

6 x 11

6 artists interpret the life and works
of 11 extraordinary women of Sardinia

Texts by Cecilia Mariani • Photographs by Nelly Dietzel

POLIEDRO



RESIDENCE
Grandi Magazzini
NUORO

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All the artworks in this book were exclusively created
by 6 artists of the SEUNA LAB collective from Nuoro,
Sardinia, in 2014

Catalogue

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A Dedication

The Grandi Magazzini apartment hotel was created in 2011 and is located on the upper floors of what was once the first department store in Nuoro, which was opened by Pietrino Cicalò in 1962.

In 2014, the building was extended with 11 new rooms. Meanwhile, a show at TRIBU introduced us to 6 artists of SEUNA LAB, a space in the heart of one of Nuoro's oldest districts where artists are free to create their own artworks.

The 11 rooms needed to be completed with something that was not a mere accessory decor. The artists of SEUNA LAB readily accepted the challenge of creating a range of artworks (for a final grand total of 36) based on a single artistic path for the various spaces: 6 young artists have then given their own interpretation of the life and works of 11 extraordinary women of Sardinia. And throughout this adventure, which began first of all by studying documents, they have worked alongside photographer Nelly Dietzel and historical/art critic Cecilia Mariani – as well as Antonello Cuccu, the creator of the whole project design – in order to convey the meaning of their artworks through the objectivity of photographs and the educational purpose of texts.

The original idea to introduce the lexicon of the most contemporary visual art – which echoes previous works of art performed by women who, like our artists today, were deeply rooted in the local social background – into the new rooms of the apartment hotel was immediately appreciated. Especially the idea to bring a more mature art into direct contact with the guests. By entering the rooms and living in them, guests will establish a simple and daily relationship with the artworks, which are there for a reason, not by mere accident, and for the use of guests only. Guests thus become inter-actors of an extraordinary closeness, of a private dialogue that is emotionally different because of the artworks defining each room and of the different architectural and furniture choices. Spaces and furniture are completely white: they are sheets of white paper on which the visual artworks become original marks of style and matter.

In a journey that stimulates their imagination, guests are given the opportunity to meet 11 women of Sardinia who, with their work and passion for life, emphasized the history and distinctive essence of this island.

This is also our small contribution to the *Distretto Culturale del Nuorese* project, which combines the Culture and local Economy of the province of Nuoro.

And a tangible mark that echoes what Sardinian writer Grazia Deledda, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926, wrote in *Tradizioni popolari di Nuoro* in 1894: «The young artists from Sardinia jokingly define Nuoro the “Athens of Sardinia”. It is actually quite the most educated and fierce village of our island. It is home to artists and poets, writers and scholars, strong and kind young people, some of whom do credit to Sardinia and are also set on a pathway to a relative success».

*To Maria Fois, our mother,
who patiently supports us in all our projects.*
Antonio, Angela, Agostino, Gianfranco, Luciana Cicalò

Magnificent Hauntings. Of Sardinian women, artists and things, as seen through the eyes of SEUNA LAB

by Cecilia Mariani

The historic commercial landmark *Grandi Magazzini Ruju Cicalò*, located at 1, via Dalmazia, in the heart of the Sardinian town of Nuoro, was opened in 1962 by Sardinian entrepreneur Pietrino Cicalò. Its conversion into an apartment hotel with 26 one- or two-room apartments – 11 of which are now dedicated to 11 Sardinian women and artists – is a monumental project that is both commercially and architecturally ambitious, and aesthetically and conceptually consistent. The building, which was renamed *Residence Grandi Magazzini* in 2011, was modified to serve its new purpose and intended use, with the idea of combining the natural beauty and culture of the Sardinian town in Barbagia with a contemporary housing offer, equipped with state-of-the-art technological devices and decorated with some of the latest interior design objects. Moreover, with the inauguration of the new part of the building, the very idea of accommodation is now being deprived of its ordinary nature of a hotel stay and blended into a peculiar experience: a private meeting with some of the leading figures of the Sardinian 20th-century literature, music, and visual and applied arts.

En passant, it is also worth noting that the mere fact that this tribute is set in the premises of a former department store is quite bizarre yet significant: department stores are the Western, middle-class symbol *par excellence* of the economic and commercial boom that the modern world experienced at the turn of the 20th century, and that reached Nuoro after World War II. It is in this bivalent background of wealth and sin that women – including first of all the stylish woman *par excellence*, the French woman, or the iconic *parisienne* – would always be the main (active) subject and (passive) object of market mechanisms: *voyeuse*, *buyer* and commodity at the same time. Here, on the other hand, in a totally renovated part of the apartment hotel, 11 extraordinary women – some of whom are among the leading figures of the 20th century in Sardinia – do not merge with an implicitly isolating idea of home, or worse with the semantic field of trade, but with the broader idea of a warm yet never servile welcome. The aim is to welcome guests and tell them a story – the story of these women, the story of an island – while interviewing them, at the same time.

11 rooms for 11 women who are known locally as well as to an Italian and international audience. These women are: Grazia Deledda (Nuoro, 1871-Rome, 1936), writer

and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature; Francesca Devoto (Nuoro, 1912-1989), painter; Edina Altara (Sassari, 1898-Lanusei, 1983), illustrator, decorator and fashion designer; the Coroneo sisters, i.e. Giuseppina (Cagliari, 1896-1978) and Albina (Cagliari, 1898-1994), artists, illustrators and craftswomen; Verdina Pensé (Alghero, 1913-1984), painter and jewellery designer; Olimpia Melis Peralta (Bosa, 1887-1975), entrepreneur; Luisa Fancello (Dorgali, 1910-1982), embroiderer; Anna Marongiu (Cagliari, 1907-Rome, 1941), illustrator and engraver; Maria Lai (Ulassai, 1919-Cardedu, 2013), artist; Marisa Sannia (Iglesias, 1947-Cagliari, 2008) and Maria Carta (Siligo, 1934-Rome, 1994), singers and songwriters.

They are the “magnificent hauntings” evoked by SEUNA LAB, a collective of artists from Nuoro that has been active since 2006. The group is totally embedded in the life of the local community and is characterized by a polystylism once again displayed – with the exception of some unusual and avant-garde effects – by the different techniques and styles chosen by its members: engraving for Pasquale Bassu (1979), painting for Gianni Casagrande (1963), installation art, printing and sculpture for Vincenzo Grosso (1977), sculpture for Sergio Fronteddu (1982), installation art, painting and collage for Stefano Marongiu (1977) and Vincenzo Pattusi (1978). The six artists were asked to connect with the 11 women in an imaginary dialogue that summed up both their life and their respective aesthetic legacies, considered either directly or in the light of the most recent theories. They have consequently established “a correspondence of loving minds” (more than of “senses”) with these potentially cumbersome *matres* (mothers), a compassion exceeding the mere and obvious tribute, as you would normally expect from younger artists. They established a connection with some of the most prominent figures of Sardinia’s 20th-century cultural scenario (like Grazia Deledda and Maria Lai) and with other less prominent figures, as it were, who expressed themselves in essentially private or exquisitely popular environments (like Luisa Fancello). Thus each room is inhabited by the presence of the woman to whom the room is dedicated. But at the same time it is also indelibly imbued with the personal interpretation of that woman by Bassu and Casagrande, Grosso and Fronteddu, Marongiu and Pattusi, which stems from their poetic and stylistic sensitivity.

The best feature of the final outcome, which refuses to yield to sheer reverence and awe, is that it doesn’t relinquish to a simplistic stereotype, nor indulge in the more obvious praise; on the contrary, in these “portraits” the hidden gushes of aporiae, inconsistencies and anxieties that the beloved artists experienced during their lives and aesthetic journeys, if not in their *post mortem* legacies, inevitably emerge like underground rivers of ink, paint and glue. It is up to guests to decode the candid and devious game of mirrors and glimpses, and to accept the invitation to a journey of the mind of which these new rooms are just the first stop.



H 501. ANNA MARONGIU

Anna Marongiu (Cagliari, 1907-Rome, 1941). Fulfilling her family's dream, she got her chartered accountant qualification, but she was always drawn to visual arts. From an early age, she stood out as a self-taught artist in the arts of drawing, illustrations and caricature. At the end of the 1920s, having just turned 18, she was already certain of her vocation for art and left for Rome, where she studied at Accademia Britannica and often visited the ateliers of Umberto Coromaldi, a painter, and her cousin Giuseppe Capponi, an architect. She made her lucky debut as an artist in 1929 at the exhibition *Primavera sarda* in Cagliari alongside famous colleagues like Giuseppe Biasi and Mario Delitala. This marked the beginning of a wide and glorious range of exhibitions. Anna Marongiu later went on to illustrate books by Manzoni, Dickens and Shakespeare with watercolour panels and ballpoint pen drawings before discovering, in the early 1930s, her natural bent to the etching technique, which she had learnt in Rome with Carlo Alberto Petrucci. She further expanded her knowledge of this technique by studying the great 17th-century tradition and often associating with contemporary Italian engravers, among whom another fellow Sardinian, Felice Melis Marini (Cagliari, 1871-1953). A master of engraving, Marini would then inspire Marongiu to turn to

landscape views, although she, now an acclaimed etcher, would always stand out from the group of fellow Sardinian engravers for her complete indifference to Sardinian folklore and everyday life. Anna Marongiu always pursued her own personal research, devoid of any forced regionalism, and seemed drawn more to urban settings and miscellaneous inspiration, ranging from circuses to sacred themes. Back in Cagliari at the onset of World War II, from 1936 to 1941 she created a series of etchings that would make her even more famous. Her 15 etchings portraying views of Cagliari (*Vedute di Cagliari*) are a joyous and accurate portrayal of a town known for its architecture and evocative monuments, which had been the town's own pride and joy for a long time before the air raids and bombings of World War II suddenly and dramatically transformed its skyline forever.¹

Pasquale Bassu's linoleumgraphy portraying a partial view of *Via Majore* – nowadays *Corso Garibaldi* – in Nuoro was inspired by Anna Marongiu's urban views of her hometown. However, Bassu presents a more ordinary part of the street that features one of the landmarks of the town's centre, the *Bar Majore-Caffè Tettamanzi*, named after the old name of the street and celebrated by Salvatore Satta in his novel *Il giorno*

del giudizio (*Day of Judgement*). Bassu's artwork depicts an old and abandoned building. Due to its photo-like style, the image looks like it was taken from a photo-essay, but actually conceals the observer's sympathetic gaze. By showing an example of present-day urban blight, the artist seems interested not in exposing it, but rather in showing his sympathy, clearly saddened by its obvious decay. The derelict old building overlooks a short uphill section of the street, which thus becomes the humorous and Pirandellian portrait of a woman who aged prematurely but still wishes to show bystanders her faded beauty.

Vincenzo Grosso enters into a totally different dialogue with Anna Marongiu, a dialogue that stems from a new version of the artist's favourite technique – engraving –, and from a critical reinterpretation of the landscape leitmotif, which Anna Marongiu was so fond of. Grosso created two very unique artworks, and adapted the engraving technique to his needs in order to express the criticalities of today's relationship between man and cities and between man and nature. In *Tombino a Seuna* the black print on paper reproducing the surface of a manhole cover in Seuna – the neighbourhood of Nuoro where Grosso was born and raised, and where the SEUNA LAB studio is located – implies an attempt to interact with the landscape views that Marongiu used to pay honour to her hometown. Grosso did the same with his hometown, which thus becomes the archetypal urban area in its nondescript ordinariness, and dismissed the idea of an overall contemplative vision, choosing a detail of city life not at random, but for its connotative meaning: a manhole cover. If we try to interpret the artwork, which was obtained by using the real object as a plate and covering it with ink, we can read the name of the original Dino Pusceddu foundry of Cagliari flipped over, as if written using a mirror writing technique. However, it is just a random, misleading cross-reference, even more so because the artist's

attitude towards the portrayed object couldn't be more different from Anna Marongiu's. The full-scale print, both frightening and creepy, actually suggests the author's critical and slightly unflattering approach not to the town of Nuoro, but rather to today's society as a whole, which, in its sheer indifference and constant absent-mindedness, is happy to see because unable to observe. To this effect, the manhole cover is a feature of a presumed civilization that Grosso provocatively draws the viewer's attention to by defining it as a symbol of oblivion, neglect and the indifference to the unwanted stream of waste and scraps that life entails. The same vision recurs in *Abused*, a charcoal print on canvas created by using a plank of wood lengthwise as a plate. The plank, which Grosso found in 2011 in a neighbourhood of southern London, was part of a building dating back to the middle 1800s. The Sardinian artist found it in a pile of rubble from a renovation project, still perfectly intact and fit for use, decided to save it from landfill and oblivion, and smuggled it to Sardinia as a relic so it could continue to exist and be remembered. Grosso covered it with charcoal and placed it on a canvas, and the plank left its image, which is now an artwork. This care for the object stems from the universal value that the artist attaches to it, and also to the overlapping – i.e. reconciliation – of wood (synecdochically representing the creation as a whole) and the human being. By hinting at and resolving one of the greatest conflicts embedded in the Western world – the conflict between nature and nurture, chaos and order, artificiality and spontaneity – *Abused* conveys the idea of a landscape that is violated, exploited, tortured and yet embodied by the contemporary man. By leaving an organic mark on the canvas and thus transforming the painting into some kind of evocative Holy Shroud, the plank of wood has become a metaphor for the life of the universe, a single log that is at once fragile and precious.

1. For further information on Anna Marongiu: cf. W. SHAKESPEARE, *Il sogno di una notte d'estate*, special edition published for the artist's retrospective (Cagliari, Cittadella dei musei, 23-28 February 2002), Cagliari, Soroptimist International Club, 2002; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, pp. 64, 67-69, 74, 86, 102, 104, 157, 163, 264; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura del primo '900*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 1995, p. 287; A. MARONGIU PERINIS, *Tavole per «I Promessi sposi»*, edited by M. Crespellani and

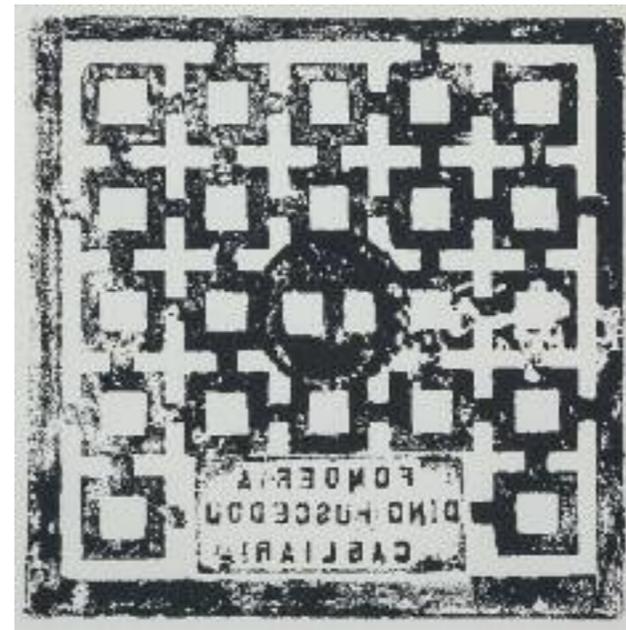
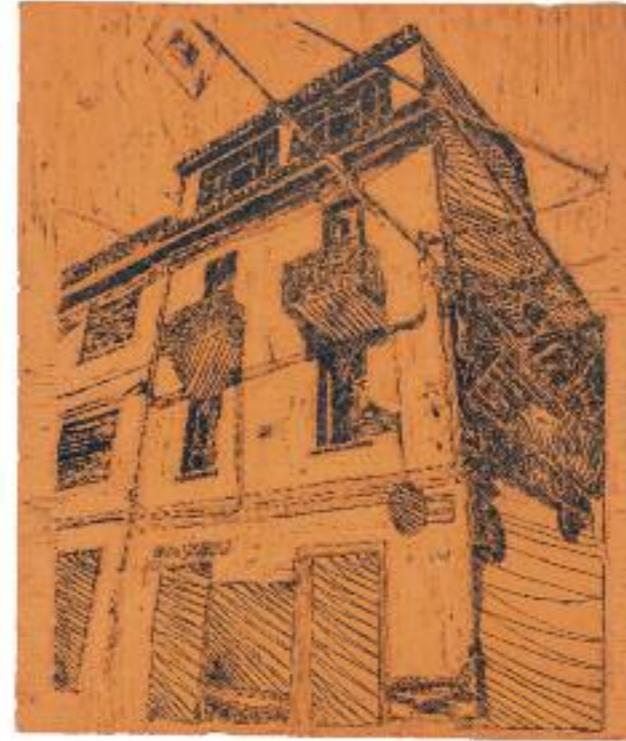
L. Rogier, Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre, 1999; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Le matite di un popolo barbaro. Grafici e illustratori sardi 1905-1935*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale, 1990, pp. 148, 179; L. PILONI, *Cagliari nelle sue stampe*, Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre, 1988, p. 303; *Quarant'anni di incisione artistica in Sardegna: 1930-1970*, catalogue of the exhibition curated by S. Naitza and M.G. Scano (Quartu Sant'Elena, 15-29 March 1986), Quartu Sant'Elena, Il dado, 1986. For further reference, please visit www.marongiu.org.



