

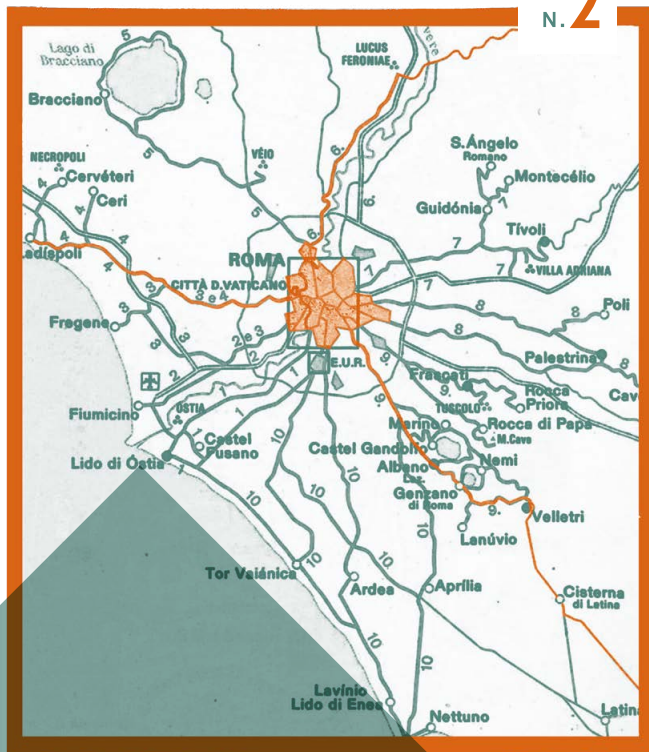
MAGIC CARPETS ITALY

FLOWING CITIES

YVES METTLER

PATRICIA GERALDES

N. 2



MAGIC CARPETS

FLOWING CITIES

F*lowing Cities*, that entitles the project of the second year of Magic Carpets, would like to place its focus on the intense and conflicted relationship between the utopian dimension of urban growth desired by politics and by the state and its fulfilment bringing the attention to the importance of the individual. The human being cannot be rooted but is free: as the great architect Yona Friedman would say, “to return to being architects of their own destiny, people must not only control the techniques, but first must know the “mechanisms” of the functioning of society.” So artists, who have a primary role in society, in this project have the role of primary importance, placing themselves in the varied and contradictory Rome’s context.

In the 1970s, large suburban centres of Rome, that were supposed to take on a new face, were an object of political attention for new ambitious urban planning projects, to revive degraded areas of the city. Large suburban residential centres were constructed, but infrastructure and services remained unchanged and, over time, what was supposed to be a dream of new residential neighbourhoods assumed the form of a dormitory area. In a short time, these abandoned and then degraded

lofty spaces were illegally occupied and, while on the one hand they remain cement monoliths, alongside them there is life that swarms. From a simple architectural cue, new shapes of life and of instances of community participation have opened up.

Yves Mettler, Swiss by birth but German by adoption, is a polyhedric artist. His field of investigation is focuses on urban structures of the contemporary age. The artist conceptually and playfully explores the social significance of the district Laurentino 38. Every day he confronted himself with the youth who live in this section of Rome, built in the late 70s.

Patricia Geraldès is a Portuguese artist who works with many materials, like wood and paper. In the last years she has included local community in her works, with the aim to gather stories about the flow of time and the memory. In this case she confronted herself in the Nuovo Corviale neighbourhood, through the storytelling and the book, an object the artist uses in several sculptures, bringing together a biocentric style with the idea of restoring a virtuous balance between human being and nature.

Benedetta Carpi De Resmini

THE FLIGHT STORY OF "A MARTIAN" IN LAURENTINO

“Today a Martian landed his spaceship”... This is not the story told by Ennio Flaiano, set at Villa Borghese in 1960, but at Laurentino 38, in 2019. This Martian is not a weird fellow from another planet plunged into the middle of the Eternal City; here the Martian is a curious fellow who's come directly from Berlin and ended up in the middle of Laurentino. He's not trampled by a crowd of curious onlookers, but welcomed by a flood of children.

