

Perverted Weddings

Luca Lo Pinto

A Conversa tion with Luca Trevisani



Luca Lo Pinto: So let's start at the beginning. If you were to interpret the role of being an archeologist of yourself, what is the point of origin?

Luca Trevisani: I believe that the first work would be *La catena montuosa del Garrese* [Withers's Mountain Range], in 2003.

LLP: I think that it is interesting to look back to when you began, not simply for the record, but because, in their candor, juvenile works often reveal the first symptoms of how future works evolve. That's why I was curious to know something about your very first works.

LT: ... then there's this one, *Untitled*, from 2003. It's a plasticine disc, about the size of a cake that has tooth-marks of several people. The work is still considered very mature in spite of its straightforwardness.

LLP: Plasticine is a material that ...

LT: ... always remains soft. It never dries up. It's pretty disgusting because plasticine is a petroleum by-product and shouldn't be eaten or put in the mouth ... The idea was to play with the stereotypes of everyday life, with apparently banal things and transform them—not in an alchemical sense—but by decontextualizing them. The comparison between identities or singularities of the people occurred by forcing them into coexistence ... using a material that belongs to the form of sculpture, to modeling, with which I created something that is automatic and autonomous, a result of the work of the body, tooth-marks. From then on the circle's perfect shape has often reappeared in my work.

LLP: You only made one of them?

LT: Yes.

LLP: Was it destroyed or lost?

LT: It wasn't voluntarily destroyed. It was lost in the dust of time. I was thinking of making another one for this book.

LLP: What was your first encounter with art? An exhibition, a work or an artist ...

LT: There were many variable and uncontrollable stimuli I wasn't aware of. Over the years I discovered—and it's an interesting point that should be developed—that 80% of those of our generation who are artists (or maybe even critics or art administrators) were influenced by hip-hop culture. It's funny. I did graffiti. You're a teenager,

you're looking for something but aren't quite sure how to obtain it ... hip hop is an imported liquid culture that everyone can practice his own way, interpret and make his own. Competition exists, but it's not as strong. That's probably why many of us began this way. Let me tell you something that might interest you. Back then there was a magazine called *AL* (Alleanza Latina) that published pictures of graffiti with interviews of various exponents of the art scene. I wrote a nine-page pamphlet in which I theorized the need to do abstract graffiti instead of continuing to write your name on walls. I quoted Kandinskij and mentioned other things ...

LLP: When was this?

LT: (laughing) I don't know. Must have been 1994.

LLP: We should find it.

LT: Well, you see, since I was a kid, I have always had this belief in my ability to philosophize or the presumption of being pseudo-theoretical.

LLP: What were you like? A nerd? Were you thirsting for knowledge?

LT: Very much so. It isn't about being a nerd, but to use your own peculiarities to be able to tell or give other people something that they don't have and that you think they need. It's something you have to feel is yours that you are comfortable with. It has always seemed natural for me to use the form that corresponded the most to my thirst for knowledge, searching for things, reading, nosing around and building new relationships. Without wanting to be a guy that knows everything inside out; on the contrary, taking risks and maybe getting it all wrong. The granitic and solid cultural framework doesn't count, rather the opportunity to use it as a means of transport to move around. I've always used the body and still do, even if in a colder and more distant way, because everything is in the body. If I succeed in using it well, I build a trap from which you can't escape. If, in the place of more abstract concepts, I use the body, I involve you in a stronger way.

LLP: Is the body or space the unit of measurement of your work?

LT: I would say the body. Space is never a space without a body living in it; at the most it is a framework that is waiting to be crossed, developed, thought of in scale in relation to a body that crosses it. It is never

an abstract, sidereal space, which exists on its own. Never ...

LLP: Going back to *La catena montuosa del Garrese*—that I consider the beginning of your career, do you find linguistic elements that have not disintegrated in time and still exist today?

LT: The need to build a closed system with internal laws that copies and simulates in a disenchanted and ironic manner the laws of the real world. The need to build an ensemble made up of parts. The actual use of the human body then decreases in time; it no longer interests me, it's complicated, it involves managing many aspects.

LLP: How was the work done? I only saw two images that represented two variances of the same sculpture ...

LT: I began with four people (my mother, my brother, myself and a female friend), and filled in the empty space between their legs imagining it as a sort of mountain, a triangle. The title played with a corrupted idea of measurement. That's why I used the word "withers" or the point on the body that is used to measure the height of dogs and horses.

The idea was to force the four people to be a group like those we see in snapshots taken at confirmation ceremonies, where you feel uptight and out of place. I had solidified this composition, the space that they had formed.

LLP: A cast of the empty space. Something like the one of Bruce Nauman with the chair, *A Cast of the Space under My Chair*, 1965–68.

LT: Exactly. But Nauman does it in a more religious way, more arid. I wasn't thinking of the emptiness of a person but of the empty space between the persons during this uptight and rather stupid social occasion. Seeing it brought to my mind a mountain chain. Neither do mountain chains know they are a mountain chain. Hence the *Catena montuosa del Garrese*.

LLP: Does the work still exist?

LT: Yes, the object does.

LLP: Where?

LT: In Verona in a garage where I store a lot of my works.

LLP: It's interesting to see how, from the beginning, all these works and interventions

are based on a link and relationship among several elements ... Did you study architecture at school?

LT: It was part of my studies at university. In addition, my brother is a designer. Perhaps the first works involving an everyday object derive less from a feeling of insecurity than from the fact that I was very attached to his world. Architecture has remained because it has a relationship with the body that can be identified in many different ways.

LLP: What was your thesis on?

LT: On Gianni Piacentino. It's funny to think that Gianni questioned me about formal value compared to artists who work ignoring the quality of the material. As fate would have it, I found myself doing things where quality often means instability ... I have always been fascinated by eccentrics, like the architects I write about in *Water Ikebana*; their stories and their approach are a reality that I use for inspiration. In his own way, Gianni is an eccentric.