PASQUALE BASSU,
Via Majore, 2014
linoleumgraphy

VINCENZO GROSSO,
Tombino a Seuna
(Manhole Cover in Seuna), 2014,
ink print on paper

VINCENZO GROSSO,
Abused, 2014
charcoal print
on canvas



H 502. OLIMPIA MELIS PERALTA

Olimpia Melis Peralta (Bosa, 1887-1975). She was the sister of Melkiorre, a painter (Bosa, 1889-Rome, 1982), Federico, a potter (Bosa, 1891-Urbania, 1969), and Pino, an illustrator (Bosa, 1902-Rome, 1985). Olimpia was the fourth creative genius in a family that left an indelible mark on the history of visual and applied arts in Sardinia. Since the 1910s, Olimpia showed quite an uncommon entrepreneurial flair for a woman of that time: she set up a factory of filet in her hometown. Over the years, her factory would stand out for the creativeness and high quality of its manufactured products, which were sold in Italy, and also exported in Europe and the United States. A brave and proactive woman, Olimpia never reduced the ancient art of weaving to a mere mass production vainly reproducing traditional manufactured products. Inspired by the designs of Art Deco, Olimpia reinterpreted the traditional designs of the past and adapted them to the new trends in home decor, trousseaus and linen, while innovating the very purpose of decorations and applying them to fabrics in unconventional ways. Today, because of her life and career, she is rightfully regarded as one of the artists of her time – along with her brothers – who managed to create a joyful bridge between the aesthetics of the past and the new trends of the present. She was able to reinterpret the

Sardinian handicraft tradition, breathe new life into it, and launch it into the future, both in Italy and abroad.²

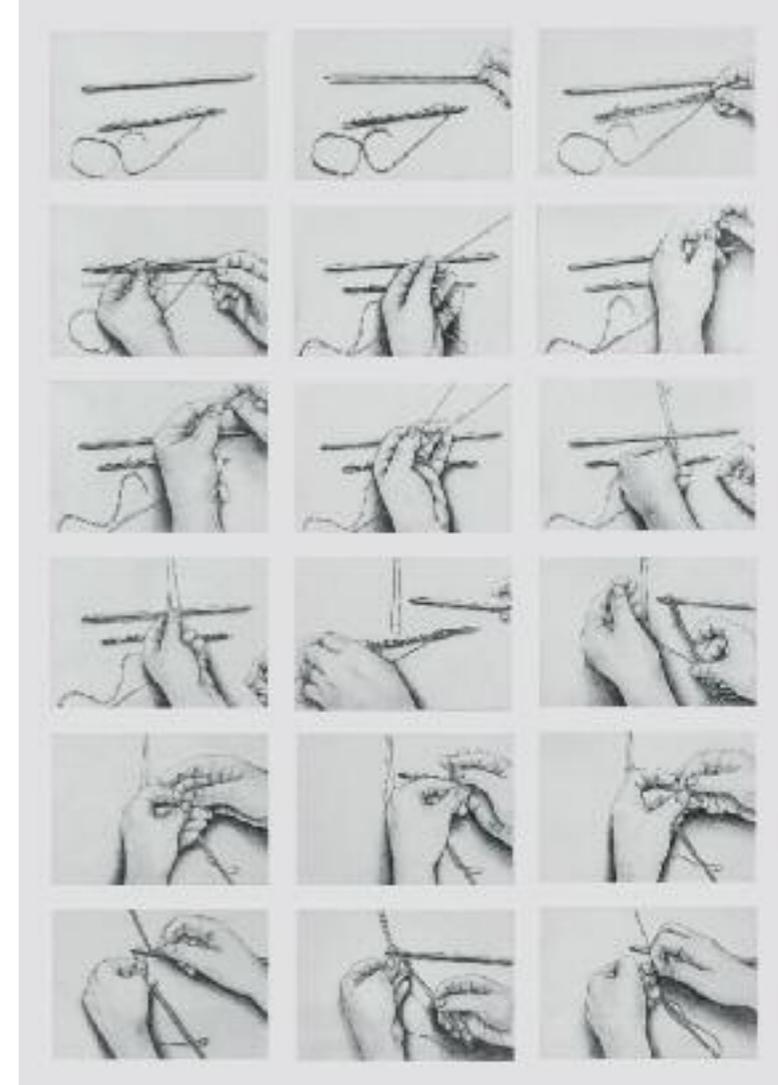
Vincenzo Pattusi's artwork *Senza titolo (Untitled)* is dedicated to her and reminds us of the pages of *Mani di fata*, an iconic Italian magazine for women, or the frames of an online video tutorial: 18 panels laid out 3 by 3 on 6 rows, 18 shots showing every single step to creating the first stitches of a filet. By breaking down the experienced and quick movements of a woman's hands, Pattusi expands in time – also through the reflection of the above mirror – the moment at the very start of this handicrafting process, thus transforming single automatic movements into a solemn pace with a slow-motion effect. The regular pattern of stop-motion images hence becomes a visual rhythm, with each image rhyming with all the others, which have been laid out as if on a conventional grid. They rhyme in the cyclic cutting and reunification sequence of lines – the straight lines of crochet hooks and tight threads, and the curved lines of fingers and loose threads – in a harmonic grace of black and white.

Furthermore, Stefano Marongiu's polyptych *Senza titolo (Untitled)* represents a triple future stage of an

imaginary process. The three vertical panels effectively simulate three looms: one of them has a frame, and each of them features a network of tight threads and partial decors. The artist used a street art technique to draw the networks of threads: the *stencil*. Through the irregular distribution of black paint sprayed onto the Forex® sheets, the technique creates a vague and slightly smoky effect similar to a radiograph, and thus gives the rectangular surfaces an evocative power. It is as though the white lines of the decors emerge through the fog of a long-forgotten past, and stand out through the powerful, sharp, chalk-white cuts against the white-board-like walls. It's the materialization of the dots and dashes of a Morse code that could still be a shared language, a binary code similar to the downbeat and upbeat of music, geometrical protrusions of pure abstraction or natural memory, mountains and valleys. Miniature houses still inhabited by the wisdom and knowledge of expert craftswomen.

2. For further information on Olimpia Melis Peralta: cf. G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, p. 254; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura del primo '900*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 1995, pp. 199, 209; *C'era un fiume e nel fiume il mare. I fratelli Melis: una famiglia di artisti in una fiaba moderna interpretata da gio-*

vani illustratori d'oggi, catalogue of the exhibition curated by A.M. Montaldo and A. Cuccu (Cagliari, ExMà. Centro d'Arte e Cultura, 28 May-8 September 1996), Cagliari, Stampacolor, 1996. For further information on the Melis brothers: cf. A. CUCCU, A. FAETI, *Pino Melis*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2007; A. CUCCU, *Melkiorre Melis*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2004.



VINCENZO PATTUSI,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
polyptych – pencil
on paper – mirror





Stefano Marongiu,
Senza titolo (Untitled),
2014

STEFANO MARONGIU,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
triptych – stencil
and incision
on Forex®



H 503. EDINA ALTARA

Edina Altara (Sassari, 1898-Lanusei, 1983). From an early age, she was fascinated by the art of drawing and collage; she started her career as a self-taught artist, and was soon admired by illustrious colleagues and praised by the leading critics of her times. After marrying Vittorio Accornero de Testa – a famous artist known under the pseudonym of Victor Max Ninon – in 1924, she began to show her versatility and creativity while working with him as a Deco illustrator in Milan. After the end of their marriage in 1935, Edina continued experimenting autonomously and with outstanding results in graphic design (young adults books, magazines, periodicals, advertisements), fashion (she opened an elegant atelier at her own house in Milan), pottery, and decoration tout court. In 1942, she began her prolific partnership with Gio Ponti, a famous Italian architect: Edina designed the cover and some fashion sketches for *Bellezza*, an Italian magazine for women, and in 1946 she started signing design and interior decoration projects for *Stile* and *Domus*, two prestigious Italian magazines. During her long collaboration with Ponti, she decorated a wide range of objects created by the famous designer, and designed the interior decoration of various ocean liners: *Conte Biancamano*, *Conte Bianco*, *Andrea Doria*. However, her destiny was doomed: the end of her life would be similar to the end of a dime novel. Her sis-

ters Iride and Lavinia were also artists, and often worked with her. After her sisters died, Edina lost her clearness of thought in a private hospital for psychiatric disorders in the village of Lanusei. An unhappy ending after a life spent searching for beauty in every possible form, last but not least, the material form.³

Stefano Marongiu's tiny sculptures *L'altra faccia dell'Isola* refer to the first period of Edina Altara's career, and take the viewer's memory back to her first creations. They remind us of the tiny paper puppets that she created in the 1910s and 1920s, and that one of the early followers of Edina's work, Giuseppe Biasi, loved so much. Sadly they are now destroyed or lost, and can only be viewed in vintage photographs. In a game of Chinese boxes, Marongiu incorporated new playful elements into objects that are already playful, and thus achieved his own personal version of figurines of Sardinian people in their colourful folk costumes. The artist further simplified shapes and lines, and reduced his colour palette to primary and secondary colours, including references to the contemporary visual culture and imagery of Japanese mangas and anime. Marongiu took one dimension away from objects only to insert one of his signature elements: paper coasters. The figurines

were actually created by assembling scraps of this recycled material, which he often uses in his art: paper coasters covered in black and featuring details of maps and aerial surveys. The cardboard scraps have been transformed into colourful clothes for the miniature silhouettes, thus adding indistinct fragments of landscape to the geometric or floral decorations of the women's dresses, and in a way suggesting a new, hybrid sense of belonging, an essential and inevitable crossing of local and global cultures and minds. The five figurines are balanced in a perfect harmony of poses, geometries and colours. The modular square shape, included in the original paper coaster, is repeated regularly and rotated by 45 degrees to become the base/skirt of the posed women. But the artist also further exploited it for its original purpose by placing an object, which is apparently out of context, on top of it: the Rubik's cube. The iconic combination puzzle – the readymade game *par excellence* – is an alienating, half-serious and ultimately chameleon-like detail: the regular, repeated square shape and the recurring colour palette of the figurines play a part in its ideal camouflage, but it's its printed surface, with the black spots of a unidentified territory, that conveys a frustrating sense of an unstable identity, of a precarious balance in a geographic puzzle whose outcome is variable and always renegotiable. Literally: manipulable.

For his diptych *À la guerre comme à l'amour* and polyptych *Perduta!* Gianni Casagrande drew his inspiration from Altara's most mature artistic period and age. It is almost as if he gave the viewer a slightly unflattering – and in some ways boastful, if not incompetent – image of the Sardinian artist. Edina appears to be playing the part of a beautiful, jolly lady sitting in a posh living-room (*Cattive notizie*) or at a table at a luxury restaurant (*Una serata perfetta*) in skits depicting upper-class people. The social events

that the artist usually attended are further ridiculed here by Casagrande by inserting elements that are dangerously out of context, alienating details that spoil the quiet and pleasant atmosphere of the two mundane events, and turn it into a surreal and grotesque one. With its green-and-white striped wallpaper, the room where Edina is portrayed while sitting and talking to another woman immediately suggests the upper-class status of the house owner. However, in order to upset the balance of the scene, Casagrande painted the magnified and unlikely heads of a locust and a tsetse fly – instead of the usual hunting trophies – on the walls, as well as a huge *Deidamia Morpho*, a Brazilian butterfly, spreading its cobalt blue wings in a big, white square. The bad news that the title refers to – and that maybe Edina reads in the letter in her hands while faking a smile – is probably nothing more than this: a fictitious danger in a faraway "East", as in the movie *The Career of a Chambermaid*, so innocuous that it is even dreamed of with an exorcizing anguish. Nothing more than a false *reverie* of a bored *bourgeoisie* that is incapable of crossing the golden fence of their own privileges. But in *Una serata perfetta* Casagrande hints at something even more subtle. Here the artist appears perfectly at ease while enjoying dinner with a high-ranking military officer. She seems relaxed in her smart dinner dress and in a glamorous, almost cruise-like setting. Edina confidently toasts with her fellow diner, oblivious of the hook that he wears on his other hand and of the metal prosthetic plate replacing the left side of his disfigured face. The common denominator of Casagrande's small diptych seems to be the risk of surrendering to a frivolous and ambiguous morality. The painter suggests all the unpleasantness of a constant social masquerade with expressionist and miniaturist care, and hints at hidden and symbolic meanings through the various elements of the scene.

3. For further information on Edina Altara: cf. G. ALTEA, *Edina Altara*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2005; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, pp. 69, 251, 260-261, 266,

268; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura del primo '900*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 1995, pp. 134, 150, 166-171, 176, 192, 199, 210-213.



GIANNI CASAGRANDE,
À la guerre comme à l'amour [*Una serata perfetta* (A Perfect Night), *Cattive notizie* (Bad News)], 2014
 diptych – acrylic on canvas

GIANNI CASAGRANDE,
Perduta! (Lost!), 2014
 triptych – acrylic on canvas



As if, in the painter's mind, Altara and her universe made "war" as they would make "love", always in a cynical and deceitful way. Nothing is there by accident: for example, the entomological accuracy of the heads of the insects goes hand in hand with the accuracy of details that are apparently insignificant but extremely connotative of a wealthy status (e.g. the books that lay closed on the coffee table in the small living room, the cigarette burning in the hands of the Mephistophelian fellow diner, the wine that the waiter keeps refrigerated in the steel bucket). Casagrande transforms the potential negative consequences of an involvement with influential people (in society, culture, the business sector) into images, casting some doubt on, and therefore slightly tainting, the reputation of an artist who, more than any other Sardinian woman, managed to live her life like a legitimate dandy, a life full of aesthetic ambitions, both in

private and in public. Casagrande seems to be slightly more lenient in his triptych *Perduta!*, but this first impression is immediately contradicted by the image of Edina aimlessly wandering in the woods. She is portrayed in three different moments out of her usual home and city setting. The slender silhouette is painted against a natural green backdrop while wearing a dress that is as white as the empty sky beyond the meadows and the bushes. She wanders and she is in despair, as though missing a point of reference and unable to find her way. The only possible outcome for this sleep-walking woman lost in the woods of life is once again to submissively surrender to beauty. To find her way, Edina must yield to nature and then collapse onto the grass, only to spend hours smelling wildflowers, like an opera heroin patiently waiting for the wicked and salvific worm of insanity to arrive.





