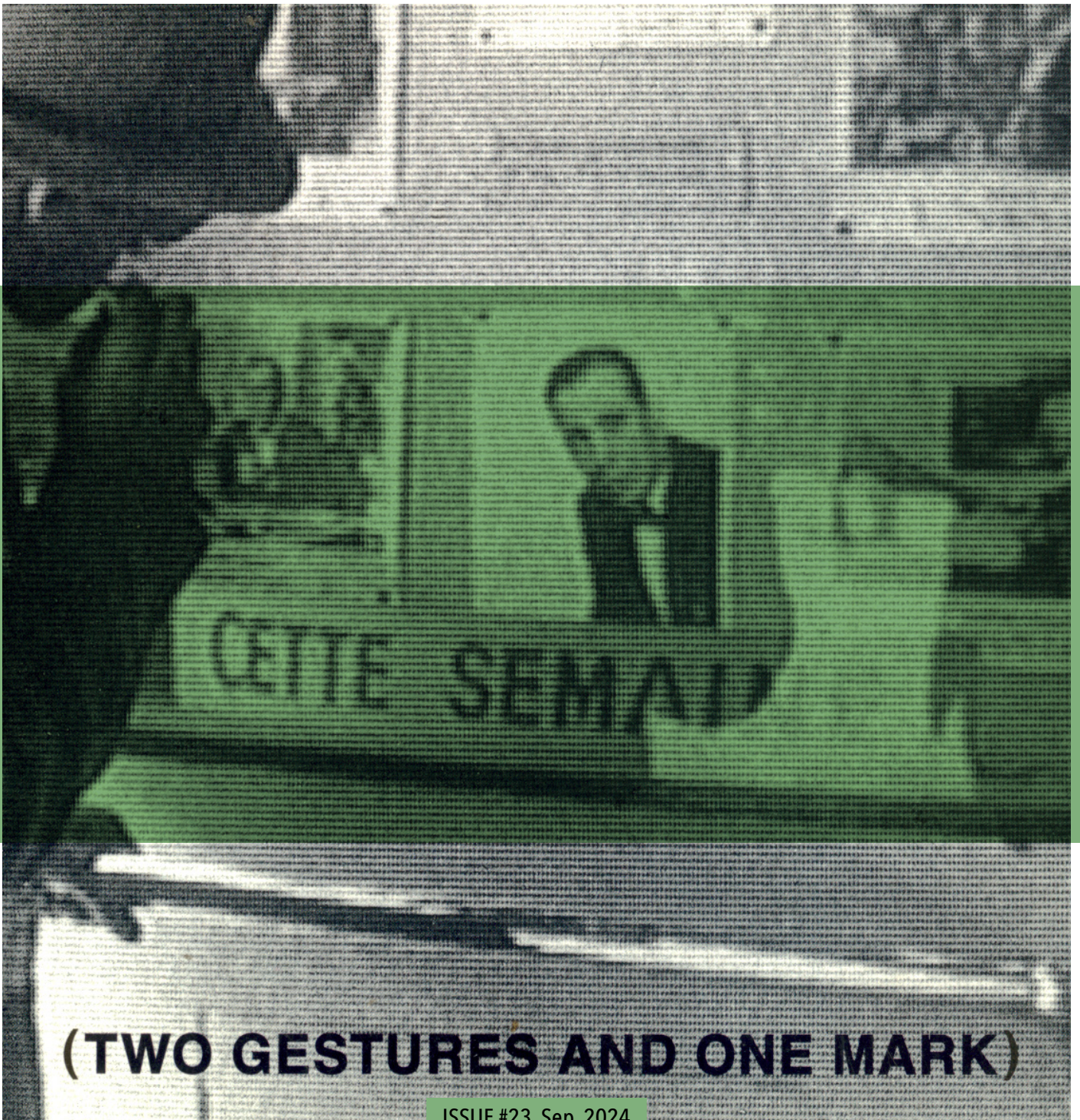


CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

Rosario Antoci | Hassnain Awais | Artur Barrio | Zhyldyz Bekova | Julien Creuzet | Qian Jiahua
Malak Mattar | Zully Mejia | Nisaa Saeed Raja | Dima Srouji | Anna Guillot | Emanuele Arielli



(TWO GESTURES AND ONE MARK)

ISSUE #23 Sep. 2024

Art is not a mirror to reflect reality but a hammer
with which to shape it.

Jenny Holzer



Artist in Residence CALL

FOR ARTIST

Apply by 20th October 2024

www.nexusartspace.com

Email to: info@nexusartspace.com

Theme: "The Body and Its Many Stories."

Nexus Art space, in collaboration with i.e. Art Projects Online Art Foundation, is thrilled to announce an international virtual artist residency with the theme "The Body and Its Many Stories." We invite artists to explore and express their relationship with their body, something that is inherently unique to each individual. Whether it's through personal experiences, cultural perspectives, or imaginative interpretations. The participants can consider the body not just as an external object of study, but as a deeply personal experience.

We are seeking art that addresses the challenges of defining and categorizing the body while acknowledging its rich diversity. Your work could explore the tension between personal experiences and broader, often simplified definitions, reflecting on the many stories that each body holds.

During this unique program, we'll host several virtual meetings, with some taking place in the Metaverse—a space offering extraordinary possibilities for artists.

You will learn about a Spatial platform where users can design and engage in virtual environments, positioning it within the larger Metaverse ecosystem. Spatial provides artists with the tools to create their own spaces, host events, and showcase their art in immersive, digital formats. Additionally, there will be networking opportunities and the potential to build a vibrant community, attracting artists, art enthusiasts, and collectors.

Duration: The residency spans one month, from 1st November 2024 to 29th November 2024, with virtual meetings scheduled twice a week throughout the duration.

Exhibition: The residency will culminate in a virtual group exhibition, showcasing the creative journey and final works of participating artists. Although we are physically apart, this virtual exhibition aims to unite artists and audiences in a shared experience that reflects our collective humanity and community spirit.

Exhibition Venue: The group exhibition will be hosted virtually in the Nexus ArtSpace Gallery within the Metaverse.

Submission Guidelines: There is no charge for submission. Please submit a portfolio of 10-5 recent artworks, along with your CV, Bio, Artist Statement, and a Cover Letter to: info@nexusartspace.com

This call is open to visual artists, sound artists, video artists and photographers.

Residency Fee: A fee of 300\$ USD is required for participation. Payment details will be provided to the selected artists for the residency.

Submission deadline: 20th October 2024 (12:00 AM CET).

CONTRIBUTORS

Art Writers:

Federica Falchi
Anna Guillot
Sophie Kazan
Lenka Piper
Zoltán Somhegyi

Editors:

Sara Berti
Elham Shafaei

Artificial Intelligence Editor:

Fabio Gamberini

Art Director:

Soheil Hosseini
tehranstudio.com

Layout:

Fariba Rahdar

Front Cover:

John Baldessari, Zorro, Two Gestures and One Mark, 2008, 11x15 cm, Offset printed, Oktagon.

Media Consultant:

Emad Pournasiri

ARTISTS

6 **Rosario Antoci**
By: Anna Guillot

8 **Hassnain Awais**
By: Lenka Piper

10 **Artur Barrio**
By: Anna Guillot

12 **Zhyldyz Bekova**
By: Federica Falchi

14 **Julien Creuzet**
By: Sophie Kazan

16 **Qian Jiahua**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

18 **Malak Mattar**
By: Federica Falchi

20 **Zully Mejia**
By: Zoltán Somhegyi

22 **Nisaa Saeed Raja**
By: Lenka Piper

24 **Dima Srouji**
By: Sophie Kazan

26 Interviewed artist
Anna Guillot
KoobookArchive.
Experiences and views on
books and multiples

34 **Artificial Intelligence**
Interviewed with
Emanuele Arielli
By: Fabio Gamberini



EDITORS' NOTE

Welcome to Issue 23 of ContemporaryIdentities, where the vibrancy of the present intertwines with the possibilities of the future. This edition is a rich tapestry of voices and visions, each contributing to a dynamic narrative of today's artistic scene. We are particularly excited to showcase the contributions of Anna Guillot, who has enriched this issue with her insights on books and multiples. Anna, founder of KoobookArchive in Catania, Italy, has provided a fascinating exploration of this unique field, highlighting its significant role in artistic research. Her archive, established in 2008, offers a wealth of reflections and experimental approaches to artists' books, underscoring the diverse languages, technologies, and themes that define this medium.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the talented artists and writers who have contributed to this issue. We are especially grateful to our dedicated board member, Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), and to the esteemed international critics Anna Guillot (Italy), Federica Falchi (Italy), Sophie Kazan (UK), and Lenka Piper (Czech Republic), whose perspectives have greatly enriched our content.

