

All is Always Now is a project that puts emphasis on the possibilities of the "here and now". This "here and now" does not forget and binds the remembrance of past events to a living present. Only memories and the present tell us what kind of future awaits us. The exhibition by Gea Casolaro, curated by Anna D'Elia, proposes practices of commitment to individuals and the community. Such commitment not only aims to raise and guide awareness, but also points the attention on the importance of taking a position on certain issues. The reflection on asbestos is also a paradigm that allows the artist to open up to the visitor, asking him to try to think about what is the most urgent issue to face. With this exhibition, Spazio Murat welcomes the challenge that the artist and the curator launch, actively involving in the exhibition young artists who have had the opportunity to work on the topic of asbestos starting with the case of the Fibronit of Bari, during a five-day workshop hosted by Spazio Murat from 26 to 30 September. In one of the first conversations I had with Gea Casolaro, a clear and sharp expression struck me: *for me art is political*. These words push all of us towards a profound reflection: on experiencing different points of view, on the meaning of our actions and on the responsibility of our choices.

Giusy Ottonelli,
Director of Spazio Murat

ANNA D'ELIA

Anna D'Elia, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bari and Rome, publicist and art critic has published, among others, the following volumes: *Degas si confessa, il segreto di Nanine* (Progedit, 2022), *VEDERSCORRERE, l'arte che salva* (Meltemi, 2021), *Pino Pascali, L'uomo che cammina nudo* (Peccolo, 2018), *Fotografia come terapia* (Meltemi, 2018), *Pino Pascali* (Electa, 2010), *Per non voltare pagina* (Meltemi, 2007), *Nello Specchio dell'Arte* (Meltemi, 2004), *Diario del Corpo* (Unicopli, 2002), *Pensare la città* (Manni, 1997), *Città Visibili* (Congedo, 1990), *Arte, la città, la cultura* (Tecnopolis, 1991), *L'universo Futurista, dal quadro alla cravatta* (Dedalo, 1989).

- She wrote, in collaboration with the director (M. Sciarra), the script for the documentary on Pino Pascali entitled *Sull'Orlo della Gloria* produced by Oz Film (2015).
- Anna D'Elia has curated numerous exhibitions, including: *Transfusioni* (Menna-Binga Foundation, Rome, 2016-2020), *Riflessioni a puntate* (Noesi Foundation, Martina Franca, 2018) *Pino Pascali e Luigi Ghirri: mare*

and cielo (Pascali Foundation, 2014-15), *Artronica* (Municipality of Bari, 1987), *La Pietra e i luoghi* (Municipality of Bitonto, 1990).

- She collaborated with the Centre Pompidou in Paris for the exhibition *La Ville, Art et Architecture en Europe, 1870-1993*; with the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid for the exhibition *Pino Pascali, La reinvenzione del mito mediterraneo* (2001); with the Venice Biennale for the exhibition *Pino Pascali, Ritorno a Venezia, Puglia Arte Contemporanea* (2011), with the Friuli Venezia Giulia region for the exhibition *Io, lei, l'altra. Ritratti e autoritratti fotografici di donne artiste* (2022).

- She conceived and curated, among others, the following projects: *Maria Lai e Pino Pascali. Tavola rotonda*, January 9, 2020, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome, 2020. *Narrare l'Arte. Incontri su arte e letteratura*, Galleria Nazionale, Rome, 2018. *Pino Pascali è vivo*, day of studies on Pino Pascali, Sapienza University of Rome 7/11/2018. *La parola e la terra*, Noesi Foundation, 2015. *Arte ed Ecosostenibilità*, Noesi Foundation, 2014. *Dall'Arte nel sociale al teatro d'artista*, Noesi Foundation, 2012. *Pensare la Città*, Teatro Kismet Opera, Bari 1996. *Altamarea* traveling exhibition, tribute to Pino Pascali, Milan, Rome, Bari 1993. *Pino Pascali*, on commission 1955-1965, Pinacoteca di Bari, 1983.

