

Lu Cafausu
a collaborative art project
by Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro,
Giancarlo Norese,
and Cesare Pietroiusti

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In the last years we have been involved in a sort of aesthetic and anthropological investigation, dealing with the contradictions of both urban and metaphorical spaces, the “self-generated” beauty (by chance or necessity) and the “errata” of the landscape.

Lu Cafausu, an old coffeehouse located in a small town in the south of Italy, has become the inspiration for stories, performances and actions in different European and American cities. We identified Lu Cafausu as a metaphor for something that is, at the same time, both central and marginal, where aesthetic contradictions meet the meanings (or maybe the lack of any meaning) of our time. It's *an imaginary place that really exists*.

Exhibitions, events, et al.

2012

The Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death), 3rd edition (scheduled);

Lu Cafausu, public lecture, ASU Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona;

And And And, DOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (cur. by Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri)

2011

The Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death), 2nd edition, Microclima, Serra dei giardini, Venezia, and San Cesario di Lecce (cur. by Paolo Rosso, with the support of Galleria Bianconi, Marsèlleria, and Luigi Presicce);

Click or Clash?, Galleria Bianconi, Milano (cur. by Julia Draganovic);

Italia Ora, Museo H.C. Andersen, Roma (cur. by LUISS Master of Art);

Dove finisce il destino? A-logicità dell'esistenza, Teatro Valle, Roma (cur. by Elena Abbiatici, Valentina G. Levy);

Illustre Scultura Polimaterica, book launch, Libreria coop Ambasciatori, Bologna (cur. by Rita Correddu, Alice Militello; pres. by Francesca Marianna Consonni; produced by Comune di Bologna)

2010

The Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death), 1st edition, And And And / Event 6, San Cesario di Lecce (cur. by Ayreen Anastas, Rene Gabri; with the collaboration of Luigi Presicce);

Illustre Scultura Polimaterica, Link Associated, ArteFiera OFF, Bologna (cur. by Rita Correddu, Alice Militello)

2008

Lu Cafausu in Second Life, project developed with Stanford Humanities Lab, Stanford University

2007

Forgotten Sculptors, Performa07, Sculpture Center, New York (cur. by Sarina Basta; with the participation of Joan Jonas and Steve Piccolo);

Contemporary Passages: temporary roots and interweaving paths, Tent, Rotterdam (cur. by Angela Serino);

A False Luke (Lu Cafausu), Vertexlist, New York (cur. by Marcin Ramocki)

2006

Il Falso Luca (Lu Cafausu), performance, San Cesario di Lecce

Publications, books

Meeting Through Fasting, PDF document, Milano 2004 (by Emilio Fantin, Giancarlo Norese, and Cesare Pietroiusti).

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Lu Cafausu is a collaborative art project by

Emilio Fantin lives in Bologna, Italy. He has participated in important contemporary art events and exhibited in international galleries and museums (Venice Biennale, Performa07, Le Magasin Grenoble, Neue Galerie Graz). Currently he is working on a multidisciplinary research: art-agriculture, art-mathematical logic, art-dreams, art-architecture.

Luigi Negro is an artist, sociologist and historian of economics who focuses his practice on developing social designs and collaborative curatorial projects as forms of art. Negro – a collaborator to the network for contemporary culture UnDo.Net – lives and works in Lecce, Italy, and together with Alessandra Pomarico and David Cossin is a curator for SoundRes, a residency program for visual and sound artists.

Giancarlo Norese was born in Novi Ligure, Italy, lives in Milano. He was one of the initiators of the Progetto Oreste and the editor and designer of its publications. Since the mid-Eighties he has been involved in many collaborative art projects, mostly dealing with precariousness, the metaphors of the public space, the mistakes of the landscapes, and the self-generated beauty. As an individual artist, he is interested in formless forms of art.

Cesare Pietroiusti's art practice focuses on problematic and paradoxical situations that are hidden in common relationships and in ordinary acts. In 1997 he published *Non-functional thoughts*, a small book containing approximately one hundred useless, parasite or incongruous ideas to be realized as art projects by anyone. Some of these ideas have been executed by artists and curators. In the last years his research has been focused mostly on paradoxical characteristics of the economical exchanges applied to contemporary art.