Republic), whose perspectives have greatly enriched our content.

We also extend our appreciation to Fabio Gamberini, our editor for the Artificial Intelligence section, for his engaging interviews that offer valuable insights into this evolving field. For this issue Fabio interviewed Emanuele Arielli. Emanuele Arielli is Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at IUAV University, Faculty of Arts and Design, Venice, Italy.

We hope you find inspiration and thought-provoking content as you explore the pages of this issue.

Warm regards,
Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei



Withhold know. Reflection on books, 2021, Environmental installation, overview, Courtesy of the artist

Rosario Antoci is an Italian sculptor engaged in the creation of large-scale installation environments for which he uses cement, mortars, resins, fiberglass, contemporary techniques and materials.

In 'Withhold know. Reflection on books', an emblematic installation from 2013 focused on the theme of books and culture at the time of the Internet, iron clamps block piles of books: the result is apparently unstable sculpture-elements that, due to the pattern followed by their spatial arrangement in the context of a square in an urban center, in Sicily, refer to the logogram of the Internet, the snail. In a recent exhibition dedicated to the artist's book, however, the ensemble was limited to a reduced portion of elements freely placed in the exhibition space, maintaining the reference to the symbol of the Web through the relationship that the pieces themselves trigger with two photographic images arranged on the wall.

The title 'Withhold know/Take hold of knowledge' focuses on the challenging theme on which the work is centered. The strong speculative nature typical of Antoci, an author also involved in philosophical-literary solicitations – he himself cites, among others, the Paul Valéry of the 'Cahiers' and in particular of 'L'idée fixe' – triggers a profound reflection on the dynamics of knowledge transformation in the age of the Web. The work questions the future condition of the 'book object', the possibility of connecting manual skills and technology,



Withhold know. Reflection on books, 2021, Installation at On the Contemporary, 2021, Iron clamps, books, courtesy the artist, Courtesy of OTC, Catania, Italy

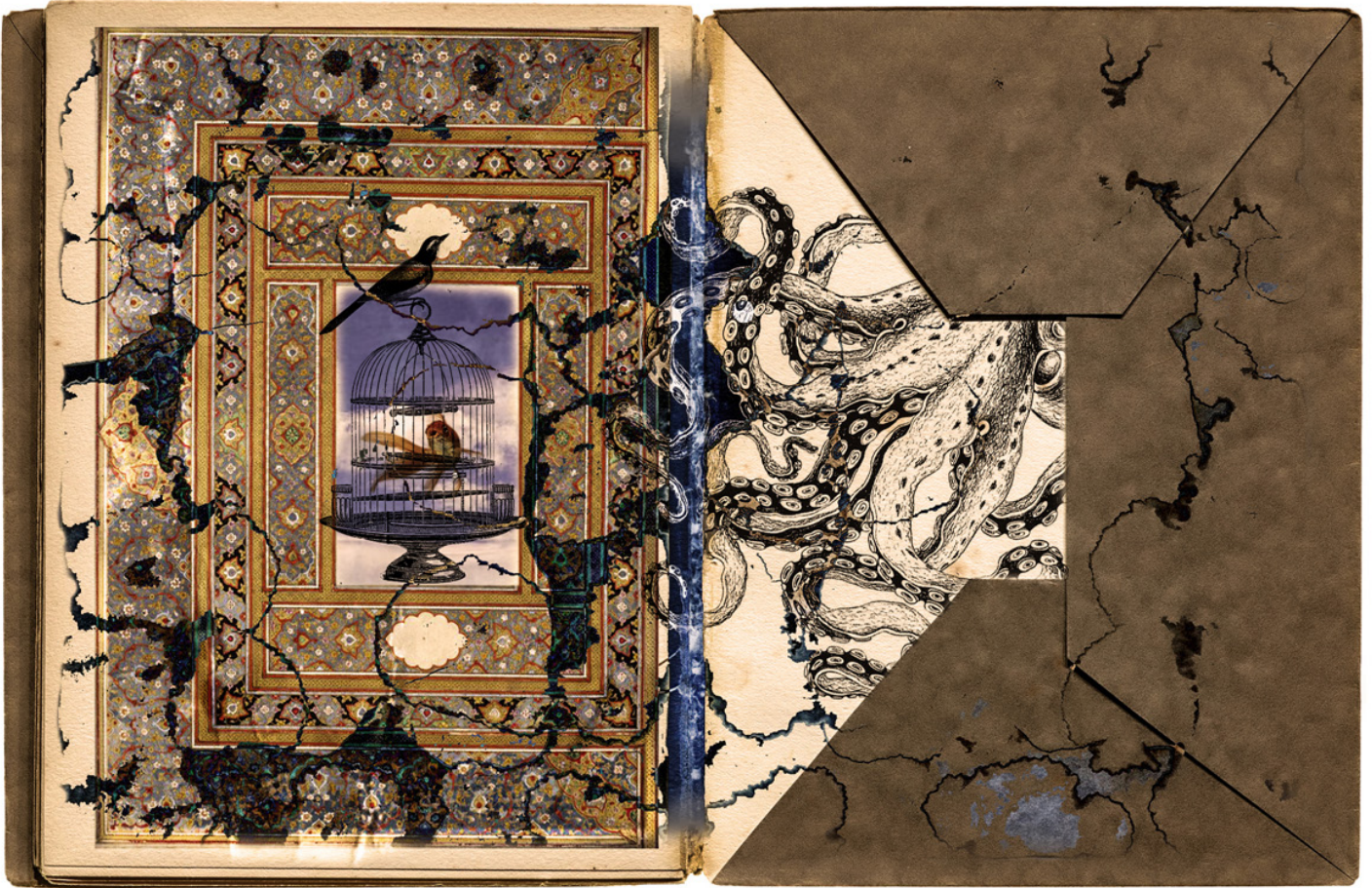
of discerning between the use of a 'good' digital that leads to social growth through democratic access to content - just to mention one point - and the 'bad' one that can give space to psycho-sensorial and behavioral aberrations that the virtual can stimulate. The investigation is wide-ranging, and the 'Book Reflection' asks many questions: "How does the relationship between mind and knowledge, between memory and information change in the age of big data? How does the relationship between knowledge, experience and expertise change? Will it be possible to arrive at an intelligent form of mediation between the real and the virtual?"



Withhold know. Reflection on books', 2021, an element, iron clamps, books, Courtesy of the artist

Hassnain Awais

Pakistan | Lenka
Piper



Said the moking bird, 2024, Mixed medium and printmaking, 37x57 cm

Archival records are treasured collections, meticulously selected for permanent or long-term preservation due to their profound cultural, historical, and evidentiary importance. These records are held in high esteem, often finding their place in archives and museums as symbols of our shared heritage. Personal records on paper—such as letters, envelopes, and other memorabilia—hold a unique power to evoke intimate emotions and memories. It is this deeply personal aspect of paper media that Pakistani artist Hassnain Awais delves into. Awais's work breathes new life into fading forms of paper communication, revitalizing them through intricate and refined printmaking. His art becomes a form of visual poetry, as he describes it, bridging the gap between past and present while engaging with the shifting dynamics of memory in an increasingly digitalized world.



