maria Cristina’s project.

Sketch for the installation Waste Land (Moscow, MMOMA, Ulica Petrovka premises)

Rendering of two installation views





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MARIA CRISTINA FINUCCI

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*Maria Cristina Finucci at L'Ambasciata (Rome, MAXXI,  
April 11 – May 2, 2014)*

“I was born in 1956 in a wonderful provincial town, Lucca... but as a teenager there I had a distinct sense of being caged in... I felt that beyond the hedge, the world was stirring and I wasn't there.”

This is the opening of a brief autobiographical profile that Maria Cristina Finucci was asked to write, but I will not transcribe it in full. The purpose of this entry is rather to put before the public some points considered salient to describe her work as an artist and to recount, albeit very succinctly, that part of her career, far from short or uneventful and including some interesting anticipations, that preceded the invention of the Garbage Patch State, the *Wasteland* project that occupied her for almost ten years, the subject of the present volume.

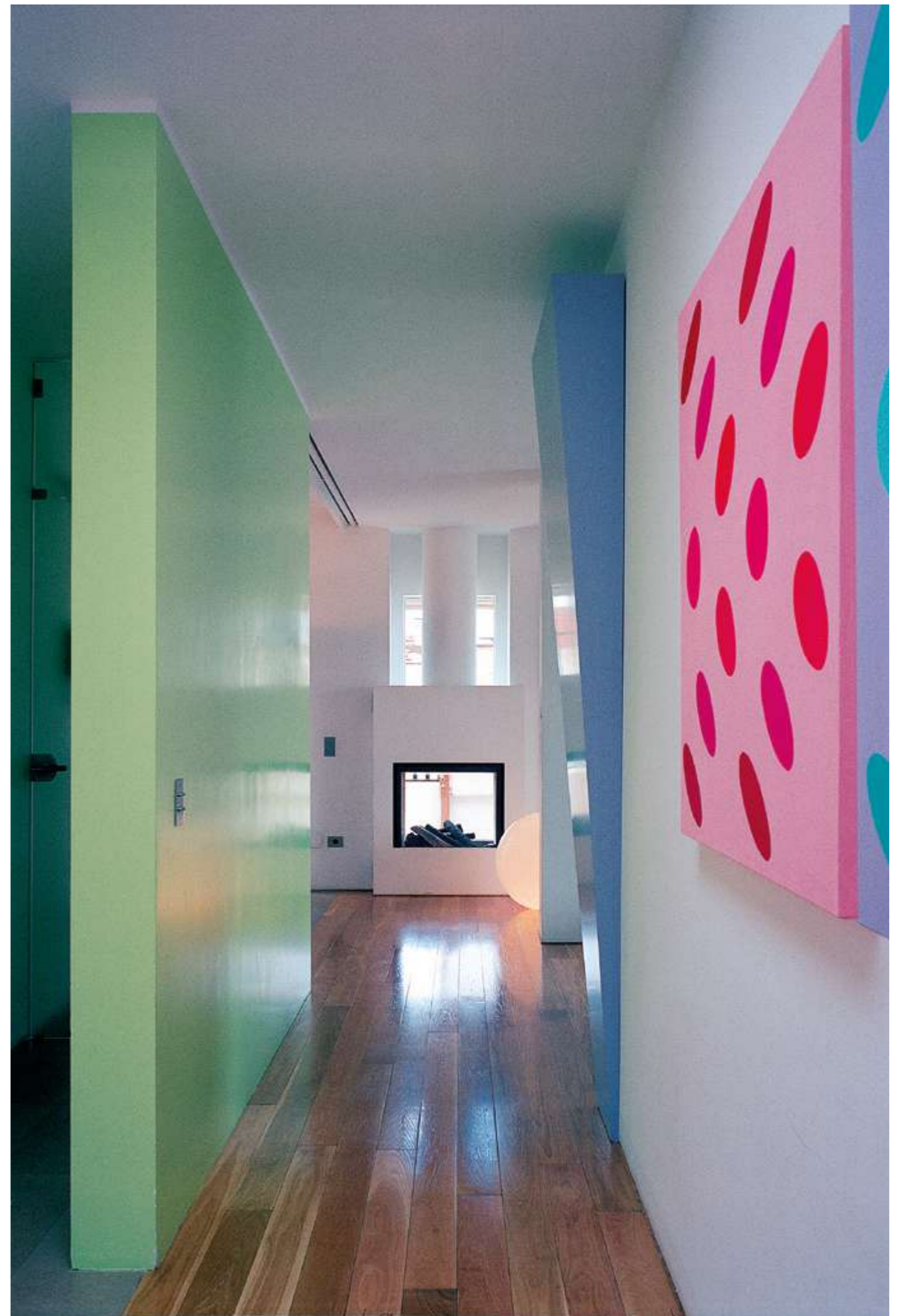
There are at least two things worth stressing in the words quoted above. The first is a sort of vocation anticipated by adolescence, the discovery of a natural artistic bent. Her secondary education was followed by the study of architecture at university in Florence, where she graduated in the summer of 1981, the attempt to begin an academic program as an unpaid assistant in the Department of History of Architecture in Florence, while conducting research in Scotland into the cultural milieu of the later nineteenth century. In her personal outlook, as architect and historian, her demanding engagement with “space” proved fully comprehensible and inevitable. Space has always been important to Maria Cristina and has influenced her research. The second point to stress is the form that space often takes in her perception, namely that of a cage that can enclose us, an area rigidly bounded by a hedge.

Finucci emerged from this a little at a time. In her personal life—her marriage to a young diplomat, Pietro Sebastiani, the birth of her first child, the transfer to Moscow in 1986, in the months immediately after the Chernobyl tragedy, her second pregnancy, and then her arrival in New York two and a half years later—her life space certainly began to expand and change (with the downside of over twenty moves to date). In New York she worked with Victor Caliendo, who, before moving to Minnesota, was one of the most successful architects and urban planners on the scene (responsible, among other things, for the master plan and guidelines for housing and the Esplanade at Battery Park City). Finucci worked in a studio in

a large building designed by Sullivan and occupied only by architecture studios, a sort of spacious cage for homogeneous activities. Since then, she has regularly worked freelance as an architect in New York, London, Rome, Paris, Capalbio, Isernia, and elsewhere. With the exception of the design of a service block for Aeroporti di Roma, she has worked almost exclusively on private commissions for buildings, conversions, and renovating private buildings. “During my career as an architect,” she wrote, “I have designed many houses, I have renovated many, I have designed furniture, some of which was presented at the Salone del Mobile in Milan, but I've always thought about art.” The statement is fully justified even with reference to art alone, given the similarities between her research in the field of the visual arts and her work as a designer. In this respect, comparison between her stools or walls of end-tables with her *Cuspidi* (which also appeared in an installation at the Fuorisalone in Milan in 2008), her slate furniture with the *Due Particelle* series, her staggered bookcases with the set-up used in *Microworld* (stripped of her refined professionalism, for example in office supplies, as in the line produced for UPPER) will reveal evident formal and chromatic convergences with the hallmarks of her work as an artist.

Since this study is limited to relating her work as an architect to her parallel and more explicitly expressed practice in the visual arts, it will suffice to stress her keen interest in producing stimulating vertical connections between floors and a marked chromatic sensibility in the definition of walls and furnishings. Alongside this, she possesses a great skill for fluidly organizing interior spaces and always responding—with solutions that differ in each case, but are not “eclectic” in a limiting sense—to the current needs of a given social and cultural context. Communicating by using the media of the time is an important part of her training and her profession.

