

# Volume!

Volume! opened its inaugural show on November 29<sup>th</sup> 1997, with works by Alfredo Pirri, Jannis Kounellis and Bernard Rüdiger. Initially a cultural association, Volume! became a foundation in 2006, based in Rome's Trastevere district. It occupies five ground floor rooms at number 88 of Via San Francesco di Sales, next to the Regina Coeli prison, in a Seventeenth Century building formerly used as a glassworks.

The association was conceived and backed by Francesco Nucci, a neurosurgeon, collector and supporter of contemporary art – passions he shared in full with his wife Daniela, who became a central figure in the development of Volume!. A small group of enthusiasts soon gathered around the couple: Alfredo Pirri, Jannis Kounellis, Bernard Rüdiger, Pietro Montani, Nicola di Battista, Franco Mancinelli. From the beginning, Nucci was clear that he wanted Volume! to be a place where artists could realise their ideas and projects with no limitations in terms of space or resources – in his own words, “a place of utter freedom... unfettered from the oppressive workings of the economy... a place like a blank sheet of paper ready to receive everything you feel”.

In keeping with these initial intentions, over its 22 years of activity – from 1997 up until today – Volume! has provided an open and ductile “environment” to which Italian and international artists have been able to connect. The idea of inviting artists to conceive works related to this space has certainly been the distinctive feature of Volume! within the Rome art scene.

In 1997, for the opening show, Alfredo Pirri created an elevating and descending itinerary through the various rooms, progressing from darkness into light. In one of the rooms he dug through the floor, down into the deep layers of soil beneath, in another he built a cement bridge suspended off the floor that connected the indoor space with the exterior. In one of the passages between rooms, lit by just an oil

lamp, Kounellis placed a naked pregnant woman seated on a stool. Within a specially constructed chamber, Rüdiger placed a striking installation of Forex PVC circles. From these pieces onwards, all works conceived for Volume! modified the space according to their needs – constructing, destroying, distorting, generating tension or pressure, closing or opening – as if the rooms themselves were a substance that was being modelled.

The freedom of spirit with which Nucci chose the projects he wished to support was matched with the freedom allowed to the artists to create their pieces for the association's Via San Francesco di Sales spaces. Over the years, this has been reflected in a stimulatingly broad and varied assortment of results, offering a faithful cross section of the nature of contemporary art – increasingly open to interdisciplinary contamination and coexistence. An impressive number of artists have worked on projects for Volume! over the years, including Nunzio, Raimund Kummer, Gianni Dessì, Maurizio Savini, Sol LeWitt, Gilberto Zorio, Bizhan Bassiri, Piero Pizzi Cannella, Paolo Canevari, Pedro Cabrita Reis, Mimmo Paladino, Giuseppe Gallo, Annie Ratti, François Morellet, Jorge Peris, Olaf Nicolai, Marco Gastini, Giuseppe Maraniello, Marina Abramović, Felice Levini, Myriam Laplante, Marina Paris, Fabio Mauri, Flavio Favelli, Jimmie Durham, Gregorio Botta, Mahum Tevet, Michele Zaza, Gregor Schneider, Kurt Johannessen, Roi Vaara, Melati Suryodarmo, Herma e Auguste Wittstock, Ivan Navarro, Sissi, Michele De Lucchi, Thomas Lange, Ruth Proctor, Ră Di Martino, Luca Trevisani, Luca Manes, Assaf Shoshan, Paolo Icaro, Christian Boltanski, Dennis Oppenheim, Walid Raad and many others.

In some cases, the works have sedimented over time and overlaid each other. It was not infrequent for the space to undergo a massive change between one project and the next – rooms, doors, windows, niches, mezzanines were all liable to be covered, filled in, illuminated or emptied. A case in point are two 2007 projects by Rui Chafes and Bruno Ceccobelli. Chafes constructed a long iron tunnel which compressed the space between strips of metal slightly taller than a person. This cold, forbidding path was followed by a spiral itinerary conceived by Bruno Ceccobelli as an elevated walkway suspended over a desolate wasteland, where the eye was caught by an orderly trail of footsteps in blue raku ceramic symbolising the achievement of a state of consciousness.

During the creation process of their works, the artists were frequently aided by curators and critics such as Lorenzo Benedetti and Claudia Gioia, Achille Bonito Oliva, Mario Codognato, Ester Coen, Bruno Corà, Danilo Eccher, Lóránd Hegyi, Teresa Macrì, Giacomo Zaza and many more. Photographers of the calibre of Claudio Abate, Rodolfo Fiorenza, Marco Ciuffreda, Marco Fedele di Catrano, Claudio Martinez and Federico Ridolfi were also present to document every moment. Texts and images were of course

published in the exhibition catalogues. A publishing house in its own right, Volume! also published essays, artist's books and special editions such as the 2005 study *Io sono un ariano*, dedicated to the performances of Fabio Mauri.

