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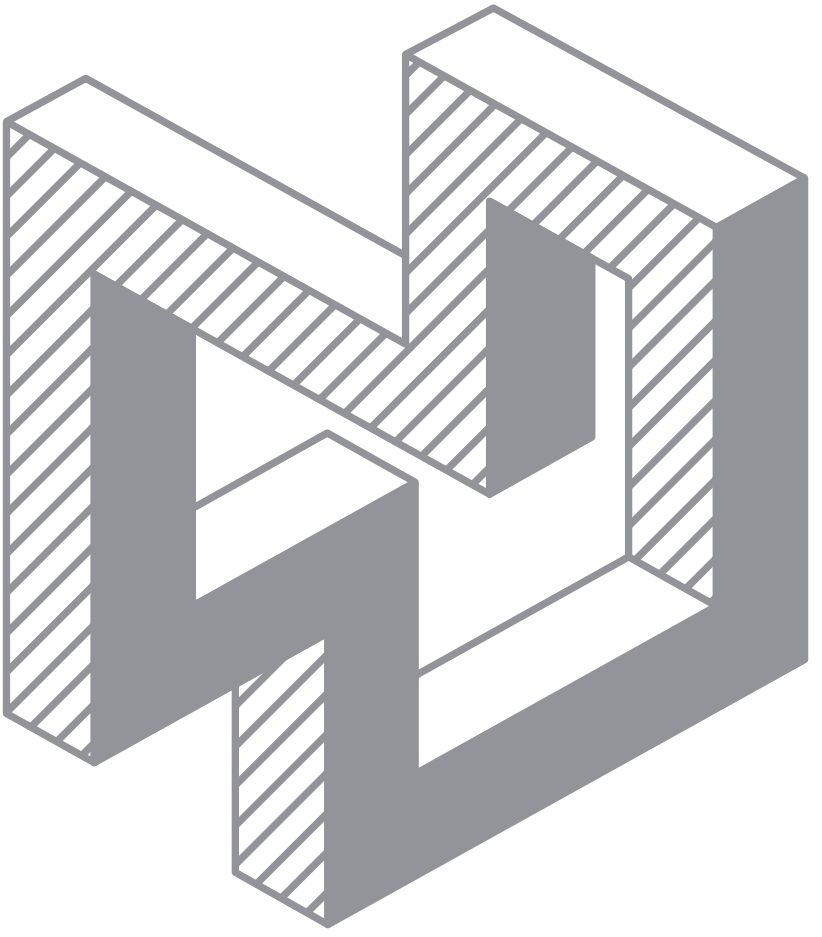
Palinsesti



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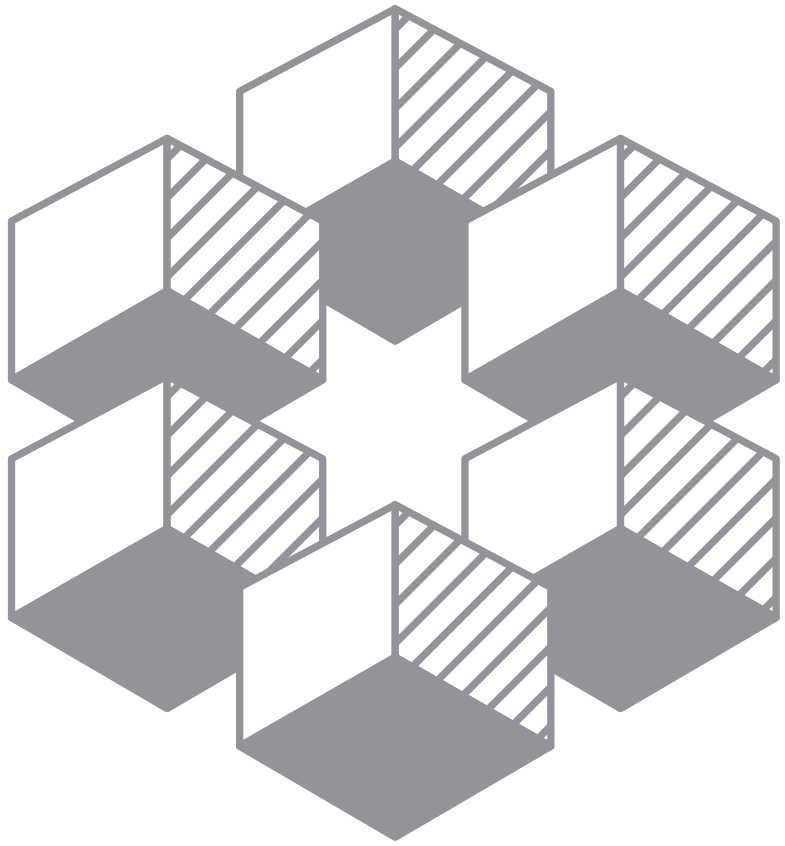
Contemporary Art
Exhibition

2015



Palinsesti

15

Palinsesti

15th November – 20th December 2015
San Vito al Tagliamento (PN)

Project by Giorgia Gastaldon

Città che si vedono
Cities in sight
curated by Giorgia Gastaldon
Palazzo Altan

A measurement measures measuring means
Stefan Doepner
curated by Davide Bevilacqua
Castello

Punto Fermo: Alessandra Lazzaris
curated by Giorgia Gastaldon
Essiccatoio Bozzoli

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Municipal Department of Arts and Culture

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Palinsesti 2015 has reached its tenth edition, but the tradition for San Vito al Tagliamento to celebrate contemporary art has now come to its twenty-fourth confirmation this year, taking into account the previous exposition entitled *Hic et Nunc*, from which *Palinsesti* ensued. Our city is proud to register these figures, as they show how much effort we have put in artistic research and promotion. In these years, San Vito has established as a place where contemporary artists gather in order to create the grounds for tomorrow's art history. As a matter of fact, the municipality of San Vito promotes contemporary art not just for its own sake, but also because we aim at contributing to future history. Every art movement has been defined as contemporary at a certain time, before making history. Through the years, *Palinsesti*'s initiatives have been brought on keeping this idea in mind, with particular reference to *Premio In Sesto* (which has reached the relevant number of seven editions opening up to international artists from the Euroregion Alpe-Adria), and to the permanent display of the collection *Punto Fermo*. The cultural identity of San Vito al Tagliamento is characterized by a wide historical stratification. *Palinsesti* contributes to this process by adding new layers to the ancient heritage; it provides renewed meaning and value to our history, which will represent the new "historical" treasure for San Vito, a city that looks ahead towards the future.