Letter to myself, 2024, Mixed medium and printmaking, 26x30 cm



I am my own royalty, 2024,
Mixed medium and printmaking, 66x40 cm

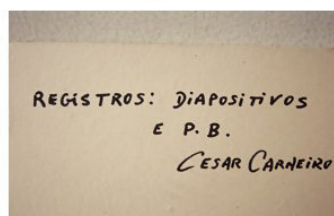
Artur Barrio

Portugal-Brazil

Anna Guillot



Situação, 1969, Ph. César Carneiro, Courtesy OF the artist



Artur Barrio lives in Rio de Janeiro and has been a militant artist in the rejection of stereotypes and conventional categories ever since Brazil was in the hands of the military dictatorship after the 1964 coup d'état. One of his best-known works, 'Situação T/T1' (Situation T/T1) of 1970, consisted of packages and bloody rags strategically placed in a park in the center of Rio to provoke reactions before the arrival of the police, during the height of the dictatorship. On this as on other occasions, by inviting the public to interact with the work without making them understand that it was an artistic action, the event was lived as an experience embedded in life itself.

Unusual and perishable, the materials used by Barrio always provoked a strong sensory reaction. Blood, saliva, hair, urine, excrement, flesh, bones, rubbish, always in connection with the body and food. Through strong disruptive actions, Barrio's operations stimulated people's contact with the totality of reality, even with aspects of extreme degradation, in order to make reality recognizable in all its conditions or forms (MUD/MEAT SEWER manifesto). New approaches, new interpretations and reflections were thus generated.

'Livro de carne' of 79'-1978 is an emblematic photographic work reproducing slices-pages of animal flesh. In the course of the exhibitions, the actual action that went into the construction of the photo-book was based on the act of cutting, the work of the butcher's knife active on the meat, the cut fibers, the cracks, etc.; the control of temperatures, the replacement of the piece when necessary, the tactile and olfactory aspect was important; here again, everything shifted towards the social question, to the form of control by the regime, etc. The notebook-book of living flesh coexisted with the projection of slides, paper notebooks, archive objects, photographs and films.

'Livro de carne' is a strongly allusive, harsh work, like all of Artur Barrio's typically South American production. On the same theme, another photo refers to an open book on which a red cotton thread sews some pearl-words, perhaps a key word or a signature.



Interminável, 2023, at CIAJG, Centro Internacional das Artes José Guimarães, Portugal, S.M.A.K Collection, Ghent BE, ph. Vasco Célio



Livro de carne, 1978-'79, fotografia, Courtesy of KoobookArchive, Catania, Italy

Zhyldyz Bekova

Kyrgyzstan

Federica
Falchi



Equilibrium, 2022, Oil and silver leaf on canvas, 140x90 cm

Zhyldyz Bekova's mystical paintings evoke a mighty ancient rhythm - a rhythm that pulses through the veil of time, harboring ancestral wisdom that lays bare the ethereal bond between earthly existence and cosmic realms. Bekova delights in conveying Kyrgyz cultural narratives and the primaeval, otherworldly impulse that flows through her, vividly articulated in figures that merge anthropomorphic, beastly, and frequently androgynous forms. Her paintings can be regarded as sanctuaries of meditation, urging us to rediscover and cherish the celestial



Cheber, 2024, Oil, acrylic marker and oil pastel on canvas, 120x90 cm



Cultus, 2023, Oil pastel, acrylic marker and oil on canvas

realms of spirituality and tradition, whilst guiding us to transcend the mundane and embrace the sublimity of nature. With a cadence of earthly hues, Bekova captures the eternal interplay between man and nature, rendering both the gentle promise of harmony we forsake and the stark tension of our lost equilibrium. Her art poignantly reflects our fractured existence, calling for a reaffirmation of our role as stewards of this tenuous world.



Attila cataracte [...], 2024, Venice biennale, Pavillon français, © Jacopo La Forgia

Julien Creuzet's art practice is described as 'protean' or shapeshifting. On one level it explores existential dialogues, themes of creolization and belonging. Creuzet combines film, poetry, sound, movement and sculpture, using found and repurposed objects to create an experiential visual environment that recalls his native Martinique, its ecology, sense of memory and place. Outside Creuzet's exhibition at the French pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale 2024, one is met with a giant LED screen of moving colors, light and



Attila cataracte [...], 2024, Venice biennale, Pavillon français, © Jacopo La Forgia

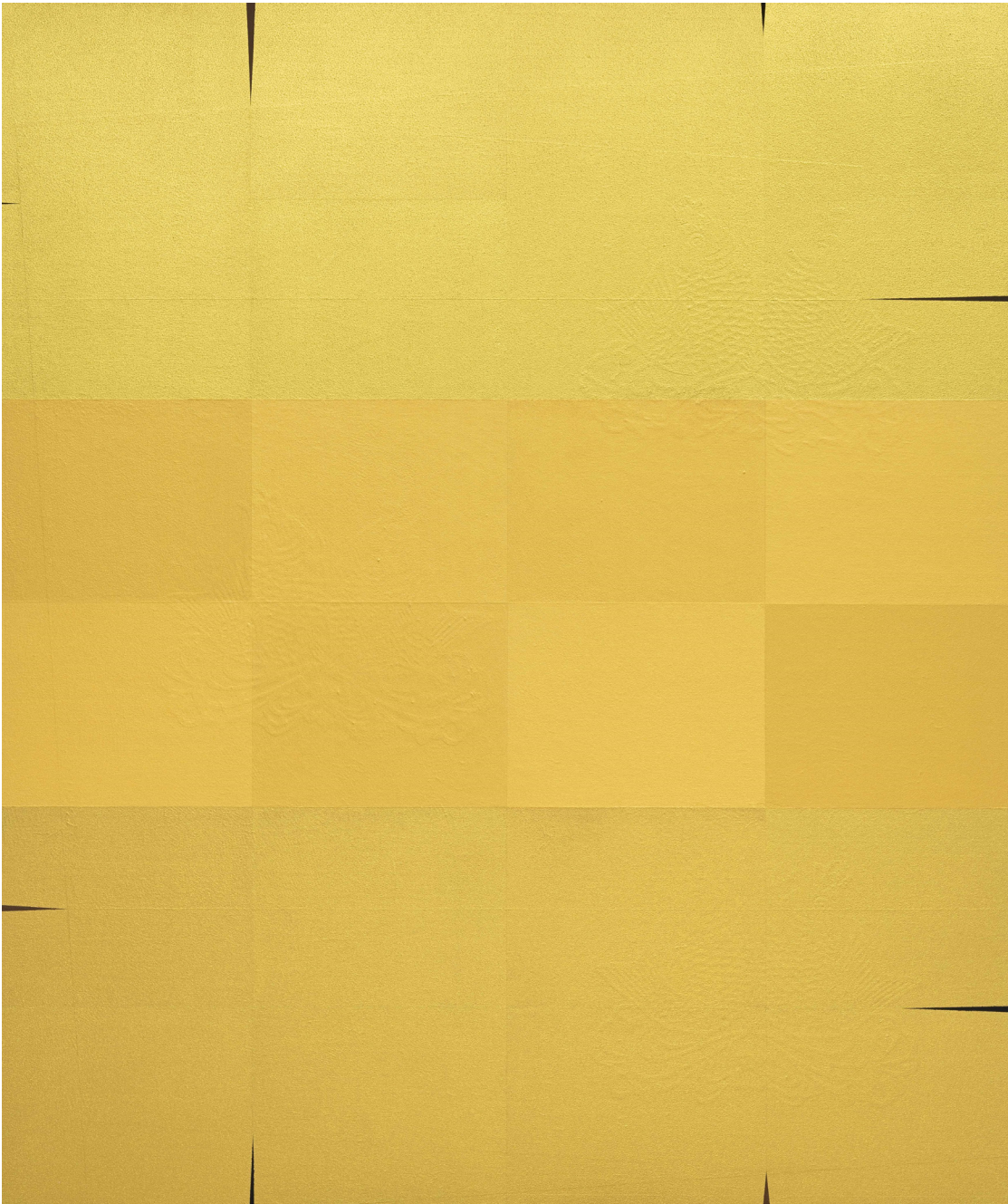


Attila cataracte [...], 2024, Venice biennale, Pavillon français, © Jacopo La Forgia

sound. It presents swirling rhythms and sensation intended to draw the eye (and the viewer) inside. The exhibition within is entitled *Attila cataracte ta source aux pieds des pitons verts finira dans la grande mer gouffre bleu nous nous noyâmes dans les larmes marées de la lune*. Poetic prompts such as this and sounds draw visitors into and around the exhibition; an other-worldly reverie or dialogue of color, movement and sensory awareness.

