
NOTHING

IS LOST

Art and Matter in Transformation

Lavoisier's *Elementary Treatise on Chemistry* is considered the first modern chemistry manual. Before it was published, in 1789, the secrets of matter were still the stuff of alchemists, with "their abominable confusion of ideas and language, their abominable hodgepodge of ideas and language, their confessed interest in gold, their Levantine swindles typical of charlatans and magicians". (Primo Levi)

The *Treatise* contained an early version of the famous law of the conservation of mass. "Nothing is created," the chemist explains in the introduction: "In all the operations of art and nature, nothing is created; an equal quantity of matter exists both before and after the experiment; the quality and quantity of the elements remains precisely the same, and nothing takes place beyond the changes and modifications in the combinations of these elements."

By associating the dimensions of art and nature – thus shifting between the description of simple facts and the illustration of a theory – Lavoisier shows that he wished to address a much broader audience than the restricted community of scientists of the day. At the basis of his discourse there was the will to place order in the most deep-rooted beliefs of society, the desire – communicated through the union of formulas and words – to look at the world through new eyes, for a new philosophy of matter ever more distant from abstract reasoning and ever more tending towards the verification of facts.

This new vision of the world and of knowledge placed humans before the need to experiment, to get their hands dirty, to "enter the laboratory," to explore – in the words of the historian of science Hélène Metzger – "that intermediate zone where logic and experience, deduction and induction meet, confront each other and combine in different ways."

Nulla è perduto (Nothing is Lost) is a project guided by this principle. From the Dada and Surrealist works, indicative of the keen interest of some artists in the theme of alchemy, to the productions of some of the leading exponents of the neo-avant-garde movements of the '60s and '70s, up to the recent research of some major artists of the latest generations, the exhibition brings together a complex overview, aimed at restoring the relationship that binds the visual arts to the chemistry of the elements and to the transformations of matter.

A field of investigation and experimentation that also finds broad expression in our time in terms of reflection on the impact of human action on natural equilibria, from the availability of natural resources to climate change.

Using various languages, the works on display prove the idea of a world made not of things but of material events. A system of processes that, in visible terms, is manifested in the physical dimension of the passage of state, among fusion, solidification, evaporation, condensation, sublimation and deposition (the six passages of the four different states of matter).

Nulla è perduto (Nothing is Lost) is designed as an exhibition-cum-laboratory, building a possible narrative around the elements through works that both trigger and feed on transformative processes, involving those who interact with them: the artists first of all through to the gallery space management and the general public. The exhibition itself is an organism in continuous transformation, in the words of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, which consider "transformation not only as a process but as a relationship."