The Mayor
Antonio Di Bisceglie

Introducing Palinsesti 2015

by Giorgia Gastaldon

This year, the contemporary art exhibition *Palinsesti* reaches its tenth edition. The program includes four exhibitions that will reaffirm and at the same time innovate its very identity, which has been built during the previous editions. The festival will also keep on developing the theme of continuity, experimentation and consolidation of the researches that has been brought on since the beginning. On one side, the exhibits portrayed "variational procedures", trying to define some sort of poetic, relational, planning necessity, rather than a specific theme, using contemporary visual arts. On the other side, *Palinsesti* aimed at extending the artistic heritage of San Vito al Tagliamento, thanks to the award *Premio In Sesto* and the creation of the collection *Punto Fermo*.

Experimentation, research and inquiry are the guidelines marking out two specific projects in this edition: the collective exhibition *Città che si vedono* (*Cities in sight*) at Palazzo Altan, and the solo show of Stefan Doepner *A measurement measures measuring means* at the Castle.

The exhibition *Città che si vedono* (*Cities in sight*) commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of Italo Calvino's departure, as it is inspired by the reading of his novel *Le Città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*) (1972). As Calvino described 55 non-existent cities to deal with themes contemporary to his century, the five participating artists "sharpen" their means of interpreting in order to inquire issues more relevant for modern human beings: the weakness of our planet, the difficulties of living in modern metropolis, the interaction between humankind and progress, the pollution issue, eco-friendly solutions and so on. Other narrative sparks for this exhibition are the themes of memory, desire, elements characterizing urban spaces, together with the activities of traveling and discovering.

The solo exhibition of Stefan Doepner *A measurement measures measuring means* relates to similar topics, as it digs into the connection between humankind and technology, i.e. progress in general, underlining how they are often conflicting.

We use, create and imagine means to interact with what surrounds us in order to experience the world. Inevitably, those instruments end up interfering with the way their inventors and users perceive and experience reality. Therefore, the roles of "maker" and what has been "made" reverse, together with the principles of knowledge and knowable. Doepner's cybernetic installations incite the viewer to understand this phenomenon.

The seventh edition of *Premio In Sesto* concludes the overview of the exposition. The award has preserved its original aim, which is making contemporary art interact with the historic background in San Vito al Tagliamento; however, the award introduces also some elements for innovation, as it has opened up to the international scene of the Euroregion Alpe-Adria.

Lastly, the collection *Punto Fermo*, which has been permanently exposed at Essicatoio Bozzoli since 2014, will confirm the centrality of its importance. The same location hosts a solo exhibition of Alessandra Lazzaris, whose artwork *Sectioned* (2011) is part of the *Punto Fermo* collection and is the first event of the upcoming series of musings on the research and artworks of the other artists present in the collection.

Cities in sight

Città che si vedono

by Giorgia Gastaldon

As Italo Calvino himself explained in his novel *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*) (Turin, 1972) «cities are unidentified. They are all figments of my imagination; I have given to each of them the name of a woman; the book is made of short chapters, which should give food for thought on every city or on cities in general». We aimed to instill the same spirit in a new context, by conveying Calvino's considerations on "every city" or "cities in general" from a written text to different means of representation, being maybe more visual and three-dimensional for sure: an exhibition. We opted for a group exhibition, since the variety of Calvino's narration would be preserved more suitably by giving multiple points of view: «the book came by little by little, with long pauses between each story, as if I were putting on paper some poems, following my inspiration», «It became a sort of diary going through my state of mind and thoughts; everything ended up becoming a city: the books I read, the art exhibitions I went to, the discussions with my friends».

The novel *Le Città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*) disagrees – or rather complies - with its title, as it is one of the most "visual" books written by the author. As Giorgio Bertone pointed out, the novel is considered as one of the books of the Twentieth century's Italian literature that are affecting more the so called "specialized" readers, like architects, urban planners and visual artists. «Formal artists face a real challenge», «because Calvino's writing seems to concentrate on the visual aspect, as it revolves around shaping, spatiality, detachment, but it involves also a conceptual side, philosophical in a way, as it arises many questions, which cannot be superficially skipped while searching for "graphic" or "plastic" cues». Bearing this lesson in mind, we decided to organize an exhibition dealing with the theme proposed by the author, meaning urban centers, without reducing the artworks displayed to simple illustrations. We aimed at revealing what goes beyond an artwork: the message, the answer provided by the artists on how human beings share the same environment, or on how some innovations will lead to destroy our planet and ourselves, while others try to save us. Therefore, we focused more on the content of the artworks, rather than their appearance. In the same way, Calvino's novel goes beyond the description of the cities he invented, by raising a great number of questions that are still relevant today: «The book in which I believe to have expressed myself more is *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*), because I assembled all my thoughts, my experiences, my conjectures and related them to one symbol».

With particular reference to this novel Calvino's writing is generally compared to a mechanism that enhances an endless stream of images. The description of the cities in the novel required an extraordinary visual intent: since they are fictional - invisible indeed - they need to be described as vividly as possible in order to appear to the reader's view, to his or her imagination. As Marco Belpoliti highlighted, «composition is imagination. Writing means to fill the blind spot, the hole in the net, the empty cell, the white paper». For Paolo Milano, Calvino's cities «are visions! The title says it all: they are "invisible" cities, as they are not perceivable by senses, but they are visible to memory or dreams. Certain signs help us to interpret them, or maybe looking at them from the bottom or from the sky, or imagining the future», «Calvino's description of Marco Polo depicts the unseen: it traces a map of the cities of our soul».

Calvino's novel consists of a long, structured and complex inquiry on many issues relevant in the Seventies, as they are today. First of all, we already mentioned that the book opens a «discussion on modern cities», «it is not just the metropolis of "*big numbers*"», «the depiction of an archaic city will make sense only as far as it has been deceived and written keeping in mind and in sight modern cities. What are cities to us? I believe, I have written a sort of last love poem to cities, since living in them has become so difficult.

Maybe we are getting closer to a general crisis in urban life, so *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*) are a dream arousing from the core of our unlivable cities. Today, the destruction of natural environment has the same relevance than the fragility of technological systems», «the crisis of urban untamed development is the other side of the crisis affecting natural environment».