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August 30, 2008

To whom it may concern

Lu Cafausu is a collaborative project by Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese and Cesare Pietroiusti. This project is among the most interesting examples of creative social practice being advanced today from any country. Within the Italian art world, it certainly takes a lead position. This project merits the support of visionary and forward thinking cultural foundations and institutions everywhere; it is my great pleasure to encourage its advancement.

I have known the artists in this collective since the early 1990's and have been informed and intrigued by their work ever since. Their investigation is contemporary and ancient, focused and expansive while being also rigorous and improvisational. These are serious thinkers, engaged artists and valuable members of the global community of creative practitioners.

I have been directly involved with members of this group on successful projects advanced by internationally respected institutions such as the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbertide Italy, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Florida, USA, Res/SoundRes residency programs in Lecce, Italy, the Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga California, the Stanford Humanities Lab, Stanford University, and at the School of Advanced Studies ISUFI in Salento, Southern Italy. Currently we are developing a version of *Lu Cafausu* in the virtual world of Second Life with the Stanford Humanities Lab.

I am pleased to provide unequivocal support to the work and residency of Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese and Cesare Pietroiusti for the development of the *Lu Cafausu* project.

Yours truly,

Gordon Knox,

Director, Global Initiatives
Stanford Humanities Lab
Stanford University

Lu Cafausu

**a collaborative art project
by Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro,
Giancarlo Norese,
and Cesare Pietroiusti**

www.lucafausu.tk

(portfolio)

Lu Cafausu is a mysterious small building, an architectural remnant that we elected as a source of metaphors and narratives.

We identified Lu Cafausu as a metaphor for something that is, at the same time, both central and marginal, where aesthetic contradictions meet the meanings (or maybe the lack of any meaning) of our time. It's *an imaginary place that really exists*.

Forgotten Sculptors

"Performa07", Sculpture Center, New York, 2007
 (a project by Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese, Cesare Pietroiusti, with the participation of Joan Jonas and Steve Piccolo); curated by Sarina Basta

Forgotten Sculptors is a project produced by Sculpture Center (New York) in the context of Performa07, the second biennial of new visual art performance. Part of the project consists in a series of short email stories. A performance by the four artists with the participation of Joan Jonas and Steve Piccolo was held at Sculpture Center on November 3rd, 2007. As a final step to the project, the artists invited everyone to join them in a collective performance on Sunday, November 18th.

In the previous days before the opening, all the discarded objects and waste found at the Sculpture Center (including the office and the hidden parts of the basement) were inventoried, collected and shaped to fit a sort of sculpture. A complete list of all the found objects was compiled.

During the performance, on November 3rd, from 3pm to 6pm, all the items were moved back to their original position, making the "sculpture" disappear.

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Forgotten Sculptors

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Discarded objects and waste found at SculptureCenter between Oct 30 and Nov 3, 2007:

4 small pieces of white plaster
 lead tube with twine
 broken lamp
 scrap of paper, "satisfied"
 large label, marked "armored cable"
 iron wire and piece of rusted metal
 lid of coffee cup
 bent bar of rusted metal
 ring of rusted metal with plastic
 fragment of black stone
 2 black rags
 piece of bubble-wrap
 piece of transparent adhesive tape
 rusty screw
 piece of broken ceramics
 2 stones (1 with a square section)
 boot leaning on protruding wall
 2 wooden boards
 small piece of styrofoam
 piece of blue adhesive tape stuck on a brick
 band for holding wires
 label "22 watt"
 piece of twisted blue adhesive tape
 piece of cardboard, 20 cm long
 small piece of white wire
 piece of black adhesive tape
 wadding
 2 pieces of electric wire
 piece of tangled up wire
 fragment of film
 metal washer
 rusty iron key
 rolled up piece of white adhesive tape
 zip tie, V shaped
 28 small stones, grouped in a corner
 piece L-shaped metal, very thin
 2 small pieces of plastic, transparent
 strip of cardboard
 piece of broken lamp shade
 (...)