STEFANO MARONGIU,
*L'altra faccia
dell'Isola (The
Other Side of
Sardinia)*, 2014
collage with
altered readymade,
acrylic



H 504. VERDINA PENSÉ

Verdina Pensé (Alghero, 1913-1984). Her fame is strongly intertwined with that of her hometown, Alghero. From the 1950s, thanks to the training courses organized by ENAPI (The Italian Institution for Trade and Small-sized Businesses, from 1951) and the resulting impulse to exhibitions that was further stimulated by ISOLA (the Sardinian Association for the Craft Industry, active from 1957 and headed by Eugenio Tavolara and Ubaldo Badas), Alghero went through a rebirth due to the promotion of coral jewellery and processing. Coral has always grown off the North-Western coasts of Sardinia. After attending the Istituto d'Arte in Sassari where she trained under Filippo Figari, who was then the school manager, Pensé experimented painting, but she soon abandoned it to follow her natural bent for jewellery design and manufacturing. Determined to promote local traditions and crafts, Verdina managed to fulfil her dream of establishing (1952) and directing (until 1959) a school for coral processing (Scuola del Corallo), which was first a branch of the local school and later became Istituto Statale d'Arte. Pensé, who also worked in her private atelier, achieved fame for the primitive and naive design of her jewels, which she created with relatively simple techniques devised to emphasize the irregular

shapes and natural colours of the raw material, in a style that was consistent with the latest trends in jewellery design of the second half of the 19th century.⁴

Toeletta is a hybrid installation specially designed for her by Stefano Marongiu: it merges the lines of ready-made and *objet trouvé* (found object) with collage and painting elements. At first glance, it looks like an ordinary three-legged wooden table with a table mirror and another small hand mirror; quite simply a scenographic reproduction of a detail of an early-century *boudoir*, yet also a corner of a bedroom or a bathroom decorated with retro style furniture and decor by a lady who is often not at home but likes stopping in front of that mirror to try jewels and makeup on. The group of objects strikes above all for the marked contrast with the sleek and polished contemporary furniture. However, under its reassuring vintage look, Marongiu's artwork proves to be variously allusive in its complexity. The old dressing table, which was found in a basement and reconditioned with a coat of burgundy paint, manages to entail an emotional burden of intimacy, as it was the artist's grandmother's, who was probably a contemporary of Pensé.

4. For further information on Verdina Pensé: cf. G. ALTEA, "Tradizione e innovazione nel gioiello contemporaneo. Dal designer per l'oreficeria all'artigiano artista", in *Gioielli. Storia, linguaggio, religiosità dell'ornamento in Sardegna*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2004, pp. 382-386; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*,

Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, pp. 269, 280. For further information on jewels and precious adornments of Sardinia: cf. *Gioielli. Storia, linguaggio, religiosità dell'ornamento in Sardegna*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2004; *Gli ornamenti preziosi dei sardi*, Sassari, Delfino Editore, 1999; G. ALTEA, *I gioielli d'arte in Sardegna*, Sassari, Delfino Editore, 1995.

In turn, the tilting mirror, which features a heavy, golden, baroque frame, is a sign of the romantic origin of the object – possibly a *marché aux puces* – in its thick, oxidised contour layer, juxtaposed with the kitsch, phoney, children's-toy look of the smaller, plastic hand mirror. However, the most unusual element of this composite beauty station is its very inefficiency because it lacks a reflective surface. Where there would usually be mirrors, Marongiu applied some drawings portraying a swash through the alienating idea of a stretch of water. And while we gaze at the waves breaking on the beach in a splash of foam, we do not see a miniature feminine silhouette embodying Verdina Pensé, but rather an "impossible" detail that the artist treasures so much: a red icon marking a position on a digital map. No wonder it's coral red; and exactly like corals, it's both sharp and round. By negating their function of reflecting light, shape and colours, Marongiu turns mirrors into fully fledged paintings, into screens that appear to have been frozen while showing a significant stop-frame – the search and wait in coral catching and processing, in the craftsman-like creation of something beautiful to wear. But also frozen in space-time windows, dream-like chamber stargates through which it is possible to access an unexplored dimension that blends together the memories of an ancient craft and the signs of a virtual reality where the contemporary world would gladly drown the living. Thus, the juxtaposition of "ready" and "altered" elements is not casual at all, and the creation of all the graphic components converge into an original evocation of Pensé: spiritualistic-sentimental on the one hand, and digital-futuristic on the other.

Gianni Casagrande's polyptych *Coralli* leads us into a surreal, underwater world. The human figures, either on their own or in a couple, are shown to the viewer as though in an aquarium in four different moments, and they absent-mindedly gaze at a sea

that is lacking both fish and corals. The old lady with a purse (*Un pensiero per la nipotina*), the woman with child (*Il regalo della madrina*), and the two young lovers (*L'anello di fidanzamento*) avidly stare at the rocks covered in seaweeds, sea moss and mucilage, unaware accomplices of a long-gone adventure, mere buyers of a now rare product. The characters have no wetsuit, mask or oxygen tank. They wander the abyss in plain clothes, whereas others dive or swim back to the surface once their choice is made. In these dreamy images, which are seemingly playful and reassuring like in one of Marc Chagall's reveries, in the smooth elasticity of the welcoming waves that do not drown the characters, but just turn them into accomplices to a "murder", Casagrande seems to have hidden a sort of criticism in retrospect at a trade that has now become a real business. As a matter of fact, if coral processing has long been one of the flagships of Sardinian craftsmanship, with a dedicated school and a first-rate manufacturing production, it has nonetheless led to sacrificing the balance of an ecosystem in the name of a louder and louder embellishment and robbery. Maybe this is why the fish, which are the rightful inhabitants of the sea, can reappear only later, when it is all quiet again. The artist entrusted the mother-of-pearl dazzle of their scales with what remains of the plunder, i.e. the silent contemplation of the outcome of an overexploiting hunt (*Acqua*). However, the human characters portrayed by Casagrande in a spontaneous and frustrating underwater search also place the viewer vis-à-vis an undeniably poetic offset, when their actions are not conditioned by material needs any more but gain historical and symbolic meanings. The characters turn the pages of Nereide Rudas' novel *L'isola dei coralli* (1997) into images, they search the seabed and the shady caves inch by inch, looking for the precious *rubrum* (hidden, missing, or lost forever)



GIANNI CASAGRANDE,
Coralli (Corals)
[Il regalo della madrina
(The Godmother's Gift),
L'anello di fidanzamento
(The Engagement Ring),
Un pensiero per la
nipotina (A Gift for
her Granddaughter),
Acqua (Water)], 2014
polyptych – acrylic
on canvas

while trying to find themselves, their sunken and multifaceted identity. As if today this identity could still have an equivalent in the biological mystery of a coastline creature belonging to the three kingdoms (mineral, vegetable, animal) and soon moving past the legacy of a flexible birth to turn towards the fixed and sharp lines of a rugged death, individually mottled in red.⁵

5. N. RUDAS, *L'isola dei coralli. Itinerari dell'identità*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2004 (first published in Rome, N.I.S., 1997).





STEFANO MARONGIU,
Toeletta (Dressing
Table), 2014
readymade, acrylic
on Masonite®



H 505. MARIA LAI

Maria Lai (Ulassai, 1919-Cardedu, 2013). One of the most prolific and important Sardinian artists of the 19th century, famous both in Italy and throughout the world, she left her beloved hometown – the small village of Ulassai in Olgiastra – in 1939 and moved to Rome where she attended the Liceo Artistico and studied with Marino Mazzacurati. She later was the only woman at the Sculpture course of Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice (1943-1945) where she trained under Arturo Martini. From the 1950s, her very personal artistic style, which she had developed over decades after experimenting with the art of painting, went through a research into sculpture that was driven by the impulse of experimenting with new techniques and materials, and this eventually led the artist to create a different, original, soon to be iconic style. During the years of her full stylistic maturity, Lai eventually turned to avant-garde solutions with environmental and relational installation and performance art. The leitmotif in her works has always been a close connection with the traditions of Sardinia, which she constantly referred to without indulging in a self-ethnographic celebration, but rather by reinterpreting the culture of materials and craftsmanship of the island with an eye to women's everyday activities in agro-pastoral communities – from ceramic manufacturing to bread-making, from weaving to embroidery and sewing. It is in these communities that the artist found traces of the existence of another realm of meanings. Among the people she

was most associated with, the most noteworthy are Sardinian writers Salvatore Cambosu, who was her high-school Italian teacher, and Giuseppe Dessi, who inspired some of her most famous works: the *Terrecotte*, *Telai*, *Libri*, and *Geografie* series were all made with elements retrieved from fairy tales, traditional oral folk tales, and everyday-life stories transformed and dramatized in her aesthetic research. With their great pathos and visual impact, these series are the best specimen of her entire artistic production. One of her most recent and avant-garde interventions is the emblematic *Legarsi alla montagna* (Connecting with the mountains, 1981): by reinterpreting and updating a local myth, the artist decided to tie houses and uplands in her hometown together using a blue, 20-kilometre long ribbon created by her fellow citizens from a single piece of fabric. This ribbon played as a symbol of the aggregating and redeeming power of art, and as a wish for a new harmony among men, and between men and nature and landscapes. The connection between Maria Lai and her hometown – where in the 1990s the artist created several site-specific interventions like *La strada del rito* (*The Road of Rites*, 1992), *Le capre cucite* (*Sewn goats*, 1992) and *La scarpata* (*The cliff*, 1993) – is obvious and undeniable. Today Ulassai still keeps and treasures 150 of Maria Lai's artworks, which she donated to *Stazione dell'Arte*, a museum established in 2006 in the premises of the local disused railway station and now dedicated to her.⁶

6. For further information on Maria Lai: cf. *Maria Lai. Ricucire il mondo*, catalogue of the exhibition curated by B. Casavecchia, L. Giusti, A.M. Montaldo (Cagliari, Musei Civici; Nuoro, Museo MAN; Ulassai, Stazione dell'Arte, 10 July-2 November 2014), Milano, Silvana Ed-

itoriale, 2015; M.D. PICCIAU, *La ricerca della forma assoluta. Itinerari dell'esperienza artistica di Maria Lai*, Cagliari, Condaghes, 2014; M. LAI, *Ansia d'infinito*, edited by C. Di Giovanni, with double DVD case, Cagliari, Condaghes, 2013; M. LAI, F. MENNA, S. TAGLIAGAMBE,

Vincenzo Grosso has pulled and interwoven *Filo conduttore* (Common Thread) to stimulate viewers to a contact and connection with the artist and with themselves. It is a composite, almost totem-like sculpture made with materials that are reminiscent of the Italian *Arte Povera* and of a controversial artist, Joseph Beuys. Its structure revolves around an old metal thread, and conveys the hope that, in its vertical unravelling and while incorporating miscellaneous objects with various places of origin, it can still be of value as a means to transfer energy. 30 years after Lai's powerful symbolic installation *Legarsi alla montagna*, Grosso used rusty iron instead of a denim ribbon, and with it he shaped what he thinks is the very *nodus* of our present times: the connection with mountains – and by mountains we mean not only rural mountain areas, but also nature and art in the poetic/symbolic meaning of Lai's 1981 work, – is now doomed to the same precarious and endangered condition that Maria Lai denounced a long time ago. The old electric cable is for Grosso a means to preserve all the remaining elements of what everyday life was like in small villages some decades ago, and also to hold them together, in order to try and convey new energy to viewers, or at least produce the early spark of a new impetus in them. Just as the blue ribbon tied knots and enveloped breads in the streets of the small village in Olgiastra, now the oxidised thread unites vintage frames and

Ulassai. Da Legarsi alla montagna alla Stazione dell'arte, Cagliari, AD-Arte Duchamp, 2006; S. CAMBOSU, *Miele amaro: racconti dettati a Maria Lai*, Cagliari, AD-Arte Duchamp, 2001. For further reference, please visit the website dedicated to the artist and Museo Stazione dell'Arte: www.stazionedellarte.it.



hinges, a chip of strawberry tree, and a fragment of granite. In its fixed verticality, the heavy sculpture conveys a craving for lightness and puzzles the viewer in its candid display of materials, which the artist collected both in an urban and rural environment. These are the surviving scraps of mountains nowadays, of a forsaken and maybe unrecoverable past. The wood from strawberry trees is now used in fireplaces and ovens (and in take-aways too), and granite is only a dead fragment spilled out of a quarry. Isn't it therefore possible that the ultimate end of everything implies yielding to its inevitable betrayal? When in doubt or in the absence of answers, only the cable seems to hold on, sturdy and loyal to itself and to its role of conveyor of meaning. This is why viewers are stimulated to connect and converse with its firm energy, while hopefully finding a "common thread" to themselves and a past and value system that are way too often set aside.

Sergio Fronteddu decided to bring Maria Lai's memory back to an original and natural level with his sculpture *Senza titolo* (Untitled), which nonetheless also hints at intellectual and critical implications. At first the tangle of coils, which have been imbued with hot glue and unevenly wound one on top of the other, reminds us of the magnified – and oversized – appearance of a silkworm intent on weaving its precious filaments, or a chrysalis that has just freed the butterfly it contained in embryo. As if the Sardinian artist from Ulassai could in some way identify with the biological cycle of both insects through the firm

VINCENZO GROSSO, *Filo conduttore* (Common Thread), 2014, mixed-media assemblage



weaving process that she carried on during her life and artistic career, and soon after the end of her earthly, mortal interlude: almost ontologically inclined to slow-paced and patient works, but also “unravelling” at last, and soaring in her definitive, most private and yet most formidable flight. Fronteddu has undertaken an uneasy task by connecting with a contemporary artist who, more than any other fellow Sardinian, has achieved national and international success, and whose critical interpretation now has to come to terms with her recent demise. In his attempt to provide the concrete and accurate portrayal that Maria Lai deserves, he shunned a simplistic idealizing representation, and resorted to an analogy with animals in what appears to be a symbolic, *post mortem* portrait.

On closer view, this is the reason why the incision that cuts the silkworm cocoon lengthwise does not hint at abuse or injury. The straight line engraved by the sculptor is rather the clear proof of a passage, the sign of an actual and final exit. The outcome of this crossing – which leaves a white exoskeleton behind, the residual leftover of death – is the airspace of a distant flight in which the honoured artist can finally be free, now a bodiless woman–girl–insect, safe from any future betrayal or misunderstanding.

SERGIO FRONTEDDU,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
hot glue sculpture



H 506. FRANCESCA DEVOTO

Francesca Devoto (Nuoro, 1912-1989). Born into one of the wealthiest and most respected families of Nuoro, she enjoyed a rare privilege for women of her times: studying in mainland Italy, Tuscany. When she went back to Sardinia, thanks to a favourable economic situation, she opened her own studio and, though still very young, managed to blend into the local artistic milieu, which was mainly formed by men. In 1935, she successfully took part in an official exhibition in Nuoro, VI Mostra Sindacale, and, in 1936, she organized a solo exhibition with 60 of her works at Galleria Palladino in Cagliari. Devoto was drawn less to regional trends and Sardinian folk traditions than her colleagues. This radical difference, along with her exceptional status as an artist, is the reason why her paintings have long and inaccurately been regarded as a mere expression of a limited and superficial – if not contented and self-referential – aesthetics for beauty. On the contrary, Devoto's choice to represent everyday moments from her middle-class background was driven by the idea that art is a personal take on the world and a profound meditation on life; a reflection that she decided to make by painting portraits, interior views and still lifes. Her studio, which was decorated with Deco and modern styles, was one of the settings she favoured for her paintings: here, in their meticulous and photographic representation, every single detail shows the artist's status, as well as her favourite objects and amusements.⁷

Through a radical intervention of reset, Gianni Casagrande brought the quietness of middle-class private rooms, which are a leitmotif in Francesca Devoto's output, back to basics. In the small-sized painting *Hamelin* there is no trace of life: in the untouched sitting room, which is on the whole anonymous despite the contemporary design furniture, humans are totally absent, or every sign of their presence has been removed. The only elements of the scene are an armchair and a sofa, silently facing and content in their long shadows on the empty floor: theirs is an unrealistic – yet the only possible – dialogue against a backdrop where not even the natural perspective, beyond the big windows overlooking the empty space, offers the viewer the comfort of human life with the colours of far-off objects, skilfully kept at a distance. Between the heavy and slightly pulled curtains, beyond the wide windows that are so typical of modern architecture, there are only empty spaces and living bodies dissolving in the dusty, chalky light. The flat that Casagrande paints with the dull and sand-like colours normally used by Devoto is somewhat hanging in space and time, an elevated tunnel that has just been furnished and represents ever-present absences and discomforts. Like a still from one of Antonioni's moving pictures, this human-comedy set is modern and hip: only words are missing, after committing suicide

alogue of the exhibition (Nuoro, Galleria Comunale d'Arte, 1-24 March 1996), Nuoro, Eikon, 1996. Special thanks to Giuseppina Cuccu for granting permission to consult her book *Una calma luce diffusa*, which is about to be published.

