

Verde  
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We might begin with the fact that *Verde* is the result of years of walking and exploring, stockpiling images and signs, and getting lost among testimony of human presence, mountains, and landscape.

An itinerary, a stroll through life mostly conducted in a hamlet in the Apuan Alps to capture the graphic signs of both Nature and Man's interventions on the landscape offered to the eye or the purpose of returning them in a form of simplification with less focus on wide horizons than on the fragments and details that only a general vision of the landscape provide. A trail of Man's little things opposed to the powerful mountain that is continuously scarred and scored, eroded subtly in short time or dramatically over long years. Time can be measured in seconds or geological eras depending on your points of view and reasons, and varies whether you're measuring green meadows or woodlands, natural things or man-made objects.

In Leopardi's words, "magnifiche sorti e progressive", a dubious idea of progress, has accelerated the previous century's rhythm to a dizzying pace, especially so in the last thirty years, giving actions the illusion of lightness and an almost lethargic sense of disorientation, and the latter condition seems almost a necessity. Although for Italo Calvino the Second Industrial Revolution still involved machines "...it is not portrayed as in the First by the crushing images of roller mills or casting ladles but rather as *bits* of information flows in electronic pulse form racing around circuit boards. The clanking metal machinery is still here, but now commanded by *bits* without mass".<sup>1</sup>

In Calvino's *Lezioni Americane*, especially this first lesson on lightness, the thought takes immediately flight. Not only in terms of content, in which lightness is pitted against weight and literature is shown to indirectly mirror life, but rather more for the sustainability of six writings: six reflections on six keywords to be passed on to the new millennium or rather for an even wider common denominator.

Meetings in the mountains, walking outdoors - an action that fosters much interiority, become occasions for observation and the generation of desire. "You desire what you see every day" observes a character in a cult film of the 90s, the *Silence of the Lambs*. Sometimes the opposite is true, however. Disorientation predominates along with the proportions out-of-scale, and what is desired are lean-tos, huts or shelters in which new times may be constructed and actions regulated. Refuge, for Prevedello, is always temporary, instable, quick to collapse and be abandoned for others elsewhere.  
(figures).

Exploration is both cognitive and contemplative at the same time. Places are where memories can be stored, almost in a Raimondo Lullo mnemonic technique: you deposit thought (or action) in a place (or graft onto, in this case) Mentally reviewing the places you'll pick up the trail of your logical process, but also, however, the awareness of having left something of your own, immensely cherished, out to drift.  
(figure).

The gestures and materials along the way are those of the sculptor: the materials are noble marble., stone, also wood, glass, even construction concrete, all of which evoke proceeding more than being.

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<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Lezioni Americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, 1. *Leggerezza*, in I. Calvino, *Saggi 1945-1985*, tomo I, by Mario Berenghi, Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori editore, 1995, p. 636

The materials are more often found than purchased, more recycled and put together provisorily. Both when the cast of the mountain is made by pouring concrete mix over chestnut wood (in the exact same way as at a construction site) or when more linear structures are assembled, whether iron rods or wooden beams, which in the cross-linking of their design always seem to be on the point of freeing themselves and re-establishing an order of gravity more consonant to their structure and weight.

The ways employed to chain these elements together, wire, screws, bolts, and trestles are all exposed. Everything is within hand's reach, all part of a process in which nothing is hidden and things even continues onto the brackets and across the walls, and the rock in the drawing, the subject of design, is turned over. Cracks and connections are visibly puttied and left as precious scars, which through their very existence project the subject into its own little story.

What exists, instead, is made of eternal elements  
joined together, and ends only when adequate forces  
disconnect them through impact and entry to emptiness:  
Nature never lets any one undivided thing perish.

Lucretius, *De rerum Natura*, Book I, 221-224<sup>2</sup>

It may be for this reason that in the end, *Verde* is more of an experience of space and time than an exhibition..

A space in which to pass some time. A space in which some time has passed. A time in which images sink deep roots down into our collective consciousness, and in recognition of our own landscape, they have taken form in stone and concrete, with a heaviness that seems to offer no escape, but with a volatility and potential transformation of the material that recalls to mind the cycles in the working of the composite stone itself, which was first split, then pulverized, and then mixed in preparation for casting into something else again . Between the nobility of the marble, the happenchance of its finding, the rusticity of mixing, each material requires different times, tools, and gestures for its working. Each one bears the marks of a different physicality. Chisels and drills were applied to marble and wood. Cement trowels, buckets of water, arms and hands were used to cast the concrete.

Gestures and actions have modeled materials both light and tormented, have torn apart formworks, sunken screws, bolted plates, and piled plaster. All these materials, informed with form, have been temporarily sheltered in the space offered by the gallery, whose walls bear the memory of processes: design, support, the measurement and migration of objects, and the drilling of holes to house something else that at first glance was not apparent.

The form, even despite the bulk and mass of certain materials, alludes to instable balance in which the remaining traces of design provide evidence of the precarious equilibrium achieved, the certainty and firmness obtained in one moment that may be called into doubt the next.