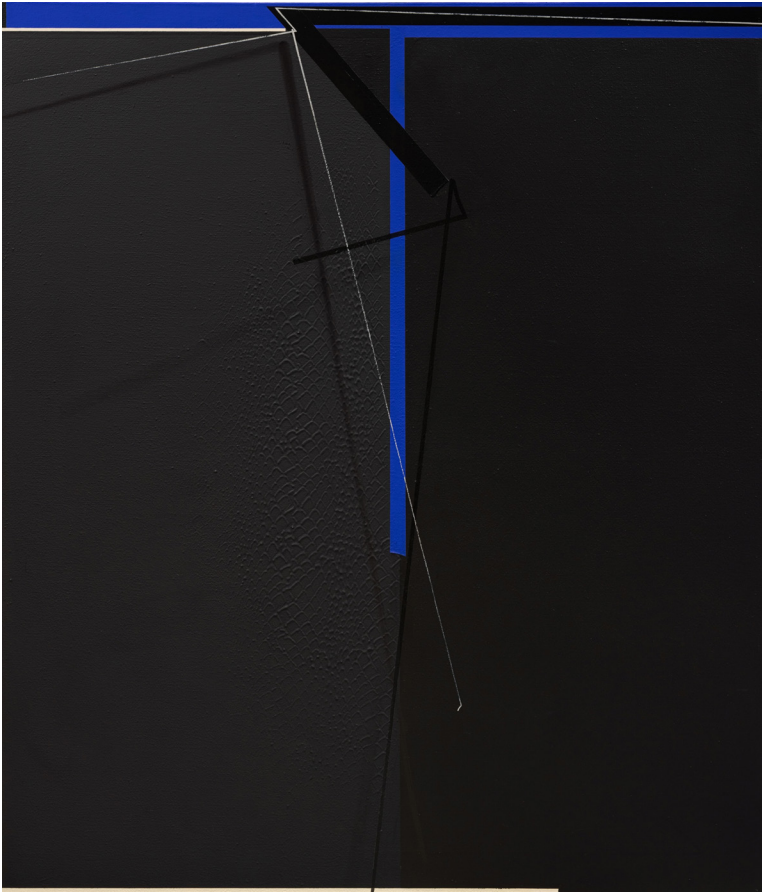
Qian Jiahua

China | Zoltán
Somhegyi



Gold Produces Water, 2023, Mixed media, 200x170 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai

The abstract paintings by Qian Jiahua first strike the observer with their minimal pictorial world, composed of basic geometrical forms and limited color palettes. One would immediately think that they are the results of meticulous and conscious planning procedures. However, the creative process of the works is more complex than that, because the artist aims at remaining at the intersection of chance and design or free randomness and well-defined project. Therefore, her works are inspiringly paradoxical, where the artist's quest for harmony is fulfilled by the serendipity embedded in the painting process and in the final relationship of the singular pictorial elements.



T-Shaped Resistance, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 155x135 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai



Wound, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 70x60 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai



When the world sleeps, 2021, Oil on canvas

Vivid in color yet bearing doleful visages, Malak Mattar's early portrayals have emerged as resonant visions of hope. Endowed with a collective feminist sentiment, her subjects speak of the genocidal wound upon her native Palestine – each gaze an elegy, each allusion a murmured truth. Mattar's color-laden compositions cherish the enduring spirit of Palestinian identity – a tangible stoicism from which the artist has departed since October 7th. In *No Words*, her latest work, the artist breaks through a silence of artistic paralysis, conceiving a lament of didactic verism that is devoid of color: both somber and defiant, her monumental work layers accurate shards of devastation and anguish into a haunting mosaic, thereby documenting not only remnants from a distant past, but the pulse of a perpetual present as it unfolds before us. Mattar's depictions thus impart an anti-colonial spiritedness, a transcendence of imperialist visions that help us embrace a new horizon of decolonial knowledge.



No Words, 2024, Oil on primed linen



Two Gazan girls dreaming of peace, 2020, Acrylic and oil on canvas

Zully Mejía

Peru-UK

Zoltán
Somhegyi



Cau Cau, 2024, Acrylic on linen, 30x40 cm

Zully Mejía investigates a complex set of questions that revolve around personal and cultural identity and immigration. As a Peruvian artist having studied and worked in the USA and in the UK, her works often depart from a personal experience. The paintings may depict an everyday life scene or can be the portrait of a figure who is appearing in an average context or in front of a neutral, undefined background, nevertheless they have implicit references to particular episodes or circumstances in Mejía's life. The same can be said about the denim jacket, elaborated with embroidery thread, and with texts and a portrait of the artist's mother, created in a period when she could not visit her daughter due to visa restrictions.



Feliz Día Mamá, 2024, Acrylic on linen, 40x30 cm

Portrait of a woman from a developing nation. Portrait of a Peruvian woman. Portrait of a woman who cannot visit her daughter without a visa. Portrait of my mother—you are always with me. I miss you., 2023, Denim jacket, embroidery thread and archival ink



Unees. Bees II, 2019, Fabric, 124x103 cm

Artworks by Nisaa Saeed Raja, a multi-disciplinary artist of Kashmiri descent, delve into the complexities of home, displacement, and the shifting social, political, and geographical landscapes that lead to a loss of identity - a theme that resonates deeply in today's globalised world. In her work titled *Unees Bees*—an Urdu phrase meaning "a minor difference"—Raja reconstructs the traditional South Asian attire, *Shalwar Kameez* (Shirt Trousers), to question the bourgeois and patriarchal structures of society. By making subtle alterations to these garments, she challenges their functionality and purpose, drawing a parallel to how minor societal changes can lead to profound impacts on identity. This piece is not just a commentary on cultural attire but a reflection of her personal journey and the shared experiences of those affected by such transformations.



Unes. Bees, 2019, Installation view



Unes. Bees I, 2019, Fabric, 116x113 cm



Charts for a Resurrection, Installation view, Photo by Ismail Noor of Seeing Things, Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabib Gallery, Dubai, UAE

The ground as a receptacle of sacred and inherited history is central to Dima Srouji's research and practice and *Charts for a Resurrection*, is her solo exhibition at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery (7 May-6 July 2024). Using systematic research and her architectural experience of placemaking, Srouji draws the reader into the history and heritage of her native Palestine.

The "Late Monuments" series explores socio-cultural, archaeological and anthropological perceptions. These 'monuments' are reliefs fixed to the wall, whose crevices filled with colored glass to emulate the riches found beneath the earth.

Similarly, "Maternal Labour" are photographs of basket girls; women who earned a living from Western collectors, by gathering artefacts from their earth that is so rich with historic remains. Srouji's art is thoughtful and considered. Glass replicas of archaeological findings are lit by a single light, to highlight their importance or symbolism. This calls into question the role of objects found or imagined, fallible or perfect.



Charts for a Resurrection, 2024, Installation view, Photo by Ismail Noor of Seeing Things, Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabib Gallery, Dubai, UAE



Charts for a Resurrection, 2024, Installation view, Photo by Ismail Noor of Seeing Things, Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabib Gallery, Dubai, UAE

KoobookArchive.

Experiences and views on books and multiples
excerpts and notes from studies and conversations with book artists

Anna Guillot



Christophe Boutin, *The Studio Carte #3*, 1995, Offset printed, 31x23 cm, Carte d'Arte, Courtesy of KoobookArchive

There are so many conjectures and points of reflection for those who work and study the subject of artists' books. It is an area of artistic research that involves, no more and no less than others, languages, experimentation, technologies, contents and themes.

In the first decades of the last century, the book, understood essentially as a traditional tool for disseminating concepts, came to assume a different significance as an object of artistic investigation. Critics are unanimous in recognizing the full awareness of this transformation made by important innovative artists only from the beginning of the 1960s, also as a result of the input provided by technological media. Today, the principle applies of considering the artist's book – an artefact followed directly by the author in every phase, from design to material realization – as a spatio-temporal field of investigation equal to other venues of the visual arts.

Among the 'modes of the book' the presuppositions and modalities of 'bookmaking', the problems of the 'unicum' and the series, of the small and large print-run, of where the value of the work lies and what the value of art actually is, whether dissemination or exclusivity.