7. For further information on Francesca Devoto: cf. G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, pp. 69-71, 108-109, 126, 142, 155, 157, 161; M.L. FRONGIA, "Un percorso dell'arte in Sardegna nel XX secolo", in *MAN. Catalogo della collezione*, Nuoro, MAN, 1998, pp. 107-111; *Francesca Devoto*, cat-

in silence, in a failure that is cried out without uttering any sound. Not even the reference to an ideal "dolls' house", shielded from the threats of the outside world, seems to eclipse the inevitability of hypocrisy, especially if even the title chosen by the author brings to mind sinister details of a possible vintage postcard, conveniently sepia-coloured. And this is due to the fact that a surreal atmosphere can be similar to the atmosphere of a fairy tale, but the town onto which the real Nuoro transfers its appearance here can only be Hamelin, from the ambiguous German tale, a town that is ungrateful and for this reason robbed of its children, naïve souls seduced and charmed away by the flatteries of eternal Pied pipers.

Pasquale Bassu decided to give his personal interpretation of the most typical *topos* of Francesca Devoto's visual collection; with his linoleumgraphics *Angolo di riflessione* and *Dove entra la gente*, Bossu reinterpreted the "clichés" of indoor scenes and of Devoto's studio descriptions. However, he also responded to the apparent and comforting quietness and undeniable bourgeois innuendo of famous paintings like *Tina nello studio di Via Cavour* (Tina in the Studio at via Cavour, 1936), *Ciccio nello studio di Via Cavour* (Ciccio in the Studio at via Cavour, 1938) or *Tina al pianoforte* (Tina at the piano, 1936) by providing a detailed description of two overtly chaotic parts of the old and abandoned building in Nuoro that Seuna has given new life to by turning it into a shared space for the members of the collective. In *Angolo di riflessione* the artist's analytical look rests on the casually stacked objects, and restores the emotional value that everyday use brings to them: the basin used to wash paintbrushes in has the same dignity as a plunger, whereas empty beer bottles – indisputable proof of a

8. This is a new take on Fronteddu's intervention at Museo MAN in Nuoro for the second stage of the project *DNA. Caratteri ereditari e mutazioni genetiche* (1 June-8 July 2012): at that time, while trying to find a synergy between the artworks of the permanent col-

lection of the museum and his own artistic research, Fronteddu had used *Senza titolo* as a link between *Ritratto di bambina* by Congiu Pes and a very modern painting by Devoto, e.g. the one portraying the well-known cartoon character Mickey Mouse (1930s). cheerful social gathering – need to be disposed of, along with the black garbage bag full of rubbish. The same happens in *Dove entra la gente* where manufactured products and finished artworks hanging on the walls are in the way, as well as all the artists' tools. They are the metaphor for a personal marking of the territory when people live together and share life as well as creative experiments, an unfettered realm in which the dustpan that is used to sweep dust into – and to clean and tidy up – must coexist with a wheelbarrow temporarily parked next to the door. To the affectation of Devoto's portrayals of interiors, decorated along the guiding decorating principles of the time, Bassu responds by welcoming the viewer into the intimacy of his private studio/laboratory, without altering its description with either stylistic or formal embellishments. The portion of bathroom and the corridor at the entrance – especially the latter, in its function as a representative office – have not been cleaned from waste for the occasion, but appear to visitors in all of their materiality, in an uncensored exhibitionism. Nonetheless, despite all the differences in genres, contexts and personal lives, the lines carved by the artist still lead the viewer to the Deco cocoon that Devoto liked to spend time in, to the golden circle that she, as an independent woman, would regard as a precious space for a much sought-after freedom.

On the other hand, Sergio Fronteddu's composition *Il silenzio della bambola* is enigmatically obscure despite the distinctive features of each part: in a sculpture-photography composition, a fruit bowl made with hot glue (*Natura morta*) is admired with silent yet avid interest by a digital version of *Ritratto di bambina*, an artwork by another artist from Nuoro, the self-taught painter Francesco Congiu Pes (Nuoro, 1861-Sassari, 1932).⁸

lection of the museum and his own artistic research, Fronteddu had used *Senza titolo* as a link between *Ritratto di bambina* by Congiu Pes and a very modern painting by Devoto, e.g. the one portraying the well-known cartoon character Mickey Mouse (1930s).



SERGIO FRONTEDDU,
Il silenzio della bambola
(The Silence of the Doll),
printed photograph;
Natura morta (Still Life),
hot glue sculpture, 2014

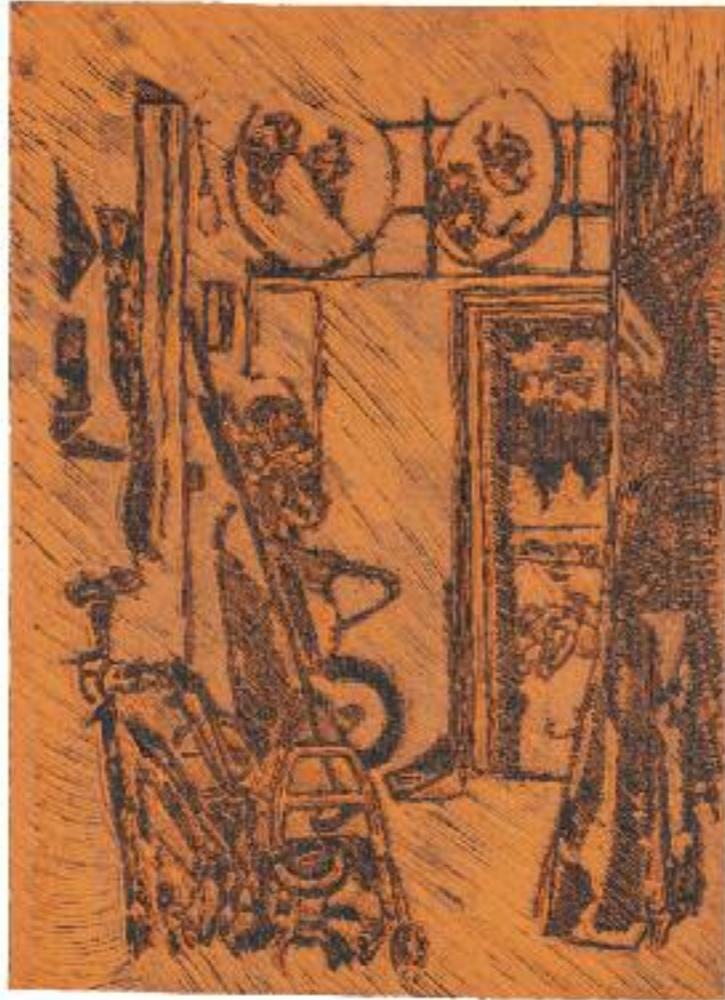
To the various genre-painting subjects that are often portrayed in Devoto's works, Fronteddu here responds with a three-dimensional artwork: he "glazed" an apple, an orange, a banana, a (bitten) pear and their bowl with a coat of hot glue. The transience of life is thus placed within the viewer's line of sight, as though in a transposition of a 16th-century still life: over time, fruits have slowly decomposed, and now feature black, sticky spots that can still be seen on the wavy plate. They have also left behind some empty yet perfect shapes, entirely covered in a dark dust. It is no coincidence that the print of Congiu Pes' painting is made with dark colours: its original colours only appear in the area – which the artist has underlined with a powerful cinematic *iris* – where the small child's finger is pressed on her lips in an affected and mysterious pose. By titling the artwork *Il silenzio della bambola*, Fronteddu casts a shadow of indecipherability on the slightly cutesy child's portrait, so that it is not possible to assert if the little girl's lingering gesture simply suggests a refrain from eating the ripe fruits, or rather an invitation to recollection, silence, and meditation on life and art, in what appears to be a sort of reference in plain clothes to the little angels that recur in Medieval and baroque paintings and sculptures. The sculptor's interpretation turns the alluring apples in the bowl into empty, opaque, wrinkled peels, in the final outcome of a bizarre vegetable moulting that is closed and sealed, trapped in a chemical and biological perfection, artificial and natural, as well as ever-changing. *A sic transit gloria mundi* that has dragged – and will continue to drag – in the indifference of dust.



GIANNI CASAGRANDE,
Hamelin, 2014
acrylic on canvas



PASQUALE BASSU, *Angolo di riflessione* (Corner for Meditation), 2014
linoleumgraphy



PASQUALE BASSU, *Dove entra la gente* (Where People Come In), 2014
linoleumgraphy



H 507. MARISA SANNIA

Marisa Sannia (Iglesias, 1947-Cagliari, 2008). Before pursuing her own personal research, which would eventually lead her to interpret art music in the Sardinian language, she was a great singer and was known to the general public mainly for some blockbuster hits in the 1960s and 1970s: Tutto o niente, Lo sappiamo noi due, Una cartolina, Sarai fiero di me, La compagnia. Also an athlete and radio disc jockey, Sannia used to perform live with amateur bands and entered several singing competitions. Winning one of those competitions, the national contest Rai per voci nuove, was the big break for her. After that, she signed a four-year contract with the Italian music label Fonit Cetra, and was discovered by Luis Enriquez Bacalov and Sergio Endrigo, who would both later write various songs for her (along with Italian singer-songwriters Lucio Dalla, Roberto Vecchioni and Francesco De Gregori, just to name a few). She would maintain a close relationship with Bacalov and Endrigo for the rest of her life. Over the years, Sannia took part in Italian popular TV shows like Settevoci, Canzonissima and Festivalbar; in 1968, she sang Casa bianca with Italian singer Ornella Vanoni, and was ranked second at the Italian music contest Festival di Sanremo. She later recorded some songs for the original soundtracks of Pietro Germi's and Dino Risi's moving pictures, and appeared in theatre recitals and musicals alongside some

of the greatest actors and music bands of her times. After enjoying a period of great success and then taking some time off from show business, the singer went back to the Sardinian language and Sardinia – which she publicly embodied the soul and post-World War II rebirth of – as a source of inspiration. In 1997, along with the Italian writer Francesco Masala, she recorded Melagranàda, a collection of songs taken from Masala's collection of poems Poesias in duas limbas. In 2003, the collection Nanas e janas was released featuring original lyrics and previously unreleased songs. This enlightened and successful research period was tragically interrupted by the singer's unexpected demise: Marisa Sannia died during the spring of 2008 of a sudden and serious illness. In the summer of 2008, her native Island granted her the Maria Carta Award, a prize in honour of her great colleague who had passed away 14 years earlier and who, in 1995, Marisa Sannia had had the chance to replace in the theatre show Memorie di Adriano. Ritratto di una voce starring the acclaimed Italian actor Giorgio Albertazzi.⁹

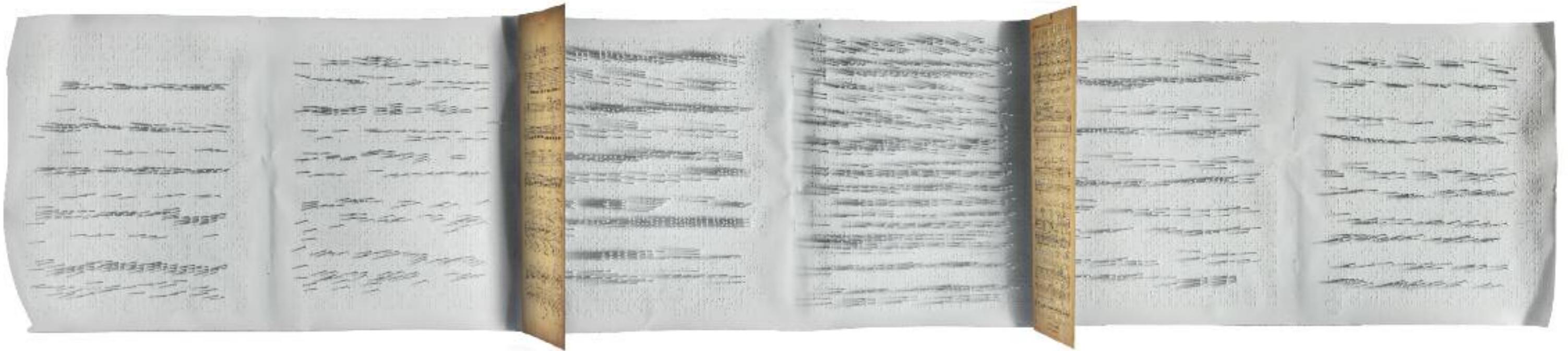
Thanks to her musical success, the public also came to appreciate Marisa Sannia's beauty, and she began to appear frequently in magazines and on TV programmes, as well as to work as a model and spokeswoman in a wide range of TV commercials. The most

iconic element of her body features, which were quite different from the usual, Mediterranean – and especially Sardinian – beauty standards for women, was certainly her hairdo: an ash blond, straight bob with volume, but still very neat in its cut, which she sported with a cheeky fringe. This type of haircut, which was very fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s (in Italy there were other famous women artists who sported the so-called “golden bob” in that period: for example, singers Mina, Caterina Caselli, Raffaella Carrà and Rita Pavone), made of Sannia a popular icon in Italy, as well as a brand new personification of the typical Sardinian woman. However, it would be slightly simplistic to comment on Casco non omologato, the artwork that Vincenzo Grosso created as his tribute to her, just associating it with her hairdo. Grosso combined golden threads of acrylic paint against a white backdrop in order to create a kind of blonde wig that is suspended in mid-air. Without underestimating the values and messages that fashion and style choices have always conveyed, here the reference to Maria Sannia's “transgression” goes beyond her hairdo and aesthetic choice, which could rather be misinterpreted and regarded as the compliance with a depersonalizing fashion trend. The “unconventional” Sannia who Grosso refers to in his artwork is not the one who abandons the easily identifiable cultural and folk frills to take on the new standards imposed by current fashion and show business, but rather the well-rounded artist in her brave versatility, in her avant-garde artistic streak, who is capable of ranging across several styles and successfully interpreting the songs contained in the original soundtracks of Walt Disney moving pictures (in the 1973 album titled *Marisa nel paese delle meraviglie*) and Federico García Lorca's verses (in her posthumous *Rosa de papel*). And above all the artist who, after a long time off away from show business, bravely made a comeback and turned to her roots in an

original way, that is by choosing to transpose the 20th-century Sardinian poetry into music and voice. A multifaceted spirit, Marisa Sannia liked the idea of mixing different art forms, and was very close friends with fellow Sardinian artist Maria Lai. In September 2009, slightly more than a year after Sannia's premature death, Lai paid tribute to her with a special commemorative event held in front of the museum *Stazione dell'Arte* in Ulassai. The two artists had worked together for Sannia's comeback in the early 1990s. To launch a new season of her career, in 1993, Sannia recorded her first album in the Sardinian language titled *Sa oghe de su entu e de su mare*, in which she sang Antioco Casula's verses, a Logudorese poet of the early 20th century also known as Montanaru. The album, which won the *Premio Silanus* in 1994, had forged a special bond between music and matter, a bond made of invisible notes and tangible weft, as Maria Lai took part in the production of the linen cardboard box. It was not the usual cover in art paper, but rather a handicraft of cellulose and fabric conceived as a fusion of arts in which the poet's verses were handwritten and decorated with thread stitches. Vincenzo Grosso and Gianni Casagrande decided to honour that collaboration and drew their inspiration from Lai's visual code for their *Non Vedo ma Sento – Sonata Sorda*, a printed artwork the aim of which was to pay tribute to the famous singer from Iglesias. The numerous elements of altered readymade are assembled here to express the synaesthesia of a seemingly impossible music stemming from the forced dialogue between the embossed writing on some pages for the visually impaired – and actually silent pages for the two artists – and the black music alphabet impressed on piano sheet music of the German-tradition – which is also a silent melody for the visually impaired or those who cannot play the piano. The outcome of this overlap is a thick theory of nails, which – with the same emotional tension of the iron

9. For further information on Marisa Sannia: cf. M. SANNIA, *Melagranàda/Marisa Sannia*, lyrics by M. Sannia and F. Masala; CD edition with booklet (M. LAI, *Sul telaio delle janas. Le muse operose come api dell'universo*, Cagliari, AD-Arte Duchamp, 1997), Milano,

NAR, 1997; M. SANNIA, *Sa oghe de su entu e de su mare*, lyrics by A. Casula (Montanaru) adapted by M. Sannia and F. Masala; CD edition with special box (linen cardboard box by Maria Lai, Nuoro, Ilisso, 1993), Sassari, Teknorecord, 1993.



nails that Lai left exposed in *Libri cuciti* – painfully stick into the braille syllables and leave blank spaces next to the black notes printed on the staff. In what could be likened to a variation on metal and special paper of Lai’s visual imaginary, Grosso and Casagrande produced a sense of intentional misunderstanding of expressive codes and messages in order to create new music that will possibly be composed either by the viewer, or by anyone who has never heard Marisa Sannia’s music. The aim is to remember her today by connecting with her through the familiar artistic code of a friend of hers, and through a piece of music for four – or more – hands, which was composed and can be performed mentally.

