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# POeTICS

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# OF THe OBJeCT

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As poetics is the art of making poetry, this room exhibits artworks intimately connected to the elegy, the gentleness with which the human spirit deals with highly sensitive topics such as memory, remembrance, and fragility. These topics require connections; that is why each of the exhibited works either creates relationships or is created by relationships. This is well told by Latifa Echakhch's edge, *Frame*, consisting of what is left of a prayer rug when its most common and stepped-on part is removed. In the Moroccan artist's view, there is a profound difference between the item in itself and the object; between the item's mental concept that emerges from *Frame*, turning a rug into abstraction or a window of reflection open to the public, and the purely material qualities of the object. Religion is also the starting point of Ruth Beraha's artwork, evoking the space of a cathedral where a voice echoes: "Are you looking at me?". The memory of a place inhabited by images, the ambiguity of a gaze's power, enchanted yet capable of enchanting or casting the evil eye, focuses on a new ritual based on relationships, according to which looking at someone means controlling them, enacting invisible mechanisms of dominance. It's a short step from the eyes to the hands: Stefano Boccalini's *La ragione nelle mani* shifts the attention towards a community in Val Camonica. Creating artworks throughout workshops promote the region's artisanal knowledge, such as weaving. The exhibited Hawaiian word, *Ohana*, means "family" in the broadest sense, a sign of relationships built by being together, exchanging knowledge, memories, and sharing time. In Siedlecki's artwork, the coin evokes, as a passing of the torch, those old, out-of-date tiny coins or medals thrown by tourists in Trevi Fountain, as a good luck ritual or a token of desire to return one day. They are no longer usable objects, sometimes modified with incisions or holes that transform their value in a process similar to Echakhch's. In fact, even here, the object becomes an item. It acquires value through memories and relationships and is exhibited alongside others alike. A shape evoking, once again, a window open on a world of stories or dreams, of which each coin, born as a symbolic "exchange", becomes the bearer.

Ruth Beraha (Milan, 1986), *R.U.? (self-portrait)*, 2022

*R.U.? (self-portrait)* presents itself as a framework of a cathedral. It encloses a suspended structure consisting of four loudspeakers, placed in a circle around which visitors are invited to walk and pause in front of each megaphone to hear the words uttered by a feminine voice, that of the artist. The hushed voice, sometimes daunted, in antithesis with the device's main feature, amplifying sounds, repeatedly asks: "Are you looking at me?". Another sentence echoes this question, this time in French: "Il me fout le mauvais oeil" ("He cast the evil eye on me"). The installation stages a confrontation of looks in which the audience, by getting close to the speakers, plays the role of observer imposing their gaze on the observed, of whom we can only perceive the voice. Observers and observed find themselves entangled in a power dynamic apparently impossible to escape and in a relationship of interdependence that becomes a constitutive part of one's identity by simultaneously involving ourselves and the Other. Not for nothing, the artist titles her work "Self Portrait": the Self can also be defined through the gaze of the Other.

Stefano Boccalini (Milan, 1963), *La ragione nelle mani*, 2020 (from the series)

This time, Stefano Boccalini, who has always been involved in social and anthropological topics, has chosen to work in a local dimension, Val Camonica, a clearly defined area geographically and culturally. The project, *La ragione nelle mani*, won the 8th edition of the *Italian Council* call promoted by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities. "Untranslatable" words are turned into physical matter through the relationships between all the actively participating subjects, in an exchange of theoretical knowledge and artisanal practice, witnesses of a specific and localized cultural tradition now on the verge of oblivion. During a workshop, a group of children learned the meaning of one hundred untranslatable words from other cultures and chose nine of them. Then, several kids had the opportunity to join lessons and laboratories led by elderly artisans – custodians of ancient techniques such as weaving the traditional "*pezzotti*", carving, and lacing bulrushes. These resulted in the creation of concrete objects, "collective artworks", generated by an ideal and emotional involvement of the entire community. In Hawaiian, the word "OHANA" means family, referring not only to blood ties but also to friendships, relationships in which nobody is left behind or forgotten.

Latifa Echakhch (El Khnansa, Morocco, 1974), *Frame*, 2010

Latifa Echakhch uses an extreme variety of expressive means, ranging from installations to videos, from painting to photography, to explore the dimensions of individual and collective identity, the concept of culture, and the feelings of belonging and uprooting. Her artworks are created from everyday objects, either presented as such or modified through simple actions.

*Frame* is a traditional rug from which the central part was removed, only to keep its edges. An ordinary object steeped in cultural value – such as the prayer rug – is emptied from the inside and transported onto a different level of meaning, where its iconic value and abstraction fuse together. Latifa Echakhch creates a sort of landscape in which it is possible to project the actuality of our days beyond ideological or religious contrasts. The weightlessness of this small frame transforms the prayer rug into something suspended between the language of geometrical abstraction and the image of a stretch of water, overlapping the western tradition of visual rationalism and the eastern decorative tradition in which both natural and abstract elements intertwine.

Namsal Siedlecki (Greenfield, USA, 1986), *Trevi*, 2019

The artwork belongs to a series of panels (100x70 cm), each constituted by 88 coins retrieved from Rome's Trevi Fountain over the years. The ritual offering was "invented" during the 1860s to ease the sorrow of leaving Rome and entrust the Fountain with one's hope to return. To create this artwork, the artist purchased 500 kg of coins (around 200.000) from the Vatican, discarded because they had no exchange value. By examining and sorting them, he discovered that many were out of circulation or had been deliberately modified in various ways. Defaced with incisions, perforations, scratches, or covered with pictures or messages scribbled on paper, aiming to personalize the offering and create an intimate and private dialogue with the Fountain, an intangible connection. These coins represent Siedlecki's inappropriate desires: "I think each coin in the Fountain reveals an untold story about the person who tossed it, about the wish they made, the dream they are still dreaming". Also present in ancient votive offerings and places geographically distant from Rome, this kind of ritual through coin offerings represents for the artist a testimony of the innate human need to connect with a spiritual dimension, transcending cultural differences.