During the performance every single item has been returned to its original position

With the support of the Italian Cultural Institute, New York, and the Fondazione Meo, Rome. Thanks to the Nanotechnology Research Group, Lecce.



Lu Cafausu

**“Contemporary Passages”,
Tent, Rotterdam, 2007
(a project by Emilio Fantin,
Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese,
Cesare Pietroiusti);
curated by Angela Serino**

**An old coffee house (Lu Cafausu),
situated in southern Italy, provides
the inspiration for stories and
activities, with the emphasis on
personal, human relationships.**

**Sculptures made with found
objects, cleaning the floor, and
improvisational masterpieces.**

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Lu Cafausu

**Contemporary Passages, Tent,
Rotterdam, 2007**

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**Projections, video-screened stories,
photocopies.**



**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 1st ed.**

**“And And And/event 6”,
dOCUMENTA (13),
San Cesario di Lecce, 2010
(a project by Emilio Fantin,
Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese,
Cesare Pietroiusti, Luigi Presicce);
curated by Ayreen Anastas
and Rene Gabri**

On November 2nd 2010, the artist-run initiative “And And And” – which is using the time between now and dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012 to consider with individuals and groups across the world the role art and culture can play today and the constituent publics or communities which could be addressed – invited Emilio Fantin, Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese and Cesare Pietroiusti.

These artists, in collaboration with Luigi Presicce, proposed to turn the “Day of the Dead” celebration into a new festivity “The Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death)”. For this celebration the artists invited everyone to be part of the shortest and slowest pilgrimage in the world, that departed (and arrived) at Lu Cafausu, in San Cesario di Lecce.

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**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 1st ed.**

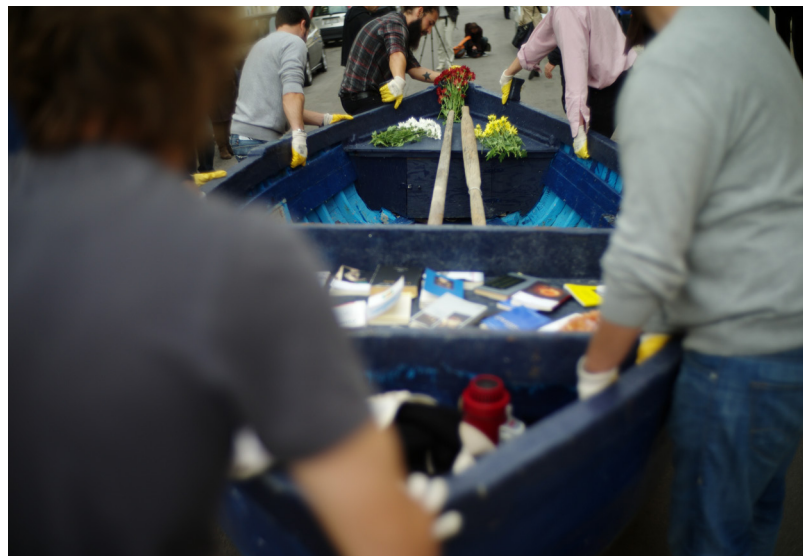
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A circular pilgrimage around Lu Cafausu, an *imaginary place that really exists*, an architectural and existential anomaly, a place full of potentiality producing metaphors and narratives.

Lu Cafausu cannot be defined without generating a non-sense because it is a place full of history and meaning but nobody knows what they are. Lu Cafausu is a place around which the presence of death is floating. Any day, the small building can in fact be demolished to accommodate more parking space for cars, or can also fall apart due to its precariousness. It could also be turned and frozen into a monument.

Because of this feeling of the presence of death, Lu Cafausu is an ideal place for a new celebration. 'La Festa dei Vivi' is for those who, in order to give sense to life, reflect upon death; their own, first and foremost.

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**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 1st ed.**

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During the pilgrimage the participants had the opportunity to meditate and discuss on themes such as that of “vital death”, of “suspension on the threshold”, a precariousness that is physical, floating, enjoyable. The pilgrimage was made of stops and very slow moves, to which every participant could contribute pushing, in the streets of San Cesario, a little boat full of books.

