

EXHIBITION
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Alberto Garutti has always paid attention to the insertion of his work inside a context of display, if by “paying attention” we mean challenging the very mechanisms of the art system. The choice of the language and medium of expression also depends to an ever increasing extent on his personal, independent response to the requests of the client, whether public or private.

This attitude is particular evident starting in the second half of the 1990s. From this moment on, the artist concentrates his activity in the sphere of public art, mostly in group events and solo shows, where the exhibition coincides with the production of a new work. This is where Garutti addresses the problems of the context: he turns the viewer into an actor, makes the artwork vanish to leave room for research on the territory, and transforms the artist himself into an enzyme that acts as a catalyst for the biological system in which he finds himself operating.

Reviewing, from a useful distance, over thirty years of his work, one realizes that each piece has been chemically constructed, through a process of combination, meaning that each work is the offspring of the last, and contains the seed of the next, which is still waiting to be given form. From this perspective, Alberto Garutti’s oeuvre is a series of families of works, in which every newborn piece is the result of the work that came before it. To make a separation between one family and another—and therefore to choose, in the Latin sense of the term—means interrupting a discourse in a constant state of becoming, and unmistakably establishing the rights of lineage. The exhibition “Alberto Garutti. didascalìa/caption” at PAC has therefore been organized to take the processes with which the artist operates into account. It conveys a landscape of ideas, past, future and present projects (like the new work *In these rooms 28 microphones record all the words spoken by the visitors. A book dedicated to them will contain those words*, 2012). The title itself—“didascalìa/caption”—reflects the importance of this word in Garutti’s research. The caption is the means through which the public work is communicated, and it triggers “the sense of the work”, as Garutti often says: it is an integral part of the piece, necessary and indispensable to help the audience approach the work. In a certain sense, it is like what happens in silent films. The caption provides

the viewer with lines from the conversations between the characters and actively engages the reader in the plot. The works in the exhibition function like captions of a silent film: their arrangement in space has been thought out to activate associations of meaning between them, and to construct a possible plot of a personal history. One shifts from suspended remarks like *Untitled* to more or less complete phrases like *I think I remember*, to dense plots like *The dog shown here belongs to one of the families of Trivero. This work is dedicated to those families and to the people who will sit here and talk about them*.

To interpret the work of Alberto Garutti through its contexts of display, however, we have to first state that spaces, like artists, are never innocent. To what extent and how does the context determine, or get determined by, the artwork? Garutti belongs to a sizeable group of artists that have asked this question, organizing their expressive output with the aim not so much of providing an answer, but of continuing to obsessively raise the issue. In this sense, the exhibition represents an indispensable device of ideation, analysis and production of the work of the artist, precisely because it is the place in which the encounter between art and viewer happens, along the red thread of art and architecture that runs through Garutti’s entire career.

Garutti has approached every opportunity as a territory to explore, a reservoir of influences and constraints to be overcome through what is often a minimal, concealed strategy of intervention in the context. At the same time, he has always tried to emphasize the distance that exists between the physical, seductive aspect of the product and the active, experiential force of the method that comes before it. In other words, Garutti makes a distinction between the “work of art” (from painting to photography to abstraction, from pictorial interventions in space to sculptural works and public art projects) and the “labor of art,” clearly linked to the whole set of researches, experiences, information and data the artist gathers and develops as a premise of process and concept for the finished piece. The relationship between the work and the context also takes on particular importance when Garutti operates in institutional spaces; spaces which the artist has gradually abandoned, starting in the first half of the 1990s, choosing to work *extra moenia*, in the urban context.

His first public commission dates back to 1994, a few years after he took part, with his own room, in the Venice Biennial of 1990, directed by Giovanni Carandente. At Pesciolli, a small town in the province of Pisa, Garutti began to develop a precise method of approach, study and resulting response to the context. By transforming the request for a public work into the renovation of the village theater (temporarily in use as a parish center), bringing back its original function and historical memory, he chose restoration as a technique for making art through the direct involvement of the community.