GIANNI CASAGRANDE, VINCENZO GROSSO,
Non Vedo ma Sento – Sonata Sorda
(I Cannot See, But I Can Hear – Deaf
Sonata), 2014, braille-printed paper,
vintage sheet music, nails



VINCENZO GROSSO,
Casco non omologato
(Non-certified
Helmet), 2014
acrylic on paper



H 508. MARIA CARTA

Maria Carta (Siligo, 1934-Roma, 1994). She was born to sing. A child from a modest family who soon became fatherless, she tried to alleviate the fatigue of farm labour by singing songs and nursery rhymes, while also learning the Mass in Latin and the church music that formed an integral part of her hometown parish celebrations. Growing up, she performed in public singing in town squares with Sardinian cantadores during local festivals. Her desire to redeem herself through music, and her broader dream of rebirth through art for Sardinia, and of a world where women could shape their own future, came true when, in 1957, at the age of 23, she became popular for her striking beauty after being crowned Miss Sardegna. The following year she left for Rome and, in 1960, she married Salvatore Laurani, a screenwriter, with whom she would then have her only child, David. She settled permanently in Rome, where she recorded several hit albums, all in the Sardinian language. She divided her time between Accademia di Santa Cecilia, where she pursued her artistic research, and her beloved Sardinia, where she collected accounts of folk tunes from elderly people. Singing was a moral imperative for her, a real political mission that she has never concealed. This is probably the reason why, although she frequently worked on A-list moving pictures, music has always been her favourite form of art. Acclaimed throughout the world,

10. For further information on Maria Carta: cf. E. GARAU, *Maria Carta*, Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre, 1998. For further reference, please visit www.fondazionemariacarta.it.

11. Fronteddu and Pattusi have exhibited a collection of artworks

she was likened by many to some iconic and politically active singer-songwriters such as the American Joan Baez and the Portuguese Amalia Rodriguez (who she would duet with). Despite being diagnosed with an incurable disease (which she did not hesitate to announce publicly), she never stopped singing, performing and teaching Anthropology at the Universities of Bologna and Sassari, both grateful and intimidated by her growing fame and numerous awards, prizes and honours, such as the appointment as Commendatore della Repubblica Italiana that she received in 1991 from the then President of the Italian Republic, fellow Sardinian Francesco Cossiga. Maria Carta eventually died in Rome in 1994. She had expressed the wish to be buried in Siligo, in her family grave at the small local cemetery, the perfect resting place for a great yet modest diva who was so proud of her origins.¹⁰

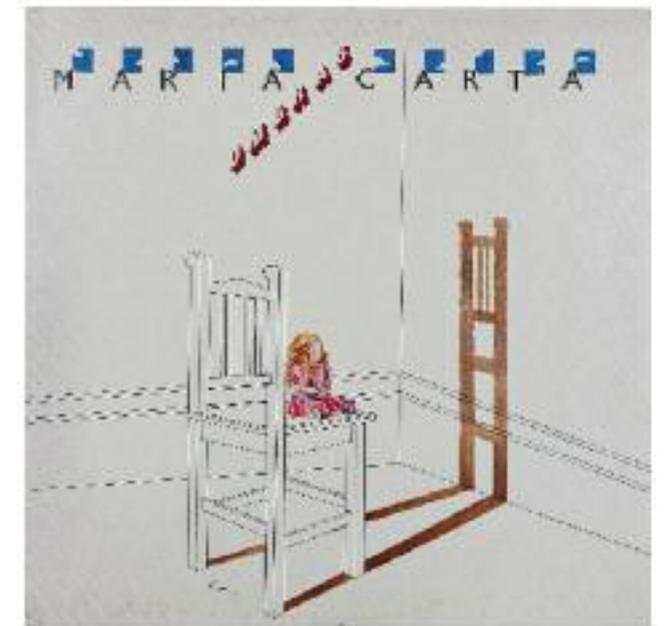
With their artwork *TV* Pattusi and Fronteddu have decided to emphasize Maria Carta's media and public side, along with the warm affection that her grateful and respectful fans have always shown towards her.¹¹ On the screen of an old, cathode-ray tube TV set, created by Fronteddu with a hot-glue cast, Pattusi portrays the Sardinian singer in what was – and still is for people today – her ideal status: in direct contact with the audience. At the centre of the screen, as though

from a joint effort and a mix of their respective techniques in the exhibition *True Lies*, which was the first stage of their project *Face Off*, at Museo MURATS (Museo Unico Regionale dell'Arte Tessile Sarda) in Samugheo (18 January-2 March 2014).

to split the audience into two with the solemnity of a sacred icon, Maria Carta faces the audience and turns her back on the viewer in the synecdoche of her long, straight, velvety hair. Pattusi avoided giving a predictable psychological portrayal of her beautiful and eloquent face, and preferred to linger on the audience at her concert: a mixed crowd made up of people belonging to different age groups, who seem happy and fascinated by their idol. It is perhaps a visual reference to the unforgettable concert that drew the whole town of Siligo in 1993, when, one year before the artist's death, the local municipality officially invited her in a tribute to her extraordinary role as a cultural ambassador. It is regrettable that the TV set is and remains silent. However, the artwork is provided with a backlight that somehow turns the empty cast of the appliance into a block of ice, freezing the warmth of the pretty black-and-white image in a vintage snapshot where all colours are deliberately left to the viewer's imagination and memory. Once again Pattusi insists on Maria Carta's international fame, achieved through the powerful means of television first and cinema after, with his sculpture *Senza titolo* that he created by placing recycled objects and materials onto a wooden piece of second-hand furniture. However, this time the readymade front part of a TV set – equipped with knobs and marbled with clots of dried colour – confirms the passage to Technicolor, while the jump towards modernity reminds us of Maria Carta's performances as an actress. She was friends with Pasolini and was widely respected in the film industry. Moreover, she starred in several moving pictures by famous Italian directors Zeffirelli and Tornatore, Coppola and Rosi, Parodi and Cabiddu. She championed the cause of the progress of Sardinia and the broadening of its horizons, which eventually led to the international spotlight being focussed on an island in full blossom thanks to the economic boom of that time.

The sleeve of the long-playing record *Umbras*, which the artist recorded in 1978 and is entirely dedicated to folk songs and nursery rhymes, serves as a link between the two TV sets. In the album cover, drawn by Mario Convertino, a famous illustrator, a doll with blond hair is sitting on a very high chair. The preciousity of her golden locks and candy rose blouse cannot conceal a sense of melancholic uneasiness, which is further emphasized by the loneliness of the anthropomorphic puppet and the long shadow of the chair. The object, in its readymade pureness, brings the singer back to her origins, to her childhood, to a playful condition of free and spontaneous singing. In doing so, Pattusi tried to somehow save her from her doomed destiny, and immortalized her as an eternal child, a prodigious performer of an island, of music and of a broader culture.

VINCENZO PATTUSI,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
readymade





VINCENZO PATTUSI,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
assemblage with
wood, readymade,
acrylic paint and
light bulb

SERGIO FRONTEDDU,
VINCENZO PATTUSI,
TV, 2014
hot glue sculpture
with ballpoint pen
and charcoal
pencil drawing



H 509. GRAZIA DELEDDA

Grazia Deledda (Nuoro, 1871-Rome, 1936). A self-taught, prolific, internationally-acclaimed novelist, she is the only Italian woman to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1926). After spending her childhood and youth on the island of Sardinia, where she perfected her studies with a tutor and published her first writings and stories in local and national magazines, she married Palmiro Madedani, a civil servant, (1900) – with whom she had her two sons, Sardus and Franz – and moved to Rome. The special bond she always had with her motherland is unmistakably clear in her prolific prose and theatrical output: from Elias Portolu (1903) to L'edera (The Ivy, 1908), from Cenere (1904; Ashes) to Colombi e sparvieri (Doves and Falcons, 1912), from Canne al vento (1913; Reeds in the Wind) to L'incendio nell'oliveto (The Fire in the Olive Grove, 1918). A folklore-imbued Sardinia has always been Deledda's favourite background to her works, where she set the clash between the most primordial impulses of human beings, drawing inspiration from local news and myths, in a never-ending, unresolved conflict – between good and evil, sin and atonement, guilt and fate – which emerges through a modern style that blends traits of Italian Verismo (Realism) and Decadentism.¹²

The first of the three artworks dedicated to the Sardinian novelist by Pasquale Bassu puzzles the viewer

with a paradox and a query: why is a fake, iron-wire bird cage half-full of yellowed, crumpled paper pages, which have been ripped from an old book, a *Pregnabile* (*Espugnabile*) object? Why is this word – borrowed from the barbaric, military terminology – associated with such a frail, assailable and vulnerable handicraft featuring a constraining essence of cage? The truth is that every single space or building actually – patently – hides one or more frailties. Over the centuries, historiography and chronicles have gotten readers used to cyclic tales of fortresses, villages, regions and whole countries surrendering under the power of conquering enemies and usurpers, to a constantly unsatisfied duress of fighting for possession. Similarly, literature has proven that the same dynamics can also apply to the human soul, and thus to the actions and life of fictional characters. Life, which is equally unresolved, shows that each and everyone one of us is pregnable.

Bassu seems to have moved from this acknowledgment and a meditation on the existential and artistic consequences of a union between personal identity and Sardinian identity. The artist drew his inspiration from Deledda's life events. She chose to live as an exile in the "promised city" of Rome, which she preferred to her hometown, Nuoro, because of the exciting

ceedings of the *Convegno nazionale di studi* of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature, Università degli Studi di Sassari, 24-26 October 2007, Roma, Iacobelli Editore, 2010; *Grazia Deledda e la solitudine del segreto*, edited by M. Manotta and A.M. Morace, conference proceedings of the *Convegno nazionale di studi* of the Faculty of Language and Philosophy, Università degli Studi di Sassari, 10-12 October 2007, Nuoro, ISRE, 2010.

liveliness of its cultural milieu. However, she has always been connected to her motherland by a persistent love-and-hate relationship. To Bassu the Sardinian novelist's life experience is a paradigm that is still valid today. Thus the complexity of this dynamic is resolved through the image of a bird cage that is illegitimately inhabited by flying pages. The object, which in its delicacy reveals the underlying selfishness of every forced adjustment, turns into a metaphor for Sardinia itself, into a scandal of its own contradiction, of its being – even now for those who are born here decades after her lately praised *Nobel Prize* winner – a prison and a fortress, a springboard for necessary departures and a magnet for inevitable comebacks, a spur to the creation and a drive to (self) censorship. After all, the fragile look of the artwork, made of thin and flexible iron wire, does not conceal signs of violence and inner conflict. The yellowed book pages have been ripped from a vintage copy of *Ashes* – a novel that was written by Deledda in 1904 and is the highest point of her existential pessimism – in a sacrilegious act, and still bear the marks of the tearing process on the inner margins. They are also piled one on top of the other, like a legacy of words that are exposed and ready to catch fire and turn to ash. Yet, there is a strong desire underlying the liberating act of violating the text and book-object, a desire to reconcile with the commonly accepted idea of inadequacy and yielding to a condition, along with the pledge to start a new style of writing that is emancipated from the need of seeking refuge. This can be read as a desire for self-invasion.

In an attempt to connect with the novelist's work, and yet deviating from it, with *Finestra temporale* Bassu tried to reproduce a talisman made of twine, canvas and ash, and projects the viewer into a remote world: that of an ancient and eternal alternation of seasons, the dull succession of life and death. Through the tool of literal quotes and an approach that is similar to that of a theatre props buyer work-

ing on stage decoration, the artist recreated the object that the main character of Deledda's *Ashes*, Oli, hands down to his son Anania with the recommendation to open it only after his death. The artist presented the small wrapping, with its mysterious content hidden in the jute, – nothing more than sooty dust – in its sheer materiality: exposed in a specific cardboard box just before Anania can open it and be reminded – and remind the viewer – that embers of a peaceful future can smoulder under the rich ashes of a burnt and indifferent past. The box, open like a book, is now a mysterious invitation to the viewer: a set prop, a literary *memento mori*, an embryo of hope, a visual summary of a stubbornly "fireproof" literary style, that of Deledda.