The pilgrimage, among other places and sites, reached the “Santuario della Pazienza” made in the early ‘70s by Ezechiele Leandro (1905-1981), a unique and extraordinary example of a mystical garden, a forest of sculptures, a temple or a cemetery, an irrepresentable site created by the artistic expression of a self-taught man, an artist whose position was beyond the division between low and high culture.

www.andandand.org
www.documenta.de



Illustre Scultura Polimaterica

Link/ArteFiera OFF, Bologna, 2010
 (a project by Emilio Fantin,
 Luigi Negro, Giancarlo Norese,
 Cesare Pietroiusti); curated by Rita
 Correddu and Alice Militello

On the occasion of the Art Fair in
 Bologna, we exhibited a sculpture
 made with discarded fragments
 left from artworks by other artists,
 collected during a tour from studios in
 different Italian cities.

Including contributions/leftovers
 by Giorgio Andreotta Calò,
 Alessandra Andrini, Stefano Arienti,
 Emanuela Ascari, Emilia Badalà,
 Sergio Breviario, Annalisa Cattani,
 Umberto Cavenago, Cuoghi Corsello,
 Francesca Grilli, Nazzareno Guglielmi,
 Arianna Fantin, Luca Francesconi,
 Andrés Galeano, Matteo Guidi,
 Lucia Leuci, Michele Lombardelli,
 Eva Marisaldi, Maurizio Mercuri,
 Margherita Morgantini, Stefano W.
 Pasquini, Alberta Pellacani, Nicola
 Pellegrini, Luigi Presicce, Fabrizio
 Rivola, Mili Romano, Marco Samorè,
 Luca Scarabelli, Daniela Spagna
 Musso, UnDo.Net, Luca Vitone,
 ZimmerFrei.



In 2011 it was published a book
 documenting the project by using
 discarded texts and images from the
 contributors.

www.issuu.com/noresize/docs/illustre_libro



**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 1st ed.**

**"Click or Clash!",
Galleria Bianconi, Milano), 2011**

**Installation with the boat used for the
pilgrimage in San Cesario di Lecce,
and video projection.**



**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 2nd ed.**

**“Microclima”, Serra dei Giardini,
Venezia, and San Cesario di Lecce,
2011**

**A sculpture workshop, a trip,
a conference, a celebration.**

Between October 30th and November 3rd the second edition of the “Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death)” took place. This edition was articulated in the form of a complex workshop in the Serra dei Giardini in Venice, in San Cesario di Lecce, and on the bus between the two places.

For the second edition of “The Celebration of the Living (who reflect upon death)” on November 2011, Fantin, Negro, Norese, Pietroiusti and Presicce proposed a workshop to be held at the Greenhouse in Venice. The participants to such workshop payed homage to Ezechiele Leandro, trying to make all together a sculpture inspired by his “three-dimensional mosaics”.

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**The Celebration of the Living
(who reflect upon death), 2nd ed.**

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At the end of the workshop, all the participants left Venice with a bus, towards San Cesario di Lecce, carrying with them the newly made sculpture.

The trip was the occasion to continue discussing the issues that were proposed in the workshop as well as to elaborate once more the theme of the new celebration.

On November 2nd, the sculpture was delivered to San Cesario di Lecce.



Episode 1
Efrem (a False Luke)

January 5th, 2007
vertexList, New York

A while ago, before the summer, in the courtyard at Careof in Milan, Efrem, a guy with a beard, told me he came from San Cesario: «I live on the edge of town, at Iluca fausu», he said, with that sly Salento accent. I thought: «He lives in a false Luca, at Luca-the-fake... whatever.»

Over the next few days, for no apparent reason, I kept thinking about this fake Luca. A couple of months later we were driving through San Cesario, Alessandra had a blue wig, it was three in the morning and we were on our way home from a party. We had ingested red wine, rum and chinotto, and I had chewed some mint leaves. «I want to show you something – she said.