Interior view of Casa Tedeschi, Isernia, 2005





*Stairway to a private house in Versilia, 2014*

*View of the artist's home in Palazzo Odescalchi, Rome 2008; Mobile3 slate table, 1987*

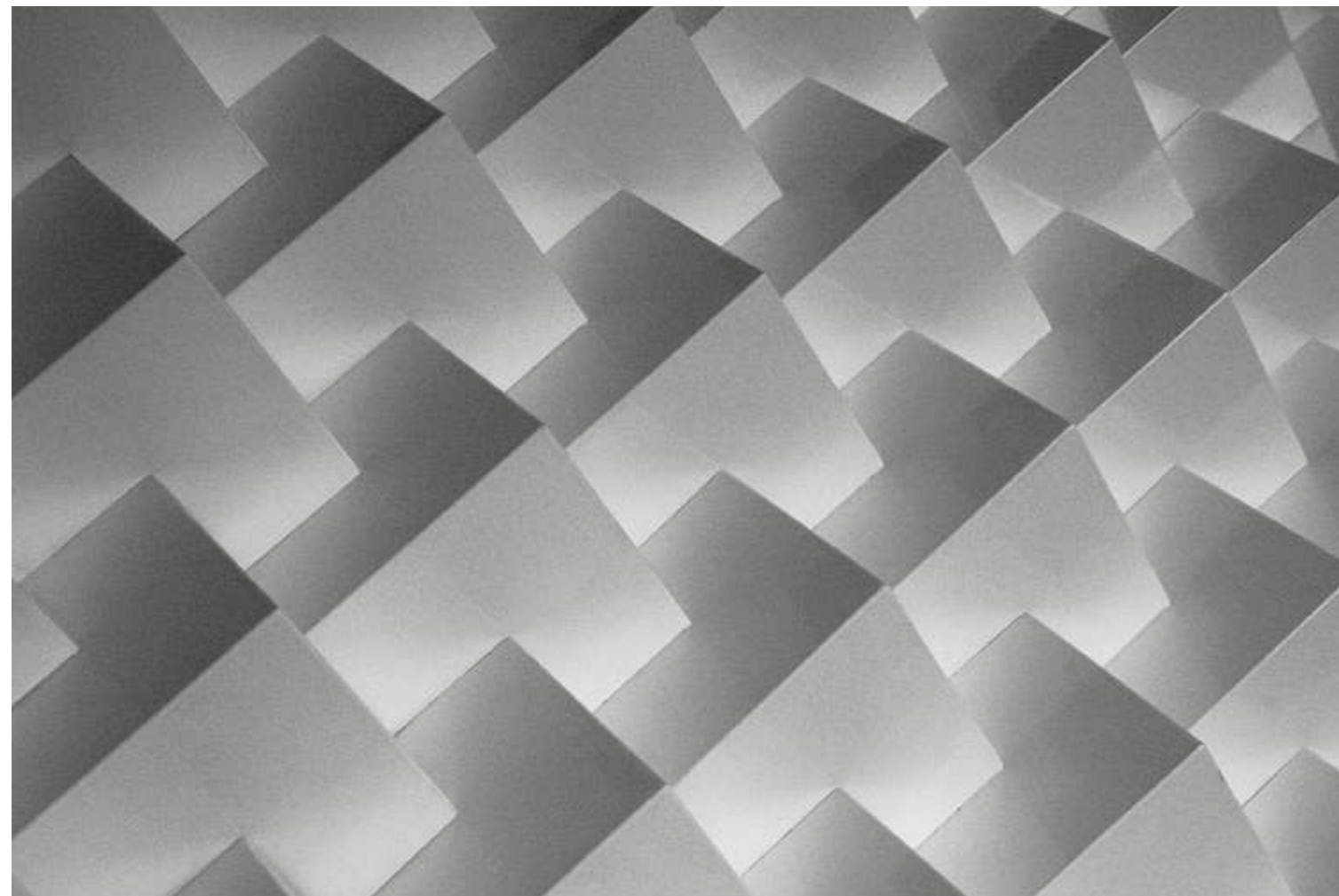
*Living room and staircase to the artist's home in Via di Parione, Rome*

We can now return to the question of space, both her own and that of others. Emerging from a cage of restricted spaces has also been a part of her professional career and expressive research. Her acquisition of a large studio in Rome, where she first worked freelance as an architect, enabled her to initiate a reflection that was not just architectural on the space and its measurement, by engaging with the thought that creates the artistic sign as the construction of the world, one of the principal scenarios and frontiers of contemporary art. The inevitable reference is to Rudolf Arnheim's studies of *Visual Thinking* (1969) which, as Luciano Floridi, director of the University of Oxford's Digital Ethics Lab, writes "give access not to a field of knowledge but to the world itself, understood as a well-organized and intrinsically intelligible system of entities, properties, and relations," as well as to a more remote and centuries-old tradition, which actually arises from Ramon Llull's mnemonic grids.

From within this challenging meditation, at a certain point Maria Cristina discovered that she had initiated a "paradigm shift" within herself. One of the first springs that determined this was her reading of a book, *The Tao of Physics* by the Austrian scientist Fritjof Capra. It was published in 1975 but has enjoyed a broader success, in Italy as elsewhere, since the late 1980s. Finucci traced in it a radical questioning of the Cartesian paradigm which, although scientifically surpassed by quantum physics and the theories of relativity, still retains an unshakeable role as a cognitive matrix in the common mentality. Moreover, she discovered in it an attempt to make the new twentieth-century scientific theories converge with mystical Oriental philosophies; finally, she derived from it an explicit sensibility for an ecological approach to our planet. The volume served her as a kind of

foundational textbook, which revealed less emotionally what she calls her less rational side, initially prompting her to seek out and give shape to the dimension of our perception and experience, which are certainly not limited to the three dimensions of geometry or the fourth dimension of time.

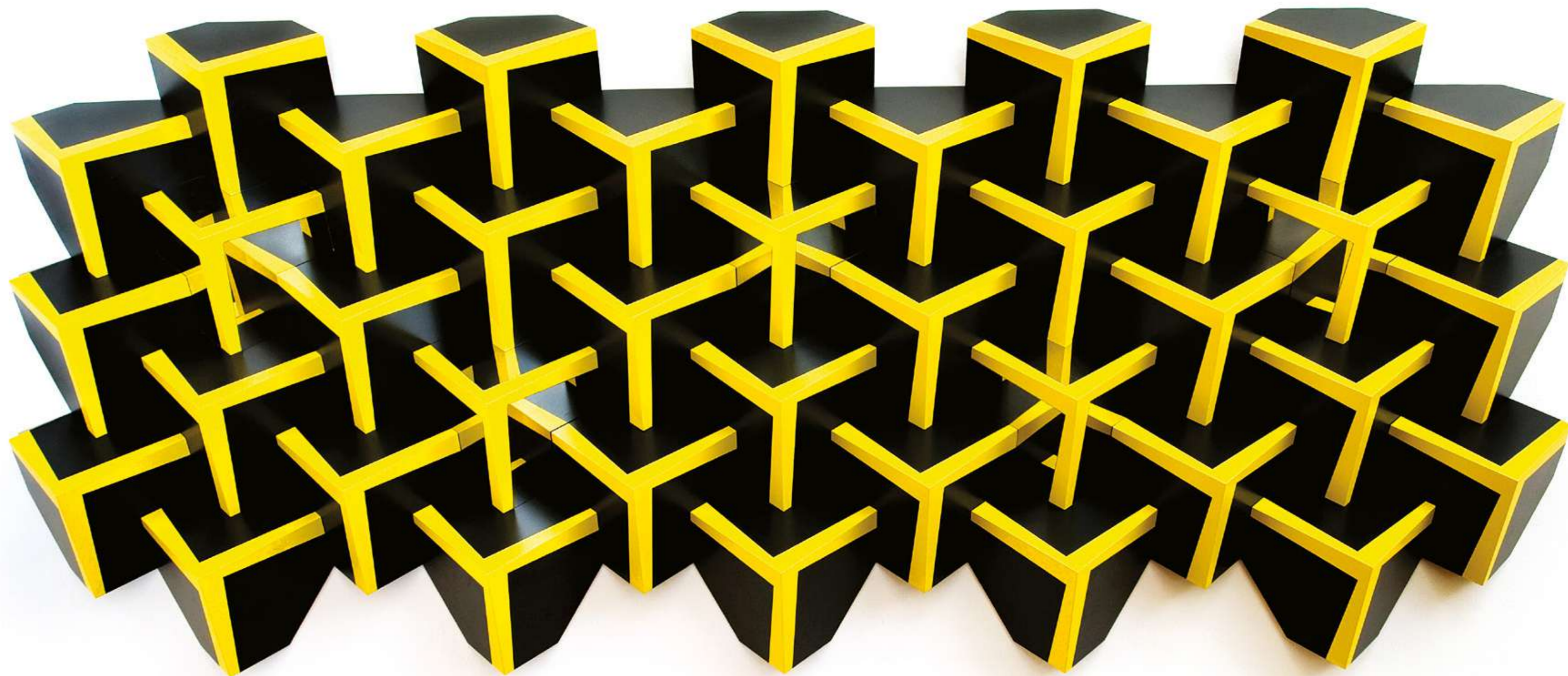
The result took the form of the *Paradigmi* series, which Maria Cristina began in 2007, and which was substantially embodied, at least at first, in the many sequences of *Cuspidi*, made from materials (acrylic paint, steel inserts, modeled canvas, photographic prints on forex) and different colors (yellow, white, red, black, steel), that continued almost until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century (and then reappeared in the red arrows of the banner of Garbage Patch State). The *Cuspidi* sought to design non-Euclidean geometries, deceptive and virtuous spaces—between Piranesi, El Lissitzky, Man Ray, Escher, Attilio Pierelli, and the various experiments with programmed art in the 1960s—convincingly and deceptively mingling two and three-dimensional objects and mirrored surfaces with close attention to the refraction of light on the corners. Finucci defined them as "an artistic expression based on perceptual codes and their superseding . . . My research into the perception of many dimensions, for the moment precluded to us, into the paradigms that our culture has transmitted to us for seeing the world, on the hypothesis of other possible and future paradigms. Despite the scientific assumption, mine is not epistemological research, but personal reflection, open and full of controversies, on the evolution of the human spirit in the progressive cognitive investigation of the world."