With *L'altra parte* Bassu went back to his favourite art technique: he portrayed the façade of an old church, *Nostra Signora delle Grazie*, in a linoleumgraphy. The people of Seuna hold this 17th-century monument dear, and surely the Sardinian Nobel Prize winner held it dear too, although she is now buried in another famous church in Nuoro: *Chiesa della Solitudine*, at the foot of mount Ortobene. Located just a few meters away from the SEUNA LAB studio, the old *Chiesa delle Grazie "vecchie"* fell into disuse in the 1950s, and was replaced by a more imposing religious building, called *Chiesa delle Grazie "nuove"*, at the beginning of Corso Garibaldi. After undergoing extensive renovations for a long time, the small church of Seuna is now open regularly and serves as a location for the gathering of the Orthodox Christian Church followers during the monthly visit of their leading Minister, the Pope. Bassu drew his inspiration from this historic symbol of Nuoro's town centre for a graphic artwork of dramatic impact. With a lowered point of view from the left-hand side that he borrowed from cinematography, he outlined the top of the building, the simple, curved profile of the central nave and the squared contour of the bell tower with few essential lines and without omitting the basic details of the small cross and the

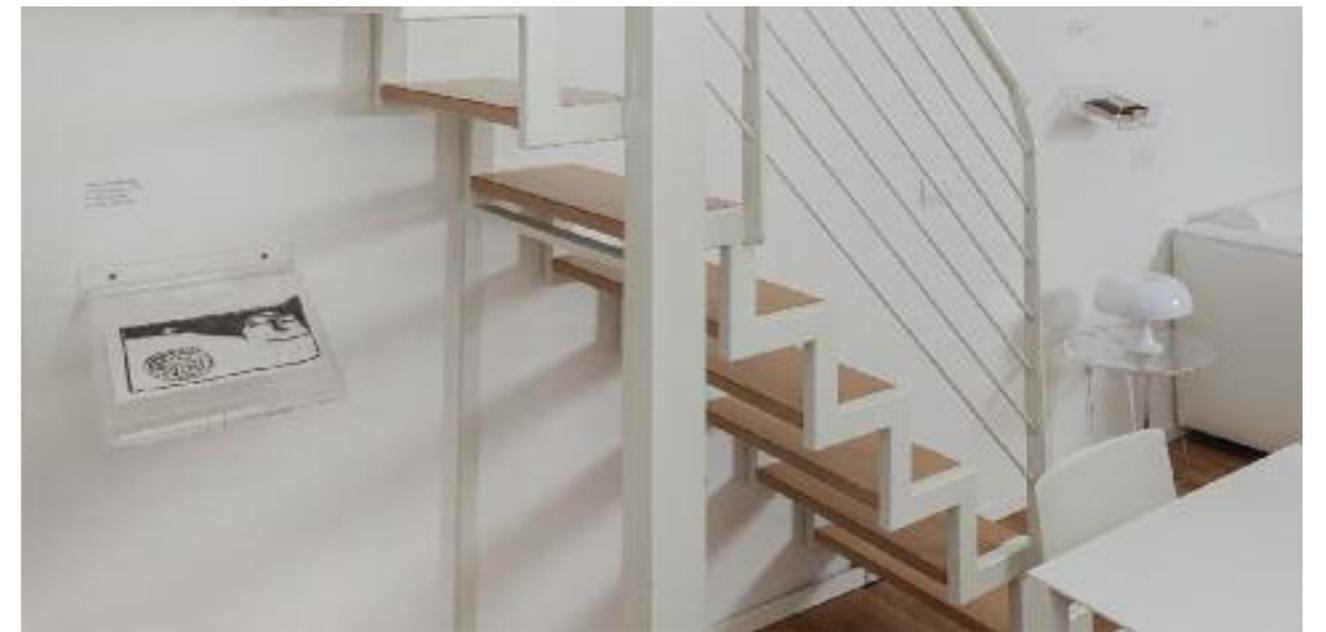
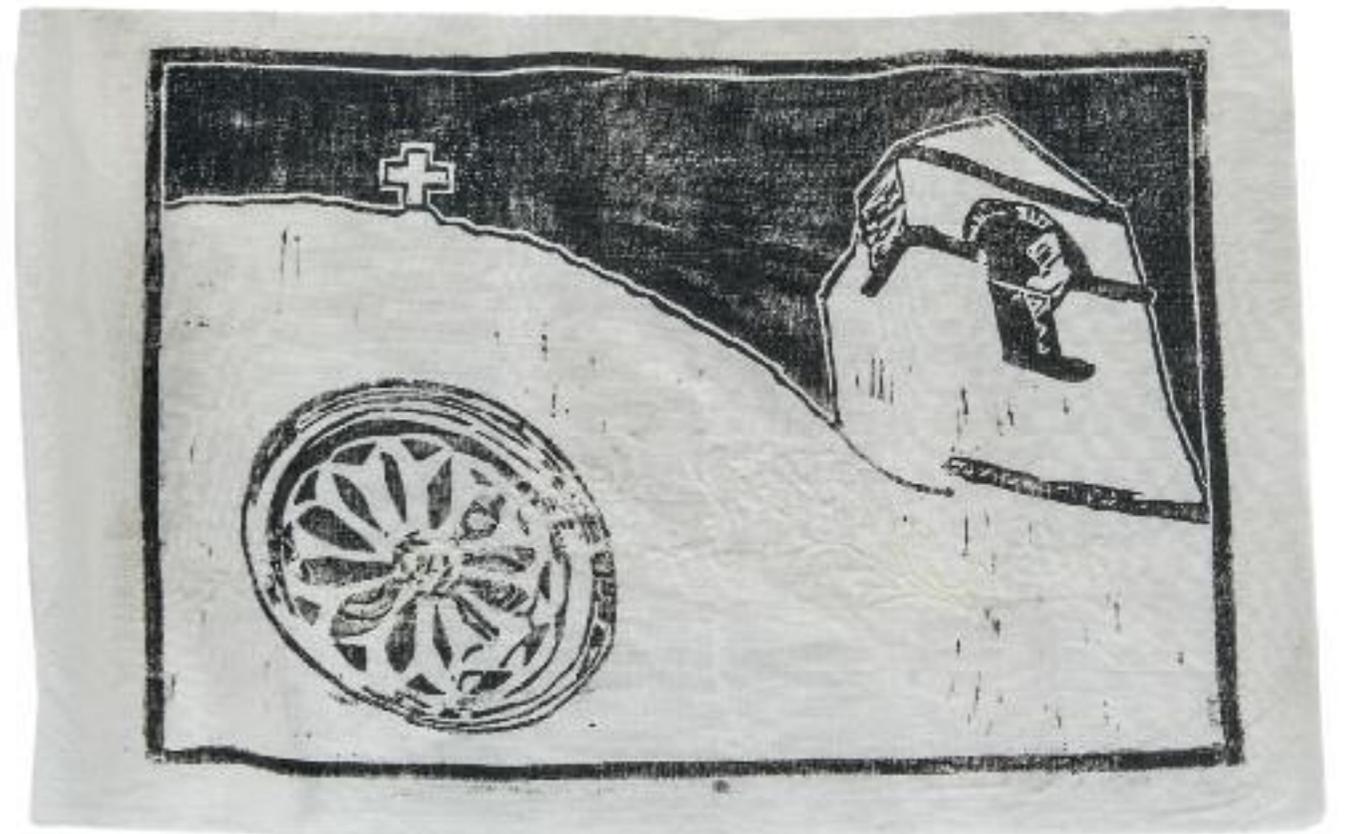
front, trachyte rose window. The black-ink print was impressed on a white, recycled canvas, probably a curtain or tablecloth, with a delicate decoration, which is all the more precious here as it is unexpected: a floral embroidery tone-on-tone. The sharp contrasts of colours seem to cover the proud face of the building, which people often look at and remember fondly, with a majestic and primordial make-up. The church façade, which stands out against a dark sky in all of its whiteness under the bright, Mediterranean light – a possible sinister symbol of destiny and looming (bad) luck, as in literature – replies from above to the viewer's puzzled gaze with the peaceful, mellow features of a familiar subject or of a Sphinx observing the human fate while being sheltered by its own riddle. It is as if it was "the other side" of a building halfway between the sacred and the urban, which here, along with a whole tradition, is once again to be discovered, decoded and interpreted.

The triptych *Senza titolo*, which Vincenzo Pattusi dedicated to the Sardinian Nobel Prize winner, is also somehow inspired by nature. While shelving the gloomiest themes of Deledda's works, Pattusi chose to take his cue from the equally famous descriptions of landscapes, the happy moments in which the author's idyllic and dreamy prose often hints at a desire to redeem herself existentially from a looming evil, in a leap towards the positivity of a life that is finally free from the anguish of guilt and perdition. It is a more mature Deledda that Pattusi has in mind, the one who gradually turned the rigid harshness and exclusive duality – inspired by the Old Testament and typical of her debut as a writer – into the Christian virtue of *pietas*, and who also managed to reconcile the contrast between *Verismo* and lyricism through style, by putting into words the suggestions of a fairy-tale space-and-time atmosphere in which human events blend with and reflect nature's events. Pattusi embraced this animated and anthropomorphic view of landscape, and thus portrayed on canvas a fantasy in

which air becomes earth and vice versa in a constant metamorphose of shapes and colours, of which the painter blocked the most visually accomplished moments. Standing out against a sky that gradually goes from the darker shades of the night to the lighter shades of the day, a whole forest – where tiny, folk-story creatures could live – can emerge from the gentle profile of pink clouds at dawn and sunset. We do not know if the green, wavy foliage – outlined against the matte black from the lowest corner of a smaller painting – belongs to the fronds of a tree or a bush, or to the head of a character hiding in the woods, or even to the temporary, emerald-green appearance of some lingering mist. However, it is not by mere chance that Pattusi chose clouds, which are a light and moving element, as the subject of the main painting of the polyptych. Here – with a cinematic-like effect of a saturated point of view shot, or of character projection – the varying whiteness, which has been slightly frozen in a woodland view, is meant to awaken memories of a young Deledda who, from the window of her house in the neighbourhood of San Pietro (now a museum dedicated to her), gazes at the horizon – both natural and existential –, which is far away but also interiorly transfigured and capable of absorbing and echoing the most intimate frames of mind, i.e. future inner voices of paper heroes and heroines. Perhaps, this is the reason why the painter concentrated the deepest meaning of this imaginary journey in the most abstract element of the triptych. Here, in the shades of brown that gradually go from darker to lighter in horizontal lines, viewers can find the freedom of imagination and expression that is typical of "colour field" painting. Or else, they are narratively projected forward and beyond, as though with a sweeping pan that accelerates and garbles their whole vision while shifting them forward in the story or deeper into the characters' psyche. Their gaze will finally land on their very personal contemplation of new landscapes, new sceneries, and new stories.



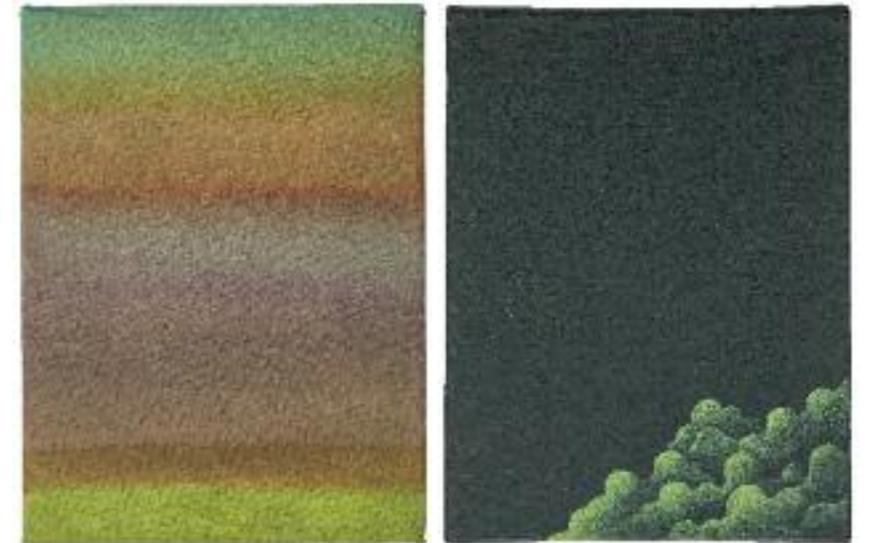
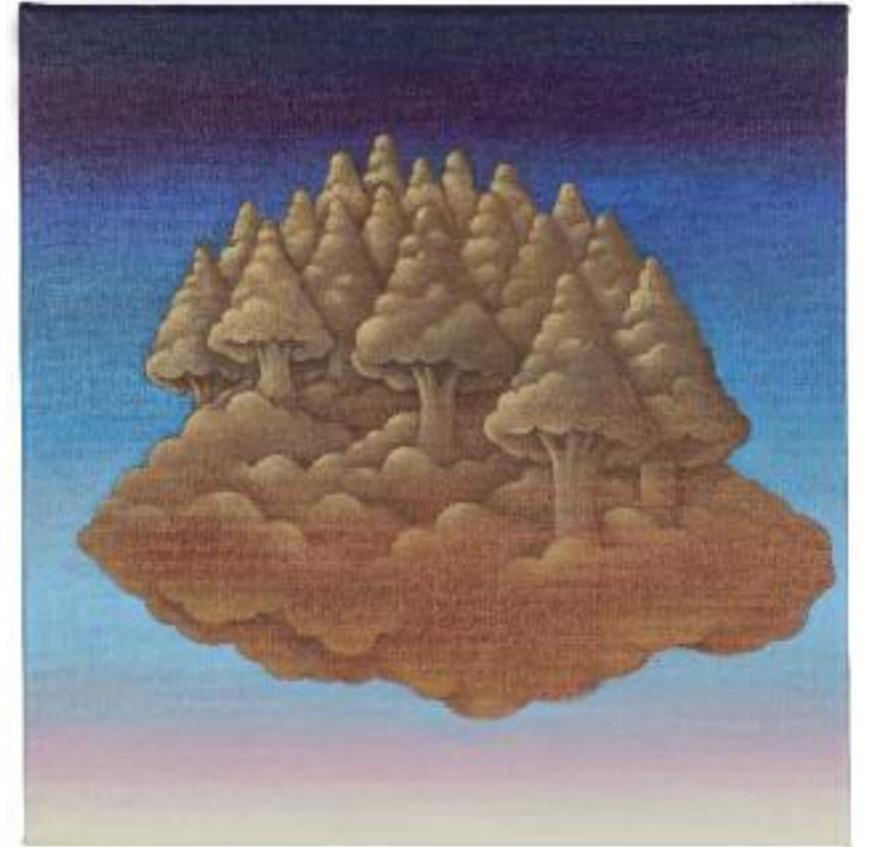
PASQUALE BASSU,
Espugnabile
(Pregnabile), 2014
iron-wire bird cage,
printed pages



PASQUALE BASSU,
Finestra temporale
(Time Slot), 2014
cardboard box,
canvas, twine, ash

PASQUALE BASSU,
L'altra parte (The
Other Side), 2014
linoleumgraphy
on embroidered
canvas

*On the next
double spread:*
VINCENZO PATTUSI,
Senza titolo
(Untitled), 2014
triptych – acrylic
on canvas



H 510. LUISA FANCELLO

Luisa Fancello (Dorgali, 1910-1982). Born into a large family from Dorgali, she suffered the loss of both parents as a small child, and soon learnt the art of embroidery out of need. She was the sister of the more well-known Salvatore Fancello (Dorgali, 1916-Bregu Rapit, 1941), a celebrated sculptor and potter. She married Simone Lai (Dorgali, 1907-Cagliari, 1984), who in the 1930s established a pottery factory, "Lai Ceramiche". Together they had one son (who died very young) and two daughters: one of them, Caterina (Dorgali, 1945), would in turn become an artist and ceramist, as well as a teacher. A very smart, talented, and naturally self-reliant woman, Luisa Fancello devoted her life to embroidery, well-aware that the results of her work would eventually bring her not only financial, but above all and most importantly personal independence. Over the years, she moved from manufacturing decorations for the shirts of the wealthiest families in her hometown to creating a large number of shawls, embroidered with floral patterns, for all the women of Dorgali, who held her in high esteem and trusted her, and who she was always happy to please while remaining faithful to her passion for the art of embroidery and withstanding the emerging trade technologies for faster and cheaper production. She was

very close to her brother Salvatore, and, though illiterate, she entered into an intense correspondence with him asking for help to the local scribe. Luisa never accepted his sudden demise on the Albanian front, on 12 March 1941, nor the fact that he was buried anonymously and far away; on 31 March 1954, 13 years after his death, she requested the relevant Italian Ministry to have his remains identified and returned to Dorgali. The zinc urn containing the remains arrived to his hometown only eight years later; and on 3 April 1962, the whole town attended the burial ceremony of the young artist, in a general atmosphere of deep sorrow and emotion.¹³

With an inspired juxtaposition (*Senza titolo*) of various media – five black-and-white drawings, one vintage print, one painted canvas, one floral passementerie and one wooden box holding some thread spools –, Vincenzo Pattusi paid tribute to Luisa Fancello's art of embroidery by drawing his inspiration from the familiar shapes and colours of Sardinian folk costumes, and from scenes of everyday life and craftwork that have now become archetypal. Thus, the image of faceless women with unmistakable folk costumes and hair styles is the happy image of any

100 anni di ceramica. Le ricerche degli artisti, degli artigiani, delle piccole industrie nella Sardegna del XX secolo, edited by A. Cuccu, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000. For further information on Salvatore Fancello, Luisa Fancello's brother, cf. A. CRESPI, *Salvatore Fancello*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2005; S. NAITZA, I. DELOGU, *Salvatore Fancello*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 1988.