Have you ever heard of the lu cafausu?» I couldn't believe my ears. Around two bends and down two one-way streets (the wrong way, she was driving) and there was the fake Luca. A dozen buildings surround what might almost be called a piazza. At its center stands a strange structure (more of an "object") in crumbly masonry, a weird sort of pagoda with a Middle Eastern air (a crescent moon on the roof), fragile, almost an eyesore.

Efrem's neighborhood doesn't take its name from some dishonest Luca, but from a "coffee house" (twisted by local dialect into "lu cafe-haus-u") that has been many little things for many long decades: a gathering place for peasants, a gazebo that provided shade for noblemen and English officers as they sipped tea, a dwelling for a young orphan and his white horse, a henhouse, a toilet, a garage for a Lambretta, a sexual trysting place, a farmer's tool shed, an illegal gambling joint, a dream object and, last but not least, the site of performances by four artists. It was and is an inadmissible spot, a territory of accumulation and absence of meaning.

A metaphor, perhaps, of what we might become.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)



Lu Cafausu, San Cesario di Lecce, Italy

Episode 2
The Secret of Catherine

January 12th, 2007
vertexList, New York

The Cafausu will seem useless, the villa it belongs to will vanish in the contortions of the complex, chaotic logic of real estate speculation. In a few decades we'll be in the suburbs and none of the people who live in the rows of condos will remember the villa.

The plots of the peasants of the Arneo, after years of suffering and squatting, have been sorted out thanks to a series of government concessions. The land no longer belongs to the English family. They had already abandoned it anyway, years ago. I know the secret of Catherine, the daughter of the owners of the villa. She fell in love with Uccio, a youth "dark of skin and hair", from a humble family, proud leader of struggling workers and, by the way, the father of yours truly. They would meet, in secret, at the gazebo, a romantic, fragrant place, near the wall of the estate.

Catherine died very young, a few months after giving me birth. But before dying she made Uccio, who had become the designated owner of the land, promise that even if he had to demolish the crumbling villa, even if he had to sell everything, he would never let the gazebo, the place of their lovemaking, be destroyed.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)



Lu Cafausu, San Cesario di Lecce, Italy

Episode 3
The Vigil

January 19th, 2007
vertexList, New York

Maria Concetta is 65 years old. She's a dressmaker. We're shut away in a room and she's washing me with care, using a sponge soaked in water and vinegar. As she washes me, my friend...

I see the Cafausu, the sun, the linen curtains shifting in the early summer breeze. Outside, all around, there are grapevines and, above all, olive trees. She stops washing and shows me an old photograph stuck on the mirror over the dresser. She says it's the first picture that was ever taken in the villa.

Catherine was a little girl, she's running, out of focus; some women are standing around her, they stop and look rather bashfully towards the photographer. In the gazebo you can sense the presence of someone who's about to serve coffee. The women, all quite tall, have very short, very light dresses, floral prints (pastel colors, I would guess). They are all barefoot. Maria Concetta points to one, the chubbiest, wearing schoolmarm spectacles.

«This one was my friend – she says – Valentina Scorrano was her name, she came from Presicce, but then she went to Germany.» In the background, away from the others, a very young, skinny girl looks sad, struggling with the breeze as it tries to raise her skirt. «Little one got no panties, would'ja say?»

Maria Concetta chuckles, enjoying her vulgar joke, her smile revealing gold teeth. She's a *chiangimuerti* (a paid mourner), and they say she got rich fixing up the corpses. In the emotional atmosphere of a wake jewelry has a way of getting lost, especially when the vigil is conducted by a *chiangimuerti*, closed up with you in a room.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)



Lu Cafausu, San Cesario di Lecce, Italy

Episode 4

Moroloja, The Chant of the Dead

May 25th, 2007

Tent, Rotterdam

Like a reawakening, as if the little space inside the Cafausu had expanded. I'm dressed up, in a shirt and tie I haven't worn for ages, perfectly still. Maria Concetta slides eyeglasses into position on my head, then emits a long shout. At first I don't understand that it is the prelude to a chant. A melodious lament that goes on for hours, hypnotic, anguishing: the Moroloja, the chant of the dead.