GEA CASOLARO

For almost thirty years, Gea Casolaro has been investigating, through photography, video and writing, our relationship with images, current events, society, history. Her research aims to activate a permanent dialogue between experiences and people, to expand the capacity for analysis and knowledge of reality through the points of view of others.

- In 2009 she was in residence for nine months at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris where she realized *Still here*, project on the relationship between cinema and everyday life in the French capital.
- In 2013 she was in a three months residence at the Italian Institute of Culture of Addis Ababa, where she carried out the collective work *Sharing gazes* with the students of the Alle School of Fine Arts & Design. In the same year she realised two photographic works on commission: in the Principality of Monaco (the work *Forever Monte-Carlo*, which has been exhibited at The Forbes Galleries in New York) and in Luxembourg at the CNA Centre Nationale de l'audiovisuel.
- In 2016 she was the winner of the recruitment call of the municipality of Casale Monferrato for the realiza-

tion of a monument of public art dedicated to the victims of asbestos for the park born where the ex Eternit plant stood.

● In 2017 and 2018 her solo exhibitions in Rome at the MACRO and at the Museo Laboratorio della Mente.

In 2019 the Museo MAXXI dedicates a focus on her video art. It is the same year of her solo exhibition at The Gallery Apart of Rome.

● In 2020 she won the eighth edition of the call of the Italian Council of the Ministry of Culture and realized the work *Mare Magnum Nostrum*, becoming part of the permanent collection of the National Museum of Ravenna in September 2021. Also, in 2021 she participates in the great collective *Io dico Io, I say I* at the National Gallery of Modern Art and in 2022 at *Il video rende felici. Video art in Italy*, at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome.

● Among the various public collections in which his works are present we remember: MAXXI, Museo nazionale delle arti del xx1 secolo, Rome; CNA – Centre National de l'audiovisuel, Dudelange, Luxembourg; Mart – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto; Museo Laboratorio della Mente, Rome; Collection of the Rome Quadriennale.

ALL IS ALWAYS NOW

The stories captured in the works on display, starting with those on the occupational deaths, are to be remembered. There are too many places where every day hundreds of workers lose their lives as it is shown in the video installation *Ai caduti di oggi, [To the fallen of today]* 2008. Another story to be remembered is that of the crimes of which the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983) was guilty and whose repercussions are still visible today in the economic crisis that tears the population apart. It is on such continuity that Gea Casolaro reflects poetically in the video *Volver atrás para ir adelante [Go back to move forward]*, 2003.

I met Gea Casolaro in 2017, on the occasion of her exhibition, *Con lo sguardo dell'altro [With the gaze of the other]*, at the MACRO in Rome, an exhibition in which it emerged clearly that barriers no longer existed in her work, in which dialogue and working together to build a shared truth prevailed. No more the traditional figure of the narcissist and self-centered artist, depository of a privileged view of the world. In overcoming the single image, Gea's photography is always the result of a montage that returns a decentralized and multiple look in a visual kaleidoscope. What Gea Casolaro does is to ask herself and the audience to continue to reflect on what

