



ROBERTO  
ATELIER **PIETROSANTI**

**TEXTS BY**

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Marco Lodoli  
Gianfilippo Mancini  
Massimo Morasso  
Camilla Balbi

**Gli  
Orl**







All forms of cultural and artistic expression – theatre, music, cinema, festivals and touring productions – are acknowledged and supported with public funding, but visual art is hardly ever included in the possible targets for state or local-government support.

Historically, artists have always depended on patronage, be it “religious”, private or that of the art market.

A patronage that charitable foundations and, in particular, banks continue to provide, playing a formidable role in maximising our nation’s talents, skills and, I would say, examples of excellence.

Roberto Pietrosanti is one of those exceptional talents and, as so often happens, his home town has been slow to take note of his artistic achievements. With the support of this book and other related initiatives focusing on his work, the Fondazione Carispaq intends to rectify an entirely unjustified “carelessness”, and in doing so is simply performing one of the key missions of bank-run charitable foundations, which is that of celebrating and supporting gifted artists whose work deserves attention.

An attention that Roberto Pietrosanti merits because of the serene audacity with which he has chosen to express himself. His work has historical roots, drawing vital lymph from the great masters of post-war abstractionism (Francesco Lo Savio, Lucio Fontana, Mark Rothko), but it has also been shaped by early collaborations with major twentieth-century artists (Bruno Ceccobelli, Fabio Mauri and Mauro Staccioli). He is currently producing work characterised by a pared-down minimalism, powerful in its impact and incisively communicative, which has won much international acclaim.

Recognition in his home region has, however, been lacking.

Redressing this lack is, for the Fondazione Carispaq, the key aim of the current initiative.

A mission that is part of the work that the Foundation performs on a daily basis, which involves offering aid and support to the many forms of cultural energy that our region produces and that all contribute to social, economic and cultural growth.

Marco Fanfani  
*President of the Fondazione Carispaq*

L’Aquila 2018

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## INTRODUZIONE

Lucia Presilla

I began then to be convinc'd,  
that to succeed in any art,  
we must cultivate it all our lives.

Voltaire, *A Discourse on Tragedy*

Many of us have experienced the pleasure of watching a landscape from the window of a plane, unfurling below us in ever larger sections... trees, houses, hills. Artists of the past conveyed a similar sense of elation with bird's-eye perspectives, vistas alive with details given unity by the treatment of light and pictorial space, provoking a continual oscillation between the overview and the delight of vividly and precisely observed details. A similar approach – in other words, a desire to survey Roberto Pietrosanti's work of over thirty years with a gaze that is unified and panoramic but, simultaneously, also capable of allowing the reader to focus on individual creative moments – has inspired this present volume which is, in reality, the fruit of a long period of incubation. A long period, as we have said, because the artist's journey seems to have been shaped by and dense in episodes, characterized by repeated collaborations, the intermixing of languages, site-specific pieces and series of works in ferment, continually generating new lines of research and, with them, the need to probe, select, pare down and make distinctions. Across these pages individual nodes spread out to form maps and itineraries that can be followed diachronically, like the building blocks of an existence progressively accumulating or evolving. The resulting atlas contains myriad alternative paths: detours, switchbacks, intersections, reprisals, leaps, karstic phenomena (a term I use far from accidentally), parallels and sudden accelerations. The structure of the book therefore resembles a sequence of blocks in chronological order – each containing the critical texts written by the diverse authors who have concerned themselves with Pietrosanti's work, along with the works to which they refer, organized by type or by thematic cycles. It is a structure intended to reflect both the variety and breadth of the artist's research and his ongoing exploration of certain themes and motifs that recur throughout his work.

Gouged into a sheet of paper, a motif might resurface, sometimes many years later, like a wadi in the desert, in a new garb, a different medium, beneath another sky: the empty monochromes created at the beginning of the 1990s, with wire threads extended to outline sections of space – evidence of

**Untitled** 2002,  
cm 150x125, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection.



a “passion for geometry” and of the artist’s remaining “classical in times that are not” (Fabio Mauri), as well as a natural leaning towards architecture; the *marouflages* that trap light within them, generating “ovoid forms of a mysterious (...) kind” (Ada Masoero); the “silence of white” (Vincenzo Trione), to which Pietrosanti gives voice in the form of legions of pinheads.

The artist’s works move between geometrical, spatial and textural coordinates, “matrices” formed of offset planes, spheres formed of sheet metal, walls formed of brass, its golden yellow dulling as time wears on. Like Machiavelli, he dons regal attire in order to enter the “ancient courts of ancient men”: Etruscan goldwork, Fra Angelico, Giovanni Pisano, Lorenzo Lotto, but also Fontana, Burri, Lo Savio, Morandi, Bacon, Reinhardt, and many others with whom he keeps up an uninterrupted dialogue.

He intercepts volumes and spaces, his hands sculpting the air with a marshalling energy. He reasons in terms of the inhabitability of artworks, although this in no way means that they are physically accessible, as Andrea Valcalda remarks with regard to the project entitled *Giardino italiano*, which it is impossible to “enter, or stroll through (...): it is a garden enjoyable exclusively via its guarded contemplability”. He often invents small architectural structures, given varying degrees of complexity and completion but all eliciting contrasts, sometimes strident – as in the case of the rough, corroded interior of the *Antro* [cavern] which stood in front of the Ara Pacis, at odds with the plain, elemental exterior of the structure, “carved perfectly out of a square block of stone” (Luca Ricci) –, sometimes disorientating – as in the columns, the emblem of classical antiquity, that he decontextualized and transposed into a contemporary idiom at the Barberini Vineyard for the exhibition *Post classici* and then propelled into an intense dialogue with the Sorgenia building in Milan. Incursions and digressions attract him: sorties into other disciplines such as cinema, dance, literature, poetry and music. Perhaps because every encroachment on other territories sets in train further investigations, and demands the activation of linguistic and communicative strategies in order to achieve a balance between the different arts at play on each occasion. Among his most recent gambles, a particularly daring one took him to the crest of the Tusco-Emilian Apennines, drawn there by a voice heard amid the sound of horses’ hooves and whispered poems. A fragmentary Annunciation, crisscrossed with jagged presages of turmoil incised with lasers into metal panels, “the age-old clash of Orient and Occident, of image and idea” (Camilla Balbi). Attempting to grasp the ungraspable. “And yet we must be very bold. Without audacity, without extreme audacity, there is no beauty”, as the 52-year-old Eugène Delacroix remarked in his journal. The temerity of beauty is a challenge to which Pietrosanti has risen, without fear.

Rome 2018

Untitled 1999,  
cm 45x40, pins on canvas





Untitled 2013,  
polyptych cm 170x150, acrylurethane  
paint on canvas-lined PVC panel.  
Private collection





## THE EMPTY MONOCHROME

Fabio Mauri

“There are invisible relationships between things the invisibility of which is, in reality, a form of blindness in the viewer, or the lack of a habit of noting observable facts.”

In Roberto Pietrosanti’s exhibition, dark iron structures weld/splice themselves together or break apart, remaining united by a single thread that extends out beyond a real, or ideal, plane. In this exhibition I have, I tell you, seen a not-insignificant chapter in the modern history of the monochrome. The monochrome – by which we mean an idea registered in the reiterated hue of a single field [of colour], generating energy and language, blanketing a piece of the world as though it were a sample of an entire universe, a projective and infinite screen, a crystalline definition of conventional representational space – has become (as it was to start with) an interpretative/critical classification, but first and foremost a sort of “*a priori*” in contemporary artistic practice.

The concepts expressed and applied in diverse places converge in one definition of the monochrome as an expressive approach to the world’s un-representable universe, one that in its narrative singularity might almost be overlooked; in the same way, they also foretoken an insurmountable gap (perhaps temporary) between the world and he who represents it.

The conceptual creation of a projective plane has to invisibly connect (the unifying thread we mentioned) the theme of the art and its range of ideas, almost as though enacting a physical, and not just linguistic, experiment which extends in real terms beyond each of these categories. This is the idea behind the monochrome. This, in my eyes, is Roberto. Or, it seemed to me, this is what he was doing. With one particular

Untitled 1990,  
cm 100x70x50, stainless  
steel, wire

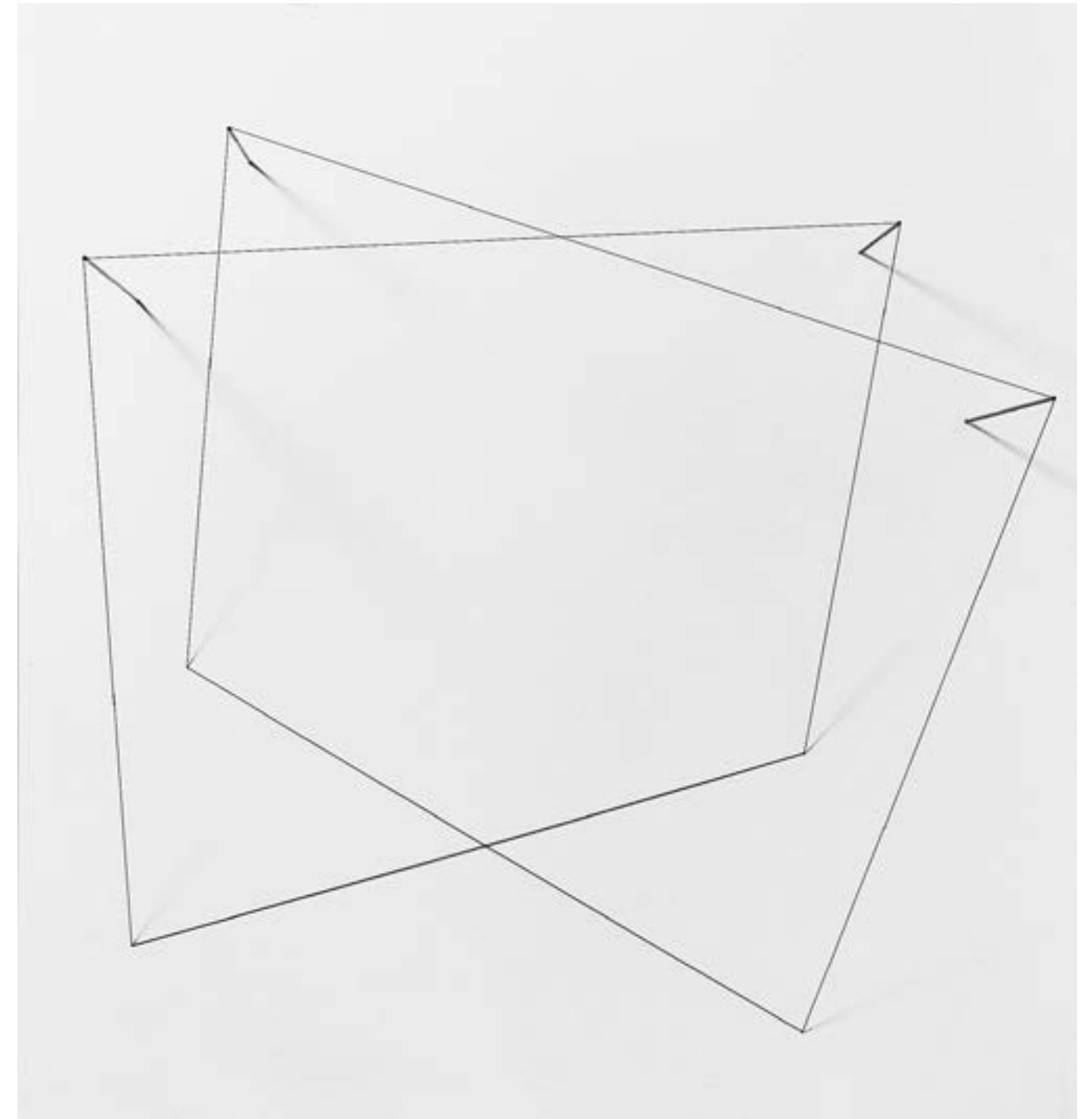


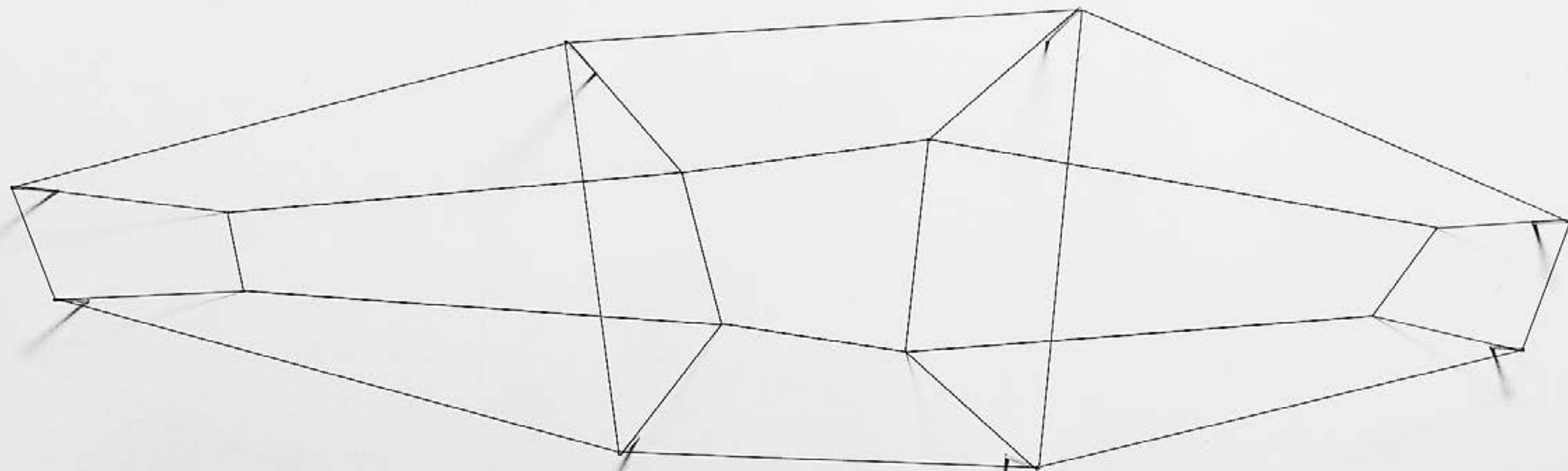
**Untitled 1990,**  
cm 60x70x6, zinc box  
with glass, mixed media on  
plywood, wire.  
Private collection

Opposite,  
**Untitled 1992,**  
cm 150x180x60, stainless  
steel, wire.  
Private collection

idiosyncrasy which explains its novelty. His monochrome empties itself out. It assigns to the image only iron contours: the essential outlines of its origin. Iron rods jut out towards the viewer, supporting the unitary and unifying projection of the thread – a geometrical solid on an empty base, effectively presented, in conceptual terms, as a surface more historical than geometrical –, the projection of one artistic memory favoured above others because it is integral to the theme of painting, and because it is his own – that of the artist, who establishes the foundations of his very idiosyncratic sculpture in a monochrome surface. The invisibility outlined by the space it occupies on the wall is, effectively, monochrome. There the monochrome empties itself of the intention to blanket the world, it becomes efficacious by exhibiting its own fundamental geometrical invisibility.

Pietrosanti imposes all the severity of such a concept. As though at the root of the pattern simulated or physically represented by the geometries of thread, plane or intersections there were inevitably an unbending idea, one almost hostile to the libertarian art of our time: a geometrical will to get to grips with it, to be seen to disown any deviation from the essential discourse. Something not unlike the alphabetical *erasure* of the







1960s. The territory that Roberto Pietrosanti's style occupies is that of the analysis of fundamentals as a fruitful introduction to the poetic action. Adults (even in art), ex-Bonapartists, myself included, are inane in comparison with this sense of severity, apparent closure and singularity. Adults can permit themselves infantile actions and jokes that are forbidden in youth. It may sound implausible, but that's how it is.

The quality that young Roberto possesses is that of perceiving the integrity of an order in the conditions of complexity and of extreme sensitivity to the hazardous overall conceptual, critical and artistic situation in which the work emerges and crystallises, in art, today, right now. So Pietrosanti's works seem to offer a lesson rather than take an exam. Or, more precisely: they teach a lesson, having taken the exam, and passed it with flying colours.

In Art, as in Physics or Mathematics, (and this is an ancient tradition), a student braves the exam and then immediately begins to teach. The disciple becomes a master. Rightly so, if merit permits. This I wrote of Roberto Pietrosanti some years back, in 1990, in a text that Roberto had asked of me, but which didn't arrive on time, for his first catalogue. Burri and Fontana remain present. They are the emblems from which he started. There is no baroque superfluity in this art. Rooted in a passion for geometry, there is, rather, still in course and progressing, sober work regarding the foundations of the contemporary artistic action. Just as there is in his analysis of a "given" convention that governs the manner in which art is currently exhibited. Not in a sociological sense but from a structural point of view, regarding the work and its physical-poetic capacity to expand, forwards and backwards, as far as its own roots, rather than the social system that hosts it. Pietrosanti's work has, felicitously, included *authentic sculptures* and *areas of figuration* made out of the very walls of the gallery in which he exhibited (1992).

Wires, or what seemed to be slack lengths of iron wire left to assume their natural curves, in fact turned out to be gaps between sheets of plywood, as though they had been badly fitted together. A genial and radical invention. The geometry, if closely examined, snaps (remove a nail and the wire contorts), losing the capacity to present itself as an indispensable mental category, almost divine but also a little miserly. And in contradiction with the extraordinary multiplicity of forms that occur in the universe.

Roberto Pietrosanti remains classical in times that are not.

In times when anything can be esoterically adopted or believed. Except for the *fundamentals*, which are, I would hazard, metaphysically indispensable and demand a certain underlying firmness, and where Pietrosanti is, powerfully, at home.

In some ways the young artist's choices are profound acts of stylistic faith, rather than exercises in experimentation. Yet, here, nothing of the

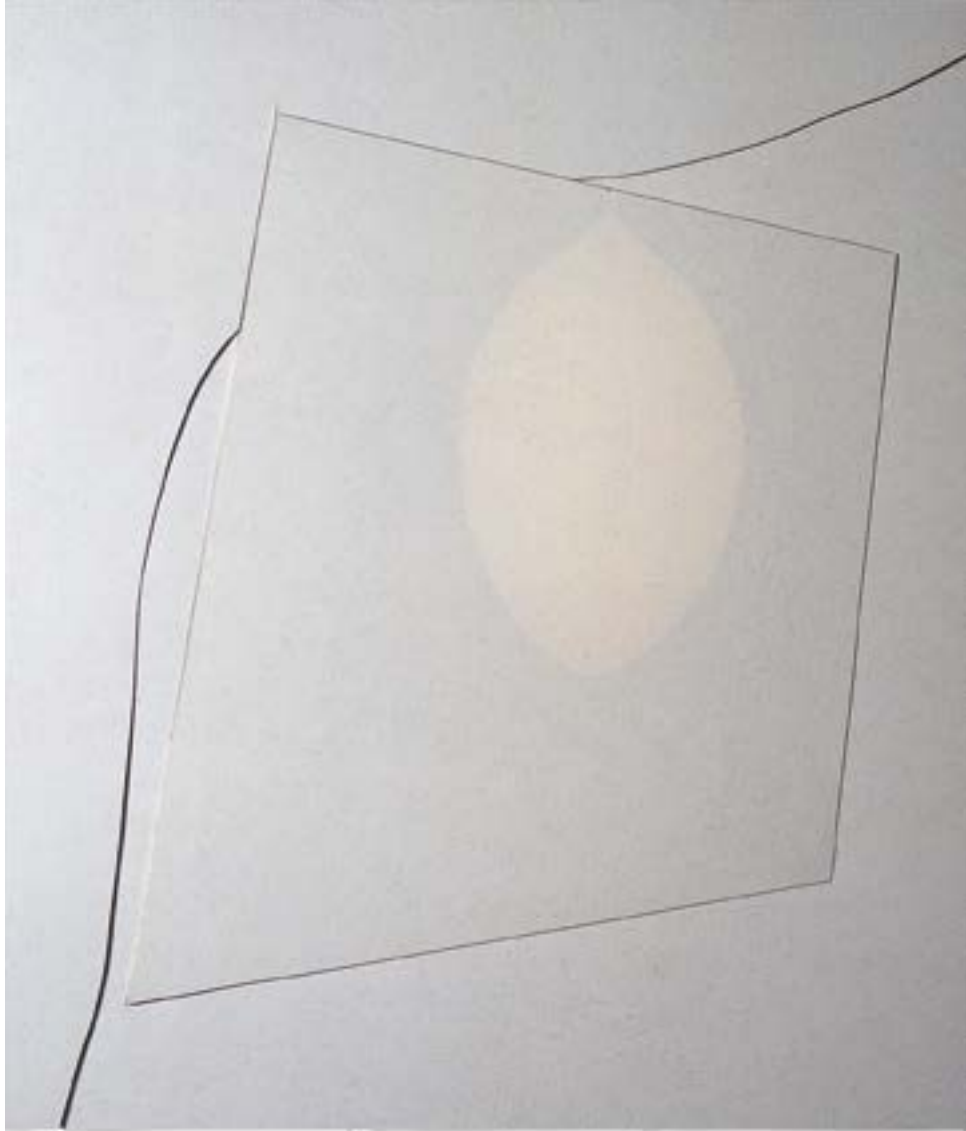


geometry adopted is left untouched: seen at close quarters, the tension or the squaring of the geometrical form that supports the artist's construction has been intimately tampered with. The axiom, the most classical of axioms, ceases to be conventional or dogmatic and becomes tractable material. The Pythagorean excess of the underlying structure is intercepted, not so that it may be destroyed but for the sake of a legitimate additional conjugation.

The process of breaking through into the work rather than out of it, an undertaking of this kind – a substantial one in certain works that are several square-metres in size and the initial basis for which is the space, a primary and shifting interpretation of the space itself – produces limpid geometric surfaces, *bas-reliefs* which in their reference to the prince of spatial clarity, Lucio Fontana, seem certainly not a form of plagiarism but simply a successive development. Pietrosanti turns, with naturalness, in a direction against which diverse artists have tested themselves, remaining, in my opinion,

**Untitled** 1990, cm  
70x60x6, zinc box with  
glass, mixed media on  
plywood, wire. .  
Collezione Serena e Paolo  
Gori, Prato

On the previous pages,  
**Untitled** 1990,  
cm 80x300x60, stainless  
steel



**Untitled** 1995, cm 103x90,  
raw canvas on plywood.  
Private collection

Opposite,  
**Untitled** 1994,  
cm 185x155, raw canvas on  
plywood

On the previous pages,  
Mara Coccia Gallery, Rome  
1992, **Untitled**, mixed media  
on plywood

prisoners of it. He emerges from an orthodoxy with great richness. Part of the reason for this, it seems to me, is the fact that these monochromes appear to be the containing framework and initial platform for geometric forms. A single diaphragm for two directionalities, the inward and the outward, to which the horizontality of painting or the fullness of sculptural volume are visibly anchored. It is an intellectual metaphor, rendered palpable, that involves a determinate idea of painting, a new approach to art's conventional space, a symbolic solution to the objective and relative relationship between the artist's self and the world. These are, that is to say, *screens* that absorb or expel images. Of course this affects me.

Rome 2018









## THE SILENT MUSIC OF THE MONOCHROME

Ada Masoero

Among the many ways in which one can swim against the current in art, one – the most difficult and laborious – involves abandoning the route trodden by everyone else, rejecting what is obvious, agreed, “fashionable”, to seek out ever-more complex technical and mental challenges. This has been the choice made by Roberto Pietrosanti, who, when he began his career at the very beginning of the 1990s, amid the storm of colour and gesture of the Transavanguardia, chose the silence of the monochrome, and who today, amid the prevailing (and homologised) climate of neo-conceptualism, continues, with rigour, his research, which also involves a meticulous and judiciously employed artisanal expertise. He explores the many side-roads of this route, sounds out its various possibilities and arrives, in this way, at results that at times appear to be very distant from the starting point, in reality fitting perfectly into a project which is articulated, certainly, but profoundly coherent. Not only that: today it is also an unusual experience to enter an artist’s studio and find no trace of assistants busy translating (with greater or lesser difficulty) the “concept” welling from the artist’s mind into “work of art”. Pietrosanti does everything himself, incorporating an extremely slow rhythm into each of his pieces, which require months and months of work. And which then display them, those

Centre Georges Pompidou,  
Paris 1994, **Marmo Asiatico**  
**Altroteatro Company**,  
set design



**Untitled** 1994, cm 70 (diameter),  
black denim canvas on wire mesh

Opposite,  
Piano Nobile Gallery, Perugia,  
**Untitled** 1993, cm 80 ø, raw canvas  
on wire mesh + **Untitled** 1993,  
cm 240x180, raw canvas on plywood

months, and present them to the gaze of the viewer in the form of an appearance that is both perfect and natural, because just as in nature (*“natura non facit saltus”* admonished the medics of the school of Salerno) here, too, every result requires long periods of “fermentation” to arrive at completion. At perfection, one is tempted to say. Nowadays Pietrosanti’s rarefied time is occupied by canvases pierced by millions of microscopic pins with which he re-evokes, in his own way, the process of granulation discovered by the Etruscans and that they translated into refined jewellery. He, however, in a sort of deliberate short circuit between slowness and speed, applies this painstaking process to signs so dynamic as to appear to have emerged from the kinetic research of Giacomo Balla: interwoven trajectories, which he traces, not directly onto the clean white canvas, but onto paper, then transferring them onto the canvas with the ancient technique of the *spo/vero*, and following the marks left by the paper’s little perforations, thickening and rendering denser, or, on the contrary, thinning and refining the lithe trail with the addition or subtraction of a handful of pinheads. The result is, as always with Pietrosanti, disturbing. It is a deception of the senses: only in coming right up to the canvas do we discover what those marks are made of – as sure but irregular as if they had been traced freehand with charcoal – emanating an opaque and suffocated light because they are made with a special material, that of the brass pins whose glaring yellow-gold is moderated by a process of nickel-coating which brings it nearer to silver, toning it down without, however, “cooling” it. The choice of this material is the fruit of long research, of trials and errors (errors in relation to what he had clearly in mind, without managing to pin it down), the initial stages of which are there, on the walls of the studio, translated into pieces in which the background is shinier (*“too shiny, artificial”*, he explains) or the line is darker (*“they were traditional pins: the effect was too cold”*, he comments now). Because, he says, in working, for him, *“it is the mastering of the material that is the challenge. The physicality of the work”*.<sup>1</sup> And it is no small thing, even

1. From a conversation between the writer and Roberto Pietrosanti in his Roman studio (July 2006). Except where stated otherwise, all of the artist’s remarks quoted here are taken from this conversation.

this, in these times of increasingly exaggerated “volatility” (technical and mental) in the languages of art. But the beginnings of his career, as we said, lie at the start of the 1990’s: after eight years of study at the conservatoire, thanks to a passion for art as sudden as it was accidental, which infected him whilst visiting an exhibition of Turcato and other Italian abstract artists of the 1970’s, Pietrosanti enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts and was also, for a while, assistant in Bruno Ceccobelli’s Roman studio. But of his training in classical music he has conserved the compositional rigour and the capacity to create pieces apparently very distant from one another whilst making use of an alphabet of few recurrent forms, almost as though they were the seven notes: his few signs are always present in his work; it is just that they emerge in different manners and moments, to then recombine in ways that are always novel.

The first pieces, from 1990 (shown in Rome by Mara Coccia in his first solo exhibition) were made of long wires stretched out on metallic rods tracing precise geometric patterns that created false volumes in the space: *“the volume is realised with a thread, like a drawing in space”*,<sup>2</sup> he explained in a conversation with Barbara Rose, who, in turn, noted how these pieces in which the wires draw a non-existent volume, establish, significantly, “a dialogue between object and void”. Which has become one of the constants in Pietrosanti’s thinking and work, his pieces always developing a close and vital relationship with the space in which they breathe; they “invade” it, in a manner of speaking, and they modify it, careless of the frame and of their objective limits, sustained by the artist’s specific desire to reformulate the space: *“I don’t know how to define my space”*, he says, *“whether it is that of the painter, the sculptor or the architect”*,<sup>3</sup> and, again, in the same lines: *“one has to create the space of a place”*.

Therefore it is no surprise that the next pass brought him to environmental art. Already, in his second Roman one-man show, at Mara Coccia’s gallery in 1992, we encounter the wooden “reliefs”, with which he lined the entire room, and the pattern of his fine ascending signs, as light and irregular

2. “Conversazioni con Barbara Rose”, in B. Rose - E. Trevi, *Roberto Pietrosanti*, Rome, Casta Diva, 2001.