*Cuspidi bianche (detail)*, 2010, catalytic painting on aluminum, 120 x 200 cm

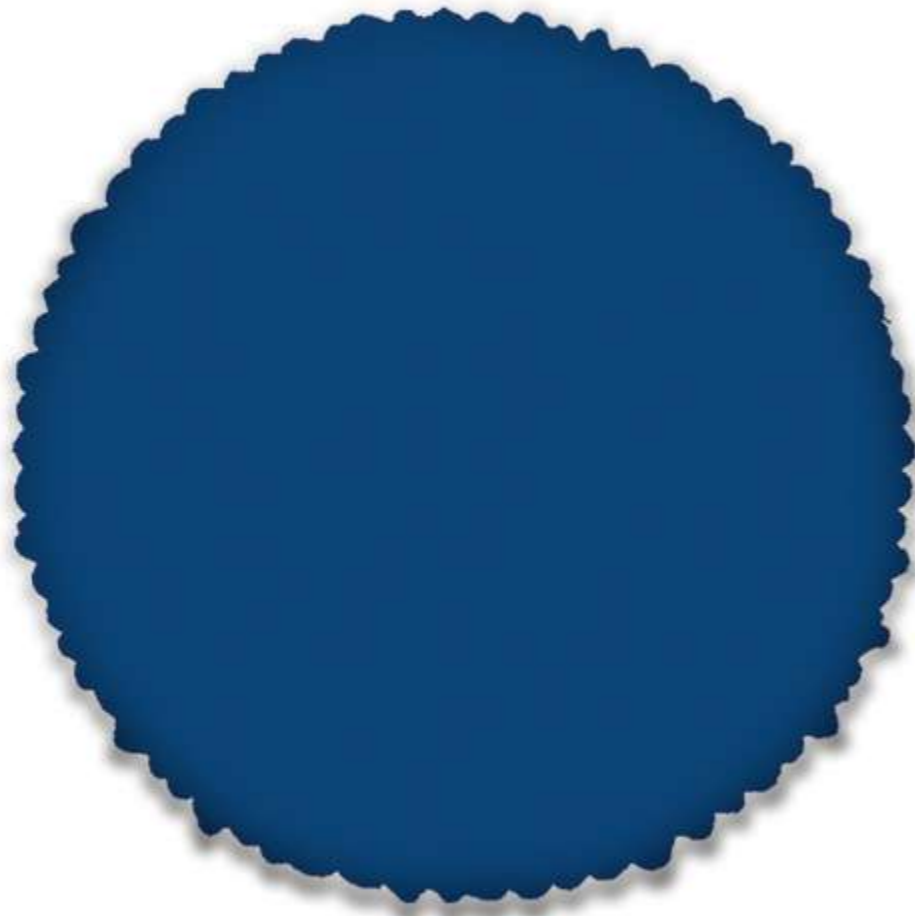
*Cuspidi R/B (detail)*, 2009, acrylic on steel, 120 x 200 cm

*Cuspidi Tela (detail)*, canvas on MDF support, 145 x 155 cm



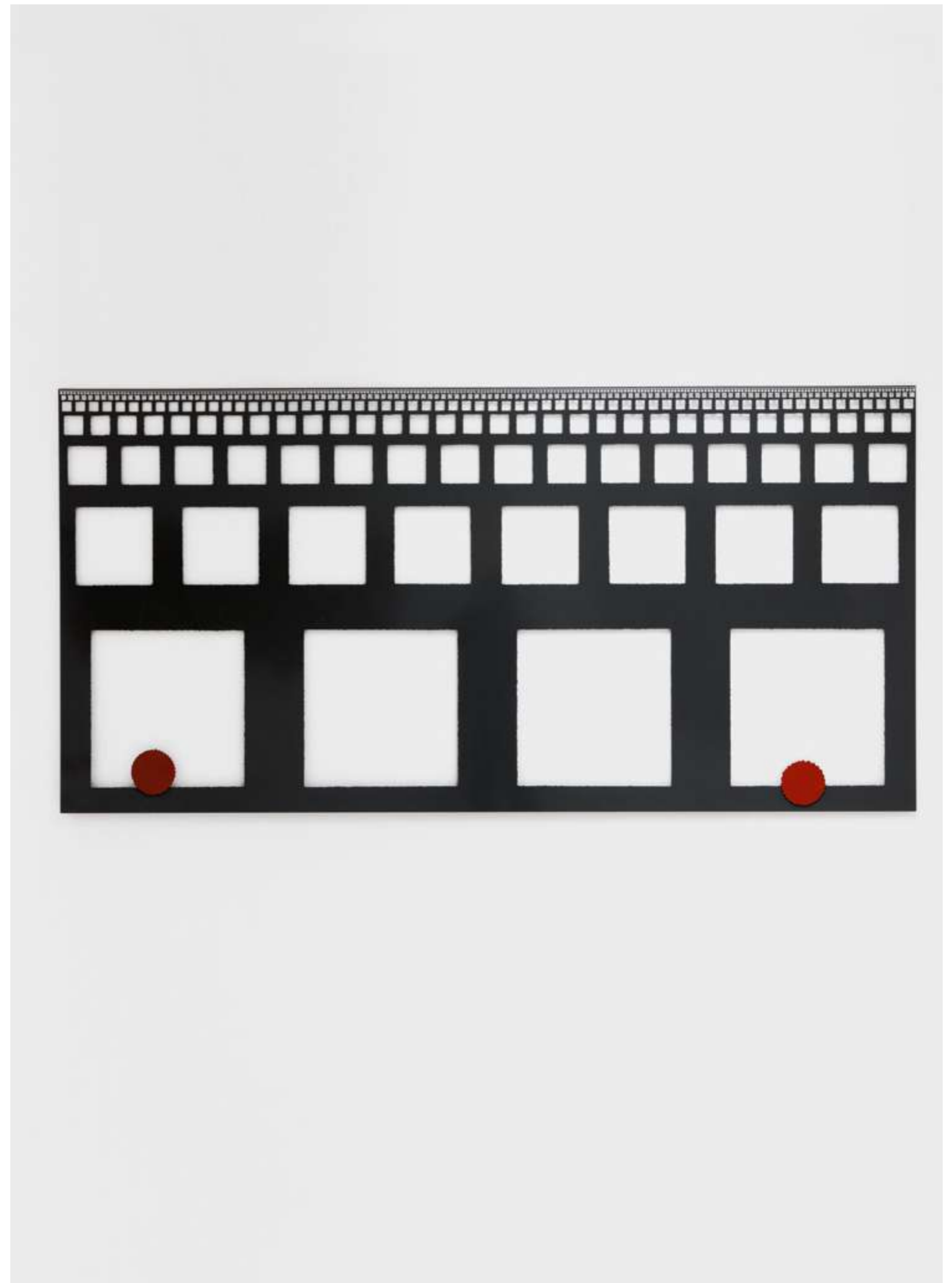
*Cuspidi N/G, 2009, acrylic on rosewood and stainless steel insert, 90 x 210 cm*

The short series titled *Due particelle* (2009) again belonged to a visual meditation on the n-dimensions of space. It provided a visual representation of a conception of non-Euclidean space, in accordance with an AdS model, where the acronym stands for Anti-de Sitter, with reference to the positions of the Dutch mathematician Willem de Sitter (1872–1934), stressing rather the components of void and symmetry. The symmetrical arrangement of these works is completely evident, as is their dense internal hyperbolic structure. However, it is less immediate (and, therefore, more evocative) to understand the process of collision between the two particles, red on a black grid and black on a yellow grid (but there is also an autonomous blue *Atomino*), which give the title to the works in the series. In this respect, it is worth noting Maria Cristina's familiarity with and propensity for (but perhaps also antinomically, her rebellion against) the primary geometric forms—the circle and the square—which are also the principal feature, in the roundness of the particles and the orthogonality of the gabions, of many installations in the *Wasteland* project: in short, the artist has continued to deal with the “cage” we mentioned above, moving beyond its limits a little at a time.