they are watching. Each exhibition, therefore, becomes a relational opportunity in which the viewer has an active and participatory role. Taking care of one's own gaze is the prerequisite for taking care of that of others and strengthening together the understanding of reality. This is what the artist experiences in *Sharing gazes*, work carried out with students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Addis Abeba in 2013. Through what they see, her vision and experience of the world is also strengthened: each one, in fact, sees and makes see, of the same subject, a different point of view. The images acquire a further sense following the editing, a compositional technique that returns the coexistence of multiple looks. In the installation *Il cielo stellato e la legge morale [The starry heavens and the moral law]* (2019) a telescope is pointed in vain at a planisphere. The viewer cannot see anything since the lens is covered. The work alludes to blindness as the evil that plagues the present. Despite having refined technologies, a refusal to look at the evils for which one is responsible toward the planet and the living things that inhabit it prevails. In *Molto visibile, troppo invisibile [Very visible, too invisible]* (2019) the audience is invited to sit in front of a screen to take part in a debate on the issues of immigration by listening to the testimonies of the migrants themselves or of the people who work with them. The biased discourse on immigration transmitted by the media is taken over by the intertwining of the many stories that makes them the protagonists themselves, allowing the viewer to approach what the most obvious image, such as the color of the skin, hides. For example, what are the dreams of a migrant, their hopes, their desires? Sometimes the deepest meaning of a story is betrayed by words, which are depleted and emptied of meaning. What is hospitality today? How do you welcome the foreigner? The discourse on hospitality overflows with rhetoric, starting with the names with which the camps are designated in which those who ask for hospitality are confined, waiting for the bureaucratic process to take its course. There are nine letters that make up the word hostility, but just add two and the word becomes hospitality. Calling for vigilance over language, the artist, as if playing Scrabble, reveals to the viewer the trick to put together the right puzzle: Whoever uses more letters wins. In the installation *Specchio delle mie brame [Magic mirror on the wall]* (2019), the viewer looks at himself on the display of an smartphone, but his image is split and deformed, the same deformation that alters the perception of the external reality. The vision takes on the challenge of learning to live with multiple levels of reality in which the original and its copies coexist, a

challenge presented by the virtual worlds that interact while experiencing each other, confusing and altering the perception, with evident repercussions on behaviors and life choices. The paradox is to find oneself in front of illusory images that seem real and not being able to recognize bodies and places that lose concreteness and credibility. In a world where it is real what the media make you believe, it is necessary to be very vigilant so as not to be misled.

ANNA D'ELIA IN CONVERSATION WITH GEA CASOLARO

A The title of the exhibition *All is always now*, alluding to the historicity of each event, refers to the conscious understanding of what happens. But how to counteract the blindness induced by the official versions of the events?

G I think that being aware of the world we live in is one of the most important things. Ways to deepen the knowledge of history and current events do exist when living in a democracy, because there are thousands of historians and journalists who work in this regard, sometimes, unfortunately, even at the risk of their own lives. It is necessary to have the will to understand the mechanisms of human societies, to deepen the facts, even in relation to terrible news that we would prefer to ignore. Being aware of the injustices and sufferings of the world, can cause a sense of anguish and helplessness, we can feel crushed by the greed and malice of which the human being is capable and prefer to ignore them to protect ourselves. But being aware is the only means to begin to question oneself and look for a way to react, a way to contribute, in one's own way and with one's own abilities, in the attempt to change the situations of abuse that spread across the planet.

A In the work *Ai caduti di oggi*, that you dedicate to the occupational deaths, the dyscrasia between the news and reality appears evident. How can art transform all this?

G I do not think there is a problem of dyscrasia between news and reality, it is just that in the world of information the news overlap, since one tragedy is replaced by another the next day. But the pain of those who have been disabled or have lost someone remains, and accidents in the workplace continue because of the greed of a few. The work of art aspires to remain as a warning: a poetic and lasting alarm signal that invites people to become aware and to take a stand.

A *Molto visibile, troppo invisibile* suggests a very different narrative about immigrants from the one that the mass media do. What methods do you adopt to return an unapproved version of the story?

G *Molto visibile, troppo invisibile* [*Very visible, too invisible*] is the title of a video-installation, and of the exhibition built around it realized in Rome in at The Gallery Apart in 2019. As for the video, together with the philosopher Enrico Castelli Gattinara, we invited different people to talk about their experience. These people, in one way or another, have to do with migration, colonialism, hospitality, participation, exchange, empathy. I hope that the intertwining of the different conversations made with the editing will help understand that people move for countless reasons and that we all must have the same right regarding to this, especially because each person carries within himself a world from which we can learn so much. The installation with the sofas and the TV invites the audience of the exhibition to stop and take part in the discussion on these important issues. The other installations of the exhibition also deal with the theme of becoming aware of the issue of migration: among these, the texts written by a group of young immigrants that recently came to Italy, collected during a short workshop held in Rome at the CIES MaTeMù, in response to my request to express what is invisible, such as their dreams and desires for the future.