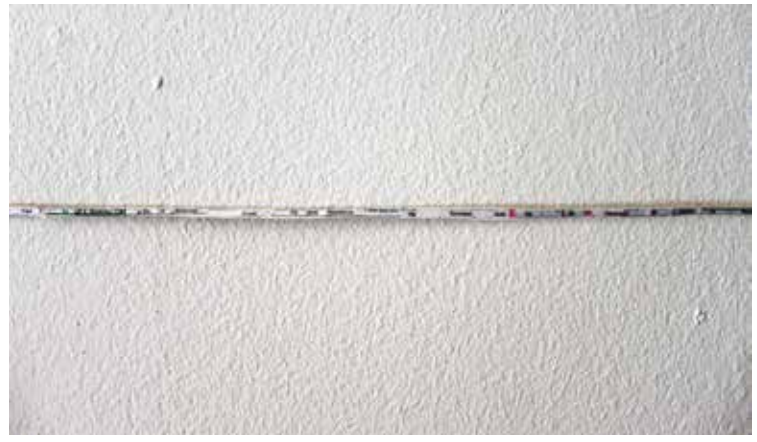
Calvino's novel is not just praising the positive sides of modern urban life, as it also provides a shifting point of view, sometimes as if he were at times in love, or disapproving, even skeptical. As a matter of fact, the whole narration begins when one of the two protagonists, the Tatarian emperor Kublai Kan, notices how his empire is falling apart, after all the energies and efforts he put into conquering it. «In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered, and the melancholy and relief of knowing we shall soon give up any thought of knowing and understanding them. There is a sense of emptiness that comes over us at evening», « It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin».

Just like Calvino, the five artists participating in the exhibition avoid glorifying (or simply describing) the subject "city", as they choose to have a questioning and enquiring attitude towards it. Their research aims at defining human role and meaning by studying the container humankind has built to live in. As Calvino pointed out, «What my Marco Polo really cares about is to find the hidden reasons that justify why humankind decided to live in a city, beyond any crisis. Cities contain many things: memories, wishes, signs of a language; every book on historic economy states that cities are trade areas, although the trade does not involve goods only, but also words, desires, memories». Therefore, just like Marco Polo, the five artists examine cities in order to reveal their hidden secrets.

For instance, the artworks by Irene Coppola enquire the visual and existential identity of the cities we are living in. The oeuvre *Milano in linea* (*Milan on a line*) (2011) – composed by a long ribbon to which some paper streets, cut out from a map of Milan, have been glued – shows how the shape of a town is due to the story of its development, which results in its current appearance. Once they are ripped out of their position on a map with a precise shape, street names become names without an identity, as they are deprived of their geographical context: they could belong to any other Italian city.

Moreover, the artwork *Eclissi* (*Eclipse*) (2014) enquires the interaction between city and nature: though the latter seems to be almost smothered by urbanization, it consolidates a never-ending dialogue with the city. The artist also analyzed the requalification works in the Isola district, in Milan, so that the viewer will reflect on how every action perpetrated by humankind on urban environment affects the surrounding natural environment as well. As for the district we are taking into consideration, the building of huge palaces has modified fatally the aesthetics of Milan, together with its natural elements: light, air currents, electromagnetic fields and so on.

Carlo Alberto Andreasi develops the same themes in his photographic shootings, that is to say the connection between man and nature or city and nature. The series *Costellazioni* (*Constellations*) depicts urban centers from the outside, meaning a peripheral location where nature is still in control of the environment. He wants to represent the point of view of a man living in touch with nature while observing those who live in urban conglomerates. By distancing himself from the city, the artist is able to observe, also to criticize it. He relocates in the suburbs at night, far from illuminated, monitored places, so that the city will lose its identity and all its details, thus becoming a shadow (or a light) of what it is by day. Their portrayal is depleted, as it is reduced only to electric lights: as suggested by the title, all those luminous spots are like stellar constellations on a black sky.



Irene Coppola
Milano in linea (*Milan on a line*), 2011
collage on canvas paper, 3000 cm

Andreasi's city looks like the fourth city described by Calvino in "cities and the sky": «Summoned to lay down the rules for the foundation of Perinthia, the astronomers established the place and the day according to the position of the stars». «Perinthia – they guaranteed – would reflect the harmony of the firmament». «Perinthia's astronomers are faced with a difficult choice. Either they must admit that all their calculations are wrong and their figures are unable to describe the heavens, or else they must reveal that the order of the gods is reflected exactly in the city of monsters».

Custodia (*Custody*) (2015) is an installation combining photography and sound created by Alessandro Ruzzier, in which the city seems to be a model of Fedora: «A peek in each sphere reveals that there is a light blue city inside, which is the model for another Fedora. These are the shapes the city could have evolved into, if it were different for some reasons to what it is today». While he wanders about the city of San Vito al Tagliamento on the night of 29 September 2015, Alessandro Ruzzier has taken a series of photos portraying this urban context at that given moment. Like Marco Polo, the artist explored San Vito by night in order to narrate it to those who did not have the chance to experience it at that time: every citizen missing from that street on that night with the artist. The city had already changed after his transit; if the artist took the same pictures today, it would give a different result from that night, as the light effects, the vegetation, the combination of open and closed windows, the noises that have been recorded, and so on, are unique. Therefore, the work of Alessandro Ruzzier collects – keeps in custody– the pictures he has captured against the will of the city during that night, leaving the latter free to change as it wished afterwards, following the combined actions of humankind and nature.

Besides the already discussed topic of urban centers, Italo Calvino's novel *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*) revolves around the themes of traveling and discovering, carried through the character of Marco Polo, who is by far the most famous explorer in western literature.

The exhibition hosts the project *Journey into Fragility* (2012-2014) by Maria Rebecca Ballestra, in which she portrays her journey all over the world made in twelve steps, while the last one brought her back to Venice, thus inverting the travel of Marco Polo. The journey lasted two years, during which the artist visited the most relevant locations on the debate of the environmental issues that have been damaging our planet for decades. The whole project aims at deeply analyzing the limits of the anthropocentric model running our modern society. The reading of the twelve founding principles from the act of ecosophy *Carta per la Terra e per l'Uomo* (*Charter for the Earth and for Mankind*) (written in 2011 by the poet Massimo Morasso and signed by more than 100 intellectuals all over the world) inspired her research.

