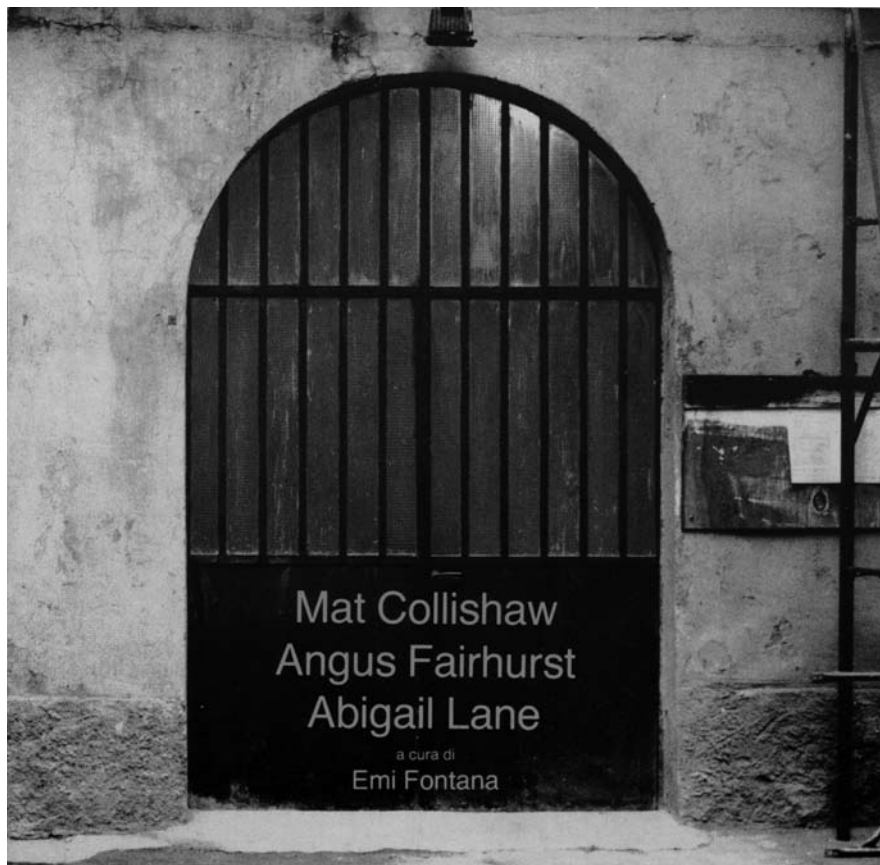


# CHAPTER 16

## LONDON

I T A Un *focus* speciale sulla scena londinese che trasversalmente e in modo accidentale ha caratterizzato parte dello sguardo verso l'estero di Viafarini. In queste pagine documentazioni e immagini che ripercorrono questa presenza: dalle prime mostre collettive curate rispettivamente da Angela Vettese ed Emi Fontana e dedicate ad artisti inglesi, fino alle più recenti personali di Mona Hatoum e Runa Islam. Non si è trattato di una scelta programmatica, ma di una casuale ricorrenza che, nell'affastellarsi dei contributi critici e curatoriali che hanno alternato e segnato le stagioni espositive di Viafarini, si è ritenuto interessante testimoniare. Non una vocazione o una dedizione, o tanto meno una preferenza, si tratta di una semplice coincidenza. Ma forse, come Mallarmé sosteneva, anche le coincidenze devono essere guidate!

E N G A special *focus* on the London scene, which has transversely and accidentally characterised Viafarini's gaze at what was happening abroad. In this section, we find documentation and images tracing back to this presence: from the first group shows dedicated to English artists, respectively curated by Angela Vettese and Emi Fontana, to Mona Hatoum and Runa Islam's solo shows in more recent times. It was not planned in advance, but a chance recurrence which we thought was interesting to point out, among the manifold contributions of critics and curators that have alternated, leaving their mark on Viafarini's exhibition programmes. Not by vocation or dedication, even less by preference, but by mere coincidence. Yet perhaps, as stated by Mallarmé, even coincidences must be guided!