Even when an institutional space hosts a solo show (the last two were at PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea of Milan, in 1987, and at the Palazzina dei Giardini of the Galleria Civica in Modena, in 1990), Garutti still studies the site and focuses on the structure of the building. The architectural symmetry of the Palazzina dei Giardini thus becomes a stimulus to create a double exhibition, a dual itinerary of identical works organized as a mirror image, in the right and left halves of the building. At PAC Garutti focuses on the “new” geometries of the facility, a formal characteristic he underlines by intervening with wall paintings, decorations and paintings with dark hues, where the sign that surfaces seems to have been deposited there over the course of thousands of years.

From this standpoint, the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea is still the least innocent space of all¹. Sharp, gorgeous and very hard to approach, this modernist Kunsthalle designed by Ignazio Gardella in the first half of the 1950s—with brass baseboards, like reminders of the interiors of bourgeois homes of the period after World War II—was opened, after a long period of restoration, in 1979, not coincidentally as an empty space, in an evening in which the city was the “work of art” to be seen. Nothing to see and everything to see: the opening of the PAC was like a Futurist evening, the performance of a city that gathers in a salon of contemporary art, a gathering of bodies distorted and altered by the lens of Maria Mulas. Transit, noise, comments, remarks, gossip: the walls talk and the ceilings listen. The work consists only of the relationship between the voices of the city and the space that listens to them. So it should come as no surprise to find our-

selves on the threshold of the PAC today, under the arch that marks the entrance to the main exhibition space, faced with the installation Alberto Garutti has created for this exhibition: *In these rooms 28 microphones record all the words spoken by the visitors. A book dedicated to them will contain those words*, 2012. This work is composed of 28 microphones the artist has hung from the suspended ceiling of the facility. The microphones will record the voices of the visitors to the show. A sort of guillotine suspended over the heads of the viewers, this device also represents their weapon of salvation against the self-referential character of the artwork. At the end of the exhibition, the recordings gathered by the microphones will be completely transcribed and published in a book. Like a screenplay or a score for multiple voices, this sonic inventory becomes the tool through which the artist re-examines the active role of the audience, while constructing at the same time the only true installation of the show; an installation that talks about the present, an ongoing present, breaking up the historical rhythm implied by a retrospective.

The relationship established between the work and its display is a theme addressed by the historical avant-gardes of the 1900s and by the neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s: from the *Mile of String* of Marcel Duchamp (made for the exhibition “First Papers of Surrealism” held in New York) to the black light of the *Ambiente nero* of Lucio Fontana (shown at the Galleria del Naviglio in Milan in 1949), to the installation by Gilberto Zorio entitled *Microfoni* (1968-1969); part of the series “Per purificare le parole”². *In these rooms 28 microphones (...)* is organized as a system that absorbs the voices of the visitors. The conceptual matrix is combined here with the use of unusual materials, like the electronic devices that allow us to hear a present in a continuous state of becoming. It is this urgency of the present, in all its adulterine and uncontrollable forms, that really matters to Garutti: *In these rooms 28 microphones (...)* encourages an attentive approach to the exhibition space in the visitor, but it is also a device of surveillance. The immateriality of sound does not immediately construct the space, it distills it in the recording: a precise *modus operandi* of the artist, countering speed with slowness, production with listening.

1. The building has been bombed by a mafia attack in 1993 when 5 men died. The bomb exploded along the main entrance wall.

2. Gilberto Zorio showed this work for the first time at Galleria Sperone in Turin in 1968. It consisted of microphones and speakers which visitors could use to amplify their own voices in the gallery space. In 2001 the piece was re-installed at Dia:Chelsea in New York, in the space designed by Jorge Pardo, where the installation also called for its own transformation over time.

