

Writing Project Between  
the Fondazione Merz  
and the Scuola Holden Turin



On the occasion of the exhibition *Mario Merz: Time Is Mute* (October 11, 2019 – March 29, 2020), the Education Department of the Fondazione Merz has initiated a project in collaboration with Scuola Holden of Turin. The objective is for students of Scuola Holden to creatively interact with and explore the artist's work through writing, bringing added value to the work from a subjective perspective.

The idea of giving a new reading to the pieces that make up the Fondazione's collection is not new. There have been previous collaborations with people unrelated to contemporary art, including historians, poets, and lawyers, in order to seek new approaches to exhibition catalogues. On this occasion, we wanted to go further, by involving in the process students who are as yet unfamiliar with the practice of critical and historical interpretation yet, at the same time, have attended workshops with artists as part of the collaboration program.

To that end, the Scuola Holden—a center dedicated to the teaching of writing, film, and journalism, with a clear orientation toward the humanities—proposed to students within its training program of storytellers to write experimental texts with the goal of capturing their own interpretation of the works. From a total of twelve texts, the school's instructors have chosen three—by Rebecca Buselli, Davide Carnevale, and Bianca Giacalone—which are shown below.

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# LIGHT

REBECCA BUSELLI

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I am the portion of the sun that has slipped away from the sky.

I broke off from its rays, penetrated the atmosphere and spun among stars, dwarf planets and their teetering satellites.

I collected the dust scattered through space and in the tedium of the flight I drew constellations.

As I fell I was dispersed in millions of flakes, golden splinters that rest on the earth.

I ended up balanced on a branch, at the centre of a pollen whorl: I danced with the spores until an arrogant breeze scattered them and I saw myself reflected on the pane of a window that a delicate hand had opened. The same breeze bore me forward over the threshold.

I imagine that the people stop, sit together and caress the surface of the table, and that someone feels cold in the fingertips while the others try to count the disseminated elements. They find apples, fruits in equilibrium on the synthesis of sand and fire: I cross it, accompany its curves as I walk on the edge of this lunar glass, I give them volume and reflection. Without me one could not be distinguished from another.

I make bodies lose their stasis and solidity, I guide them in search of a more recondite dynamism.

I bestow colour on materials, creating canvases of mixed techniques. I see men and their reproductions. They pass beside me and mix languages and words. Thought is without place and without time.

I define the contours of the space in which they move, I guide them along a perimeter: and I become artificial where architecture does not allow me to arrive.

I connect the attention of the object in itself to the energy that it emanates.

I give my dust, which bottled in cylinders illuminates the bases of the structures, little reproductions of the world: in macro and micro, they are the same forms. I strip away the veil that distances you from things, I am the guide that allows them to be known: darkness recedes, a tiny part of me is enough to make it disappear.

I suggest the material need to touch drawings with the fingertips, I restore their volume, the desire to enter these nests to feel really at home.

I create the reflection on the surfaces, I allow your eyes to see the objects you touch: I grant you finitude, the moment of touching them.

I run on tables, I am metamorphosed into water, they mistake me for dust that is trapped between wax and aluminium. I zigzag between the series of drawings, I stop to illuminate the works to which you pay no attention. I flow between piles of newspapers, I squeeze between clusters of farmsteads that smell of distant forests when they are close together. I play hide-and-seek among the hybrid structures, in precarious balance, joined with mastic and your desire. You find me among slivers of glass so that, weary, I entrust myself to your hands.

I slide inside luminous tubes, fashioned to communicate recognisable signs, arabic numerals that decode the world in which we live. I become energy again, dissolve to become life. From stellar particle to synthesis of light in constant evolution.

I am transformed into the words that you chew, in those taken from the mouths of people and reshaped according to a new order: I am your second possibility.

I am the energy that you try to capture in panels, dew that runs down blades of grass and that shines when the sun's first ray crosses it. I am the one responsible for all the phenomena of physics that you have never understood.

Now I can tell stories while, clinging to the fabrics, I speak with words that spring from interweavings, from curves of irregular letters.

I can become an ancestral sequence for the comprehension of the world, attach myself luminescent to buildings, count tablemates or explain how the entire population has been formed from two individuals. Secret key to the knowable, I become the formula to which Fibonacci gave his name.

But from the same hands a shaft, a spear of light can spring: an organic and organised beam to penetrate surfaces. Luminous cylinders of colours to perforate material held tightly between the fingers of many, dust enclosed in a nautilus of different biologies.

Until neon too dies and with a sweet sizzle I go back to being a morsel of light.