In the context of the KoobookArchive, the archive of books and art multiples that I founded in 2008 in Catania, IT, the direct relationship with the protagonists of Italian research areas such as Gruppo 70, the Visual, Visual and Concrete Poetry and Sound Poetry movements has been decisive and propaedeutic. Generators of interest and strong motivators were the contacts and assiduous acquaintances with Eugenio Miccini, militant artist and founder, with Lamberto Pignotti, of Visual Poetry in Florence, with Luciano Caruso and, again in Italy but in the Rome area, with Mirella Bentivoglio and Giovanni Fontana, authoritative artists and theorists on a European scale; figures who had a formative and experiential impact by involving me in the study and practice of artists' books. Meetings with Bruno Munari in his Milan studio, with Carlo Belloli at the ISISUF, with Giovanni Anceschi. Just to name a few. More generally, important stimuli towards research and critical analysis have also come since the early 1990s from encounters due to my collaborations with specialized magazines.

The Koobook archive features hundreds of artists and consists of about a thousand books, a small percentage of which concern the production of the multi- and intermediate research area conducted at my request for joint research projects with particular authors. Almost all the specimens are paper based; although connected with digital and new technologies, the experimental typology does not completely exclude paper and analogue.

The collection responds to a historiographical criterion and a sub-criterion



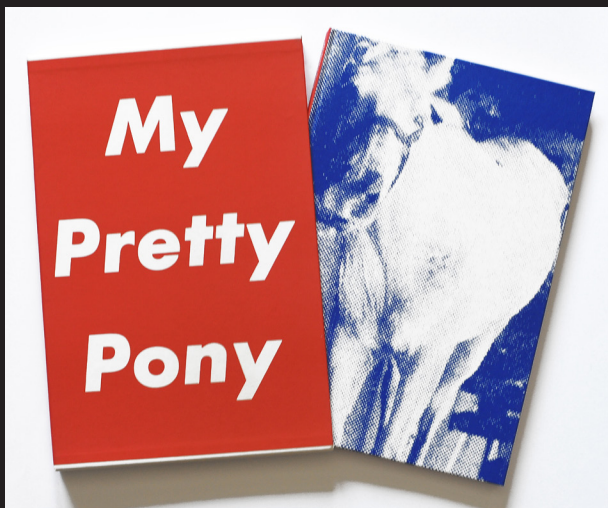
Mirella Bentivoglio, *Litolattine*, 1998, Cans and iron, Courtesy of KoobookArchive



Eugenio Miccini, *Ex Libris*, 1977, Mixed media and collage on photograph in wooden box, 52.5x52.55 cm, Private collection

referring to movements and artists. It ranges from the 1960s to 2000. Italian and European authors predominate; of particular interest and consistency in the Archive are the focal movements of the verbo-visual area and the Italian and French neo-avant-garde, the aforementioned visual, concrete, sound poetry. The Italian exponents Arrigo Lora-Totino, Belloli, Munari, Bentivoglio, Ugo Carrega, Caruso, Ketty La Rocca, Pignotti, Lucia Marcucci, Miccini, Giuseppe Chiari, Fontana, etc., and the French Julien Blaine, Henri Chopin, Ben Vautier, etc., some of them with quite prolific literary backgrounds, document the time span from the 1960s to the 1990s. Alongside them in the collection are the American pioneers of the book, to name but three: Edward Ruscha, John Baldessari, Lawrence Weiner. With them opens a section introducing a different and massive use of photography in connection with graphics. From the 1980s-90s-2000s, Europeans are in the archive: Ian Hamilton Finlay, the aforementioned Chopin, Blaine and Vautier, up to Christian Boltanski and Sophie Calle, to name a few. The 2000s are documented through the predominantly younger generation, big international names: Matthew Barney, Damien Hirst, Richard Tuttle, William Kentridge, Julian Opie, Roni Horn, Ettore Spalletti, Maurizio Cattelan, etc. In each area there are also books by lesser-known authors and research by my former students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Catania.

— Luciano Caruso, artist, theorist and cultural activist, saw bookmaking as a 'traverse exercise'. I have repeatedly quoted this definition, contextualising it in my reflections on the artist's book in order to take it as the central key to this particular operation: of 'making a book': as he put it. "KOOBOOK KOOBOOK. Matters of times and modes, of poetics and pulsations", is



Barbara Kruger, *My Pretty Pony*, 1989; 36x23.5 cm, Offset printed, Alfred A. Knopf, Courtesy of KoobookArchive



Antonio Freiles, *Blind Red Book*, 2014, Handmade, Colored paper, 15x11x1 cm, Self-published, Courtesy of KoobookArchive

the performable textual development in the form of a play that Giovanni Fontana makes of the Archive, and which gives a good idea of this complex transversality.

The following is a segment.

"[...] that the artist's book / in fact / once again / plays different roles / and performs many functions / and wears innumerable masks / so that it appears as a precious verbovisual occasion and as a brilliant narration / in plastic terms / as a shadow theatre and as a material spectacle / as a magic box / as a chamber of wonders / as a training ground for total adventures / as a playground / as a measuring stick for mental times and as a diary of the senses / as a as a product to be used or as a fetish / as a find / to be treasured / and as a gift to be cherished / as a trace / as a mute witness of the gesture / as a sign to be dispersed / to be interpreted / as a puzzle to be assembled / as a labyrinth to be traversed / as a perimeter to be defined / as a ritual object or as a technological sounding board / as a contaminating fabric / as a dazzling fire / but also as dejection and trash catalogue / as an exemplary indication or as a vulgar tool / as a poem / as a voice / as a score to be performed / as a container of crystallized sounds or as a truly sonorous instrument / as a gold mine / as a place to inhabit or as a nest to hatch / but also as a machine of transversal surprise / as a digital card / as an intermediary device / as a cybernautical message / as an electric and electronic circuit / or, on the contrary / as a sacred shrine / as a secret ark / as a treasure chest / even as a tombstone or as a confessional / and then as an occasion for transgression / as an erotic object / as a burlesque disguise / a carnivalesque joke or as a tragic mask / as a grotesque testament / as a grotesque testament / as a burlesque disguise / a carnivalesque mask or as a tragic mask as a tombstone or as a confessional / and then as an occasion for transgression / as an erotic object / as a burlesque disguise / as a carnivalesque lazzo or as a tragic mask / as a grotesque testament and as a dissipated legacy / as a map to be decrypted and as a passport to travel / as a lost occasion or as a recovered memory / and so on / so on / koobook koobook / koobook koobook / koobook koobook / by types / by genres / and variety / that".

Precisely in the case of Giovanni Fontana, a performer as well as a theorist, a specific book of his seems to apply to the entire content of his research and production. It is "Il libro dei labirinti" (The Book of Labyrinths), a book-work from 1996 that serves as a 'musical' score for an intermedial operation; a very full-bodied book that should be considered as 'pre-text', in the sense of 'germinal point', for the performative action, and also as 'hyper-text'. Each page is performed by Fontana with a specific direct action; the book is leafed through, read, perused and activated in its innumerable devices, in a synesthetic melee full of surprises. It is a matter of pages, of course, but also of different and unpredictable objects, devices and materials inserted between sheets held together by a tangle of threads and laces, perhaps alluding to ideally viable trajectories. Behind Fontana's back is projected the action filmed in macro, the action happening on the plane in front where author and work interact. This sort of folder that refers to a Wunderkammer and at the same time to a laboratory of technoscience is thus activated page by page as a generator of polysensorial perceptions and space-time coordinates.

More than 50 years ago, Eugenio Miccini, co-founder of Visual Poetry, conceived the link between aesthetic operation and society as a socio-political commitment to be practiced under the banner of 'semiological guerrilla warfare' - an exuberant linguistic guerrilla fought in the public square with the tools of culture - or rather of what was called 'counter-culture' in opposition to dominant thought - contending with the 'society of spectacle' in its own areas of action, mural, editorial, and advertising. Miccini told me how his interest in every phenomenology of communication and the trespasses derived from it flowed into the sense of his personal productions of display cases and artist's books, poem-objects and folders. One's mind immediately goes to the provocative "Piano regolatore insurrezionale della città di Firenze", a folder of free cards each reproducing a topographical map of neighbourhoods in the city of Florence realised with mixed techniques (Sampietro, Bologna 1972).