Somebody pays her to do it, I'm not sure whom, also because I'm not supposed to be dead and in any case I don't even know what is supposed to have killed me. All I know is this lamentation, this woman who just a few minutes ago was stealing my gold and my watch. Now she's crying (tearlessly) and singing my praises. She seems to know me, as if we'd met time and again for years.

I am on the ground in the Cafausu, surrounded by people I've never seen before. Maria Concetta wails and cries, shaking her head, mussing her hair, shaking. She holds a kerchief in one hand. Candles and rotting flowers waft a putrid odor of lavender and coffee. I feel like throwing up but I can't. Evidently the dead are not allowed to vomit.

The "chiangimuerti" is sweating now, swimming toward a spoken tone, but then her inebriating sobs return, another spasm of grief. I can hear the way she avoids the pleasures of singing, out of respect, eschewing the harmony of the musical structure, keeping a perfect balance between groan and tune. I start to pay attention to the words. They express no Christian concepts of death or resurrection, no mention of Christ, Mary, saints.

After life there is only dissolution, "dark night". I listen to an appeal to Thanatos, death personified, and to the fairy Fate, with her dramatic power of dominion and destiny. I think I can salvage a memory: my grandmother, Vincenzina, became senile when she was about eighty, and would often sing a song by Orietta Berti:

*Stretti stretti nell'estasi d'amor la spagnola s'amar
così bocca bocca la notte e il dì.*

Then she would immediately cut it short, and lose herself in a wailed lament:

Ohimmè, Sorte noscia. (Oh my... such is our Fate)

(translation by Steve Piccolo)



Lu Cafausu, San Cesario di Lecce, Italy

Episode 5 The Nanocafausu

October 11th, 2007
Performa07, New York

Dusk. I knew my way around that suburb. Lu Cafausu was in the reflection on a puddle, together with a scrawny pink pepper tree. Surrounded by tract houses and condos that still emitted odors of construction dust and mortar. It looked like a Cyclops with a droopy single eyelid. The totally ungovernable nature of its beauty, and at the same time its complete autonomy with respect to my sentiments, had never been so clear before. It had been raining for days, and a dark dog had taken shelter under the roof: from a distance the dog was just a blotch, like a little tar pit.

Two hours later I was in a room full of Canon printers: Professor C was seated in front of me, in his studio at the Nanotechnology Research Group. I had explained things to him openly: I felt a physical need to contain that place, to incorporate it in me. Lu Cafausu had to be able to travel thanks to my body, I wanted to become its vector, I felt an urgent need to hide it, wrapping it inside me like a fetus. To become its living frame. I also told the professor that the first time I talked about this with Cesare (a mutual friend) he immediately urged me to swallow it. **SWALLOW IT.** I was fascinated by the word, more than the act in itself. Digestive processes exist to transform or to expel, but the nano-Cafausu would never have to be transformed.

Talinjit was from New Delhi and had been Professor C's assistant for a couple of years. Together, with boundless patience, they tried to explain how I should guide the flywheel with which I could create, "freehand", the nanosculpture of Lu Cafausu. Later, though, we would have to come up with about 10,000 euros: the average cost of a hypothetical material with which to "work". Otherwise, the use of the laboratories and the work of the team were free, because everyone seemed to like the idea. But something seriously bothered me; in that moment I tried out my sculpture using a material that was easy to shape, but toxic:

«It's the most ductile and flexible of all elements, but it is not suitable. This is because we cannot know what will happen inside your body in ten years' time. We can inject it into a muscle, under the skin, or if you prefer we can use a long needle to place it in the parenchyma of an organ. No one can tell you what will become of your little Cafausu if it starts to freely circulate inside your organism...»

The fact is that I continued to complicate matters. I



Lu Cafausu, San Cesario di Lecce, Italy

thought about a material that would remain stable, in its shaped form, only inside a living human being. I imagined my death and Lu Cafausu as it came apart within me, with me.

I took some journals home with me that day: "Mechanical and Electrical Behavior of Carbon Nanotubes", "Rivista Italiana di Compositi e Nanotecnologie".