# THE SHELL IN THE SCENE OF THE NIGHT OF THE WORLD

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DAVIDE CARNEVALE

When the dike caves in and stops forcing back the internal currents of the lake, they abandon their concealed spiral course and become a straight vector. That rectilinear mass is formed as the waters advance, an algebra sheathed in the aqueous foaming frenzy and the confused dark of a starless night. All is and remains black, as the lake hurtles into the valley, omniscient in volume. There is no light in any part of the city it is approaching; the windows have not seen light within for years. Every building, there in the dark, is a wall waiting under an accumulation of dust, the odd shutter still attached by one of the two cords, the scars in the crumbling plaster of what has already collapsed to the ground in the streets. Nothing changes, not even the fine dust poised on the window-sills, as long as a sliver of air remains between the threat of the liquid mass and the wall: nothing. Not even the mosquitos split apart on the mirrors.

Then oblivion.

The man looks at the mud: everywhere, the epiphany of a brown, gelatinous, sluggish, cold flat surface. Stranded in it, here less densely, there more, the objects that the water has wrenched from their original places, scattering them within the sweep of its empire. They poke up incomplete, half buried, half exposed to the air. It is on the latter that the man continues his intermittent skating. The lower down the valley he descends, the more material his soles find. He tries not to sink into the ooze where an overturned table or a radiator have found a mooring. With his feet dry he takes the time necessary to scrupulously examine the abraded remains of the homes: they are plaster that the attrition of the water has stripped of every detail, above all of what he is looking for. The shorn off bases of the balconies are visible in those closest to the streets, signs two dark spans high of cement that has never seen the light of day. Then, with the bones of a tight-rope walker the man resumes his interrupted wandering. He wades in that aqueous world, supported by the residue of past domestic lives like a tin soldier on confetti scattered by a carnival procession.

In the end he descries a promising spot. It is a huge basin into which the valley runs. The man interprets it with his eyes. The diversion of the lake must have reached its stopping point there. The water had entered it impetuously, encircling it like the conchiolin of an egg-shell. The filthy water of the relics that it has stolen from the cities. The earth has swallowed it, leaving behind the solid discarded items. They have been left in piles where the current heaped them up. With a geometry that the man navigates with care, intent on finding what he is looking for, peering down with his legs parallel, a flea on the hunt.

As soon as the objects on which he makes his way become tarry in the dark, the man abandons his search. He sights an armchair and sinks down in its moist cushions. His eyes closed, he hears the wind croaking in the things. If he opens them he sees the stars cast a silvery light on the upper profiles of those immense quantities, curdled without syntax as in an infinite living room that has just been burgled.

In the morning he advances on the objects buried in the ooze. His mouth is still claustrophobically encrusted with sleep and his legs stiff from the armchair. The man searches, in vain.

At the moment when the air grows dark he finds a refrigerator that is less waterlogged than the rest. He opens it, the shelves have gone missing. He curls up inside it. His troubled dreams are those of one who sleeps in a hard and constricted space.

A little dawn light is enough to wake him. He emerges from that metal-plated sarcophagus and resumes his search, operating closer and closer to the pole of the spiral. When he reaches it the man finds grass. He sits down on it, senses that the back of his thighs is getting damp. He looks around. Objects are massed together incoherently like the stones of a cemetery without tombs. In front of him, beyond the rim of the basin, the smoking towers of his companions' camp.

They have moved forward, they have no time to look.

He sees, half-hidden like a grass snake, the gutter. He frees it from its entanglement, then he pulls it, dragging it on top of the other things. When he reaches the grass, he sits down close to the twisted pipe, seizes its better end, straightens it, puts it under his armpit and measures it by stretching his arm. He bends it at the point reached by his fingertips: he presses at the maximal angle until the inverted tip touches the undisturbed one. Then he bends it the other way in an acute angle with goniometric precision. He continues like this until the metal splinters at the bend and the piece breaks off. The man takes it, steps on it, straightens it, picks it up again and rolls it lengthwise. The result is an arm's-length tube. He spends the rest of the afternoon repeating the operation, seated, his mind revolving as he repeats the basic actions.

He spends the night on a legless billiard table. At a certain moment he wakes up and feels he is being watched. On a rectangle of green wood in the navel of the basin. He falls asleep again, his nose in one of the two side pockets. He dreams of becoming smooth inside, a mollusc with a billiard table as a shell.

In the morning he builds his spider. He collects the tubes in their supine indecision and gives them vertical pride. With straps and seals ransacked from other objects he ties them in knots that are thicker than the ordinary diameter of the tubes he has made: they are like the knees of very skinny children, joints. He joins them in four arches tied together at the top, in the body of the spider. A minuscule, concave body on eight spindly tapering legs. Standing on eight books with white pages, the ink washed away by the water.

Inside the spider he introduces a bundle of pieces of wood that he has found nearby. Pieces of items of furniture: shelves, small doors, racks. The driest he has found. He sets them alight. The bundle is substantial and the flames reach every leg. The joints whistle in the heat. They melt, fusing together the units in a group, the segments in continuous limbs. The paint on the drainpipe bubbles until it becomes detached from the surface, swells up and flakes off: it loses its leaves unlike trees in autumn because the flames carry them upwards. The dark remains of the moult whirl through the air, leaving only the scorching exoskeleton. The heat spreads to the books on which it rests, which are set alight and complete the shedding of the pigments at the tips of the feet.