From 2000 Volume! began extending its projects to include other places around the city of Rome, in a series of initiatives entitled Extravolume!. The idea was to encourage a fresh outlook by making artworks interact with public spaces. *Siderare*, at Forte Portuense, and *Parco Nomade* are among the most recent of these exploits. Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, *Parco Nomade* involved an artist and an architect in the creation of modular dwellings, similar to containers, which were arranged at Corviale in the Tenuta dei Massimi but could be easily transported to any other place or context. Both *Siderare* and *Parco Nomade* were conceived with the intention of favouring a polycentral dimension to art, involving a broader community in lesser known places around Rome, including its outskirts.

In February 2019 Nucci launched a radical new project at the Via San Francesco di Sales venue, which he transformed into a neuroscientific research lab. Entitled *Percezioni*, the new programme was drawn up in collaboration with various Italian and international universities. For at least a year, visitors are invited to enter Volume! one at a time. Alone and with no way of finding their bearings, they remain in the presence of a work created especially for the event by an artist. During the visit, viewers are asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire on the thoughts and feelings they are experiencing, with a view to gathering information and analysing the cognitive mechanisms of interaction between individual and artwork. (PB)

# The Gallery Apart

The Gallery Apart's activity began in 2003 and was the result of an encounter between Fabrizio Del Signore and Armando Porcari. Although from very different professional backgrounds, Del Signore and Porcari shared a passion for art and collecting. Together they decided to launch a completely innovative and unprecedented cultural project: they worked alongside their artists in the creation of their works, all in collaboration with public institutions and various venues across Rome. The very name they chose for their new enterprise speaks of this project's initial vocation to 'nomadism'. Entirely unique in the art gallery panorama, The Gallery Apart project provided the necessary equipment to artists, supporting them in the creation of pieces that were at times extremely costly. In short, without being a proper gallery in the physical sense, The Gallery Apart behaved much in the way that many private galleries do. This is precisely what went into the 2004 show of Myriam Laplante, *Elisir*, which we have recreated here at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, and which was first organised in the spaces of Volume!.

The Laplante show was part of a series of initiatives started in 2003 and entitled "OUTSIDE", which opened with a solo show of Passarella in the Studio Andrea Gobbi in Rome, curated by Gianluca Marziani. Over the following years, "OUTSIDE" involved an initial nucleus of artists who exhibited in various other venues across Rome, such as Gea Casolaro and Andrea Aquilanti at the Teatro India in 2004 and 2006, Mariana Ferratto and Luana Perilli at the Fondazione Pastificio Cerere in 2005, Alessandro Scarabello at Sala 1 in 2005 and Myriam Laplante – after the Volume! show in 2004 – at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in 2007.

In February 2008, The Gallery Apart evolved from its initial, 'homeless' identity and opened its first space in Via della Barchetta 11, in a building with a small exhibition area. The following month, Myriam Laplante presented a selection of her photographic works from 1996 to 2008.

As well as nurturing the work of the group of Italian artists we have already mentioned – a group that was soon joined by Marco Strappato –, right from its beginnings The Gallery Apart cultivated an active interest in a number of international artists. These included Meital Katz-Minerbo, Astrid Nippoldt, Dominik Lang and Florian Neufeldt, in an interfusion of creativity and genres (from video to painting, drawing, sculpture and installations) which fully reflects the global and interdisciplinary nature of today's international art panorama.

In December 2009, the gallery moved to Via di Monserrato 40, where the inaugural show was a solo devoted to Luana Perilli, *Manutenzione sentimentale della macchina celibe*. In March 2013, The Gallery Apart found its current, more spacious premises, in Via Francesco Negri 43, in the Ostiense district of Rome on a street opposite what were formerly the city's main fruit and vegetable wholesale market. The inaugural project at this latest venue was an ambitious one by Dominik Lang, entitled *Missing Parts* and curated by Lýdia Pribišová. The Czech-born artist occupied the entire gallery space with a monumental work composed of sections of plaster in relief connecting the two floors of the exhibition space – a stimulating and alienating confrontation between art and architecture.

The gallery's activities continue, with a selection of artists and an exhibition programme particularly attentive to showcasing art with a strong political and social theme. This is thanks also to the involvement of major international artists such as Bertille Bak, Oliver Ressler and the Russian collective Chto Delat, as well as to the launch of new young talents such as Corinna Gosmaro, Rowena Harris and Sinae Yoo. (PB)

# Myriam Laplante. Elisir

curated by Lorenzo Benedetti e Teresa Macrì  
Fondazione Volume!  
coproduced by The Gallery Apart  
November 29<sup>th</sup> – December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2004

Myriam Laplante has been invited to present again, here at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, the work, intitled *Elisir*, she conceived in 2004 for the Fondazione Volume! in Via San Francesco di Sales. Francesco Nucci's foundation had organised the event in collaboration with The Gallery Apart, which had been recently launched by Fabrizio Del Signore and Armando Porcari, precisely with the intention of assisting artists in the realisation of projects in various locations spread across the city of Rome. Laplante's project was curated by Teresa Macrì and Lorenzo Benedetti and documented in a catalogue published by the Fondazione Volume! complete with photographs, a critical text by Macrì and an interview with the artist by Benedetti.