Though originating inside the specific space of contemporary art, for the recording of the voices the work makes use of the gradual expansion in recent years of the audience for art exhibitions, to capture a multiplicity and variety of vocal sources—the voice of the art lover and expert, but also that of the student, of professionals from all walks of life, of children on a trip to the adjacent park who visit the show with their families, of people dragged to PAC by a friend on a rainy day. In short, all the voices of a composite world that will cross the threshold of PAC, free of charge. Life is called in, to disrupt the plans, expectations and effects of art.

This multiplicity of narrative registers corresponds to a mutant bodily choreography generated by the different physical positioning of people and sound sources inside the exhibition space, revealing the artist's interest in the mechanisms of notation of space, i.e. the possibility of knowing and measuring it through the position assumed by the body. In this sense, *In these rooms 28 microphones* (...) becomes a mapping system and, at the same time, a floating textual structure, aimed at destroying any crystalline vision of the artist with respect to the world. It is no coincidence that this work is found in the first room, along with some display cases in aluminium, iron and glass, containing a series of prints—drawings and preparatory studies, of works completed or still on the drawing board—conserved under glass as if they were contemporary parchments, or like the fossils on display at the nearby Natural History Museum. This archival hypothesis—as private as it is formally perfect—that opens the show confirms the artist's obsession with control and attention to detail, while also seeking complicity with the viewer, who is given a voice to comment on the ideal landscape the artist has constructed. Again in this case the work depends on the context and, at the same time, becomes the context itself—namely the set of relationships that are created between the work and the viewer. In other words, in his works Garutti thinks of space as a raw material, that is granted a precise meaning through the development of a repertoire of potentially infinite forms.

In these rooms 28 microphones (...) thus represents the backbone of the whole exhibition project: enveloping and to some extent overshadowing the works on display, the microphones also amplify the meaning

of the show, functioning as a resonating chamber inside the public space and the process of media distribution of commentary. In a computerized society, enthralled by the need to “post” and to “tweet,” Garutti turns things inside-out, giving a solid form to the flow of bits. In this sense, the work harks back to some of the artist's favorite themes: the autonomous spread of the work and its development in an ongoing present, formal repetition inside the exhibition space, multiple authorship, the white/black bichrome. The development of the work is similar to that of the series *Horizons* (1987-2012): the microphones, in this sense, continue the line of viewing previously indicated by the two-tone glass, shaping a new horizon of reference of the artist, whose clientele is thus extended to the world that will pass through PAC and that is the reason for his making art today. *In these rooms 28 microphones* (...) is nevertheless also the result of a meticulous analysis conducted by the artist of the volumes designed by Gardella, in the empty space of PAC. “With the void, full powers,” wrote Albert Camus on 28 April 1958, regarding the exhibition “Le Vide” by Yves Klein at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris. Construction by subtraction is not just a canon of Renaissance sculpture, but also a concept connected with the relationship between art and environment, in artists like Michael Heizer and Lucio Fontana. A similar focus on mechanisms and conventions that circumscribe the art world and on the modes through which art is enjoyed, evaluated and assimilated by society takes this work, like other by Garutti, closer to the solid research in the area of institutional critique of masters like Michael Asher, Hans Haacke and Joseph Kosuth, formidable teachers and tireless champions of conversation.

Thus the concept of the body as the “measure of the world”, as in Leonardo, returns in a post-media context in which the compass is discarded in favor of an iPhone. For Garutti, space is generated by movement—whether it is the minimal perception of a change (as in the *Untitled* series of photographs from the 1970s, where the pictorial sign of the line surfaces or settles against the background), a conceptual structure (like that of *In these rooms 28 microphones* (...)), or the movement generated by the endless conversations Garutti brings about when he operates in public contexts, as has happened in

the works: *To Those Born Today*, 1998-2012; *Dedicated to the tenants who live on the other side of the wall*, 1996-1999; *Dedicated to the young women and young men who have danced in this room*, 2000; *Storms*, 2009-2010), or an object generated by the measuring of a distance (as in the *Skeins* series (1997-2003), composed of spools of nylon whose length corresponds to the distance between the home of the artist and that of the client of the work).