Carlo Alberto Andreasi
Dieci variazioni al buio (*Ten variations in the dark*), 2015
analog print on salted paper of negative 120, 10x12 cm

Alessandro Ruzzier
Custodia, 29 settembre 2015, 02:41 (*Custody, 29th September 2015, 02:41*), 2015
photograph, inkjet print on Fine Art paper, 15,5x23,9 cm

Travelling and exploring are as well key themes for the artistic research of Irene Fenara. She aims at discovering not existing, imaginary lands, which are actually microcosms inside the buildings in which we live every day. As a matter of fact, artworks like *Atlanti* (*Atlases*) (2013) and *Vedute* (*Views*) (2013) translate imperfections on walls – moisture spots, craquelures, missing plaster- into imaginary geographic maps. The artworks seem to reproduce the game in which bored kids have fun reading into the spots on walls and inventing new worlds: magic islands, scary faces, exotic animals, and so on. However, her artworks depict how the environment in which we live is made of many facets: not just their physical aspect with defined, measurable geographical characteristics (meters in height, leagues in width), but also how each of us read and relate it in the light of our personal experiences. The artistic books made by Irene Fenara remind us, inevitably, «the atlas of Gran Kan» «containing also the promised lands, those appearing only in thoughts, not yet discovered or conquered».

Maria Rebecca Ballestra
The Green City #1, 2012
print on rikbond, plexiglas,
70x100 cm

Irene Fenara
Vedute (*Views*), 2013
video, 3'07"

[1] I. Calvino, *Italo Calvino on Invisible Cities*, p. V.
[2] I. Calvino, *ivi*, pp. V-VI.
[3] G. Bertone, *Quarant'anni dopo. Attualità e inattualità delle città invisibili*, p. 6.
[4] I. Calvino, *Esatezza*, in I. Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il nuovo millennio*, p. 72.
[5] M. Belpoliti, *L'occhio di Calvino*, p. 73.
[6] Alter, in P. Milano, *Commento a due voci sulle città di Calvino*, p. 119.
[7] I. Calvino, *Italo Calvino on Invisible Cities*, p. IX.
[8] Kublai Klan, in I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 5.
[9] I. Calvino, *Italo Calvino on Invisible Cities*, p. X.
[10] I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, pp. 140-141.
[11] I. Calvino, *ivi*, p. 31.
[12] I. Calvino, *ivi*, p. 159.

Carlo Alberto Andreasi

In his oeuvre *Costellazioni* (*Constellations*), the artist Carlo Alberto Andreasi assembled a group of pictures he has taken subverting the standard rules for nighttime photography. He portrayed distant city lights shooting pictures with a short time exposure; they seem to emerge from the surrounding darkness, just like the luminescence of astral bodies. The artist chooses the fleeting vision of a city rather than its clarifying, detailed portrait; those glimpses of city seem to have been captured while in motion from a distance. Therefore, they undergo a process of subtraction, almost as they reached the sidereal dimension. The pictures portraying shapes and profiles of spontaneous vegetation recall the enveloping shade of the artwork *Costellazioni* (*Constellations*). The artist used an analogue process to develop the images and then he impressed them on calotype paper in order to maintain the inverted colour tone of the negatives. Vegetal subjects root and multiply silently among the urban net, testifying the interest of the artist towards what grows and develops in forgotten shadowy places, where order and control have ceased to exist.

Though united by the wrapping black atmosphere, the two photographic series belong to different poles: the first one represents the city as a symbol of human civilization, organized on different structures and levels, where citizens lose their identity to become one of many. The other collection shows "anarchic" plants and spontaneous herbs, rooting and growing in forgotten places, whether because they were abandoned by their inhabitants, or because they eluded the invading human supervision. Shrubs and underbrushes are visible temporarily when framed by the lens of the camera: they will emerge from the shadows in order to prove their existence and their right to live.

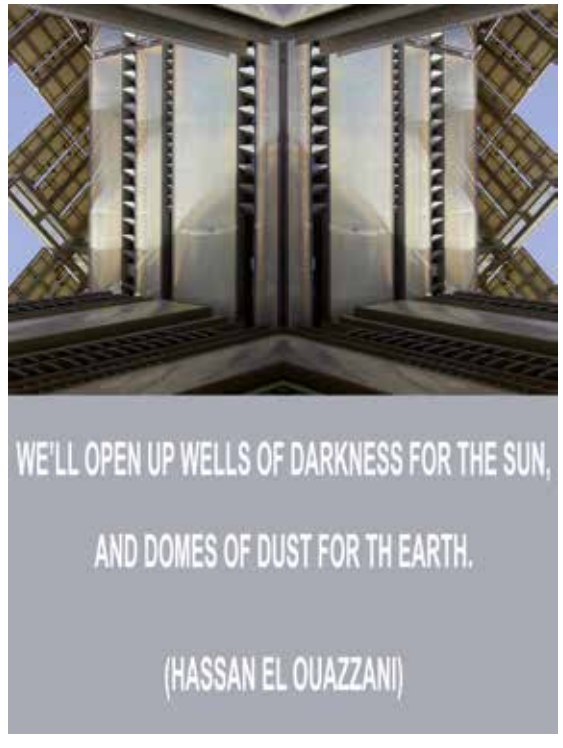
The juxtaposed showing of the two series suggests new meanings, opening a dialogue between the opposites, such as near and far, visible and invisible, research and mistake. At the same time, the photographer decided to depict the city from a shadowy, hidden position, which reminds us of a darkroom, the place where latent images are developed and become visible. [IB]

Carlo Alberto Andreasi *Costellazioni* (*Constellations*), 2010-2015
digital print on silver salts colour paper, 30x40 cm

Maria Rebecca Ballestra

During the last years, Maria Rebecca Ballestra has devoted her artistic research to analyzing the connection between man and nature, pointing out how human atrocious behavior has caused permanent damages to the Earth in the past centuries. Her project *Journey into Fragility* started in 2011, taking the cue from the twelve principles on the *Carta per la Terra e per l'Uomo* (*Charter for the Earth and Mankind*), which has been written by the poet Massimo Morasso in July 2001. Even though the author is well aware poetry goes often unheard, he tried to give voice to the desperate call Earth is screaming silently at us. Maria Rebecca Ballestra decided to put all her efforts (both as a human being and as an artist) delivering its message, thus beginning her journey in twelve steps. The artist left Africa in 2012, then she traveled through Europe, Asia, Middle East, South America; lastly, she came back to Venice, where she created a permanent installation on Certosa's island. The artwork is composed by twelve metal spherical caps, which have been carved each with the name of a city included in her project – they were all connected to a matter of survival for our planet- and the distance (expressed with kilometers) dividing that place from Venice, where everything has begun, like a snake biting his tale. We would like to address her the same words spoken by the Great Khan to Marco Polo: «I don't know when you had time to visit all the lands you are describing to me», «It seems to me like you never left this garden» (I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 101). Maria Rebecca Ballestra considers traveling as a way to discover, but also to experience something different: «I need to start from a city that will be implicit in my mind in order to discover the qualities of the others. To me, it is Venice» (ivi, p. 101).