LLP: This volume covers almost all the works that you have created over the last ten years. Looking back, are you able to find in self-analysis moments that have represented a deviation or a turning-point? I think that one coincides with the film, *Glaucomaleo* ...

LT: The first moment of transition occurs with the plasticine circle I mentioned earlier. There I abandon the iconic force and situationist use of design that characterizes my previous works. I take the seeds of the project, the design and the object and make them my own, assimilating them deeper and deeper. The work becomes a presence. This is the first deviation and occurs in 2003/2004.

The other deviation took place in 2006, for my first truly one-man show, *Clinamen*, where I present myself to the world, with the idea of a material that shatters and disappears; a material flow. Then I work on Lucretius, on Francesco Lo Savio, the flow, with temporary, transitory materials that fall apart. At the same exhibition I decide to make my first video, even though I imagine it as a sculpture; I say this because I presented it on a monitor; it didn't have its own space or relationship with the body, as I would now say in 2014. It is a minute vision, which should be seen as a page of a book, or poster. The idea of using images in movement to portray things that are falling apart began there, and also the idea of a video created from the choice of location in

which it is set. With *Clinamen* I began to think about places that can function with the event that I want to record with the video camera. At the time, I felt that the sculptures of Francesco Lo Savio, if used as a cast, created perfect skating ramps.

That's how the sculptures begin and, when I see them, I understand that I must look for a huge skate park to shoot the video, releasing ice spheres that roll. This is something that has always remained in my films. The next deviation is in 2007/2008 when I decide to stop making videos and make films. I was looking for a person to shoot and work with me, I got organized, I asked myself questions about photography and sound. I want to present my obsessions in a completely different way. The film can travel the world alone as a representative of my thoughts, no longer trapped in a small monitor.

The other break corresponds with operation *Glaucomaleo*, or, anyhow, the things I did during the last year, which have taken everything to extreme consequences and forced me to develop increased awareness. When I was asked to write about Francesco Lo Savio, Bruno Munari, or about *Flogisto* [Phlogiston], I did it with pleasure but only when I wrote the book, *Water Ikebana*, did I realize how important writing is, how much I enjoy it and how much it helps me to convey things in a way that I no longer want to abandon. It is not so much for the fact that I made a film, but for the relationship that I succeeded in establishing between images in movement and words, a balance between a mysterious form and contents that now reach you in the way I thought of them. The use of words is nothing new, the significance I give to them is. The voiceover of Kary Mullis in *Glaucomaleo* could be a text of mine that instead of being published in a magazine, takes you by the hand and leads you into the film. It doesn't explain it but it helps you to experience it.

LLP: In general, everything appears to begin with the response to something. In practice, it can be very obvious, but in your case it is pursued and evident. One just has to look at your blog with its ideas and suggestions that are then transformed into works. Works are almost never artificially created but as a reaction to something ...

LT: Obviously everything begins with a response to something: the architect is in his office, the telephone rings and the client asks him: we need this ... are you able to help us? Or the artist who is invited to have an exhibition or is offered a new production. There is a request that leads to a proj-



ect that is put down on paper; everything is decided beforehand, studied for months and then produced. The incubation period can be brief or very long, but ends with a structure. But this is not for me. Of course, my project is produced and established, but it continues to change as work proceeds. Obviously, changes do not occur by chance, but it is always open to new suggestions and to new encounters, and I feed on this need to find the right ingredients. I always give this explanation, a bit stupid but effective. I always say that to achieve a certain taste you must use certain ingredients and

not others, like a cook. In terms that are very creative and not very clinical I think it has to do with perversion. There is the paranoid and the pervert. For Rem Koolhaas in *Delirious New York* the critical paranoia of Dalí, the paranoid par excellence, is a vision of the world. The paranoid is convinced of a truth, he knows how things go. On the other hand, in methodological terms, I am a pervert. I read on the train yesterday that the pervert has the courage and immodesty to achieve without false pretense what the neurotic confines to his dreams and fantasizing. It is a constant psychic lever that perversely achieves one's dreams, one's attractions cultivating and following them. I am not convinced about something so I cannot be a critical paranoid that builds a structure for his own truth. Let me answer you this way, mangling Freud instrumentally.

LLP: If I look at Italian artists of your generation, you are one of those with a particularly multiform range of interests. It is not merely about knowledge and being updated on everything. It is as if you have a desperate need to feed an omnivorous appetite.

LT: It is curious how with the passing of time it has only worsened, or perhaps improved. Like a psychic patient who becomes aware of who he truly is. That was the case with this book that appeared in 2008 for the exhibition of Giò Marconi by Mehdi Chouakri at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. This page you are looking at works like this. I asked a group of people who were following my work to ask me a question to which I would not answer, convinced that this set of questions would already be an affirmation. I was convinced that taking a volley of questions and writing them down as answers would have been an immediate test of my work. And it does really work. Listen to this: "If I look at your works with my eyes closed and try to imagine their sound, certain condensed arid sounds of the Autechre or of the recordings that Chris Watson made in Iceland come to mind. I dream of a melting glacier. Does it ever happen that you think of and see your work in terms of music and sound?"

LLP: I don't see the first memory I have of one of your works here. It involved a group of people ... it brought to mind Franz Erhard Walther. Where did I see it?

LT: Perhaps in some publication. The body has always been both very attractive and to a large extent dead wood. A bit because Franz Erhard Walther had already done a

lot, but especially because one aspect that has always bothered me is the psychology of the person with whom I work. I used either my friends, people with whom I had a relationship, or I had to choose people. And when you must choose, why choose him rather than her? Why a man, why a woman, blond, brunette, beautiful or ugly? I was fascinated with the body as a somatic trait that belongs to the spectator, not for its appearance. In fact, at the beginning, I deliberately deleted it, because I was interested in the body as an architectural framework that you inhabit. If I put the body in a work, I am immediately making a reference to your body; I am speaking to you without speaking to you; I am using a platform that we have in common. For this reason, I choose not to use nature, but its laws. Gravity, weight, the functions of things that you know well, regardless of whether you are Italian, French or American. The laws of nature are a common ground where I can speak to everyone, obviously with all the problems this entails.