3. Ibid.





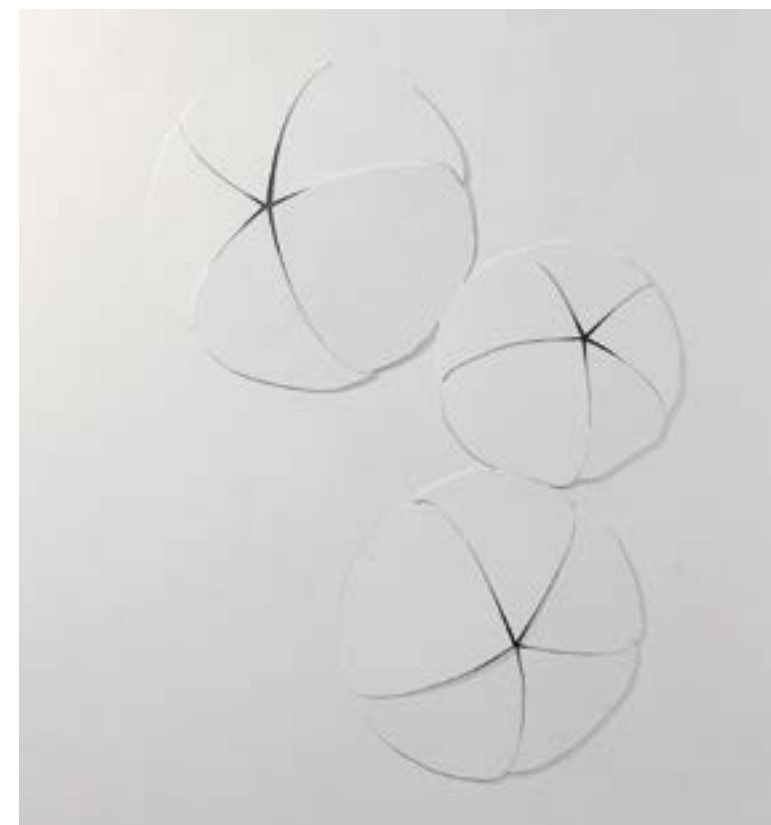
as pencil lines (in reality they are very carefully calibrated fissures: here – again – the third dimension), capable, however, of radically altering the spatial perception of whoever ventures within them. In the same exhibition another of Pietrosanti's successful inventions makes its appearance (extremely young – he was twenty-five at the time –, he demonstrated a prodigious mastery of idea and material). They are canvases in which there float ovoid forms of a mysterious and spellbinding kind: ectoplasms, pure apparitions of light with no clear outlines, as though immersed in a mist that forces us to peer, unsuccessfully, harder. The mystery is easily solved, but only by turning the canvas round – it is lined, with the exception of the luminous oval, with a board: the light that we perceive is, therefore, the ambient light of the room, which filters through the canvas, reverberating on the wall and returning, softened, to our gaze without having been intercepted by the opacity of the board behind. Something which, in negative, calls to

**Untitled** 1998,  
cm 154x142, mixed media on  
plywood. Private collection

Opposite,  
**Untitled** 1995,  
cm 158x133, mixed media on  
plywood. Private collection







mind the research of Francesco Lo Savio, an artist as great as he is neglected: moreover, Pietrosanti admits, “*Lo Savio is one of my maestros, along with Fontana, Burri, Manzoni, Klein, Rothko and Reinhardt*”. Every artist has them. Few acknowledge it. He does. He has, it must be said, chosen giants, the fathers of post-war abstract art, and then he has read, re-read and sounded them, and like every true artist he has reinterpreted them, creating something exclusively his own but rooted in history.

The following year he experimented<sup>4</sup> with a new medium, which has recently made its return, albeit camouflaged in white, in his painting with pins: it is an unprepared linen canvas with which, in that exhibition, he created vast monochromes inhabited by the silhouettes of columns outlined in the background, the only allusion to volume being a curving of the weft. Unprepared canvases which then, as if grabbed by a colossal hand, mutate into irregular “balls”, almost as if they were the giant transposition of the rag balls with which pre-war

4. At the Piano Nobile gallery, Perugia.

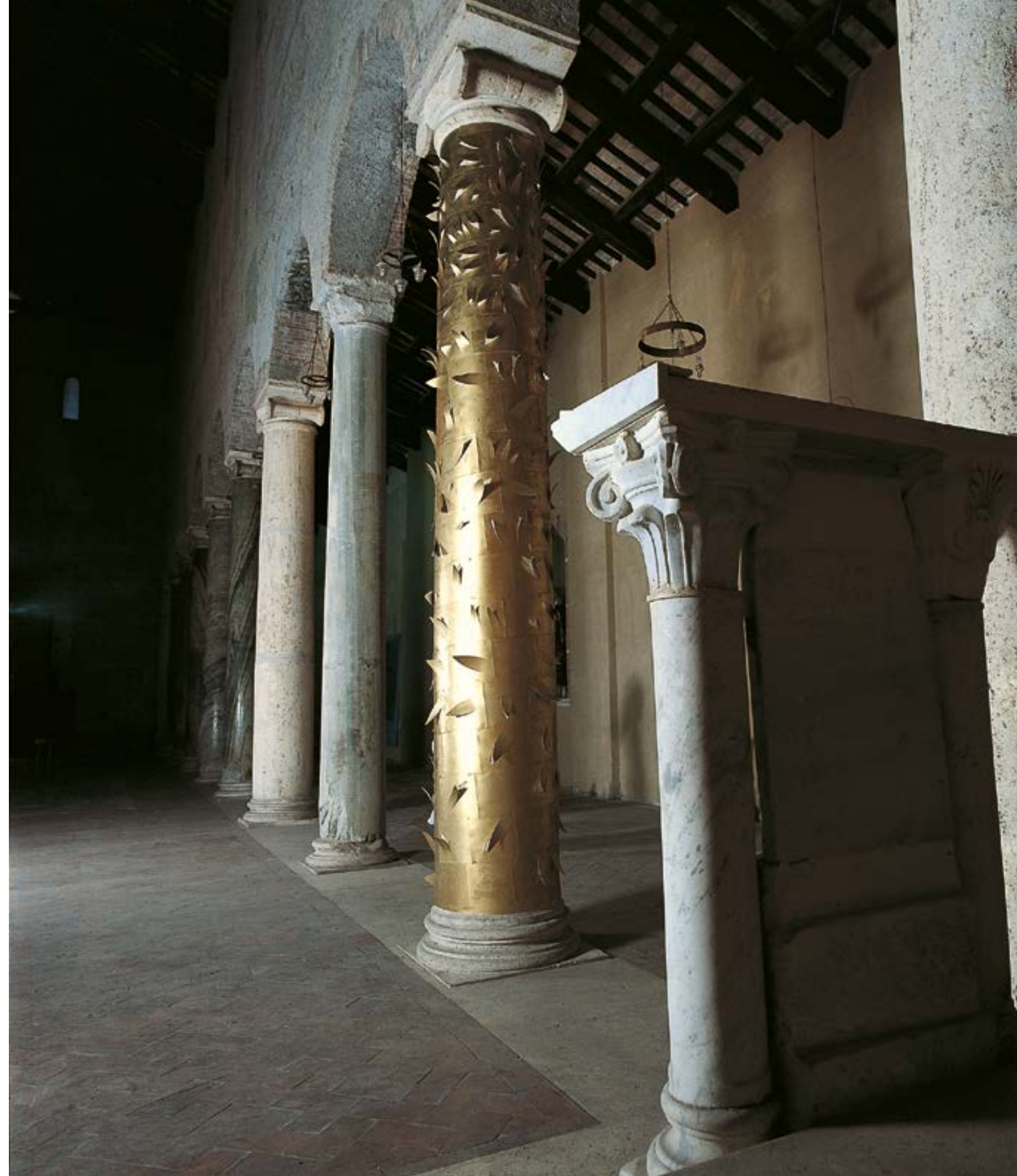
**Untitled** 1998,  
cm 154x142, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection

Opposite,  
**Untitled** 1999,  
cm 154x142, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection



Untitled 1997,  
cm 57x44, brass.  
Private collection

Opposite,  
Church of San Pietro alla Carità,  
Tivoli, **Untitled 1996**, brass





children played. This is still monochrome, but speckled with the visible weave of the canvas, with its natural colours. And the passage, sometime later, from this to polychrome seems natural: but it is a “chaste” Morandian polychrome, always obtained with natural pigments, and fruit, in any case, of the juxtaposition of pieces that are in themselves monochrome. These polychromatic pieces in various earth tones, crisscrossed with the usual incised ascending forms, were presented in Rome in 1996<sup>5</sup>, the same year in which another “mother” work first saw the light, progenitress of many of his subsequent pieces: this is the (magnificent) piece that he created for a Romanesque church in Tivoli. The trunk of one of the columns in the main body of the church is clothed in brass and from its glinting surface there protrude pointed barbs, these too in brass: “*They are the thorns of Christ’s crown*”, he explains with simplicity, “*a thought and an image that have fascinated me since I was a child and that seemed to have always been present in that sacred space*”. And herein lies the power of Pietrosanti’s work: in not being afraid of “beauty” (nowadays fled from, almost abhorred, by the great majority of artists) without, however, slipping into aestheticism. And in being able to evoke images that we all hold within us, because they are part of our most ancient cultural identity, re-proposing them, however, in new forms, poetic and potent, capable of making our deepest chords vibrate in unison with his own.

The same pointed forms, natural-looking (pointed leaves or thorns as the case may be) but which are obtained, instead, by meticulously stamping the base of each one with miniscule rivets, reappear (after other pieces), infinitely multiplied, in the imposing work created in 2004 for Piazza dei Goti in Ravenna. The area, in one of Italy’s most precious cities, is that of Enichem [the Italian chemical giant], devoid of history, devoid of soul, devoid of identity. And yet, following the artist’s intervention, this place devoid of qualities really does become a “space”: on the white stone paving, as Pietrosanti wanted, the reflections of the brass were, for a time, dazzling. The place transformed itself into a mirage, into a dazzling illusion. Then pollution intervened, in the space of a few weeks (and not the months or years that were expected) oxidising the metal of the base and of the “thorns”: “*The gold has died*” – says the artist, pleased with the intervention of fate – “*and it has all become more forceful*”. He does, it must be said, believe very strongly in fate: “*It is the occasion that generates the work. It happened in the church in Tivoli, it happened in Ravenna, it always happens to me. I keep myself in training, then the occasion sets me going*”.

And it is from this monumental work that a cycle of very recent work has budded: works on paper, fruit once again of an element of chance (“at

Untitled 2002,  
cm 140x120, brass on  
plywood.  
Private collection

5. At A.A.M. Architectura Arte Moderna, Rome







Fabriano they created paper sufficiently large, thick and robust enough: and so finally I have been able to put my idea into practice”). On the white background, protruding, his pins appear, but now organized in robust irregular lines that suggest the image of entwined branches: brambles that settle on the neutral background, strong, with their hard-to-define colour, a black-not-black, deep and semi-transparent, obtained with Van Dyke brown: “*Because*”, the artist intones, “*only natural pigments enter this studio*”.

In the meantime the wooden “reliefs” have grown and transformed, both skin and face mutating. They, too, are difficult to define: “stamps” has been suggested because the slight variations in level that animate their surfaces bring to mind engravers’ blocks, or the type blocks once used for newspapers. In reality, on careful inspection, they are not even wooden reliefs: the wood is present, it is the base. But then it is patiently worked, in the same way that the Byzantine monks worked, for weeks and weeks, on their antique icons, using the technique of *marouflage* which served to render the panel rigid, to prevent it from “breathing” and thus risking damage to the painting. So they glued a very fine cloth onto the wood and painstakingly worked gesso into it, scraping it down until it was silken. Pietrosanti does the same with the forms that he cuts laboriously, patiently, meticulously into the panels (irregular strips, particularly in the most shamelessly architectonic pieces, and concentric circles, composite spheres, “pinnacles” incised with converging cracks...), to then re-clothe them one-by-one with the finest of linen cloths, plastered and polished. Then he paints them with twenty, thirty, fifty layers of a very diluted tempera which is scrapped away after each application (which gives, when finished, a special internal vibration to what might appear to be a simple monochrome). Finally he pieces them together in such a way that some parts are slightly raised: in this way, in the much bigger pieces, in those “walls” of his, furrowed with the irregular, ascending signs, a physical “anomaly” is perceived, an excess that first alerts the senses, then asks reason to step in.

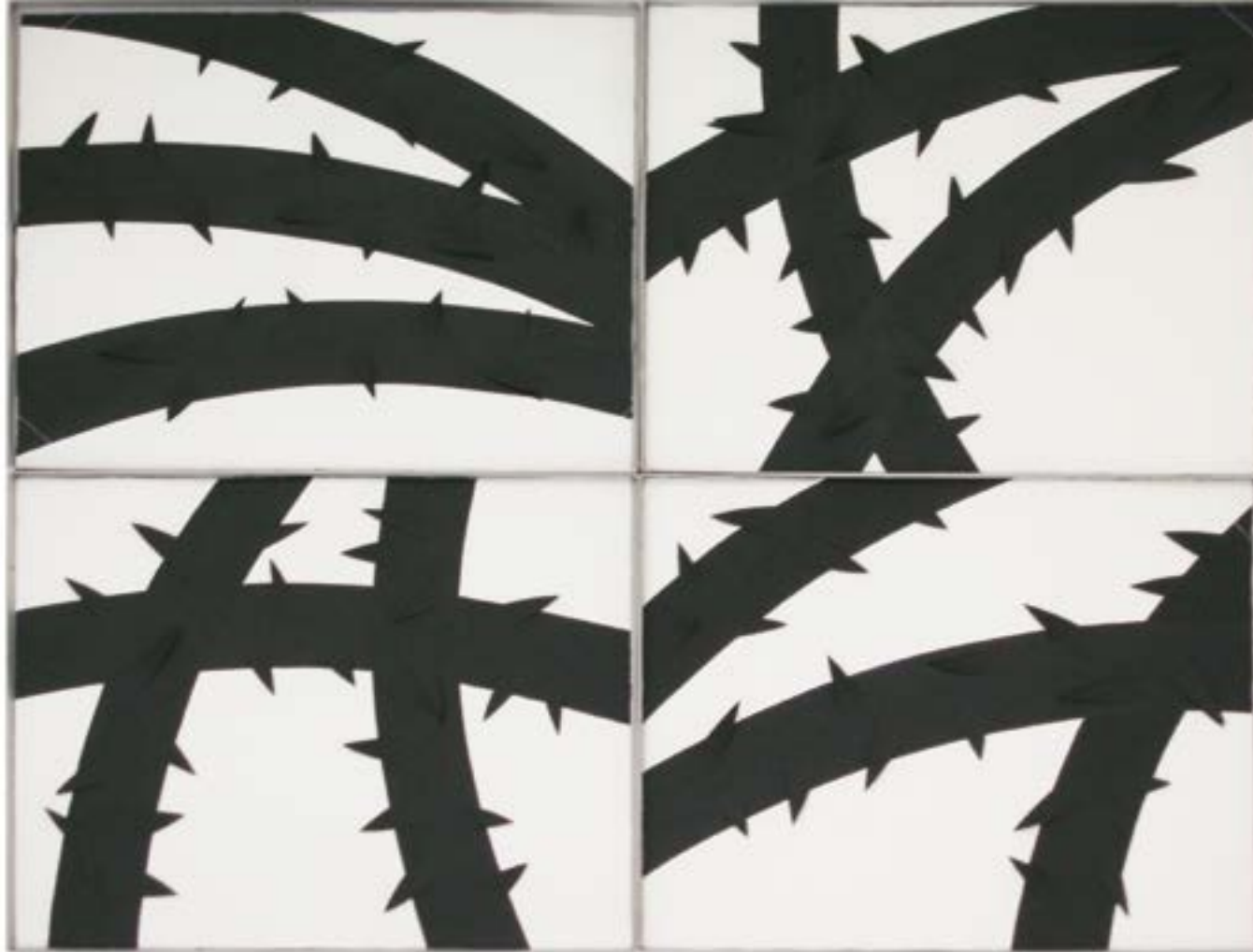
In the smaller works, in which the signs of his tapered alphabet of forms recur – the circles, the composite spheres, “unfurlings” (to which we will refer later), the pinnacles that appear to be buds on a tree, about to open, seen from above, realised through a laborious process similar to that used by violin makers to thin down the boards of the precious woods destined for the instruments – in these works, as has already been remarked, the protuberance is more carefully attended to, determined by the precision of the artist’s design, with each relationship calibrated in minute detail. We have spoken of the “unfurled” sphere (it is hard to think of another way to define it): it is made up, in fact, of modular metallic “leaves”, woven together with all the skill of the ancients, until they give life to a body which is spherical but irregular, perfect and imperfect at one and the same time.

Piazza dei Goti, Ravenna,  
**Untitled** 2005, brass.  
In collaboration with  
Compagnia del Progetto  
and AAM Architettura Arte  
Moderna

Untitled 2001,  
cm 100x90, brass on plywood.  
Private collection







Untitled 2006,  
polyptych cm 112x152, mixed media  
on paper

Opposite,  
Untitled 2006,  
polyptych cm 224x380, mixed  
media on paper.  
FFMAAM collection







Untitled 2011,  
cm 56x76, mixed media on paper



This, too, was born almost by chance: “*I needed a model to photograph in order to reproduce it in my reliefs, because I wasn’t managing to realize exactly what I had in mind*”. He “put it together”, and it became a work in its own right, now almost his signature, having been the protagonist of the stirring exhibition held in the Roman space Volume!<sup>6</sup>, in which a big solid in cement, a blunt parallelepiped, not quite as tall as a man, almost entirely blocked the space whilst, in the thin passageway running along the walls, some of these spheres, suspended, put their questions to the viewer.

Made of copper, and oxidised with a procedure that limits itself to accelerating the same process that manifests itself in nature, the spheres, too, assume a speckled, burnished, monochrome, rendered all the more vibrant by the layering of the planes: although at first glance very different (because in Pietrosanti’s work, as has been said, *tout se tient*), the process adopted in one of his most recent and most successful pieces is no different, a sort of little temple or bright white pavilion that he created for the exhibition *Monocromos*, organised in 2004 at the Reina Sofia in Madrid by Barbara Rose. A cube, four metres long, made of “unfurled” (again!) sheets of white Galician stone, a “*fragmented stone, in scales, in pointed shards [that] are a store of myriad memories, a gorge-like deposit of existences and portions of time*”<sup>7</sup>, as Roberto Pietrosanti himself writes so well. From the outside the volume presented itself as an optical gleam: in fact from a distance the shifting light of the monochrome appeared chromatic, and not created – as it really was – by the myriad of irregular sheets of white stone layered one on top of the other in a closely-packed texture, regular in thickness, irregular in form. The interior, on the other hand, clean white and scored with the ascending signs that always appear in his monumental reliefs, was silent and “still”, in total antagonism with the formal “hum” of the exterior. We should conclude here leaving the last word to the artist: “*Within the cubic space – firmly anchored to the ground and safe within the precise spaces that the gaze manages to dominate – the meditative thought takes over, in its own way uncaring of human finiteness. A thought that elects ascending routes, the gaze confirming the walls’ scendent lines. The room becomes a support. It offers a contrast to the provisional ephemeral stage sets. It reveals the solidity of the stone. Yet it does not rebel against time. It takes upon itself the impermanence, it becomes a solid that resists and also desists*”<sup>8</sup>. A mystical space, we might add, profoundly religious, in the only way (perhaps) in which today we can imagine an art that, without being specifically religious, might however be capable of evoking the sacred.

Rome 2006

6. A large sphere was exhibited at the Fori Imperiali in the *Giganti* exhibition, 2000.

7. R. Pietrosanti, *L’effimera durevolezza*, in “AR2”, year I, no.3, July-Oct. 2004, Naples, p.80.

8. Ibid.

**Untitled 2003**,  
cm 150x125, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection

**Untitled** 2001,  
cm 60 ø, black patinated copper.  
Private collection

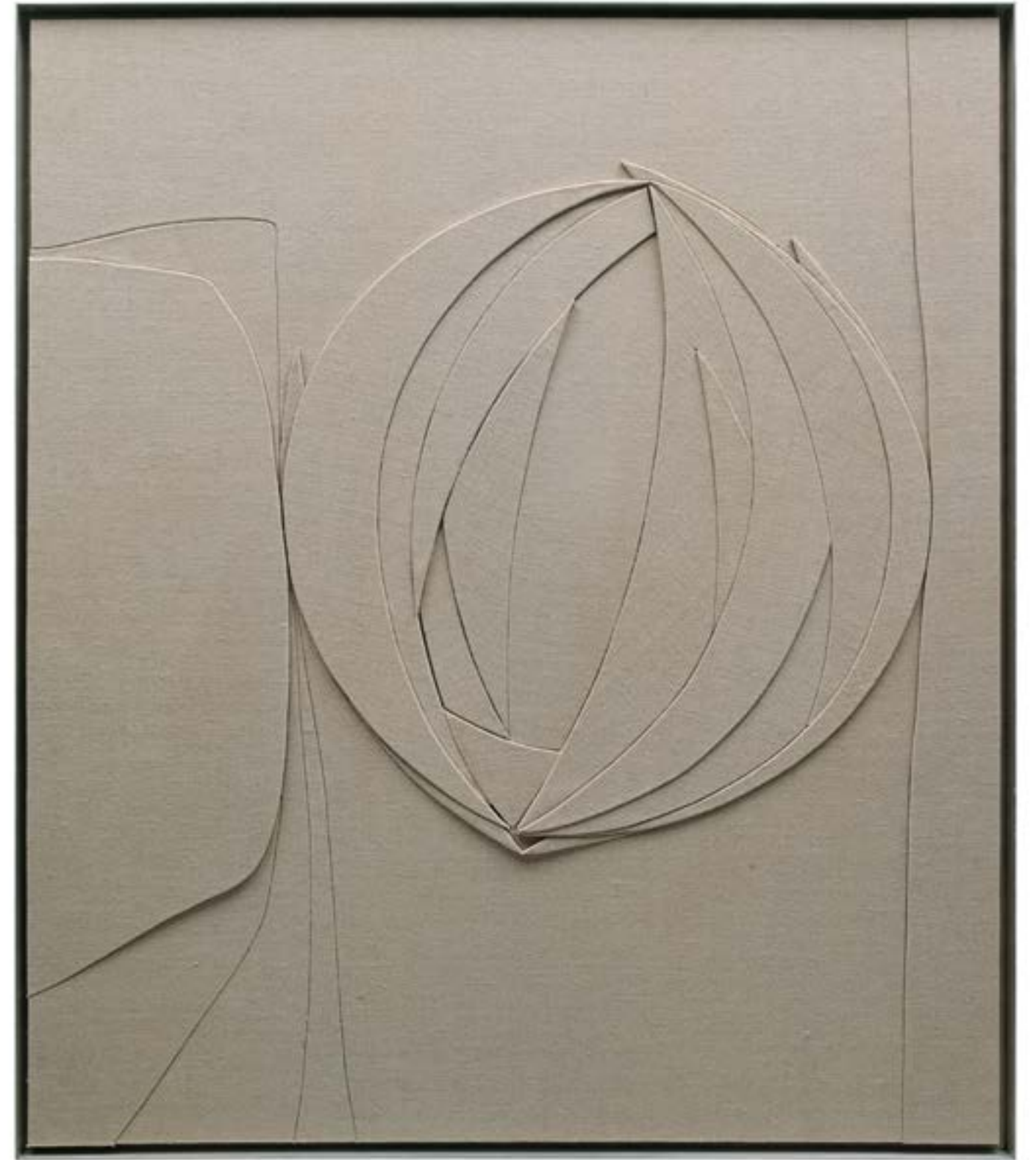
Overleaf,  
left, Architectural model, Volume!  
2003  
right, **Untitled** 2005,  
cm 90x80, raw canvas on plywood.  
Private collection

p. 54, Volume! Rome 2003/2004  
p. 55, **Untitled** 2003,  
cm 60 ø, black patinated copper.  
Private collection

p. 56, Volume! Roma 2003/2004  
p. 57, **Untitled** 2008,  
cm 150x122, mixed media on  
plywood.  
Private collection

p. 58, the artist's studio  
p. 59, **Untitled** 2009,  
cm 69.5x67, watercolor on paper

















## ROBERTO PIETROSANTI: INSTALLATIONS AND IMAGES

Barbara Rose

The transition from painting to installation was natural for Roberto Pietrosanti who began his career as an artist making constructions that incorporated mirrors and small geometric spheres in subtle juxtapositions of solids and voids. His concern with structure was clear from the beginning of his career. That as a mature artist he should chose to work with architects was also a logical development of his concern with space, which inevitably led to literal three-dimensional space.

The tradition within which his work has developed was established as a mainstream of the Italian avant-garde by Lucio Fontana whose trail-blazing experiments with space and light opened a rich avenue for exploration. I acknowledged the importance of this tradition in the exhibition *Monocromos*, a history of monochrome art, which I curated at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2004, by including important works by Fontana, Burri, Bonalumi, Bianchi, Longobardi and Pietrosanti, who was among the youngest artists in the exhibition, which began with Malevich and Rodchenko.

Pietrosanti's project was a complex installation that was the culmination of his involvement with monochrome reliefs and interior spaces that enveloped the viewer. This time, however, he had the opportunity to build a structure that had an exterior sculptural presence as well as an interior space entirely covered with painted relief panels that could be entered and experienced by the viewer as a total environment.

The rectangular structure was made of thousands of pieces of rough white Galician stone wedged together to form a horny crust that

Opposite and on pp.  
62, 63, 65, 68, 69,  
"Monocromos" Museo  
Nacional Centro de Arte  
Reina Sofia, Madrid,  
**Untitled** 2004, cm  
380x380x380, exterior:  
white stone from Galicia,  
interior: mixed media on  
plywood





projected in an aggressively tactile manner while the interior was made of smooth monochrome panels whose surfaces were built up into rhythmic undulating reliefs characteristic of Pietrosanti's style. The idea of an environment for meditation was suggested to Pietrosanti by the compact early Christian building at the ancient site of Clitunno in Umbria, which was used as a meeting place whose exact function is not clearly established. This inspiration of a sacred site whose ritual significance is still mysterious appealed to Pietrosanti's sensibility, which is involved with a concept of the sacred that is not necessarily involved with ritual or at least with no specific ritual.

Given his dedication to nuance, subtlety, silence and artisanship, it is hard not to see a relationship between the work of Pietrosanti and the tradition of Asian, especially Zen Buddhist, esthetics. His most recent works, done with an elaborate and painfully labor-intensive discipline, made up of images created on a monochrome surface with hundreds and hundreds of pins, which pierce the canvas surface, are particularly original in their capacity to synthesize Western with Asian aesthetics. The creation of scintillating images from an assemblage of silver pinpoints rather than from traditional drawing is a highly original way to present an evocative image without re-







Architectural model,  
Madrid 2004

Overleaf,  
**Untitled** 2002,  
cm 160x204, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection



course to the forms of illusionism that characterize academic art. Indeed, it is a brilliant solution to how to exit strictly monochrome work and create both surface tension and imagery that fixates vision. In their intensely concentrated tactility, the new paintings continue an avenue of investigation that Pietrosanti began with the accumulations of jagged pieces of broken stone that covered the environment he constructed for the occasion of the *Monocromos* exhibition. The new paintings are not enveloping installations. However, in their demand for concentrated focus, they have a similar capacity to occupy the entirety of the viewer's perception. Our sense of how demanding a preoccupation they have been for the artist who has patiently tattooed his designs with a force at odds with their delicate patterning is equalled by the demands they make on the viewer for a similar degree of concentration and commitment, which ultimately not only focuses and organizes thought but results in a degree of contemplative disengagement sought by those artists who define art as a mystical rather than a material experience. Indeed this tension between materiality and disembodiment is at the core of their meaning and originality.

New York 2006









On the following page,  
**Untitled 2006**,  
 cm 125x110, mixed media on  
 plywood.  
 Private collection.

pp. 73, 74, 75, the artist's studio



**THE WORLD CONTRACTED TO A RECOGNIZABLE IMAGE  
A VISIT TO ROBERTO PIETROSANTI'S STUDIO**

Emanuele Trevi

*The World Contracted to a Recognizable Image* is the title of a poem by William Carlos Williams, written in the autumn of 1959, just after he had recovered from serious surgery. He sent it to his Italian translator, Cristina Campo, convinced that this handful of verses summed up, in a miraculous synthesis, the sense of his work in its entirety, "in a way that I had never achieved up until now", he says in the accompanying letter.

