

GIULIO PAOLINI SALE D'ATTESA



Imagination is the somewhat disorderly antechamber  
of that room where the work then appears.  
It's the secret deposit, the dark and mysterious territory  
that keeps the threshold of the work open.

*Giulio Paolini*



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**GIULIO PAOLINI. SALE D'ATTESA**

**Magonza**



*Dear Giulio,*

*A few months ago, when we came to visit you in your studio, we brought you a new edition of a book you love, and which we also love a great deal: The Maker by Jorge Luis Borges. Another reason to consolidate our friendship and to testify to our boundless admiration for your work.*

*“In a goblet, a woman has set a yellow rose; the man murmurs the inevitable lines of poetry that even he, to tell the truth, is a bit tired of by now:*

*Porpora de' giardin, pompa de' prati  
Gemma di primavera, occhio d'aprile...*

*Then the revelation occurred. Marino saw the rose, as Adam had seen it in Paradise, and he realized that it lay within its own eternity, not within his words, and that we might speak about the rose, allude to it, but never truly express it, and that the tall, haughty volumes that made a golden dimness in the corner of his room were not (as his vanity had dreamed them) a mirror of the world, but just another thing added to the world's contents.*

*Marino achieved this epiphany on the eve of his death, and Homer and Dante may have achieved it as well” (from “A Yellow Rose”, in The Maker).*

*A thing of beauty added to the mystery of the world: and this is great art. Art also as a form of waiting. Inspiration as a gift. The enthusiasm of creation. Enthousiasmós, Ènthous, Èn-theos: full of a god, being in God, being possessed by a god, the daemon of Socrates. Like your – our – beloved Borges, we know you are very fond of thinking of the act of waiting, like an antenna, listening out for a voice that might arrive, that comes; for a force that lies beyond our own, far away, mysterious and different; yet a voice, a presence that wishes to speak through us. The work as “a sort of apparition that transcends the intentions of the artist.” “How do I compose a poem?”, “I put myself in a passive situation, and I wait. I wait, and my only concern is that it all ends in beauty. I feel like I am receiving a gift, and I don't even know if it comes from my own memory or something else” (Borges). The perception of a gift that we may receive, through our own memory or the limitless Memory of everything. The reality of a long artistic and creative career, your life, which many may still discover with extreme gusto and great wonder.*

*Paolo and Carlo Repetto*

## HOUSE ARREST

Andrea Cortellessa

... entre les feuillets et le regard règne un silence encore,  
condition et délice de la lecture  
*Stéphane Mallarmé, Mimique*

How well I would write if I were not here!  
*Italo Calvino*

I am still searching for, or waiting for, beauty  
*GP, 1992*

### Waiting for the Work

In a doctor's surgery, an office or a station, the *waiting room* is a neutral space, uncharacterised, as bare as possible, situated this side of the room in which the event will take place that, be we confident or worried in regard, we are about to experience. I call it a 'space', but while this term designates the event in question – the *proceeding space* – the space in which we find ourselves is in actual fact its opposite. Here we do not *proceed*, we do not carry out or implement anything at all. We do nothing but spend some time there (*killing time*, as we might say). It is no coincidence if that limbo is also known as the *antechamber*: it's an anti-factual, anti-practical and anti-effective space. Situated on this side (*ante-*), or perhaps on that side, of what we call *life*: that story which, in the words of a barbarian not bereft of wit, "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." A story made up of events: intentional or reflex actions, incidents and accidents, facts and vicissitudes. Be it a medical examination, the resolution of a procedure or a permanent departure, our future will depend on that event. Regardless of how much or in what manner, it will still be a fork in the road, a node in the boundless *continuum* of the possible, the event which respectively *awaits us*. But as long as we remain in the *waiting room*, here in the antechamber, we find ourselves *this side of the event*: we are stationed in the time which precedes that in which, among the "several alternatives," a man "chooses one and eliminates the others." Indeed, no need to dwell in Borges's metaphysical Garden, where "diverse futures, diverse times, which themselves also proliferate and fork," are produced simultaneously: each of our tedious existences,

every day that goes by, is made up of paths that split. Suffice to focus our attention on the moment *before* those destinies split: in the waiting room, no less.

Right from the start – from his totemic *Disegno geometrico*, commented on countless times by he himself, with which (and despite the *juvenilia* made known somewhat *après coup*) he symbolically chose to begin the numbering of his catalogue raisonné – the work that Giulio Paolini *attends to* (a curious linguistic expression, *to attend to a work*: used by him, as we will see, in a strategic manner) or is positioned in this timeless time, in this spaceless space. That *squadratura* (‘squaring’, the term used in title of Calvino’s famous essay which in 1975 introduced the artist’s first collection of writings: in turn serving as an ideal – i.e. non-chronological – foundation of his critical fortune) was conceived as a “preliminary design of any design,” and this preliminary *status* was valid both in general (“a conceptual assumption,” as Paolini would say to Germano Celant, “extended to all the works of a certain artist [myself] and to virtually all the works of all artists”) and in particular to his works to come. In fact, Paolini also mentions to Celant that the *Disegno* “still seems to constitute the secret and invisible yet tangible line that my work follows.” With great elegance, Daniel Soutif recently pointed out that it’s “the watermark of all the work to come by the artist who created it, and it is by creating this very work that he becomes an artist.” Also (but not only) in this sense, “the start” of ’60 is also – according to Paolini – “the end”: the *incipit* but also the *télos*. The “first painting” is also “the last” because the *watermark* of that *drawing* is inscribed conceptually (and in many cases also materially), in all his images to follow. And so *transparency*, a value which he often invoked for his work, is that in which this *watermark* may be perceived: “transparency is endless,” Paolini once said; “it tends towards the infinite; it does not lead to an ‘image’ but it leads us to ‘imagine’, to always see beyond the contingent limit” (more recently he added: “imagination is the somewhat disorderly *antechamber* of that room where the work then appears. It’s the secret deposit, the dark and mysterious territory that keeps the threshold of the work open”).

In general, this transparency pertains to the dimension of *drawing*. In the notes written for a series of courses he held at the start of the 2000s, Paolini declares: “on my ID card I stated my profession to be that of the ‘drawer’. Unlike painting, sculpture or other media [...], drawing lets the premises shine through, the initial datum, thus allowing us to foresee – yet without limiting – the final result.” In these terms, all of Paolini’s works



are thus *drawings*. That of '60 mimics the coordinates of a perspective drawing, but a *perspective* value – in general and etymologically – is to be found in all his works, insofar as they *prospect* an indeterminate vanishing point, an invisible future which they tend towards indefinitely.

In other words, they are all *incipits*. This term should be understood in almost opposite terms to the 'autobiographical' ones in which it was used, for example, by Claudio Parmiggiani (who thus titled a recent work where, *après coup*, in the famous photographs taken in Luzzara by Paul Strand for *Un paese* – the photo book produced in 1955 together with Cesare Zavattini – he retraced the remote origin of so many of his successive images). In fact, while there is an 'author' in Paolini's work – as Calvino warned – it is not there "as a subject" but rather "as an element of the work". Within it, the "individual I" is "cancelled" so as to "identify with the I of painting of all times, the collective I of the great painters of yesteryear, the very potential of painting." And in fact, while Parmiggiani's *incipit* sinks its roots into the past, *aux sources du poème*, Paolini's is paradoxically rooted in the future – which by definition is undefined.

*Incipit*, indeed, should have been the title of Calvino's novel – meta-novel or, more precisely, ante- (rather than anti-) novel – which was inspired by Paolini's work on *squadratura*: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. The seventh chapter of which, preceding the 'incipit' of a 'potential' novel, Borgesianly (or anti-Borgesianly) entitled "In a Network of Lines that Intersect", is inspired by the figure of the artist friend, the character known as 'Irnerio the sculptor' – a "familiar ghost" who, just like the protagonist whom the narrator turns to, the Reader, is introduced into the home full of books of the deuteragonist, the Reader Ludmilla – who with books "makes things" ("statues, paintings, however you wish to call them"). In one of his books (one of those books made "with the photographs of all his books" which once "printed", confesses Irnerio, he will use "to make a work, lots of works," which in turn will be "featured in another book, and so on"), published by the same publisher as Calvino, Paolini included a quotation from the following chapter of the novel, the eighth: "I would like to be able to write a book that is only an *incipit*, that maintains for its whole duration the potentiality of the beginning, the expectation still yet to focus on an object."

And so back we come to the *wait*. Actually, *Sale d'attesa* [Waiting Rooms] is the title of the chapter in *Quattro passi*, Paolini's book in which these words are found: the same

title, in fact, as the series of collages that would be put on show, i.e. that were put on show, in London (in the immediate future following the moment in which I'm writing these words, or rather in your immediate past as you have just seen them in the gallery). A chapter in which two other masterpieces of literature are evoked illustrating the procedures of art: *The Unknown Masterpiece* by Honoré de Balzac and, inspired by this, *The Madonna of the Future* by Henry James. Of the former, we might recall the episode in which the protagonist, Frenhofer, intervenes in the painting of another painter, Porbus, correcting just a tiny detail (on close inspection, *The Unknown Masterpiece* is first and foremost a great apologue on the detail: on the subverting force of the detail with regard to the whole), yet by so doing, appropriating it to all effects. According to Paolini, the effect of that intervention carried out with hindsight demonstrates the lack of belonging of any work of art to its material extensor. But what concerns us more closely here is the plot of James's story: in which a typical American tourist during a visit to Florence meets the painter Theobald, who *attends* to the creation of an *d'après* of the *Madonna della seggiola* by Raphael. With the intention, however, of thereby creating at the same time "a Madonna who was to be a *résumé* of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school – like that antique Venus who borrowed a nose from one great image and an ankle from another." The infinite past of the *painting of all time* is therefore equivalent to the infinite future of the works to come: i.e. the *Madonna of the Future*. (This is a project – it may well be said – that pre-empts many *d'après* by Paolini himself; including in particular, one based on a work by Raphael himself: *Raphael Urbino MDVIII*, 1968.) And so, in a manner both equal and opposite to the chaos of overlapping and unintelligible signs of which in the end Frenhofer's work would turn out to be made up of, Theobald's remains the forerunner of itself: a "blank canvas that lies motionless, virgin, on the easel of his studio." "A canvas," writes James, "that was a mere dead blank, cracked and discoloured by time."