LLP: And what about your relationship with time and temporality?

LT: It's very simple. Things come and go. We are here for a brief period then we will be gone. Either you let yourself become overwhelmed by a profound sense of nostalgia, or by anger, or by a desire for power that leads you to use marble (or any other material that eludes you into thinking that you will overcome death), or you play with it with disillusion and irony. Perhaps constantly repeating the vain nature of things to yourself shows that you are completely at ease with these rules of the game, or that, on the other hand, you aren't able to accept them. I don't know. I don't know if this constant compulsion to repeat this evanescence, presenting fragile things that shatter and dissolve is the presentation of a Zen peace or poorly concealed suffering. I have always found it hard that people have a reified, perfect image of my work. This will be my first book that provides a fairly clear idea of what I do. All the others that I have published are like whirlpools in which I would ask the spectator to fall into. If one is prepared to lose one's bearings among the pages, many things are to be found. But if there is no desire to participate in this game and lose one's bearings in this jungle of signs, stay away. There are many artists who present their works with mysterious and elusive photographs, or do not provide any photographs at all. I have unconsciously always left messy traces. The question is about knowing how to be responsible, assuming the re-

sponsibility of deciding who one wants to be. Until now, I have always preferred being in a kind of labyrinth; I considered work as a house of mirrors with some clear things and others that are not; a place made of reflections where one could lose one's bearings.

LLP: Personally, there is wide gap between the richness of this magma of references, suggestions in constant movement and their subsequent translation into a work that represents a milestone. Despite the use of unstable materials, at the end of the day you remain a sculptor playing with a shape in space who, at a certain point, decides to end this process and finalize it in a work of art. How legible do you think the complexity of this process is in the eyes of the spectator? Putting yourself in the place of a spectator, don't you think that there is a risk of it remaining merely a "pretty shape"?

LT: That is an interesting point and we could spend the entire day discussing it. The first thing that comes to my mind is that all these system or *extracurricular activities* that I have set up are an attempt to say: "Hey, I'm sorry I'm just a formalist, you know, keep in mind that these things come from far back."

LLP: But they are not justifications ...

LT: No, of course not, they are a part of the work. Over the years I began to corrupt formalism and to make it increasingly evident that these activities are not extracurricular or merely personal needs, but that they represent a position that I want to express clearly. They express a way of life. I have gradually become increasingly explicit to the point of publishing a book with a publisher outside the world of art, to present it and divulge it to everyone. The same is true for the film. I am becoming aware of these language set-ups and I believe that the idea of Luca Trevisani as a formalist sculptor is becoming less and less present in the spectator, and less risky as a result.

LLP: But there was once if you say so ...

LT: There was and at the beginning I really enjoyed playing with formalism. I present you with something that is very algid and arid, I present you with a closed space. It's up to you to play with it and see where it takes you. I slowly began to realize that, on the one hand, it was a trap that didn't work like I wanted it to. I spent a lot of time building it and waiting for the animal and when it finally approached, it sensed the

results of my efforts and didn't enter it, or it entered and wasn't harmed. From time to time, you need to improve your traps by trial and error until you see the trap work just like you want it to. Undoubtedly, the idea of enriching the language I use and making it more intriguing has to do with this awareness that I acquired over the years.

LLP: In this regard, the exhibition centered on *Floating Bananas* is a good example. It was a complex but accessible system of relationships.

LT: Consider that the exhibition lasted several weeks and the bananas rotted in the meantime, so the weight changed, as did the relationship between the various elements ...

LLP: I meant almost at the level ...

LT: ... of mechanism?

LLP: ... of mechanism compared to the work. In this respect, film is an ideal medium. Moving images, even if without several senses important to you (touch and smell), are more immersive and are an excellent bridge to access your imagination. Generally, there is also a concrete question that is worth investigating. Many of your works are, from a material point of view, very fragile and unstable. Often, as in the case of bananas and flowers, are in constant movement. It is as if they had their own life, as if they spoke their own language. Almost an animistic vision ...

LT: ... yes, absolutely ...

LLP: ... it's interesting. Mutability undoubtedly succeeds in suggesting something to the spectator. But have you considered that, in this continuous metamorphosis of materials and meanings, the public can never grasp the ultimate meaning of the work? I noticed a different spirit in your latest works...

LT: So do I. Because I changed...

LLP: ...that's why I asked you first to point out the deviations and turning points to me.

LT: I was thinking of different kinds of deviations. Now that I think of it, you are correct. I like what you made me see. I have always thought of all my works as inhabitants of vast, infinite spaces, without walls or partitions. Do you know the rooms of Superstudio? I have always imagined the spectator as an archeologist who discovers the works and must interpret them or as a doctor who, faced with symptoms, must



identify the disease. Works are symptoms. There are obviously decisive symptoms and irrelevant symptoms, fundamental works and transitory works. Undoubtedly, the relationship with moving images led to a deviation. I understood that I was taking too high a risk: dedicating my entire life to work and I ran the risk of keeping away the very people you want to approach. I don't know if the decision not to offer people explanations, perhaps squandering what you wish to say, is snobbism or simply shyness. The turning point was the use of all this plastic know-how, these symptoms, like a storyboard; therefore, not as an inanimate object but as players of a story. Do you know the puzzle in the weekly Italian puzzle magazine *Settimana enigmistica* where you have to join numbers to obtain a drawing? I was asking the arts administrator, spectator and everyone outside this studio to do the same. I was asking them to join the pieces.