Over the next few days the attempts to construct a form similar to the Cafausu failed repeatedly. The scientists who were helping me thought it was excellent news and tried to convince me to abandon my sculptural compulsion, saying I would not be able to achieve much more, even after a full year of trying. I remember that during the first days they kept urging me to make a computer-aided construction, based on a photograph but the results seemed cold, impersonal, like an architectural model. It wasn't the work I wanted to contain, to carry, to feel, to frame. The sculpture had to be less like a caption, it should have been more symbolic, more emotional.

At a certain point Talinjit, without taking his eyes off the monitor, said that I was building myself a non-functional organ.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)

Episode 6 Dorothea

October 18th, 2007
Performa07, New York

In front of me is the face of Annie L.; in her early 60s, she died of a heart attack. Her face is like a ball of paper, crushed in a fist. Her mouth is a box for rings, opened and emptied. "Theft", I think... then I hear a voice softly say "It won't be easy, Dee".

Working for the MacAllister School of Embalming hadn't seemed like such an outlandish idea. My father was an illustrator and had a strange passion for anatomy. Knowing the human body gave him confidence; for him it was a sort of guarantee, the way people carry an amulet in their pocket.

Who knows if his real desire was to shape bodies rather than draw them. His passion was contagious and anatomy became a path leading to art for me as well. So when I looked at or touched a skull, I began to feel I was simply shaping what was latent in a face; I felt like someone making a portrait, but my action was clearly sculptural. I wanted to create forms.

Here at the Embalming School, I handle a material that is not clay. I touch the lips, smooth the forehead, comb the hair, touch up the eyebrows, imagine the movements of that face, its character, its tics, all its expressions. Over time I have developed a technique for reshaping the faces of corpses. Slender but strong elastic threads stitched inside the cheeks make it possible to restore the skin's tension, to keep the mixture of wax, parafin and cornstarch in place, which I have always used to fill the oral cavity and, where necessary, to restore the smooth firmness of the face.

I feel that working on the head of a dead person is much more than making a sculpture: of course the sculptor's challenge has always been that of giving life to his creation, but those faces grant me an emotion that is hard to describe. It's not so much in the idea of imagining the person alive, or coming back to life, and it's not the thrill of creating an illusion, or having a feeling of power over life or over bodies.

Maybe it is simply a state similar to the one certain dreams confusedly leave behind them. I've always known that no one would come back to life, that my hands could not restore life, but lately I have felt that the face of the deceased, in my hands, takes on a particular power, very great and very fragile at the same time; something that calls forth an idea of life as potential, an instant in which time inexplicably loses its dimension and its very reason for existing, and goes



The Clay Club, circa 1940. Photographer unknown

back to being absence. The thrill of this suspended moment in which I feel like something could happen, like something is about to happen.

Inspired by the life and work of Dorothea Denslow (1900-1971), sculptor, founder of the Clay Club (1928), later re-named SculptureCenter. Denslow taught anatomy at an embalming school from 1946 to 1951.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)

Episode 7
Modigliani's Heads

October 25th, 2007
Performa07, New York

Try to imagine the rediscovery of several previously unknown pieces by Modigliani during an exhibition of his works, along with the din of attributions, statements, expert opinions, proclamations and critical hairsplitting that cannot help but follow in its wake.

Now try to imagine four high-school students in a garden, armed with hammer and chisel, working on a stone and savoring, in advance, the surprised expression of those who will find it. At least for a few minutes, because the experts will undoubtedly realize soon enough that the statue is a fake. Now try to imagine the faces of the students when they find out that the statue has fooled everybody. At this point, it is up to them to admit to their practical joke.

Twenty-three years have passed since the perpetration of one of the greatest hoaxes in the history of Italian art. Four kids from Leghorn did their part, as citizens, to make a contribution to the loopy adventure of the salvaging of the lost sculptures of Modigliani. Rumor had it that the artist, in a moment of discouraged despondency, convinced that his sculptures would never be as good as his paintings, had tossed them into the Fosso Mediceo (a canal). After having dredged up all kinds of stuff, but no sculptures, people began to make jokes about the entire operation: «Look, they just found Modigliani's bicycle!», «There is one of Amedeo's shoes!»...