MANCANO DIDA IN TUT

Sul finire degli anni ottanta nuove energie percorrono la scena artistica inglese. Mi riferisco all'area di giovani artisti, nati intorno alla metà degli anni sessanta, molti dei quali diplomati al Goldsmiths' College, che negli ultimi anni si sono resi protagonisti di grandi mostre in spazi non istituzionali ("Freeze" PLA Building London 1988, "Modern Medicine" e "Gambler" Building One 1990) avvalendosi della collaborazione di alcune nuove gallerie (Karsten Schubert, Interim Art, Laure Genillard).

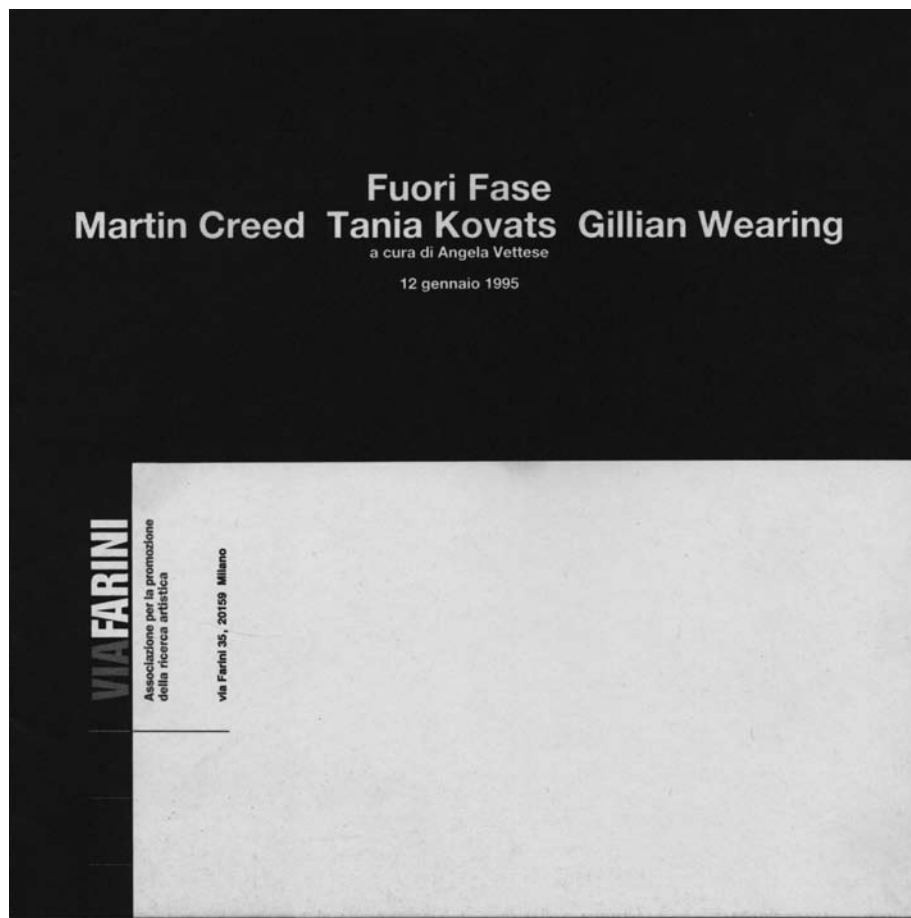
Il lavoro di questi artisti, attraverso l'utilizzo di nuovi linguaggi, si caratterizza in modo autonomo rispetto alle precedenti esperienze di questo paese, e sembra determinato ad uscire da un certo isolamento, da un essere a sé, che è peculiare della cultura britannica. Questa è anche la prima generazione di artisti inglesi disposti a confrontarsi con le emozioni, il che segna un notevole punto di svolta rispetto ad una cultura tesa più che altro a rimuoverle, mantenendo però il distacco e l'ironia che sono propri della tradizione inglese.

L'opportunità di organizzare a Milano una mostra di Mat Collishaw, Angus Fairhurst, Abigail Lane, tre artisti che ben rappresentano la scena artistica londinese in questo momento, viene oltre che dalla sollecita collaborazione del British Council, e dal mio personale interesse, dalla recente apertura di Viafarini che sembra essere luogo ideale di confronto tra esperienze artistiche geograficamente lontane.



TO IL CAP





**FUORI FASE  
MARTIN CREED TANIA KOVATS GILLIAN WEARING**

Obsessions and phobia, personal, collective and social. The three artists chosen for this exhibition illustrate, by way of example, the effervescent English artistic climate. Through their work they bear witness not only to a local situation, but also to the more universal state of mind of the young urban generations.