The night sky is still rust-coloured. A stag stops and turns its head sprouting antlers, so sinuous that they seem to fold like paper. The animal has sensed a puzzling smell and looks in its direction, its eyes two circles of shiny black resin ensconced in compact fur.

The drainpipe is still smoking, it is the smouldering paint left inside the tube, and the smoke escapes the only way it can, upwards, from the point where the four arches meet, from the body. It rises perpendicularly, silver in the moonlight.

The luminous reflection in the eyes of the stag is an enormous bright spider still attached to its web. Immobile, having just landed at the completion of its celestial descent. Swollen in its limited physiognomic grammar without a body, it contains the black figure of a seated man. As when, at midday, a hand placed vertically with the fingers pointing upward on a pure white table covers its own shadow.

# EGGSHELLS

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BIANCA GIACALONE

An egg.

I see it there, placed on a grey marble counter, awaiting its fate. It rocks to and fro on its own shadow: a small oval in motion above the dark and desolate landscape, a warm belly of life amid the metallic clatter of the kitchen objects. It stares at me.

An egg, I take it from the counter and, as I raise it, the shape of its shadow is magnified, intensified and becomes brighter. A clean tap and it is no longer in the singular. It becomes two shells, then reveals its nature as it becomes three. It is two shells and a liquid that spreads, settles and knows it will not be born. Two shells on the counter and between them a liquid, a transparent river with a soft sun in the centre. One that becomes two, two that discover they are three. Two shells that stand upright, two shells like two solitary huts, waiting. Two emptied huts that someone has placed together on the counter, like two houses. I would like to go inside.

Their walls, their windows with their little holes, their cracks. Fissures palpitating with life: two shells that contain life. I would like to be there for ever. To be in the midst of them, to move around there to discover their secret, among the arabesques of the cracks and the delicate freckles. To touch their walls and lick their belly. Smooth. Moist. They have an aftertaste very far from earth. It is from there that they come, it is to there that they go. I would like to tread the pale fertile river and immerse myself in the sterile sun that will not have a future. But I hear it, deep down, the heart of the chick that it could have been. I feel, deep down, the feathers growing on me and that perhaps I could be the missing link, but this cannot be enough.

A shell, I remove it from the cold marble and deposit it in the warm belly of the earth, I cover it completely so as not to see it any more. A funeral of life.

It loses its identity. It is blended with nature and nourishes the seed, just as it has protected that sun that has not been able to be born. But one day it will be born.

A shell, I see it, which becomes a green and fertile shoot feeding on water, earthy fluids, subterranean rivers. A shoot that expands and makes the bare earth green again. A shoot that I can now touch, which has become bushes, trees beneath which I can shelter and feel their life.

A shoot that lives on the light of the sun and nourishes whoever comes near it, which has now become a wood. And life extends in a space that occupies an eternal time, never immobile.

I feel it.

In the ground beneath my feet, amid the intricate architecture of the roots. The shell. Which grows as a shoot and is chewed in the drooling mouths of animals. It is the shell that in the course of time has occupied its place and it is a tree, the safe home of birds and squirrels. It creeps into the veins of everything around me.

It is the shell that nourishes the palpitating blood of a newborn fawn, the strength that makes it rise on its feet, the mother's milk that feed it. I see it in the backlight as it patiently constructs the impressive platform of antlers of the proud deer; which hides in the long sigh of the dormouse in hibernation and in the energy of the wild boar that runs among the trees; a shell that causes the watchful hare to prick up its ears, which is in the vibrations of the wings of the wild birds, in the tremor of the sweaty trampled soil.

A shell in the howl of a wolf, ravenous predator that has killed the deer in the night, now it is in his throat in the fiery red of sunset, resounding in the walls of his stomach as it digests, is dispersed in the vital juices and returns to fertilise the seeds that grow. One shoot is born from another, three from two, eight from five.

And the fruit, that falls from the trees and scatters its seeds on the soil, recreates the spiral of a life that from above is a green and red and yellow canvas of natural colours in which the intertwining tubular branches are formed by unbroken pencil lines. A shell that is an entire canvas of colours.

And now it returns in the beak of the same hen that eats the shoots and has conceived it. And in its birth it can become itself again. Identical to one, divided into three, a process of growth in the earth or the gestation of a chick.

And here it is, in my hand, still unbroken, once again it will be placed on the grey marble. It still rocks. A torrent of seeds and dry leaves pulses inside it, inside is the tempest of being and becoming, a full spectrum of birth and death

But for now it is still one.

An egg in my hand.

An intact eggshell.

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