Beginning in 2012, from *Il dentro del fuori del dentro* [The Inside Outside the Inside] everything is part of a storyboard. It is always up to the spectator to make a connection, but I pre-set it. Regardless of whether it is a film, a video or an object, there is flow, dynamics, a relationship and a story line. I no longer ask you to eat something raw but I serve it to you cooked. I realize that this deviation truly leads to a change, not of direction, because it's always the same thing, but it is a different type of cuisine. It all has to do with an idea of storytelling and, if you think about it, of generosity. After the intuition of the story-

board, the works have a longer period of preparation. On the one hand they are defined much more, on the other, inevitably different from works before 2012.

LLP: What year was this work done?

LT: 2008. The title is *Every basin is a mixing bowl*. So every basin, every basin of life is a place for mixing, please stir and mix.

LLP: Did these different elements have a relationship with the exhibition or did they stand alone?

LT: I have always thought of exhibitions as short stories, so there was a relationship. They were stories in my mind, but for the spectator they weren't cooked, to continue with the previous metaphor. I now feel more like someone who cooks, builds relations and expresses them clearly.

LLP: In a certain sense, does this work with flowers derive from this one with the fishing rods?

LT: There are a lot of works hanging ... also this one ...

They are gardens, places where your body enters into a relationship with a sculpture. When you think of a garden, the sculptures no longer stand alone. If something is hanging and mobile, the relationship that it establishes with your body is much stronger. There is no plinth to protect and separate it. The one at MAXXI with eggs is also the same thing.



LLP: How was this work conceived?

LT: I bought the fishing rods at the flea market in Berlin.

I put together archives of objects that have something to do with mixing air or water and to show them, I used fishing rods. The two fishing rods are joined at their soft, loose ends that, when they bend, reveal the weight of the objects they were carrying attached to their extremities. This one was at Mehdi Chouakri a few months earlier.

In this group, there are a series of mixers to prepare colors, an instrument to mix concrete, wind chains, a cocktail mixer ... And these are straps used for artistic gymnastics. A wide variety of materials used for the art of mixing.

LLP: What do you mean by fishing rods as an archive?

LT: They were a physical base ...

LLP: ... they supported ...

LT: ... all these shapes.

LLP: They were the surface.

LT: Exactly, and the fishing rod in any case throws something in liquid and pulls it out. In the exhibition, they are attached to the ceiling with audio tapes on which I had recorded sounds of water mixing it with my hands or with a stick. The work expands into space depending on the position of the fishing rod.

LLP: Do you consider it more a set-up or a sculpture?

LT: It's a good intersection between the two... It's a sculpture that constructs the set-up.

LLP: (laughing) It didn't stimulate smells?

LT: No.

LLP: Unlike *Floating Bananas* ...

LT: Smell counts here, a lot. There is also the idea of passing time that didn't count in the fishing rods. After a month and a half, the bananas rotted, some fell and in any case they were lighter. The pulleys allowed everything to move, so the screen almost fell to the floor and the projector rose. It projected a little on the screen, a little on the wall in the back and there was an incredible smell of bananas. I think that Gerwald Rockenschaub, whose exhibition came after mine, was desperate, because there was such a strong smell of bananas in the gallery that it seemed like a jungle. It was the sign of a living machine ... like I wish an exhibition was.

LLP: The point is how to transfer movement into a temporarily closed form like an exhibition. This work does it well. It almost has a poetic aspect. The condition of mutation is no longer mental here, you don't have to imagine it, you experience it. Was *Floating Bananas* the only work on show?

LT: There was another room with other works, but this was essentially the exhibition. In fact, the title, *Interval Training*, was also borrowed from the name of a method of fitness training that I mutilated to show this reasoning about time.

LLP: And what is the video running now?



LT: It's a video I shot with my cell phone at the Philadelphia Museum of Science and Industry. Do you know the machines that have to show the Newtonian relation of several bodies? Let's go back to my first works ... Science and Industry Museums always have a very abstract design: you can find spheres, squares, primary colors. I found these three objects that look like three bananas, or three dancers, or three gymnasts, and they were in bronze. It looked like stuff by Georg Dokoupil, an expressionist sculpture of the 1980s. I had to find a way of expanding this seed in space, the relationship between bananas that together build a set-up and a system that should have disintegrated because it was temporary. I slowly began to understand that it was very easy. Everything had to be hung and balanced by bunches of fresh bananas.

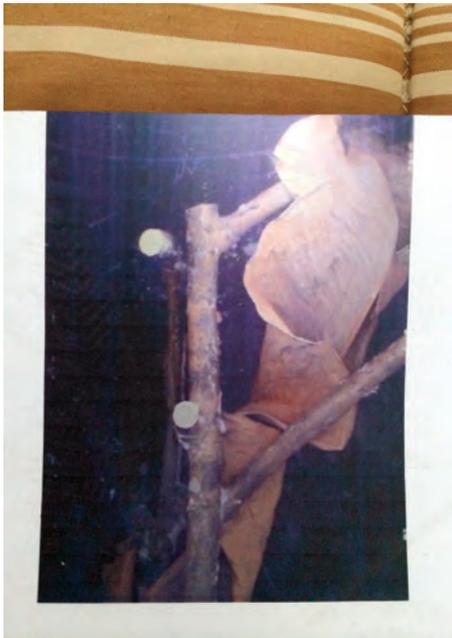
LLP: Does the work at MAXXI come later?

LT: Yes, the one with eggs.

LLP: And where did you shoot the video for this one?

LT: In a marble quarry in Piedmont. But the work I feel is closer to the one with bananas is the one with flowers that I presented at *abc art berlin contemporary* and before that at MACRO, in Rome, and also in the exhibition "Vanitas—nothing will be forever" at Georg-Kolbe-Museum, Berlin. Because, there, the experience is for real, there is melting ice, the smell of flowers. At MACRO, the smell was stronger because it was in a closed space, less at *abc*.

LLP: Is it a work that at the environmental and spatial level expands and recedes depending on the occasion?



LT: Yes, it is determined by the setting it is placed in. Obviously, there is a dimensional limit, the setting must be one where one can enter with the body and move.

LLP: What are the rules of composition of these two works?