We are in the midst of the Mardi Gras parade that brings together the inhabitants of the upper and lower sections of the Laurentino, in particular the area's two schools, one named for Ada Tagliacozzo and the other for Antonio Gramsci. The two processions of costumed children meet in the middle of the neighborhood noted for the bridges built by the architect Barucci in 1979.

This is Laurentino 38, considered one of the most notorious housing projects in Rome. Twenty-eight thousand people live here in 6 thousand houses, half public and half cooperatives; there's no post office, no bank, and public transportation is sorely lacking. There are eleven bridges, originally designed to link 'islands' of apartment buildings

with lots of shops, full of life. They were to be the new face of Rome, an example of excellence and functionality; but instead, the bridges have become synonymous with social malaise and the risk of social exclusion. Barucci had envisioned a sort of floating city where everyday life would unfold on the bridges; but the idea was so revolutionary that even the inhabitants didn't understand it. The street they were used



to seemed far removed, and the bridges soon became a good place for illicit activities.

But that's just one part of the story; the other part is the everyday lives of the kids who live in the neighborhood and are trying to redeem it.

We decide to take a look at this neighborhood through the eyes of our

Martian: the impact is intense and overwhelming. The parade, with the varicolored costumes and the hullabaloo of the band, momentarily distract us from the grayness of the area; eloquent graffiti written on apartment block walls suddenly comes into view: *Laurentino38 Bronx*, *L38 No Gentrification!*, *Puzzi, lavati! (You stink, clean yourself up!)*, *Credici ancora (Keep believing)*. We cross streets marked with the names of great 20th-century Italian writers that clash with the cement panorama spreading before us, but that hearken back to the dream of the one who inspired the incipit of this story.

"It seems like everyone is hiding!" exclaims the Martian in astonishment, and he's not wrong: shuttered storefronts, deserted streets and very, very few people around.

With our Martian we continue on to the Laurentina Library/Elsa Morante Cultural Center at the Associazione Pontedincontro; the two institutions seem both distant and somehow close. Both are run by dreamers who share a common hope in spite of the social conditions they deal with on a daily basis, amid imperfections and the difficulties of creating a common language. Every day they try to chip away at that vast wall of silence behind which the young people seem to shut themselves off and curl up. People say it's utopian, an imaginary plan, a pipe dream that can't come true, but every now and then someone has the pleasure of slipping out of the ordinariness of life and finding refuge



in utopia, carrying out difficult projects to get young people interested in communication that goes beyond video games, that can embrace discussion, interaction and even reading! The neighborhood is quite fragmentary; kids don't hang out here, but they live here; for us who are now adults, when we were teenagers, the most important thing was the scooter, while for them it's WiFi. They'll willingly travel 3 kilometers to go to the Eur Roma 2 shopping mall, but the 500 meters to a place

like the Library seems like an interstellar distance. The teens who hang around at the Association Pontedincontro come from pretty complicated and difficult situations. Kids don't socialize; they feel no need to meet or make friends with each other, even though they may attend the same school. The Association at the 4th bridge has existed for 25 years, and for the past 10 has been run by Danilo Morbidoni, an architect and a volunteer with the Association. The Martian fits in with the group of adolescents; they don't perceive him as an outsider – a Martian –, but simply as a foreign guy who can help them with their homework. The Martian has an inquisitive look about him, not unlike an adolescent's, and in fact D., an 11-year-old boy, starts to tell him his story: he comes from a difficult family situation, absent father and mother, his grandmother and aunt are his reference points. He finds refuge in video games, as if in a parallel world, and the presence of our Martian sparks his interest, perhaps because he seems to come from the same world in which D. takes shelter.

The Martian is captivated by the sounds of the kids' language: he particularly likes the phrase "*andare a Zonzo*" (wander around goofing off), which perhaps reminds him of one of those poems from "*Mars*," and he repeats it gleefully, like a tongue-twister. When he's not at the Association, he goes to see the kids at the Laurentina Library/Elsa Morante Cultural Center. This is where he decided to land his spaceship, in this particular spot, just 500 meters from the Association, and it seems li-

ght years away from the reality of the zone. Luisa Ledda, who runs the Library, is elated by our Martian's stories, and together we decide to share them with the children who come to the Library. *The spaceship from Mars came crashing down at Laurentino 38, in the Library's park; a few little monsters who were trapped inside escaped from it and scattered around the neighborhood. These little monsters don't know earth, and they're really curious: from the Laurentina Library they set out to explore the neighborhood...*