The *hubris* to concentrate all possible works into one single work, into its *watermark*, in the attempt to pre-empt all of them, leads to the outcome – paradoxical yet, at this point, not unforeseeable – of a blank, *virgin* canvas (a religious metaphor here – already explored by the surrealists, as Gabriele Guercio reminds us in one of the most intelligent essays I have ever read about him – which Paolini explored in one of his works in 2007–08 titled *Immacolata Concezione. Senza titolo / Senza autore*: among the elements

of which there is one – a spherical mirror – which must be viewed as a further homage to his friend Calvino, who holds one in his hand in a well-known photo portrait of his: in turn a homage by the writer to an artist of the past: Parmigianino and his *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, along with the *d'après* by Maurits Cornelis Escher). An *absolute nothingness*, a canvas *cracked and discoloured*: just like the archetypal *Disegno geometrico*. (As an aside, also in the *maestro* there is a religious substrate – of a “Godless mystique” perhaps, as Roland Barthes would conceive of it in the ’70s – among those most venerated by Paolini, who gave the name *Attese* to many of his famous *Concetti spaziali*. In 1988, Paolini dedicated these words to Lucio Fontana, in a text that starts with these words: “I will say nothing about Lucio Fontana. I’m here to speak about the work, without dimensions and without date, which Fontana has always ‘awaited’ (he says it himself insistently, with many of his later paintings indeed entitled *Attese*, ‘Waits’).” It’s this clear laconicism and ahistoricity on Fontana’s part that in Paolini’s view clearly illustrates how “the work of the artist lies beyond any work (it does not emerge; it is not visible) insofar as it was seen before and it will be seen afterwards.” Those by Fontana are “celestial vaults, sidereal paths [...] in an absence of time and place.” In an interview in ’63, Fontana defined “these cuts, these concepts” as the “start” of “a thing”: “What are they? They are mystery, the unknown element of art, they are the wait for something that has yet to happen.” Among those interpreting Paolini’s work, the one who most insisted on the importance of Fontana in his work was Michele Dantini, who underlines his frontline presence, alongside Carla Lonzi and the mask of the customs officer Rousseau who takes the place of the author in the ‘group’ *Autoritratto* put together by Paolini in the year of Fontana’s death, 1968.)

But there’s another much lesser known work by Paolini which I am reminded of even more precisely by the ambivalent reversibility of this infinite future which reflects the infinite past which, in the words of Calvino, is *the painting of all time*. I believe Denis Viva is right to interpret Paolini’s choice to display reproductions of works of the past in his exhibition at the Galleria De Nieubourg in Milan, in February 1969 as an implicit polemic against the ‘semiotic resetting’ attributed by Germano Celant to the procedures of *Arte Povera*: a critical grouping within which, two years earlier, Paolini had accepted to be included. There’s no doubt that “reproducing nothing but paintings of the past” represented “an outright inverted canon in the era;” an era, 1968 (which had also been

marked by Gastone Novelli's choice to deny his canvases to the Biennale della Contestazione by displaying their *verso*, not so far-removed from certain procedures typical of Paolini...), marked by the spasmodic *wait* for an Event Yet to Come, the Revolution, which for many even then was a mere virtual element towards which to tend, without really believing in its actual potential implementation.

In that way, the ingenious metaphor of one of the best known of Paolini's poetic formulae, set out only the year before ("In my work I invoke the etymological transparency of the works of Beato Angelico, Johannes Vermeer, Nicolas Poussin, Lorenzo Lotto and Jacques-Louis David"), took on a literal expression. But in that exhibition, on closer inspection, it was not only the *etymological transparency of the past* that was convoked. It was concluded by an image that once reversed, just like the *Disegno geometrico*, evoked a no less transparent *watermark of the future*. The last photograph (featured also on the exhibition invitation card) did not in fact feature any more or less canonical work from the pictorial tradition, but rather the space in which those works or meta-works would be displayed, completely empty. The title of the work, *2121969*, coincided with the opening date of the exhibition: 21<sup>st</sup> February 1969 (at "19h", as the invitation specified). Claudio Zambianchi commented: "it's as if the works had been volatilised, underlining the absoluteness, paradoxical here too, of the space in which art is institutionally presented." True, but the opposite is also – if not above all – symmetrically true. The place portrayed is in fact perfectly empty, i.e. full of its mere potency: prefiguring works to come, which are those just viewed by the visitor, but also – as usual – *all possible works* (of which specimens are indeed shown as reproductions therein). In fact, if not virtually and fictitiously, the hypothesis that that photograph had been taken *after having been emptied* (the relative image, in that case, could not have been published in an exhibition catalogue) is not put forward. More likely, it was instead photographed *when the space had not yet been filled*. The Void, in other words, is always previous and successive to the Event (and so – should we pursue the 'political' interpretation put forward by Denis Viva – it would be hard to deny a value of prophecy verging on the insolent in Paolini's gesture).

(As another aside, it is quite believable that this work by Paolini was the inspiration for a writer with a background firmly set within the arena of conceptual art, Tommaso Pincio, to *imagine* an episode which for me has always had the value of an apologue as moving as – on closer inspection – it is insolent. In the short sci-fi story – one of a science

fiction of course set in the past – titled *Beat Space*, published on that ever so symbolic date which was the year 2000, one is called upon to *imagine* that, in a hypothetically alternative 1950s, Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller went to live in the Kaufmann House, better known as *Fallingwater*: the one built in 1939 by Frank Lloyd Wright on Bear Run stream in Pennsylvania. In the contorted yet fragile interweaving, *et pour cause*, of what is in actual fact a genuine short treatise on the Void and on Disappearance, Neal Cassady tries to call Marilyn but in the meantime she has disappeared, no less, for the phone rings off the hook in the House, itself void of human presence. Representing this disappearance, chapter 43 is made up entirely of an image, followed by a blank page. The image is a perfectly normal photograph of the Bear Run waterfall, perhaps taken during a survey of the area by the architects called in to implement Wright's designs. Of course, *before the House on the Waterfall* was built, there was nothing but the waterfall. But in our imagination, in our memory, that is the place of an absence, a privation, an *emptying*. And thus of a nostalgia: as paradoxical as it is undeniable.)

### **A Room with a View**

So far, I have considered the *wait*. But at least as important if not more so, of course, is the *room*. From the series of *Sale d'attesa*, all dated 2011–2012, there is I think a *preliminary sketch*, a blueprint dated 2001 which, also in this case, is not among the most commonly known by the artist. The work in question is *Reportage*, a study of which is reproduced in the previously cited volume *Quattro passi*. Also in material terms, in this case, it is an actual drawing. A man is sitting on an armchair, legs crossed, his posture composed and relaxed: we might in fact imagine that he is biding his time in a *waiting room*. His face is hidden by a series of concentric and overlapping frames, at the centre of which lies a black rectangle (a sort of negative of the rectangle of 'light' which, in *Raphael Urbinas MDIIII*, ideally reproduces that in the "portal of the temple painted by Raphael in his *Marriage of the Virgin*").

Although the features of the person portrayed are not recognisable, *Reportage* is a self-portrait. This is how Paolini in fact describes it, in the pages of the same title that come right after it: "The artist abdicates, he draws aside, *si ritrae* (which in Italian has the two-fold sense of 'withdrawing' and of 'portraying', 'assigning himself' to the image of the work). The only image in which he admits to recognising himself, his

self-portrait, is the empty frame, the only image authorised to represent him.” (This is not the first time that Paolini’s self-portrait is merely inferable, or rather deductible, since his face within the image is in fact hidden, counterfeited, physically eclipsed: suffice to think of another *watermark-work* of his early period: *Delfo* ’65.) The text continues: “Thus, nobody made it to the appointment. An armchair, in the centre of the room, seems however to be there, waiting for someone who, on closer inspection, perhaps already occupies it. The sinuous design of the furniture, Louis XIV style, curvilinear and vaguely anthropomorphic, does nothing to help acknowledge the actual presence of the guest. More distinguishable is a picture frame, but it is not clear whether it is resting on the arm of the chair or in the lap of the figure who appears (if he really does appear) as if he has been there forever, like a figure that has abandoned his body.”

Paolini’s fascination with interiors and furnishings in the neo-classical style is no novelty. In the most extraordinary sense, *Raphael Urbinas MDVIII* has always reminded me, insofar as it appears to be so much less glittery than others, of a cinema masterpiece dated 1968: *2001 A Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick. At the end of his mind-bending journey (also in the hallucinogenic sense of the term) “to infinity and beyond,” as we might recall, the astronaut who remains alone finds himself walking on an alternatively ‘lunar’ surface, unlike that seen at the start of the film, that of a metaphysical *intérieur* in which he encounters himself, both dying and just born. This short circuit between past and future might remind us of Borges (although his closest texts are actually *later* than Kubrick’s film); however, it certainly evokes the philosophical framework of *2001*, Nietzsche’s ‘eternal return’ homaged in the *incipit* to *Also sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss. His visual theme, the reprise which at the end of this scene joins it up to the prologue set in prehistory, is the appearance of the Monolith (an enigmatic yet authoritative black parallelepiped which, with its monumental yet minimal style, seems to have been produced by the hands of Richard Serra). But just what is that heart of darkness – dated 2001 to boot – framed by Paolini in the perspectival vanishing point of the concentric picture frames that conceal his face if not indeed a black Monolith? (we might even suppose that the bizarre title of this work, *Reportage*, in turn alludes to another cinema masterpiece of that period which, just like this one by Paolini, is an apologue on the rejection of subjective identity and its reproduction through imagery: *The Passenger* [*Professione: reporter*] by Michelangelo Antonioni.)