Martin Creed is scottish, he was born in Wakefield in 1966. He has studied in Glasgow and London. In his work he generally confronts the problems of rules and rhythms, of prolific and uncontrolled growth, sustained, however, by an inflexible methodology. This applies to the plaster cubes which he layered around the walls of a particular place, all at the same height, all according to the plan, which takes into account the characteristics of the place, sparing not even the tiniest hidden corner. The result is that of almost vegetable-like protuberances, mould, parasites, perfect and worrying imperfections of the walls. Likewise in Viafarini, the artist is showing a series of metronomes, which signal space and time, out of rhythm with each other, but all corresponding to a definite rule which is by no means a casual deduction. The obsessive search for a law can bring about anomalous results.

Tania Kovats was born in Brighton in Sussex in 1966. Her first mature works, all from the nineties, demonstrate a morbid obsession with religious phenomena. Above all with the Madonna figure, presented in drawings which recall the imaginary world of Kitsch, presented in the form of a statuette irreverently closed inside a condom, the important missing guest, but still expected in the visionary shepherdess cave. The artist oscillates between the most real tension found in the transcendental, which can also be found in the various installations in which only a primordial white hits the eyes of the observer, and the popular version of every form of devotion.

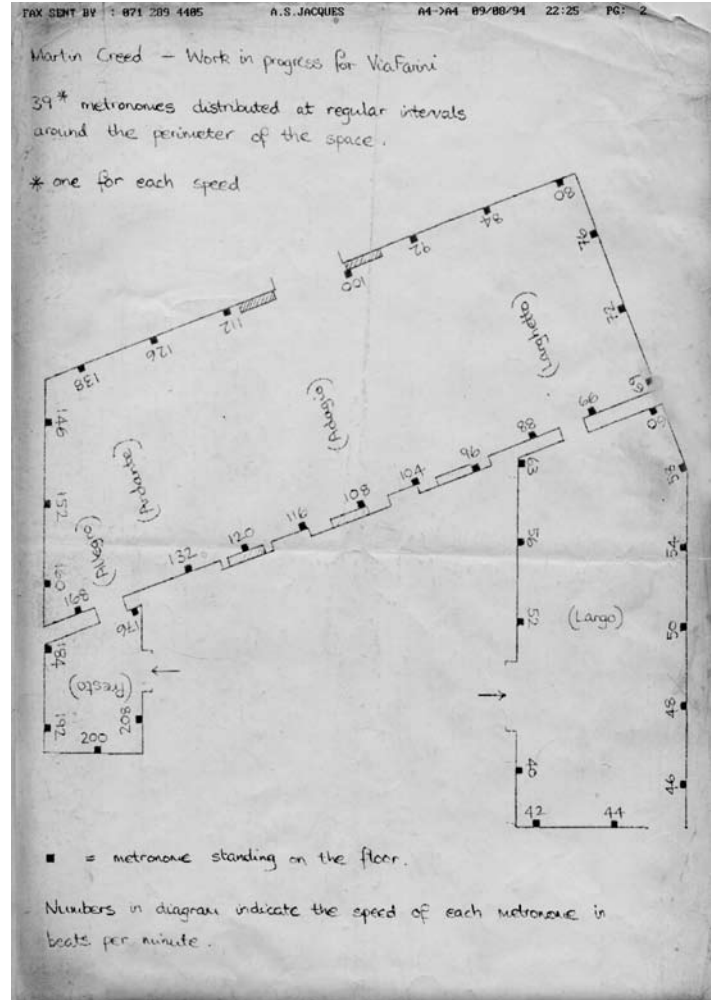
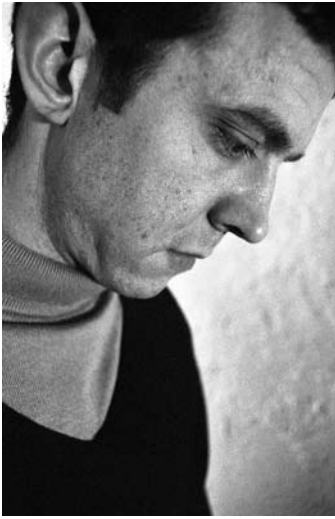
Gillian Wearing, born in Birmingham in 1963, has directed her research towards an area which is more decisively sociological. For example she asked over four hundred people to have themselves photographed holding a placard on which each had written an impromptu personal thought. Another series of her work saw her as the protagonist of dangerous but also tender encounters with transvestites, in whose beds she photographed herself, convincing them to accept her between their sheets and to show the most domesticated side of themselves. Her last work is a video which bears witness to the lives of young rock lovers, involved in the music to the point of making it the pulsating centre of their own existence.