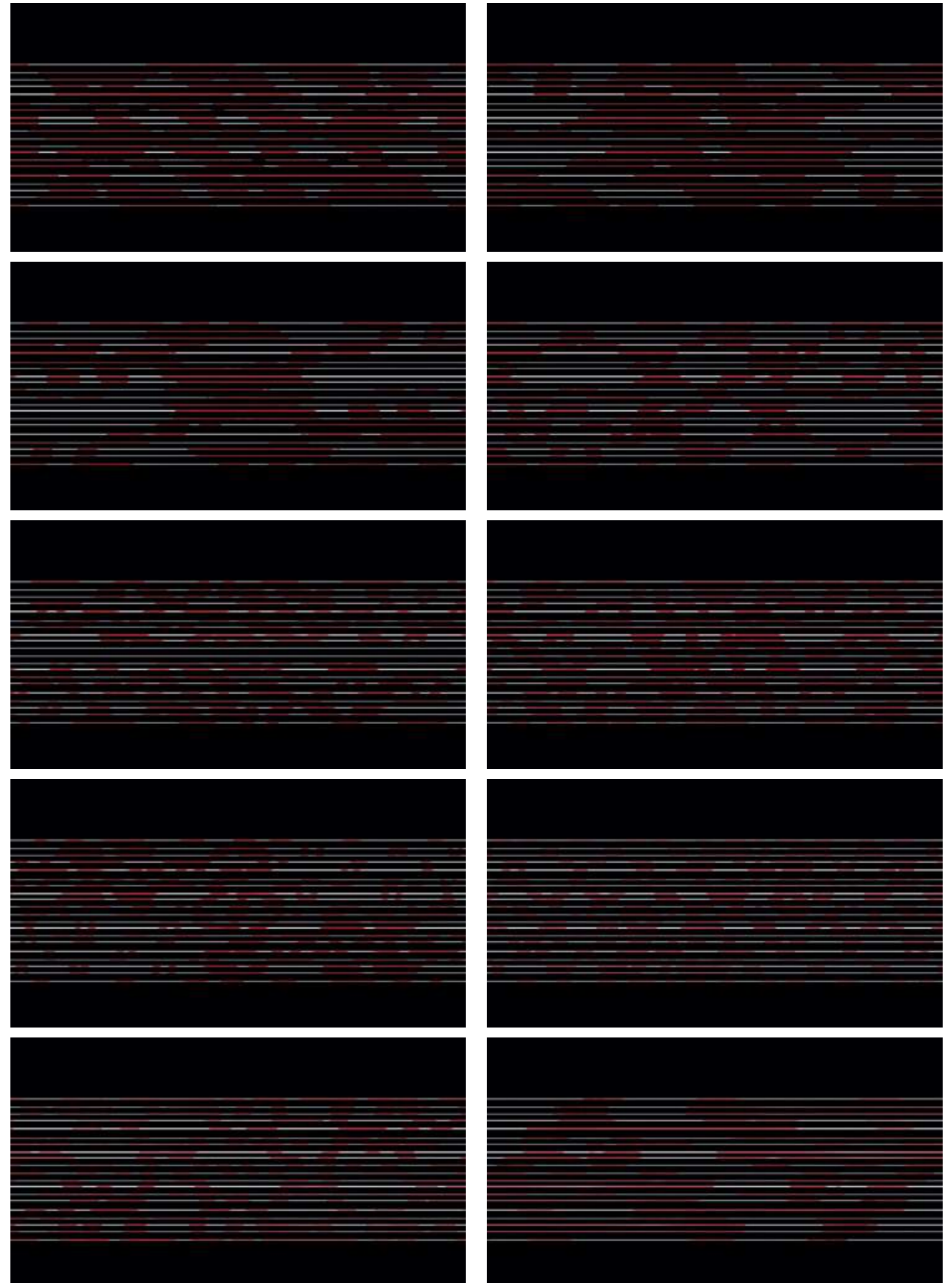


*Atomino blu, 2009, catalytic paint on sheet steel, diameter 25 cm*

*Due particelle in rotta di collisione in uno spazio AdS N, 2009, catalytic paint on laser cut sheet steel, 120 x 250 cm*

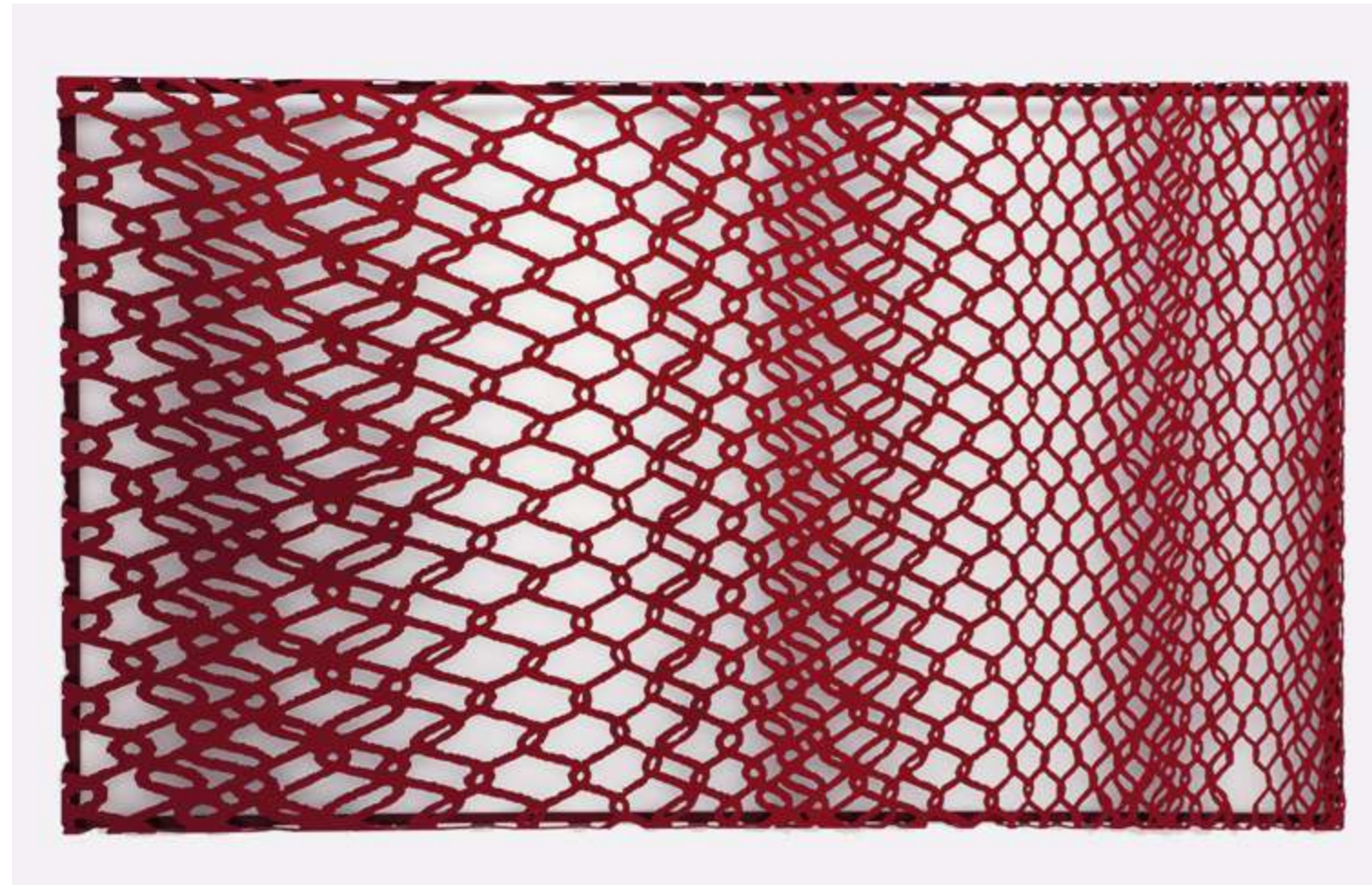


To some extent this approach was influenced by another book, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. This is the fantastical tale of the encounter between a two-dimensional world and a three-dimensional one (Flat Land, Space Land), published in 1884 by Edwin Abbott Abbott (1838–1926), which has a square and a sphere as its protagonists. Mr. Square, the main character in *Flatland*, would also be the starting point and the protagonist of *Altri occhi* (2011), a 4'27" video made by Finucci as a preview of an installation at the Progress Gallery in Belgrade, which never took place. *Altri occhi* is an important experiment that somehow exposes the limits of our perceptual capacities in relation to the multidimensional nature of reality and experience. The video shows essentially the point of view of a subject (Mr. Square) who is unable to perceive the world in three dimensions, with the consequent effect of an overall, dispiriting monotony. The object of observation is not really the world as a whole but an image (both metaphor and synecdoche) that emblemizes it, namely that of a *Rete* (network), a previous work by Maria Cristina discussed below. The impression that we get is that of a flowing with different rhythms—first slow, then faster—of a kind of weird pentagram, and for this reason the vast projection in Belgrade (the video would have occupied a wall 20 meters square) was to have been accompanied by an appropriate sound track.