The focus on the composition and arrangement of objects and human beings in space is another constant in the work of Alberto Garutti: it grants a narrative basis to the relationship between art and architecture, while treating the architecture inside which the work develops as a tool with which to evoke historical memory, in an operation that fights amnesia and favors knowledge. The anachronisms and stratifications of the Art History conserved in the city of Milan trigger reflections on the composition of figures in space: one example is the masterpiece of Piero della Francesca, the *Pala Montefeltro* (or *Pala di Brera*, held at the Pinacoteca di Brera since 1811), which Roberto Longhi described as “edifications of flesh and marbles”, since “the sacred connotation of the altarpiece comes from the persons assembled, not from the architecture that unites them”³. For Garutti, architecture is not made to be contemplated, but is a construct that functions as a repository of experiences. Even when he decides to operate through the absence of the work—because it is hidden, as in the cultural event “Le opere e i giorni” (2002-2004) held at the Certosa di Padula and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, where the artist walled up a gold plate inside one wall of a monastery—it is the exchange of information gathered on site that gives form to the immateriality of the work. Finally, the relationship between art and architecture—and perhaps this is the most interesting and urgent aspect—is a tool to analyze and reveal the economic processes behind that very relationship.

In Garutti the art-architecture relationship takes on the characteristics of an ongoing process of negotiation in which architecture becomes the ideal object of analysis and can be interpreted as the manifestation of the social, economic and cultural transformations of our time. Architecture, in other words, is the vehicle through which the artist investigates the relationships between the

constructed environment and its representations. The use art makes of architecture lies behind a reflection on art as exchange value, and on the canons of aesthetic evaluation applied in the era of stakeholder transactions (as in the tracing of lines on a monochrome background in the series *Samples*, 2008-2010, whose lengths correspond to the distance between buildings that are symbols of political and economic power, which are also the facilities of the clients of the work).

The theme of empty space is at the center of an entire effort of research of Alberto Garutti, often leading to works that start with the act of listening to empty places, measuring and pacing through them, then taking them over. The artist surveys emptiness in the same way that the architects of the Prix de Rome surveyed ancient works of architecture. It is no coincidence that in one of his first important solo shows, that of the Casa Masaccio of San Giovanni Valdarno, in 1996 (or in the solo show at Galleria La Nuova Pesa in Rome, that same year), Garutti constructed the work to address the issue of empty space, which the artist defined as “the fulfillment of the work.” The pieces, which focused on the idea of the dwelling, were built through subtraction of material (like the *Carpeting* series (1993-1995), where layers of mealy, whispering pink and yellow carpet took on the silhouette determined by the empty space between the furnishings in the artist’s room; *Red Crystal*, 1996, a large painting-window placed on the ground, like a fresco ripped off the wall; or in the family of works *Perforated Mirrors*, 1992-1996, where the profile of certain furnishings owned by the artist is represented by subtraction through the perforation of the surface of a mirror). The theme of the window—or, more precisely, of the city that enters the house—links back to the Futurist matrix of Italian art, and in particular to the tradition of the Milanese cityscape, from Achille Funi and Mario Sironi onward. After all, what prevails in works like *Red Crystal* is the “myth of architecture,” in the same way that—as Elena Pontiggia wrote about Mario Sironi in the introduction to the exhibition held at PAC in 1990—“for Sironi architecture was a myth, if by myth we mean not an ingenuous idealization, but an ideal pursued with visionary lucidity.” Garutti belongs to this Italian and Milanese tradition, and in different times and ways he has been able to reinterpret its myths and the codes of

3. Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca. La forza divina della pittura*, Milan, Silvana editoriale, 1991, p. 134.

modernity in an independent, original way. Through his works, it is as if Garutti were drawing a set of dots to connect, a system of symbols and abstract figures to be read with care. The artist offers the viewer an incomplete, partially empty map that needs to be filled up with the gestures and meanings of others to become clear. Only in this way can the work respond to the context, laying claim to an active relationship among men, objects and space, asserting the centrality of the body of the artist as a way of measuring things, but also its dissolving in the practice, at the same time. Like few other artists of his generation, Alberto Garutti has emerged in these years as the perfect exponent of an art that is still linked to a modernist project, that often revolves around the concept of the threshold and the gradual trespass of the figure into the background. In over thirty years of artistic research, he has approached his interest in the relationships with space through progressive leaps of scale and linguistic experiments, leading from oil painting to projects in public space. But the starting point has always remained the same.