In these three cases we find different components more or less orientated to emotionally affect the public, but they are brought together by a continuing oscillation between a subjective expression of youth starving for security, and an objective revelation of an uncertain, uneven and complex ground, just like a multi racial metropolis.

Angela Vettese



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# SOUVENIR D'ITALIE. A nonprofit art story

10/2/96

2 PAGES.

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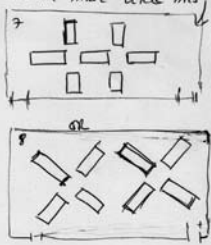
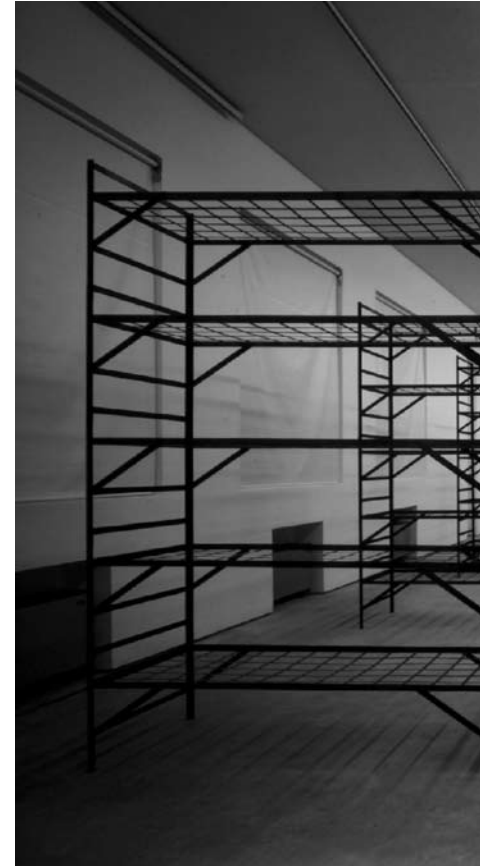
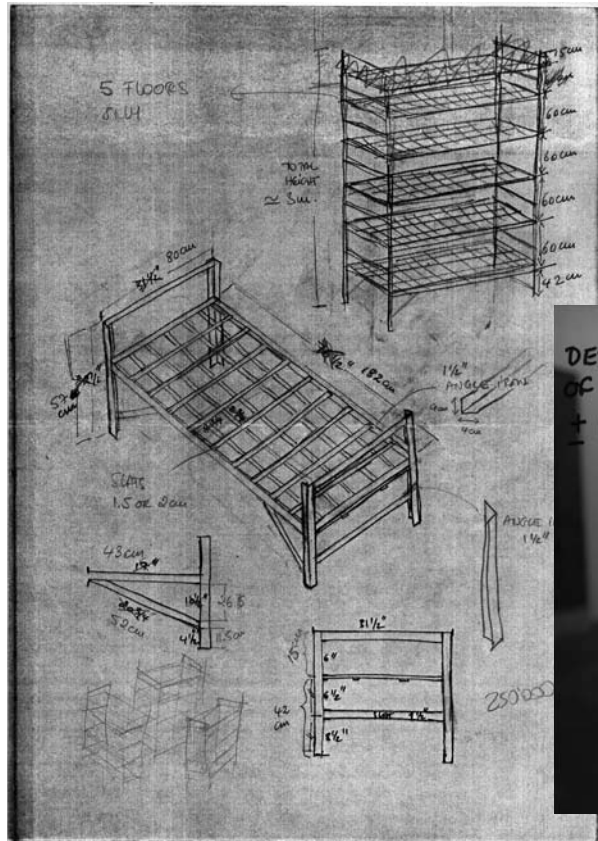
DEAR PATRIZIA,

MY VACATION IS SPYING OVER AND I AM BACK TO BEING  
EXTREMELY BUSY.