A What criteria did you adopt when editing the visual and sound register in *Volver atrás para ir adelante*?

G This video, made in Buenos Aires in early 2003, consists of a static camera shot of the entrance of a shopping center – in the past a railway station, in the basement of which was discovered a clandestine detention and torture center at the time of the dictatorship – which is located in the center of the city. In the video I decided to wind back the video, slowing down the speed, in order to transform the comings and goings of people into a sort of a dancing dream, in which passers-by retrace their steps. Above and below the images, like in television news, scroll on two distinct ticker tapes the data relating to the damage caused by the military dictatorship of 1976–1983 and those of the great economic crisis that starved the population of Argentina from 2001 to 2002 (and unfortunately again today). The sound is that of the normal chatter of people walking, which is slowly drowned out by the cries of protest coming from a rally passing behind the camera. *Volver atrás para ir adelante* denounces how the disastrous policies of the past continue to have repercussions on the history of a country

even after decades: for this reason, “All is always now”. This is something we can also see in Italy, where the so-called Years of lead and the strategy of tension have left room for indifference to political commitment, creating a huge vacuum of representation and participation in collective life, with the consequent cuts in public spending, for example education and health, which create more and more cultural and social inequalities in our country.

A How to find the right words to tell yourself?

G Personally, I'm not very interested in telling myself. This is why I create works that tell of the community. I think that the world is full of things to learn, that it is full of injustices to be healed, of rights to be respected: I prefer to try to tell how all is connected, I prefer to invite to reflect on how equality and respect are the first necessary step for a better world for all.

A How do the development of personal creativity and doing together relate to each other?

G I think that for personal growth it is essential to always listen to what we do not know. This is what I tried to visualize with *Sharing gazes* (2013) – work carried out with a group of students from the Halle School of Fine Arts in Addis Abeba – by adding the point of view of others to our own, reality is enriched with possibilities, thus increasing our individual ability to know reality.

A In the practice of your participatory art workshops are a pivotal moment. What other methods do you use to stimulate the creative decentralization and the active participation of the audience?

G It happened in the past to directly involve people on the streets, as in Manciano for *Cartoline personali [Personal postcards]* (2003) or with sheets with a pre-printed text in German or Czech for *To feel at home* (2002), work carried out between Germany and the Czech Republic. More recently, I have also used the online communication tools, that have been very useful in involving an audience that is far from the place of the exhibition and to which they will probably never have access due to the physical distance, but to which they can still participate by sending their own contribution. An example is the exhibition *Send me a post card. A site, aside, inside, in between, away* made for the CNA, Centre Nationale de l'Audiovisuel du Luxembourg in 2013: through local newspapers and social media we asked the public to send postcards from abroad with images that echoed the photos I took in Luxembourg. The intention was to modify the exhibition by increasing from

month to month the dialogue between the different images, so to have a symbolic representation of the country itself that has developed thanks to the contribution of immigrant workers. The other example is *Mare Magnum Nostrum* (2013-2021) - which, thanks to the support of the Italian Council, it became part of the collection of the National Museum of Ravenna - for which I designed an environmental installation that represents the entire Mediterranean basin at 360 degrees on walls and floor: the emerged lands in white, without borders, and the sea in blue. On the coasts are posted snapshots of the various places printed in 10 × 15 format, which were collected through a dedicated website on which, those who wanted to participate, uploaded their photos directly.

The audience that comes to see the work can change the setting every time, choosing a photo of the same location rather than another and thus leaving an always different vision of the work. I find this double participation interesting: I hope that the direct intervention on the images on display can make us reflect on how many points of view, always dynamic and different, make up this shared sea of ours in which thousands of people continue to die every year, and how it is up to each one of us to take into account and take charge of the points of view of others.

A Do you think it possible to make an exhibition tailored to each spectator, entrusting those on the other side (the audience) tasks so closely connected with a precise professional figure?