“At the time I was showing [1978, Galleria Paul Maenz, Cologne, ed.] my photographs: I always photographed a room, a basement, decayed walls, also pictorial, so to speak, but what interested me—and still does—was the time and place of thought, of absence. I measured architecture to get beyond it: it was the work inside the space, beyond your autobiographical rants, but always and in any case pursuing the theme of the interior, of the place of art, the room also understood in a metaphorical sense, a counter-sense, if you will, to a sort of cowboy anthropology, all projected onto the surface. It was living inside the space of art. And that is still my theme.”⁴ Thus spoke Garutti in 1991, the year in which he showed at the Venice Biennial. A few years earlier, he had started to work with some new galleries in Milan that from the second half of the 1980s were concentrating on supporting the work of a new generation of Italian artists. Galleries like Studio Guenzani, Studio Casoli, Fac-simile, Massimo De Carlo, operating in the same city where Corrado Levi was organizing a composite series of exhibitions in institutional spaces and other spaces (we can mention the exhibition “Il cangiante”, at PAC in 1985). Radical initiatives were taking place in Milan, like the experiment inside the aban-

doned Brown Boveri factory, or the experience of the Casa degli Artisti with Luciano Fabro. So it should come as no surprise that in those years Alberto Garutti alternated solo shows in private galleries with participation in institutional events, including shows held at PAC, directed at the time by Mercedes Garberi (in 1985 the work *Fragment*, 1983, was acquired to be donated to the Civic Collections of the City of Milan, as part of the program “Nuovi Argomenti. Acquisizioni di giovane arte italiana”). After Inga Pin, who in 1975 held a solo show by Garutti at his space Diagramma, and Françoise Lambert, Garutti’s works were seen in the exhibition facilities of Horatio Goni, first (in 1987, at Galleria Fac-simile; catalogue edited by Giorgio Verzotti) and Studio Guenzani, which in 1987-1988-1989 presented sculptures in cement and glass, paintings on paper inside iron structures, oil paintings with strong colors, in a path marked by thresholds and tracks that determined the passage from one work to the next, one room to the next. Garutti’s output in this period becomes a recording of minimal shifts of experience, as demonstrated by the works included in the exhibition at Giò Marconi in Milan in 1992. Once again in this case, the show contained multiple works, like “a floor slab divided into two parts, white and black [...] and a rectangular shadow traced with red paint on the wall, that expands on the floor.”⁵

The interest in the modes of relation between work and context dates back, in any case, to the previous decade—the period from 1976 to 1984—during which Alberto Garutti began to work with the Italian and foreign galleries who, at the height of the success of the Transavanguardia, were to play a crucial role in the introduction and spread of Conceptual Art in Europe: Paul Maenz in Cologne (who hosted a solo show by Garutti in 1979, with a text by Germano Celant), Françoise Lambert in Milan, Ugo Ferranti in Rome, Vittorio Dapelo and Uberta Sannazzaro of Galleria Locus Solus. In this period Alberto Garutti moved nimbly through a territory contaminated by the two most important Italian movements (Arte Povera and the Transavanguardia), while at the same time showing work that involved photography and painting and installations, pointing to research on spatial issues, beyond reflections on art as a cognitive tool.