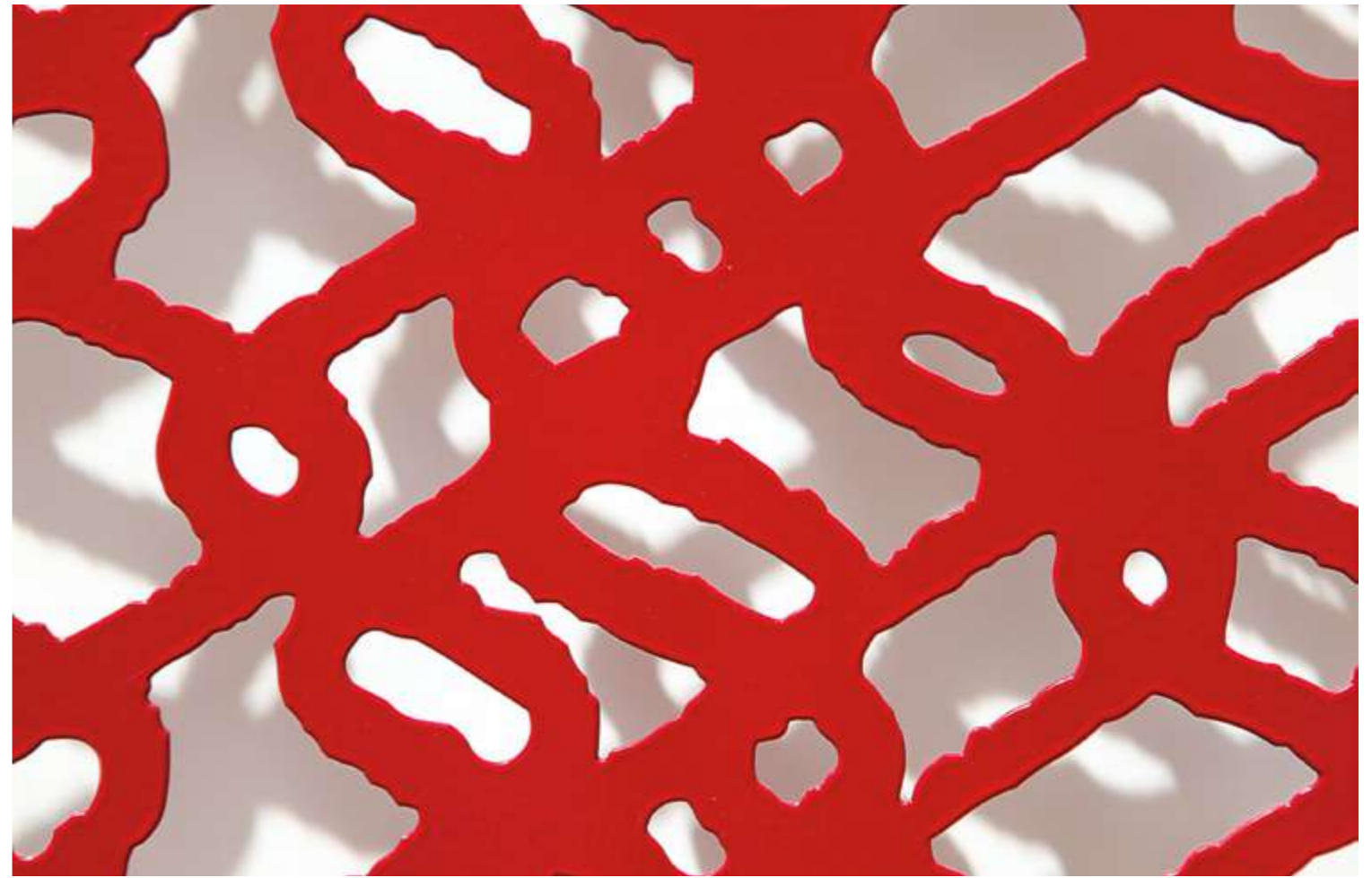
Frames of *Altri occhi*, 2011, video (4'27")

The *Reti* of 2009 and 2010 (catalytic paintings on laser-cut steel sheet) direct our attention in different ways to the interstitial dimensions of space and the multiplicity of layers that shape our perception of surfaces, at the same time exploring our limited ability (which is not just Mr. Square's) to attain a greater understanding of depth.



Untitled (*Rete rossa*), 2010, catalytic paint on laser-cut steel sheet, 108 x 180 cm

Untitled (*Rete rossa*) (*detail*), 2010, catalytic paint on laser-cut steel sheet, 108 x 180 cm  
Untitled (*Rete*), 2009, catalytic paint on laser-cut steel sheet, 108 x 180 cm





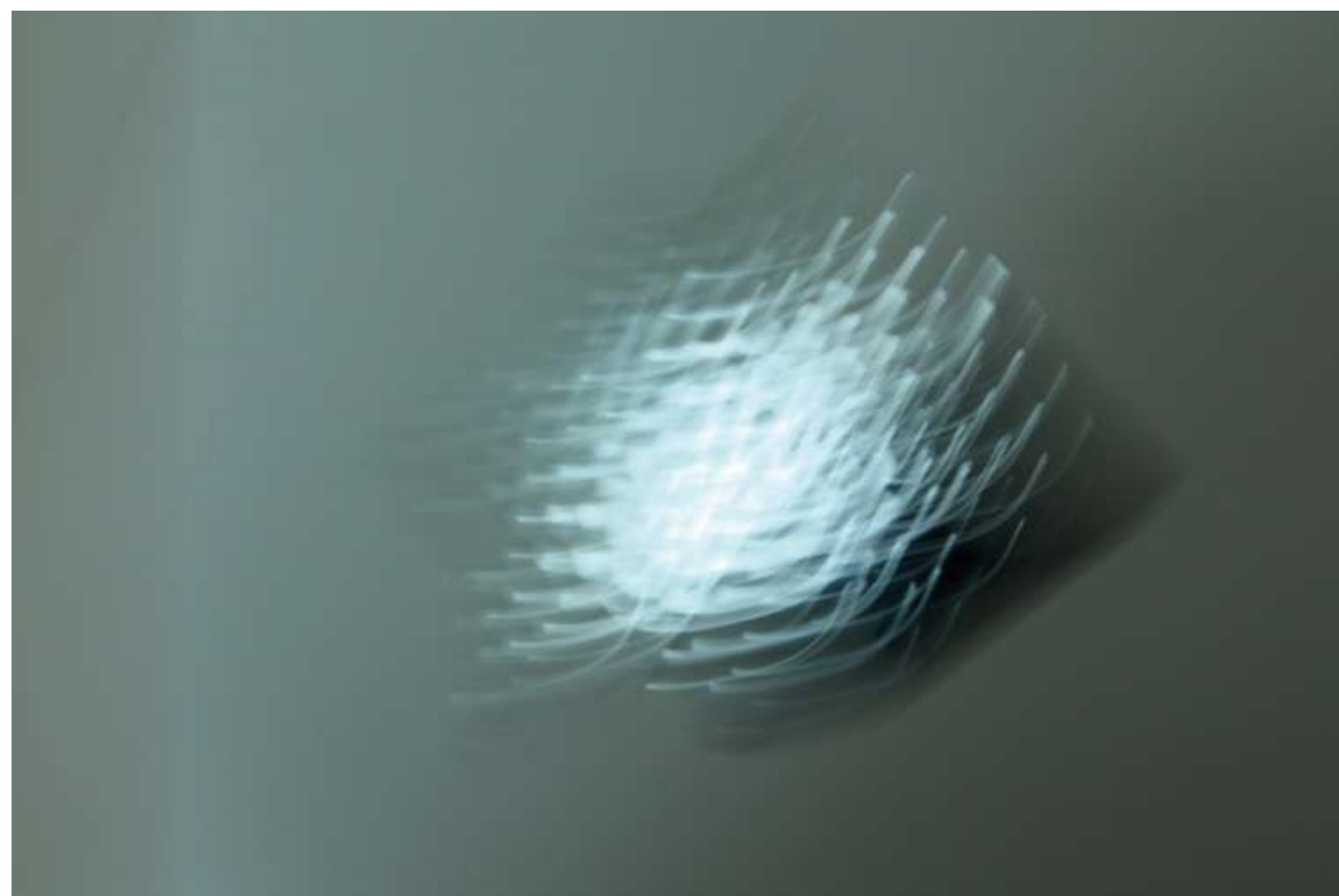
The *Microworld* series (2010) marks an important transition, also with regard to the imminent advent of *Wasteland* and the Garbage Patch State. For the first time plastic bursts into Maria Cristina's works in the form of the Polly Pocket dolls, which were popular toys in the early 1990s. The work was a small- to medium-sized installation, in the usual forms of an architectural model. In the more deeply meditated version (but there are many other versions), it presents a solitary doll on each staggered shelf, in which parallels are also evident with certain stair designs created in her architectural works and product designs. A micro world of solitudes, therefore, apparently joyful and chromatically bright, of small inanimate beings (very different from the parallel expressions by Nathalie Djurberg, from other infinite claymations, and the frequent and problematic use of the doll in twentieth-century art) immersed in an afternoon light, which is also reflected in the title. This comes from a famous poem by Salvatore Quasimodo, *Ed è subito sera* (1930), which initially concluded, even more explicitly, a long poem significantly titled *Solitudini*. Despite the restrained dimensions of the work, what we observe is a prospect with a shift of scale—from micro to macro, from measurable to immeasurable—which would become one of the salient features of the Garbage program.