But what interests us about *Reportage* here is most of all the combination of Louis XIV furnishings and the phantasmagoria of the frames that ‘square in’ or rather *square off* – and thereby effectively cancelling – the identity of the figure. Because as said before, the figurative framework of the *Sale d’attesa* dating a decade later is just this: actually presented, compared to the original *Reportage*, as variations on the theme. In fact, each time the image features the same scenario, or rather the same ‘set’: in the centre, framed from the front, there is a *curvilinear and vaguely anthropomorphic sofa*, to the sides of which, two armchairs in the same style are laid out, identical to that designed in *Reportage*, viewed side-on. (Unlike in *Reportage*, however, here the furnishing is not a neutral field of projection: on the back of the sofa we can make out a rural scene, perhaps the reproduction of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century tapestry.) Sometimes photographed in black and white (thus with a choice more akin to that of the blueprint-work, more often in colour, this *sala* welcomes various ‘guests’ on different occasions. We may pick out the masters of Paolini’s discipline, such as Fausto Melotti, and his notorious tutelary deities of literature: Borges of course, in the *sala* named after one of his most famous stories, *The Aleph*, and Calvino (accompanied by the spherical mirror of the *Immacolata Concezione*) in that which bears the same self-ironic title of one of his texts, *Ermite à Paris*.

But the *Sale d’attesa* are most of all the place in Paolini’s work given over to the re-proposing of a canonical genre of Western painting, that of the ‘gallery’ or ‘cabinet d’amateur’: i.e. paintings which, within them, feature other paintings. Indeed, from time to time, waiting on the sofa, we see ‘guests’ that are in fact works, by others or his own (such as *Nulla da dichiarare* or the previously mentioned *Immacolata Concezione*): in a triumph – as peaceful and understated as it is clearly smug and virtuosic – of the *mise en abîme*. As Victor I. Stoichita demonstrated in a key study, the *cabinet d’amateur* genre, which developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, moving away from the mere and indiscriminate addition of images when it began to deploy shifts of sense in the form of *mises en abîme* itself. By so doing, he doubles (or rather, raises to the power) the sense of seclusion, the concentration with which “the painting, thanks to its frame, stands in opposition to all that which is non-painting.” And thus the convocation of a plurality of works (no matter here whether they are actually existent, as part of the traditional repertoire, or vice versa conceived especially for the occasion by the artist) “serves as

a 'super-frame.'" We could not imagine a more congenial genre than this, therefore, for the 'reclusiveness' which the *Ermite à Turin* that is Giulio Paolini loves to indulge in. In fact, in his work the *Sale d'attesa* are the arena of greatest meta-pictorial concentration, and at the same time, of the greatest closure within the *intérieur*. No less self-ironic, but as we shall see not only cruel, the title of one of the rooms is *Arresti domiciliari* [House Arrest].

Hence on closer inspection, Paolini's reprise of Fontana – as often with regard to his predecessors – is also a reversal. An initial example of the *wait* in Fontana is in fact to be found in the manifesto of the *Spaziali*, dating back to '48: "we looked at ourselves from above, photographing the Earth from soaring rockets. | This does not lead us to exalt the primacy of our mind over this world, but we wish to regain our own true face, our own true image: *a change awaited by the whole of creation*, anxiously." As we might see, the candidly neo-futurist approach adopted by Fontana – who makes his extreme and technologically assisted naturalism from Marinettism – all looks *outwards*: his holes and cuts are slits through which to look beyond, but specifically, to look *out*. Vice versa, Paolini's *tranche de vie* is addressed *inwards*: in this case, with a fair share of self-irony, towards the most canonical bourgeois *intérieur*. While the enthusiastic and futuristic Fontana prepares each time for the Departure, the melancholic and meta-pictorial Paolini obsessively stages the Return.

And indeed, once Paolini had confessed his outright 'anti-Futurist faith' (although, he added immediately, "the prefix 'anti' really is an echo of Futurism,") first of all in temperamental terms, alluding to his 'fear of planes' (but again adding that "immobility really is the sublimation of speed"). In this sense, its decisive *etymological transparency* is the symmetrical inversion of the Futurist dromomania: i.e. the Eleatic immobility of Metaphysics. The ambivalence between *inside* and *outside* is after all the main invention of de Chirico, a guiding light that Paolini is ever more often inspired by: "the returner" who, ever more often in his later works, turns his gaze to the past instead of to the future, to the museum. Even that of Paolini's *Sale d'attesa* is an interior museum which is at the same time a museum of the *interior*: if you will, a little like in those companions of Futurism that clearly prefigured Metaphysics, such as the works of Govoni or Carrà (and the sets of the *Sale d'attesa*, catatonically fixed yet at the same time frenetically variable, may indeed remind us of the *Camera sentimentale* by the



former or *L'ovale delle apparizioni* by the latter). Like in Kubrick's 'neoclassical room', in the *Sala d'attesa* Paolini stages the 'eternal return' to the Space-matrix of his own imagination. He says so in no uncertain terms at the start of a recent book in which once more he expresses his annoyance (or simply his suspicion) with regard to his own personal identity: *L'autore che credeva di esistere* [The Artist who Believed He Existed]. A book which, in the first part, for the first time features the reproductions of the *Sala d'attesa*, in a far more substantial series than the selection on show in London, and which is presented not as a "book-catalogue, as is usually the case, documenting the usual path (studies/for the works/on display), but which on the contrary announces the return (without departure) to the place of origin: here, between the walls of my studio." As always, however, this subjective *origin* coincides for Paolini, as Calvino reminds us, with "the *I* of painting of all times, the collective *I* of the great painters of the past: and in fact it is both "an imaginary museum: a place (or non-place) that can host the past and future memory of the artist."

It's a museum, but also a film ("Silence, cameras rolling: but what? A film sequence, or more simply shall we roll, turn over this page?"). Of course, a film in Paolini's manner. Indeed, thanks to an exemplary analysis of Riccardo Venturi, we are reminded that the only experiment of video art produced by him, *Unisono*, actually avoids the illusion of cinematographic motion in order to create a series – each time presenting a minimal break between one and the next – of ninety-two reproductions of his own past works. Thus also in that case, more than an auto-anthology, an auto-biography: not of the artist, of course, but rather of the work. (Although in at least one case – yet I am bound to have missed other more cryptic self-allusions – i.e. in the work titled *Bergamo, inverno 1944-45*, his own image appears, albeit half-erased as always: "a little black-and-white photograph with tattered white edges" which, as Antonella Soldaini writes, "peeks out of a half-opened letter. In the photo, the artist as a child is visible [...]. It's the 1940s, and Giulio is living with his family in Bergamo.")

Paolini's new 'picture gallery' is not to be found within the Space-matrix, in the venue of the Event: where in a more or less 'immaculate' fashion, in other words, the Work is conceived. We do not find ourselves in the artist's studio, but rather, as we should be well aware by now, in the space which is immediately adjacent and *preliminary*: in its *Sala d'attesa*.

### Giulio Paolini's Dwelling

"Exile, the poem then, makes the poet a wanderer, the one always astray, he to whom the stability of presence is not granted and who is deprived of a true abode. And this must be understood in the gravest sense: the artist does not belong to truth because the work is itself what escapes the movement of the true. For always, whatever our perspective upon it, it revokes the true, eludes signification, designating that region where nothing subsists, where what takes place has nevertheless not taken place, where what begins over has never begun." This passage from Maurice Blanchot, who in *The Space of Literature* comments the *Exil* by Saint-John Perse, is cited here with regard to Paolini's Eleaticism by his most faithful and 'authorised' interpreter, Maddalena Disch (in a major essay which indeed often invokes Blanchot). But it was Gabriele Guercio who most persuasively traced the way back to the *etymological transparency* of Blanchot's conceptual framework, that of Paolini: especially where he associated the idea of the latter, of an image which is "pre-existent, anonymous and neutral" with the "impersonal singularity" that Blanchot defines in various places (although Guercio strangely does not mention it) as *neutral*. This is a dimension that had an extraordinary influence on the theorists of the following generation, such as Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida: who not by chance, and albeit each with their own respective diversity, all chose him as their secret (and indeed, to use a term dear to Blanchot, *clandestine*) master. The lamented Alberto Castoldi, paraphrasing a sentence by Kafka, recently defined Blanchot's work, and indeed more precisely his highly particular writing, as "a window" which "served as a medium to draw a whole series of authors into the contemporary sphere" – this is the case, for example, of Mallarmé or Kafka, but also Heidegger – handing down a lesson of radicalness which was then developed in a whole range of directions, even ones very distant from those indicated by him (the alternative acceptation of *neutral* in Barthes is a fine example of this).

That of the *window* (and not only in the classical sense introduced in the artistic literature in a famous passage by Leon Battista Alberti) is also a recurrent figure in Paolini's thinking. He has often summed up his idea of *waiting for the work* with a *bon mot* by James Whistler so dear to his guiding light *par excellence*, Borges. "Art happens," "a small miracle" which "does not depend on the artist," who thus cannot but *await* its epiphany: standing, as it were, at the window. ("Looking at a painting is like standing at the

window. This is what makes the artist and the viewer coincide in a single figure, in the same person: it's this threshold, a genuine frontline, which allows us to grasp that ray of light (the image of the work) before it goes any further and fades in the room behind us, among the things of the world.”)

It's above all in the extraordinary pages that Blanchot dedicates to Mallarmé (Mallarmé who conceives of the 'work' as the “abounding disappearance of the poet”), in an essay eloquently titled *The Book to Come*, that we find the nuclei of Paolini's thought closest to research, i.e. that yet to come. And there is a deeply symbolic value to the fact that the book containing these pages was published in 1959: just preliminarily to the all so preliminary *Disegno geometrico* the following year. More in general, *The Book to Come* by Blanchot teaches once and for all how “the work is the wait for the work,” where literature and art are placed in the dimension of the 'not yet': insofar as “the 'not yet' is literature itself, a not yet which, as such, is both completion and perfection.”