The Martian takes photos with a strange gizmo of every part of the neighborhood; he decides to tell his stories from his alien point of view through black-and-white prints (perhaps there are no colors on Mars). The kids go beyond the grays of the image and color the story with images of monsters, writing and colorings. We can deduce that the imagination of this large and enthusiastic group of children was not held back by the sad grayness of those photos, but actually took flight, just like our Martian flew to arrive here.... The Martian has begun talking about leaving soon – that is, if he can get his spaceship back: the older kids from the Association have taken possession of it with their stories. Who knows – maybe they're planning a *Flight together!*

Benedetta Carpi De Resmini







1-KM-LONG STORIES

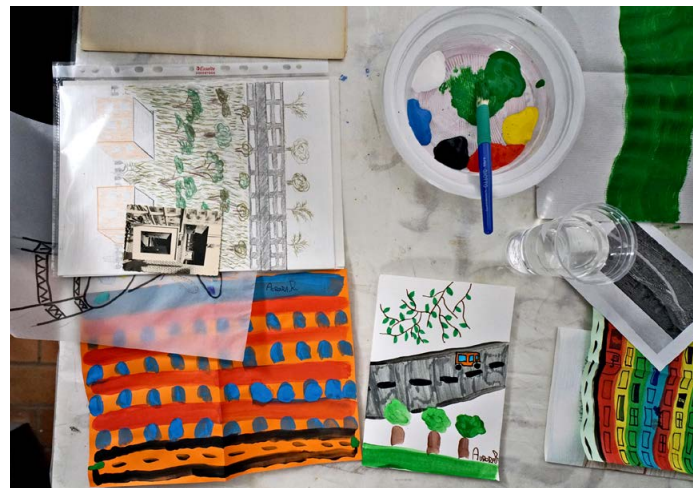
The Nuovo Corviale building was built between the late 1970s and early 1980s in Via Poggio Verde: on that street, before then, there had been rows of cherry trees – it was a true “poggio verde” (green hill) filled with flowers and sweet smells in spring. Then, they started to build the “Serpentone” (Big Serpent). From that moment, the Corviale neighbourhood took on a new look, a new identity, new colours. We asked Patricia to work with us in this place, a little far from the Rome that we’re used to thinking about, because we decided to focus on a part of the Capital that many know but few talk about. We wanted to tell the stories here, because we wanted the words and memories of this neighbourhood’s residents to be part of Magic Carpets, flying as if they were on a magic carpet, crossing over barriers and borders.

The Nuovo Corviale, affectionately called the “big serpent” by Romans – although the reason isn’t clear, since a snake has the ability to curve and move with its long body – stretches rectilinearly with its 960 metres of length in a green valley, where sheep still graze and there is a feeling of the country. Really, we are in the countryside, but we are also in Rome, in its XI Municipality. In this area, there are poplars, oaks,

plane trees, lots of flowers... and then there are the people. Lots and lots of people. About 7,000, all inside, living among lifts that barely work (or don't work at all) and are noisy, corridors distinguishable only with different-coloured markings, divided into 9 floors.

The first time we speak with Patricia, we are divided by our computer screens and we glimpse, on the slightly pixelated screen, Patricia's eyes with the creative flashes that can be seen only in artists. Her mind is beginning to reflect, to probe, to review everything: "we could make diaries and ask people to tell their stories. And if they don't want to, they can bring materials or photos that represent their story, their identity, their being residents of the neighbourhood." Patricia comes from Portugal, lives in the countryside, far from the noises of the city. For her, the link with nature and vegetation is key: it is the starting point of her work and living. She collects branches that have fallen and no longer live attached to their tree, their mother, and gives them new life. She transforms them, she offers them up for a new story, giving them new possibilities, and we would dare say, a new life. Her works are the result of weeks of work: wood sanding, reflection and introspection.