The exhibitions in Milan at the gallery of

4. Alberto Garutti, in an interview with Marco Meneguzzo, *Avvenire*, 24 August 1991.

5. Francesco Tedeschi, in *Il Giornale*, 17 May 1992.

Françoise Lambert—like the one in 1980, “Interno con natura morta,” the same title used for the first solo show of Alberto Garutti at PAC, in 1987—gave the artist an opportunity to experiment with ideas and approaches to space, creating a relationship between architecture, photography, painting and decoration. He often made use of architectural fragments painted on walls, together with photographic sequences connected to the theme of the line crossing the frame. Each photograph is a module—framed and combined in different ways—crossed by a line made of simple material, like wool, cotton, binding or tempera, materials that indicate a private, lyrical, domestic operation, an everyday exercise performed on a work table, observing the imperceptible happenings of life from the window, at the feet of a father-mentor who reads stories of heroes and knights. This line crosses a nude wall, on which we can nevertheless glimpse the signs of time, as it becomes a fantasy threshold towards the pleasure of the painting. Garutti works to make the pictorial sign that has been deposited over the years come to the surface. The photographs are like pieces of frescoes torn down from walls, little paintings in dull hues, earth tones; remains of the past, granted new meaning by the artist. The results are true photographic objects—shown for the first time in this exhibition—with a more or less regular form, all of them *Untitled*. More than lines of color they are lines of force, that indicate a partial perspective that disorients the viewer. A square, the silhouette of a door, a horizontal line or a column, while making reference to a vocabulary connected to design and to interior architecture, are transformed into abstract signs scattered on the walls of the gallery—nude, yet bearing traces of the passage of previous works—parallel to the floor, often right up against corners, openings or zones of passage, to emphasize the structure of the place and its way of being above all a place of relations.

There is a closer focus on interiors and the domestic character of objects⁶ in the series of solo shows held at Galleria Banco in Brescia, now known as Galleria Massimo Minini. The research on materials, the gradual detachment from the canonical tools of painting, the tendency towards experimentation, multiplication and repetition of the languages and forms of art were refined, starting in the late 1980s,

when for two solo exhibitions (1988 and 1991) Garutti presented a series of works made with materials used in the home, like wallpaper, embroidery on silk and veneered wood (all *Untitled*, works Garutti continued to produce in the years to follow). In the first and second cases, the bourgeois facing par excellence (the paper typical of domestic interiors of the 1950s, in pastel tones or floral patterns) or fine fabric (connected with Lombard industry and with the figure of the woman doing handiwork) were perforated or stitched along lines that reflect the profile of a piece of furniture. In the case of the wood, we are instead faced with reliefs of polished material, with a warm, luminous surface, whose volumes emerge like soap bubbles in a bathtub.

The relationship between inside and outside, between vacant space and inhabited space, is the true protagonist of this exhibition at PAC. After all, *In these rooms 28 microphones (...)* immediately establishes a dialogue with the work *Ficus PAC* (2012).

This is a series of ficus plants arranged inside the exhibition space. *Ficus PAC* talks about the composition of objects in space and the mechanisms of relation that arise between things and people. The work is an enigma the artist is unable to explain: a sort of unconscious and uncontrolled reaction to the space, the same reaction one has upon returning, after a long time, to a place that seems both foreign and familiar. The sequence of plants inside an institutional space becomes a vehicle of the idea of the exhibition as a landscape and, at the same time, it is linked to the idea of interior decorating—of private homes or public spaces—dense with culture and memories. With *Ficus PAC* Garutti reactivates the civic memory of a city that had an entire greenhouse available, which it used for openings and cultural events, to “decorate” its interiors. It is as if the artist were bent on bringing to light, in a sideways, discreet way, the very strong presence of nature in architecture; a presence that strongly influences anyone who approaches PAC with the attitude of a listener, of someone who knows how to look at architecture.

In this sense, the Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea is revealed by the presence of this indoor nature, and no longer appears to be an uncontaminated white box, but a threshold between man who constructs and nature that contains.

6. See, for example, the exhibition “Camera con vista. Arte e interni in Italia, 1900-2000”, curated by Claudia Gianferrari, Milan, Palazzo Reale, 2007.