Paolini's position is very close to this when he states decisively that “a painting is announced but is not carried out: the image that a work provides us with is not something formulated and defined forever but something that always comes back to us.” For this reason, the whole of his work may be conceived – of course, just like that of many other artists both before and after him, but never, I believe, with his sacrificial obstinacy – indeed *like a single work, uninterrupted and uncompleted*: a never-ending and never-defined flow of *themes with variations*, which always and constitutively rejects the idea of *completion*. While many of his works, as we have seen, are presented as self-portraying collections and self-catalogues, this is paradoxically because, as Paolini states, “nothing seems more distant, extraneous to the expectations of an artist than the compilation of a general catalogue of his entire work.” This is something “unconceivable” insofar as in actual fact “the exactness and completeness to pursue will be touched on and achieved only afterwards by the work which has yet to be produced, and thus following such a compilation.” *Compilations* and *catalogues* must be constantly redefined, corrected and re-launched, thus making any completion impossible.

Paolini flees from completeness as if it were death itself: for from this point of view, it is clear, *completeness is death*. He who said so in the most memorable fashion is an author who in Calvino's training was at least as important as Borges (who in many ways may indeed be likened to him): it was Tommaso Landolfi who wrote that “Death

and perfection are sisters / (Or perhaps they are one and the same) / And both are deluding." Every single work, like a novella by Shahrazād, moves away the catastrophic moment which, at the same time, every single work pre-empts. Materially it anticipates it, indeed: it is just like life ("death / is paid / by living," no less). And on closer inspection it is this very double bond between *work* and *death* (which, also in this case, should not simply be understood in the technical sense of an individual passing away), which all of Blanchot's writing questions. *The Space of Literature* – a book revolving around the myth of Orpheus and the work of Mallarmé – prescribes starting out "from the deep of death in order to turn toward the intimacy of things – to 'see' them truly, with the disinterested gaze of him who does not cleave to himself, who cannot say 'I', who is no one: impersonal death."

*Impersonal death* was also constantly summoned by those who, right from the start of their career, we might say, were most closely linked to *possible death* (as cited in the title of another formidable text concerning suicide in Kafka and Dostoevsky in *The Space of Literature*): not only and not so much for his ever perilous state of health – which of course led him to live to the age of something like ninety-six... – but above all for an episode in his biography dating back to 20 July 1944 (the very year of that photograph shot of Paolini as a child in Bergamo), which Blanchot revealed only a long time after the event: with a brief *récit* between the autobiographical and the narrative, published only half a century later, in '94, under the title *The Instant of my Death*. Just as had happened to Dostoevsky, who in 1849 only on the gallows received the news of the revocation of his death sentence, Blanchot states (in the third person) that during the withdrawal of the German army across French territory, after the Normandy landings (an extraordinarily similar set to that of *Racconto d'autunno* by Landolfi...), a contingent (actually made up of Russian soldiers banished from the so-called 'Vlasov Army') found themselves passing by the large country home ("the Castle, it was known as") in which "a man still young" lived. "A Nazi lieutenant" orders all the occupants to come out; he points to the ground covered in cartridges, a "war ground"; he lies up his men "to shoot, according to the rules, at the human target." Blanchot describes the suspension of that moment in which the *young man*, "already in the crosshairs of the Germans, awaiting only the final order," feels "a sensation of extraordinary lightness, a kind of blessedness (albeit not a happy one) – an overwhelming exaltation." From that *instant*, the

*young man* knows that he is “bound to death by a surreptitious friendship.” At the last moment, however, given the “incumbent noise of a nearby battle,” the soldiers of the execution squad disband, and one of them signals to the *young man* “to make himself scarce:” and so he finds refuge in a wood, “sheltered by trees that were familiar to him” (*il demeura abrité par les arbres qu’il connaissait bien*), while all around him the landscape was bathed in flames. In his mind, he goes back to that instant of suspension, but also to the return of the Germans who, once the alarm has passed, set fire to everything they could, while saving ‘the Castle’ (although not without entering and ransacking it). “It was probably then that the torment of injustice began for the young man:” “this was war: life for some, and for the others the cruelty of killing.” The thought remains of that “sensation of lightness,” “perhaps already with one foot on the other side” which once and for all “changes” “the life he had yet to live. As if the death outside of him could not but clash with the death inside him.” The last sentence of the text shifts from the third to the first person: “the instant of my death since then has always been pressing” (*l’instant de ma mort désormais toujours en instance*).

What attests the identity of the ‘I’ that signs the text, Maurice Blanchot, with the ‘young man’ of whom he recounts the *decisive moment* is a letter sent by him to Jacques Derrida: “20 July. Fifty years ago I experienced the happiness of almost being killed by a firing squad.” This *après coup* is also a *decisive moment*: because in retrospect, as Francesco Garritano wrote, it casts new light on everything Blanchot had written up to that point, “making it clear how certain ‘notions’ (dying, surviving, disaster, passivity, patience, eternal repetition etc.) are not the result of speculation [...], but also and above all of experience, life lived, which at a certain point returns to that moment, that iteration which takes place of course in testimony.” The key texts by Blanchot from a speculative point of view (*La littérature et le droit à la mort*, ’49; *L’attente, l’oubli*, ’62; *La folie du jour* e *Le pas au-delà*, ’73; and *L’écriture du désastre*, ’80) in fact with hindsight turn out to be attempts to *give an account* – to himself, first of all – of that fatal *instant* and of its *ongoing presence*. And yet his narrative writing had been such (if there is any point, in his case, in distinguishing between the levels of  *récit*, of philosophical *essai* and his critical-literary writings – indeed, *La folie du jour* had already been published in a literature review in ’49, titled simply *Un récit* – each of which accompanied or not by a symptomatic question mark) that Derrida himself had assiduously commented on them. In a 1979 essay

titled *Survivre*, in particular, he had read in parallel *The Triumph of Life*, the poem left unfinished by Percy Bysshe Shelley at his death in 1822, and a short story published by Blanchot in 1948, titled *L'arrêt de mort* (also in this case with the subtitle *Récit*, which would disappear in the second publication in '71).

That of Blanchot, Derrida speculated in '79, is a "logic of the supplement:" for him, living is effectively *surviving* (as stated in *La folie du jour*: "Surviving: not living, not being alive but remaining lifeless, in a state of pure supplement, a shift towards the replacement of life, but rather suspending death, a suspension that does not suspend it, but which, on the contrary, makes it *last*"). *L'arrêt de mort* describes a long illness, the wait for death and ultimately the decease of the young woman known as 'J.' (the *senhal* which appears to shadow that of a friend of Blanchot's, Claude Séverac, but which also alludes to the medical error which had risked killing him when he was fourteen) who, exhausted, convinces the narrator to carry out the injection which will ultimately kill her. Derrida's usual hermeneutic vertigo takes the expression that titles Blanchot's tale to task (with an ambiguity that cannot be translated into English): *Arrêt de mort* is the juridical formula which in French stands for 'death sentence' (or which to be precise designates the moment in which, having discussed the case and passed the sentence, the condemned man is *definitively placed under arrest*), but which in actual fact focuses on the *suspension* which, also in this case, is described by Blanchot: the long period spent by 'J.' between the moment in which the doctors decide that *there is nothing more to be done* for her, and that in which the young woman actually dies. A time, as Derrida says, in which she "sur-vives, in the sense that she is more alive than ever." Thus the word *arrêt* at the same time stands for the *sentence* and its *suspension* (the *arrest* of her *death*): "the suspensive arrest is indecisive insofar as that which it decides on – death, the Thing, the neutral – is the undecidable itself, caught in its undecidability by the decision. Like death, the arrest *remains* (it is suspended, arrested) undecidable;" "such would be the sur-truth of sur-vival:" "the Thing takes place without taking place: the non-place of the process, the non-place of the 'end' of the process."

"*The survivor*," concludes Derrida, "is provisionally the character but also, certainly in definitive terms certainly longer, the narrator." This is because *L'arrêt de mort* is a two-fold tale: i.e. one which in turn is *arrested, suspended* only to then start once more, repeat, and ultimately stage in its very structure the inconcludibility that it describes. But most

of all because, from the *instant* described in the other story to the *arrêt*, it reveals the biographical framework, its author left *waiting* for the *second instant*: that of fifty years later. In turn, therefore, Derrida *returns a second time* to that instant, writing a second essay titled *Demeure Maurice Blanchot*, and over ninety pages comments in slow motion, sentence by sentence (because “every sentence in this text withholds if not the key to it, at least a guide to the reading of all Blanchot’s work”), on the three pages of *L’Instant de ma mort*. Yet above all *pondering* an expression in this brief text that recurs at least five times: *demeurer*. Like in the case of the medical ‘death sentence’ issued to ‘J.’, the *instance* of death does not provoke an immediate death; vice versa, paradoxically, it draws away from it: and the character *demeure* – dwells – in that *arrêt* – in that *wait*. As Blanchot says at the start of his story: “I remember a man – one still young – prevented from dying by death itself.” The instant of the death sentence imparted by the *Nazi lieutenant* is that in which time stands still, frozen in an image: “this snapshot that looks like a painting,” as Derrida comments, “like an execution by Goya or Manet” or like the “still of a film with a movie camera: the soldiers are there, they do not move; and nor does the young man: an eternal instant.” This salvation, marked by the *suspension of time*, is defined by Derrida – with an apparently emphatic term, one which we find somewhat surprising written by him – as “a miracle.”