LT: The fishing rods, for example, must be able to turn without touching each other, or they will get stuck. The distance necessary between rods will determine the size. The work with flowers concerns a relationship between space and the body entering it; the number of elements is not defined.

LLP: And the deterioration of the various components ...

LT: There's a variable on this ...

LLP: Should the person who buys it leave it as it is, or continue to replace the various elements?

LT: The only definite thing is that every time the work is set up, it must contain flowers shown on the previous occasion. Like a continuous process that contains its past. I like the idea of this chain, of a work that continues to exist but changes in time. There are the previous flowers, the wooden frame, and new flowers. A bit like in this work with flying balloons ...

Every arts administrator or collector decides how to deal with the question of time. I provide the possibilities and he decides. The balloons didn't fly any more after five days and the work lay on the ground like leftover food. One can decide to leave it on the ground or change balloons and make it fly every 5 days new, but as it was, as if it had gone to the gas station.

LLP: So you also leave a possibility of mutation in the interpretation of the work?

LT: Yes, you can't do whatever you want. The work exists beyond your control.

LLP: Obviously, always within a certain framework.

LT: Yes, of course. For the flowers—for example—we decided that, after the opening, some ice would be added. So ice melts the flower, steals its color, falls to the ground and when it dries, it leaves a trace of colored water.

LLP: It's as if it started a process that continues on its own ...

LT: I chose flowers with which these shapes should be built: callas, sterlizas and lilies. I chose them for their smell, for their shape and for their resistance to ice.

LLP: And how did the set of UV prints start? Which is the first?

LT: This one perhaps. They are the remains of bronze castings combined with a banana leaf; the same one that is burning in this other work ...

The prints on aluminum concern time. In a much more conceptual and mental way, they have the same characteristics of the set-ups we spoke about.

Do you remember what I told you earlier

about the archeologist. These are x-rays, but also stratifications of time with a reference to the photographic sculpture of Brancusi and Medardo Rosso. The idea that Brancusi decides that he alone is able to understand how to photograph a sculpture I apply to a scanner; I objectivize the eyes akin to paroxysm. I place a sculpture on a two-dimensional surface, crush it and reduce it.

The scanner also takes time and during this time the objects on its glass change, even if the eyes do not record it. At times they change because I decide to manipulate them: I moisten them, set fire to them, change them by the force of nature. I play with the idea of passing time that does not succeed in stopping things. The Rayogram or the photograms of Moholy-Nagy are analogue. I work instead with digital and then print with the technique you see here ...

These are the largest. I print them on aluminum that makes them a hologram. Because if you move, the image moves with you!

LLP: The choice of aluminum is for the sake of light?

LT: Yes, I chose it because I wanted to have the effect that depending on how you move, it moves with you. All are entitled *Placet experiri*, the pleasure of experimenting.

LLP: You remove a dimension from them as there you add that of time ...

LT: Exactly!

LLP: Going back to the subject of images in movement, the first film you referred to is *Platinoiridio*?

LT: *Platinoiridio*, yes. The work exists in two versions: one digital and one in 16 mm. The 16 mm version is installed in space and forms a space that is a copy of the one we see in the film, where the protagonist is shot against the light, painted in black, holding a carpenter's tape measure. The protagonist extends the tape measure as if it were a sword. But he extends it so far that it breaks and falls to the floor. He must interact and build spatial relationships, and he does this by touching things with the tape measure; lighting is created with neon lights; neon tubes form moving lines, pulled by cords. The film was shot in the cold storage room of the Magazzini Generali in Verona. Moving around the room, the 16 mm reconstructs the spatial relationships that the tape measure establishes in the film. The spectator and actor coincide. The tape measure used for the film was 5 meters long and



we used this measurement in editing. Five meters correspond to about 30 seconds of film in 16 mm and so, every 30 seconds we inserted a section of white frames in order to recreate the tape measure that moves in space. Obviously, in the digital version all this is lost, the white pauses remain every 30 seconds. Some things are obviously lost in this continuous translation. I like to spread these deviations ...



LLP: Another aspect that I wanted to discuss is writing. Did you write only in reply to commissions or has it always been a form of expression necessary for you, even if not shared with the public?

LT: I have always found it useful. It's a way of putting together the thoughts that led me and still lead me to produce the works. But if no one asks me to write, I feel like an idiot sitting at a table for no reason at all, when it may be sunny outside. So, without a commission, I don't write. I just jot down notes. My i-phone is full of notes for possible texts. I had lots of structured notes for *Water Ikebana* as well, but nothing more. I wrote my first texts years ago in less suspicious ...

LLP: ... times ...

LT: It was in 2003 for a journal of decorative arts. Then there was Francesco Lo Savio, after Munari and so on. Writing is important, but it must never render things more conceptual than experiential.

LLP: In the exhibition in 2006, did you make an explicit reference to Lo Savio, the point of departure of the work? You rarely do.

LT: I do, I do. Only that very often they are tributes to minor, eccentric or unlucky individuals. There is Geoffrey Pyke who invented Pykrete, modified ice that almost never melts. Or this sculpture, this sort of mimetic military cover. The title is *Norman Wilkinson*, the late Cubist painter who invented mimetization for English ships in the First World War. I mentioned Francesco Lo Savio, because he is a bit of a novelty not many people know. It was very important to point out who he was, almost a gesture of civility. I thought it was due, not only because I had reached certain conclusions thanks to his work, but because he was and is well worth discovering for a new experience. It was right to shout "look at Francesco Lo Savio!" I did the same thing for my first one-man show abroad in Berlin in 2008, where I exhibited a work of Gianni Colombo.

I am very pleased that Colombo has now been put on the map in America as well. I wouldn't include him anymore because he doesn't need it. I like to use works I like, but also works that should be given a fresh look. Once again, we have the story of the archeologist at the beginning. In 2008, taking Colombo to Berlin was important. There was Olafur Eliasson and also a group of other personalities who spoke of things that Colombo had already elaborated

in a very powerful way. I brought a work very close to those intentions, which was a version of this one. *Soap Bubble Skin*. A work that spoke of the same things, but in much more amusing, exciting and non-scientific terms. Back then, it was right to include Colombo ... physically, I mean.