I wander around Roberto Pietrosanti's studio on a bank holiday afternoon, as the last glimmer of daylight falls from the overhead window, and it occurs to me that Williams's title, which contains within it an entire artistic project (to say nothing of a lifetime's ambition), could do equally well for these paintings, propped against the walls; for each one of them individually and for the group as a whole: the world contracted to a recognizable image.

Clearly, what William Carlos Williams is describing in this poem/revelation is not an encounter with an object of any particular "artistic" merit. It was simply something he saw from his bed in the clinic, in one of those dusky

intervals between sleep and wakefulness that always occur on days of illness. This particular form of rapt focus, which all of us have experienced at some point (it is, for instance, typical of childhood fevers) has nothing to do with the aesthetic merits of the object itself. Williams states this clearly: he had in front of him a painting that was "possibly Japanese", one of those impersonal things used to decorate places of transit – at any rate, "an idiotic picture". Yet, at the outer edge of infirmity, in that final moment of weakness and prostration, "at the small end of an illness", that image, which in normal circumstances would not have grazed even the threshold of his conscious perception, filled his gaze...

*at the small end of an illness  
there was a picture  
probably Japanese  
which filled my eye (...)*

Consciously or not, Williams speaks of the condition of illness using the same terms that mystics employ when contemplating the most



precious, subtle and elusive portion of the soul. Its *“fine pointe”*, as St. Francis de Sales, for example, calls it: the “supreme point” of the soul. Just as the soul possesses this spire-like summit, a platform from which to launch itself towards the measureless depths of the heavens, illness too has its own *small end* which – considering the poet’s choice of words – much resembles the circle of light glimpsed at the end of a dark tunnel. The idea that the possibilities suggested by the concept of “illness”, or infirmity, might occupy the same mental space as those traditionally suggested by the notion of “soul”, to the point of entirely replacing them – this is much more than a simple modern irony. For the old, extremely wise and infirm American poet, there was probably no longer any room for doubt: “soul” and “illness” are synonyms, two verbal labels applied to the same experience, the same level of reality – one which, moreover, language can never fully explore. Both work towards a *refining of vision*. They are profoundly and subtly connected with the gaze. Theirs is a pathway that promises to lead beyond the level of superficial appearance (beyond the “beautiful” or the “ugly”, for instance) and into the very heart of forms. It is impossible to contemplate “soul” or “illness” without thinking, instantaneously, of a dynamism, of a path to be walked, of new vistas opening up before us.

I move around, in Roberto Pietrosanti’s studio (which was once a cinema, and before that a mechanic’s workshop), without any precise strategy, a little lopsidedly, as one does in front of Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, looking for the anamorphosis – the skull, the point at which the viewer’s eye unexpectedly halts, the decomposition of the gaze. I happily lose my visual balance, my frontal alignment. For me, this is “soul”: a walking sickness, a manic skittishness of the senses, something that will die along

with the body’s other functions, when their time comes. Roberto’s pictures leave their pale wooden supports and re-enter them, making way for others, like pieces of theatre scenery. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky, too, invokes the notion of “soul” without mirroring it in metaphysics, or in immortality; he places it, rather, at the centre of a theory of vision and the power of colours. It is obvious, Kandinsky says, that an artist seeks to achieve the *proper vibration*, the *powerful connection* – that principle of *“innermost necessity”* that belongs completely neither to the artwork, as a manmade object, nor to the viewer. It is a relationship, a circumstance. It exists within the realm of time, amid life’s multitude of unforeseen events.

In these pictures, it is the relationship between the colour (the white, the ochre and the grey) and the forms (slashes and concentric circles and slits of various widths, and swellings...), a relationship unquestionably narrative in nature, that hands me a thread with which to find my way through the maze. Ultimately, to narrate means to reveal a secret, to adopt a perspective from which (and this is how stories move) that which was previously unseen now becomes visible.

Nearing Kurtz’s abode, says Marlow at a certain point in *Heart of Darkness*, I noticed the stakes of an enclosure. They were crowned, these fence posts, with strange, circular forms, like wooden knobs. Then suddenly, as we moved further ahead, advancing a few yards upstream, I saw what they were, those knobs: they were skulls that had been driven onto the top of the stakes. To see is to shift. To enrich, to clarify that which is contained in our field of vision, is to narrate. This type of storytelling may also offer a model – how consciously, I am not sure – for Roberto Pietrosanti, who always seems to begin with a premise, with an observation made







at a distance: the unity of a particular colour, the way it uniformly covers a given space... And then, as we close in on that visual field, getting nearer, penetrating it, he turns out to be giving shape to the exact opposite of that premise. Shapes that open up and perforate the surface and that are traces, secret wounds, signs of a passage.

Exactly *what*, then, has passed through there, no one can say. It is not, nor ever could be, the essence, the subject-in-and-of-itself of this work. We follow the trail... There is a recurring motif in these pictures that I find captivating. An image that inspires a sense of peace and understanding, a small, sentimental, *abstract* utopia. The white of the background swells to form large bubbles. And on the surface of the bubbles, which resembles that of milk in a pan, fissures begin to appear, a sort of concentric elementary flower – three equidistant grooves, converging. They open slowly, as though responding to very slight pressure. Birds’ feet on snow, I think to myself.

“The artist is the hand that plays, touching one

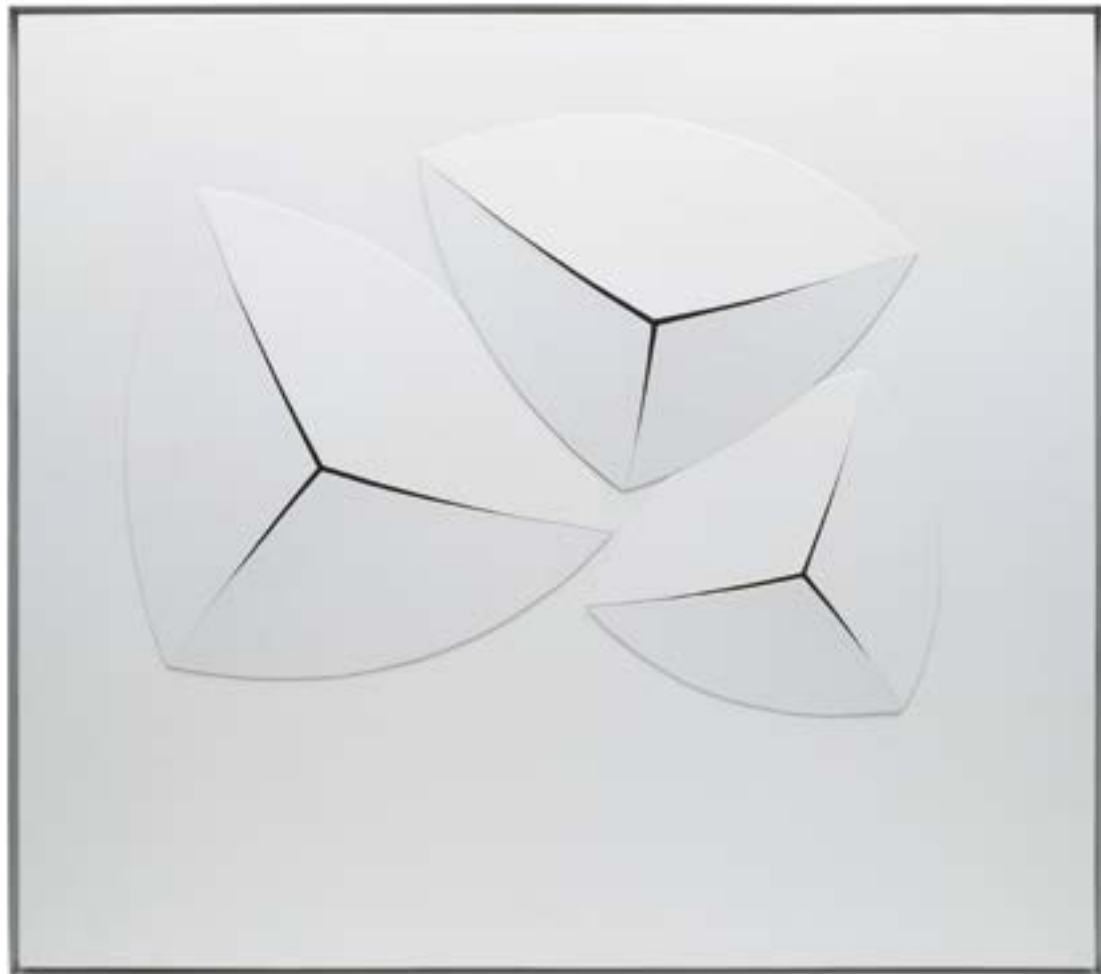
key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.” (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Chapter 5: “The Psychological Working of Colour”).

During the long hours of illness, relates William Carlos Williams in the second half of his poem, that figure hanging on the wall, that light at the end of vision’s tunnel, became the fulcrum of my existence. *I clung to it*, he writes, *as a fly*.

(...) *an idiotic picture*  
*except it was all I recognized*  
*the wall lived for me in that picture*  
*I clung to it as a fly*

At the outer limit of the visible, which is the outer limit of illness, which is the outer limit of the soul, perhaps nothing is any different from what it was at the beginning of the journey. In the meantime, however, we have become flies, creatures capable of *clinging* to things, of clinging to a vision’s contents, creatures with thousands and thousands of eyes; by no coincidence, one might think, *spiritual creatures...*

Rome 2000



Untitled 2006,  
cm 110x125, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection







Untitled 2006,  
cm 125x110, mixed media on plywood.  
Private collection



Untitled 2006,  
cm 125x110, mixed media on plywood.  
Private collection.



Untitled 2009, detail  
cm 56x76, mixed media on paper





## WHITE NOISE

Vincenzo Trione

### ACCESS ROUTES

You will live an unexpected experience. As if by magic, you will be in an invisible place. Not in front of a picture, but in the heart of a work of art, which you can move through, a little like what happens in one episode in Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*.

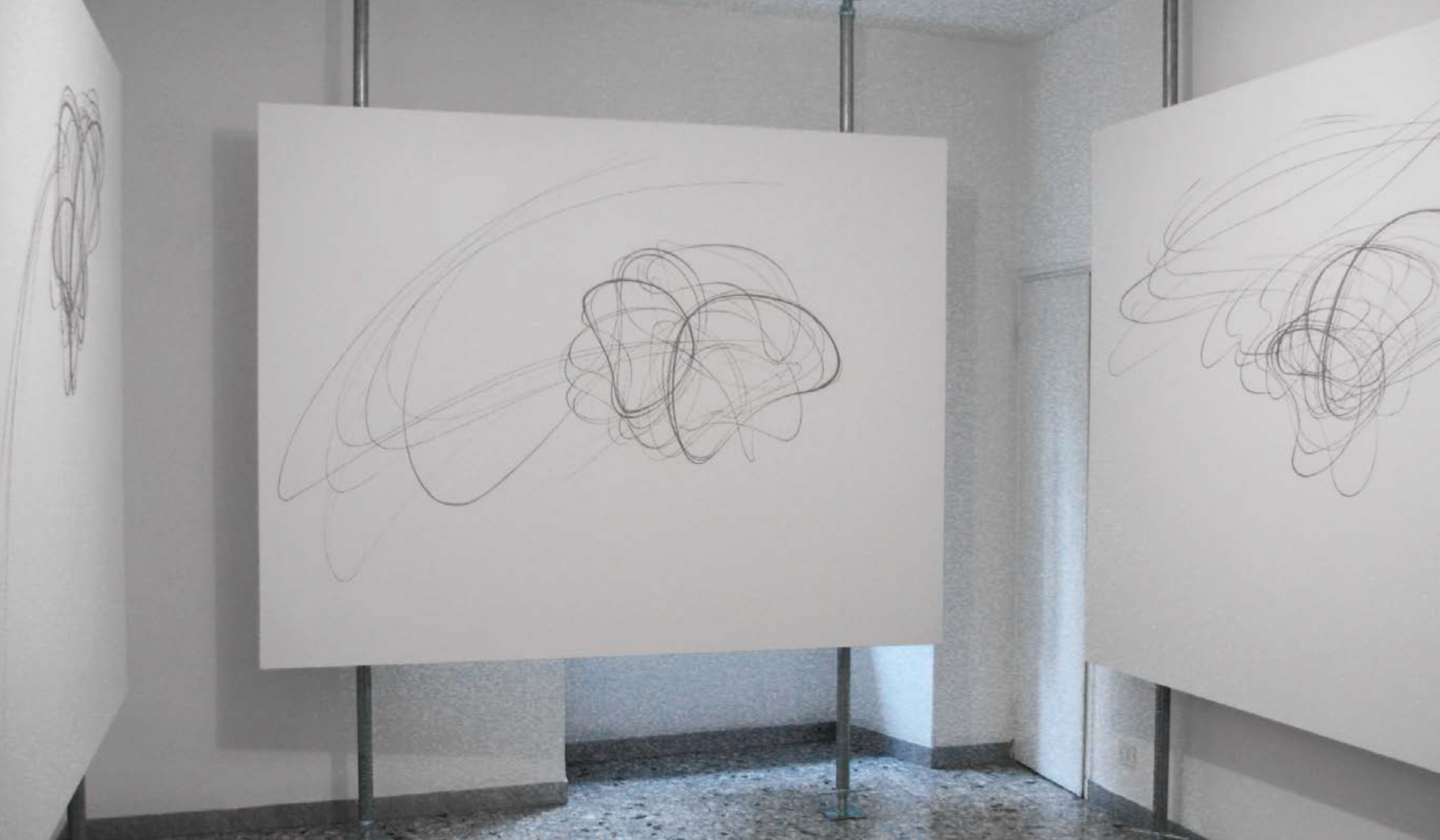
For a moment, you will find yourselves *elsewhere*. You will throw open a door, and you will have the sensation of falling *into* colour: you will perceive its transit, you will note its whispers, you will intercept its silences.

### INSIDE COLOUR

So, for now, stop there. And follow in the tracks of Jack Gladney, the hero of Don De Lillo's epic novel, *White Noise*. Secretly, follow in the footsteps of this strange and obsessive character, director of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill, engaged in research on the cults of the Third Reich and the hypnotic spell cast over the masses by the Führer's speeches. Scrutinize Jack Gladney's perversions, right through to the book's epilogue.

The scene takes place in a house. "The point of rooms is that they're inside. No one should go into a room unless he understands this. People behave one way in rooms, another way in streets, parks and airports." Necessarily we have to agree to a certain type of behaviour. "It follows that this would be the kind of behaviour that takes place in rooms. This is the standard, as opposed to parking lots and beaches. It is the point of rooms. [...] There is an unwritten agreement between the person who enters a room and the person whose room had been entered, as opposed to open-air theatres, outdoor pools".

AAM Architettura Arte  
Moderna Gallery, Rome,  
**Untitled** 2006,  
cm 180x700, mixed media  
on plywood.





Here the encounter with Willie Mink takes place. It is the final showdown, almost a frame from a Western. A few paces and Jack Gladney is in the centre of the room. He is struck by strange phenomena. On the television screen the images come and go: at times they jump; flickering, they get mixed up. Confusion. But also visions that tend to take on a sudden clarity.

“The precise nature of events. Things in their actual state”. Finally Willie Mink emerges, “out of the deep fold, rising nicely, sharply outlined against the busy air”.

No doubt about it. This is *white noise*, a voiceless sound, a simple emission of the “panasonic score”<sup>1</sup>.

#### CAMERA PICTA

From this prologue we can move on to observe Roberto Pietrosanti’s installation at the Roman gallery A.A.M..

Here too we are in a house. In a contemporary *camera picta*. Various boards are arranged so that they mark out a space, touched with an imperceptible musicality. With a *white noise*.

Where are you? Amidst monochrome surfaces, on which, in lateral positions, gentle constellations of pins deposit themselves. You will effect an exit from the world, precipitating into the weaves of white. With the “mark of Saturn”, Pietrosanti takes up a challenge, which he renews daily. His is an almost impossible venture: to dialogue with white, which, as Kandinsky wrote, is “a nothing before the origin, before birth”<sup>2</sup>.

This *mark* is everywhere – in life, in dreams. It is on every painter’s palette. It is the beginning of the day; it reveals itself as soon as we open our eyes. It can change easily, passing from snowy to milky. Historically, white was extracted from lead consumed by vinegar fumes. For months it was kept in sealed containers, immersed in manure; there it fermented. From this procedure white lead was obtained, the basis for performing acrobatics, the dry, cool base of every material.

The icon painters served themselves of this “source”, which they spread parsimoniously over their works, to reveal blinding lights. The *lumina prima* shone where the flesh tone seemed to dissolve; they lit up on the hands, in the creases of the faces, in the milky fog, on the lips. Mixed with other colours, with the ground eggshell and cuttlefish bones, the white accentuated the painted figures’ sense of fleetingness.

A prodigious thing. But also anathema. Simple and complex, white (Pietrosanti is profoundly aware of this) is a body to be possessed. A gleam, an aura. A wide region stretching between things. It is a *neutral*

1. Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, Viking Penguin Inc, New York, 1984.

2. cf. W. Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), (in particular, the chapter “The language of forms and colours”).

**Untitled** 2008,  
cm 150x122, mixed media  
on plywood. Private  
collection

On the previous pages,  
Galleria AAM Architettura  
Arte Moderna, Roma 2006



Untitled 2006,  
cm 182x238, pins on canvas.  
Private collection







which, to use Savinio's words, "mutates with the mutations of the sky". It holds within it an intrinsic asymmetry; in a glimmer, there coincide transparency and opacity. It is the root of all possible architectures. A body that adheres to other bodies; it controls them; it takes possession of them. It has a physical force. Alchemic substance, it oscillates incessantly on contact with shards of reality. It is a wind that penetrates beneath the skin of all colours, attenuating or accentuating. A caress that softens the modelling, purifying reality of imperfections. With a veil it enfolds the profiles of people and objects, placing them in a timeless frame. White leads towards a land in which to lose oneself, where exploration becomes shipwreck. It suggests the stages of a journey towards the unknown. Beyond the threshold, the darkness, in which the sailors of all ages have got themselves lost...

It is the icon of the beginning, of the limit. "That which takes away the darkness", said Wittgenstein<sup>3</sup>. It is the incorporeal. And it is also the stuff on which signs and signals will deposit themselves. It is an image of the opposites – snow and dust. It designates a neutral condition, in which nothing has yet happened – or everything has happened. It is, as De Chirico noted in a short letter to the painter of *logogrifi*, Ezio Gribaudo, a hue that contains infinite mysteries. Devoid of limits and of shadows, "no one knows where this colour truly exists"<sup>4</sup>.

White is the heart of an ideal geography of painting. It alludes to the extreme achievement and to the insurmountable obstacle. It defines the theatre within which the most difficult gamble that the artist sets himself will take place: conquering the emptiness of the canvas.

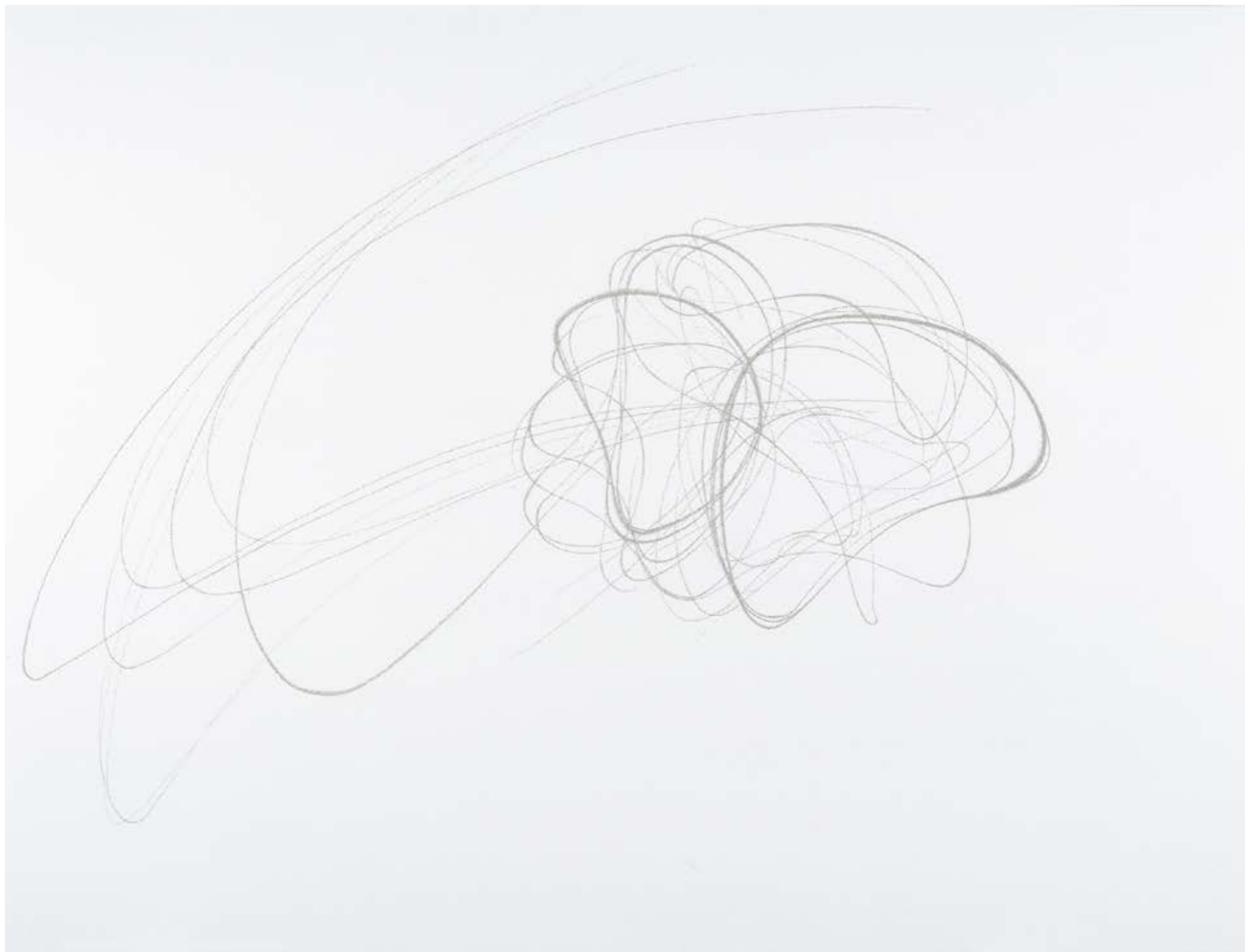
#### ANALYTICAL ATTITUDES

Through white, Pietrosanti attributes a dimension to evanescence. He stages a theatre of disappearance. Motivated by an instinctively theoretical disposition, he denies all recognizableness. Enrolling himself, albeit independently, in the vast and ragged archipelago of the "analytical current" of twentieth-century art, he sets himself to the deconstructing of every representative code. He reduces the syntax of the work of art to a basic unit devoid of connotative meanings, to a series of elementary and constant "data". He thinks of creative activity, essentially, as a complete system – *peinture*. He asserts the language's structural autonomy, effecting a clean epistemological break, in order to accentuate the rules governing the organisation of the canvas. He deconstructs the canon of painting (governed by the doctrine of resemblance), to exalt

3. cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on colour* (1977).

4. G. De Chirico, *I bianchi di Ezio Gribaudo* (letter to E. Gribaudo dated 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1969), in P. Gribaudo (ed.), *Ezio Gribaudo Epifania del bianco e teatri della memoria*, Turin, Edizioni d'Arte Fratelli Pozzo, 2003, p. 18.





Untitled 2006,  
cm 182x238, pins on canvas.  
Collezione FFMAAM

the procedures that preside over the formation of art, until he reaches the degree zero of the *inventio*<sup>5</sup>. Sustained by *esprit de géométrie*, he focuses on the work as “object”. Thanks to an extraordinary awareness of design and a very real sensitivity to architecture, he raises imperturbable “edifices” that refuse all external references; they bar all the openings, taking themselves beyond any comment.

Referencing a long tradition<sup>6</sup>, Pietrosanti eliminates any possible interlacing of colours, experimenting with original monochromes. A musician whose instrument is material, he seeks to draw close to the point beyond which painting cannot go. To capture a *pureté* freed of all narrative obligations. The work of art no longer speaks of reality, it speaks only of itself. The monochromes indicate a wall that cannot be scaled. Articulated in a single dimension, they define a sort of territory of absence in which the face has disappeared, definitively. They depict *icons without iconography*, which induce a state of meditative contemplation.

#### AMBIGUOUS POETICS

The analytical attitude conceals cracks, periods of waiting, openings. With his monochromes, Pietrosanti never arrives at an extreme minimalism. But he follows the trajectories of a “counterargument”, composed of incessant changes in rhythm.

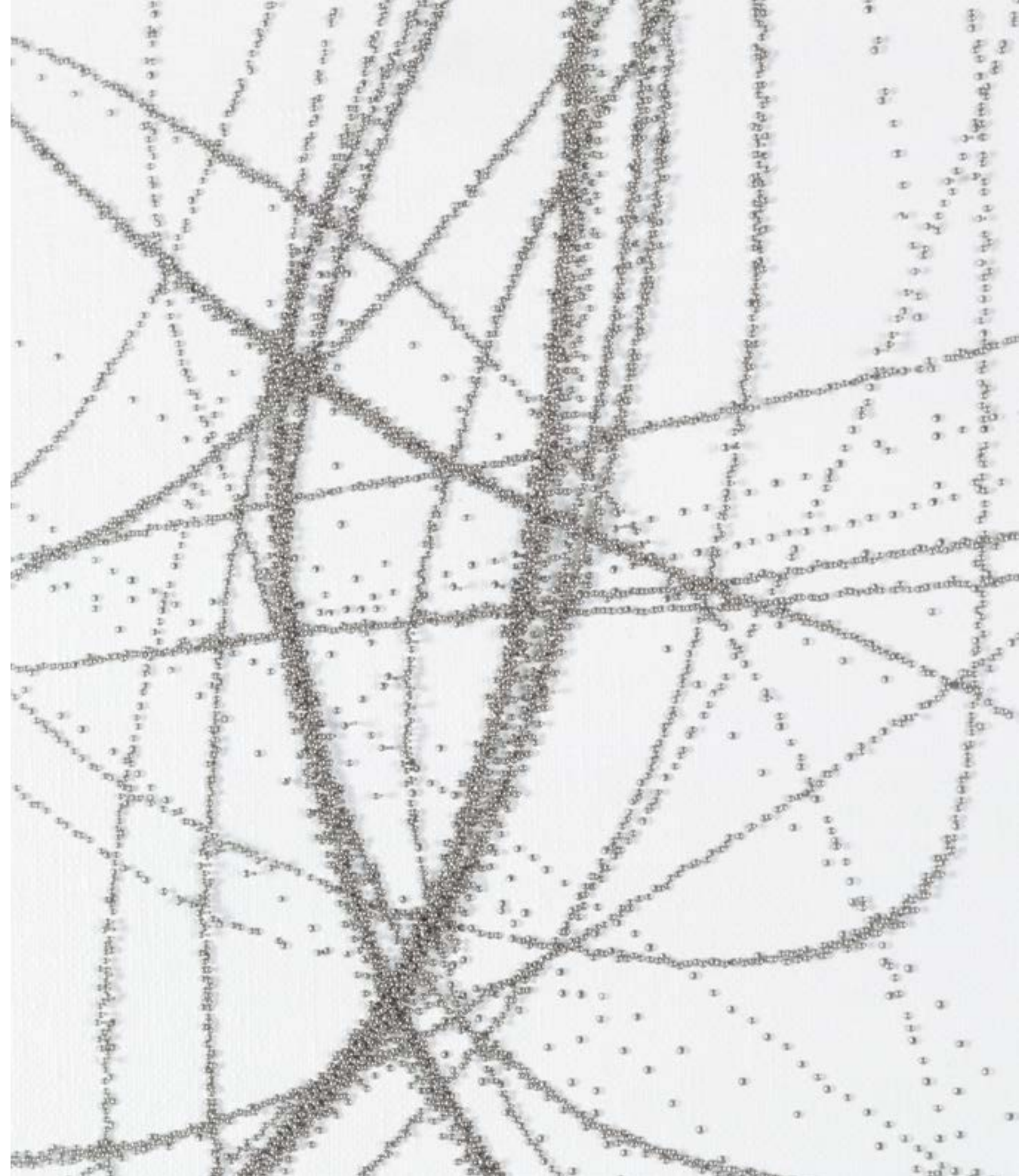
The basic immobility of the painting is affirmed, then immediately negated, amid deviations and decelerations. The work of art offers itself up like a star-dotted sky, with evident references to the abstract *compenetrazioni* of Balla, to the dry forms of Giacometti and to the formless sketches of Bacon.