*Microworld*, 2010, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 110 x 155 cm and details

Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra trafitto da un raggio di sole, 2010, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 30 x 50 cm

In *Altre vite*, part of a more general project titled *Regno artificiale* (2011), the problem of the “leap in scale” (evoking the title of a fine book on the biography of images by Ruggero Pierantoni) is considered from a different angle. These are micro objects (a chocolate wrapper, a cupcake, a fragment of tinfoil) that are photographed and then magnified so as not to be recognizable even when looked at carefully, individually or in sequence (*Tizietto*), with the resulting prints then being placed between a plexiglass plate and an aluminum support. *Regno artificiale* evidently stands in oppositional reference to the animal and vegetable kingdoms. It deals with structures and materials established by others (as we have seen before, in Tiziana Andina’s observation: “the artifact is an object created by someone with a precise intention and with a view to a purpose”). Maria Cristina, therefore, adopts aims and intentions, using heteronomous materials and contexts, and opens them up to new perspectives through an alienating gaze on their forms leading to new definitions in both the objects and the viewers.



*Regno artificiale. Oggetto n. 2, 2011, Lambda print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 110 x 110 cm*  
*Tizietto (detail), 2011, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, three series, 33 x 150 cm*

*Regno artificiale. Oggetto n. 2, 2011, Lambda print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 110 x 110 cm. Rome, Palazzo Odescalchi*





Tizetto, 2011, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, three series, 33 x 150 cm



*Still from Living Restraint, 2011, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 110 x 165 cm*

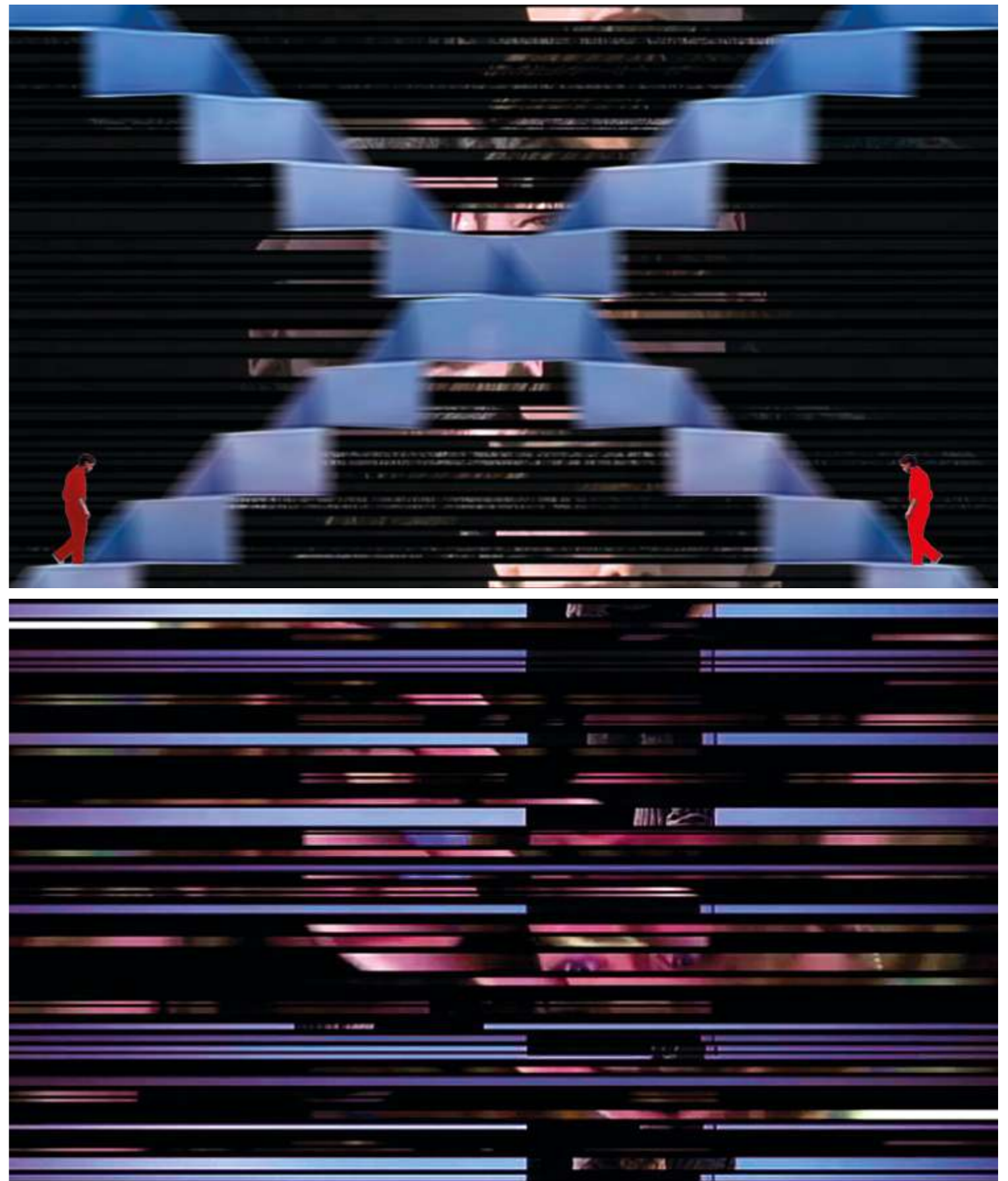
*Living Restraint* (2011) is a video performance of just over 7', inspired—with some significant variations—by the celebrated program, lasting more than ten years, by Matthew Barney (*Drawing Restraint*, begun in 1987). There the strategy was to place his own body inside the work, in almost extreme situations, in a refined analogy between the perfections of the athlete and those of the artist. Here, on the other hand, Finucci in her studio appears wielding a long brush soaked in phosphorescent paint and frantically pursuing the rapid movements of a red dot originating off screen. A dance of light which, in an anti-entropic perspective, tries to reveal, at sunset and with a radical change of register, those otherwise invisible traces—of life, activity, energy—that seek a cosmic convergence with the universe and somehow inhabit it. Maria Cristina wants to shape a cognitive shift, a strategy of understanding that attempts to visually mark limits, to see art from another point of view and give life to another world.

In addition to the video-performance, the series also aligns still images of considerable size (*Still, Not so Still*), once again defined with the retroplexing process, and, before that, a sort of montage of distinct frames of the action (*Scene da Living Restraint*), in which an ordered sequence of gestures and actions is neither perceptible nor exists. The research is rather that of a rhythmic gait, in an apparently very spatially constrained grid (as in the *Cuspidi* of 2009), where each cell is animated by a movement. “They are like fragments of time,” wrote the artist, “that are not related to each other; there is no sequence, they are all moments of the present that do not imply the conception of past or future.”