Miccini intended to practise a doing aimed at recovering manual skills - a doing that would constitute a playful activity oriented towards the acquisition of a 'liberated thought' - making objects that were obviously completely free of any kind of subservience to the market, only bearers of a shrewd metaphor for the struggle against technological-consumerist exasperation (the dominant thought in the West at that time). About my request to define the artist's book.

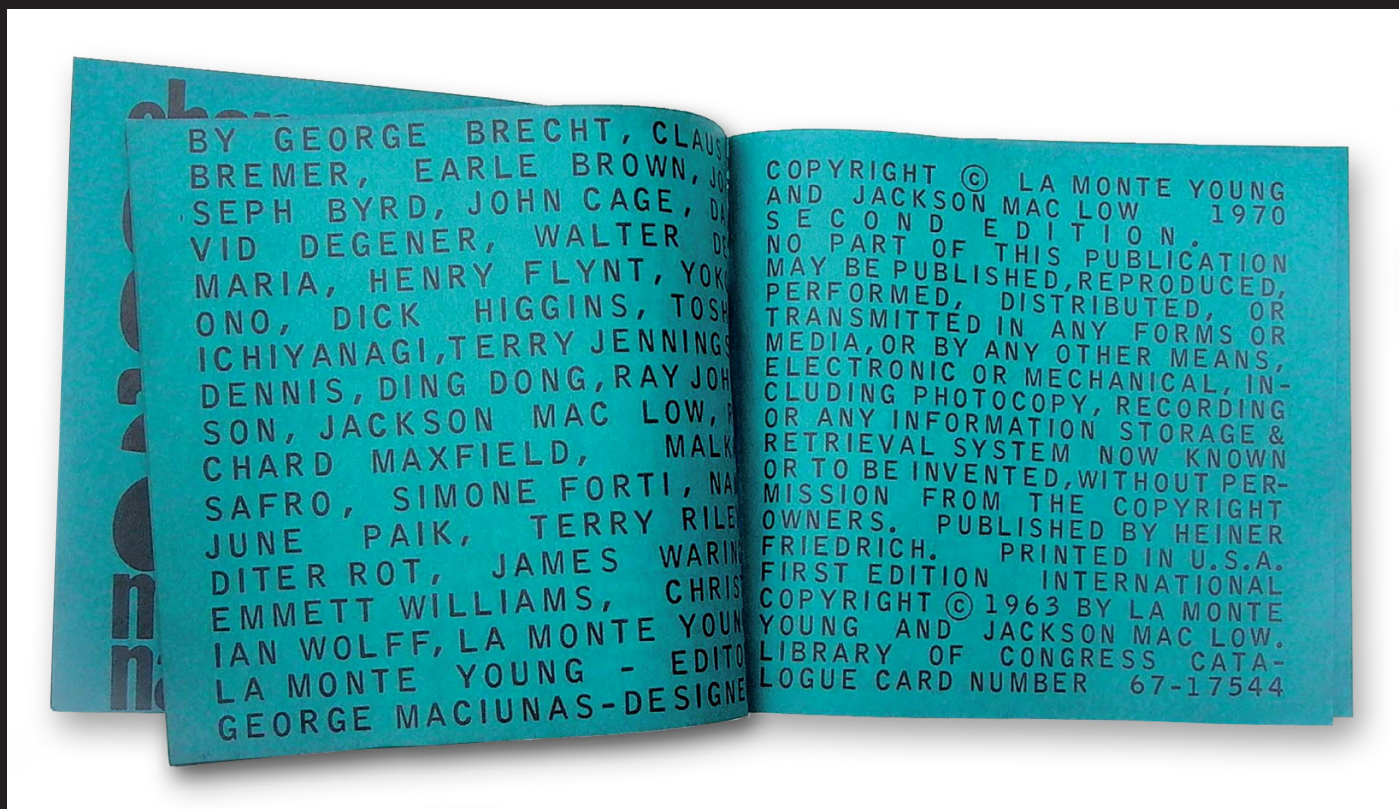
In the climate of the semiology studies conducted by Paolo Fabbri and Umberto Eco, in the early 1970s Miccini assembled in a "Libroggetto" (Techne, Florence, 1970) materials produced by artists, sending them by post and as a 'home exhibition'. This kind of penetration - which also strategically made use of canonical distribution techniques - obviously combined with other modes of communication, allowed Miccini to conduct his 'guerrilla warfare'. In a number of object-books that he himself manually produced and assembled, "Ut scriptura" (Techne, Florence 1978) and "Liber" (Techne, Florence 1980), he takes stock of the content and form of the book. 'For some time,' he writes, "artists have subjected the book, in various ways, to a tension that dilates its concept, technique, materials, to the point that it is



John Baldessari, Zorro. Two Gestures and One Mark, 2008, 11x15 cm, Offset printed, Oktagon

sometimes no longer recognizable, to the point of transferring its charismatic name to something else". And in "Recycling papers" (Techne, Florence 1979), made of typography waste, "This book (or anti-book) is an expression of doubt and, therefore, of research; of other creativity that our time cannot dispose of."

And here is what Miccini replied some twenty years ago to my request for a definition of the artist's book: "The artist's book? To this day there is no satisfactory definition [...] I can say, with an enthymeme, what it 'does' and why I do it, rather than say what it is. It is a practice prompted by the need to manifest a kind of creativity that neither satisfies other modes of expression nor replaces them. Certainly, among its virtues, there is that of 'handling' and 'manipulating' the book, of physically controlling what one wants to inscribe or figure in it or even simply place, and without delegating to others - mostly censors and bureaucrats - the realization (reification) of ideas, the pleasure of truly mixing the cards, of violating not only the sense of the rules of expression but also the forms and materials of the book, adapting it to the homologous transfiguration of the 'things' it contains. And then, circumventing large industrial print runs [...]"



La Monte Young, *An Anthology*, 1963, Jackson Mac Low, Courtesy of KoobookArchive

A rich and cultured conceptual value constitutes the essence of Eugenio Miccini's vision of art and the book, a pure intellectual.

Pictorial-plastic artefacts with an essential projectuality derive for Antonio Freiles from an entirely artisanal making process. I witnessed the procedure of the manufacture of the cellulose pulp he prepared in his studio-laboratory in Messina and the layering of the pigmented pulps for the construction and elaboration of long bands of paper, which, once dried, were folded like an organ on themselves to become leporelli with a bright Mediterranean or delicately Nordic chromaticism whose materiality could also be appreciated. Antonio Freiles has experimented and researched the artist's book extensively, even amassing a large number of specimens in order to build up a valuable collection. In addition, with the help of international experts, he has edited interesting publications on the subject under the label 'Carte d'Arte'.

Books and other multiples from the Koobook archive are the subject of analysis and study by experts, collectors and students; this material also constitutes living matter to be taken up as the subject of projects. About ten years ago, the "Anatomies" project focused on the structural anatomy of the book as a physical object, and at the same time on anatomy as a theme in the book itself (within the book, in terms of content). The project rendered precisely the point of view of Stéphane Mallarmé, who called the central part of open books 'my vagina'. Antonio Curcetti highlighted this concept in his very lucid focus on the exhibition (in 'Folio #12' published in 2015 by the Archive).

I mention this project because curiously enough, the idea of the artist's book mentioned by Richard Tuttle, an important American post minimalist author, presents a personal vision of a similar problematic to the one addressed by "Anatomies". In a conversation a few years ago, when asked to give me his views on the subject of the book and tell me about his experience, he replied verbatim: "[...] the first thing to talk about is the relationship to the human body. The body has a spine just as the book has a spine, the book has a cover, it opens, and the similarity can relate to the act of opening the arms; like the body, the book has an outside and an inside. I can consider a further point of proximity to the human body: holding a book triggers, or rather in itself is, a 'physical' relationship; the body of the 'reader' is in contact with the body of the book. These are connections that many are not aware of, they exist imperceptibly. That is why, as I said, for me the book is a kind of allegory of the body. Perhaps such a metaphor for many would be conceivable in terms of spirit, soul or heart. The difference between my approach and the presumably widespread approach is that for me this is very 'physical' and related to issues of vitality and actual corporeity. Almost always a book is understood as a cross between visual and verbal, in any case it is only truly inspiring when it solves the problem of a good cover, good content and the right paper that relates content and cover. Everything is defined in a harmonious and enjoyable form through research. For me as I conceive it, at the beginning it is a kind of chaos and the cover as well as the content have to solve form-color problems; one has to mould one's own nature to define the formal instance; just like for the human being, it is a matter of making the rational comfortable with chaos.