LLP: In this regard, how do you deal with the past, Italian specifically, not only in the field of art. Do you feel you belong to a movement with a certain uniqueness? The question is deliberately provocative. For example, it is no surprise that Arte Povera began in Italy.

LT: Yes, that's obvious.

LLP: I also say this with regard to the generation you belong to that is basically stateless, culturally and geographically.

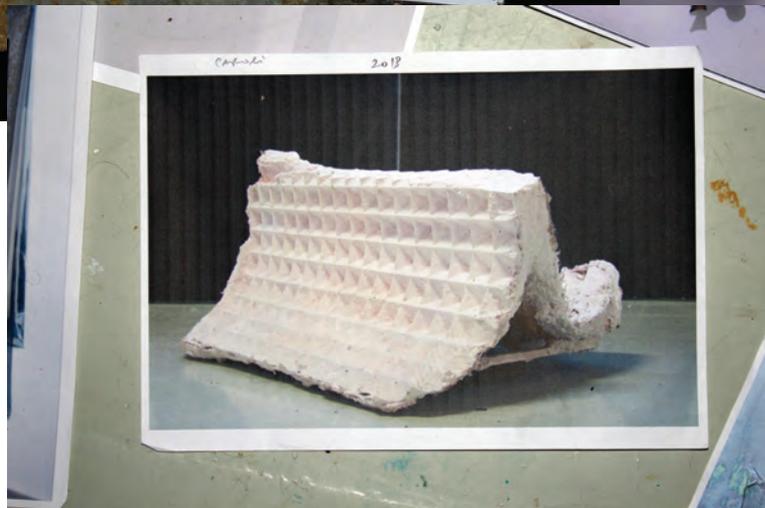
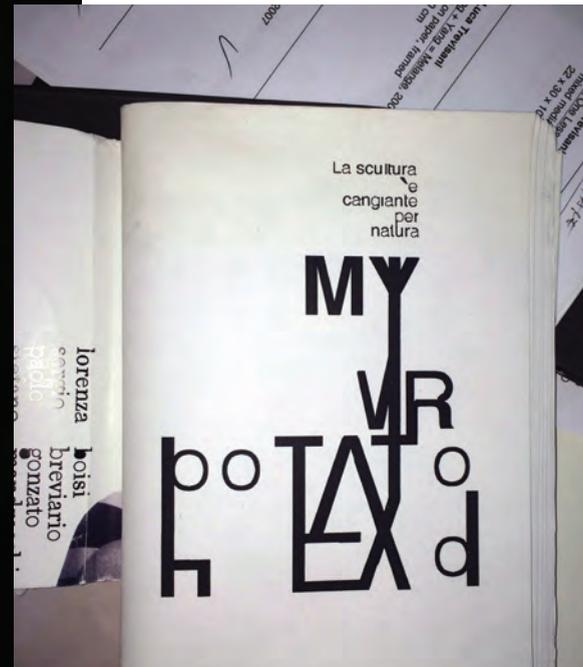
LT: This is dangerous territory, because it seems you are saying so to please someone. I consider myself Italian and I believe that what I think and do is inevitably sustained by a tradition and it is a tradition in which I put among its founders Munari and Lo Savio, including all the work done in Italy during the 1950s and 60s on space and the somatic. It is interesting how Manzoni is the true sponsor of Group T. He wanted to create a set-up, an enormous placenta, which can already be found in the work of James Turrell or Eliasson. Then there is Colombo, but also the architectural debate in Italy, which is not post-modern, not Aldo Rossi, not Sottsass, but a combination of many minor debates. There is a solid tradition, an idea of modernity that is 100% Italian and extremely interesting, because it is spurious. An anti-industrial, homemade, special modernity made of excellences and of inestimable value. To continue with a football analogy, our history is made of number tens, of exceptional solo players ... and this is obviously also a limit. Mollino, Manzoni, Munari, Pascali. They are all very strange personalities, very modern but with an eccentric side and hard to classify.

LLP: What about fashion?

LT: Italian or in general?

LLP: In general.

LT: There was a text I wrote without writing it! I had found an interview with Raf Simons, who was very young at the time, in a very old issue of *ID* and I felt that all the things he said were my thoughts too. I photocopied the page, deleted the



LUCA TREVISANI
~~RAF SIMONS~~
 WORK
 what inspired your collection and why? **May the circle be unbroken. Community. Togetherness. Unity. The gathering of tribes. The festival as utopian micro-society. A collective state of mind. Daydream nation. Nature. The endlessness of landscape. Handicraft. The four elements. Symbols. Sacred branches. Hearing answers from the river. Different state of consciousness. The spiritual journey toward enlightenment. Meditation. Contemplation. Mysticism. Purity. The wisdom of Herman Hesse** key looks for spring summer? **White cotton and handmade quilts** what will you be wearing this season **White jeans, white sweater** accessory of choice? **Crystal** and stone amulets spirit of the season? **UNITY** what type of man sums up this spirit? **Herman Hesse** soundtrack to your summer? **United**

name of Raf Simons and wrote Luca Trevisani in its place, and gave it as a critical review for a group show. It was around 2004. To answer your question: fashion is often an incubator of stratified, well-packed awareness. An excellent *trade union* between personal identity, group identity, politics, society, body and culture. When fashion is not fetish-inspired material, luxury or status symbols, but all these things together, it excites me.

LLP: What did Raf Simons say?

LT: Who knows, he said that what interested him was *total white*. It was the period I was doing my first works and they were all white. He spoke of the *gathering of tribes*, of materials, of textures, of light ... I don't remember much else.

LLP: And what about Franz Erhard Walther? You told me he is one of your favorite artists ...