The fact is that this story by Blanchot, even though neither he nor his commentator *par excellence* cite it, and it is then referred to in his case as a “true fact” (but for good reason in his essay Derrida insists on the fictional ambiguity which undermines any testimony), is the rewriting of another one by an author dear to him, written and set in the same period in which his is. This story, only a little longer than *L’Instant de ma mort*, is titled *The Secret Miracle*; it was published in 1943, and the author is Jorge Luis Borges. One spring night in 1939, in Prague, the Jewish writer Jaromir Hladík was arrested by the Nazis, who announced that he would be executed ten days later. From that moment onwards, Hladík never stops imagining *the instant of his death*. “He *dies* hundreds of deaths,” invoking God so that he might concede him at least the time to finish the work which he is *attending to*: a drama called *The Enemies*. On the morning of the execution, Hladík, stood against the wall of the barracks, *awaits* the discharge from the rifles; a drop of rain starts to run down his cheek; the German sergeant gives the order to shoot. At that point, the *miracle* occurs. “The physical universe came to a halt,” writes Borges:

“the wind had stopped as if in a painting.” In the timeless time of that *arrest*, Hladík patiently works on his drama, to the point that he completes it. “He brought his drama to a conclusion: he lacked only a single epithet. He found it: the drop of water slid down his cheek. He began a wild cry, moved his face aside. A quadruple blast brought him down.” The two ‘miracles’ in the form of *arrest* – that by Blanchot and that by Borges – are both equal and opposite: the first speaks of the *sur-vival* of the protagonist-author; the second does not (if not in the ideal form of literary glory, as much of the character as of the author... a *perfection which is death*, indeed). But in both cases, the narrative is handed over, says Derrida of Blanchot, “to the miraculous, to the fantastical, to the phantasmatic, to the spectral, to the vision, the apparition, the touch of the untouchable, the experience of the extraordinary, to history without nature, to anomaly.” An *anomaly* which consists exactly in the dwelling of “those who die, where two die, do not die, dwell or un-die in the moment they die.” And which is intimately linked to the *demeure* or ‘dwelling’ (The Castle, as Blanchot Kafkaesquely calls it; Kafka is the obvious *avatar* of Borges’s Prague-born writer, prisoner of another Castle): “as if the dwelling – his dwelling – were the real main character and at the same time the scene, the place in which the narrative unfolds.” The word *demeure*, Derrida explains, derives from the Latin *de-morari*, which means *to wait* and *to be late*: “there’s always a notion of waiting, of delay, of lateness, of a prorogation or postponement in the dwelling like in the moratorium.” In their respective *dwelling*s – be it their own or ones forced upon them – the characters of the two stories *attend* to their respective work and their respective fate; through to the *extreme dwelling*, “where the dead reside.”

Like in the cosmos of Blanchot and in that of Borges – who for once in his *History of Eternity* cites, deforming it, the thought of his unloved Nietzsche: “the interval lasts the time of a thunderbolt, although a billion years are not enough to measure it,” because “where there is no ‘I’, the infinite may be the same as succession,” – in Paolini’s work, the place in which one *dwells* completes the miracle of *arresting* time and, at the same time, does away with individual identity. His *waiting rooms*, in actual fact, are *house arrests*.

P.S.

The second novel by Maurice Blanchot, *Aminabad*, dates back to 1942. Its protagonist – who has the same name as that in *Thomas l’obscure*, published the year before – is in-



vited by an unknown woman, who beckons to him from a window, to enter an unknown construction. Thomas accepts the invitation and wanders around this obscure *dwelling*. On the walls he discovers a number of paintings which portray unrecognisable figures, with cancelled or confused features. At the peak of the quest, in the *ónfalos* of this umpteenth Castle, Thomas comes across a painter's studio, one who of course is absent. In this space he finds one last canvas, on which this time it is very clear what is depicted: the room itself in which the painting is found, represented down to the last detail, in such a way that "it would no longer be possible to tell the room from the painting."

The best painting is always yet to come.



Giulio Paolini, 2121969, 1969, photo emulsion on canvas, cm 120 x 90. Private collection, Milan. Courtesy Fondazione Giulio e Anna Paolini, Turin ©Giulio Paolini

### Notes

*The Garden of Forking Paths* was published by Jorge Luis Borges as a short story in 1941, before being included three years later in the collection *Ficciones*. The line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is from act V, scene V. *La squadratura* by Italo Calvino, originally the preface to *Idem* by Paolini (Einaudi, Turin 1975), may be found in Id., *Saggi 1945-1985*, Mario Barenghi (ed.), Mondadori, Milan 1995, t. II, pp. 1981-90. A selection of Paolini's *juvenilia* pre-'60 is reproduced in the section that bears the title "The Private Life" by Id., *Suspense. Breve storia del vuoto in tredici stanze*, Florence, Hopeful Monster, 1988, pp. 219-21. The sentences by the author on *Disegno geometrico* from 1960 are to be found in *Giulio Paolini 1960-1972*, catalogue of the exhibition held in Milan, Fondazione Prada, 29 October – 18 December 2003, curated by Germano Celant, Fondazione Prada, Milan 2003, p. 15. By Daniel Soutif, work cited: *Filigrane. Paolini, il primo quadro e la storia dell'arte*, in *Giulio Paolini. Il passato al presente*, Mantua, Corraini-Fondazione Giulio & Anna Paolini, 2016, pp. 81-117: 89. The sentences on *Disegno geometrico*, the 'start' and 'end' of his work, are to be found in the incipit by Giulio Paolini himself, *Quattro passi. Nel museo senza muse*, Einaudi, Turin 2006, p. 8. Ibid., on p. 62, the sentence on transparency is also to be found (from an intervention titled *De l'instrument à la trace*, held at the Auditorium of the National Library of Paris

in 1986). That on the imagination is on p. 61 of Id., *dall'Atlante al Vuoto in ordine alfabetico*, Sergio Risaliti (ed.), Electa, Milan 2010. In the section of *Quattro passi* titled "In extremis" (which brings together teaching materials used at the Fondazione Ratti in Como and at the IUAV in Venice in 2002-2003) on p. 59, the passage on design is cited. *Incipit* is the name of an artist's book by Claudio Parmiggiani, published in 2008 by Allemandi in collaboration with the Serge Le Borgne gallery in Paris, on the occasion of the exhibition of the same name (his introductory text concludes the publication of his writings: on pp. 381-6 of *Una fede in niente ma totale*, a volume edited by the undersigned, with a preface by Jean-Luc Nancy, as part of the 'fuoriformato' series by the publisher Le Lettere in 2010). Information on the origins within *Squadratura* of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the novel published by Calvino in 1979, is given by Bruno Falchetto, *Note e notizie*, in Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, Mario Barenghi (ed.), vol. II, Mondadori, Milan, 1992, pp. 1380-401 (in particular, the original title of the novel, 'Incipit', is testified in a notebook dated '77 and is cited on p. 1385). See by Marco Belpoliti *L'occhio di Calvino*, Einaudi, Turin, 1996, pp. 38 and following (of this first edition, the front cover is a portrait of Calvino by Paolini, which however is absent from the successive enlarged edition published in 2010). The quotations from the seventh and eighth chapter of *If on a Winter's*

*Night a Traveller* are to be found on pp. 756-7 and 785 of the edition cited of the *Romanzi e racconti* by Calvino: the second is given on p. 39 of *Quattro passi*, cited (in which the section 'Sale d'attesa' is on pp. 23-44). On pp. 33-5, the story by Henry James is evoked, *The Madonna of the Future*, published in 1873 (the quotation is from Id., *Racconti di artisti*, Francis Otto Matthiessen (ed.), translation by Cesare Rusconi, preface by Susi Pietri, Einaudi, Turin 2005, p. 51). The essay cited by Gabriele Guercio is *Incipit immacolati: l'opera, l'artista e la sovranità dell'arte*, in *Giulio Paolini*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, MACRO, Daniel F. Herrmann and Bartolomeo Pietromarchi (eds.), Quodlibet, Macerata 2014, pp. 49-61 (the reference to the theme of the Immaculate Conception in Duchamp and the Surrealists is on p. 58). The portrait *à la Parmigianino* of Calvino was produced in 1984 by Gianni Giansanti (there is a version on the front cover of Gian Carlo Ferretti's *Le capre di Bikini. Calvino giornalista e saggista 1945-1985*, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1989). Roland Barthes proposes a "counter-philological reading" of the mystic repertoire – to "read the Mystics without God," i.e. – in his course at the Collège de France of the academic year 1976-1977 (*Comment vivre ensemble*, Claude Coste [ed.], Seuil/Imec, Paris 2002, p. 43). Michele Cometa takes up this passage and bases a fascinating yet debatable connection between "literary theory and religious experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century", in

*Mistici senza Dio*, Edizioni di Passaggio, Palermo 2012, p. 200 (on the front cover of which there is a 'spatial concept' by Fontana). The text on Fontana by Paolini, titled *Non dirò nulla*, derives from the notes for a conversation held on him at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna in 1988, and was published in *Suspense. Breve storia del vuoto in tredici stanze*, citation from pp. 122-3 (see also in Id., *La voce del pittore. Scritti e interviste 1965-1995*, Maddalena Disch (ed.), ADV Publishing, Lugano 1995, pp. 14-5). The interview cited with Lucio Fontana, by Bruno Rossi, came out in *Settimo giorno* on 22 January 1963, titled *Dialogo con Fontana, l'astronauta dell'arte* (the passage may now be read in Id., *Manifesti scritti interviste*, Angela Sanna (ed.), Abscondita, Milan 2015, p. 97). By Michele Dantini see *Gradus ad Parnassum. Giulio Paolini, Autoritratto, 1969* and *Giulio Paolini e un omaggio raffaellesco a Lucio Fontana: Raphael Urbinas MDIIII (1969)*, in Id., *Geopolitiche dell'arte. Arte e critica d'arte italiana nel contesto internazionale, dalle neoavanguardie a oggi*, Christian Marinotti, Milan 2012, pp. 89-111 (especially pp. 100 and 109n) and 113-5. The sentence on *etymological transparency* is in *Una lettera sul tempo*, text of 1968 to be found in Giulio Paolini, *La voce del pittore*, citing p. 13. The comment by Denis Viva on the staff in '69 at the Galleria De Nieubourg is in his "La storia in abisso. Letteratura, fotografia e passato", in *Giulio Paolini. Il passato al presente*, op. cit.,

pp. 45-79: 73-5. The reasons behind the protest at the XXXIV Venice Biennale are discussed by Gastone Novelli in various texts gathered over the last part of a recent anthology of his *Scritti '43-'68*, Paola Bonani (ed.), NERO, Rome 2019 (see here in particular, on pp. 274-7, "La parola a Gastone Novelli", a text which came out in '68 in issue number 4 of the magazine *Che fare*, and on pp. 278-9 the letter to Vittorio Carrain dated 9 July 1968). The invitation card to 2121969 is reproduced here: <http://www.arenario.it/opera/2121969/>. The work of the same name is in *Giulio Paolini. Catalogo ragionato 1960-1999*, Maddalena Disch (ed.), Milan, Skira, 2008, vol. I, p. 182 (sheet 162). By Claudio Zambianchi the citation is from "Riflesso sul tempo. Note sul senso della storia nell'opera di Giulio Paolini", in *Giulio Paolini. Il passato al presente*, cited pp. 9-41: 21. The episode described in *Beat Space* by Tommaso Pincio, published with epilogues by Luca Briasco and Mattia Carratello by Fanucci in 2000, is now on pp. 138-45 of the edition published by minimum fax in 2010 (for comment, see "Nostalgia, ovvero l'invenzione del passato. Michele Mari e Tommaso Pincio a colloquio con Andrea Cortellessa", in *La narrativa italiana d'oggi/II*, monographic issue by Walter Pedullà (ed.) of *L'Illuminista*, II, 6, 2003, pp. 185-211). Various of Pincio's later books refer to the lengthy period in which, under the heteronym of Marco Colapietro, he worked in Rome at the Gian Enzo Sperone Gallery: see *Scrissi*

*d'arte*, published in 2015 with an epilogue by the undersigned in the 'fuoriformato' series published by L'orma, and the recent *Il dono di saper vivere*, Einaudi Stile Libero, Turin 2018.