The exhibition hosts two artworks, *The Green City* (2012) and *Future Nature Culture* (2015), which are part of her project *Journey into Fragility*. The first one was inspired by the city of Masdar the artist visited in 2012. The city has been built few kilometers outside Abu Dhabi and it is the first urban center to be considered zero impact, since it does not produce waste or carbon emissions. In the same way, the artwork *Future Nature Culture* shows a series of pioneering projects defining an alternative model of rural life in order to understand the rules of permaculture, although she inserts them in quite a fantastic, imaginary context. [GG]



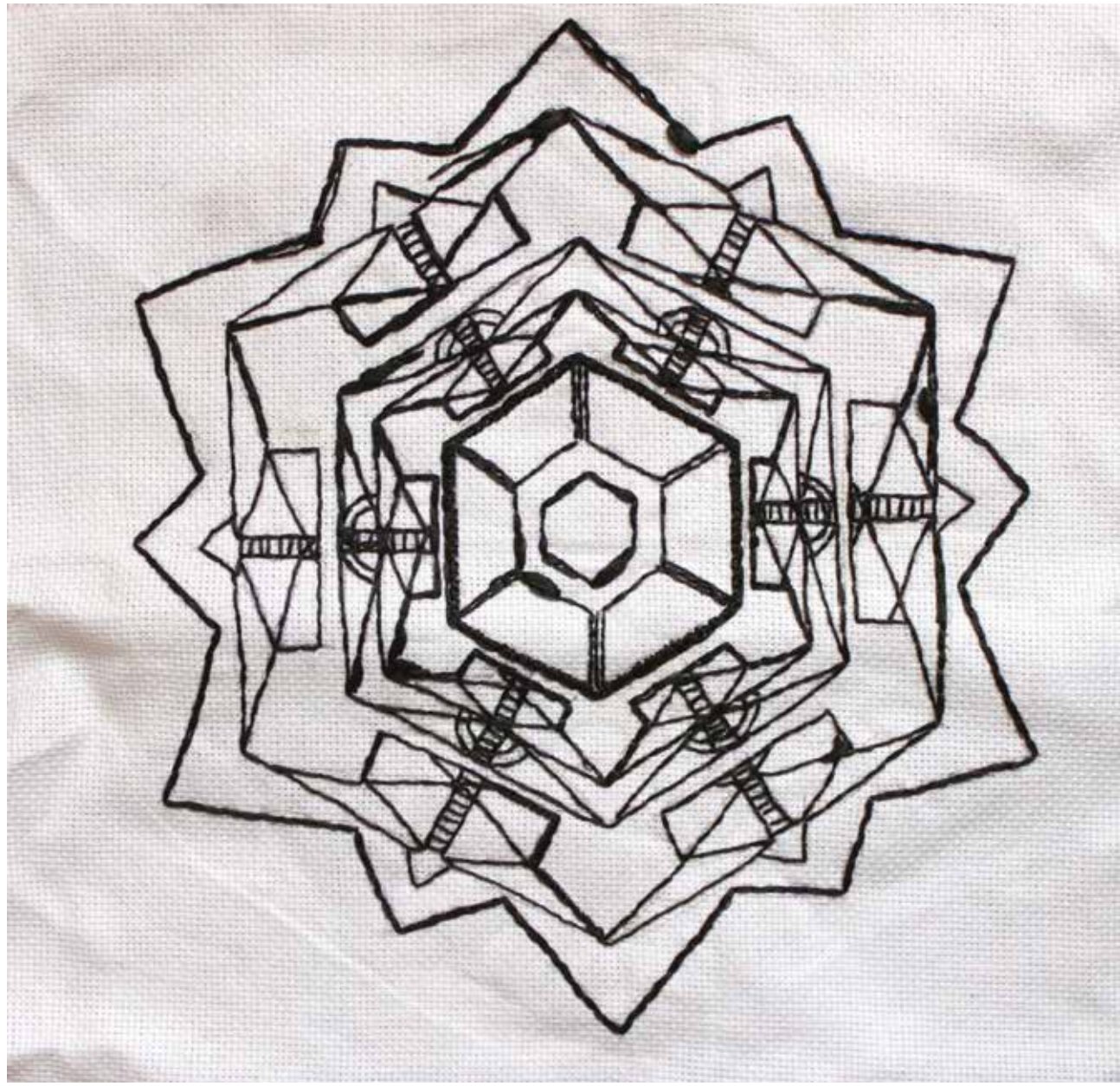
Maria Rebecca Ballestra
The Green City #4, 2012
print on rikbond, plexiglass,
screen print on mirror, 120x40 cm

Irene Coppola

A relevant part of Irene Coppola's artistic research focuses on the inquiry of urban spaces and on their representation on geographic maps. Her artworks show her interest for places in which human presence has left a trace, altering inevitably the space where they have lived.

For instance, her artwork *Are(e) alla n* (*Area(s) to the power of n*) (2011) studies maps, more specifically how humankind devised new techniques to convert the chaos of inhabited cities into neat graphic signs, organizing them according to clear rules and norms. Although cartography seems to be quite a strict branch of knowledge due to its wide regulation, everyone (artists in particular) is able to skip the rules, thus having freedom of action to perform on it their fantasy and imagination, as Italo Calvino did in order to write his novel *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*). As a matter of fact, the twelve hand-sewn canvas exposed are the result of a deepening research on projects and maps of ideal Renaissance cities. The artist employs such historic material to create a new imagery. Thanks to her wide imagination, she transforms maps of non-existing cities – invisible – into visible "tapestry". «The catalog of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to born» (I. Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 136).