The powerfully sculptural installation exhibited at A.A.M. appears like an oasis, riddled with fortuitous presences. Stretches of white interrupted by barely-disciplined swarms. Beaches lapped by waves that chase one another over the sand, to then pull back. Planes furrowed with little jolts, at times devoid of any unifying logic.

Unreachable continents. And yet, inhabited by epiphanies. The surface is occupied by pins, which emerge from the void like stones in a Zen garden. From the nothingness there emerge “events”, which reveal the subtle ambiguity of Pietrosanti’s poetics, his research governed by the rhetorical figure of the oxymoron, interpreted as a device for soldering together antithetical terms in sequences of oppositions. A succession of *callidae iuncturae* appear, emblems of a happily contradictory language that inhabits a place of transit, between subterranean tensions

5. For twentieth-century “analytical poetics”, cf. F. Menna, *La linea analitica dell’arte moderna*, Turin, Einaudi, 1975.

6. For the history of the monochrome in the twentieth century, cf. G. Fabre, C.K. Ho, B. Rose and V. Trione, *Monocromos*, Madrid, Documenta, 2004.







Untitled 2006,  
cm 182x238, pins on canvas.  
Collezione FFMAAM



and conflicting pulsations. A meticulously written text, crisscrossed with secrets.

Caution and pathos, method and liberty layer up. The homogeneity of the project cohabits with the effervescence of fantasy, calculation cohabits with *insecuritas*.

#### CALM CHAOS

At first, Pietrosanti denies the body of things. He reduces his own syntax to a few essential figures. He models perfect outlines, constructed within flexible materials, equipped with tactile consistency and warm sinuousness. He undertakes a descent, in which all waste material is, progressively, eliminated.

This “fall” accompanies vehement accelerations. As if by magic, the work, having been stripped of every encumbrance, seems to “climb”: it fills up with elements. Pietrosanti does not pursue a radical reduction to zero. He paints – and, at the same time, sculpts – compositions based on an imperfect order, crumbling the symmetry away with jolts and pleats.

The installation at A.A.M. is riddled with slippages. It hosts processes, corrections, clarifications. It becomes an arena in which data graze against one another. A calm chaos is suggested. The solemnity of the layout is re-modulated. The firmness of the whole is contaminated with airy deceptions. On the velvet of the work, thrust and counterthrust touch.

Pietrosanti deconstructs the crystallised form, making distant peninsulas collide. He paints rectangular canvases, into which he introduces movements. The works are paths paved with fragile steps. The tranquillity of the “architecture” is thrown into disarray by faint disharmonies.

There materialises, in this way, a style capable of marrying the moment of utmost reduction and that of formulation; the minimal phase and that of greatest exuberance. The harmony of the *camera picta* is exalted in the flight of a thousand dots, in a daring pointillisme. Airely, we oscillate between less and more, between void and *horror vacui*.

#### PLANES, LINES, POINTS

Amid gleams and illuminations, Pietrosanti gives a voice to the silence of white. He violates the perfection of the nothingness, with sudden, and precarious, solidifications. He exhibits the void, filling it, in peripheral areas, with evanescent shards.

As Emanuele Trevi has written, he always starts out from one premise, from one observation. The unity of the colour, “the way it uniformly covers a given space”. Then he closes in on that *field*; he enters it, in-



fracting the beginning of the process, with “shapes that open up and perforate the surface”: clues, wounds<sup>7</sup>.

This effect is accentuated by the passages of the lines represented, which lend themselves to diverse readings. From a distance, the segments he utilizes seem unified and compact. Then certain differences materialise. Formed of many pixels, the lines are trapped within vortices, destined to challenge every law of gravity. Dense, inextricable skeins. Woven balls transported by an invisible wind. Ever-uncertain tangles, in search of a final definition. Pietrosanti does not enclose his drawn signs within margins. In this, he seems to be in tune with several of the intuitions of Kandinsky, who saw the line as an indivisible entity produced by the point in motion. “It is born of the movement – and to be precise, of the destruction of the point, of its extreme stillness, closed in on itself.” The straight line, for Kandinsky, is the *most concise form of the infinite possibility of movement*. The point is an image of stasis and of stillness, “tension stirred from within”. The pictorial experience *is completed* when these two elements combine in a language “that cannot be arrived at with words”<sup>8</sup>.

From here Pietrosanti moves on to draw his eccentric, dionysian<sup>9</sup> geometries. Consider some of the episodes

7. E. Trevi, *The World Contracted to a Recognisable Image*, in B. Rose – E. Trevi, *Roberto Pietrosanti*, Rome, Casta Diva, 2001.

8. W. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (1926).

9. B. Rose, “Conversazioni con Roberto Pietrosanti”, in B. Rose – E. Trevi,

**Untitled** 2011, cm 50x60,  
acrylurethane paint on PVC panel.  
Eduardo Secci Contemporary  
Collection

in his poetic adventure. From the “wires” occupied by airy forms, to the “brasses”, with their gilded sheets from which there sprout branches and leaves. And then the “surfaces”, where spheres emerge, at first splitting open and then, partially, recomposed. We see forms which, whilst adhering to the picture plane, protrude from it, with cracks of varying thickness: segments, slices and circles, accompanied by gaunt shadows. As if “responding to very slight pressure”, the backgrounds swell up, with great bubbles, like the swelling of milk as it cooks in a pan: concentric flowers open up, with equidistant and concentric grooves, like “birds’ feet on snow”<sup>10</sup>.

A process that is also to be found in the temple on show at the Centro de Arte Contemporanea Reina Sofia in Madrid, in the exhibition “Monocromos” (held in 2004). A white cathedral that generates many perceptual ambiguities. From afar it imposes itself in its cubic homogeneity, formed of pieces of marble, which seem as light as sheets of pressed paper. From close up, one notes thicknesses and weights. Angles, stratifications. Pieces of fragmented stone, shards and barbs, in a deposit of portions of time. In its interior, high bright walls, riven with clefts and curves, which evoke a duration without development<sup>11</sup>.

Experiments that all share a notable technical acumen, which conceals (it too) dark corners of its own. Pietrosanti constructs his pictorial and plastic architectures with an ancient know-how, meted out in slow rhythms, made up of hesitations and of repetitions. His intent, however, is that of obtaining *results* that are dynamic, simultaneous and succinct. Every symmetry is moved by delirium, by restlessness. The “mathematical” structure of the work is violated by gestures capable of being contemporaneously violent and elegant. A way of demonstrating that, as Giorgio Manganelli noted, “the natural vocation of madness lies in having reason on its side”.

#### WAYS OUT

Chronicle of a brief journey *into colour*.

We abandon the *camera picta*. We leave the rooms of the gallery where the installation is. In the distance, the echoes, still, of the *white noise*.

There is just time to listen once more to the words of Don De Lillo. The moment in which Jack Gladney stands before Willie Mink.

“The precise nature of events. Things in their actual state. [...] White noise everywhere”.

#### Naples 2006

*Roberto Pietrosanti, op. cit..*

10. E. Trevi, *The World Contracted to a Recognisable Image*, op. cit..

11. R. Pietrosanti, *L'effimera durezza*, in “Ar2”, no. 3, 2004, p. 80.

Untitled 2009, cm 300 ø  
acrylic resin and fibreglass  
on plywood.  
IVAM collection.

Overleaf,  
The artist's studio











Above, opposite and overleaf,  
 “Confines” IVAM, Valencia 2009









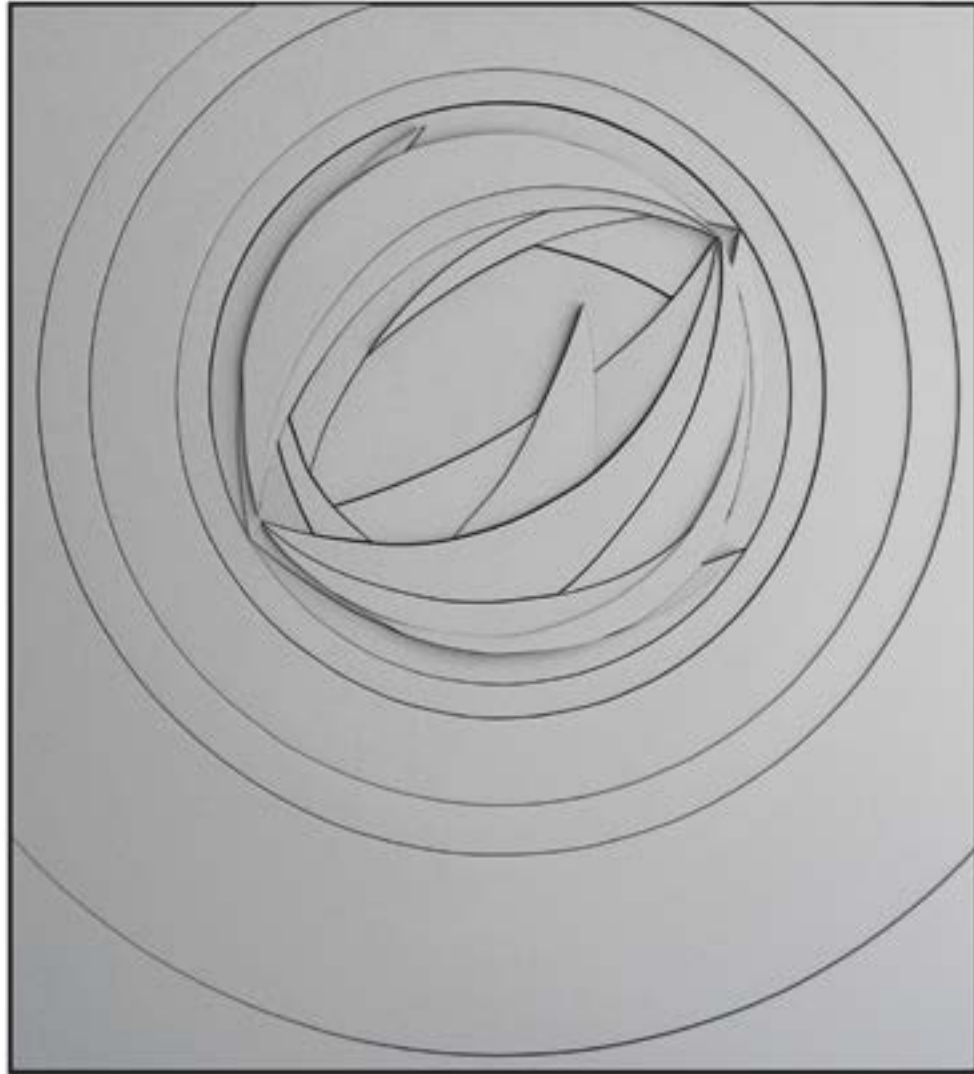
## ABSENCE AS THE POTENTIAL FOR CONSTRUCTION

Francesco Moschini

From the beginning of his career in the early 1990's to his most recent work, Roberto Pietrosanti's entire artistic journey seems to have unfolded under the sign of a duality kept wilfully unresolved, not, certainly, for the sake of any deliberately pursued *coincidentia oppositorum* but, rather, to underline the impossible choices, the ambiguities, the deformities, the duplicities and above all the distances separating two approaches that are always simultaneously present in his work. At the very moment in which the artist underlines the fact that, "the work of art is not to be identified in an object, it lies in the artist's idea", he seems to relegate the concrete result of the artistic operation to a sort of limbo in which the artistic object might even be said to become negligible in comparison with the idea contained within it, yet at the same time, his own work confronts the emphatic solidity of its structure, the complexity of its formation, the layers of its own patient, laborious and articulated construction. The very manner in which his works are presented, confined within precise and immobile containing structures, as though both the limits and the completeness of the work were to be emphasised, in reality emphasises the work's intention to overstep every limit, its leaning towards an "elsewhere". Certainly, behind this particular conception of the work of art there surface traces of American Abstract Expressionism's yearning for the infinite, for new and increasingly distant frontiers, but the sense Pietrosanti gives this is not a geographical one connected with place as a sentiment, so much as cosmic, and anything but earthbound. In all of this, he renounces any sentimentality or lapses into pure spirituality, instead favouring the material facts, which

Clockwise from top left,  
**Untitled** 2006,  
 cm 125x110, mixed media  
 on plywood,  
 FFMAAM collection.  
**Untitled** 2006,  
 cm 125x110, mixed media  
 on plywood,  
 FFMAAM collection.  
**Untitled** 2006,  
 cm 125x110, mixed media  
 on plywood.  
 FFMAAM collection.  
**Untitled** 2006,  
 cm 125x110, mixed media  
 on plywood.





**Untitled 2010,**  
cm 110x100, mixed media  
on PVC panel,  
Private collection

the physicality and the palpability of the titanic work involved in each piece seem to suggest are both objective and objectifiable. But this interest of his in the infinite, the unlimited and the eternal, marches in parallel with a similar attention to the indefinite, the undetermined, the immeasurable. Clearly, the question of the infinite has been at the root of scientific and philosophical speculation from the culture of ancient Greece onwards, from the pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle. But Pietrosanti is capable of combining the idea of the work of art and the physical representation of the idea of the infinite with an acceptance that in the act of experimenting, he cannot but content himself with the “finite”. The artist counters the idea of the infinite with that of continuum, the multiplicity of the material and its divisibility, but also with hints of black holes and superstrings. Pietrosanti’s works thus succeed in evoking



whole portions of galaxy as though we were meant to believe in the existence of a single visible image, seen from different directions and distances. But if we think of the universe evoked by Pietrosanti as being multiply connected, then a multitude of luminous routes open out before us, generating a kaleidoscopic myriad of images which are never immobile, “original” and univocal, but almost “phantom copies” of the same galaxy. It is Pietrosanti himself who points out that, “I have always drawn the same thing [...] but the mother work is the sense of the perseverance of and respect for the Idea, which does not close in on itself, but grows”, as often happens to great artists – one has only to

**Untitled 2010,**  
cm 150x125, mixed media  
on plywood,  
Private collection



**Untitled** 2007,  
cm 110x100, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Eduardo Secci  
Contemporary collection

think of Federico Fellini who, at heart, spent his entire life working on a single film, albeit in the form of a series of phantasmagorical paraphrasings. It is as though the artist wanted to confront us continually with a real physical space and a whole series of “phantom images in the cosmic looking glass”, in order to achieve a sensation of infinity stretching off in all directions, apparently uncontrollable, in which streaks and trails of light multiply, and finally a cosmic multi-connected space in which multiplicity and the finite combine, but borderless and unlimited. Evident in the forms of Pietrosanti’s works, this conflict between microcosm and macrocosm is also reflected in the sober colouration that is a feature of his entire oeuvre. Provocatively, the artist enti-



**Untitled** 2010,  
cm 150x125, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection.

ties this latest cycle of work “Nel bianco” [In the white] almost as if pursuing the same “obsession”, engaging in the same obstinacy, as the Burri of “Annotarsi” or “Non ama il nero”. In reality, if in Burri the recourse to black coincided with a sort of *cupio dissolvi*, for Pietrosanti the white to which he continually returns is only explored in order to probe its limits. I would even hazard that for Pietrosanti white does not exist – at least not in the scientific and cultural sense of traditional interpretations, from the theories of Goethe and Itten to the scintillating “reinventions” of Manlio Brusatin – and that that white is co-opted by the artist, peremptorily, in order to invent and give life to a particular and “artificial” idea of whiteness all his own, one that cannot be com-

pared with any other white, from Fontana to Manzoni to the insistent “white writing” of Marc Tobey. But even this *in vitro* elaboration of a certain idea of white is conducted with great care to avoid any lapse into the naturalistic or the sentimental. Everything is always explicitly artificial, although behind this artifice we glimpse all the alchemical artisanal expertise necessary to arrive at that abstraction, even when the artist employs a small selection of other colours, which are almost suggestive of layers of old stucco from minor works of architecture, but elaborated to obtain “other” tonalities – certainly not the shrill ash blues or the pearly greys of Van Wittel. Here too, we encounter overlapping voices, the skill and the length of time involved in the work’s crafting counterbalancing the aseptic result of purely scientific experimentation. In this, Pietrosanti underlines the distance that separates his work from that of the artists who first inspired him – that great abstract tradition running from Fontana, through the lambent effulgence of Lo Savio and arriving at the metaphysical constructiveness of Castellani. Certainly, the desire to construct lies at the foundation of the entire artistic journey taken by Roberto Pietrosanti, and via a triplicate operation, solidifying, thinning out and crystallising, he seems to want to maintain a feverish sense of the tensions and stress forces affecting his surfaces. Then, almost in order to attenuate the mineral hardness of his works, he allows trails and sinuous trajectories to make rapid incursions, as though the wind that whips round Osvaldo Licini’s “Amalasuntas” builds up, every now and then, behind the flexing joints that surface, like bony apparitions, like an archaeology of the present, recently churned up and re-emerging in the works of Pietrosanti. But unlike remains waiting to be identified and maybe even recomposed in an ideal reconstruction, those surfacings aspire, instead, to rest where they are, like tracks, like Conradian footprints, almost as though to remind us, and the artist himself, that only in studying the tracks of those who have gone before is it possible to give a sense to our own journey. These figures emerging in the artist’s works are subjected to a wild oscillation in two directions, so the more geometrically constructed forms at times rise to the surface as though drawn upwards by a form of exsiccation, and at times they seem to breath, turgidly, in and out, to the point of swelling up like parachute silk. But even this duality serves the artist’s purpose in pointing out that univocal affirmations are never possible, the work should never be assertive in order to exalt negation as a value. Hence, therefore, this continual reliance of his on a non-colour, on the form transformed into its own dissolving, on a material that never lapses into voluptuous texture. Even that apparent excess of presence underlines how, for this artist, absence is always to be seen as

Untitled 2011,  
cm 125x110, raw canvas on  
plywood.  
Private collection







the potential for an allusion to something that is not present, and it is precisely in order to obtain this result that he employs those continuous risings and fallings and those zoomings in, almost looming towards the microscope lens, to counterbalance the gazes surveying interstellar distances, and also, the counterposing of a love of the fragment, of the indeterminate, of incompleteness, with a studied classicism in which it is hard not to see an epiphanic summary of works like Man Ray's "Close up" or "Trompe l'oeuf". Even the endless entertainment that the deliberate heterogeneity of his works seems to offer is, in reality, rooted in a search for continuity and identity that is Morandian in its doggedness. The artist concedes himself few liberties in the structure of his own work, as though any excess of experimentalism would be at odds with his inclination towards coherency, singularity of method and a particularly close relationship with the surrounding context. So his figures seem to emerge as though they had been encapsulated in a material that is drying out around them or, contrastingly, they are outlined by strands of signs that encircle them in a manner that almost recalls Brandi's description of Borromini's wrought iron finials stretching skywards. Even the reading that the artist himself seems to suggest for his works (that they both rise up prayer-like and also flow downwards, like Morris Louis's pourings, until they form broad fluvial deltas) alternates with a skimming flight-like effect, as though we were flying over desert landscapes – the solemnity of an absolute frontality, which the precision of the gashes or of the spear-like forms that detach themselves from his surfaces demands we view close-up, as also happens with those lambent swarms of pinheads that highlight the intervals of perturbing interweavings. And so it is the simultaneous contraposition of the gravitas of his works and the accentuated anti-gravity of the figures that appear there, that suggests that the meaning of Roberto Pietrosanti's entire artistic journey lies in subtraction, a subtraction that leads from form to sign, from the forms' reticence to their concealment, until they are barely perceptible, without resorting to traumatic revelations. The "suspended" quality of many of his figures, which hover in the air as though reluctant to settle, is countered (thanks also to the continual negation of any possible internal horizon within the work) by the crystallisation of other figures which, almost folded in on themselves like sheets in a cupboard, remain in a limbo rendered strangely unfamiliar by casual interruptions and the lack of any outer limits. The limit, the artist seems to suggest, is never the work itself nor even the room, when the artist's work has been developed for a specific environment. It is simply, therefore, rationality that gives substance to what appear to be Warholesque "blurrings", until they soften into fragmen-

**Untitled** 2013,  
cm 150x125, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection

tary conflagrations, if not into meteor trails and sudden “flashes of gaiety”. The same rationality that imposes order on the geometrical structure whose accumulations of material (veritable Duchampian concealments à la Isidore Ducasse), like archipelagos of substance, rimple the implacable geometry of the piazza in Ravenna where (yet again on the exaggerated scale that this kind of urban structure suggests) Pietrosanti draws to the surface these islands of memory, redolent of the Zen gardens of Kyoto and Katsura, and (more probably) the garden of the fourteen rocks, but in a more terrestrial, anchored version: a glittering facade of burnished brass that is solicited, tormented and then quietened, transforming a Byzantine dematerialisation into a more sturdily “barbarian” structure. But his use, too, of the caesura (which offers no glimpse of the secret that his surface guards, a surface which, on the contrary, displays a “glacial” perfection, the “geometric vigour” of a sign that knows no hesitation, that does not vibrate or veer from its chosen course, except to adopt a new one, different and equally confident) seems to be intended to highlight the total and conscious absence of error, to demonstrate the clarity and the lucidity of the artist’s thinking. Similarly, in violating the smooth, infinitely dark or infinitely light, outer coating of his material, Pietrosanti seems to be assessing its tectonic properties, the possibilities of a shift away from an ontological and objective descriptiveness: the potential for *chiaroscuro*. His pure form (which does not yield to the temptations of the cross-reference, despite emerging as part of a larger and ungovernable design of which it whispers, of which it signals the existence) seems, however, not to belong to the universe of the already-seen, of the hint of something remembered, as though, in its aesthetic predilection for appearing both as subject and, simultaneously, as detail, like an icy biological form to be investigated, the work strips itself of any direct link back to the images of the world. Moreover, where it approaches architecture and therefore the logic of function striving for sensation, the hoped-for poetry of spaces, Pietrosanti’s work conveys a feeling of logical construction, a sense of space-appropriated, which gives his signs the authority of mass and volume. This happens in the intervention in Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where the centrifugal advance of the fissures across the surface suggests, perhaps, a desire to announce the presence of an expanding telluric force, a new form of control, growing in rigour and artificiality. But it also happens in the project for the NTV headquarters in Moscow, where the centripetal spiral of the descending ground surface, which loses altitude to arrive, Le Corbusier-like, at a “sensation”, has the same violence, the same brutality as the sudden and unexpected burgeoning of cruel metal thorns out of one of the columns in the church of S. Pietro alla Carità in Tivoli. Pietrosanti’s works tend to dis-



**Untitled 2010**,  
cm 100x110, mixed media  
on plywood

pp. 121, 123, 124, 125,  
**Untitled 2011**,  
cm 74x126x80, acrylic resin  
and fiberglass.  
Private collection

tance themselves from a purely conceptual or intellectual realm – at the beginning of his career via the visual associations that he tended to highlight, whilst today he underlines the objecthood of his work. He currently highlights its sculptural qualities, with frequent references to the nobility of the materials and with a polishedness that results from a technical rigour which, together with his numerous juxtapositions, gives his works, and above all his materials, their classicism and composedness, even in the measured minimalism of their forms. What is surprising in this latest cycle of work is the artist's desire to indicate, in some way, a clean break away from the direction his work previously followed, but within a "system of assonances" so that, despite the differences that arise as they "distance themselves" from his earlier work, the pieces presented in the current exhibition maintain the same fundamental characteristics. First and foremost, they too are crafted with an obsessive precision which suggests that rigour itself is the foundation for the very exercise that generates the work, as has already and rightly been observed. The result is an evident aspiration to beauty in the form of a constructional precision which does not, however, reveal any of the fatigue of the act of construction. All this, in a sort of suspension of the image which becomes an icon of exactitude, wielding a veritable "geometric vigour" even when the image emerges from the work with a sumptuous sinuosity more akin to wild abandon than it is to any contrived geometrical convention. The dryness of his more recent pieces is less the result of a deliberate desiccation and more the effect of a sort of cooling in which the work's monochromaticity accentuates its ambiguous oscillation in a kind of limbo that is neither entirely the realm of sculpture nor that of painting. Pietrosanti's current iconographical universe focuses on elemental images that suggest imperceptible spatial interpenetrations, no longer ostentatiously expansive, but circumscribed almost to the point of forming an impenetrable *hortus conclusus*. Yet even when the image, dissociating itself from geometry, unfolds with a more beguiling allusiveness, almost as though opening its wings to hover in the emptiness of those "solidified" airy spaces, the elemental or elementary nature of the design assigns it to the realm of absolute lyrical abstraction. His work as a whole, however, is imbued with an earthier character by his emphasising of the image in close up, as though focusing on a detail, an obsessively recurring but negligible portion of reality, or of nullifying macroscopic-ness, in a way that clearly recalls the close-ups of Domenico Gnoli, although in Gnoli's case these were characterised by a paradoxical and corrosively ironic realism. Pietrosanti's points of reference clearly lie less in a world of exasperated iconicity, and more in the grand abstractionism of Burri and Fontana, and more specifically in certain very circumscribed as-





pects of their work. It is obvious that, in the case of Burri, for example (the only antecedent Pietrosanti seems to look to), this is limited to the extraordinary adventure of Burri's "Il Viaggio", seen as a summary of the maestro's entire artistic journey. But all of this happens in a state of suspension in which, despite being entirely different from one another, the works present themselves in a serried sequence held together only by a studiously "academic" aura that an adamantine composure renders almost neoclassical in flavour. The same suspension, the same coolness that remove the work itself from the wear and tear of space and time, seem to emphasise the imperceptible variations that gently stir the image until it begins to rise from the surface, which barely holds it in. Etched into the studied smoothness of the whole, which the colour/non-colour unifies and, perhaps more importantly, anchors, without ever slipping into neo avant-gardisms, the shadow, too, evokes the suspended quality of a Canova-esque *stiacciato* in bas-reliefs that are sculpted with an almost "buttery" softness in which there emerges the merest hint of a need for and a mild fear of that corporeality sculpted and then negated, and of the consolidations that testify to an apparently rediscovered equilibrium between mind and body. All his smaller pieces, including a series of drawings on paper (a drawing liberal and liberating, taking an almost infinite delight in both the liberation of the form and the dread of and need for it), can be associated with the "system of assonances" already in evidence in the previous exhibition held at A.A.M. in 1996. They still exhibit their rigorous craftsmanship – beauty in the form of constructional precision – and develop, with a surprising smoothness, into veritable icons of exactitude. The most surprising and innovative feature of this series is the very obvious inward compression, within the area occupied by the work's surface, of a handful of elements, which no longer dilate until they are indistinguishable from the background. The peace that once reigned between the object investigated and the surface hosting it seems to have come to an end: almost as though the shadows which were once subtly hesitant if not ambiguous, have become threateningly real. The "field" of the yet-to-come is suggested in dense layers of a unifying material which, like a layer of lava, covers everything, immobilizing and solidifying those signs (although they are still capable of levitating to the surface, if not of breathing there). If, earlier, I highlighted Pietrosanti's relationship with the great Italian tradition of abstractionism, today, in the light of more obvious references to, for example, the world of Lucio Fontana (not so much to his eager invasion of the space beyond the canvas, as to his precise and corrosive exploration of forms of space), the sense of Pietrosanti's relationship with Fontana is clearer. There is one particular drawing by Fontana, from 1948, in which impenetrable, monochrome

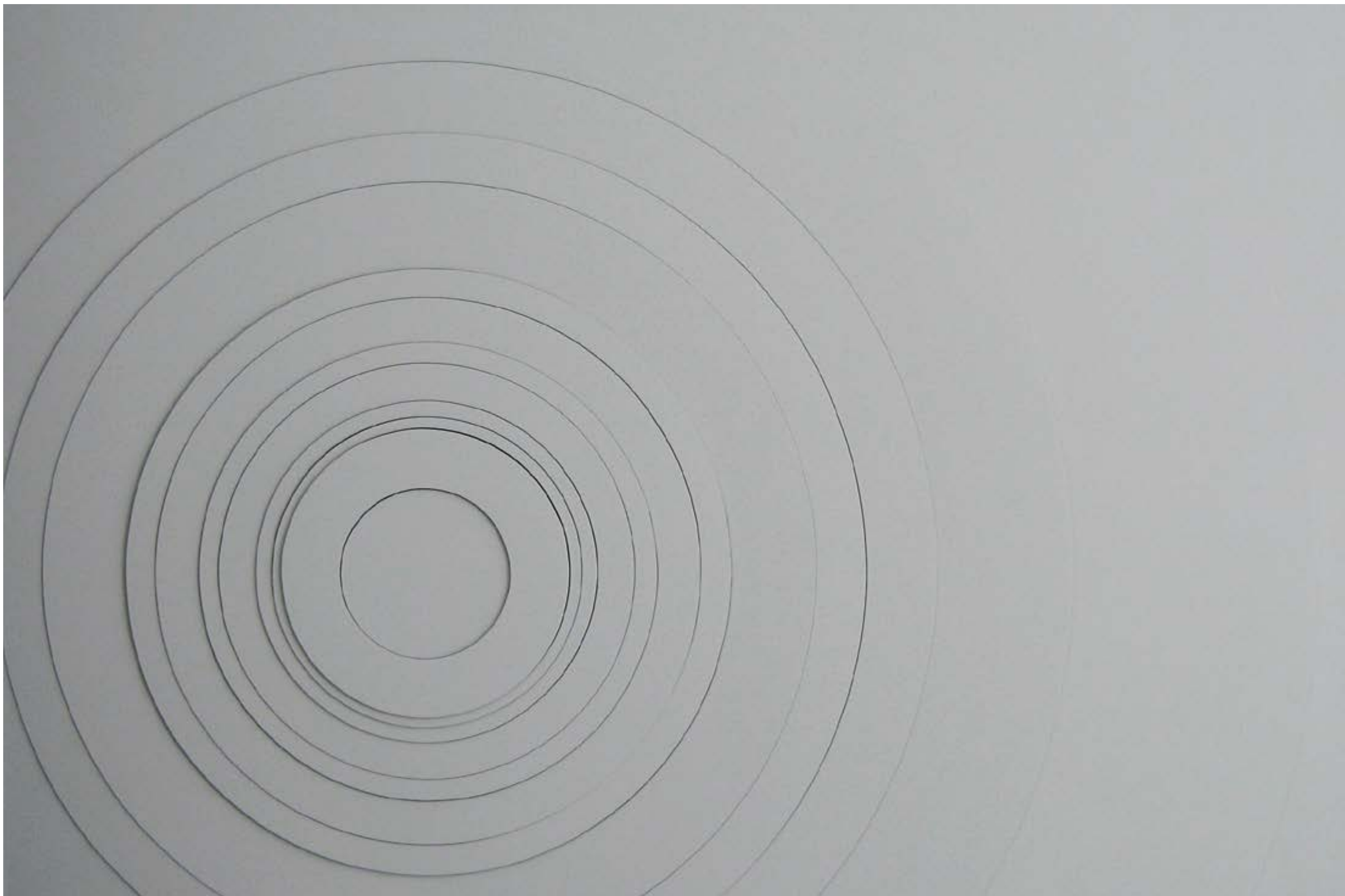




monads collide with one another in a relationship of pure proximity, held together only by a liquid halo that reconnects them in a single, continuous stroke. The “concreteness” of this work, by no coincidence made for the first Arte Concreta portfolio, which was exhibited at the Salto bookshop in Milan in December 1948, represented, for Fontana, a sign of a deliberate continuity with the geometric focus chosen, at the end of the 1920's, by Seuphor and Torres-Garcia's *Cercle et Carré* movement and the group associated with Art Concret. But where Fontana's learned relationship with the historical avant-gardes privileged the elementary, Pietrosanti instead favours a sense of harmonious disjointedness. So, after his early conceptual/structural experiments, he now concentrates on highlighting bony nodules slowly surfacing, on penetrations and perforations that are responses to Fontana's neon sabre-strokes, and on the inflorescence of natural and organic forms redolent of Georgia O'Keeffe, softening into a swarm of New Atlantises that surface and settle like dust on an atoll and in which we catch a glimpse of possible new worlds of uncontaminated formal beauty.