"Studio per Reportage" is reproduced on p. 120 of the op. cit. *Quattro passi*, and references the exhibition of the same name held in 2000 at the Annamarie Verna Gallery in Zurich; the pages with this same title, from which the cited self-comment by Paolini comes from, are on pp. 121-2. That on *Raphael Urbinas MDIIII* is in the same book (on p. 64). For Borges, in relation to the 'neoclassical' scene of 2001, I am reminded most of all of two later stories, *The Other* (found at the start of the collection *The Book of Sand*, 1975: Tommaso Scarano (ed.), Adelphi, Milan 2004, pp. 9-11) and *25 Agosto 1983* (published in 1980 in the brief anthology of the same name published by Franco Maria Ricci and, in 1990, by Mondadori). In both stories, the first-person narrator encounters a version of himself remote in time: in the first – a young man sitting on a bench in front of the Charles River, near Harvard University – he recognises himself on a similar bench on the shore of the Rhône, in Geneva in 1918. In the latter, the explicitly oneiric scene takes place in an unknown hotel: this time the first person narrator is sixty-one, and the figure he meets, on the other hand, is an older version of himself, eighty-four years old (the date of the title

is that after Borges's birthday), who confides to him that he has decided to commit suicide because the two of them "are too like one another" (a sentiment which, as chance would have it, they both discover they share). Rather than to Kubrick's film – which he is unlikely to have been able to see – this later Borges is most likely to have drawn inspiration from a story he loved a great deal in his youth and anthologised in old age: *Due immagini in una vasca*, published by Giovanni Papini in his 1907 book, *Il pilota cieco* (cf. Roberto Paoli, *Borges e gli scrittori italiani*, Liguori, Naples 1997, pp. 125-31): which however in turn references Nietzsche, so that – in a cyclical fashion – it all adds up. *The Aleph* is the 1945 story that provides the title for Borges's book of the same name, published in 1949 (in *Collected Fictions*, Penguin, London 1944). *The Hermit in Paris* is the title of a 'memoire-confession' by Calvino, taken from an interview with Valerio Riva for Swiss Italian television and published in a *plaque* in Lugano in 1974, then brought together after his death in a volume of the same name of 'autobiographical pages' published by Mondadori in 1994 (and now in Id., *Romanzi e racconti*, Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falchetto (eds.), 1994, pp. 102-10). The key pages on Victor I. Stoichita on the 'cabinet d'amateur' are p. 110 and following of *The Self-Aware Image* [1993], Italian translation by Benedetta Sforza, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1998. The Spaziali manifesto, written in Milan

on 18 March 1948, may be read in Lucio Fontana, *Manifesti scritti interviste*, op. cit., pp. 23-4. Paolini's 'anti-Futurist' passage is found in a brief message presented in Nagoya in 1987, and published in *Suspense. Breve storia del vuoto in tredici stanze*, op. cit., p. 265 (not to mention, with the title "Viaggio al centro della Luna", in *La voce del pittore*, cit., p. 306). 'The returner' is the role conferred by Giorgio de Chirico to Guillaume Apollinaire, in his necrology published in *Ars Nova* in November 1918 (and published in the volume edited by the undersigned Id., *Scritti/1. Romanzi e Scritti critici e teorici*, Bompiani, Milan 2008, pp. 665-6). I proposed a reading along these lines of the work *Pictor Optimus*, in the introduction to the previously mentioned volume (on pp. XXI-XXXIV), titled *Il ritornante*. The *Camera sentimentale* is one of the amazing freehand 'parolibere' ('words in freedom') tables featured in *Rarefazioni e Parole in libertà* by Corrado Govoni (Milan, Edizioni futuriste of *Poesia*, 1911; now in Id., *Poesie, 1903-1958*, Gino Tellini (ed.), Mondadori, Milan 2000); *L'Ovale delle apparizioni* was painted by Carlo Carrà in 1918. The *Sale d'attesa* by Giulio Paolini are reproduced on pp. 43-117, *L'autore che credeva di esistere*, Monza, Johan & Levi, 2012: where the citation on the 'ritorno (senza andata) al luogo d'origine' is on p. 10, that on the 'museo immaginario' on p. 12 and that on the 'sequenza cinematografica' on p. 16. *Unisono* is a work by Paolini produced in 1974 at the art/tapes/22

gallery in Florence: Riccardo Venturi traces the presuppositions, contexts and procedures in *Fare schermo all'immagine. Su Unisono di Giulio Paolini*, in *Giulio Paolini. Vedo e non vedo*, Corraini-Fondazione Giulio and Anna Paolini, Mantua 2014, pp. 115-45. The contribution by Antonella Soldaini in *Bergamo, inverno 1944-45* is on p. 81 of *L'autore che credeva di esistere*.

The passage by Blanchot is on p. 207 of Id., *The Space of Literature* [1955], translated into Italian by Gabriella Zanobetti, with an essay by Jean Pfeiffer and a note by Guido Neri, Einaudi, Turin 1967 (and on pp. 246-7 of the new translation by Fulvia Ardenghi published in 2018 by Il Saggiatore, with an epilogue by Stefano Agosti): Maddalena Disch quotes it on p. 77 of her wide-ranging essay "Giulio Paolini. Hors-d'œuvre", in Giulio Paolini, *La voce del pittore*, op. cit., pp. 75-139. The cited essay by Gabriele Guercio, "Incipit immacolati", discusses Paolini's Blanchot on p. 53. The sentence on the *neutral image* is in the "Note di lavoro" published by Paolini in *Nac*, 3, in March 1973 (and now in Id., *La voce del pittore*, op. cit., p. 61). Often Blanchot evokes the category of the *neutral* yet never in terms of a univocal definition, but rather in the 'musical' one of the theme with variations (well described by Giuseppe Zuccarino in "Blanchot, il neutro, il disastro" in *Il clamore della filosofia. Sulla filosofia francese contemporanea*, Paolo Aldo Rossi and Paolo Vignola

(eds.), Mimesis, Milan-Udine 2011, pp. 107-22): "a threat and a scandal for thought" as it is defined in the '63 essay "René Char e il pensiero del neutro", in Id., *La conversazione infinita. Scritti sull'insensato gioco di scrivere* [1969], translation by Roberta Ferrara, introduction by Giovanni Bottiroli, Einaudi, Turin 2015, p. 399 (this is the same translation published by the same publisher in 1977 under the title *L'infinito intrattenimento*); the italics following this text, on closer inspection, conclude (on p. 408) rather close to those of Paolini: "all the encounters in which the Other, rising in surprise, forces thought to leave itself and the 'I' to clash with the lack that constitutes it and by which it is protected already bear the brand, the fringe of the neutral" (although previously in a 1953 essay on Beckett's *Unnamable* – "Where now? Who now?" in Id., *The Book to Come* [1959], translation by Guido Ceronetti and Guido Neri, Einaudi, Turin 1969, p. 217 – Blanchot speaks of his own "approach to a neutral word"). Rather useful for the definition of the reach (and of the limits) of the influence of Blanchot on the thought of his time is Alberto Castoldi, *L'effetto Blanchot*, in *Maurice Blanchot*, monographic issue edited by Giuseppe Zuccarino of *Riga*, 37, Marcos y Marcos, Milan 2017, pp. 212-24, which rightly distinguishes from its own the value of the *neutral* in Barthes (on pp. 217-8; the cited passage by Kafka is in a letter dated 1903 to his friend Oscar Pollack: "For me you were, as well

as many other things, also a kind of window from which I could look onto the streets.” Id., *Lettere*, Ferruccio Masini (ed.), Mondadori, Milan 1988, p. 18); on his Italian fortune, see Gian Luca Picconi, “Le metamorfosi di Orfeo”, in *L'in-subordinato: Maurice Blanchot*, monographic issue of *il verri*, LXII, 67, June 2018, pp. 115-27; more in general cf. Christophe Bident, *Maurice Blanchot partenaire invisible*, Champ Vallon, Seyssel 1998. The phrase by Whistler, “art happens”, comes from an interview with Borges (*Conversazioni con Osvaldo Ferrari* [1985], translated by Francesco Tentori Montalto, Bompiani, Milan 1986, p. 88; it is also cited by the writer, for example, in the prologue to *The Deep Rose*, 1975: in Id., *Collected Fictions*, op. cit.), and Paolini attributes it to him on p. 37 of *Quattro passi*, op. cit. “Looking at a painting is like standing at the window:” *L'autore che credeva di esistere*, cit., p. 126. The essay on Mallarmé titled *Il libro a venire* is on pp. 224-44 of the book of the same name by Blanchot, as said, published in 1959 and translated ten years later by Einaudi (the quotation on ‘not yet’ is on p. 154, commenting Musil’s *Man Without Qualities*). “The pure work implies the general disappearance of the poet, who hands over the initiative to the words:” Stéphane Mallarmé, “Crisis in Poetry”, in Id., *Divagations* [1897], translated by Valeria Ramacciotti, in Id., *Poesie e prose*, Garzanti, Milan 1992, p. 299. “A painting is announced but it is not completed...” *Quattro passi*, op. cit., p.