Scenes from *Living Restraint*, 2011, Epson print application with plexiglass back and aluminum support, 110 x 171 cm

The video *Trueman* (5'22", 2011) repeats the almost parallel structure of *Altri occhi* from the same year, but significantly intensifies it. Again in this case the problem is to measure the inadequacy of our perception and our logic before the infinite dimensions of reality. Finucci was inspired in this case by the positions that the hyperspace theorist, Charles H. Hinton (1853–1907), expressed in his *Many Dimensions* (1885), and she did so in that *Found Footage* logic she had experimented with (though using still images and montages) in *Altre vite*. In this case we are dealing with some sequences of the film *The Truman Show* (1998) by Peter Weir, featuring Jim Carrey, which have been sampled, broken down, and differently recomposed, surmounted by the horizontal grid of perception of *Mr. Square*, on the one hand to recreate a vision in the fourth dimension (but without legible temporal sequences), and on the other hand to establish—with the obsessive repetition of Mozart's *Turkish March*—a strong emotional involvement. The goal this time is also to make the original filmic text unrecognizable (an experiment that the great Ukrainian photographer Boris Michajlov also practiced at the 2017 Venice Biennale) by opening up many other possible dimensions of perception that completely engages the viewers and not just their rational side. It is probably needless to add, however, that the well-known message of Weir's film, built on the contrast between real and fake, would have a decisive development in Maria Cristina's research, from the very start of the *Wasteland* project. The name chosen by the artist certainly echoes Eliot's poem (*The Waste Land*), but on the web it is closer to the title of a post-apocalyptic videogame. We have seen previously, in the pages of this volume, the emphasis Finucci places on a plurality of expressive codes, on their timeliness, and the need to continually combine them to make her message more pervasive. She has always done this.



Untitled\_3, 2011, print on Dibond, 112 x 200 cm  
 Untitled\_4, 2011, print on Dibond, 112 x 200 cm  
 How is it going to end?, 2011, print on Dibond, 70 x 125 cm (from *Trueman*, video, 5'22")  
 Untitled\_8, 2011, print on Dibond, 70 x 125 cm (from *Trueman*, video, 5'22")

Untitled\_2, 2011, print on Dibond, 150 x 265 cm  
 Untitled\_7, 2011, print on Dibond, 70 x 125 cm (from *Trueman*, video, 5'22")





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## APPENDIX

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BIOGRAPHY

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ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Maria Cristina Finucci in the great court of  
Ca' Foscari (2013)*



1956 Maria Cristina Finucci is born into an old-established family in Lucca on November 10. From childhood she displays a great passion for drawing and painting, together with a love of dance and skiing.

1970 She attends the art high school in Lucca but, disappointed by the academic teaching, after high school she enrolls in the School of Architecture at the University of Florence.

1979 She meets Pietro Sebastiani.

1981 She graduates *magna cum laude* after spending a year working on her thesis, a monograph on Charles Rennie Mackintosh with original documents found in Glasgow. In the same year, again at the University of Florence, she qualifies to practice as an architect and opens a studio in Lucca, while remaining at the Department of History of Architecture as an expert on the subject. Also in Florence, she teaches at the Pennsylvania State University School of Architecture in its semester in Italy.

1984 In February she marries Pietro Sebastiani, who in the meantime has passed a competitive examination to enter the diplomatic service. The couple move to Rome. Maria Cristina continues to commute to her work in Tuscany.

1985 In November, in Lucca, their first son, Frediano, is born, now a management engineer and CEO of an Italian luxury brand; he is married with three children.

1986 The family move to Moscow, where Pietro is first secretary at the Italian Embassy. Maria Cristina gives up her work at the university and devotes herself to painting and drawing and making prototypes of furniture in marble, slate, and wood, which she paints as if they were pictures. She delivers a lecture on the architect Giancarlo de Carlo at the Shchusev Museum in Moscow.

1987 Costanza is born in Lucca. Today an economist and manager, she is married with two daughters.

1988 In autumn, Pietro Sebastiani is appointed consul at the Consulate General of Italy in New York and the family move into The Pythian on Manhattan's Upper West Side. This is the start of a very active period for Maria Cristina. She meets Giovanni Pasanella, who introduces her to the great names in New York architecture. Together with Hermon Telyan she designs various residential and commercial projects. She works for Caliendo Associates on the design of the Plaza Convention Center in Yokohama, Japan, and a school in Brooklyn. She curates the exhibition on Ogden Codman for the inauguration of La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi in New York. She contributes to the review *Controspazio* with correspondence from abroad.

1990 On February 14, Olivia is born in New York and dies six months later from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The family falls into despair. Pietro and Maria Cristina found the Association Seeds for SIDS – Semi per la SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) based in Florence.

1991 In June, Cristiano David is born and happiness returns. Cristiano David, with a PhD in Physics from Università La Sapienza in Rome, is now a researcher at CERN in Geneva and a post-doc at the University of Liverpool.

1993 They return to Rome, where Pietro works at the Farnesina in the Cabinet of the five foreign ministers who hold office until 1996. Maria Cristina again works freelance as an architect.

1994 In Lucca, the exhibition *Opere di Giovanni Pasanella e Maria Cristina Finucci* opens in the Casermetta delle Mura Urbane. At the end of the same year, they again move abroad, this time to Paris, where Pietro Sebastiani is the permanent deputy representative of Italy to UNESCO. An intense period begins for Maria Cristina, who starts work on the renovation of various apartments in the center of Paris, including: 9 Rue Massillon, Île de la Cité; 6 Rue Cloître Notre Dame, Île de la Cité; 21 Quai St.-Michel; 30 Rue Frédéric Sauton; 22 Rue Jacob, many of them published in books and magazines.

2000 They move to Brussels, where Pietro Sebastiani is appointed to the Italian Embassy. Meanwhile, Maria Cristina

is asked to lecture at various institutions and universities including the School of Architecture of the Universidad de Alcalá d'Henares, where she meets the founders of the organization La Mujer Construye. Together with them in 2003 she brings the exhibition on the most important Spanish architects to the Casa dell'Architettura in Rome, where Maria Cristina curates the section devoted to her Italian colleagues.

2001 Pietro Sebastiani receives the post of diplomatic adviser to the President of the Chamber of Deputies following a change of government in Italy. The family moves to their residence, an apartment on Via di Parione with views over the roofs of Rome renovated by Maria Cristina and widely published. She reopens her architectural office. Here, assisted by architect Angelp Pieraccini, she engages in residential designs, both new buildings and the restoration of ancient villas in Tuscany. In the same year she is a consultant for the Italian section of the UIA (International Union of Architects). She renovates many apartments, some abroad (London, Paris) by adopting a research approach.

2005 Signs a project for the new services for Fiumicino airport, Gruppo Aeroporti di Roma, ADR S.p.a.

2008 At the Salone del Mobile in Milan she presents her line of Aer office furniture designed for the company UPPER.

2009 In November, at the Carousel du Louvre in Paris, Salon Prestige, her architectural works are exhibited with those of the architect Stefania Stera. At the same time she creates the works in the series *Paradigms* and *Two Particles*, inspired by discoveries in quantum physics.

2010 Pietro is appointed ambassador to the UN agencies in Rome. The family moves house again, but in the same city, to the residence in Palazzo Odescalchi. Maria Cristina moves from her office on Via Montevideo to the large industrial space on Via Luigi Tosti, which is better suited to containing the large-scale works she has been creating in the meantime. In June, the LuC.CA (Lucca Center of Contemporary Art) realizes a solo exhibition titled *Paradigmi*. The coat hanger *P.S. I love U* is



exhibited at the 37th edition of Casaidea, the Rome furniture and design exhibition.

2011 Maria Cristina reads a short magazine article about the existence of the *Garbage Patch*. This is the start of the *Wasteland* project. Her large new studio enables her to finally produce projects long in gestation and she works feverishly. Inside the still empty studio she creates the video for the *Living Restraint* video-opera inspired by Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series. Later, she makes *Trueman*, another video-work created by manipulating the film *The Truman Show*. In the same year, for the series *Altre vite*, she makes works by photographing objects of common use in unusual ways. They include *Tizietto*, restoring life to factory waste. She also creates the works in the *Microworld* series, for which she creates the setting, a model in which she photographs the dolls her daughter played with. At Superstudio on Via Tortona in Milan, during the Salone del Mobile, the work *Tu non puoi dire né immaginare perché conosci soltanto un cumulo di immagini infrante dove batte il sole* is exhibited. The following year it is added to the permanent collection of contemporary art in the Chamber of Deputies at Palazzo Montecitorio. The furnishings *Bello lo sgabello* and *Tavolo piccolo* are exhibited at the 38th edition of Casaidea. In November, a solo exhibition opens at the Baker & McKenzie studios in Munich. Other works are subsequently presented at various group exhibitions, such as *In Fabula Art* (2012) in Rome and *Immagine Italia* in Istanbul (2014).