Elements of uncertainty, imminent hazard, and monitions against the caducity of human experience facing far longer universal eras punctuate *Verde* where sculptures, which depend on the contraposition of materials, light weight, heaviness, and their types of interaction, emerge from the area reserved for them nailed into the gallery's walls in a relationship with the latter through a series of signs and mediation, using the walls as another blank page from which fragments and details of a general focusing emerge while offering areas for meditation that dot the itinerary to generate various forms of dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> This quote was taken from the version edited and translated by Francesco Vizioli, Roma, Newton Compton Editori, 2a ed. 2010, p. 55

“You marvel at how this jumble of materials in the hands of Chance was able to make a man, given the vast number of things required for the construction of his being, but you do not know that hundreds of millions of times this material came to a stop before producing a man and instead produced a stone, lead, a branch of coral, a flower, or a comet on account of the too many or too few other figures required or not required to design a man. In the same way, you fail to marvel that from an infinite quantity of changing, incessantly shifting materials the so few animals, plants, minerals that we see were made. Similarly, why do you not marvel when the dice are thrown one hundred times and not even one set of doubles occurs? For this reason, it is impossible that nothing is created from this delicate movement, and this one thing will always be a source of amazement for the heedless person who does take into consideration just how close it came to not being made.”

Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'autre monde ou Les états et empires de la lune*<sup>3</sup>

In the first room, the one with the stones and concrete structures, two sculptures lean against the walls. A third is on the ground.

Up against the right wall is a structure made up of elements in concrete that supports a stone. More than merely supporting, the structure appears to interact with that piece of Bardiglio marble that looks as if it had fallen down from above right into what appears to be a wreck of some kind by pure chance. The wreck is undoubtedly the work of human hands but seems to have been abandoned before completion, perhaps due to lack of interest or the sudden realization that it no longer served a purpose. Born useful but rendered useless, its current task seems to be merely supporting this accidental encounter with the stone from above, a function more aesthetic than utilitarian.

Lying on its side, a sort of beached marine creature or the remains of a shipwreck, the sculpture on the ground is composed of bars of concrete that join and divaricate by means of a central joint that is also made of concrete before continuing into a sort of metal coupling. Perhaps torn from a more complex architectural element or arrived here mounted on its own original structure, almost as if once again uselessness had gotten the hand over usefulness. At the other end of concrete arm stands a stone. Also this has been uprooted by an entirely more complex and consistent something or other, or perhaps the object itself was the cause of the uprooting of the bundle of arms, too thin, on the other hand, to support the stone. This represents an absurdity in regard to the materials with which they are made.

Concrete, on the other hand, is a material that starts out in powder form, then gets mixed with water, and hardens. Here we see it in the process of changing state, ready for the next dissolution that awaits it in the process of someone's losing interest and its own loss of functionality.

This neurotic conglomeration of stone and concrete and the consequent drift of everything formed by these two cousin elements is associated in my mind with a recent image: a beach in Cornwall, a stormy sea, nature's flotsam dashed on the shore, some of which with a little vitality remaining, including a long, still fleshy stalk of algae, something of a miniature tree tenaciously clinging to a stone swept up from the rocky sea bottom and heaved onto land by the waves. A form of resistance of some kind – but in both cases completely useless – is shared by both.

On the wall at the back of the room stands a skeleton of architecture, something of a shell with a precise design. A prickly pear with its round, juicy leaves is wrapped around its feet.

This is sort of a relic of the human ability to design things for a specific function. Nothing remains of such function, merely the memory of an aesthetic choice.

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<sup>3</sup>This quote was taken from Italo Calvino, *Lezioni Americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, 1. *Leggerezza*, in I. Calvino, *Saggi 1945-1985*, 1995 cit., pp. 648-649.

The three sculptures together delineate a circular space at the center of which ruins may be admired. Everything with its one dignity; all with epic tragedy that rebounds from a manmade panorama consisting of trestles, miraculously resistant skeletons of human invention to a remote and dusty present.

Thus brings to mind certain buildings that have made history in 20th century architecture, the ones that no one has the heart to demolish today because they've become industrial archaeology treasures in witness of their new shapes permitted by their new materials (or the way their new shapes enabled the use of new materials, such as certain buildings by Pier Luigi Nervi like the remains of the aircraft hangars in Castel Viscardo destroyed by retreating German troops at the end of last war, the state of abandon of the tank at the Cagliari salt flats, the spiral stairway at the Florence football stadium. These structures are cherished not only for their forms but also for the concrete that enabled them that continue telling a story today in their deterioration or in the aesthetic result of certain materials.

The same story is also told by the ruins of shark-toothed defense works erected along the coastline, those bunkers poking their heads above from the lush vegetation that recall acts of bravery and resistance against oppressors now long gone in the same way in which our experience or the entire documentary and commemorative process has restored them to us.

The circle created by the three sculptures demands movement. Requires time. Expects closer attention. After registering the form, a verification in regard to a by-product that provides the reason for disorientation is indispensable.