Rome 2006

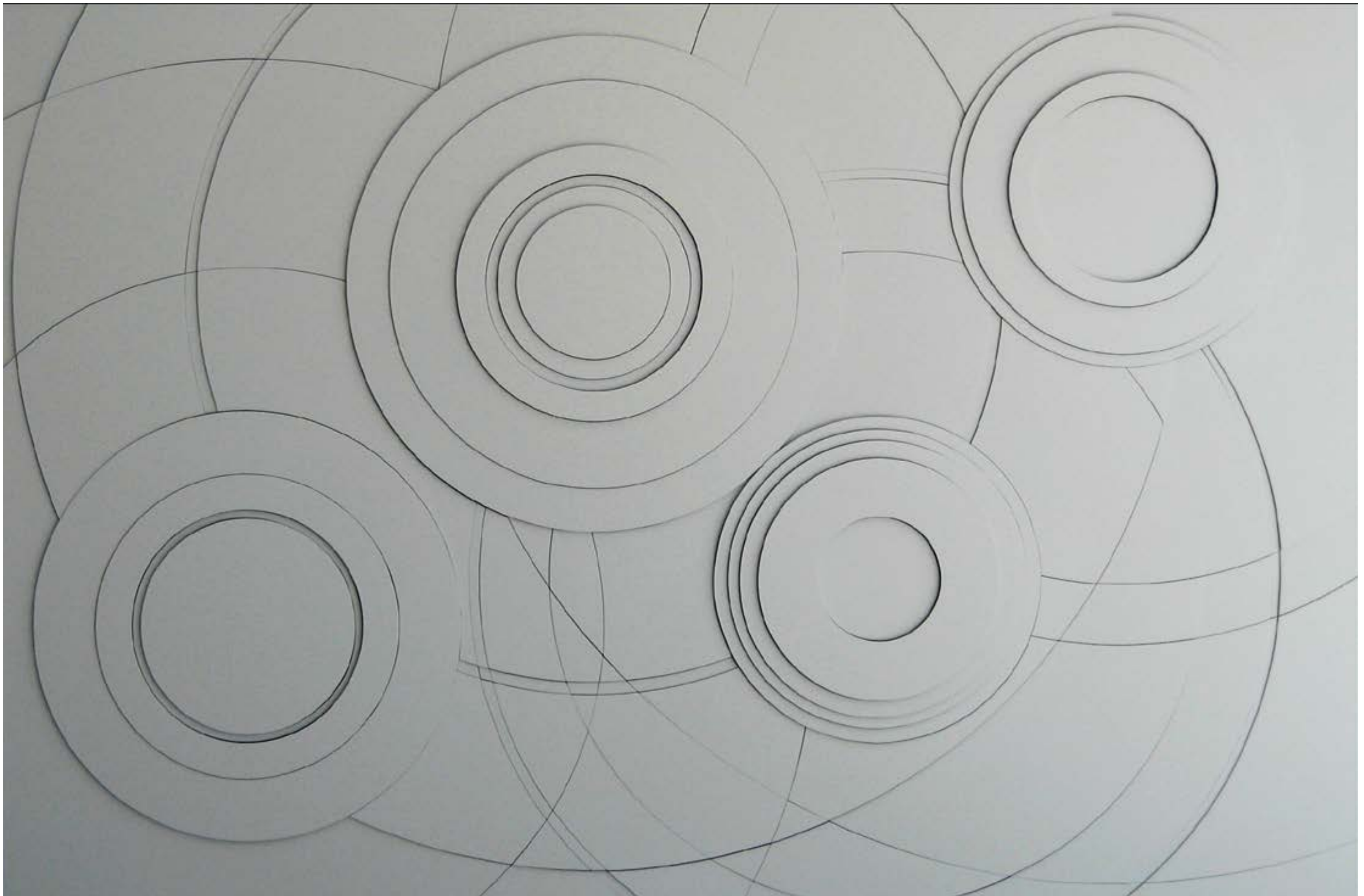
Untitled 2010,  
cm 200x300,  
acrylurethane paint on PVC  
panel







Untitled 2010,  
cm 200x300,  
acrylurethane paint on PVC  
panel



Untitled 2010,  
cm 200x300,  
acrylurethane paint on PVC  
panel







**ROBERTO PIETROSANTI'S *GIARDINO ITALIANO*\***

Andrea Valcalda

For the garden has always been, and remains,  
the space in which man translates his relationship  
with nature into structural form.

Rudolf Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*

*One early-autumn Saturday, in the October of 2010, I visited Roberto Pietrosanti's studio, which back then was to be found at the Tecnopolo Tiburtino [a technology park on the outskirts of Rome]. That day Roberto showed me a new piece of work: a wooden vitrine containing a 1:10 scale model of a section of hedge, shaped in a classical renaissance design and assembled from thousands of little shards of cardboard, glued one on top of another in piles of forty. It was the first model for what was to be an environmental sculpture, the Giardino italiano [Italianate Garden], a hedge formed of hundreds of kilos of fragments of pietra serena.*

*At the time of that visit (which I remember being an enjoyable day of gossip, ideas, friendship and companionableness) I had recently finished writing the introduction to this book, a sort of "plan of work", and I envisaged one chapter being dedicated to the fruits of my readings re-*

*garding the history and philosophy of gardens, which I had cultivated with particular enthusiasm over the preceding months. Over time an idea that was, to my mind, even more stimulating, began to ripen: that of giving concrete application to the concepts I had assimilated, testing them against what is, in some ways, an extreme touchstone: Roberto's Giardino italiano. What follows is a remnant of that operation. (...)*

D.

"When times are hard the garden will be hard: but there will always be a garden." (R. Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*)

I see Pietrosanti's garden as a garden in the *present tense*, by which I mean a qualitative or stative tense embracing, rather than replacing, past and future. A garden in no way consolatory, neither therapeutic nor conciliatory; and certainly not political, revolutionary, recreational or of any social utility.

\* From *Un giardino a Pieve Ligure. Esercizi di composizione di un luogo interiore*. Edizioni Il Bulino, Rome, 2015.



Responding to an interviewer's questions regarding a completed project on the site of the Barberini Vineyards on the Palatine Hill in Rome, Pietrosanti explained that he walked comfortably and with pleasure through archaeological sites, amid the ruins, in order to identify their potential, "to understand the forms, to re-elaborate them".

Turning back to the definition of the garden as a "model landscape", and thus to the [various] historical manifestations of the art of gardening as testaments to [different] ways of seeing and judging the natural landscape, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that the themes of Pietrosanti's *Giardino italiano* include that of the contemplability of a landscape made of rubble.

A first piece of evidence in support of this hypothesis seems to me to be identifiable in a fact both intimate and obvious: the sensibility of an artist born and brought-up in L'Aquila, the city that was destroyed by an earthquake in 2009, its ancient centre even now, obscenely, a mound of ruins; it too, in its own way, "a garden of stone", inverting the sense of a definition that Cesare Brandi originally coined for the city of Noto, which rose from the devastation of another violent quake.

A second suggestion might regard a vision, and a judgement, of Italy and her ethical, environmental, political or social situation. However, while to a certain extent agreeing with it, I would limit any such reading to the most superficial of levels: I see an association between my own impatience with those who pontificate about the country's "moral ruin" and decay (beginning, in most cases, with macroscopic omissions, as well as implicitly absolving themselves of any blame) and the implicit reply to be found in Pietrosanti's work and civil consciousness, which are solid, rigorous and factual to a rare degree.

Significantly more fertile roots for the idea can, in my opinion, be found in a combination of other elements: the garden conceived as a fundamental locus for *recomposition*; a reference to the formal tradition of Italianate gardens and their fragile equilibrium; the artist's specific moral standpoint, his vision and his responsibility towards the present and towards the accumulated debris of history.

In the face of these, Klee's angel, in Benjamin's interpretation, cannot hold himself back but is driven forward by the stormy wind that, caught in his wings, blows out of Paradise and towards the future.

It is as though Pietrosanti wanted, with this gesture, to show the angel that man's singular vocation is to know and to embrace that which has been denied him: to pause before the ruins, to reconnect the fragments, to give them form, perhaps even new life, redeeming their original beauty. A typically human "work of contemplation": the work of a gardener.

But here I also see a "use" of the rubble, of the detritus, without any vague hope of redemption. A work that redeems and rescues transience; an untiring attempt at reconciliation.

"The sign, the written word, is history, but a secularized history leaving no residue (...) an exposition of the world's sorrows" (M. Cacciari, *Intransitabili utopie*); and, again citing Benjamin, revelation of "the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape".

It is interesting to note how one cannot enter, or stroll through, the garden that Pietrosanti has designed: it is a garden enjoyable exclusively via its guarded contemplability. Like many of his works, it draws us in and then, as we get closer, it reveals its asperity and drives us away.



The idea that an intimate, circumscribed space like that of a garden contains no perils is utter delusion. Just like the belief that its physical limits, its boundaries, might enclose its essence.

"Man and Nature resemble one another and, at heart, are one and the same. Man is the little world, the microcosm. The Environment is the macrocosm. As is generally said. Nothing, however, prevents us from affirming the opposite, and defining Man as the macrocosm and Nature the microcosm: if both are infinite, then man, in as far as he is part of nature, is equal to its entirety, and the same can be said for nature, in as far as it is part of man (...). Man is part of the world, but at the same time he is

every bit as complex as the world is. The world is part of man, but the world, too, is every bit as complex as man." (P. Florensky, *Macrocosm and Microcosm*)

"In the end, the result of this will be a form of identity card for humanity, a snapshot that is, in truth, quite unforgiving. For the garden cannot but be order: man's relationship with nature is measured against it with great precision; and it is also order in the sense of measure, education and salvation, because every form of order is also all of these things." (R. Borchardt, *The Passionate Gardener*)

Rome 2015

Untitled 2012,  
cm 60x50, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection

p. 134,  
**Giardino Italiano** 2009, detail model,  
cm 80x100, cardboard, wood, glass  
p. 137,  
Private collection  
**Giardino Italiano** 2009, model,  
cm 80x100, cardboard, wood, glass.  
Private collection







## THE CAVERN

Luca Ricci

The jeep dodged a pyre from which a plume of thick smoke rose, dirtying the teal-blue sky. They were scattered all over the place: it was the only way some people had found to get rid of the stench of the corpses. The jeep swerved towards the first available supermarket, halting fifty yards or so from the entrance.

“Pass me the binoculars,” said the man in the vehicle.

Passing them, the boy next to him asked, “Why did it happen?”

The man had already tried to explain it to him many times. There had been a moment in which the global financial markets had starved a sizable section of the world’s population, and social turmoil had done the rest.

“Humanity’s back where it started,” was his toneless reply.

“Yes, but why?” the boy insisted, childishly.

The man didn’t have time for this. He had to keep an eye on the entrance to the supermarket – it all seemed calm, but you never knew –, and then, eventually, attempt a sortie. In the distance yet another explosion could be heard. Neither the man nor the boy seemed surprised. Over the past few days Rome had

been torn apart by violence, and the hope now was that the wave of devastation was shifting south, into the outlying districts, into the suburbs. Elsewhere.

“Won’t you tell me why?” the boy urged.

“I don’t know,” the man lied. “I thought I knew but maybe I was wrong.”

In reality, the chain of events had been fairly logical. The markets had crashed, inflaming the ire of communities worldwide. The violence of the virtual exchanges had soon mutated into real war.

“The entrance is clear,” the man announced. “I’ll try to get in there.”

He ordered the boy to get behind the wheel, ready to escape. The rudimentary course of driving lessons had lasted just half a day: on the other hand, the business of survival left no time for the perfecting of other skills.

“I’m off,” said the man.

The boy nodded in acknowledgement, endeavouring to keep his feet on the correct pedals. He would have liked to have asked yet again how it was that things had come to this pass, why it was that from one day to the next they had found themselves back in the Stone Age, but this time he remained silent.



Meanwhile, the man had almost reached the entrance to the supermarket. He flattened himself against the wall and shouldered the semi-automatic rifle that he had succeeded in snatching from a well-known gun shop in the centre of town. The specialist shops were the first to have been looted, followed by the police stations and the Carabinieri headquarters. Firearms had become the *bible*: anyone who failed to get hold of so much as a pistol would soon die of hunger. The man aimed at the supermarket entrance. His hand was shaking and he struggled to keep the rifle's barrel straight. He knew that, in this new world that was taking shape, he was a mere amateur, thrown into the fray. He knew that at that very moment there were many men, stronger and better prepared than he was, who were trawling the city in search of a little food. There were groups of former soldiers who were prepared to do anything, criminal organisations, marauders and gangs. But the normal people too, the people who just weeks earlier had been his *neighbours*, wouldn't think twice before riddling him with bullets for the sake of a box of tinned food... His irruption into the supermarket was over fairly swiftly. He tried to mimic what he'd seen done in war films or action films, just that this time it was all real. He ran through the supermarket from one end to the other without entering any of the aisles: a sort of recce. Then he began to sprint like a madman into the various sections, into the aisles that had once been innocuous rows of merchandise and were now transformed into dark, narrow tunnels. There was hardly anything left on the shelves. It was the third supermarket he'd found in that state, already picked clean by hordes of ravenous men. In the end, all he managed to load on the jeep was a pack of soft drinks.

"Did you have to shoot?" asked the boy.

"There wasn't any need," answered the man.

"And anyway, you'd have heard it".

He should have started looking for another

Ara Pacis 2012,  
cm 220x300x200, composite graphite











supermarket but he could feel his strength failing. He was *frightened*, that's what it was. With the jeep, they passed what was left of the Maxxi, the museum of contemporary art where a couple of his own works had been exhibited. "Don't you want to go in and see if there's anything left?" asked the boy.

"Are you kidding?" he answered. "There's no time for art now; that was the old life."

The boy didn't say anything further and he continued to drive, continued to force himself to drive. Of course he'd have liked to save a few pieces, of course he still thought about Fontana's slashes or Burri's ragged seams, or Klein's blue, or the profound silliness of Warhol or Koons or Cattelan.

"Perhaps one day we'll go to the Maxxi," he said without thinking. "To the Maxxi and all the other museums."

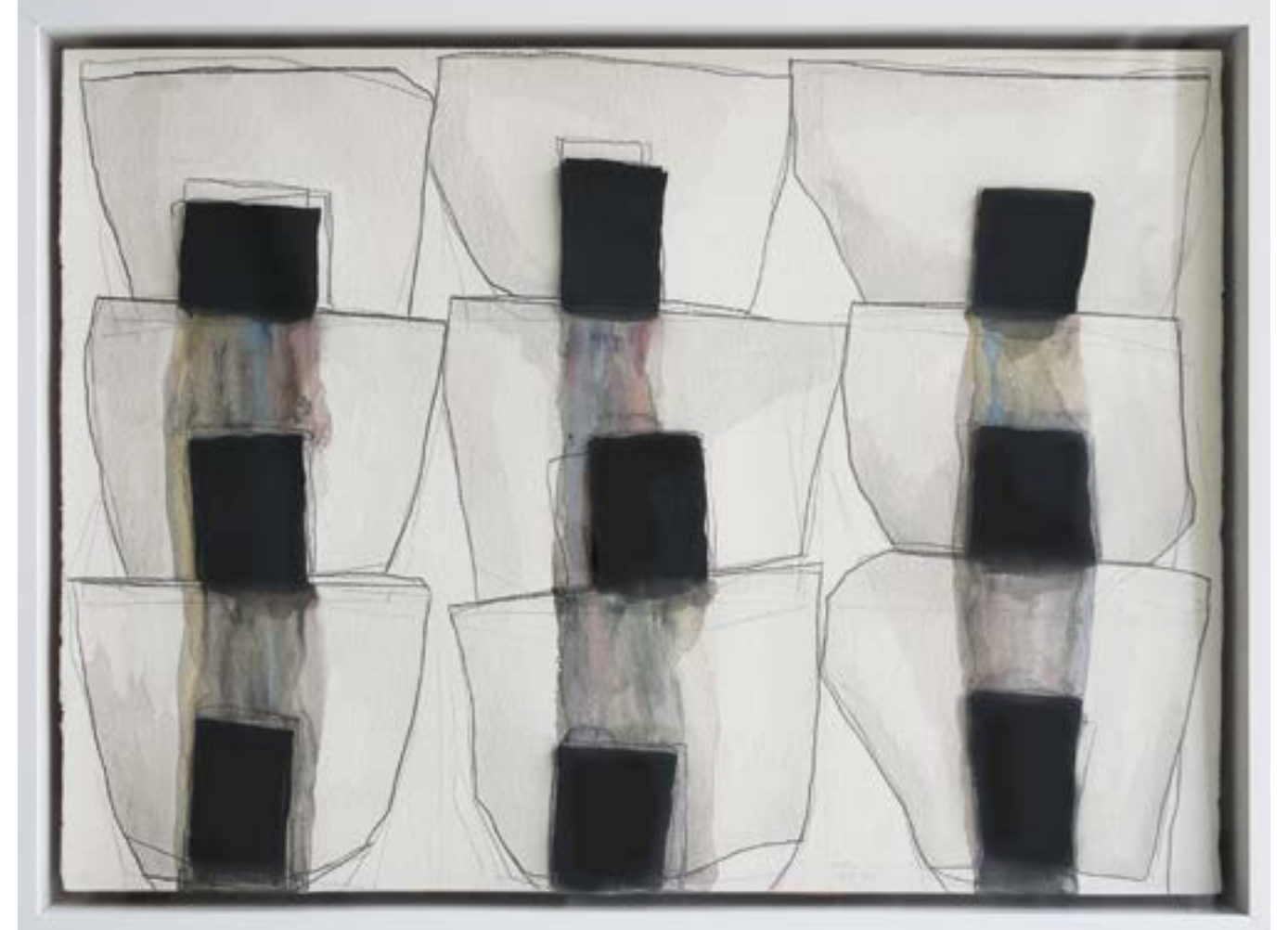
The boy nodded. He seemed terrified, now. Near the Tiber, right in the middle of the Ara Pacis, someone had constructed a sort of cavern. "Will they shoot us?" he asked, almost whimpering.

"There isn't any other road we can take," replied the man.

The traditional houses, as it were, had almost all been abandoned in favour of safer dwelling places. Most people now lived in grottoes or caves, because they were easier to guard: only one entrance. And many people only had one bullet. The whole Monte Mario area, which overlooked the city, had been tunnelled into in that way.

"Why did it happen?" asked the boy, again.

"It couldn't have gone any other way," the man replied coldly. A coldness that he hoped would put an end to the discussion once and for all.



For a while he remained uncertain as to what to do, with the Ara Pacis cavern looming menacingly on the right bank of the Tiber. Then an absurd thought occurred to him. A cavern like that, carved perfectly out of a square block of stone, would have been the perfect *installation*. Like one of those he, too, used to make.

The thought lasted a mere instant, while new explosions rattled the cobbles that had been ripped up during the clashes. He took a deep breath and put his foot to the gas.

Rome 2015

**Bestie** 2011,  
cm 56x76, black aluminium, mixed  
media on paper

Opposite, **Bestie** 2011,  
cm 60x87x21, black aluminium,  
mixed media on paper



EARTHLY APPARITIONS

Franco Purini

Roberto Pietrosanti's works position themselves at the intersection of three distinct lines of research, of which they represent an effective and enduring synthesis, bringing life to a theme that could be defined the *domination of chaos* or, if one prefers, *chaos vanquished by order*. It is a theme that sees a primordial energy, impetuous and roiling, come to terms with a prevailing order, a fundamental law in which the spirit recognizes and manifests itself, imposing its presence as the most urgent of necessities. This is the equivalent of *reason*, in that it is a means of redemption, but at the same time the site of an ulterior loss. Such order, translated into a form of rationality, meaning that which gives a sense to the arbitrary, is very simply (although it is perhaps unnecessary to underline this) the enduring memory of the *classical*, by which we mean an impartial vision of the contradictions, the concordances, the contingencies and of the complications that permeate human existence, rearranged in a harmony which is never self-absorbed, but open and mutable. The classical canon (which in reality also includes what Rosalind Krauss has called *formlessness*) is essentially that ideal and imaginary place in which that which evolves and degrades entropically is, nonetheless, capable of generating, moment by moment, a complete and lasting representation of itself. It is in that rarefied district of the mind, in which disorder transcends into order, that, in the context of artistic invention, a definitive and ever-relevant iconic simulacrum materializes, one devoid of any emotiveness if not that which is rendered sublime by an intellectual detachment that implies man's reconciliation with the meaningless randomness of things. An authentically classical artist – a classicalism

Overleaf and on p. 153,  
"Post Classici", **Colonne**,  
Palatino Foro Romano,  
Rome, 2013 galvanized  
steel







tested against the shifting contradictoriness of the contemporary metropolis – Roberto Pietrosanti knows how to detach himself from his work, putting, between the work and himself, a distance sufficient to guarantee that everything that is subjective will decant slowly into an *external* sediment, in an objective concretion which transforms his own experience into something neither incidental nor transitory but as *natural* as a stone, a mountain, a coral reef.

The first of the features underpinning Roberto Pietrosanti's work is a strong sense of its constituent material, envisaged as a dense and stable substance, considered in all its rudimental promise and in the fullness of its visual/tactile impact. Sensitive to its subtlest echoes and with a precise comprehension of the potential forms that lurk within it like implicit realities, Roberto Pietrosanti has, with this material, a complex and intrinsically conflictual relationship. In effect, the material (in more than one way resembling what Antonin Artaud referred to as the subjectile) fights against the form it will come to express – a resistance that has to be confronted with appropriate guile, firstly by accepting it and then bending it to the artist's own ends.

The second element shaping Roberto Pietrosanti's work is his pronouncedly conceptual approach. In effect, there is an emphatically intellectual component to every one of his works, be it a canvas in relief, a metal on canvas, or a sphere in iron: an extreme awareness of the action to be undertaken and of the finalities that this action sets itself. His is a conceptualism in no way showy or pedagogical, nor does it express any degree of self-satisfied esotericism: on the contrary, it is the austere and elemental tool that enables the material to become material, to become a physical reality imbued with a desire for form. This conceptualism has a notably theoretical quality of its own, thanks to which his work presents and constructs hypotheses of great clarity and very precise frameworks of discourse. Pietrosanti's art is woven through, stitch by stitch, with detailed reflections on the nature and the meaning of the act of making art (experienced, ambivalently, as both the expression of a programmatic intent and an eager transport) in which the task of the artist's gesture (a confident gesture, at times solemnly *priestly*) is to reveal the truth of art, which is to say the truth of how much, before the work was realised, was *existent* but *invisible*. This *dialectical structure* which is, however, kept implicit, almost like a *watermark* running through his paintings and sculptures, is the *living consciousness*, so to speak, of the work, but with none of the elitism and self-satisfied abstruseness typical of conceptual art. Recouping, in some ways, the archaism of Arte Povera, Roberto Pietrosanti pours his conceptualism into the totality of the work, so that it becomes an organic part of the whole.





The third of the approaches characterising his research is an emphatic highlighting of the methods employed in, and the various stages of, the work's construction – a constitutive experience that presents itself to the viewer as a *narrative process* relating its own evolution. This allows it to acquire a tense and evocative *temporality* of its own, as a result of which it also acquires historicity. *Eternal* in their classicalism and at the same time immersed in the flux of events, thanks to this internal contradiction (which, if it didn't seem too *sentimental* and *empathetic*, it would be tempting to think of as dramatic) the works of Roberto Pietrosanti participate in the most radical form of modernity. It is, in fact, undeniable that the twentieth century as a whole has seen a succession of rifts that have pitted it against itself, almost as though to demonstrate the concurrence, throughout its course of events, of positive elements and negative forces. Intentionally overstepping its own limits, modernity always finds itself outside and beyond its own coordinates and paradigms. In the same way Roberto Pietrosanti's objects, walled into their eloquent silence, recount their own internal contradictions, their structural plurality – the rare and precious fruits of interlaced and irreconcilable declarations.

It should be remembered that these three lines of research do not shape his work autonomously, but fuse together, as has already been remarked, in the inimitable and always surprising unity of its form. The fact that this unity is not conspicuous, but is, on the contrary, attenuated and subtly *diminished* via judicious adaptations and careful *fragmentation*, does not prevent it from catching the viewer's eye, like a ripple. *Active* in their surroundings, Pietrosanti's works often shelter an unassailable nucleus that anchors them in place, drawing in the forces at play in the surrounding context.

Roberto Pietrosanti's works occupy space with an unquestionable authority. They occupy space, but at the same time incorporate an autonomous space of their own, creating a vibrant dialogue between the two, made up of antitheses and affiliations, of proximity and distances, of identities and differences. The space into which Roberto Pietrosanti's works are inserted is condensed and anti-perspective, repetitive and complex, discontinuous and corpuscular: its folds generate a multitude of gravitational accumulations and interstitial fractures, metrical interferences and typological digressions. It is an uneven space that defeats any attempt to approach it grammatically or taxonomically, favouring complex and definitive utterances, in some ways *postsyntactic*, which present themselves as the *physical evidence* of remote and indecipherable events. Permeated with ancestral *signs of origin*, Pietrosanti's works (which seem to *demand* a direct relationship with the city) take the form of *earthly apparitions* riven with secret movements, dotted with mysterious signs, shaped by



obscure and powerful forces. Crisscrossed with echoes of the linguistic universes of Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri and Mark Rothko, endowed with an innate instinct for the curve in which one senses the sacredness of myth, the work of the young L'Aquilan-born Roman artist (who must surely have absorbed from his homeland that absoluteness of form which is much more than mere simplicity) hovers poetically between painting, sculpture and installation. Worlds different but kindred, of which Roberto Pietrosanti is capable of distilling, with inspired precision, the genetic core, bringing their elements to the point of fusion, and then casting them into the mould of that theme which makes his research unique, the theme to which we have already given a name: *chaos vanquished by order*.