Like every project, the artist's book project has a process, beginning, development and conclusion. I am fully involved at every stage until publication. Then I no longer have any interest. The book is gone. I do not keep a single copy; I do not know where the books are, nor do I care to know. The moment of publication somehow corresponds to a death. I let my work go out into the world. Indirectly I say something about the body again, perhaps even in a religious sense. One of the most difficult contents of Christianity is precisely the idea of the transformation of the body of Christ into wine and bread. Some argue that it is the body of Christ and others that it is a representation of the body of Christ. It is an interesting idea. I am not taking a position on it; I just want to suggest that the book is also an example of how an artist and a reader come together spiritually and then let themselves go on a journey of knowledge. It is a real transformation for everyone involved: printer, graphic designer, reader, distributor; everyone is involved and that is exciting. When I finish each book, I punctually tell myself that I will never again undertake such undertakings. Nobody can imagine how much energy and time it takes to produce a book. That is why every time I think it will be the last. But then the phone rings and I am asked for another one and it starts again."

Interviewed with Emanuele Arielli

By: Fabio Gamberini



Lev Manovich, *A play for a winter city*, 2022, Digital images created with generative AI and edited in Lightroom

FG: Hello Emanuele, could you briefly introduce yourself to our audience?

EA: I am a professor of Aesthetics at the IUAV University of Venice, an institution focused on the design dimension of arts, design, and architecture. I have a philosophical background and complete my studies in Italy and Germany. Since 2018, I have been working on the topics discussed in this interview, when I began reflecting on the role of algorithmic data analysis in the cultural transformation of taste (a concept from aesthetic theory I have worked on), and since 2019, when I started exploring emerging AI technologies and their role in artistic production with Lev Manovich—an authoritative scholar of media theory and an artist. We began writing a book, which was published in installments on his website the following year. However, we paused because what was a niche and unknown topic exploded with the advent of new technologies that everyone now knows, from Midjourney to ChatGPT. So, we decided to observe and reflect on what was happening. Only now have we finished the book (*Artificial Aesthetics*), which will be published soon.

FG: In your paper *Calculated Risks: Strategies and Paradoxes of Uncertainty in the Arts*, you explore risk as a central element of the creative process. How do you think artificial intelligence might redefine or even eliminate this risk? Could the ability to generate an infinite amount of visual material reduce or nullify the

role of risk in certain art forms, potentially compromising artistic expression itself?

EA:

- Risk has always been a key category for the avant-gardes, where the artist puts themselves and their artistic practice at stake, and the work is not simply a (re)production of styles, genres, or formats, but constant innovation, venturing into unexplored territories. The "paradox" I discuss is that in contemporary art, we expect the artist to take risks and provoke, to break conventions, which has now become part of a cultural industry where risk itself becomes a "calculated" tool within the artist's practice and their relationship with the audience.
- The advent of AI—and before that, the spread of large-scale algorithmic data analysis procedures for artistic consumption, audience behavior, and people's tastes and preferences—has led to a view of some artistic and cultural production (not avant-garde) as something optimizable, where risk is minimized, especially in light of an ever-decreasing willingness to take even financial risks in production. A classic example is the pervasive algorithmic analysis system of a platform like Netflix (though this can be extended to Spotify for music), which tracks audience reactions, behaviors, and preferences to guide future productions: Netflix knows exactly what kind of stories, actors, genres, narrative arcs, and aesthetics are preferred, allowing them to invest in productions without the risk of the final product not being a success. The algorithm "knows" and optimizes the production process, avoiding failure but at the same time leading to a certain uniformity in what is offered to the public, which is extrapolated from past successes to shape future productions. There's less risk, but there's also less daring. These examples mostly pertain to mass-market art forms, different from more experimental and innovative arts, but we cannot rule out the possibility that AI, as an exploratory tool, might lead to "less risk-taking," as it can generate large-scale effective visual imagery, impactful rhythms and melodies for musicians, or text variants for writers. The cost of experimentation decreases because content can be created rapidly, reducing the risk of pursuing a path that turns out to be unfruitful.



Lev Manovich, Bookshelves, pictures, fragments, 2022, Digital images created with generative AI and edited in Lightroom

- Certainly, the issue of content inflation could be a risk not only because the exclusivity of a unique and unrepeatably creation might be lost but also because, despite the increased production capacity, the audience's ability to perceive and enjoy art and culture remains limited by our attentional capacity and mental and temporal resources.
- This is happening in a scenario where, even without AI, cultural content production already exceeds consumption demand. In popular culture, for example, SoundCloud (as of mid2024-) has 350 million songs produced by 40 million artists. According to 2023 data, more than 120,000 songs were uploaded to music platforms daily. Thus, we might question whether we really need music quickly produced by AI (as in the recent case of someone who did this, simultaneously creating bots to listen to these songs and automatically earning large sums). Perhaps in some contexts, we've already reached a saturation point, and we need AI systems for curation and critique to guide us through this ocean of content rather than producing more.
- The same could be said for the production of images, texts, and content in general, leading to new risks—namely, the dilution and fluidification of cultural production, where the importance will lie in being able to extract what is relevant or valuable to us from the sea of content, thanks to filtering and selection performed by critics or curators, perhaps even artificial ones, capable of reviewing the vast amounts of such content.

FG: Could you briefly explain the myth referenced in the title of your recent publication, *Aesthetics of Artificial Intelligence and the Anthropocentric Myth of Creativity*?

EA:

• In that essay, and in the book, I am about to publish with Lev Manovich on AI and aesthetics, we view AI as an interesting testing ground for some of the typical assumptions in our culture about artistic creation, which is seen as an exclusively human activity tied to the uniqueness of the artist's creative intuition. This idea has Romantic origins, emphasizing the exceptional nature of artistic genius capable of producing something new, but this does not align with the concept of creativity in earlier periods. In antiquity, the artist imitated reality and nature, serving as a conduit for divine, not human, inspiration. In the contemporary world, the assumption of the single creative individual has been questioned based on the idea that what we produce results from a complex web of collective and cultural influences, and that the new is really a transformation and reworking of the totality of experiences, education, and suggestions the artist has been exposed to. AI reinforces this critical perspective because what it generates is often the result of an unusual recombination of the iconographic, textual, or musical databases on which AI systems are trained, which the human artist can then use. The idea of unique, individual (and human) creativity is further challenged by technologies that draw on the collective (or subsets) of existing production, without being any less "creative" for it.

FG: AI-assisted art is still a relatively new form of expression, and many struggle to grasp the concept of "aesthetics," which you've explored extensively in your work. How do you see AI contributing to the creation and perception of beauty—not just through autonomously generated artworks, but by influencing creative processes and reshaping aesthetic standards?

EA: Aesthetics, among other things, concerns the perception and appreciation of objects, both natural (a landscape, an organism) and "artificial" (the artwork), as "artificial" originally referred to something produced by a human artifex, not by nature. Today, with AI, it almost seems as if humans produce what is genuinely natural, while the machine does not. However, I would dare say that the machine, as discussed earlier, liberates us somewhat from the intervention of the individual artifex, drawing from more collective and less predictable inspirations, so the machine produces more "naturally," while the individual produces the artificial. That said, AI is not only trainable to reproduce images, forms, texts, and compositions, but it

can also be trained to calibrate itself on which images, forms, texts, and compositions people consider aesthetically valuable, pleasant, or, simply, "beautiful." Of course, aesthetic preferences and tastes vary individually, but general trends can be traced, which the machine can analyze and extrapolate. An artist using AI can rely on the "taste of the machine," meaning what the machine has learned to be aesthetically appreciated forms, and let it assist in their artistic exploration and experimentation. Certainly, this can influence, in a feedback mechanism, both the artist's sensitivity, who is guided by the machine suggesting "what is effective" and "what is beautiful," and the public, who in turn is exposed to these products. Again, there is the "risk" that this leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy in the aesthetic field and to a uniformity of aesthetic criteria. But it is up to the artist to "use" the machine, to know how to tinker with it, making it do something unusual, not just following the statistically average taste. Or perhaps, in the evolution of AI, it will learn to be more provocative, daring to go beyond the data on which it was initially trained.