8 (on the following page we find the sentence on the “complete catalogue”). The verses cited by Landolfi are from the poem *Un capodanno*: in his last collection, *Il tradimento*, published in 1977 (now Adelphi, Milan 2014), p. 76. In the notes to the book (ibid, p. 11), Landolfi presented it as a *supplement* to the previous *Viola di morte* (1969, now Adelphi, Milan 2011): “grave and terrible following” to that which could already be judged (right from the title) as “one last Thule”. “Setting off [...] from the depths of death:” a passage from the essay by Blanchot on Rilke and the need for death, 1953, which is the last translation cited in *The Space of Literature* is on p. 160. *L’instant de ma mort* was published as a *plaque* by the publisher Fata Morgana of Montpellier in 1994; with the title *L’istante della mia morte* and comments by Jacques Derrida, it was translated by Patrizia Valduga, pp. 32-7 of the issue 267-268 of the magazine *Aut Aut*, May-August 1995; in 2013 it was re-proposed in a free e-book by Maldoror Press: *Maurice Blanchot, La follia del giorno. In appendice L’istante della mia morte*, Gallizio and Carmine Mangone (eds.) ([https://maldoror.noblogs.org/files/2013/12/MauriceBlanchot\\_LaFolliaDelGiorno.pdf](https://maldoror.noblogs.org/files/2013/12/MauriceBlanchot_LaFolliaDelGiorno.pdf); I cite the translation by Valduga). *L’arrêt de mort* is a short story by Blanchot published by Gallimard in 1948 (and in a different version, borrowing from the last two chapters, in 1971; *La sentenza di morte* is the name of the translation by Giancarlo

Pavanello and Roberto Rossi, SE, Milan 1989). By Jacques Derrida, *Living On: Borderlines*, which originally appeared in English in 1979, was included seven years later in his *Parages* (Italian translation by Silvano Facioni with an introduction by Francesco Garritano, *Paraggi. Studi su Maurice Blanchot*, Jaca Book, Milan 2000, pp. 175-271). *Le pas au-delà* is a collection of Blanchot's fragments published by Gallimard in 1973 (*Il passo al di là*, Lino Gabellone [ed.], Marietti, Genoa 1989: the passage on 'surviving', cited by Derrida on p. 208 of *Living On: Borderlines*, is – in a different translation – found on p. 105; the other quotations from *Living On: Borderlines* are from pp. 212-3 and 236). After the publication of *L'instant de ma mort*, Derrida returned to address these themes at the conference *Fiction et témoignage*, held at the Catholic University of Leuven on 24 July 1995, then expanded upon in the essay *Demeure Maurice Blanchot*, published by Galilée in 1998 (in Italian, *Dimora Maurice Blanchot*, Francesco Garritano (ed.), Palomar, Bari 2001; Blanchot's letter to Derrida is cited by him on p. 130; the other quotations are from pp. 146 and 150-4; the curator's introduction, *L'indécidable e la sua legge*, pp. 5-86, is quoted on p. 64). *The Secret Miracle* was published by Borges in 1943, and the following year it became part of *Fictions* (it is cited in the same classical translation by Franco Lucentini, published by Einaudi in '55; on this story I based one of my own interpretations of

Borges in "Miracoli segreti. Quattro tentativi di confutazione del tempo", in *I portatori del tempo. Enciclopedia delle arti contemporanee*, Achille Bonito Oliva (ed.), vol. IV, *Il tempo pieno*, introduction by Paolo Virno, Milan, Electa, 2018, pp. 266-96). Blanchot on Borges: "Literary Infinity: The Aleph" [1958], in Id., *The Book to Come*, cit., pp. 101-3. The sentence by Borges on the 'interval' which would not be measurable in "billions of years" is in the *History of Eternity*, the 1936 text translated by Livio Bacchi Wilcock for Il Saggiatore in 1962 (now by Gianni Guadalupi (ed.), Adelphi, Milan 1997, p. 74).

*Aminabad* was published by Maurice Blanchot in 1942. The citation is from p. 20 of the second edition, published by Gallimard of 1972 (I use the translation given by Alberto Castoldi in *L'effetto Blanchot*, op. cit., p. 222).





# **SALE D'ATTESA**

Selection of Works on Paper

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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Matita su carta), 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Ring), 2011-12  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Bergamo, inverno 1944-45), 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5





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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa"; 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa"; 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Palais des Thés), 2011-12  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5





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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011–12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5

"I first met Fausto Melotti in the spring of 1967, during the setting up of his exhibition at the Galleria No-tizie of Luciano Pistoï in Turin.

I had known him since 1935 (although according to the registry office, I was not born until five years later, in 1940) from the pages that illustrated his works on show that year at the Galleria del Milione in Milan.

Of that initial encounter in Turin (Melotti was then sixty-six years old, I was twenty-seven) I remember that first of all he seemed the younger: younger than me, I mean, and perhaps he was if we consider the

density of episodes over the early years of activity compared to the decantation and rarefaction which, for a wide range of reasons, had diluted or even suspended his experiences at that time.

After that first encounter, we continued to see one another ever more often (and with great affection, I might also say). Even after he passed away in 1986, I bumped into him on more than one occasion." [Giulio Paolini, *Contrappunto (punti e linee di un disegno)*, in *Klee - Melotti*, exhibition catalogue (Lugano, Museo d'Arte, 17 March – 30 June 2013), Kehrer, 2013, p. 144].



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Ermitte à Paris), 2011–12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5

Starting from the early 1960s, with his blank canvases and his frames, Paolini has always wanted to subtract the painting from its traditional function as an "image trap", presenting it "as an image of itself." In brief, "the image of the painting is made up of the same elements that constitute it." In 1985, towards the end of his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino writes: "Literature lives on exaggerated objectives which seem beyond hope of realization." His friend Paolini was of the same persuasion, that of the same happy utopia: an art may continue to live only if it sets itself exaggerated objectives. In this sense, he has always desired and pursued the absolute, objective image, the total image. "Every time he meets a painter friend of his, the writer comes home musing to himself. The works that the painter displays are not real paintings: they are moments of the relationship between the one creating the painting, the one look-

ing at the painting and that material object which is the painting itself. The space that these works occupy is above all a mental space, and yet they present the raw materials that they are made up of: frame, wood, paper, industrial paints, products that may be purchased in paint supply stores; they take place in the visible space, occupying space that would otherwise be taken up by a painting, and they don't want to think of anything else but the paintings. It is not the relationship of the 'I' with the world that these works try to fix: it's a relationship that is established independently from the 'I' and independently from the world. The writer would also like to make works like this, for he does not believe in the 'I', or if he does, he doesn't like it. And because he doesn't like the world either, or perhaps he likes it but he doesn't believe in it" (Italo Calvino in Giulio Paolini, *Idem*, Einaudi, Turin, 1975, p. VII).



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Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (*L'Aleph*), 2011–12

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5

Paolini is very fond of this statement by Jorge Luis Borges: "How do I compose a poem? I put myself in a passive situation, and I wait. I wait, and my only concern is that it all ends in beauty. I feel like I am receiving a gift, and I don't even know if it comes from my own memory or something else. And I try not to intervene too much." Like Borges, Paolini believes that "the concept of 'committed' art is an act of naivety, insofar as nobody can really know what they are doing." He believes that art and literature should try to break free from the limits of time. He believes it is absolutely false to think "that art depends on politics and history." He believes "that an artwork does not identify entirely with itself, and that it is not just what it

is, but that it possesses or is possessed by something else that lies in the shadows..." (Giulio Paolini, *Quattro passi. Nel museo senza muse*, Einaudi, Turin, 2006, p. 102). He believes in something that transcends us completely. He believes that the rhythm of the things of the universe is established by Something that comes prior to our existence. Whistler wrote: "Art happens." "Art is a small miracle," completely unbound by any logic and historical or overly human structure. Art is a secret, an enigma, an apparition; and creation is something sacred, a gift that, as it descends from the sky, transcends us completely.