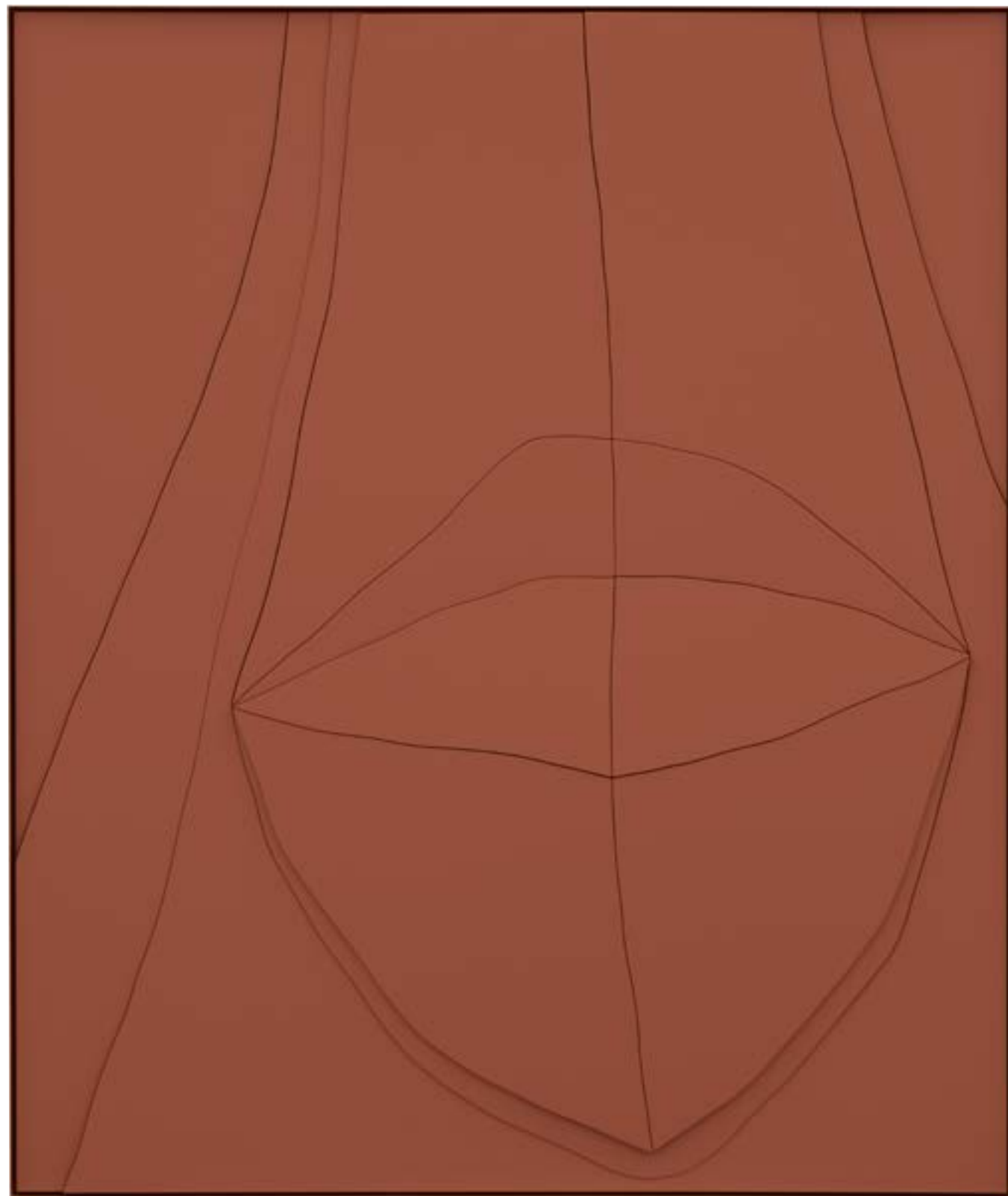
Rome 2006

Untitled 2013,  
cm 100x90, mixed media  
on plywood.  
Private collection



Untitled 2015,  
cm 90x100, mixed media on  
plywood.  
Private collection





## ACTION AND POTENTIAL SEVEN WORKS BY ROBERTO PIETROSANTI

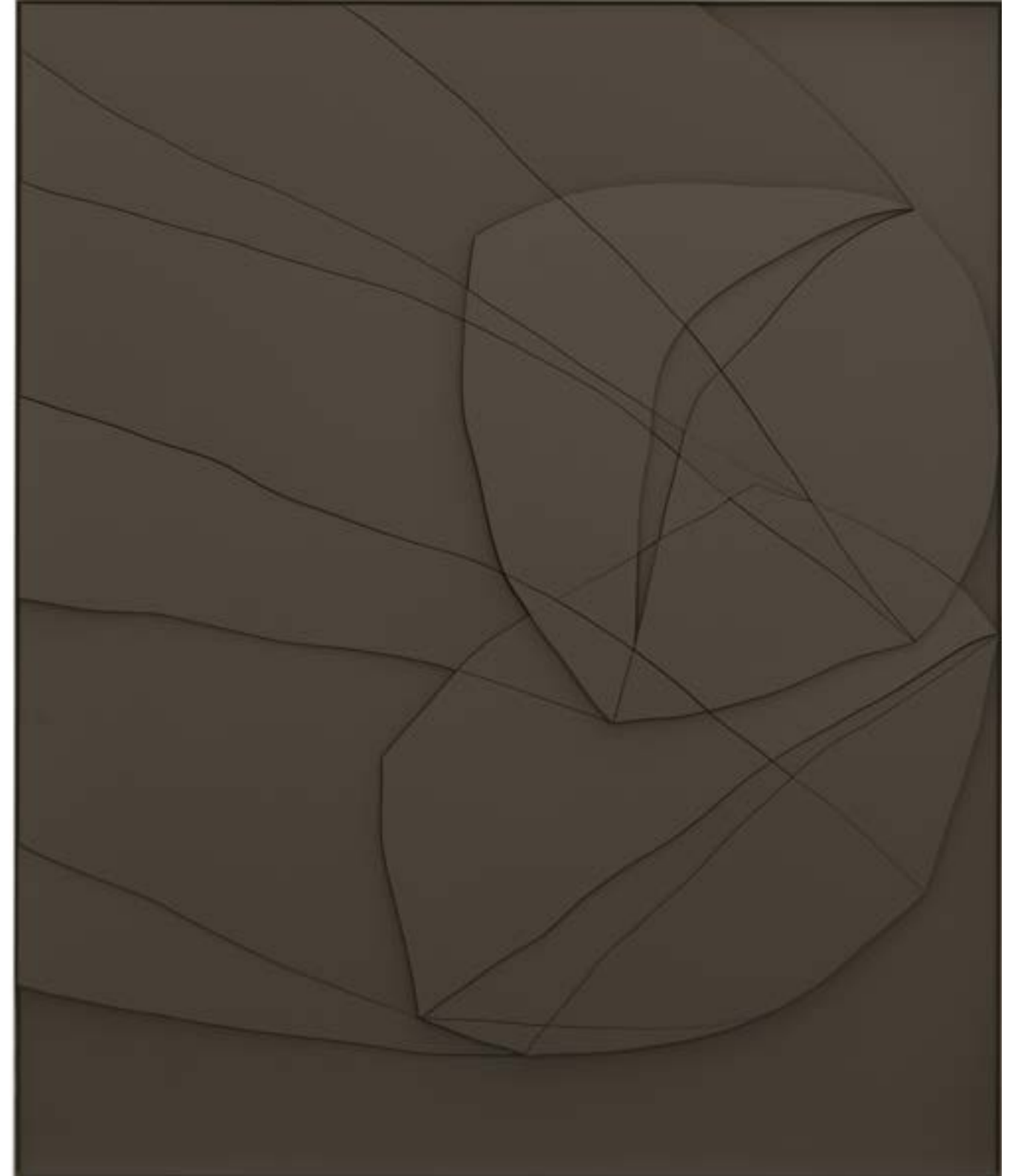
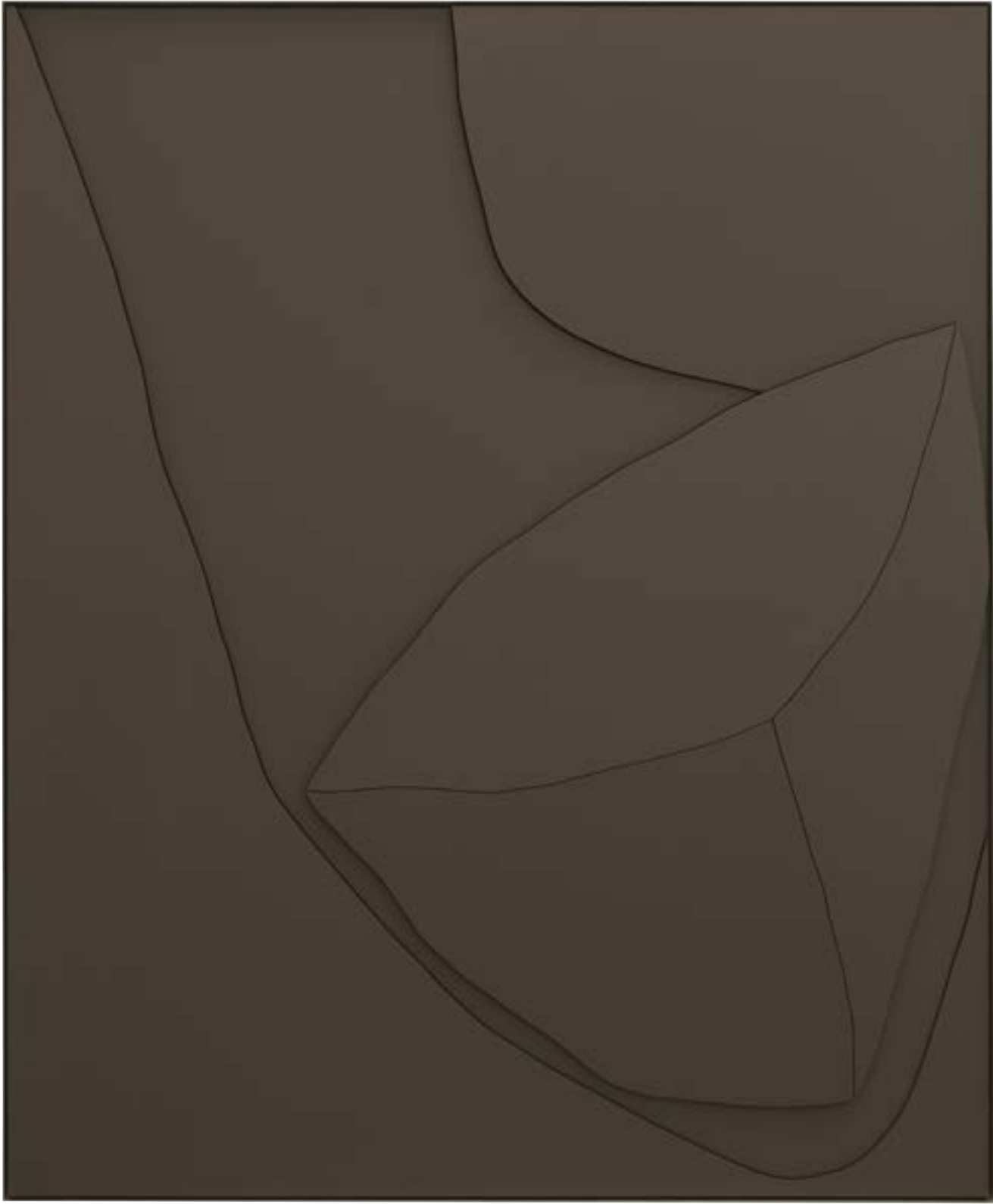
Marco Meneguzzo

In ancient classicism one of the aesthetic categories of figurative representation – borrowed, I would say, from the Aristotelean system – concerns the action that the represented figure is undertaking or intends to undertake: in a familiar representational system, such as that of the classical world, where everyone knows what this hero or that god could and should do, and where everyone is perfectly capable of recognizing a figure via the attributes by which he or she is inevitably accompanied (Hercules with his club, Apollo with his lyre or his bow, Hera with her diadem, bearded Zeus with his bolt of lightning...), the range of possible actions was, after all, not vast, because everything was connected with mythological narratives that were, substantially, immutable, despite their possible variations. The same system has survived in Judeo-Christian representations, which have joined and occasionally replaced those of Greco-Roman culture, with what is sometimes an even greater rigidity: saints and biblical figures had to be immediately recognizable in that “poor man’s bible” which constituted the codified repertoire of artistic representations over the centuries. Yet, even in the presence of a code so rigorous as to seem, when put into words, perhaps even overly rigid, the possible mutations of each individual figure are practically infinite (as is demonstrated, for example, by the thousands and thousands of madonnas that have trooped through the past two thousand or so years...); and the first of the broad subcategories within which this code can be seen at work does, in fact, regard the intention or the action, in other words, the moment in which the figure “is about to” act, or a moment in the midst of the action that we know he or she will inevitably undertake. The two different moments are classified with the apt

*Atto e Potenza* 2013,  
cm 150x125, acrylurethane  
paint on PVC panel

p. 160, *Atto 1* 2013,  
p. 161, *Atto 2* 2013,  
p. 162 *Atto 3* 2013,  
p. 163 *Potenza 1* 2013,  
p. 164 *Potenza 2* 2013,  
p. 165 *Potenza 3* 2013,

all cm 150x125, smalto  
acrylurethane paint on PVC  
panels  
Courtesy Galleria Santo  
Ficara



definitions of “actuality” or “potentiality”: “potentiality” when the figure is planning or considering the action that will, effectively, make him or her noteworthy, “actuality” when the figure is portrayed during the action for which he or she is famous, or in its immediate aftermath.

Therefore, when Roberto Pietrosanti decided to take as a “pre-text” for his latest cycle of work the observation, both idealized and concrete, of two great works that share the same subject (David), by two very different artists (Michelangelo and Gian Lorenzo Bernini), the first element to catch the eye was precisely this difference between “potentiality” and “actuality” in the two figures’ poses: calm and self-assured, Michelangelo’s David grips the stone with which he is about to hit Goliath; Bernini’s David has just thrown the stone (which we do not see, but which we know is flying towards its target) and his entire body is thrown off-balance by the explosion of power that the act of flinging the stone requires. So, Michelangelo is “potentiality”, Bernini is “actuality”: all very well, were it not for the fact that Pietrosanti is neither critic nor historian but an artist and, moreover, an incurably “abstract” artist, something that complicates in no small way any search for a motive and, above all, any analysis of the results.

The contemporary artists who draw inspiration quite openly from artists of the past are far from few in number: one has only to consider Picasso to understand instantly the intimate bonds that unite artists of all eras. So much so that, to cite another example even more relevant to Pietrosanti’s approach, Yves Klein, that other giant, maintained that the artist whose work was closest to his own was Giotto. This lack of concern for historical periods and time, reducing everything to a continuous contemporaneity, derives, in artists – and, more generally, in the more observant of art lovers –, from the intrinsic power of the language of art which surpasses the stylistic differences imposed by various historical moments, almost (almost!) for the same reason that a mathematical equation is the same in the middle ages, today and in the near future. But if Klein’s affinity with Giotto (and vice versa, at that point) is immediately obvious in the blue in all of the French artist’s works, and in the Florentine painter’s infinite skies which represent, quantitatively, the greater part of his frescoes and which are the element that gives them unity and homogeneity, it is more difficult to recognise the complexity of the human figure (which is the quintessence of figurative representation) and, what is more, one motivated by an urgency as great as that of saving his people from slavery, in the abstract works of Pietrosanti. It is more difficult, but not impossible, and Pietrosanti loves this kind of challenge. For a start, the young Roman artist concentrates on the detail that, metonym-like, “stands for the whole”: in the case of David, in all Davids, that detail is the stone, the pebble that kills or will kill (that much we know for sure) Goliath. Now, the sharp and jagged edges (as dangerous as those of a stone that has been chipped at to ensure it does more damage) of the stony

projectile are clearly recognizable in Pietrosanti’s six pieces dedicated to the two Davids (three for one and three for the other), but this is not and cannot be the issue. Otherwise we would, paradoxically, find ourselves confronted with the “portrait of a stone” and thus with works that are entirely figurative and merely disguised as abstract (apart from anything else, in Bernini’s David there is no trace of a stone: it is flying through imaginary space...); the question instead lies in the sense, on the one hand, of [there being] an unmoving stone and, on the other, of a stone that has been cast or, better yet, the sense of an action that is dynamic and forward-looking, all concentrated in a handful of force lines raised only very slightly higher than the ideal plane of a supporting surface (it cannot be described as a picture plane, because here Pietrosanti uses the chromacities of PVC, the material he currently favours and which he cuts into sheets).

So, we have static lines and dynamic lines, both, however, laden with tension: in one case an “actual” tension and in the other a “potential” tension, but with only very slight differences between the two, among other things because the object which is pregnant with this tension – the stone – is the same in both cases. But Pietrosanti does more: he attempts a synthesis of the two poses, in a seventh piece that looks to the other (equidistant) six. Now, from a purely logical philosophical point of view this synthesis is an impossible operation, because one condition excludes the other, but – as we have already observed – Pietrosanti is not a philosopher or a critic, but an artist, and in this instance has greater freedom of movement than a logician would because, while it is true that we have, in a certain sense, “translated” his probing of Michelangelo and Bernini as an exploration of “potentiality” and “actuality” (an interpretation that seems entirely plausible), it is also true that he has taken as his models their works, meaning, if anything, the material form that these ideas have been given. And forms can certainly overlap and fuse, despite their differences, while the concepts that underlie them would seem to be mutually exclusive. Art therefore has the potential and, one hopes, the capacity to fuse into a single form not only different forms but also the ideas that these forms represent, precisely because they are given material definition in a language that permits such acrobatics. Had we instead been referring to a purely logical language, not only would a result of this kind have been impossible, it would not even have been attempted; it would have been dismissed *a priori* as a foolish attempt to demonstrate that “A equals A and simultaneously does not equal A”. So Pietrosanti’s experiment here not only traverses time and offers a tangible demonstration of a dizzying process of hypothesis-antithesis-synthesis, beginning with a figure and arriving at an abstraction (and vice versa), but it also asserts and demonstrates, once again, the extraordinary gift that is peculiar to art and artists: that of making chimeras real.

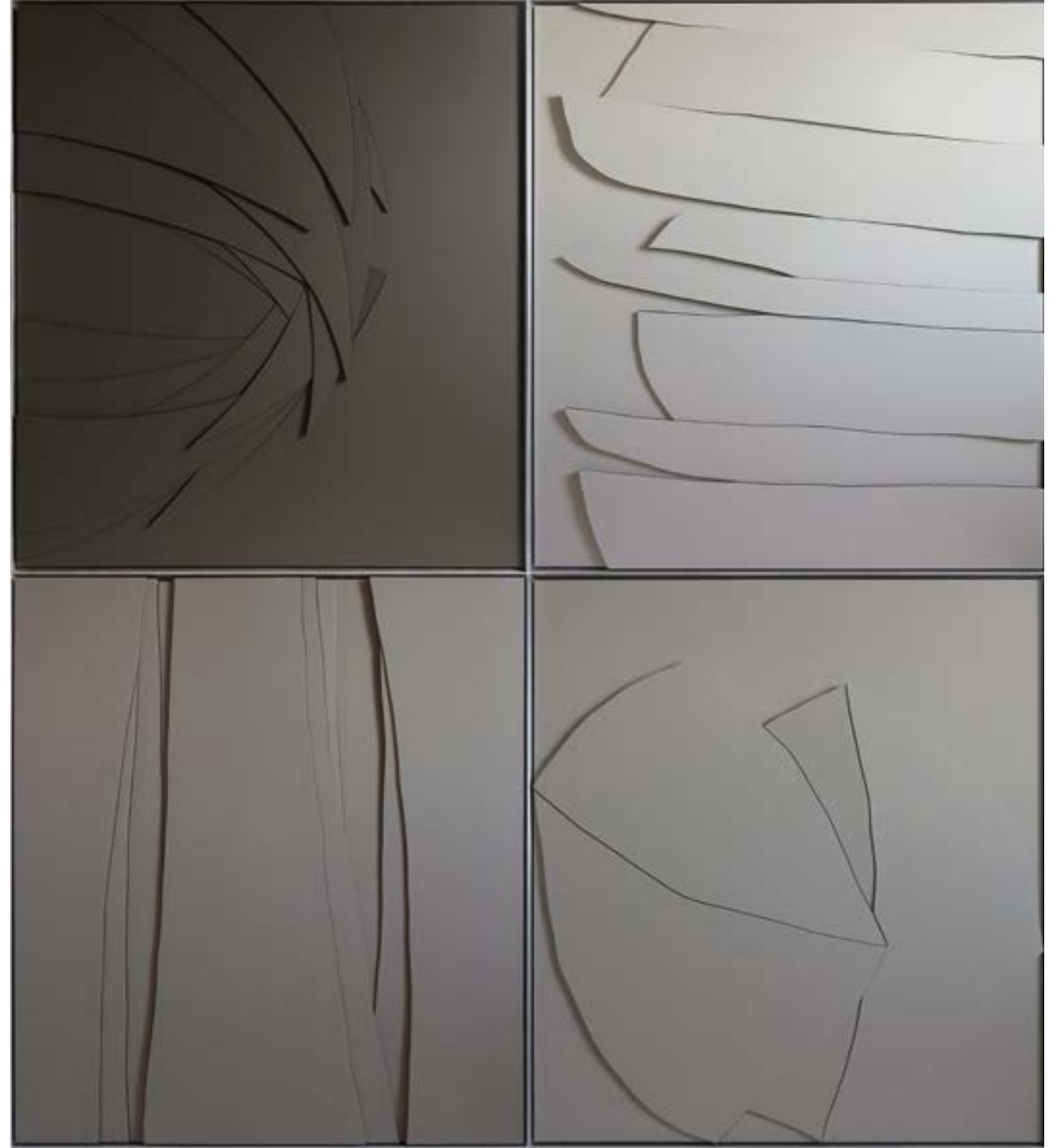
Milan 2014





Untitled 2013, polyptych  
cm 200x180, acrylurethane paint  
on PVC panel.  
Private collection.

Previous pages,  
**Atto e Potenza,**  
Galleria Santo Ficara, Florence 2014







«La Lettura» no. 158 cover

Opposite,  
**Untitled** 2014,  
 cm 60x50, acrylurethane paint on  
 canvas-lined PVC panel.  
 Private collection





**SIDIEF FOYER, 2016**

Carola Giuseppetti

For SIDIEF’s headquarters, Roberto Pietrosanti has created an artwork/ space that demolished the boundary between the work of art and its physical context. The artist has redesigned and moulded the space with a pattern of lines and indentations of varying thicknesses that run around its walls. Rigorously monochrome surfaces seem furrowed with incised and interlocking planes overlapping in a series of complex rhythms.

We chose to involve an artist like Pietrosanti in the design of our new company’s headquarters for a series of reasons. First and foremost, for the wellbeing of the people who work here, so that every day, coming into the office, they can experience something beautiful and unique, something conceived and designed for them and which honours their work. Secondly, because right from the start it was planned that the foyer in which the work is housed should be visible from the exterior and illuminated at night so that it might be enjoyed by the local community and enrich the appearance of the city. The currently much-discussed idea of *urban regeneration* is connected, among other things, with precisely this type of intervention. Lastly, but by no means less importantly, because our company is owned by the Bank of Italy, an institution that has always supported culture and the arts. Reintroducing works of art into architecture, as was done in the past, could, I believe, result in many noteworthy projects.

Entering the office, I often mentally thank Roberto Pietrosanti for the beauty of this work of his which perfectly reflects our company philosophy. The space comes to life; it is given form and rhythm by shapes that have been carved out and mounted like bas-reliefs, their contours both clean and vibrant.

Rome 2018

Untitled 2013,  
cm 170x150, acrylurethane  
paint on PVC panel

Overleaf and pp. 178-180,  
**Atrio SIDIEF 2016**,  
acrylurethane paint  
on plywood











ALL OVER AGAIN

Marco Lodoli

- But I didn't 'ave nothing to do with it, did I? I was just there for a bit of a laugh. 'Cos when it's Friday night and you ain't done fuckall all week, you're knackered and you want a bit of a laugh. I was queuin' in front of the club and that bloke wouldn't let us in and they were all shovin' like mad and shoutin' and one of 'em even yelled let me in or I'll get 'em to set fire to the lot of you, and Fatso there at the door was tryin' to look hard... you gotta wait, you gotta wait, you can't go in yet...
- Tell me about it... I just wanted to get clear out o' the way. I wanted to tell 'em, go on in, no need to fuss, we're just fakin' defending Rome, we might be armed and all that but we know that it's all over, that you've got to come in with yer feathers on yer 'eads and we've to make way, quiet as mice. History's like that... when it's no longer your moment you don't play the hero, don't get all indignant, you just hold the door open for what's to come.
- Bloody 'ell, are you a philosopher or something?! I done Sunday school and I finished junior school and that's it.
- Get orf, I don't even know 'ow to read 'n write, me.
- And where'd you get them fancy ideas from?
- When you're born in Rome you just know cer-

- tain things. You look at all them ruins and you know right from the start 'ow it'll all turn out.
- There ain't no ruins out at Torre Angela, and I only been up in town two times, with the teacher at school and with my mate what stole a vespa and wanted to drive around a bit.
  - So 'ow old are you?
  - Seventeen, before. You?
  - Me, nearly forty, before.
  - Get what I mean? In front of the club they was all pushin' like you can't imagine. It was bedlam. And there was music coming out, tututum tututum, heavy-duty house stuff... People was pushin' in and bustin' moves in the street and some of 'em were already lashed.
  - I don't understand you. I'm old.
  - Go on, you're not that old. My uncle's forty-two and he moshes like he's mental, you should see it. Full of tattoos, he is. Got a pierced nose an' all. Makes me laugh.
  - I'm older than him.
  - Sorry 'bout that.
  - They came down to Rome, the Piedmontese did, to snatch our city.
  - Bleedin' Juventus fans.
  - Our commander, he said: they're about to break through at Porta Pia; us, we'll fire off a couple o'



rounds and then up wi' the white flag it is... won't be a problem. We'll put on a bit of a show, act like we're in a bit of a stew, but just 'cos that's our role in History, to be the losers but without losing our dignity.

- I been to Porta Pia. There's a joint there where the grub's good. My auntie took us when my cousin Luchetto done his confirmation. I remember that statue of that soldier what's running. A statue what's running, give over! Makes me laugh. Why you bleedin' running if you're a statue?
- The bersagliere. It was him wot shot at us, sod 'im.
- We wasn't being serious neither. S'not like we really wanted to break the door down, it was just to make a bit of noise, 'cos it was cold out there and we didn't want to hang about doing nothin'. That's all it was about, innit... just to feel a bit alive. 'Cos some days you feel half dead.
- You get sad, don't you?
- It's almost like you don't exist, like you're there, in the middle of Rome, in the middle of the world, but you don't exist. You're like the pong from a bus or a fry-up, stuff that just blows away 'cos it don't weigh a thing.
- But then there are the good days. Not many, but there are some.
- Not many. When I saw my mum happy. When I got a call tellin' me to get down the market and unload some stuff and they gave me a couple of bob and my mum was happy 'cos I wasn't just lyin' in bed.
- When my old girl loved me. She was beautiful that morning, my old girl, she said tomorrow life'll be different, it'll all be better, you'll see... and she gave me a proper smacker.
- I got a smack in the face instead, and I didn't 'ave nothing to with it, innit? He was bleedin' enormous, had a black t-shirt on, bouncer's t-shirt, face like fuckin' thunder. He took two steps forward right in the middle of all that pandemonium and punched me right 'ere, on my temple. I didn't even want to go in, did I? I'd got fed up, another five minutes and I'm off home, I thought.
- Whereas me, the bersagliere got me 'ere in the



chest. Just took one shot. It was a nice September day, one of them when you actually think things can be good. I touched my chest and my uniform was covered in blood, my 'ands were all red.

- I just saw black, and after the black I was 'ere.
- What's your name then?
- Can't remember.
- Me neither.
- Life's over, so now we're dead what 'appens?
- We stay 'ere for now. We wait.
- Anyways, I didn't 'ave nothing to do.
- But maybe I did. Dunno.

Believe me, we ain't missed nothing special.

- P'haps you're right.