G Duchamp's famous quote *Le tableau est autant fait par le regardeur que par l'artiste*, says that the work is made both by the artist and by those who look at it, not only because the public is a necessary part in the reception of any cultural work, but because it is an active part of it. The work is a poetic instrument destined to renew the vision of things even after centuries. It is up to the beholder to be available to this freedom, to be open to question their codes through an emotional and imaginative reading of what they see, read or listen to, to open their mind to a greater understanding of life.

WORKSHOP WITH GEA CASOLARO

● Participants to the workshop: Angela Capotorto, Vanessa Chimenti, Desirè D'Angelo, Beatrice D'Aurelio, Natalija Dimitrijević, Arianna Ladogana, Davide Marrone, Grazia Palumbo, Alessandra Rivelli Antezza, Sofia Salzo, Margherita Settanni and Donato Trovato

The ex Fibronit plant is a place that we have already

learned to look at with the eyes of the men who worked there, with those of the people who lost their lives, with the eyes of their relatives. The testimonies that tell how asbestos was processed without any protection, exposing the people to maximum danger, are appalling. The problem is now to reflect on what can be done after many years since the closure of the plant in Bari and of the others in Italy. In fact, on the restored area of the ex Fibronit, Il Parco della Rinascita [The Park of Rebirth] is about to be built after years of struggles and mobilizations of the City Committee. Gea Casolaro has worked with young artists and students to attract their interest to the issue, to urge their participation and not to extinguish their desire to fight for change.

An inspection in the area of the ex plant of asbestos-cement products, in via Caldarola in Bari, called the beginning of the workshop. The area, now reclaimed, looks like an uncultivated land in which the remains of the Fibronit plant were buried in 1985, well before law 257 of 1992 which, in Italy, banned all products realised with asbestos, prohibiting extraction, import and marketing. ***On windy days, I begged my children not to leave the house and not to look out on the balconies covered as if by snow, it was asbestos fibers flying in the air.*** Nicola Brescia, President of the Fibronit City Committee, is reporting his experience at the time when the factory was still operating, a story well known to those who live in the buildings overlooking the area. It takes only a fiber of asbestos, 1,300 times thinner than a hair, to threaten the lungs, petrifying them even after many years. The survivors, among those children who played with those mortal scraps, are engaged today in a battle that can be won thanks to the knowledge of the danger that is far from being overcome. Asbestos is still present everywhere: in water boxes, pipes, roofs and in 4% of Italian school buildings. It is estimated that there are still 30,000 tons on the territory and the number of victims affected each year by mesothelioma to the lungs is still about two thousand. Young people know little or nothing about it, so Il Parco della Rinascita that will rise on the 13 hectares of the ex Fibronit in Bari, must have the purpose to raise awareness and to keep up the struggle.

It was raining and a strong wind was blowing on Monday morning, but many arrived at the appointment. Giuseppe Galasso, the councillor for Public Works, provided some anticipations on the connections that the park will carry out between the neighboring districts, also fulfilling other functions including: remembering the victims, monitoring the health conditions of workers in their respective environments, raising awareness of climate change and

respect for the environment, acting as a gathering point thanks to a community center and a library. The councillor for Culture Ines Pierucci appreciated the challenge of Gea Casolaro: to give back to the young participants in the workshop the tools to address the topic in a way that is capable to touch deeply, winning over the indifference and the estrangement to the issue. After the inspection, the work continued in Spazio Murat: it was here that the young people were confronted with the text by Bertolt Brecht "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth" on which Gea had urged them to reflect starting from the reading of the passage found in a catalog by the artist Hans Haacke. The awareness of the many points of view necessary to bring out a shared truth and the cunning in communicating it in the right form to be accepted and disseminated, are the basic conditions posed by Gea through Brecht's words in starting the work. Subsequently, the young artists expressed themselves on their motivations and expectations, starting from a different idea of art that is poetry, but also politics, always. Gea showed the works of some artists, among the most effective in transforming reality thanks to a different look at the world: Sophie Calle, Hans Haacke, William Kentridge, Thomas Demand, Cristian Boltanski. Gea Casolaro focused on the latter, showing the permanent installation he made in the Museum for the Memory of Ustica in Bologna, around the remains of the DC9 shot down in flight on June 27, 1980.