The compound work of art entitled *Eclissi* (*Eclipse*) (2014) is a project analyzing the Isola district in Milan, which has been recently reevaluated thanks to a great renovation work. The research is based on the satellite maps of the district from 2001 to 2011. The four drawings on the wall are graphic realizations of the different chronological phases that marked the reconstruction of the district. In addition, the light box shows how the maps have been superimposed creating a layered image, in order to reveal the development of urban fabric through the years. [GG]



Irene Coppola
Are(e) alla n (*Area(s) to the power of n*), 2012,
detail
cotton on sewing canvas, 150x208 cm

Irene Fenara

The artist Irene Fenara focuses her work on the analysis of space and its conceptual implications, using various expressive media, especially videos and photography.

Physical space is delimited by walls, and experienced and observed obsessively day by day. This consideration stimulates the artist to evoke imaginary lands following one another through the cracks and the imperfections of the surfaces. The result is the artwork *Atlanti* (*Atlas*), hosted inside the former Plaster casts Gallery of Collegio Venturoli in Bologna. The artist has created a series of books composed by pictures portraying the walls of her studio, where she traced boundaries and water systems, high grounds and vast oceans with pastel colors, as if they were emerging from the walls recreating an imaginary geopolitical area. The craquelures on the plaster mark the boundaries of the land, while the moisture spots suggest sea expanses. These maps are folded in order to recall a true atlas, on which the viewer may find their way through a fantastic space. Fenara collected old guidebooks of Italy, in which she inserted her immaterial maps to align them with the maps of several regions. By combining the two maps, the artist suggests a comparison between the topography of real places and the geography she has invented. She outlines a new world, which is not real and tangible, but rather suggestive, since it emerges from the perimeter defined by cracks and materials. The artist aims to extend the boundaries and travel towards unexplored lands thanks to transparent maps lying on printed pages, rather than reinventing real geography.

The artwork *Vedute* (*Views*) allows the viewer to perceive the establishing of a distance between the observer and the space portrayed in the video. The wall is still the main subject of the artwork, as it shows the content of the video from a fixed point of view. While the images flow on the screen, noises of engines, announcements and indistinct chatter echo in the background, suggesting that we have been teleported to much higher altitudes: the wall becomes a landscape seen from above, as we look worryingly from the windows of a plane. [IB]

Irene Fenara
Atlanti (*Atlas*), 2013
artist book, 10,5x15,5 cm

Alessandro Ruzzier

«The man who walks slowly through wild lands will just need to desire a city». It is the opening and closing line of the tale on the city of Nemeria, written by Alessandro Ruzzier. His work approaches the narrative language of Calvino, the author of *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*), by analyzing his way of assembling and combining the structure of a text. The project began in 2009 and has been revised for this edition of *Palinsesti* exposition. The writer has already showed his desire of measuring up with Calvino's writing in the tale *Una città parallela* (*A parallel city*) (1997).

Falsehood is the key point of Nemeria. The tale is credible, although the city it describes - as well as the twin city developing symmetrically underground - does not appear in the 55 ones listed by Marco Polo with Kublai Kan. It recalls *underground* cities like Derinkuyu or Kaymakli in Anatolia. The writer proves the existence of the city with false, artificial evidences; however, they are so ingeniously assembled that Nemeria can be actually seen, at least from those who look, observe, listen, smell those evidences (videos, objects, organic materials). Ruzzier reintroduces Calvino's power of metalanguage and the "*art of Combination*" in order to remind us that truth is not as important as the power of words, through which invisible cities can be created (both existing and not existing ones).

Custodia (*Custody*) is the title of the *site specific* installation Ruzzier has created for San Vito al Tagliamento and its citizens. While the night slowly goes by, the artist directs his gaze to the sleeping city, thus becoming its guardian. During the night, the city is invisible to its citizens. They cannot see or live it, while they are busy with their daily routine or just sleeping. Therefore, Ruzzier builds a setting with images and sounds to recreate the invisible city and give it back to its citizens.

Almost as in a game for cross-references and eye gazes, the contrast between outside and inside might also work backwards. *Rear Window*, the majestic film directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1954, is a perfect example of it. In this case, too, the protagonist (James Stewart) is a photographer, just like Ruzzier, who spies through the window of his apartment the lives of people far away, thus becoming the *faber* of new invisible cities.

As Calvino himself said at the end of his novel *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible cities*), the true challenge in a countless list of possible worlds is to «seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space». [AG]

«Falsehood is never in words; it is in things»
Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*)

Alessandro Ruzzier
Nemeria, 2009-2015
video still

Stefan Doepner

A measurement measures measuring means

by Davide Bevilacqua

Humans imagine, create and use tools to interact with the surrounding world in order to experience it. These inventions will work more efficiently than bare hands, they will make us hear and see better, thus enhancing the perception of the environment around us. Therefore, tools become our filter, which mediate the interaction between human beings and the environment; the connection originating is both special and complex, on an intellectual, aesthetic and emotional level. To get a closer look at the mediation role of those tools, we should reconsider them as true "media", working as an interface between us and the rest of the world.

Stefan Doepner e Lars Vaupel
noiseBot, 2011
kinetic object with
electromagnetic material, sensors
and sound, variable dimensions

The Extensions of Man

In his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) Marshall McLuhan maintained that human beings overcome and extend the boundaries of their body through *media*, thus increasing gradually our capability of acting and perceiving. Carrying goods, people and information through the whole world, communication media increase the speed of connection with the furthest location and make the Earth become constantly smaller.

McLuhan conceives the term "media" in a wider sense than it is usually intended. Even written and spoken language, numbers, clothes as well electricity are media. Each of them characterizes deeply the way in which human beings organize their conscience, or how they approach physically the outside world: language and writing define our way of thinking and influence how we perceive the world, just as a certain clothing widens the range of situations and environments in which humankind would survive.

The device programs the user

However, as devices have the purpose of improving our physical performance and our intentions, we adapt consequently to their physical conformation and to their daily use.

McLuhan states that the externalization of our physical capabilities through the use of our media prosthesis causes atrophy and anesthesia, while Vilem Flusser, philosopher and media theorist, tackles this issue of power balancing from the point of view of the machines.