The concrete cast in wooden formworks conserves every trace of the materials used for its containment: the grain, the imperfections, and the structural sag imparted during casting and the gaining of weight. Knocking out the concrete often required hearty blows that created splinters and left flakes of paint from the boards that had been used again and again.

Both this action far from the output that Le Corbusier desired for the same material and procedure, and the modular grids used for design left by casting in the formworks on the surfaces used by another great and uncommon architect, Louis Kahn come close to the operation of conserving the memory of human labor that the latter desired as the "skin" of his buildings.

"Stone and wood, not bought but procured on site, must be used coherently as is in the expression of gratitude for this gift of Nature"

Louis Kahn<sup>4</sup>

Other traces of the presence and passage and of man, so insignificant and unnoticeable sheltered from the towering Apuan Alps, are the votive shrines walled into the facades of homes. Occasionally depicting popular saints but more often any of the thousand different faces of Maria (Our Lady of Sorrows with bosom pierced by swords, Triumphant, crushing the serpent's head, and so on), the historical center of Carrara is dotted with these benevolent presences in a city where even the storefronts feature the use of marble for shelving or pure decoration.

The mountain floods the feet of city dwellers with a material that was once more precious than gold and capable of assuming the most diverse forms and suited to the most different uses.

A blessing in cursive script, these roadside shrines were something anyone could afford, separating inside from outside, the home from the public area open to transit by anyone, friend or enemy alike. In the mountains, even in the some of the smallest, most isolated houses, it's worthwhile to seek refuge beneath the sign of a benediction, and in the separation of the private from the public, there's

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<sup>4</sup>Nicola Braghieri, *Buoni edifici, meravigliose rovine. Louis I. Kahn e il mestiere dell'architettura*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2005, p. 55

a tiny inside that poses a barrier to the boundless outside.

In the vicinity of these lonely homes, they used to plant a walnut tree every time a child was born. The fruit of the adult tree would be used to build some piece of furniture for the newborn creature by the time he or she was ready for marriage. Sometimes those homes were abandoned by their inhabitants, and the walnut saplings were suddenly free to grow into knotty-branched old age without anyone chopping them down. They survive - most probably – the people who planted them, and the houses as well which are often more ruins by now than homes.

The second room that holds three walnut trees sculpted in relief into white marble dot a map of abandonment and form an itinerary in which the life of the plant lasted longer than man's stay in the area. They as well are, in fact, remainders compared to the reason for which they were planted, and indicate a different origin: born from a family's intention and tradition, perhaps more than from necessity, their current existence is linked to an absence, a migration, and a detachment.

Observe what happens in a sunbeam  
that enters the dark through a curtain  
and pushes a blade of light into the room:  
we see in that narrow strip of light  
numerous minute bodies intermingling  
as if involved and intent on eternal conflict:  
groups collide without granting truce.  
From what we can see we may intuit  
how everything moves in the greatness of infinite space  
and this little example helps us understand  
how the important things that support the world proceed.

Lucretius, *De rerum Natura*, Book II, 114.124<sup>5</sup>

These depictions of walnut trees bespeak the long time for their contemplation and execution, an amount of time that can be compared to those of the gestures and muscle power, the ways and actions dedicated to the three plaster moulds which together compose another memorial portrait, the one dedicated to Mt. Sagro.

The model of the mountain was cast and divided into three parts, opened into slices like an orange and chained to three different walls using scrap metal and little trestles bolted in place. The subject, the mountain, has been subtracted from our view, and in its place remains a sucking vacuum, an absence inversely mirrored in those slices of mountain made of jute hardened by the white plaster that dripped onto this sort of industrial framework, those embraces of different length and "borrowed" from their construction purposes to which the slices of mountain cling. Depending on the viewpoint, these three casts appear to be either floating weightlessly or firmly anchored to the walls, and from another angle appear almost obscene in their dramatic approximation of the casting of an absence entirely made of solids. They are all made of progressive vacuums, deep, dark shadows representing the invisible. From yet another angle they appear welcoming and inviting, resembling hardened cloths ready for draping around the shoulders of future sculptures.

They remains the only way to recall a mountain that has disappeared, to conserve the memory of a physiognomy destined in the long-term to be further excavated and continuously modified.

Stone returned to dust regains greater solidity again after mixing with water and cement or plaster. This transitory aspect of a material's return to various states gives the sensation that even the most

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<sup>5</sup>La citazione è tratta dall'edizione curata e tradotta da Francesco Vizioli, Roma, Newton Compton Editori, 2a ed. 2010, pp. 99 e 101

solid materials may crumble from one moment to the next, and more in general, that transmigrations of place, state, and form are what we perceive despite the invasiveness of certain assertive gestures that have left visible evidence in place, state, and form. Everything takes on the appearance of clouds of dust that come together and dissolve in time, a state that is “melancholic more than sad” and one which, once again referring to Calvino, remains like face powder in the glass mirror conserved in the infernal bedlam of Montale’s more famous invocation to persistence.