13. For further information on the art of embroidery in Sardinia cf. *I fiori nel tessuto e nel ricamo sardo*, Sassari, Delfino Editore, 1992. For further information on Sardinian folk costumes: cf. *Costumi. Storia, linguaggio e prospettive del vestire in Sardegna*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2003. For Sardinian pottery and ceramics: cf. *Ceramiche. Storia, linguaggio e prospettive in Sardegna*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2007;

bride-to-be of times gone by who prepared for her wedding by decorating her linen and dresses with precious and propitious ornaments. But it is also the – more meditative – image of Fancello, in a featureless portrait, intent on embroidering other people's clothes while she waits for a letter from her brother who has left to study in a far-away country, or worse the return of his remains, which have already been buried in a war cemetery. Similarly, the solitary profiles of the two shawls – suspended against a white backdrop and resembling insects displayed in a display case – create a sculpted and artificial effect of the portrayed garments in the exact moments when the curves and tensions in the fabric reveal the presence of the invisible models wearing them. The triangular piece of cloth is worn over the head and opens up to disclose an untouched back, as though to evoke a desire to fly; or it curls up like a cocoon, hanging down straight because of the multiple, heavy fringes, whereas the detail of the hand picking up one edge of the shawl emerges from behind the curve of cloth. Nature also provides the inspiration for the decorations of the floral pattern and for the piece of passementerie, which is the symbol of finished handcrafted products, a sensual picot of red roses and golden ears of wheat. Even the vintage botanical-themed print, illustrating a specimen of *Medicago Helix*, shares the same decorating purpose because the thorny sprouts, typical of the spontaneous plant and easily attaching themselves to fabrics, will eventually draw random three-dimensional patterns. Pattusi hints at the embroiders' essential tools by directly resorting to the immediacy of ready-made art. He aligned colourful thread spools in a small wall case that, by extension, becomes a colour palette and ends up incorporating the decorative-numerical detail of an "8", the rotated symbol of an endless imagination. Also, more additional colours

expand and go from darker to lighter shades one into the other, like in a spectrogram, in the single small canvas of the readymade. Above everything, in the upper part of the artwork, the artist placed the sgraffito drawing of a thimble, a protective armour for every embroider: here the enlarged image shows in turn a pitted, embossed surface, rich in complex decorations, while the enlargement gives the object an architectonic magnificence that likens it to a *nuraghe*, or a Babel full of fantasy patterns.

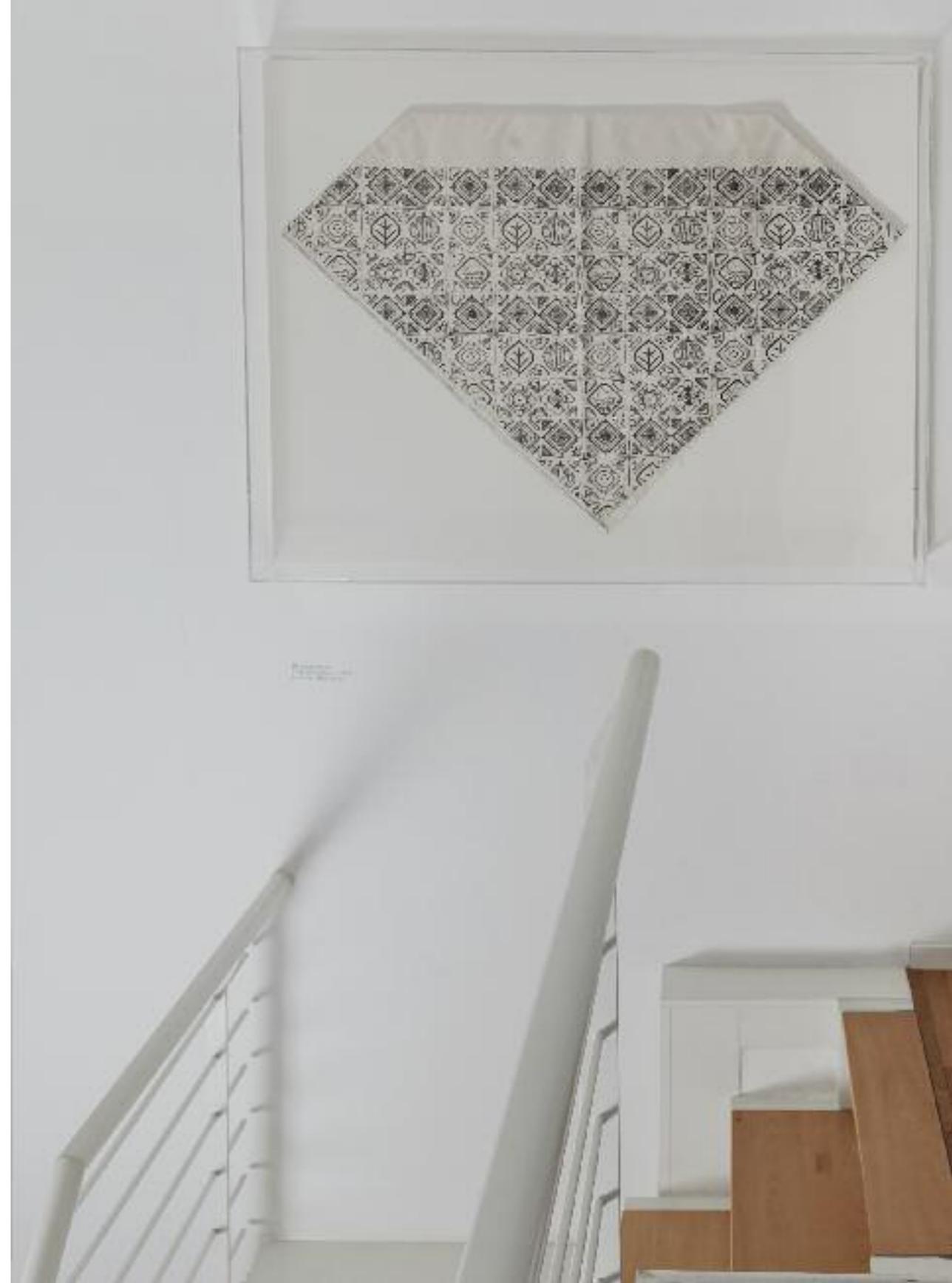
The meaning of the Majolica Flowers (*Fiori di maiolica*) that Pasquale Bassu picked for Luisa Fancello blossoms in a biographical and aesthetic cross-reference to the life of the craftswoman from Dorgali. Two triangles of fabric, recalling the shape of the traditional headscarf worn by Sardinian women dressed in folk costumes, bear the black stamps of several square tiles, which are in turn decorated with natural and abstract patterns and laid out in close-packed groups or according to the cutting lines of the fabric. The linoleumgraphics are also a clear reference to Luisa's expertise in the art of embroidery, to her husband's expertise in sculpture and ceramics, as well as to her daughter Caterina's talent, but above all to that of her beloved brother, Salvatore. In a visual oxymoron, Bassu's *Fiori di maiolica* resembles small decorated tiles, but unlike tiles – which are usually baked and then coated with a transparent, resistant, polishing and waterproofing enamel –, they reveal all the fragile porosity of a drawing on canvas. At a closer look, the lines of the decorations show an atypical evolution of the drawing process, a progress from the traditional shape of petals and leaves to fantastic buds. However, the real alienating detail of this artwork does not lie in the reinterpretation of techniques, materials and patterns that belong to different realms of the applied arts, but rather in the fact that the category of tiles that the artist's small tiles printed on fabric refer to is

completely unrelated to Sardinia's handicraft tradition, being as it is inspired by Campania's and Sicily's traditions. Bassu ended up entering into an imaginary dialogue with the excellent handicraft skills of different areas of Italy, and inserting references to extra-regional traditions into a project that is only Sardinian at first. He thus adapted his favourite technique (linoleumg-

raphy) to the purpose of conveying a personal, stylised vision of a post-modern idea of nature. The final outcome is quite close to a bold family portrait where the creative output of a range of generations and material traditions come to life again – ideally blended together – in a miscellaneous set of contemporary lines, shapes and techniques.



PASQUALE BASSU, *Fiori di maiolica* (Majolica Flowers), 2014
linoleumgraphy
on canvas





VINCENZO PATTUSI,
Senza titolo
 (Untitled), 2014
 pencil on paper,
 acrylic on canvas,
 readymade



H 601. CORONEO

The Coroneo sisters: Giuseppina (Cagliari, 1896-1978) and Albina (Cagliari, 1898-1994). Their father was a retailer from the Sardinian town of Cagliari, and they succeeded in turning the creative charms of their father's haberdashery and antiques shop into colourful collages (of thread, passementerie and panno Lenci®) and puppets made from recycled materials (papier mâché, wood, iron wire, straw, remnants of fabric). The Italian architect Gio Ponti, along with Eugenio Tavolara and Ubaldo Badas – who promoted the boost of Sardinia's handicraft in the second half of the 20th century in a scenario of widespread revival and rehabilitation of folk art – were among their most enthusiastic supporters. The two sisters were completely self-taught, but nonetheless always lived on the fringes of the then-blossoming “art world”, as they preferred to work in full autonomy and obey a freedom of expression that was immune from fashion and market influences. The sophisticated Deco illustrations, created mainly by Albina and published on children's and women's magazines; the small scenes with stylised women in traditional costumes; the nearly expressionist puppets created mainly by Giuseppina: they all merge into a collection of “pure” works that were created in the almost complete indifference of the general public, and were either jealously guarded or given as a gift to someone who could understand and appreciate their inner, humanistic meaning.¹⁴

In Vincenzo Pattusi's vision (*Senza titolo*), the Coroneo sisters go back to being children again, back to the lightheartedness of childhood, to the free unconsciousness of the creative experiments at the very beginning of their art career. Laid down on a late 19th-century sewing machine – a readymade where the heavy body of the machine is just barely softened by the faded floral decorations –, Albina's and Giuseppina's silhouettes somehow materialize and take the familiar form of embroidery on panno Lenci® and of a collage of thread, coloured papers and wallpaper. Pattusi chose to create a mixed composition, playfully rhetoric, and gave life to a patchwork of metaphoric suggestions, along with visual synecdoches and synesthesiae. Bearing in mind the so-called “dolls hospital” – a tiny room in the two sisters' house where their father Attilio used to “treat” old dolls in bad shape –, the artist turned them into dolls too, and for both of them he imagined small two-dimensional bodies made up of remnants of fabric or just briefly outlined with a few stitches of white thread on a red cloth. At ease among small pieces of the floral passementerie that is used in Sardinian folk costumes and that Pattusi laid down as an inventory of the tools available for use, the Coroneo sisters smile happily and unawarely in the form of dolls, with their eyes closed. They seem to be perfectly comfortable in the comforting realm

14. For further information on the Coroneo sisters, cf. V. SGARBI, M. PERI, *Coroneo. L'opera di due sorelle artiste-artigiane*, Nuoro, Ilisso,

2009; G. ALTEA, M. MAGNANI, *Pittura e scultura dal 1930 al 1960*, Nuoro, Ilisso, 2000, pp. 266, 271.

of a vintage comic strip, which does not deliberately foreshadow any of the future dramatic events that followed the outbreak of World War II and that would have serious repercussions on the evolution of their activity. Everything is suspended in the quiet innocence of a past that has been further sugar-coated by memory. Thus also the needle rising from the red fabric that remained after having sewn the distinct profiles and features of the two handicraft artists is apparently prevented from stinging.

With his *Proviamo così*, Stefano Marongiu also mimics the two sisters' first handcrafted products in style and materials, while referring both in its title and in its purpose to a later work by Giuseppina, a stand-alone puppet with a surreal and carnivalesque look dating back to the early 1970s, and portraying a man who carries his head under his arm after having replaced it with a watermelon. By blending remnants of coloured panno Lenci® with scraps of cardboard coasters, Marongiu split up a template-scene of Coroneo's early period, and then isolated its ideal basic elements into three round embroidery hoops. In one hoop he portrayed the subject of a well-known and recurring collage, *Profilo femminile con cuffietta di Desulo* (Woman's Profile with Desulo Bonnet, 1920s-1930s); in another, smaller hoop he isolated the tiny vase with a thorny plant in the hands of the even more well-known *Fanciulla con fico d'India* (Girl with Prickly Pear, 1930s); in a third and final hoop he emphasized what he thinks is once again a basic element, a modular shape of a recycled object, a paper pixel: the printed coaster. Marongiu took the action performed by the character in one of Giuseppina's latest creations literally. Her creation portrays a puppet that changes his head and face to replace his old, run-down features with a brightly coloured watermelon carved like a Halloween pumpkin to create a large smile. And Marongiu replaced the tiny woman's pinkish ruddiness with a satellite map, as though to con-

vey once again a sense of a wavering and uncertain belonging to a local community and culture.

With his *Volo strumentale* Gianni Casagrande travelled through time, caressing with his fingers the scars that war left in the lives and careers of the Coroneo sisters. The small paper sculpture becomes a metaphor line beyond which a probe can be launched into the material and psychological void provoked by World War II, in order to assess the chances of survival of mankind and art after all peace coordinates have been lost. By folding some dress patterns – a clear reference to Albina's and Giuseppina's textile aesthetics essence – in multiple ways, Casagrande created a geometric object with an almost architectonic look, a sort of broken and stage-less miniature theatre, or a wrecked house, ravaged by bombings, whose walls, floors and foundations have all collapsed. The polygonal origami, which stands on three sides only and is thus marked by a structural default, carries the symbolic prophecy of a potential, future reconstruction, a prophecy that coincides with the solid and dotted lines of the dress pattern. With light pictorial touches, the artist turned the direction arrows on the dress pattern into black beaks of swallows, as though to hint at the possibility of new flights and a new existential and artistic spring. Casagrande seems to suggest the idea that as a pilot cannot take off without the necessary flight instruments, both at peace and at war, so art cannot soar beyond the boundaries of the present without ideal conditions. However, we do not know what the best background for it is. The viewer will decide whether the swallows are looking forward to flying away, beyond the thin ceiling, or if – given the general chaos and the lack of set directions or safe coordinates – they have finally found their ideal destination and the most favourable air currents for their wings in their constant migrations.

With *Guardaroba per figura a riposo*, Vincenzo Grosso chose to reinterpret the miniature world of the

puppets created by Giuseppina after World War II, replacing the “anthropomorphic fauna” of an unrecognizable town of Cagliari with a synecdochical and *in absentia* commemoration of the working class of Nuoro during the years of post-war reconstruction. Hung in a corner, guests will find a pair of worn-out trousers, a shabby jacket, a very old, torn, moth-eaten sweater, a loose flat cap and a ragged leather belt: few basic clothing items, clearly the last ones that were used by the character that the artist refers to here, the member of an urban working class that has never forgotten to work on local land. Civilian and working clothes here are favoured over any other uniform. The tired worker takes his dirty clothes off as a normal guest of the apartment hotel would, as though Grosso thought to offer him all the comforts of a pleasant and unexpected stay. And to remind real guests of the dramatic events of an only deceptively distant past, as well as of the forced courage of those who had to live those events, the artist inserted an additional element: a small heather broom carefully hung next to the clothes. The broom immediately brings to mind *Lo spazzino* (The Street Sweeper), the character that Giuseppina elected as a paradigm of her times and portrayed in several puppets to pay tribute to this respectable, useful worker, relegated to the margins of society. Exactly like Giuseppina, who preferred to portray him in his breaks, laying on the ground and hugging the broom as if it was his lover, Grosso depicted him in a moment of inactivity and well-deserved rest. The worn-out, life-size readymade – that is both evocative and ghostly – manages to convey a sense of topical, current themes when the clothes of yesterday’s street sweeper make room for the clothes of today’s waste collector – a role that has been dignified by the allegedly civilized progress of recycling –, and also of miners, factory workers, or graduates, people who are often forced into a “break” by a society that

is facing a crisis of overproduction, and are compelled to deal with the disposal of a totally different kind of bulky waste.