LT: I discovered Franz Erhard Walther by chance many years ago in Berlin. I found a book of this artist with the unpronounceable name in a bookshop that had some incredible stuff. Like that piece by Raf Simons I put it over it and it was the same thing. The two things combined completed my thoughts.

LLP: It would be interesting to think of Franz Erhard Walther as a fashion designer and Raf Simons as a sculptor.

LT: Yes, that's true! It's a liberty that I have also granted myself, moving thoughts ... Franz Erhard Walther seemed to be a European Bruce Nauman, who, instead of being an introspective loner in his studio in search of Kant's rules, needed other people. Then there was material manipulation, in this case fabric. Twelve years ago—and it's still true—artists I see for the first time that make me angry and make me feel a mixture of distress, anger, anxiety and irritation are those who I will end up liking! Franz Erhard Walther was one of the first.

LLP: Since we have discussed your initial work, I suggest we fast forward and talk about your most recent project, *Glaucocamaleo*. The film actually originated from an invitation to organize an exhibition at the Marino Marini Museum, didn't it? Tell me how the idea took shape.

LT: In the beginning I was thinking of an ice sculpture. I was skiing and someone suggested that it would be nice to pour syrups in the snow, color it and even eat

the snow tainted with syrup. I was excited by the idea of this ink that melts and doesn't pollute, a sign that disappears, a material that changes shape and color depending on the temperature. While I was thinking of these things, I happened to see the sculptures that are produced in the alps by simply letting water fountains freeze. These natural sculptures are very beautiful, huge blocks of temporary ice. So the idea was to create a temporary sculpture, color and film it ... I also wanted to shoot in several locations, not just one, because I wanted the film to be a little longer than usual and create a set-up of rooms, different places ...

LLP: ... this is also the reason it differs from the video *Clinamen* ...

LT: Yes.

LLP: On that occasion it was like a performance sculpture documented on video ...

LT: Exactly.

LLP: Whereas you define *Glaucocamaleo* as a sculpture.

LT: In my opinion it is a set-up. Playing with words, I would say that the film is a thermal sculpture because it speaks to the spectator's skin.

LLP: One very interesting aspect of the film is that the places that we see seem to be uncontaminated, fantastic worlds when in reality they are more ordinary than they appear.

Instead of creating sets, you took a pre-existing reality and customized it as you wished. You made reality fiction instead of rendering a fictional scenario a reality.

LT: If I had to build everything from scratch it would become a mythographic exercise. I don't want to be the one to decide the shapes and flavors of the location ... I am not a *deus ex-machina*, or a demiurge artist, I don't want to be one. I search among places that already exist and that already contain everything that I would have liked to do. All I need to do is to follow them with the movement of the camera and the work is done. To make them a set-up you just have to decide how they move around you. You just remain immobile in front of the screen and they will be the ones who move, dictating the rhythm. I create a sculpture deciding how the machinery moves. At times, someone mentions Matthew Barney, but there is really no relationship

at all. I can understand the intensity of the language, but if you think about it, there is no mythography in me, no construction of a personal imagination; no Wagner, and the idea of being at the center of something. I try to disappear inside the work.

From the very first video, I decided that I had to go outside, become passive, choose a part of the world with which to work: the skateboard ramp for the rolling spheres of Lo Savio, the *De Rerum Natura*, the atoms and Lucretius; then the world of plants, the Botanical Garden in Genoa, the bio-phytomorphic house of Alvar Aalto, and the photocopies of his vases ...

LLP: What are you referring to?

LT: To *Vodorosli* of 2009. And then the set in the marble quarry and the eggs, because the egg shell is made of calcium carbonate just like marble, the color of the quarry, the egg that breaks, emerging nature, life, water that rains deep in the mountains. Here: ice, glaciers and the locations with ice, the solar mirror.

With *Glaucocamaleo* I only increased the number of trips and the locations. Of course, I explained everything clearly, when I wrote the book, inserting the voice-over in the film and the initial dialogue that adds another code, another style.

LLP: However, I believe that it would be a useful exercise to maintain the sculpture as a parameter and unit of measurement for your work.

LT: Definitely, yes.

LLP: The fact that you always define yourself as a sculptor is the key to avoid confusion. It's to have a set of rules sometimes.

LT: I do it because at the end of the day you need to have a grid to give those you meet. Like when you meet a new person, you are asked who you are, where you live, what you do. A sculptor is a person who shapes figures and puts them in a space. It's true, of course ... But when I say sculptor I mean the sculpture as the only form of art that puts a body in front of your body. The painter does too, but it is not a real body as it is two-dimensional. If we consider classical orders, classical classifications of art history, then I am not a sculptor; mine is the most clever way to be an architect. Almost effortlessly, I build temporary set-ups, small or large, without engineers and complications. Declaring myself a sculptor I facilitate the understanding of my work. If I defined myself an architect I'm



convinced no-one would understand a damn thing. An architect that builds houses that don't last long, cost a lot and are not for living in! See, it's better I don't say it! That's what I did with *Glaucocamaleo*, what I did with *Floating Bananas*, and what I did with the ice flowers. Obviously, I will continue to say that I am a sculptor. But the thought of architecture intrigues me. I like to think of sculptors or authors with scientific training. Once you become aware of their particular story you understand a lot about how they live. Primo Levi was a chemist who worked in a color plant. Italo Svevo was also a chemist of colors. Or Alberto Burri, perhaps less interesting ...

LLP: About Burri, is he an artist you like and one you considered?

LT: No. Burri's rhetoric is very effective but I don't particularly like him. I like *Cretto di Gibellina*, because he is a catastrophic failure, artistic and otherwise. *Gibellina* describes a period in Italian history, a relationship between art, culture

and the country that is completely out-of-date and he failed where he thought he could succeed. It's a place that is pretty unattractive, dismal and unsuccessful, but very, very interesting. Restless people who feel out of place attracted me more. So artists like Burri or others—whose value is obviously not at issue—captivate me less. I prefer those who went searching for it, who did something, got bored and changed idea, or those who tried to speak to the world, provoking it, bombarding it from various viewpoints with many languages.