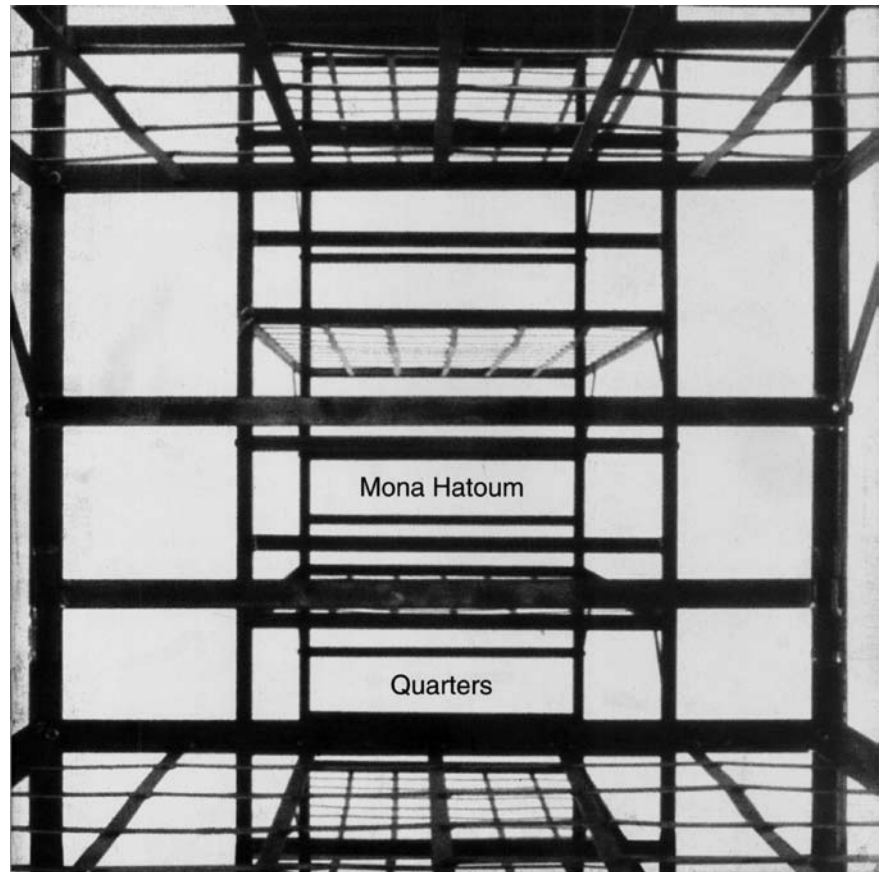
AS I MENTIONED TO YOU, I BUILT ONE UNIT OF SEES TO SEE  
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AND I SAW IT STRIKE AWAY  
LAST DECEMBER AND ASKED THE TECHNICIAN TO RE-DO ALL  
FOUR WHILE I WAS AWAY. I AM VERY HAPPY WITH THE  
RESULT. I AM PUTTING SOME PHOTOS IN THE POST FOR YOU  
ON HOLIDAY.

I AM THINKING THAT FOR YOUR SPACE WE WILL PROBABLY  
NEED TO BUILD AT LEAST 7 OR 8 OF THESE UNITS BECAUSE  
IT IS A LARGE SPACE AND WILL DISPLAY THEM LIKE THIS  
(I THINK THIS WILL LOOK TO GOOD  
IN YOUR SPACE.

I HAVE TO VISIT MILAN TO MEET UP  
WITH THE MANUFACTURER AND WE  
HAVE TO PLAN THIS VERY CAREFULLY  
BECAUSE I WILL BE AWAY FOR THE  
WHOLE OF APRIL IN JERUSALEM +  
I HAVE TWO EXHIBITIONS IN MAY