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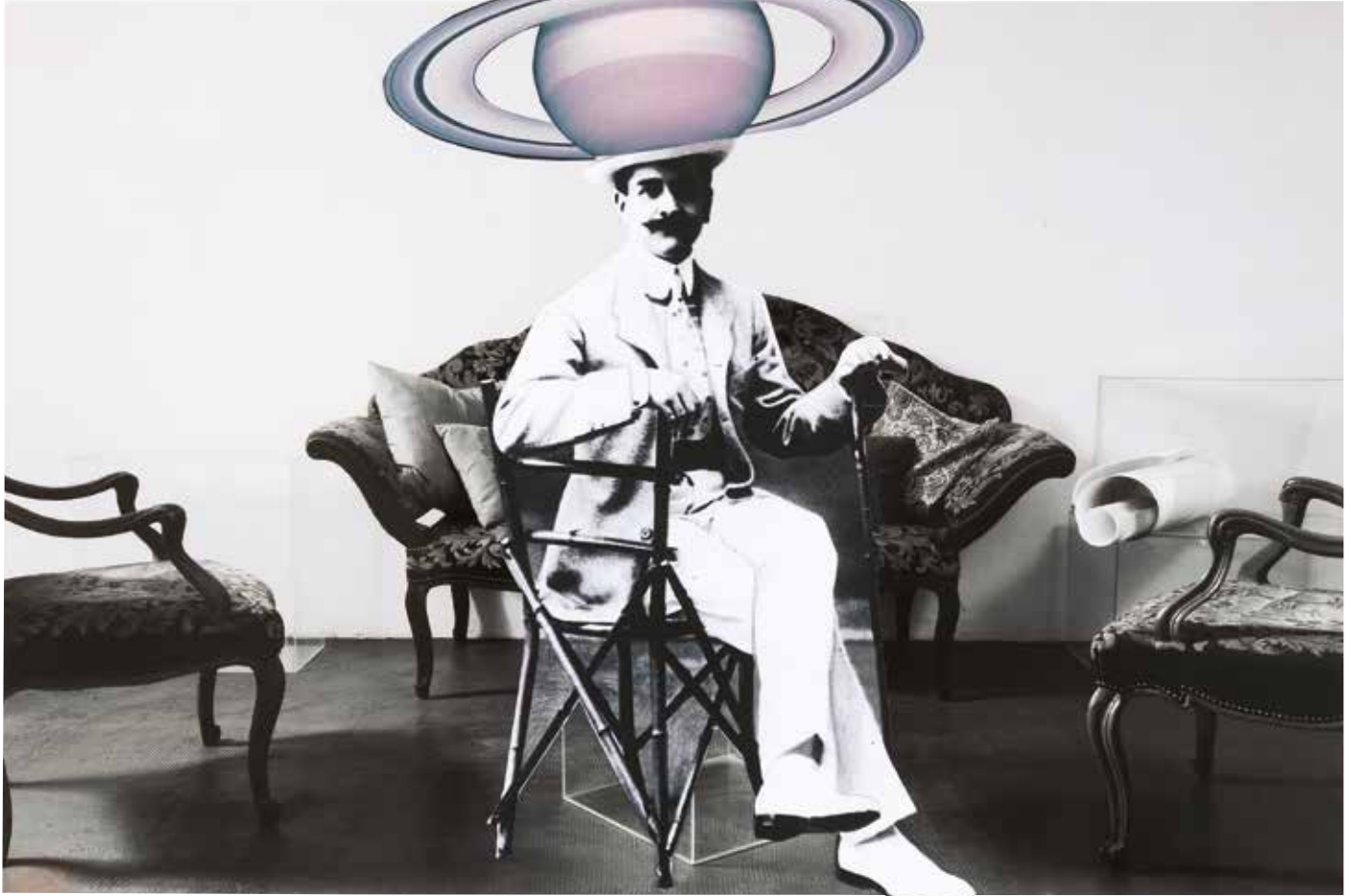
*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5

The infinite possibilities of looking. Seeing and not seeing. The limitless edges of shapes. The very far and the very near. The infinitely huge and the infinitely tiny. Paolini paid tribute to one of his favourite writers, Raymond Roussel, also in another work, setting the 150 pages of his poem *La vue (The View)*, 1963 on Masonite and framing it within a large single surround. Such a vast landscape may contain the minuscule space of a mere penholder! What a rich sea horizon may come to the fore in a minimal space! With

his poem, Roussel demonstrated that the minuscule may be hidden in the enormous, and that within a microcosm a boundless universe may be found. In actual fact, the whole of reality, all that we can see, is a sprawling swarm of presences which, from the outskirts of micro fragments, forms a centre, and from this centre it returns like an invisible wave before its incommensurable dispersion. Logically speaking, every description is either partial or infinite.





Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (*Nulla da dichiarare*), 2011–12

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12  
Collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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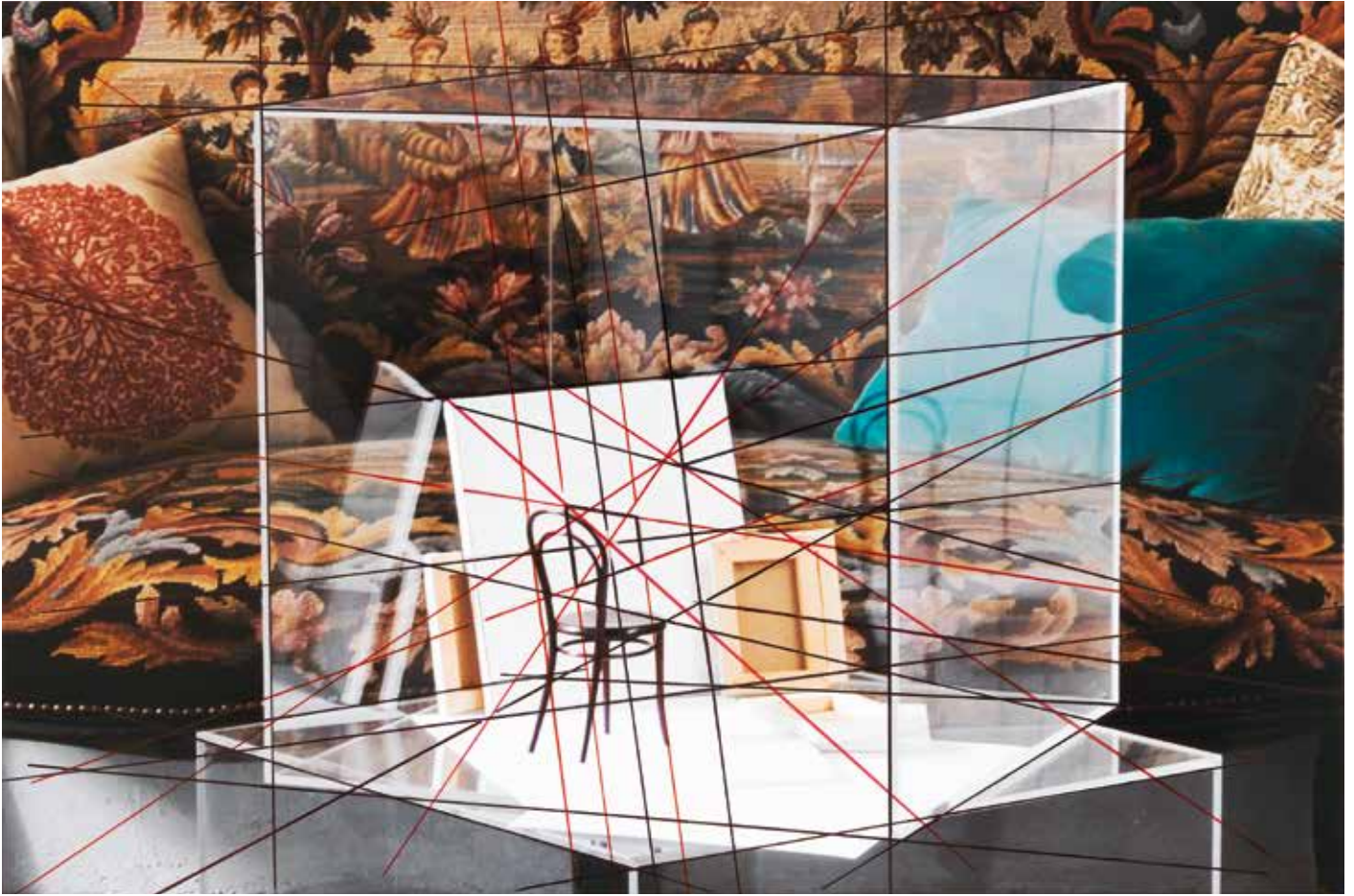
*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011–12*

Red ink, black ink and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5





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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa"; 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (Arresti domiciliari), 2011–12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (St Rémy de Provence), 2011–12*

Pencil and collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5





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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa" (In extremis), 2011–12*

Pencil and collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*

Collage on digital printing

cm 34 x 46.5



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*Studio per "Sala d'attesa", 2011-12*  
Pencil and collage on digital printing  
cm 34 x 46.5



## REPETTO GALLERY

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### 2019

- 17 May – 14 June  
*Luigi Ghirri. The Enigma of Vision*  
text by Ennery Taramelli
- 26 March – 3 May  
*Threading Spaces*  
curated by Paolo Cortese,  
text by Franca Zoccoli
- 22 November – 27 February  
*NASA. On the Moon*

### 2018

- 26 September – 26 October  
*Carlo Scarpa. The Shapes of Light*  
curated by Marco Arosio, Paolo  
Repetto, text by Charles Hind
- 21 June – 7 September  
*Christo & Jeanne-Claude. Reveal*
- 18 May – 15 June  
*Michele Zaza. Il rito dell'essere*
- 5 April – 4 May  
*Carol Rama*
- 8 February – 16 March  
*Atomic Bomb*

### 2017

- 16 November – 13 December  
*Giorgio Morandi. A Bright Elegy*
- 28 September – 27 October  
*Arcangelo Sassolino. Matter  
Revealed*  
curated by Luca Massimo  
Barbero
- 27 June – 15 September  
*Gio Ponti. Mediterranean Summer*  
curated by Marco Arosio
- 16 May – 16 June  
*Cosmic Pulses*  
Biasiucci, Byars, Cantori, Dibbets,  
De Lonti, Fontana,  
Ghirri, Hermann, Mangano,  
Paolini, Sinigaglia, Teruya, Vella,  
Vigo, Zoppis, Zorio  
curated by Daniele De Lonti
- 10 March – 17 April  
*Victor Vasarely*  
in collaboration with  
Fondation Vasarely

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**2016**

- 16 November – 16 December  
*Conrad Marca-Relli. The Prodigy of Collage*  
in collaboration with Archivio Marca-Relli
- 5 October – 2 November  
*Metamorphosis. The Alchemists of Matter. A Point of View on Arte Povera*  
text by Bruno Corà
- 29 June – 29 July  
*Sadamasa Motonaga. The Energy of Infancy*  
text by Takesada Matsutani
- 20 January – 19 February  
*WE LAND*  
Biasiucci, Burri, Calzolari, De Lonti, De Maria, Eliasson, Fulton, Giacomelli, Gohlke, Goldsworthy, Heizer, Long, Mangano, Mendieta, Penone  
curated by Daniele De Lonti

**2015**

- 30 September – 30 October  
*Getulio Alviani. Works from the 60's to the 70's*  
text by Getulio Alviani
- 26 June – 24 July  
*Michelangelo Pistoletto. The Mirror of Enigmas*
- 26 May – 19 June  
*Kiarostami & Neshat*
- 5 February – 20 March  
*Overpainting*  
Beard, Christo, Kiefer, Nabil, Neshat, Ontani, Rainer, Richter, Schifano  
text by Luca Massimo Barbero

**2014**

- 2 – 25 October  
*Postwar Italian Ceramics.*  
*Fontana - Garelli - Leoncillo - Melotti*  
text by Luca Massimo Barbero



## **Magonza**

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