In his essay *Towards a philosophy of photography* (1983), Flusser analyzes the interaction between the photographer and the camera, in which the user exploits the device, from which is though simultaneously conditioned. The behaviour of the machine can be indeed described through a sort of abstract algorithm that the user cannot overcome. This program defines the limits of action of the human according to a inner intentionality of the device. The machine needs human beings as "activators" and "users" in order to fulfil its purpose of existence.

Franco Vaccari enquires further the autonomy of the device has towards the user through the concept of "technological unconscious": if every device originates from the mind of its creator as the solution to a problem, it will bear inside a trace of the unconscious of its inventor, meaning its drives and its vision of the world. Since it detaches from its maker, the part of unconscious thought will remain somehow "frozen" in the device and will reveal

itself only when the photographer (especially amateur ones, who are less familiar with the mean) will take a picture.

The device as a medium

The connection between man and technology revolves around two counterposed arguments on balance. On one side, extending the boundaries of human body and enhancing its functions induces faith in technological progress, while on the other side, exploiting users and programming their behavior suggests a different balance in this power structure between man and machine.

It is a short step from "media" to "devices". All artifacts and objects surrounding us may be considered an extension of our capabilities, as they take on our actions and express our intentions. They influence and program our life based on our "inner necessities". Through their use, humankind puts into being the thoughts of those who invented such device, thus causing a space-time lag, which makes creation, production and use of the technological dispositifs coincide.

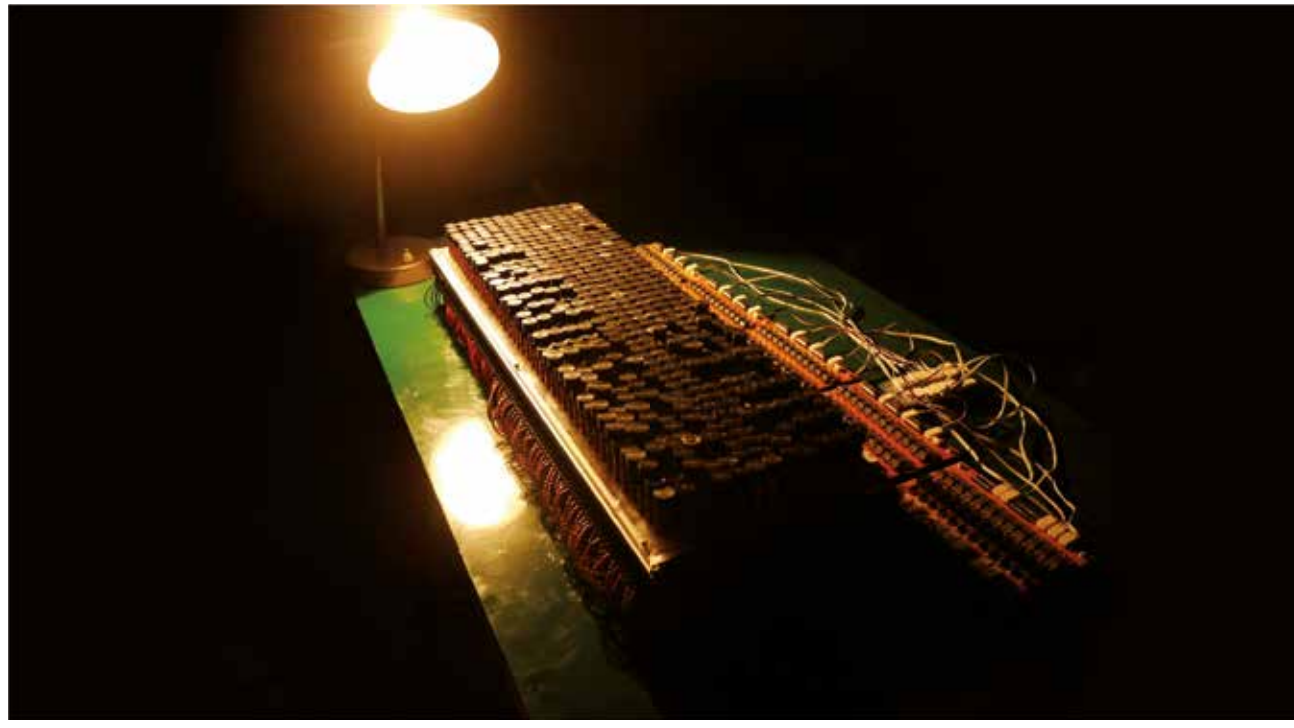
This conceptual triad represents a fundamental matrix of analysis to address the relationship between humans and electrical / electromechanical devices, which is the most widespread technology in our daily life.

A measurement measures measuring means

The theories above constitute the subtext at the bottom of the exhibition *A measurement measures measuring means*. Its author, German artist Stephan Doepner, assembled a series of cybernetic installations made with household appliances and everyday electronics.

Doepner is a media artist working in Ljubljana. His artworks are based on movement, light, noise sound and electromagnetism, all phenomena produced by ordinary electronic devices. His artistic research aims at exploring the aesthetics of our daily interaction with technology which is in fact the main theme of his practice as well as his favourite material to work with when he creates his art.

Stefan Doepner examines the universe of electronic appliances in order to reconsider their role and show their electromechanical operating principles. He dismantles and analyses ordinary machines both physically and conceptually and then he reinvents their use by altering their functioning. He builds majestic cybernetic art installations combining light, sound and movement, catching the



Stefan Doepner e Sanela Jahić
Mechanical Book, 2011
installation with electromagnetic material and electromagnets, variable dimensions

viewers' attention with their lively electronic atmosphere.

The viewer might rediscover the surrounding technologic environment through the poetic moments evoked by the machines themselves, becoming the witness of the interferences between past and future, man and environment, art and technology.

A measurement measures measuring means is a quote from the *Expanded Cinema* by Gene Youngblood (1970), in which the author analyzes the first experimentations on video art and *computer graphics* (an emerging technology at the time), as they were to become the tool with which humanity would reach a new level of awareness on the technical and technological environment.

Stefan Doepner brings forth a subsequent passage from those already reported on the feedback loop regarding the relationship between humankind and devices: just as McLuhan stated, electricity is a medium without a message, but it transmits and contains in itself all the other electrical "media". In the same way, each device refers to itself, every possibility of interaction is already contained in it and is simply waiting of being realized from the action of the user.

The object is almost a perfect platonic idea, since its existence does not need to be justified: its meaning is already included in the object, it is part of it; it just takes the interaction with human beings to be fulfilled.