Giuseppina Coroneo’s puppets also provide the inspiration for Pasquale Bassu’s collection of tiny silhouettes in iron wire and remnants of fabric. *La famiglia* aims to be, from its title, a critical yet heartfelt representation of the contemporary *comédie humaine*. To impoverished nobles, unrefined bourgeois, war veterans and poor people further impoverished by the tragedy of war, the artist responds with few, quintessential figurines, symbolizing the sheer drama of the present: the quest for a material well-being that is unbalanced due to the gradual loss of romantic and social cohabitation values. Despite its name, Bassu’s family group has in fact no strong and firm bond: it is a scattered, floating, suspended humankind that is vulnerable to the slightest puff of air, fake in its masks, and easily subduable in its tangled, iron-wire souls. For this reason, no figurine can readily be identified with a set role, but rather all of them are dressed with nonmatching clothes. Males are depicted in random poses that express excitement, provocation or threat. Their figurines blend miscellaneous or masquerade elements, and thus a basic jeans jacket is matched with a cowboy hat, and a cowboy gun-belt with a pair of Texan boots; a leather waistcoat with a red bandanna; a pirate coat with a pair of trousers decorated with psychedelic prints. Even the single, slim, feminine silhouette is wearing a dress that soon appears to be inappropriate: a simple, black sheath dress that conveys the dignified composure of mourning rather than a graceful and timeless elegance. And it is actually the feminine side that the figurine of *Ragazzo padre* (Young Single Father) is missing in its display of implicit denial: it is possibly the most desperate character among Bassu’s figurines. The young man is sitting with his son on his knees, and it does not really matter if he is divorced,

separated or if he has simply been abandoned, if he is guilty or not of the end of his love story, if he is suitable or unsuitable for the difficult role of parent. He leans forward in an impulse that shows an authentic emotional involvement, which is absent in the other characters. The only support he can count on is that of a cat and a dog, domesticated surrogates of other missing companions, which keep him company in a shared condition of weakness and vulnerability.

The *pathos* of the characters that Giuseppina Coroneo chose to depict in their material and existential solitude seems to be further expanded in the various scenes of couples or groups. The gathering of alcoholic outcasts in a group scene like *La bettola* (The Tavern) does nothing but amplify, through the sum of the individual despairs, the discomfort of other outcasts, like the intellectually disabled – who in *L’idiota* (The idiot) has been abandoned to his demons – and the prostitute – who in *La peccatrice* (The Sinner) is reinterpreted in a faded and tardily regretful way. The representations of brides/grooms and lovers seem even more loaded with human compassion, and they still continue to impress the viewer with their poetic bluntness: from the older one in *Arrivo in due* (Double Arrival) to the younger one in *Figure* (Figures). And it is to the latter couple in the bloom of youth, which appears so rundown and scarred by war, that Sergio Fronteddu dedicated a tiny, delicate artwork, a Casket (*Scrigno*) full of money and potential “wonderful things”, the same things that the Coroneo sisters held so dear at the beginning of their careers. The artist imagined to ideally give them to the two sisters, who are in turn evoked by the black paint mark left on the wall with a stencil reproducing the lines of a hug. For this double, ancient, almost archetypical figure, held together by an immortal feeling, Fronteddu prepares a small chest brimming with coins, which is very similar to those handed down over time by the imaginary of fairy-tale and pirate stories, but which has been cre-

ated by using a simple technique of recycled *papier mâché* in a tribute to the material that Giuseppina used for puppets in her latest period. Resting on a wooden base – which somehow reminds one of the shape of a heart – and secured to it by a layer of hot glue – the transparent binding of good omen –, the small treasure-toy represents the precious auspice of a future union between love and well-being. The two lovers, hugging tightly, seem to look away from that small fortune, while the contrast between the handcrafted look of the miniature casket and the contemporary street look of the profiles on the wall – which are slightly blurred projections dripping onto the contours like holograms that are ready to vanish into thin air – brings the viewer back to a more contemporary, urban modernity.



VINCENZO GROSSO,
*Guardaroba per
figura a riposo*
(Wardrobe for
Resting Figure), 2014
readymade with old
clothes and heather
broom





SERGIO FRONTEDDU,
Scugno (Casket), 2014
stencil on MDF with
papier mâché and
hot glue sculpture

PASQUALE BASSU,
La famiglia (The
Family), 2014
iron-wire and
fabric puppets

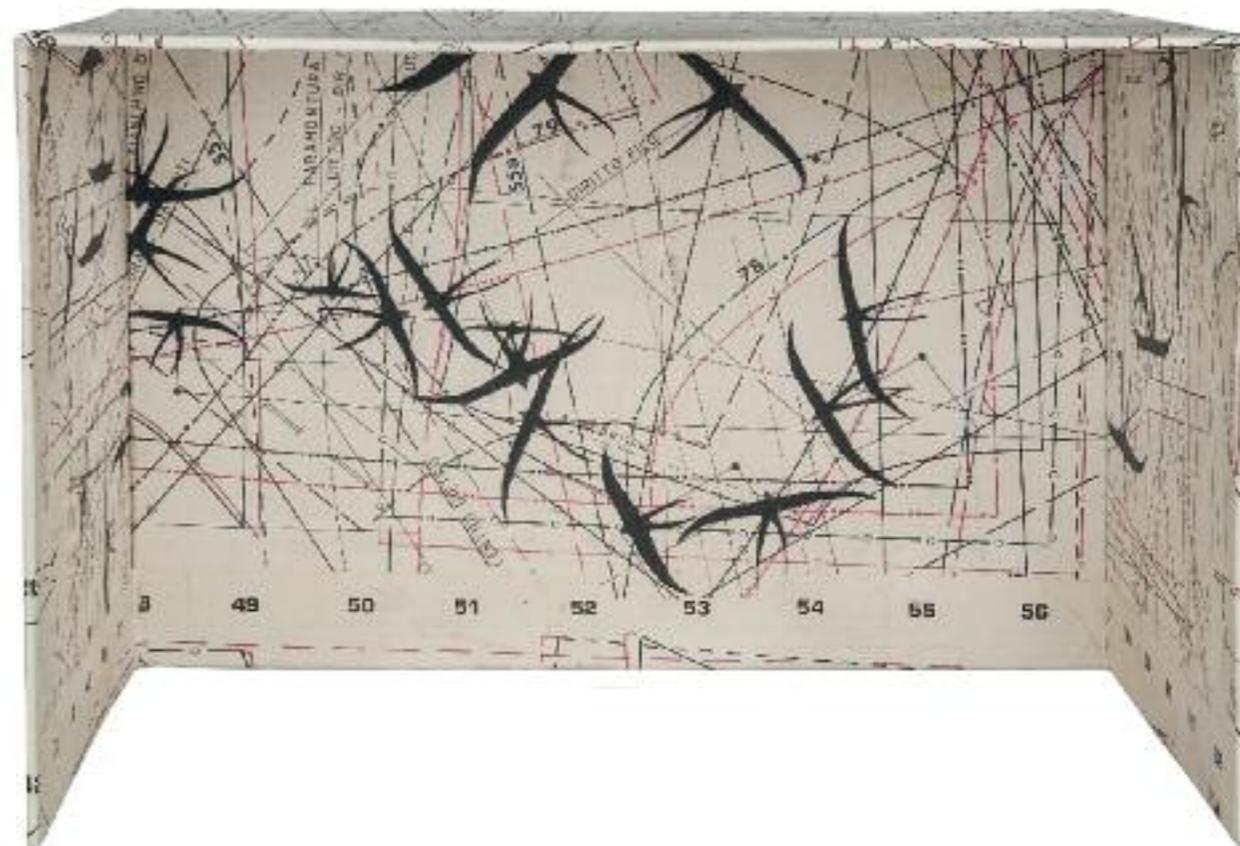




VINCENZO PATTUSI, *Senza titolo* (Untitled), 2014
readymade, collage
of coloured paper,
embroidery on panno
Lenci®



GIANNI CASAGRANDE,
Volo strumentale
(Instrument Flight),
2014, india ink on
dress pattern,
mounted



STEFANO MARONGIU,
Proviamo così (Let's
Try This), 2014
mixed-media collage,
embroidery hoops



The Artists



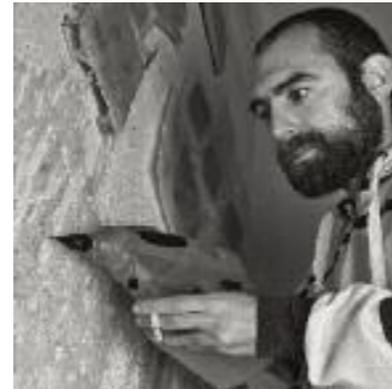
Pasquale Bassu

Pasquale Bassu was born in Nuoro in 1979, and has been a self-taught artist since 2006, when he first approached the art of engraving. After his first experiments in Sardinia as a member of the SEUNA LAB collective, Bassu further explored the art of engraving in Germany. Back in Nuoro, where he currently lives and works, he pursued his research in the domain of graphic arts and linoleumgraphy, mainly focusing on the subject of paper money. Meanwhile, he carries on an ongoing critical analysis of the added value of money resulting from the complexity of the drawing, printing and standardized reprinting processes. His works, always centred on contemporary political and social issues, have been exhibited in a variety of solo and group exhibitions both in Sardinia and in the rest of Italy, and are also part of public and private collections.



Gianni Casagrande

Gianni Casagrande was born in 1963 in Nuoro, where he currently lives and works. An eclectic and entirely self-taught artist, since 2006 he has devoted himself to the art of small- and medium-sized paintings after some attempts to write fiction, movie scripts and song lyrics. His paintings combine a meticulous attention to detail with the representations of a fascinating, vigorous and surreal imagination. His works have appeared in a variety of solo and group exhibitions in the most important exhibition centres of Sardinia: Museo Murats (in Samugheo), Pinacoteca Carlo Contini (in Oristano), Museo Tribu (in Nuoro), Museo MAN (in Nuoro). In 2011, Casagrande was among the Sardinian artists who were chosen to exhibit their works at Museo Masedu in Sassari for the 54th International Art Exhibition organized by *La Biennale di Venezia*.



Sergio Fronteddu

Sergio Fronteddu was born in 1982 in Nuoro, where he graduated from the local *Istituto d'Arte* before earning his degree in Sculpture at *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Sassari. Through his research, Fronteddu aims to recreate the shapes and casts of everyday objects with uncommon materials, like soap and hot glue. The viewer is invited to interact with his artworks, which are often abandoned in unconventional settings, through a sensory approach that stimulates new perceptions of everyday life and contemporary art as a whole. Fronteddu is also currently involved in various design and creative recycling projects. His works have appeared in solo and group exhibitions in Sardinia as well as in the rest of Italy, and he has won several awards and prizes, among which *Premio Total Art (COM.FUSION)* in 2010, and *Premio creatività Ponti non muri* in 2009. He currently lives and works in Nuoro.



Vincenzo Grosso

Vincenzo Grosso was born in 1977 in Nuoro, where he got his diploma in Gold Jewellery from the local *Istituto d'Arte*. After getting his degree from *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence, he qualified as a Painting teacher and later worked both as an artist and a teacher. In 2010, Grosso moved to Berlin, where he worked with XLAB Gallery and BBK Künstlerhaus Bethanien, while taking an interest in post-World War II architecture and focussing on the influence of man on landscape. He currently lives and works in Nuoro and Berlin, and his works have been exhibited in several exhibitions. In 2011, Grosso won the third *MAN_Gasworks Award*, and consequently lived and worked in London for some months. He was among the Sardinian artists exhibiting their works at Museo Masedu in Sassari for the 54th International Art Exhibition organized by *La Biennale di Venezia*. He is also one of the artists chosen by APT (Artist Pension Trust) for its Global Collection.



Stefano Marongiu

Stefano Marongiu was born in 1977 in Nuoro, where he got his diploma from the local *Istituto d'Arte*. He later got his degree in Decoration from *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence. Back in Sardinia, Marongiu currently combines his artistic work with teaching, as he organizes workshops on creative recycling and graffiti. Recycled materials and a style that vaguely echoes urban *street art* are the main features of his most recent art production, in which his research on the identity of places and people blends with the control frenzy implied in today's hyper-connected society. Besides exhibiting his works in exhibitions in Italy, in 2007 Marongiu worked on the cinematography of *Sonetaula*, a movie by Sardinian director Salvatore Mereu. He currently lives and works in Nuoro.



Vincenzo Pattusi

Vincenzo Pattusi was born in Nuoro in 1978. He began painting as a self-taught painter while studying for his Bachelor of Arts degree in Pisa, and later for his master degree in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage. Fascinated by street art, he aims his visual research at an overt and evocative graphic design and uses the pseudonym "Ludo 1948". Besides paintings on canvas, he creates public and *site-specific* artworks. The art installation *Faraway so Close* for the Olbia-Costa Smeralda Airport (2011) and a mosaic made of 30,000 used credit cards for the headquarters of Banco di Sassari (2013) are some of his most recent artworks. His works have been exhibited in Italy and abroad. Represented by Galleria LEM of Sassari since 2009, Pattusi was among the Sardinian artists exhibiting their works at Museo Masedu in Sassari within the 54th International Art Exhibition organized by *La Biennale di Venezia* in 2011. He currently lives and works in Nuoro.

The authors



Cecilia Mariani

Cecilia Mariana was born in Nuoro in 1983, and got her degree in Italian Cinema and Literature History and Criticism in Sassari with a text that was awarded the *Premio Fernaldo di Giammatteo*. After specializing in Modern Philology with a dissertation on History of Theatre and Entertainment, Mariani focused her Ph.D. in Contemporary Art History on the connections between aesthetics and food from 1980 to today. She has mounted several exhibitions in Sardinia, and her art and history criticism texts have appeared in a wide range of catalogues, publishing projects, as well as on the pages of the newspaper *Sardegna 24*. With Ilisso she published the essay *Tavolara critico d'arte* in *Eugenio Tavolara. Il mondo magico* (2012). Besides working with www.criticaletteraria.org, a cultural blog, Mariani was awarded a scholarship by Fondazione "G.A. Sulas" in 2015. She currently lives and works in Nuoro.



Nelly Dietzel

Nelly Dietzel has been working in Sardinia for a decade now, and currently resides in Nuoro after living in Brazil (Jundiai, Sao Paulo), Spain (Valencia) and Argentina (Puerto Madryn), where she was born. Dietzel has been working in graphic arts for over 20 years now, specializing in publishing, while also working as a photographer. Her photographs have appeared in a wide range of exhibitions (*Vietri a Bitti*, Laboratorio Terrapintada, 2008; *Monedda*, "Guardarsi l'ombelico", MAN, Nuoro, 2011; *Che a sa manu de Deus*, Acquario, Cala Gonone, 2012; *Il denaro tra rito, leggenda e quotidianità*, Deutsche Bank, Nuoro, 2013; *Il Pesce d'Oro*, Teatro Civico di Cagliari, 2013) and various publications. Dietzel has worked with Ilisso Edizioni from 2004 to 2012. All the photographs in *Piante medicinali in Sardegna* (2009), *Vino in Sardegna* (2010), *Dolci tradizionali in Sardegna* (2011), published by Ilisso Edizioni, were taken by her.