Born in Bangladesh of Canadian parents, Myriam Laplante lived a number of years in New York before moving to Italy in 1985. She held her first solo show in Rome in 1992. After beginning her artistic career as a painter, she broadened her research to include other media such as photography, video, installation and performance.

In her text for the Volume! show, Teresa Macrì wrote that "Laplante's imaginary is clear: recalling the literature of horror and thrillers, re-treading the land of B-movies, branching off into the acrobatics of the Cirque du Soleil, extricating herself between antique anatomical encyclopaedias and delving deep into those unconscious zones of the soul that are usually repressed in dark incunabula considered inaccessible". The Volume! venue offered Laplante an ideal location to unleash her unfettered and fertile imagination and she produced a single work made up of an installation and a performance. It

was her second installation after the 2003 project conceived for a show at the Certosa di San Lorenzo at Padula.

For her 2004 project Laplante altered the entire space of Volume!, beginning at the entrance itself. She had an old door mounted on the Via San Francesco di Sales entrance to the space, which narrowed the existing, modern access, taking the building back in time to when it was a glassworks. The old shop sign was mounted on the outside, the idea being that what was going on inside remained hidden. When visitors entered, they found themselves confronted by a glass factory setting, empty except for scattered alembics, burners, distillers, tubes and test tubes containing coloured liquids heated to boiling point. The condensed distillation from these liquids was made to drip onto the heads of five strange figures. In another corner, by a desk, three shelves were ranged with a series of bell jars containing curious creatures with “genetically modified” features. This was clearly a laboratory where strange experiments were being carried out on test subjects.

“As the show goes on, so do the experiments,” explained Laplante at the time to Benedetti, “the creatures that receive the elixir will be progressively destroyed; their faces will disintegrate, leaving only the skulls. They are unwitting, (...), and they even whistle in chorus as they are being destroyed (...). It will be a slow and irreversible process, just like what is happening in the world today”. Instead of reinvigorating them, after being condensed and dripped onto the heads of the subjects the elixir consumed them, melting the delicate clay from which they were made.

The installation was accompanied by a performance in which the artist, posing as a visionary, mad scientist, immersed first herself in the elixir, then her parasite twin – also the product of crazy genetic experiments and initially her ally. She then decided to murder her alter ego by suffocation, before ripping off its head and leaving it immersed in the elixir. The artist-scientist remained the only person left in possession of the miraculous elixir, with the power to control and keep alive the genetically generated organisms. Like the laboratory guinea pigs, the artist-scientist's end is not a happy one: there is no way to share knowledge in harmony with others, but only the negative, selfish drive of an individual who wants all the power. Laplante’s work performs a “playful transposition” of certain dynamics typical of the globalised world, where biotechnological experimentation on plants and other living creatures is not always conducted according to criteria that are either ethical or palatable to most of us. Quite the opposite, in fact: riches and power end up concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, at the expense of everyone else.

Re-staging *Elisir* at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni has placed the work in a very different context to the Volume! space, which necessarily implies that visitors will experience the work differently than they would have in the 2004 version. Presenting the piece in a museum context also means that there are a number of restrictions in terms of the actual functioning of the installation. In this context, for example, it will not be possible to light the laboratory burners and witness the slow dissolution of the bodies of the test subjects, together with the progressive alteration of the work (at the moment of writing, we are still waiting to hear from the Fire Department whether we will be allowed, for a day at least, to make an exception so that the public can appreciate the work in its original form). Notwithstanding this, the mere presence of Laplante's piece retains all of the disquieting power which generated it. Its strength lies in its ability to present an image from contemporary reality – a laboratory, the archetypal positive and catastrophic image of the future of mankind – whilst transfiguring it into a place and time seemingly from another dimension, far removed from reality. In Macri's words, Laplante presents us "objects that have a double identity: those fake and fur dolls, innocuous and tender, which become acephalous monsters and modified bodies". Through her language and aesthetical *logos*, continues Macri, "she intimates the risks and abuses from that shadowy area of science", just as in many of her other works she deals with issues related to "coercion and social control".

According to Laplante herself, we are all in a state of "blissful ignorance". For this new presentation of her work, she has decided to include a "cosmic gem" (similar to the ones she conceived for her installation with the same title at the Nuova Galleria Morone in 2015), an alien organism watching the passing of time and the transit between parallel dimensions – a glimmer of hope for an alien (?) regeneration. (PB)

We wish to thank the artist, who curated the presentation of her works for this exhibition.