A measurement measures measuring means has another key of interpretation. "*Measuring means*" may also indicate the "measuring capabilities", meaning the boundaries innate to measuring operations: looking over what is visible is impossible. Therefore, the measuring mean is an obstacle that prevents us to look further; the process of examining, measuring and observing proves to be limited and insufficient.

Even though the devices we have been using are scientifically accurate, they are not able to let us discover the inner essence of things: we need to find new tools to analyze the technologic world and our interaction with it.

And according to Youngblood, art has become a privileged instrument through which we can reach a higher level of awareness on our electronic environment, and on the role we play in it.

Stefan Doepner
Jedinica Jedan/UnitOne, 2013
light installation with fluorescent bulbs,
electromagnetic field and sound,
variable dimensions

Punto Fermo: Alessandra Lazzaris

by Giorgia Gastaldon

Alessandra Lazzaris' work *Sectioned* (2011), shown in the Contemporary Art Collection of San Vito al Tagliamento, is the starting point of her solo exhibition, which will analyze and examine in depth the research carried on by the artist in recent years, as well as depict the cultural heritage of San Vito al Tagliamento.

Since the beginning of her artistic research, Alessandra Lazzaris has chosen rust over any other material. The oxidation of metals is partly controlled by the artist, who induces it employing acids, but it is mostly regulated by chance. The artist has applied this phenomenon artistically in several ways over the years.

In the first phase, going from 2002 to 2007, the artist assembled rust using different techniques, for example sewing. This kind of experimentation is well rooted in the Italian pictorial tradition, tracing back to the first half of the Twentieth century. Alternatively, she tried to add enamel paint to rust. The result gave even more value to the pictorial purpose of the artist's research, which aimed at combining contrasting colors and materials in her artworks: polished metal, opaque rust, absorbing pigment. The research on "contrapositions on the surface" reached its highest level in 2009. Then, Alessandra Lazzaris opted for dripping rust – previously pulverized to become a pigment and then mixed to transparent enamel – on a surface of mirroring metal. She managed also to realize the fascinating paradox of leaving to rust even stainless steel, which is notably a material that would never rust. In 2010, the artist begun the series of artworks entitled *L'età del ferro* (*Iron Age*), adding resin to rust. Pouring such a liquid, shiny and transparent material all over the metal surface allows the artist to interrupt the oxidation process triggered by acids and, subsequently, the passing of time.

Alessandra Lazzaris, *untitled*, 2005
enamel paint on metal, rust, 80x200 cm
picture Piero De Grossi

Alessandra Lazzaris
Sectioned, 2012
metal, rust, resin,
40x80 cm

The artwork *Sectioned*, displayed in the contemporary art collection *Punto Fermo*, belongs to this period. It is a plate of rusted metal and resin that appears in the viewer's eyes like a microscope slide, as if we were trying to analyze a find arriving to us through centuries and cataclysms. In other words, the exhibition displays fossil remains to the viewer, which are the signs of past civilizations. As the artist herself explains, Iron Age marked the end of a cycle in ancient cultures, after which a new one would inevitably follow. In fact, the progressive phases would be: Golden Age, followed by Silver Age, Bronze Age and, finally, Iron Age. The last cycle is also the darkest, hopeless time for humanity, but rebirth will follow it.

Therefore, Alessandra Lazzaris applies the same principle to her research, thus choosing to end the previous phase of artistic experimentation and beginning the new series *Sindoni* (*Shrouds*) in 2013, which marks also a radical innovation of her technique. From that moment, Alessandra Lazzaris' research on rust has stopped being "additional" – meaning involving the production of rust through the action of acids on metal – and has rather become "extractive": the artist has started to obtain rust literally tearing it off old metal objects, which have been found in abandoned and forgotten places. This overturning of perspective keeps on inquiring the central theme of her research: the impossibility to overturn the flowing of time and the relentlessness of entropy.

Città che si vedono
Cities in sight
by Giorgia Gastaldon

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A measurement measures measuring means
by Davide Bevilacqua

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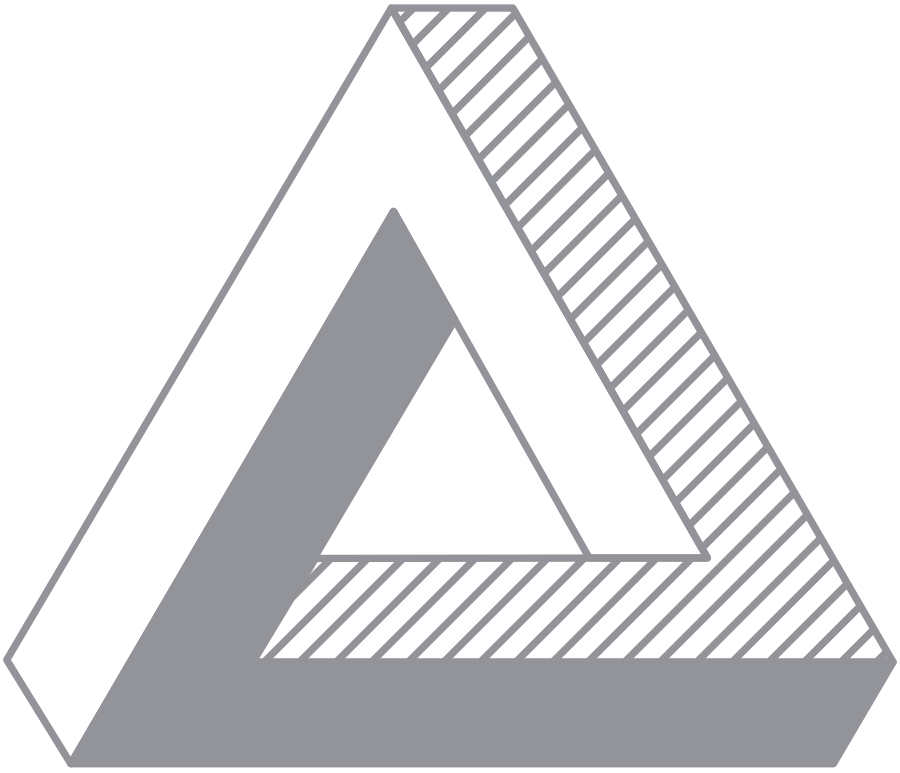
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