2012 *Wasteland* takes shape. Maria Cristina designs the flag and accessories such as the constitution. Olga Strada notices the project and introduces Maria Cristina to Silvia Burini and Giuseppe Barbieri of the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice. Together with the then rector, Carlo Carraro, they make arrangements for the construction of the new state pavilion in the great court of the university. A group of students drafts the texts of the website to present the traces of the founding myth of the Garbage Patch State. A long collaboration begins with the Università Roma Tre, which procures the plastic bottle caps and provides technical support for each of the installations to be built. The Associazione Arte per la Sostenibilità is founded, chaired by Lucia Odescalchi, who gives her support to many of *Wasteland's* subsequent installations.

2013 In January, her husband is appointed ambassador of Italy to Spain. There follows another move, this time without the children. The couple move into their residence in the Palazzo de Amboje in Madrid. On April 11, in UNESCO's Parisian headquarters, Maria Cristina founds the Garbage Patch State, of which she becomes the president. On May 29 in Venice, in the large courtyard of Ca' Foscari, the pavilion of the Garbage Patch State is opened and runs until September, coinciding with the 55th Biennale of Visual Arts. Here, as for the UNESCO event, ENI is again the main partner, thanks to Stefano Lucchini, the first to believe in the project.

In June, she receives the Mela d'Oro of the Premio Bellisario. In November, in Madrid, for *GRAZIA Planeta sostenibile*, she creates an installation on the facade of the Italian Cultural Institute, the site of the event. On the windows and balcony of the building's main facade, she places vestments similar to the traditional Spanish ones also found on the building opposite, but made of sacks filled with plastic bottle caps like those used for the pavilion in Venice. Giovanni Vimercati joins her as a collaborator, continuing until 2016. She meets the documentary producer Miguel Ángel Tobias who makes the first institutional video for the Garbage Patch State.

2014 In February, in Madrid, as a side event at ARCO, Spain's most important art fair, with the participation of Endesa, she creates the installation on the Gran Via together with the

IED – European Institute of Design. The work is carried out in a team with the director Riccardo Marzullo, Marisa Santamaria, Ivan Vidal, the architect Izaskun Chinchilla, and her students, who produce a parallel installation within the building.

On April 11, to mark the Garbage Patch State's first national festival, its embassy opens at the Museo MAXXI in Rome, in collaboration with the Master's course in Public and Exhibit Design at the Università La Sapienza and with the support of ENI.

On September 29, in New York, the mission of the Garbage Patch State to the UN Building during the General Assembly with the installation *The Serpent*. In November, at the Loggia dei Cavalieri in Treviso, Maria Cristina creates an installation for the reception at the Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche of the seventh edition of the Premio Internazionale Civiltà dell'Acqua Renzo Franzin.

2015 The *Wasteland* project is struggling to cope with the great demand and from January a dedicated director is appointed. Paola Pardini joins the team with responsibility for its many operational and administrative aspects.

On June 4, Maria Cristina presents her State at the headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva during a talk. In the same month, in Milan, for *EXPO in The City*, the *Vortex* installation is inaugurated at the Bracco Foundation and will remain part of the Foundation's permanent collection. In October in Venice, for the *Bluemed High Level Conference*, she presents the installation *Bluemedsauros*, sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Research. In Rome she receives the Premio ROSA (Results Obtained Without Aid).

In December, for the COP 21 Climate Conference in Paris, at the request of the *New York Times International*, in partnership with Acciona, she creates the *Climatesaurus* installation. At the same time, in China, for the Shenzhen Art Biennale, the installation *RE* is inaugurated together with Aaron Betsky and Francesco Delogu.

2016 In January, she visits Moscow to inspect the venue of the MMOMA – Moscow Museum of Modern Art, where she has been commissioned to produce a set of installations for both the external and internal facade. She designs a complex work inspired by photos of Sebastião Salgado's gold diggers. The

installation, curated by Silvia Burini and Giuseppe Barbieri, still awaits production. In March, Pietro Sebastiani is appointed director general of Cooperazione Italiana allo Sviluppo, a position which entails their return to Rome. After lengthy preparations, the installation *HELP. The Age of Plastic*, strongly backed by Emmanuele F.M. Emanuele, president of the Fondazione Terzo Pilastro, and by Giovanni Ciarrocca opens on the island of Mozia off Sicily. Workshop tutor, with Teresa Sapey, at the *Architects Meet in Selinunte* sixth edition, directed by Luigi Presinenza Puglisi.

2017 The Garbage Patch State signs a framework agreement with the Fondazione Acquario in Genoa. Its secretary general, the marine biologist Antonio Di Natale, a UN expert for the assessment of the state of the oceans, is the Garbage Patch State's Minister for the Sea. In autumn, Maria Cristina gives lectures in various universities and other institutions, including Georgetown University, the Università Tor Vergata, the Acquario di Genova, and FIDU – Federazione Italiana per i Diritti Umani. Pietro Sebastiani is appointed ambassador of Italy to the Holy See, so they move into Palazzo Borromeo.

2018 In February, Maria Cristina is appointed Grande Ufficiale al Merito by Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, on his own initiative. In the same month she also receives the honor of Dame Great Officer of the Constantinian Order of Saint George. In April, on the occasion of Earth Day 2018, as president of the Garbage Patch State, she signs up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countersigned by the Minister of the Environment Gianluca Galletti and the president of ASVIS Enrico Giovannini. Together with Greta Thunberg, she is appointed Ambassador of the Italian commission of FIDU. On June 8 the installation *HELP the Ocean* opens in the ruins of the Basilica Julia in the Roman Forum. Its official inauguration is held in Piazza del Campidoglio, with the screening of the institutional video of the Garbage Patch State on the facade of the Palazzo Senatorio and the institution of a *Blue Carpet* in the presence of some 2,500 people. The mayor of Rome and the director of the Parco Archeologico del Colosseo deliver speeches on the occasion. The partners who have made the event possible are Fondazione Bracco, Officine Maccaferri, ENEL, and ENEL X.

In July, a photographic exhibition on the Garbage Patch State installations opens in Milan at the Bracco CDI, the first in a series of photographic exhibitions.

In October in Rome, she receives the 17th Anima Award for the growth of an ethical conscience.

In December, she receives the Premio ANGI – Associazione Nazionale Giovani Innovatori.

2019 On February 16 at the Accademia dei Lincei she presents the *Wasteland* project on behalf of Università Roma Tre. In April in Milan, for the Fuorisalone she inaugurates the installation *HELP the Planet*, a project commissioned by Marco Balich and Alessia Crivelli. She is named Ambassador of the One Ocean Foundation.

In June, one of her works, together with those of thirty Italian artists representing the twentieth and twenty-first century, becomes part of the artistic heritage of Palazzo Quirinale, in the nascent collection of contemporary art in the seat of the president of the Italian Republic.

On September 14 she receives the Lucchesi nel Mondo gold medal.

She presents the project at different locations: in Milan, at *Seed and Chips, the Global Food Innovation Summit*; in Porto Cervo at the One Ocean Foundation and at the MBA conference *Shape and Inspire Future Leaders* held by the Università Bicconi in Milan; in Venice at the Università Ca' Foscari, for the DFBC Lectures *Partecipare*, curated by Silvia Burini; at EXCO 2019 – Fiera di Roma in *Women for Climate: the Italian National Female Pact for SDGs*. For the Fuorisalone 2020 in Milan she designs the *EXIT* installation, which remains unbuilt due to the lockdown.

2020 She is the artistic director of the competition *Life Beyond Plastic. Mobilitazione giovanile e attuazione di buone pratiche per ridurre l'inquinamento da plastica nei mari*.

In July, she makes the video-opera *Passaggio* for the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice as part of the *AdriCleanFish* project.

Prevented from realizing many events by the pandemic, she works on satellite images of the oceans provided by the Leonardo company. Currently she is completing the renovation of an old farm complex in Tuscany.

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Sites

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