The main danger of asbestos is its invisibility and volatility, but precisely for this reason it can become the symbol of what, being invisible, must be made visible. Angela is the first one to share an idea proposing to involve the people living in the neighborhood by asking them to take photos of the current site from the balconies overlooking the ex Fibronit as a visual memory of a shared problem. Beatrice suggests building a transparent structure to show the underlying stratification of the ground up to the depth of eight meters bringing back to visibility what was buried, but which today is reclaiming life. Donato talks about putting plant seeds in a spiral or wave sculpture as a symbol of energy, life and rebirth. Desiré proposes to build a wooden house on one of the trees in the park, thus making it possible to look from above on the whole area, a way to call the people to a state of continuous alert: ***The balconies that were closed when the factory worked are now open. The idea of the house is this: an open balcony.*** Sofia thinks of eco-friendly shelters for reflection built in the shape of green lungs. Grazia would like to create a sound journey with the testimonies of families affected by asbes-

tos that gives concreteness to pain, an echo from the past that remains as well as the danger of the fiber of asbestos that in Italy and in the world is not yet extinct and on which we must continue to watch. Arianna describes her idea for an installation consisting of stones with the words chosen by the people of the neighborhood engraved on them. Margherita plans a journey into memory through a sand path with symbolic footprints as a representation of the steps of the past joining ours today, walking together towards the future.

Laura Rubino, the winning architect of the call for the preliminary plan of the Parco della Rinascita, presenting some tables of her project, after having illustrated the different areas planned, including the one with the purpose to remember the Councillor Maria Maugeri, pioneer in the fight against asbestos, welcomed with enthusiasm the proposals of the young artists, showing the different stations, indoors and outdoors, designated for the installation of works of art and the realization of site specific artworks, underlining the great request for art received by the associations that, over the years, have fought, alongside the Fibronit City Committee, for the reclamation of the area and its redevelopment.

Nicola, a passer-by who looks out into Spazio Murat during the workshop, after informing himself on the project the artists are working on, told them about when, in the '50s, two friends of his, who lived in the surroundings of the Fibronit, about to embark for America, were rejected because they had asbestos in their lungs. **Back in my time** – he adds – **we used to fight together for our ideals, but people no longer do that. I say this to you, young people: you have to believe in the cause and fight with curiosity.** – and thus giving to Arianna the first two words for her project for the future park, which consists of a series of stones with the words of the people involved in the story of the Fibronit carved on them: Ideals and Revolution. The correct use of words was a recurring theme during the five days of the workshop. Many of the bad policies go through their distorted or superficial use. Gea invites the participants to summarize the keywords that emerged during the work: visible-invisible, volatile, Lie-truth, danger, memory, struggle, rebirth, prevention, responsibility, awareness, courage, naivety, cunning, sacrifice, pain, death-life, harmony, involvement, poetry, art, construction, necessity, community, air, breath, people, nature, work, change, roots, depth, fear, knowledge, game, balcony, home, school, education, union, omertà, misunderstanding, future, earth, speculation, politics, management, survival, color, bond, profit, hope. Each word was written on a sheet of paper, and all

sheets were attached to the wall. It was the most playful moment of the workshop, the one in which the words are grouped by cross-references, analogies and cause and effect, thus generating conceptual chains to inspire future arguments. There was much discussion on the word *politics*. Gea stresses the importance of reclaiming the political dimension of life, **politics is a beautiful word: it represents our living and building together.** And then she asks: **What do we do with the traces of the past? How do we build something new, alive, starting from pain? Pain must become a brick with which to build something else. The artist is the person who transforms pain, collects negative facts, to transform them and return them into poetry.**

The projects and the proposals developed during the workshop are on display in a special section of the exhibition, bearing witness to the poetic and political manner with which the danger of asbestos has been addressed, turning a place of death into a space of life, because: **All artforms** – as told by Bertolt Brecht – **are in the service of the greatest of all arts: the art of living.**

● Text by Anna D'Elia