### Mona Hatoum Quarters

Entering "Quarters", the installation that Mona Hatoum has prepared specifically for Viafarini, is to step into the midst of a forest composed not of Baudelaire's "living pillars," but of metal barriers. Bed-like structures stacked five high intersect in space. Without mattresses these beds are unusable and suggest a cage or labyrinth, transmuting the sense of rest usually associated with beds into one of anxiety and fearful insomnia. The installation was conceived when the gallery was still unrestored, with pitted floors and bearing the scars of previous installations. The artist, born in Lebanon but forced to move to London in 1975, originally considered a delicate yet tragic counterpoint for that specific space, with ideas ranging from spheres of blown glass containing locks of hair to a carpet of glass containers. She also contemplated working with those objects of industrial design that are so closely associated with the city of Milan. The raw aspect of the Viafarini exhibition space, today rather less shabby, must have prompted her to remain within the realm of furniture, albeit employing the services of a blacksmith and privileging reflection on structure, whether that of the body or that of the conventions of society. Technically her decision to use metal, with its threatening luminescence that lends itself to an insistence on the objective, sculptural, and architectonic aspects of the works, is an extension of her predilection to use the material in similar recent works. Quarters also represents the artist's current position after having tackled the frame of the bed and the body in many ways, ever attracted by its enormous symbolic, and ambiguous potential. It is possible to study the history of art in relation to the metaphor of the bed: in Titian's *Venus* it appears soft and chaste, covered with a finely worked white sheet that harmonizes with the domestic life glimpsed through the window in the background. The woman with the rounded belly lying on the bed appears as an exaltation of eroticism not unrelated to the sense of maternity confirmed by the flourishing vegetation behind her. The bed on which Manet's *Olympia* is lying in a closed room and the relationship with nature is lost. The dormouse is draped with silks indicating a desire for respectability but also a poor sense of decorum, including a pair of disillusioning slippers on the feet of this flat-bellied girl. In the present century Francis Bacon has contorted the characters in his paintings on unmade beds located in blind rooms illuminated by squalid light-bulbs. The bedroom, born for two, becomes the site of an indolent depression, sterile and solitary. In the post-war period Robert Rauschenberg overturned his single bed, displaying it vertically, visually insisting on the relationship between order and disorder, between comfort and discomfort. The checked cover recalls the quilts mothers would once sew by hand from scraps of cloths providing a sense of snug well-being. But nobody remade the bed when the child got up: the brush-strokes of color that, on the upper part of the

painting, invade the sheet and pillow contradict the repetitiveness of the underlying squares and indicate the achievement of an adult and disordered existence. In the plates of steel and wood that Jannis Kounellis exhibited from the late Sixties attention is shifted to that particular portion of space occupied by a living body in a state of repose but also of relative movement. The surface area of a bed is roughly twice that of a coffin and similar to that of a door. Thus the bed becomes a homeland, one's "personal space," a marker for the identification of the persona, the body, and all the physiological phenomena associated with it, from sleep and reproduction through to sickness and death.

According to the artist her primary inspiration was her observations of urban quarters which from the earliest times have represented a form of segregation for social classes and are composed of cells of greater or lesser dimensions and luxury. Huge residential buildings (projects) in metropolises around the world often doubly function as cages of the masses, and in some cases making daily existence a negotiation of a claustrophobic affair.

This structure, reduced to its basic essence, can also be seen in barracks and above all in prisons. Hatoum was greatly impressed by visits she made, during a trip to the United States, to the Alcatraz penitentiary in San Francisco where prisoners were housed in cells not much wider than a bed, and to the jail constructed in 1825 by John Haviland in Philadelphia. The latter, Eastern State Penitentiary, was based on the Panopticon central control and radiating arm system designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. In fact, problematics of this kind, in regard to social control, were analyzed by Michel Foucault and influenced Hatoum as a student.

"Quarters" assumes, perhaps unconsciously, a little of all these meanings but this work also associates them with the problems of systems of cohabitation together with the themes of social control, the relationship between space and the body and between the body and the rhythm of life, punctuated by its own movement. As mentioned above, the installation was preceded by many other works that suggest and refer to its salient points. Vertically suspended beds meshes linked to one another with visible springs and hooks were the principal elements in "Short Space" (1992). These were the types of beds usually found in such locations as hospitals and prisons and all those spaces in which the body is barely permitted to satisfy its basic needs. The installation was equipped with three motors which allowed the entire structure to rise and sink slowly, underlying the mechanical and dehumanizing aspects of the ensemble. A similar sense of torture is found in "Light Sentence" (1992), an assemblage of metal cages capable metaphorically of evoking both the containers used for keeping animals and the cells of a prison; the very title of the work was a pun based on judicial terminology. Illuminated by a swinging light source, the work inspired a strong sense of insecurity in observers and recalled the lights used to illuminate prisons. The room had no windows and the shadows of the cages were projected on the walls like in a hospital ward in which X-rays are taken. The paradox of denied comfort probably reached its visual zenith in

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di Marcello Maloberti

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