FG: In your writings, you've highlighted the varying reactions to AI-generated art. Do you believe the value of art is primarily linked to human emotion and creativity, or does the act of creation take precedence over who—or what—the creator is?

EA: Just as AI's advent marks a further step toward overcoming an anthropocentric conception of creativity, it also challenges a traditional, Romantic-derived idea of authorship. Imagine reading a captivating novel or admiring a painting that moves you. Then someone tells you these artifacts were created with AI assistance: does our perception and aesthetic impression diminish? If so, why, since nothing has changed in the appearance of the observed work? The novel that moved me, that captured me because its characters are so human and the story so engaging—does it cease to move us





Lev Manovich, *In the Garden*, 2023, Digital images created with generative AI and edited in Lightroom

because we no longer feel the presence of the writer behind it? The issue is complex and fascinating. Many of us might want to attribute value only to what has exclusively human intentionality and control behind it, but it's not certain that our attitude won't change in the future, perhaps in a direction where we no longer ask who the "real" author is behind the work (or better yet: with what processes, tools, and media the work was created) but focus on what remains, which is the relationship we establish with it. After all, in an age where collective writing and appropriation of images, texts, and sounds through sampling are common practices, who is the "author" becomes less important. Perhaps what matters more is the creation and its effect. If I'm moved, why should it matter who created it? I don't know if we are ready for this shift yet.

FG: As AI continues to become a more integral part of the creative process, how do you see the definition of art evolving? Do you think we will maintain a clear distinction between 'human-created' and 'AI-generated' art?

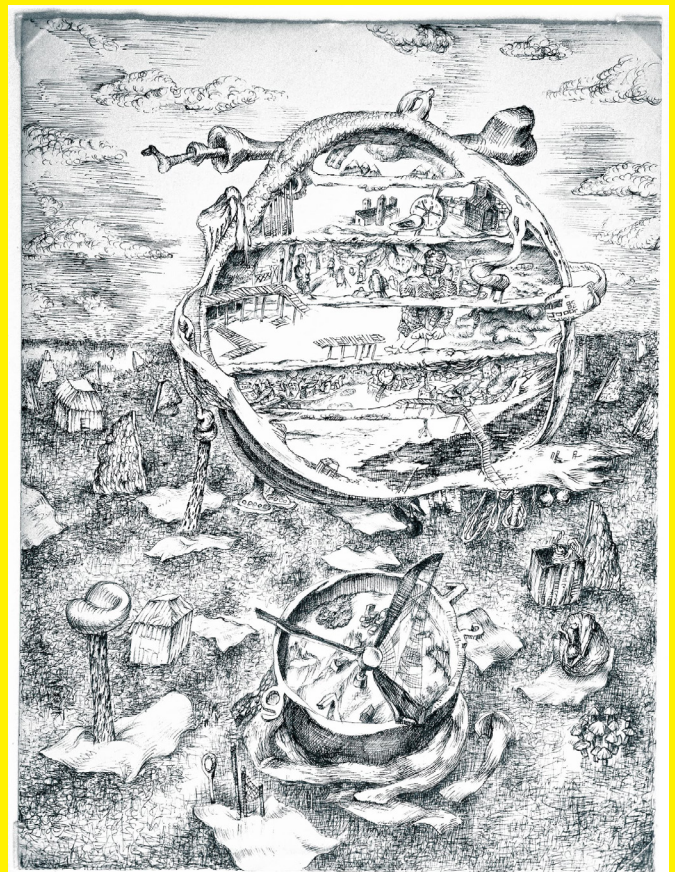
EA: Aside from the fact that the definition of art has always been a problematic issue (there are still those who don't consider Duchamp's 1917 urinal as "art"), there are already products of human culture where AI's contribution is present, whether as a tool for generating sketches, images, musical compositions, etc., and it doesn't seem like anyone refuses to consider these works as forms of human artistic expression. Additionally, in contemporary discussions about AI, there's a somewhat imaginative tendency to think of AI as it's portrayed in science fiction films, meaning a kind of autonomous entity with its own will and initiative. But the AI we're dealing with today is more of a complex tool that artists and non-experts use for experimentation, for finding inspiration, and for creating. However, we can certainly envision "without AI" and "with AI" forms of production, just as certain photography competitions distinguish between images "without post-production" (using digital tools like Photoshop, etc.) and those "with post-production," or like in daily consumption, we distinguish between a "handmade" artifact (like a vase made by a potter) and an "industrially produced" artifact (a vase made by industrial machines). In the future, there might be literary competitions or visual art contests for works created "without AI" or "with AI," but this would be an internal distinction within cultural and artistic production.

FG: In the arts, ambiguity, the undefined, and the open-ended are often seen as strengths that invite interpretation, while in machine learning, these can be challenges. How might we teach machines the undefined?

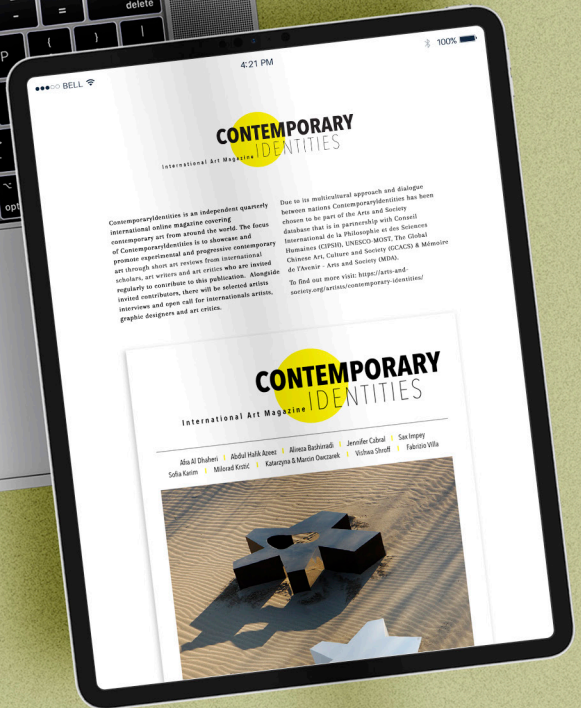
EA: I'll answer this briefly: why do we associate machines with the tendency toward definitiveness and unambiguity? This is again a cinematic stereotype where the mechanism seems bound to its mechanical and rational base, but nothing in principle prevents artificial devices (which are similar in structure to how the human brain works, i.e., neural networks) from learning to be "ambiguous" or from producing undefined images open to interpretation. However, if by undefined we mean something that somehow escapes its original programming (so a program that "generates the undefined" isn't truly undefined because it's the result of programming), then we need to ask what is ambiguous and indeterminate in human creation: perhaps that which eludes our understanding, that which isn't the product of programming and determination by someone's intervention (the programmer). Humans have initiative, while the machine—as we understand it today—does not. To give it initiative, we'd have to let it roam free in the world, make its own experiences, and develop its own drives. Only then would the product of its actions be "undefined" in the sense of not being defined by its original programming. It's not impossible to imagine this, but we're still far from realizing it, and perhaps we're not particularly interested in doing so, nor is it necessarily desirable.

FG: Are there any upcoming projects or events that you'd like to share with us?

EA: I'd like to take the opportunity to announce that from May 8th to 10th, 2025, one of the first major international conferences on the ethical and aesthetic aspects of AI-generated images will take place. The *Ethics and Aesthetics of Artificial Images* conference at IUAV, Venice. There will be internationally renowned scholars and artists working in these fields, such as Joanna Zylińska, Lev Manovich, Antonio Somaini, and Francesco D'Isa.



Lev Manovich, Closed world, 1978-1985, Selected work on paper, drawings, etching



www.contemporaryidentities.com
info@contemporaryidentities.com
www.facebook.com/ContemporaryIdentities
Instagram: contemporary_id