*An empty tram passes and stops right in front of the two dead men, the Papal soldier who was killed on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1870 and the lad who was killed last night in front of a nightclub in Testaccio. The tram driver leans out of the window.*

- Come on, climb on board.
- And where's it you're takin' us?
- We're goin' to get you back in. Come on, I'm in a hurry, I got another dozen of you to pick up.
- But back in 'ow? Just the same as before?
- Not exactly the same, no. Different. The same but different.
- Is it worth it?

*The tram driver shrugs his shoulders as if to say: see what you think.*

*The soldier and the lad exchange doubtful glances. Then the younger man gives the other an affectionate shove.*

- Let's go, come on.
- Oh alright then, let's go.

*The two of them board the tram which resumes its journey down the broad avenue.*

Rome 2017





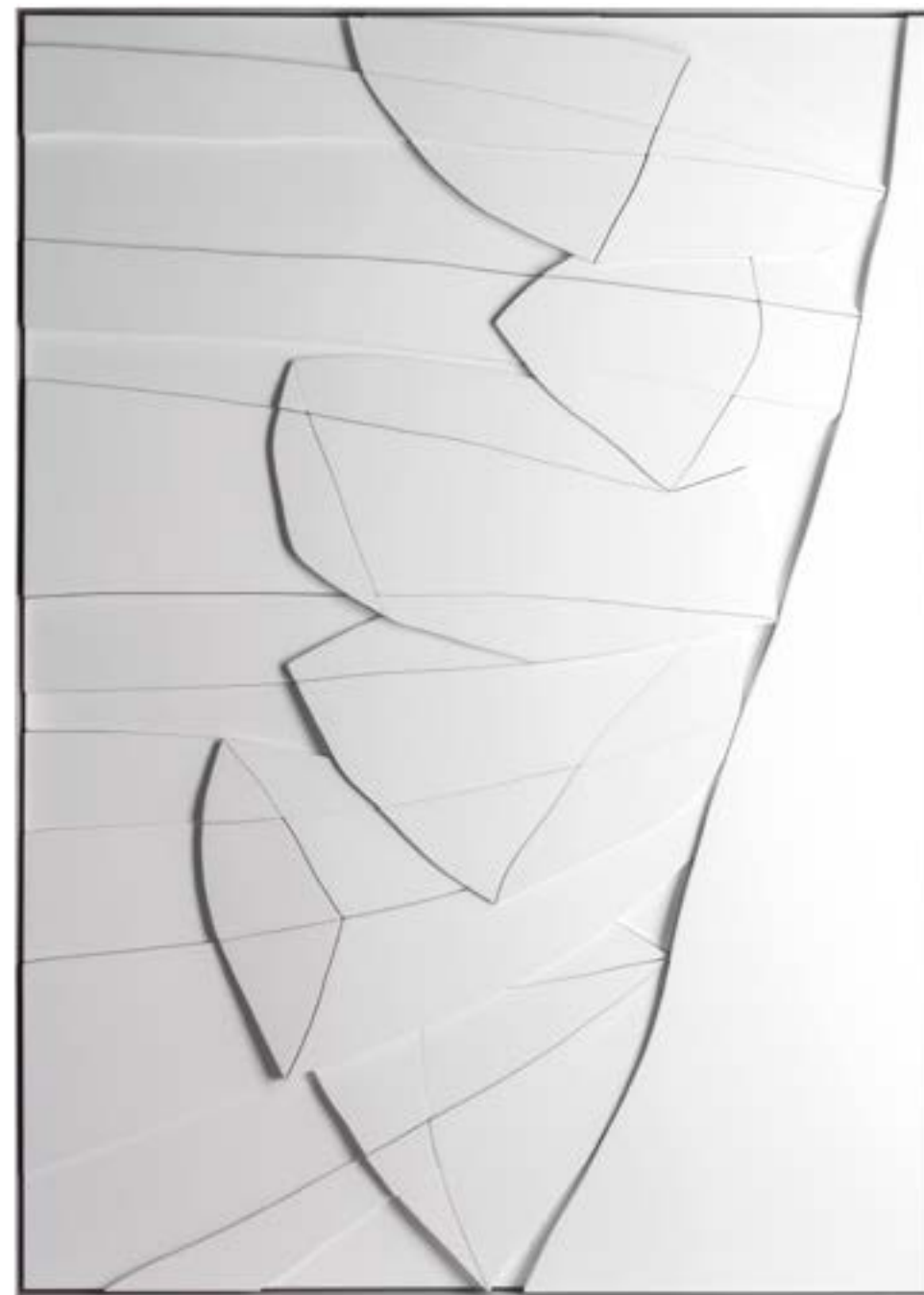
Progetto SIDIEF 2016,  
cm 100x140, acrylurethane paint on  
canvas-lined PVC panel.  
SIDIEF Collection

p. 182 *Punto e a Capo*,  
portraits of the actors: Luca  
Zingaretti, Gigi Proietti and Emanuele  
Propizio

p. 183 *Punto e a Capo*,  
Roberto Pietrosanti and Marco Lodoli



Untitled 2018,  
cm 140x100, acrylurethane paint on  
canvas-lined PVC panel



Untitled 2017,  
cm 140x100, acrylurethane paint on  
canvas-lined PVC panel





**PORTAL, 2016**

SALA DELLA MEMORIA, PALAZZO ESERCITO, ROME

Commissioned by the Italian Army's Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Danilo Errico, and designed by the architect Carlo Maria Sadich and Roberto Pietrosanti, the Sala della Memoria [Remembrance Room] was inaugurated on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and is dedicated to the memory of military and civilian personnel who sacrificed their lives while participating in international peacekeeping missions. The stainless-steel portal, designed and crafted by Roberto Pietrosanti, is inscribed with a phrase attributed to St. Augustine: "The dead are invisible, not absent. Their eyes, filled with glory, are fixed upon ours which brim with tears".

Rome 2016

Overleaf,  
Portale 2016,  
cm 300x150x70, stainless steel







*"Coloro che ci hanno lasciato non sono degli assenti, sono degli invisibili.  
Bastano i loro occhi pieni di gloria fissi nei nostri pieni di lacrime".  
Sant'Agostino*











Untitled 2016,  
cm 125x150, pins on canvas

Untitled 2018,  
cm 100x90, acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel

pp. 196, 198, 199  
Colonna SORGENIA 2017,  
cm 1200x120, painted steel

pp. 197,  
Colonna SORGENIA 2017, model,  
cm 120x12, cardboard, PVC

p. 201  
Colonna SORGENIA 2017,  
cm 300x60, black patinated copper







**SORGENIA COLUMN, 2017**

Gianfilippo Mancini

We live in an age of profound change, of great threats and of abundant opportunities. Consider, for instance, the speed and impact of new digital technologies and of globalization. To navigate such waters successfully, it is my belief that today's enterprises must continuously identify, develop and communicate a unique sense of meaning – in other words, their unique perspective and their unique *raison d'être*, the values and significance for which they wish to be recognized by their clients and by the society within which they operate.

And art and artists, I believe, have always done precisely this: they communicate, in the most direct and powerful way we know of, the meaning of things.

Energy and technology have always been the pillars that support and elevate our civilization. But in Roberto Pietrosanti and his “Column” we have, above all, found an expression of our unique new message, which regards digital energy and our company values. Because this column, which Pietrosanti has recouped from an installation that featured modern ruins scattered among those of ancient Rome in the Barberini Vineyard on the Palatine Hill, symbolizes very effectively the recovery and relaunching of Sorgenia, effected with great energy over the space of just a few years. And, on an iconic level, it points Sorgenia towards a future formed of sustainability and innovation.

Milan 2018





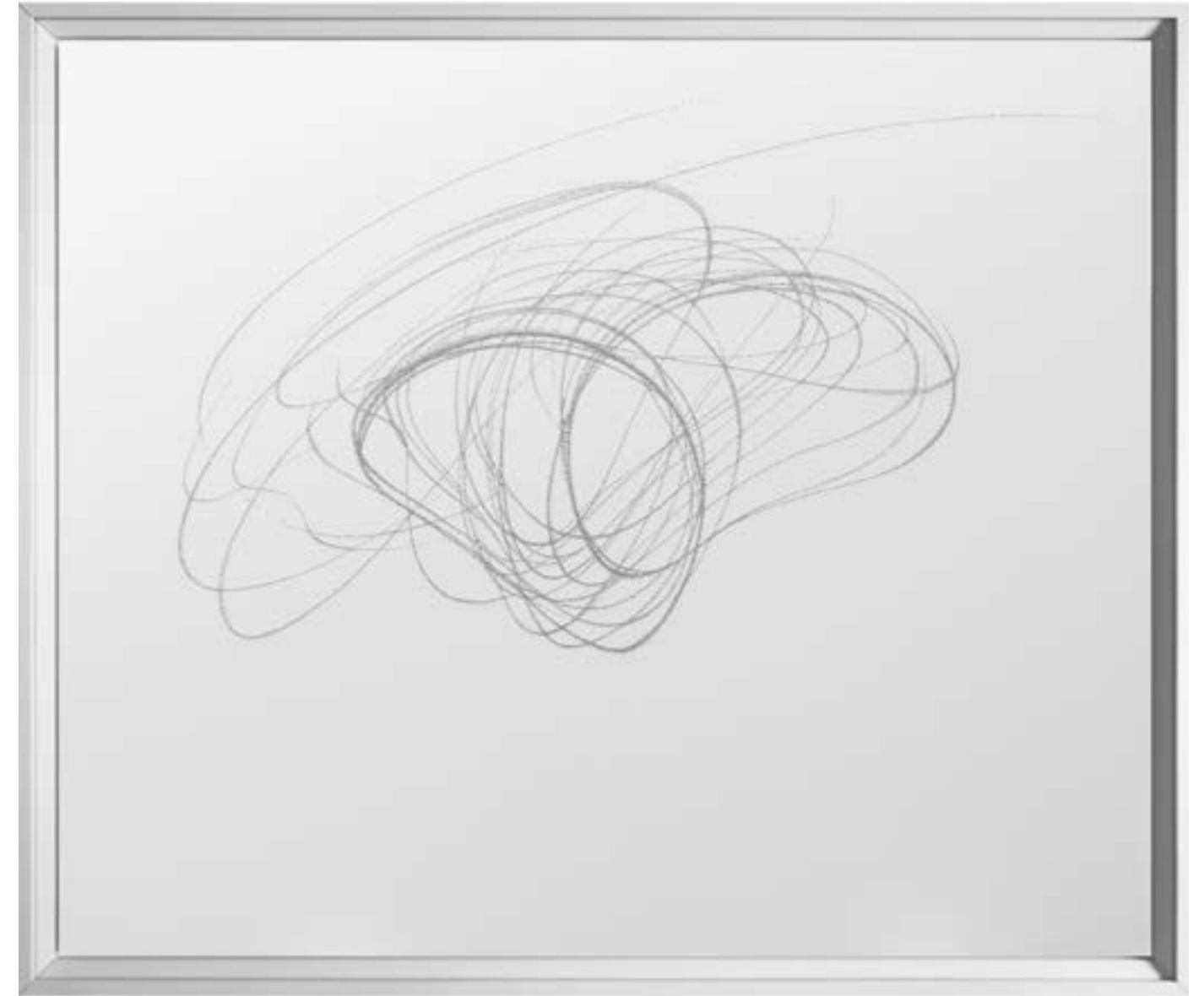




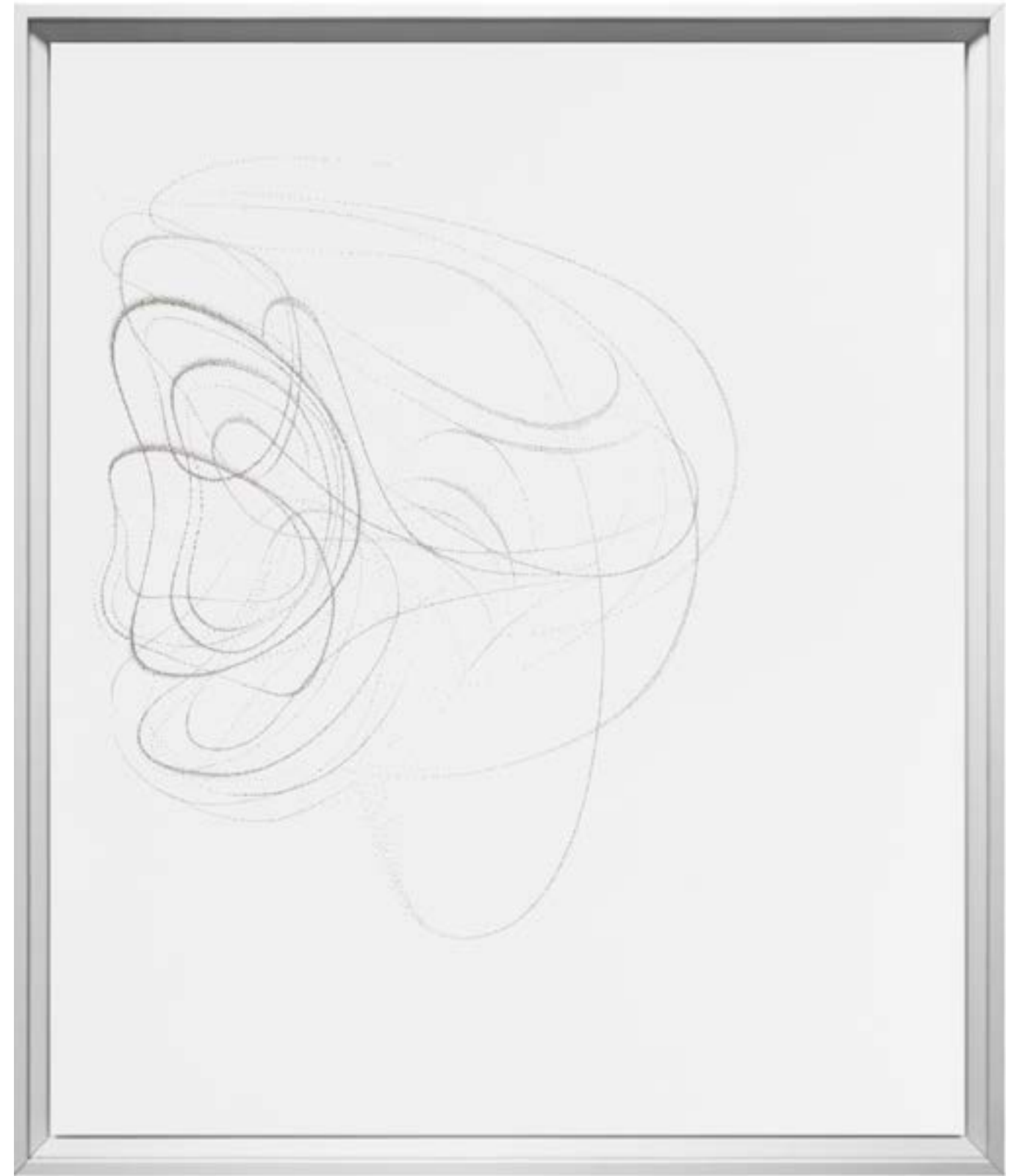


**Untitled** 2016,  
cm 125x150, pins on canvas.  
Private collection

Overleaf,  
left, **Untitled** 2014,  
cm 150x125, pins on canvas  
right, **Untitled** 2014,  
cm 150x125, pins on canvas







“Painting after Postmodernism”  
Reggia di Caserta, Caserta 2018,  
**Untitled** 2014, cm 150x125, pins  
on canvas

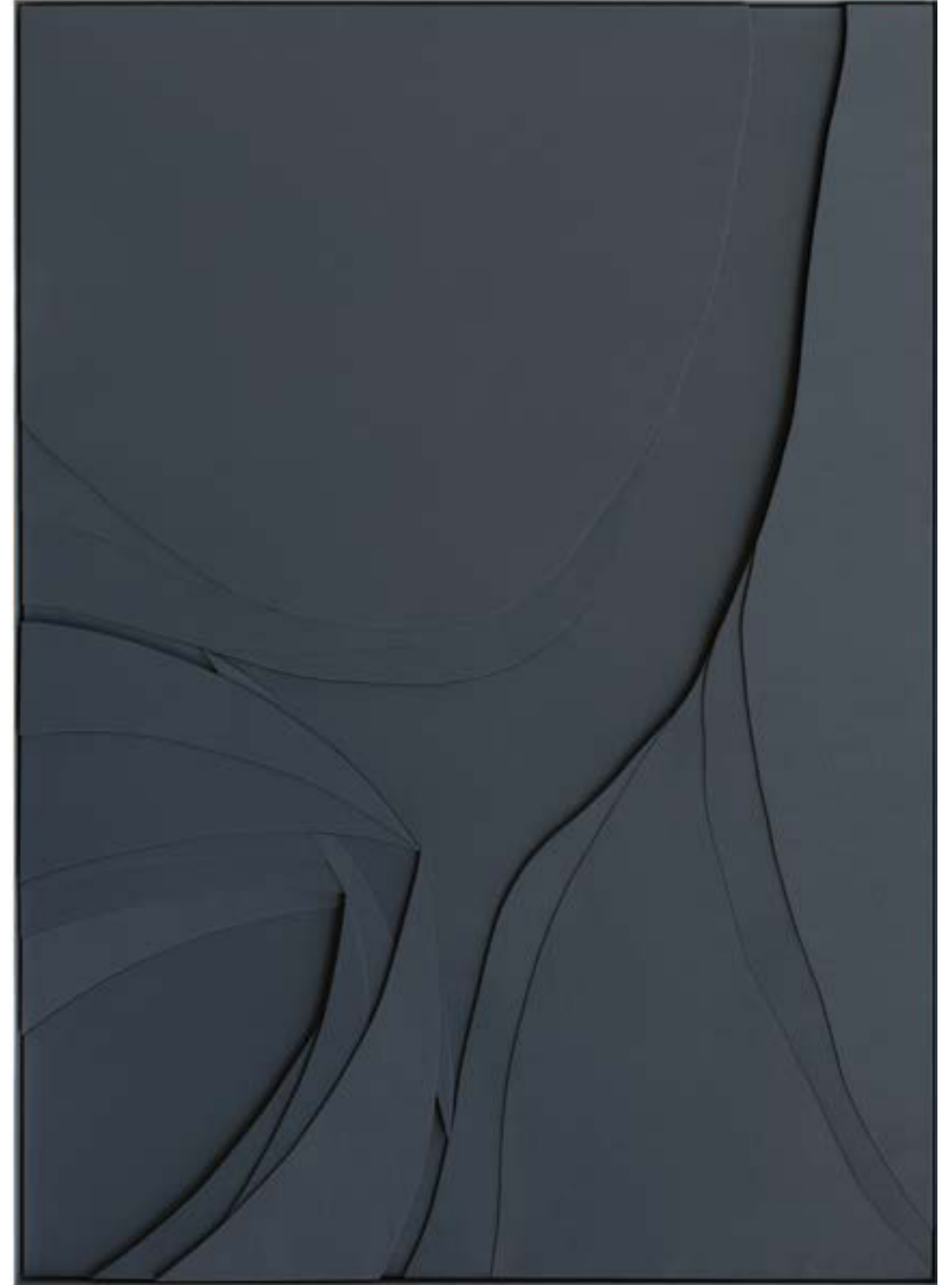
Overleaf,  
left, **Untitled** 2017,  
cm 140x100, acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel.

right, **Untitled** 2017,  
cm 140x100, acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel.  
Private collection

pp. 214-215, Gallerie De Crescenzo  
e Viesti, Roma  
**Untitled** 2014,  
polyptych, cm 200x270,  
acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel













Untitled 2017,  
polyptych, cm 120x100,  
acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel



"BAG" Bocconi Art Gallery, Bocconi University, Milan 2017,  
**Untitled** 2013,  
 cm 400x300, acrylurethane paint  
 on PVC panel



**Untitled** 2017,  
 cm 60x50, acrylurethane paint  
 on canvas-lined PVC panel.  
 Private collection





## SPINARIUM

Massimo Morasso

Nourished by a love of materials, Pietrosanti's is an analytical inventiveness. In his most recent work, one of the scenes most frequently imagined in the iconography of Christian art becomes the subject of an excavation, tunnelling into its essence. This excavation does not produce conceptual art: the gaze of he who analyses the visible world, encountering and reinventing things and spaces by the radiant light of his own inner vision, is a pilgrim's gaze. Directed at the profound truths hidden on the surface of things, it is the gaze of a reader of the Book of Nature who, "midway upon the journey" of his life, with the "theologically" inspired (in the broadest sense of the word) and subtly interpreted icon of Christ's crown of thorns, succeeds in elevating his materials to a speculative height at which any purely aesthetic vision reaches its limit. This, it goes without saying, above and beyond any possible contemporizing, in a psychological and/or autobiographical sense, of the biblical pre-text and of the final agony of its protagonist. A protagonist who, in the work of Pietrosanti (who never makes religious art) acts not as a model of devotion or faithful abnegation, so much as a travelling companion, the reflected shadow of the *homo viator* that exits in every one of us, caught at the hypothetical boundary between existence and the need for meaning that dwells therein. Here, in some strange, obscure way, the violated material that these casually juxtaposed sheets present to us, these intriguing laminas/ribs that have been pummelled, hammered and sliced with a craftsman's skill and patience, speaks to us of how Christ's thorns wound both Christ and the observer, because – clearly – they point not just towards Christ

**Spinarium** 2018,  
cm 60x50, detail, black  
patinated brass

pp. 224-227,  
Galleria La Nuova Pesa,  
Rome 2018, **Spinarium**

pp. 228-229,  
the Dominican Monastery  
Muro Leccese 2018,  
**Spinarium**

but also towards us. A stark and exemplary specimen of a fecund form of twenty-first-century *pathosformel*, Pietrosanti's *Via Crucis* asks to be observed intensely and engagedly, breaking open the closed triangle of aesthetic immanence: the artist; his work; the viewer. In the work of those, like Pietrosanti, whose senses are sharp enough to detect its intellectual vibrations, space-time here on Earth has secret passageways, threads of continuity and oscillations that connect the before and the after – the primeval and the future yet-to-come – in a pattern of relationships and genetic exchange linking the physicality of materials and the breath of the spirit that animates them, thanks to which the work of art represents not (or, in this case, no longer) the result of an aesthetic resolution, but the remainder – verifiable and embraceable – of a process in act. In other words, a dynamic remainder, simultaneously imbued with ancient past and future. Pietrosanti lives, suffers, observes and hears the wail of that which is alive beyond and within himself, and he begins to dig. And the superficially rugged art that is the fruit of his oscillation between intellectual contemplation and sculptural reframing has no need to objectify itself as a “figure”, not because it pays homage to any sort of abstractivist intellectualism but because it speaks, with great naturalness, the language of transfiguration. In this sense, the scratches and the arabesques on paper that make up the surprising polyptych (which anyone endeavouring to apply the coherency of a narrative order to their reading would think acts, independently, as the “fifteenth station” [of the cross] on an inner journey) reinforce the sense that what we have before us is a deliberate visual short circuit, activated by an artist who is capable of giving physical form to works of non-art skinned, at this point, of any superficial glamour. The specificity of Pietrosanti's art lies in its being made of transfigured materials, materials/valves that act as a skeleton key inspiring and unlocking thought images located somewhere between the fleeting sorrow of that which is human and the seemingly impassive quasi-eternity of nature. Because, for those sensitive to life's knot of celestial and subterranean roots, it is materials that break through onto the inclined plane of reality, as a sort of revelatory energizer of that which, for most of us, usually remains hidden from sight.

Genoa 2016



Untitled 2006,  
cm 168x228, mixed media on paper.









*Non per condire i tuoi giorni dell'attesa di Dio, non per sapere, non per avere idee, o per essere colto.*



*Paesaggio, non solo il paesaggio, ma anche il paesaggio dell'anima.*



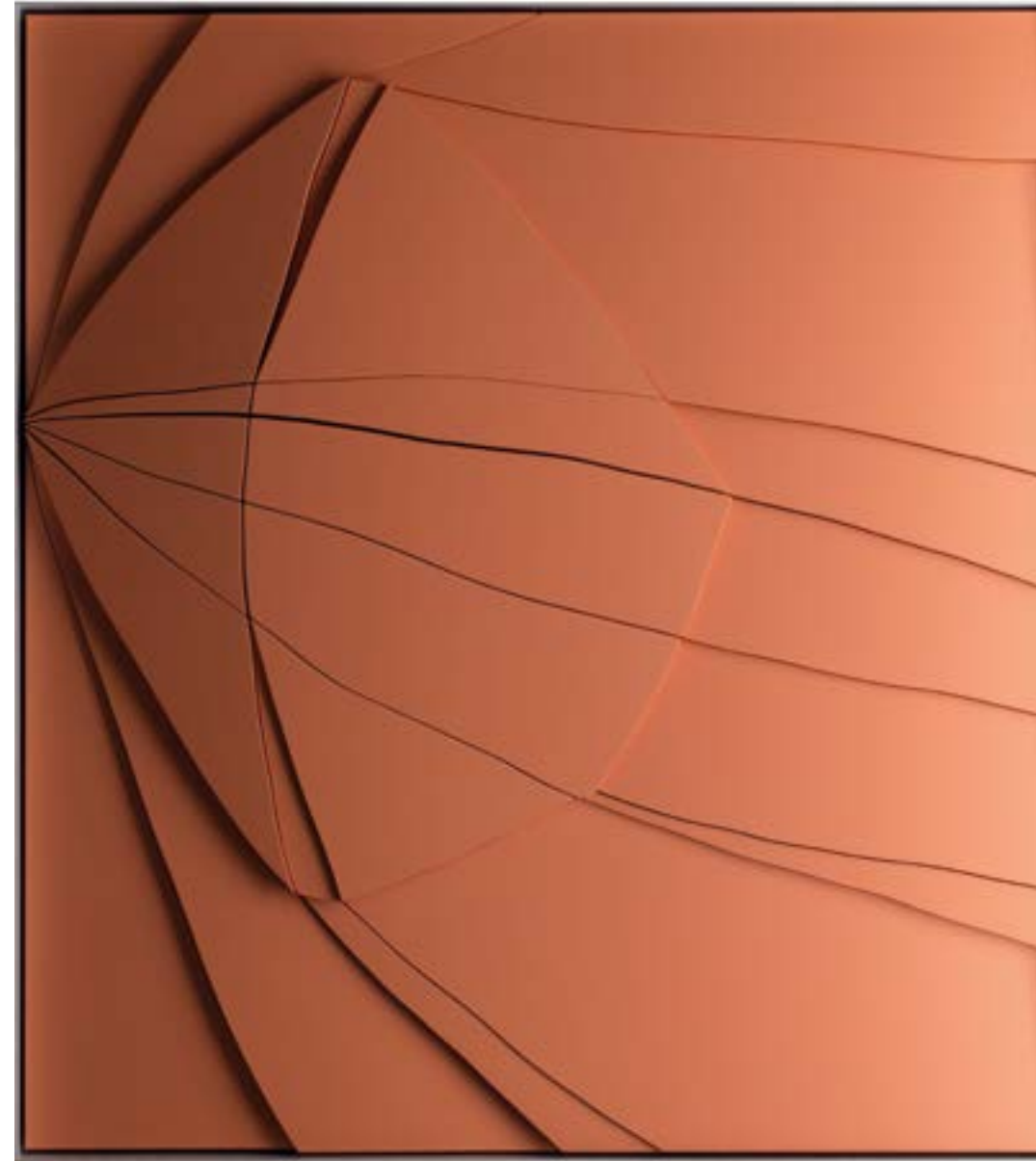








Untitled 2017,  
diptych cm 100x180, acrylurethane  
paint on PVC panel.  
Private. collection



Overleaf,  
Untitled 2006,  
cm 25x35, mixed media on paper

p. 230,  
Castello di Rivara 2016, **Non avere  
timore**, *Campana* 2016,  
cm 60x60, black patinated bronze







## NON AVERE TIMORE

*Project in collaboration with Giovanni Lindo Ferretti  
with images by Leonardo Aquilino*

*Non avere timore* [Fear Not] is a work that was born of an idea of Roberto Pietrosanti's which evolved into a conversation with Giovanni Lindo Ferretti on the theme of the Annunciation. Accompanying these nine months of work, the photographs of Leonardo Aquilino capture the throb of nature, the mute dialogue of men and animals: portraits, actions, relationships, landscapes.