LLP: So, the exhibition 'Conceptual and Applied III. Surfaces und Pattern', that you have co-curated at Daimler Contemporary in Berlin, together with Renate Wiehager, is a good recap of your reference models.

LT: Well, yes. There's Lina Bo Bardi, Mangiarotti, Giò Ponti ...

LLP: What other exhibitions have you curated?

LT: I did one in 2007. It was called *MR Potato's Head* like the game.

LLP: What game?

LT: It's a children's game where there is a plastic head containing eyes, eyeglasses, shoes inside that you put together by attaching the pieces. This was the self-produced catalog.

MR Potato's Head, la scultura è cangiante per natura. [Mr. Potato's Head, the sculpture is dazzling through nature.] A tribute to Corrado Levi. There were obviously artists who I had invited plus my incursions, from Lorenza Boisi to Patrick Tuttofuoco, from Tomma Abts to Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec, from Charles & Ray Eames to Enzo Mari ... and many other things.

I want to read you the press release of the exhibition because it will help you to understand many things. "The most beautiful sculpture of the first decade of the 21st century is *Blur* by Diller Scofidio." Do you know it? You see ... once again architects had concocted this crazy steam



machine for the exhibition, for the Expo, in Switzerland. A structure covered with moisture vapor in the middle of a lake. “Definitely a construction made of nothing, a very elaborate nothing, a costly, complicated machine built to produce steam. A cloud of habitable steam. *Blur* portrays us and our world, our expanding universe where entropy increases moment after moment while everything flows. Sculpture is something that brings the human body into play in an open dialogue. Mr. Potato is a children’s toy, a playing field to design. First by choosing, then by placing the somatic traits on the face. We play in a closed, given universe. My mother wanted me to play with lego to stimulate my fantasy, and found playmobils very limited. Later, Sol LeWitt taught me that the limit is an idea open for exploration. Now I know that sculpture is a living thing like a wild animal in a zoo. Like an animal in the circus in front of its tamer. It can be fragile or eternal like a sculpture of Cy Twombly, varied and changeable like a bouquet of flowers, alive and well like the snow in Cooper Square by David Hammons.”

LLP: Regarding everything that we have talked about, I’m interested in what you have to say about the exhibition of an artist who succeeded, using explanatory language, to elucidate the complexity of his work without looking inwards, in favor of a constantly changing, open vision. I’m talking about the exhibition of Pierre Huyghe at the Centre Pompidou.

LT: Ah!

LLP: In reality, in this publication, you are also playing with the idea of a retrospective. In my opinion, Huyghe was able, as no one was before him, to change the rules of the game and create a new scenario.

LT: Very clear. A publication is very different from an exhibition. An exhibition is much easier in my opinion. The way in which you can set things up and put them together is different ... and given how I am, the spatial practice helps. Where do I start? Like I told you, I put Gianni Colombo in an exhibition and he puts his teacher in Grenoble taking the sculpture of his teacher in the park in front of the high school where he studied. He wrote a sort of expanded biopic of himself, full of overlapping layers. He succeeded in finding a very delicate but perfect balance and it works perfectly between the old works (small romantic conceptual pieces of the 1990s) and the recent works (characterized by a biomorphic, narrative, filmic

and architectural drift). You could see how he has never changed and has always stayed true to himself.

LLP: He succeeded in not limiting his work in any way, maintaining a sense of movement. As all your work is so metaphoric, this exhibition was an important experience. Everything was linked. It was a single body made up of many elements ...

LT: The choreography was very smooth, made up of overlapping layers ... a living organism. The works trampled each other becoming marmalade; an exhibition that never sleeps ...

LLP: But what will be the last work presented in the book?

LT: It will end with crystals because the title—copied as always from a book—explains the huge amount of work done, the obsessive exploration: *As if repetition could legitimize the action*. It’s a nice sentence, perfect for ending the book. In some way, crystals, for how they are made, are an unconscious self-analysis of all that comes before. Crystals are a mirroring machine that continues to reflect itself, to build, to grow without a hierarchy and proliferates in repetition.

LLP: Is this the prototype?

LT: No, this is a sculpture and the others are autonomous ... it’s an archipelago of sculptures.

LLP: But how are these made?

LT: They’re made with dead, dried succulent plants.

LLP: But do you buy the crystals?

LT: No, they are chemical salts dissolved in a solution. When the water evaporates, they solidify creating crystals; You can also do it with cooking salt ...

LLP: How?

LT: I don’t know ... Take 100 grams of copper sulfate and 300 ml of water. That’s all. The proportions are those that produce a saturated solution. When you have the saturated solution, heat it in a small pan on low heat for half an hour. Then pour it into a jar and let it solidify for at least one week. The nice thing about these crystals is that they seem like magical things when, in reality, they are made from nothing, because I’m not a demiurge, I’m a Boy Scout!

LLP: And when did you do this one? Which year?

LT: I began working on it in 2008 and every now and then I make them. It’s wood veneer: a very soft wood. The shape comes from the elasticity of the wood; I don’t decide anything. I fold it and when it keeps its shape, I fix it into place and staple it and continue. It’s called *La pelle delle bolle di sapone* [Soap bubble’s skin].

LLP: It reminds me of Yona Friedman. Like the crystals make me think of Roger Caillois.

LT: The trick is not to work on Yona Friedman or on Roger Caillois, but to wed Roger Callois with Yona Friedman. That’s the challenge.

LLP: You’re a bit like a wedding agent ...

LT: (laughing) Or wed Rosemarie Trockel with Ettore Sottsass ...

LLP: What about these?

LT: It’s a study of textures. Bee hives, bees, Beuys, filter, hot, cold, temperature, sounds, sound absorbent material. They are materials and proposals, purposely not developed, suggestions.

LLP: It would be nice to have a retrospective show of all the works only with audio, using the sounds of each one.

Luca Lo Pinto is curator at Kunsthalle Wien and founder of NERO magazine.