One night Pietro Luridiana, Pierfrancesco Ferrucci, Michele Ghelarducci and Michele Genovesi, after having sculpted a stone with a Black&Decker drill, stealthily threw it into the canal. The next day, as the dredging continued, the workers did indeed find a sculpted head in the style of Modigliani. But when they saw it the boys were amazed... it wasn't the head they had made!

Its real author was Angelo Frogia, a dockworker and artist, who later declared that his action could be seen as a work of conceptual art, unmasking the faulty mechanisms of the art world. But the joke got the better of the concept, and as the entire tale emerged the media turned all their spotlights onto the four boys.

The head made by the students was the second to be discovered. Immediately afterwards, the leading experts expressed pompous opinions regarding the artworks and the episode, confirming the authenticity of the sculptures (though we should recall that unlike



Black&Decker

all his colleagues, Federico Zeri said the sculptures were so "immature" that even if they were authentic, Modigliani had been right about throwing them away).

The four friends, heirs to Buffalmacco and Calandrino, must have had a good laugh, though at a certain point the event took on such importance that it would be hard to resolve matters just by saying: «Hey, it was just a joke». But fortune smiles on the daring, and our practical jokers – who, after all, had committed no crime – demonstrated the truth with photos taken at pertinent moments. In the end, at prime time, they made a replica of the work (with the usual tools) for the television cameras: a perfect Modigliani, in just 45 minutes.

Michele told me he started to make sculptures again, a few years ago, and I immediately understood that the spirit of Modi, together with that of Angelo Frogia, who passed away a few years ago, were still in town, spreading the virus of sculpture.

(translation by Steve Piccolo)

Episode 8 A Blind Sculptor

**November 1st, 2007
Performa07, New York**

The last image is a hailstorm of little black stones against the leaden gray field of the sky. Then an awful burning sensation all over my face, stabbing pain in the eye sockets. I was lying in a bed, voices whispered so softly that the words were almost incomprehensible, though they seemed to be talking about me. I thought I heard the word "extraction". The smell of chloroform and, in the distance, moaning.

Five years ago, when I delivered my work to the Head of State, Benito Mussolini, he was very surprised and pleased. He told me he had rarely seen portraits of such accuracy, and when he found out that I had made the work only from memory, and by touching some other sculptures, like that of Selva, he allowed me to touch his face so I would know what a good job I had done.

For the regime I was some kind of hero: blinded by a grenade near the end of the war, I had begun to sculpt: I shaped clay, sculpted stone, received dozens of commissions, and today my sculptures are found in many public buildings in Rome, the great home of the invalids, the ministry, the headquarters of the blind veterans.

Over time, though, I seemed to understand that another possibility existed, apart from that of trying to reproduce the forms of a face, the proportions of a body as accurately as I could. It was Zighina, daughter of the sun. She agreed to be the model of a blind sculptor, and she let me touch not only her face but also her whole body. I understand almost nothing of her language, and she cannot speak mine, but she guides my hands, and with hers she helps me to know her in the only way I can. With an ingenuousness (or indifference?) that to me seems like naturalness and complicity, she let me be free to feel pleasure when I touch her.

Since I became blind I have always said that sounds seem almost like an intrusion, that the sense of smell is useless, and that eating serves only to fill the stomach. I said that the blind have eyes in their fingertips. But since Zighina arrived touch gives me a pleasure that I had never imagined.

Today I think my art can go beyond color and figure. I want to be able to make sculpture that reproduces the sensuality of a smooth surface, not the form of an arm or a thigh; the pleasure of caressing a throbbing breast,



**Istituto Nazionale dei Ciechi di Guerra, Rome.
On the floor, two bronzes by Filippo Bausola (Vittorio Emanuele III and Benito Mussolini), circa 1934**

not its perfect roundness. I would like to be a pioneer, to make sculpture something it has never been: an art of the touch.

Freely adapted from the story of Filippo Bausola (1893-1952), who became a sculptor after losing his sight in World War I, and from the film Mōjuu (English title: Blind Beast) by Masumura Yasuzo (1969).

(translation by Steve Piccolo)