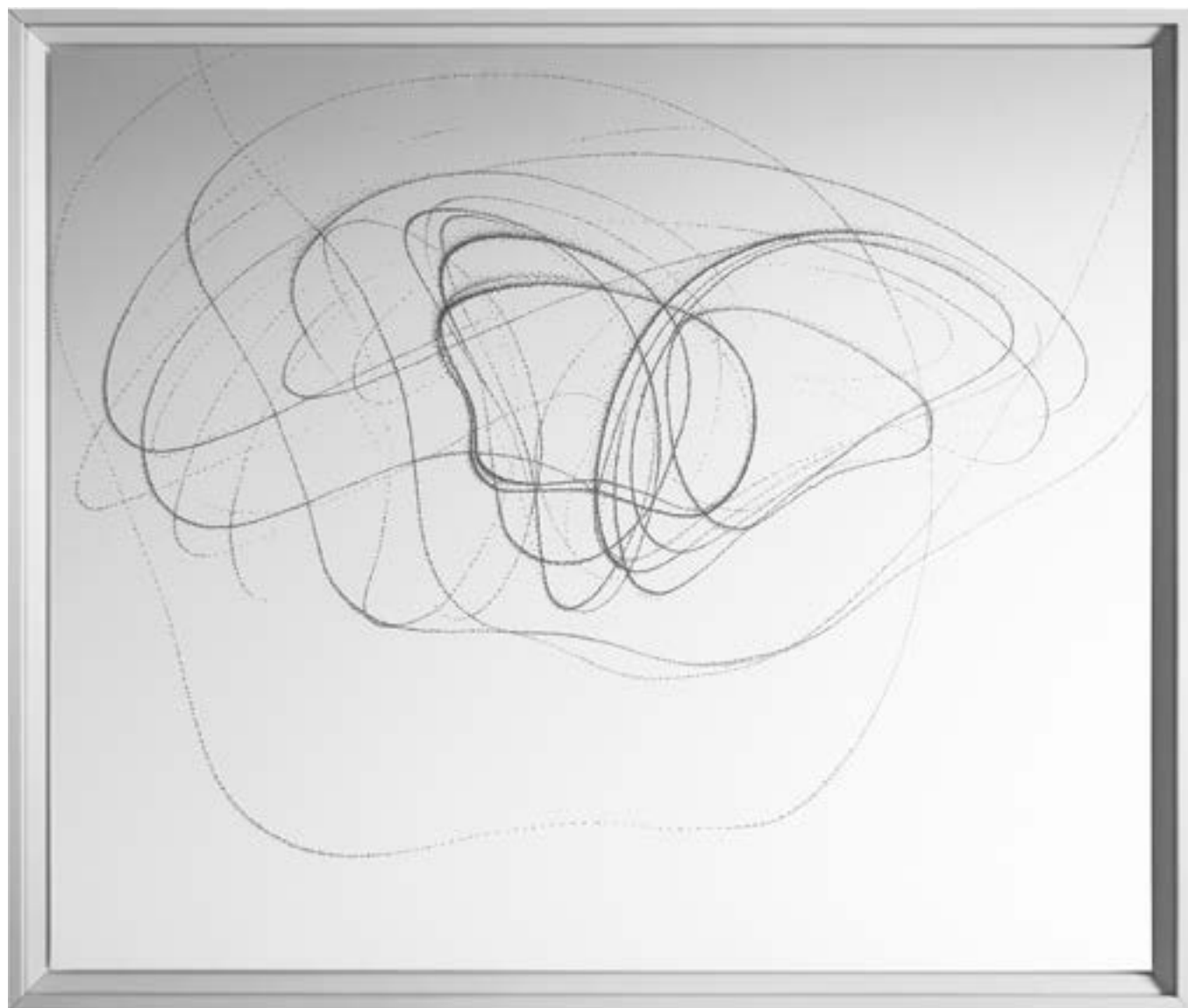
Is it possible to create a form of visual representation that is unrelated to the imagery that has nourished Christianity over the past two millennia? We are at the root of the mystery of the Incarnation; an eternal instant, just before the Angel declares, "Fear not". What is fear? How can it be visualised? Here, then, we see the idea of a richly textured iconostasis taking shape, to separate and divide the exhibition spaces. It will take nine months of work to define and make of it a work that fuses beauty and alarm: arabesque filigrees of firearms pierce sheets of stainless steel shaped like fourteenth-century triptychs. Pietrosanti and Ferretti investigate that eternal instant in which a voice changes the destiny of mankind: a pause, a light breeze. Nothing will ever be the same. Scribbled notes (published in the limited-edition art book that accompanies the exhibition) fly back and forth between the

two of them, handwritten, passed from one to the other with shy apprehension, giving a sense to the making or the interpreting of that which is potential and asks to be accomplished.

At the heart of the Tusco-Emilian Apennines, in the village of Cerreto d'Alpi, in a wood-lined room smelling of resins and wreathed in spirals of incense like a mute prayer (one of a group of cells belonging to a hardworking and abbotless community of hermits) tens of thousands of pinheads combine to form a swirling mark. Shining traces of the granular jewellery that was born and died alongside the myths of peoples on the march, across the steppes of Asia, following the sun, westwards. Opaque maps in code for those who will one day navigate by starlight but have already been warned. On the back of the canvases, hidden from view but looming, interminable spikey sequences, legions of pins, waiting for the breath of wind that will shake sound from them. A latent sound that has the power to destruct, by means of implosion. A soft sound that becomes words of reassurance: "Fear not". Then *that which must happen... happens.*

Rome/Cerreto Alpi 2016





*Non avere timore 1*, 2014,  
*Non avere timore 2*, 2014,  
*Non avere timore 3*, 2014,  
 all cm 125x150, pins on canvas







## NON AVERE TIMORE

Camilla Balbi

*The story of the time an abstract artist went to ask the father of Italian punk music what he thought of one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith.*

It is a bitterly cold March morning, the sky bright and clean. I am in Carbognano, a little village with two thousand inhabitants, a smudge of tu-fa-stone cottages in the violently thick, lyrically pagan green of the Roman countryside. A place in which time seems to stand miraculously still. A temporal – and also spatial – paradox. As I watch tractors edging their way through the medieval lanes, I think how extraordinary it is that I am only half-an-hour away from Rome, from the lavish, chaotic, papal *urbe*, and how radical Roberto Pietrosanti's decision has been to set up his studio here in what was once the lord of the manor's granary, a tall stone building with copper-framed windows that absorb and gleam in the hesitant winter sun. I close my eyes to better visualize the frozen velocity – now throbbing potential – of his works, and I rediscover it here, in this patch of land that seems governed by distant and inscrutable cosmic rhythms.

Carbognano has taught me that, to paraphrase Nanni Moretti, *places matter*. That to observe a work of art in the (again) temporal suspension of the whiteness of an art gallery (the uncontested monarch of the artificial realm of the art world), is to see but half of it.

Had I not made this little secular pilgrimage, I doubt I would ever have used the time allotted to this interview to talk of *the things one never mentions*: silence; God; a muddled but unbending faith in art; the fear,

The artist's studio

Previous page,  
**Non avere timore**,  
*Iconostasi*, 2015,  
cm 200x150, stainless steel



the profound insecurity that our era, its voices and its social rituals bombard us with until they seep into the soul. That instinctive need to search for a truth, a single primordial Voice, amid all this noise. Probably, I would never have truly understood the motivations underlying *Non avere timore* [Fear Not], for that is our subject here.

An artistic project that resembles this little village in Latium, in which assorted eras and stories interweave to form complex patterns, composing a dreamlike and intensely spiritual scene, frozen in time – a time that is abstract and hazy, yet endowed with the urgency of an event. The first of these stories, the story that gives the project its name, is one you all know: one day, a day just like any other, two thousand and nineteen years ago, a girl from Nazareth finds out she is pregnant. That day, along with the terror in the eyes of young Mary (forever imprinted in Europe's collective imagination in the abrupt acid colours of Lorenzo Lotto), western civilization was born. It was born with an angel's metaphysical assurance, which to Mary's ears must have sounded like words of encouragement and, simultaneously, a challenge: *fear not*.

It is a notable starting point, an ambitious, sacrilegious, almost *insane* one, in an era in which metaphysical questions and the austere solitude of religious introspection (perhaps overly disquieting in the eyes of the art market) seem utterly *taboo*. But Pietrosanti is no mystic. He is, rather, one of the last great *classical* artists and, as such, chooses to confront a theme beloved of the very greatest of artists (Fra Angelico and Simone Martini among them); he chooses to seek an answer to a question that obsesses him both philosophically and, above all, from the artistic point of view of *materials* and *structure*.

*What is it like*, the voice that inspires belief in a truth, however absurd, a voice before which fear evaporates, worldly voices are muffled and that which we truly are (that which, alone, can perhaps save us) ripens within us?

Pietrosanti takes this as his starting point, exploring *that voice* as though it were a medium like any of the others employed in his work but, this time, invisible.

It is, from this point of view, a piece entirely in keeping with the overall aesthetic of his oeuvre: a complex balancing act involving materials and form; an impassioned but entirely lucid exploration put to the service of the former in order to reveal the latter; a quasi-Platonic search for an *eidos* that will turn out to be the only possible *eidos* for *that* material, for *that* place, for generating *that* space; an art which is mind *at the service* of the body of things and that is, in itself, both a revelation



(One might say that, in this sense, the theme of the annunciation has always been present, hidden between the lines of Pietrosanti's surfaces) and a narration: an exercise rigorous and instinctive, artisanal and hermeneutic.

The difference is that here the epistemological scope of the operation – via which the material *discovers* itself to be form – is openly declared: the search for that Voice is, once again, *a search for the object's inner truth*, but this time it must divest itself of “secular” immanence and of any neutrality in its accompanying imagery: it must, instead, confront the entire history of Western thinking and that tradition's most complex questions, resulting in an image that will therefore be both absolute and contingent, immensely personal but universal, complete and still-evolving, still but tense.

The project's fascination derives, I believe, from an extraordinary faith in art's capacity to clarify things (a provisional, purely emotional, barely tangible and possibly quizzical clarity, but clarity nonetheless), its capacity to throw light on the *big things* in life. It is a blind faith – willfully so – in the practice of art and in the artist's instinct which urges that practice on, well beyond the limits of the rational and of the utterable,

Roberto Pietrosanti and  
Giovanni Lindo Ferretti  
Triennale, Milan 2018



in other words, beyond the socially acceptable, *fearlessly* abandoning all safe harbours (ultimately, Pietrosanti tells me, *this* is the great lesson he has learnt from Mary) and surrendering itself to the complexity of deep insights, to which it attempts to give visible form.

Thus Pietrosanti decided (or perhaps discovered, following a hunch) that this was work he would do not alone but together with one of the fathers of Italian punk, the former frontman of CCCP and CSI, and much more besides, Giovanni Lindo Ferretti. I won't pause to tell the story of a collaboration that has also, and above all, marked the birth of a friendship, a collaboration that has led to some radical, preposterous choices, such as Pietrosanti's decision to move, with the photographer Leonardo Aquilino, to Cerreto Alpi, a tiny village in the Tusco-Emilian Apennines, and the two years spent there in a monkish setting miles from Rome, miles from his family, to the bewilderment of friends and art dealers, in almost total solitude, in the ascetic, eremitic company of Ferretti. I won't talk of it because I don't want to slip into voyeurism, and because I believe that it is, sometimes, better for narrators (even

Non avere timore  
Triennale, Milan 2018,





the best-intentioned among them) to take a step back. Because I can only imagine those two years of evenings spent conversing, of words written and stuck on the walls of an unadorned room; the unhurried daily life of the village; the hard, daily grind of snow and toil. With perhaps excessive lyricism, when I imagine the day in which Ferretti left a note on the door of Pietrosanti's rented room saying "fear not", I think of it as having the same thickly emotional beauty as Dante's first encounter with Virgil, "within a forest dark", on the knife-edge between great art and mysticism, between fear and the search for truth.

*Non avere timore* is partly this and in part a great deal more. As in many of Pietrosanti's works, and as in many of Ferretti's words, here there is *almost everything*, embraced in a miraculous synecdoche. There is the age-old clash of Orient and Occident, of image and idea. There are journeying stars and the dusty movements of the universe and clanging bells. There are weapons of all kinds and an intricate analysis of the meaning of beauty in this wretched century of ours. There is L'Aquila's Cathedral and there are the iconostases of Orthodox churches. There is the harmonious assembly of the individual elements and their utter solitude, their otherworldliness and the heft of the material of which they are formed. There is a symbolic profundity, a gaping silence dissolving into muffled song, blurring the symbols in an atmosphere that is unequivocal and necessary: inevitable.

It is a human and intellectual adventure, and in some ways it is also a meta-artistic reflection on the ultimate consequences of art choosing, programmatically, to become a quest, and (all told, this is the same thing) a reflection on the ultimate consequences of fully absorbing the secular message of the Annunciation: trust, even in the absurd; trust the inner Voice that we suppress but that will, if we are willing to listen, be the one thing that truly leads us to fear *not*.

Milan 2018



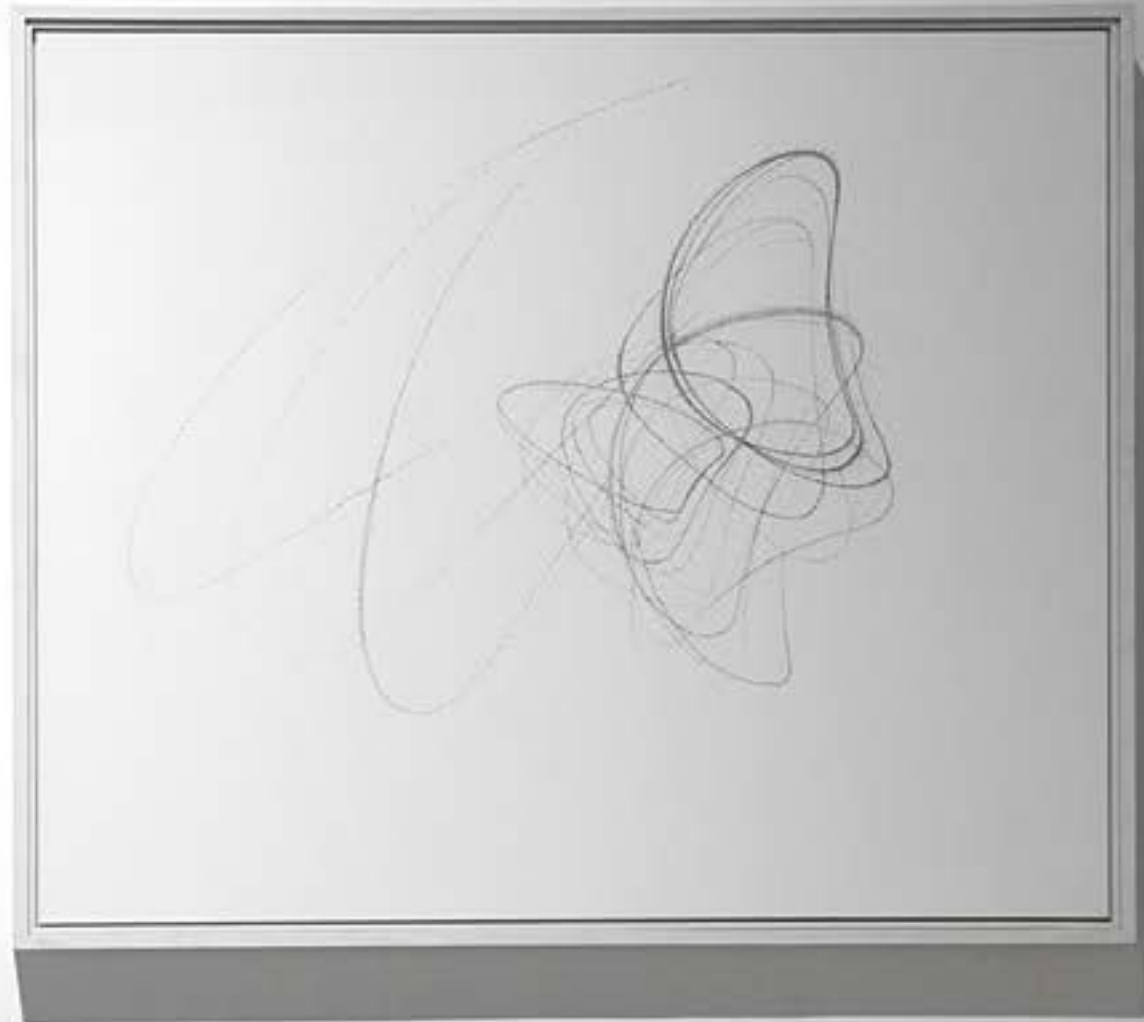
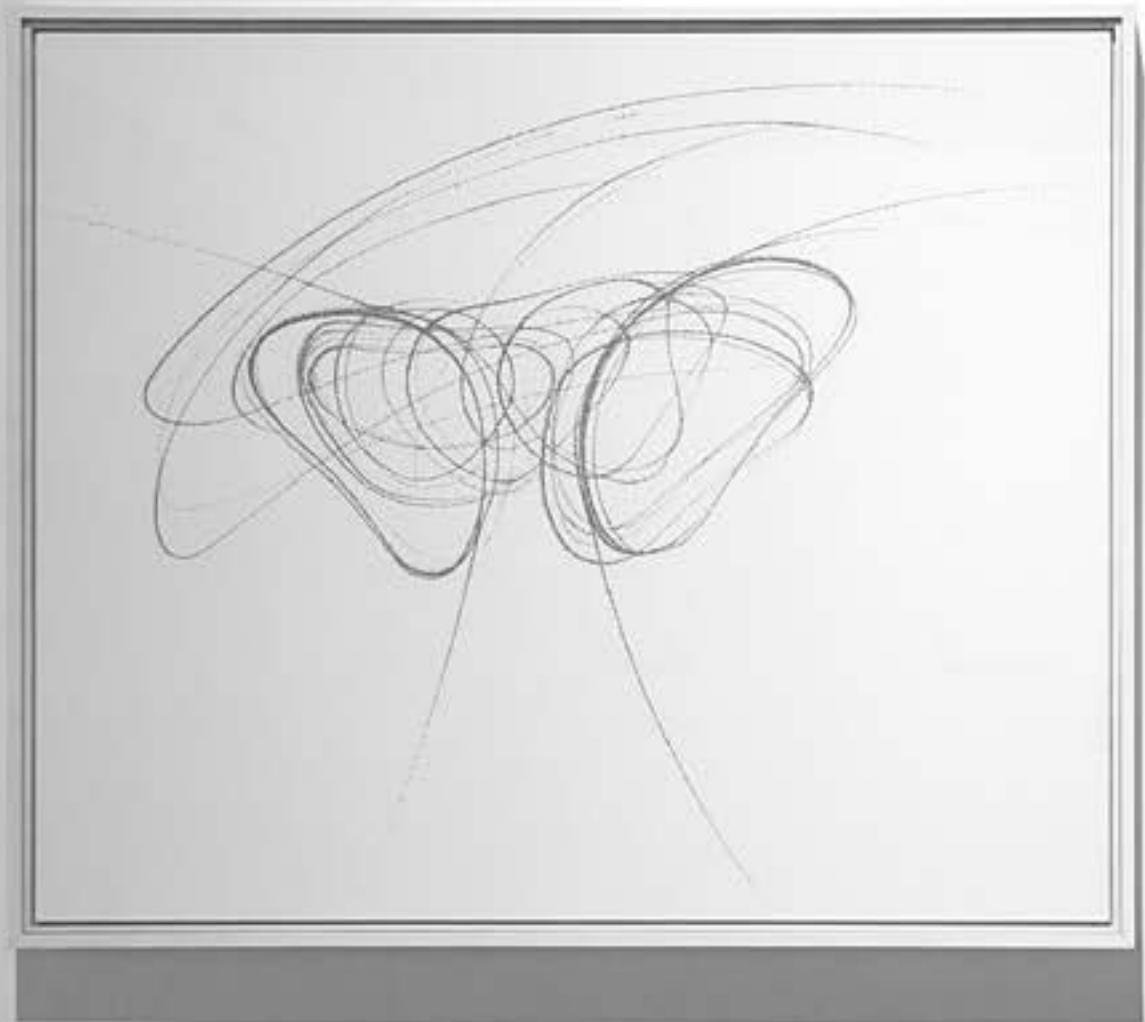




THESE ARE THE  
WORDS OF THE  
ARTIST. THEY  
ARE NOT TO BE  
REPRODUCED  
WITHOUT HIS  
CONSENT. THE  
ARTIST'S NAME  
IS NOT TO BE  
USED FOR  
PROMOTIONAL  
PURPOSES.  
THE ARTIST'S  
NAME IS NOT  
TO BE USED  
FOR PROMOTIONAL  
PURPOSES.









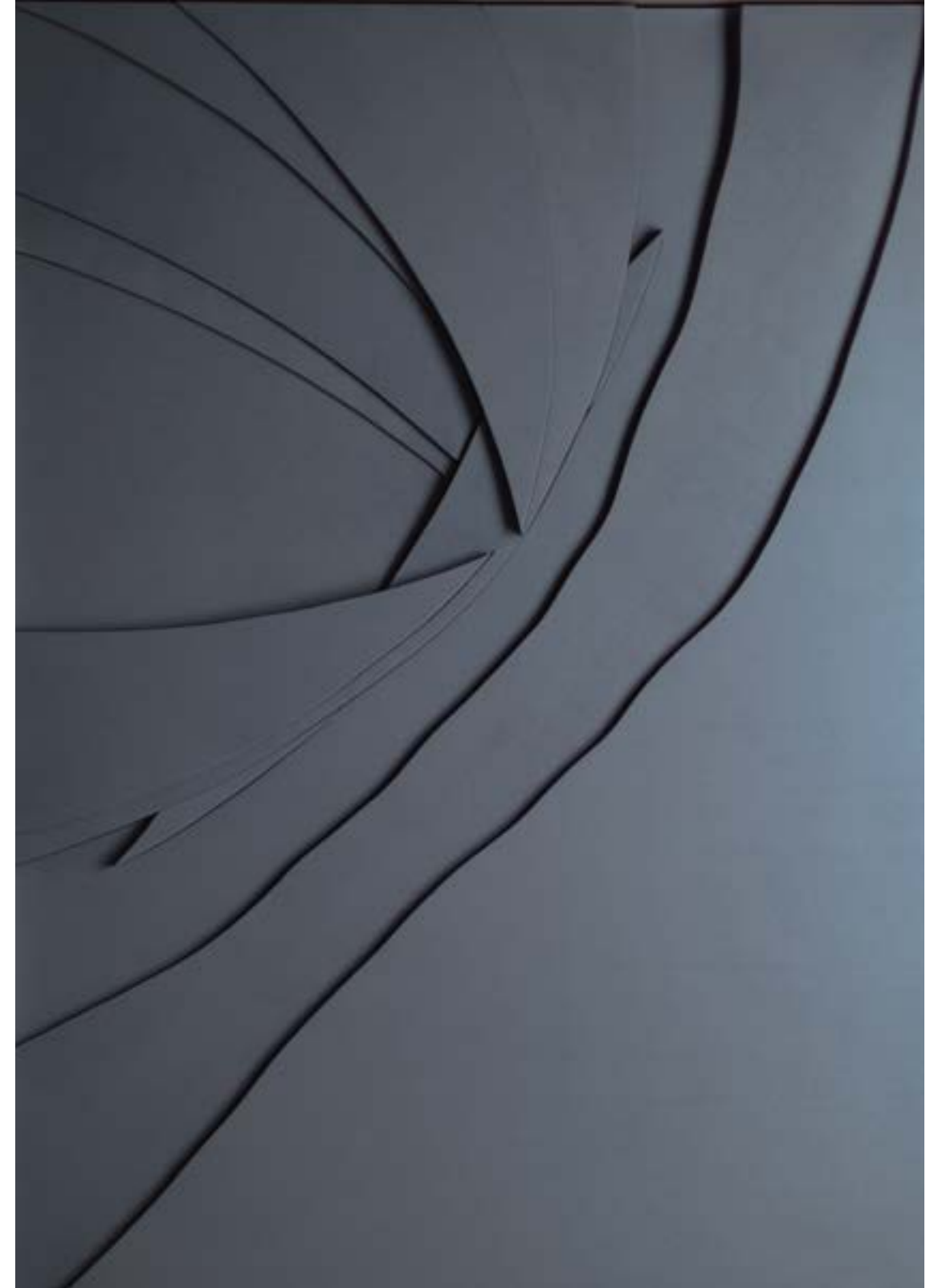


Untitled 2018,  
cm 90x100, acrylurethane paint on  
PVC panel



**Untitled** 2016,  
cm 140x100, acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel. Private  
collection

p. 161,  
Aurelio Amendola 2016,  
Roberto Pietrosanti, portrait





## BIOGRAPHY

Born in L'Aquila in 1967, Roberto Pietrosanti moved to Rome in the late 1980s, immediately embarking on an intense programme of exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The musical training that preceded his career as an artist has left its mark in the compositional rigour and the use of “an alphabet of few recurrent forms, almost as though they were the seven notes” (Ada Masoero) that have become defining characteristics of his work. His early work focused on space and its constituent elements. In classical, crystalline and simultaneously radical proposals for an aesthetics of “engineered air”, wires stretched out to explore the ambient space three-dimensionally, surfaces were scored with furrows or self-sufficient lines that probed their own depths almost as though retracing patterns lost, in an intense dialogue between surface and volume (XII Quadriennale, Rome 1996).

Pietrosanti's artistic journey has taken place within a world of rigorous monochrome, expanding to address architecture. The spaces redefined in his works are often transformed into microenvironments which, from a structural point of view, possess the brazen confidence of vast Roman vestibules. From 1999 onwards this line of research evolved into a series of interventions regarding major architectural projects, and in 2000 he won the competition for ideas for the redesign of Piazza Augusto Imperatore in Rome. In parallel with this, Pietrosanti has also worked on a series of projects for the theatre and contemporary dance.

“For Roberto Pietrosanti, architecture is more than an interest, it is an attitude, a vocation. Because the act of exhibiting is, for this artist, not the demonstration of something but the act of interpreting a space.” His collaborations with architectural studios have included the creation of a monumental work in Ravenna – a project undertaken on behalf of the Compagnia del Progetto working alongside the architects Franco Purini and Carlo Maria Sadich, curated by and under the artistic direction of Francesco Moschini and A.A.M. Arte Architettura Moderna. Work is currently underway in Rome on his winning project for the *Menoèpiù* competition, with the architect Efisio Pitzalis.

Subsequent projects have included the architectural installation – a small structure in stone – with which he participated in the major international exhibition *Monochromos: de Malevich al presente* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 2004). He was also invited to exhibit at the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale.

In 2006 he presented *Nel bianco* at the Roman gallery A.A.M. Arte Architettura Moderna, a solo exhibition curated by Ada Masoero, Francesco Moschini and Vincenzo Trione.

He has made various sorties into the world of industrial design, including an exclusive project for Alda Fendi – a sculpture/lamp in opaline Perspex.

In 2009 he participated in the *Confines* exhibition at the IVAM in Valencia, with a large-scale sculpture which is now part of the museum's permanent collection.

In September 2012 he completed an important installation on the external steps of the Ara Pacis museum in Rome: a cavern/grotto carved out of a sharply geometrical monolith.

In 2013 he was invited to participate in the exhibition *Post classici*, which was curated by Vincenzo Trione and occupied the archaeological area of the Roman Forum and the Palatine Hill, where he constructed a site-specific installation in the Barberini vineyard composed of eight metallic columns, almost as though they were the ruins of a future civilization.

Attracted to mutual contaminations and dialogue between the arts, in 2014 Pietrosanti began a collaboration with Giovanni Lindo Ferretti, which developed into a project entitled *Non avere timore* – the fruit of an intense and impassioned dialogue regarding the theme of the Annunciation. The resulting exhibition toured Italy and, having been shown in Rome, Rivara and Pistoia, concluded in 2018 with a memorable exhibition/performance at the Milan Triennale.

In 2016 he created a permanent immersive space/installation for SIDIEF, a sculptural remodelling of the entrance foyer of the company's headquarters in Rome. A powerfully metaphysical space, the writer Marco Lodoli chose it as the location for “Punto e a capo”, the short film starring Luca Zingaretti, Emanuele Propizio and Gigi Proietti which was presented as part of the *Trame d'autore* series at the 2017 Festa del Cinema in Rome.

In 2017 Sorgenia commissioned two large sculptures: a twelve-metre column in galvanized steel, to stand outside the company's new Milanese headquarters, and a blackened copper column for the building's boardroom. For his 2018 solo exhibition *Spinarium*, at the Nuova Pesa gallery in Rome, Pietrosanti presented a new series of brass panels, burnished, hammered and embellished with spiky barbs, arranged to form an intense Via Crucis inspired by the work of the poet Massimo Morasso.



Untitled 2018,  
cm 100x90, acrylurethane paint  
on canvas-lined PVC panel