This two works become indices of a way of making art that “counters speed with slowness, simplicity with complexity,” as Giorgio Verzotti wrote in 1987, for the double show of Alberto Garutti and John Armleder at Galleria Artra in Milano, where the paintings of the Swiss artist established a dialogue with the painting-object of Garutti (large oils on canvas with an irregular geometric form, repeated in random modules, balanced between abstraction and design; and paintings on the wall and on the floor, in which the color expanded beyond the limits of the plane). Yet on closer examination *In these rooms 28 microphones (...)* also evokes another memory, more closely linked to the sphere of artistic research, that of trespassing “beyond the canvas,” of the work in space as a central theme of Italian research, and of art in Milan, in particular, from the end of World War II to the present.

Close to the premises of Conceptual Art and the formal research of the European and American Minimalist currents, early on Garutti took a clear, even severe and threatening position with respect to a pictorial expressionism that in the decade between the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1990s had taken a place in the spotlight of the entire contemporary art circuit. He crossed this decade without ever abandoning a certain cerebral approach and, above all, still battling to make the work communicate no so much the “what” as, above all, the “how.” In this period, in fact, his work is marked by a stylistic eclecticism, passing from the use of photography to experiences of painting or photography-painting that test the possibilities of trespass into space, or the resetting of painting in the monochrome. This attitude was in line, at the time, with a more general questioning of the economic aspects of Conceptual Art, the issues of the new economics of aesthetic value and the new critiques of cultural production, as well as the transformation of the role of the artist from a producer of objects to a distributor of information (in this sense, the series of works *Samples*, 2008-2010, represents a good example). Alberto Garutti is fully aware of his cultural background: son of a teacher of Latin and Greek at the Liceo San Carlo of Milan, Garutti is a tireless reader of stories that narrates the acts of heroes and myths, a voracious consumer and spreader of images from the history of art (from the *Last Supper* of

Leonardo da Vinci, not yet restored, to the postcards of the great masters of Umbria and Tuscany; from the monochrome of Lucio Fontana to the obsessive, unyielding repetition of Enrico Castellani; from the circle of Azimuth to the reflection on art as a cognitive experience and a possibility of taking possession of reality of Luciano Fabro; from the seductive technology of the research conducted in the wake of Bruno Munari to the concern with gestures, behaviors and memory of others, to translate into luminous or sonic devices, all the way to the proximity, through “combinatory” affinities, with works like *I fatti della vita* (1979), the masterpiece of Dadamaino shown at the Venice Biennial in 1980. The investigation of painting, never completely abandoned by Garutti, but approached inside a renewal of languages and a desire to multiply the expressive possibilities, is reflected in the choice of the materials with which he makes his works, domestic things that nevertheless have a universal meaning. Often applied by the artist to interior surfaces (stone composite, glass, wood, wallpaper, mirrors, carpeting) or industrial substances (aluminium, nylon, cement), in Garutti’s work painting becomes a glossy patina that makes objects with a multiple identity glow, which we might call sculptures-reliefs-installations. The landscape that takes form in the whole of these works translates into a question regarding the idea of the monument, be it a private object or a public work. The artist gradually shifts into an urban scale of intervention, and on these occasions he uses the techniques of restoration as the raw material of the work.

The focus on the process of the work, on its development more than on its nature as an object, is a constant in the output of Alberto Garutti. His works, different in terms of scale, language and reasoning, come from deep meditation on the act of making art and, at the same time, from the inner desire to dissolve art in life. This is the enigma that continues to surface, from 1974 to the present, in the work of Garutti. An enigma that is brought out by the display context in which and from which his work is generated: architecture, in its sense as an object, not to see but on which to reflect, a repository of experiences of living or re-living.

In over thirty years of work, Alberto Garutti has refined a conceptual procedure in the structure of a repertoire of infinite formal

translations, moving from the construction of a vocabulary of domestic symbols—in which tables, chairs, furniture, floors, wall-paper and embroidery evoke the world of affections and qualify domestic space as a place of relationships—to develop a precise method of production of the work in public space, putting himself on the line, along with social architecture that surrounds the work.