We begin on the path that leads us to Monica, a strong, energetic and creative woman, an entrepreneur serving the community. She welcomes us at her life's grandest art project, the Mitreo Iside Centre for



Contemporary Art, which has been the place to go for culture in the Corviale for years – a place for gathering and play. The first day we visited, we came across very large groups of people “young of all ages” – as they called themselves – doing exercise. Patricia, who is fortunate enough to understand and speak Italian, invites these ladies and gentlemen to participate in her workshops. In just over 5 days, we manage to bring together 15/16 people, including children, teenagers, adults and “young of all ages” who want to tell us their stories and put themselves to the test.

For the workshops, Patricia brought several pieces of coloured paper,

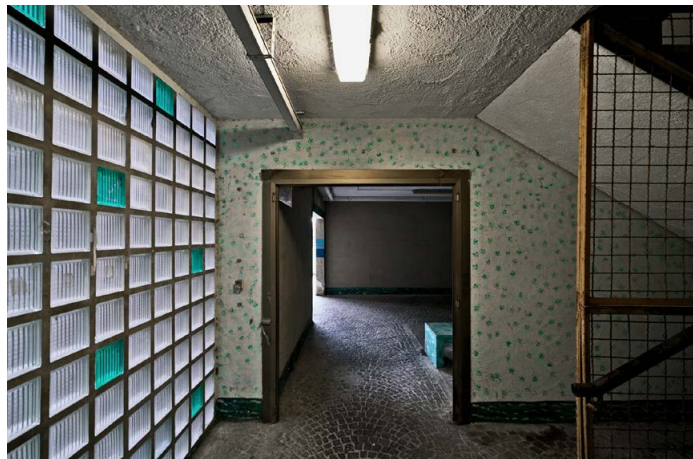


of different sizes and different thicknesses: the children immediately started to draw. For the most part, they draw little monsters that live in the Corviale. Valerio, 8 years old, says that “at the Corviale, there are really, really big and amazing monsters!” Who knows if this depends on the building’s large size. Mirko, his older brother, 9 years old, tells us that there is “lots of joy” at the Corviale. We are amazed by how children always manage to filter the world through different eyes, with bright colours, with positive feelings. How can they draw such a grey and gloomy building with the colours of the rainbow? Maira, 9 years old, creates the Nuovo Corviale in colour in twenty minutes. Each floor has a different colour.

The children’s creativity is joined by that of the adults: Michele leads us into a dark and grey vision of the Corviale that took him away from the glowing world of art in the centre of Rome, seemingly very distant. Then there’s Laura, who tells us all about her life, about her painful move from Torpignattara to Nuovo Corviale in the 1980s, a transfer within a city that is so vast and diverse that it’s hard to entirely feel part of it. Laura felt that she belonged in Torpignattara. Now she’d never leave the Corviale. During the workshop, she creates a map of the Corviale, of all the services that have sprung up over the years: the shopping centre, the community pool, the rugby field. So much energy and so many elements that make a neighbourhood a crucible of lives. Raffaella tells

us that, when she skipped school, she would go to the “Notorious Corviale: a grey but lively neighbourhood”. A place where you felt common, where you felt, and feel, equal.

Ivan is 23 years old. He has lived in the Corviale since he was three, with his family. And he knows and has seen so much: he floods us with stories and viewpoints, feelings and emotions. He suggests we take a tour around the building, “Patricia, do you want to take a walk, I’ll take you up to the roof!”. With the sensation of being outsiders, a bit like being on a field trip to a world we’re aren’t used to living in, we venture up the 9 floors of the Nuovo Corviale. From up there, you can even see “Er Cupolone” (the dome of St. Peter’s): and again we remember that we’re



in Rome. Ivan makes us part of his story, he takes beautiful photos and has a gift for writing. He writes streams of words, where he condenses 23 years of life, few, very few, but certainly full: “What does it mean to live in a neighbourhood like the Corviale? It means having many more mirrors where you can see the parts of You, of your Being. It means that, if they listen to you, many listen to you and your voice echoes. If they don’t listen to you, though, you can take the chance to listen to your own voice with the ears of others, you listen in their place.”

Patricia tries to listen and we do the same, with her. As if the trees on the ground, nine floors away from us, could speak and tell us stories of everything that surrounds them and what they’ve seen.

Up there on the roof, we tried to recognise the Ponentino, the wind that many say the Nuovo Corviale blocked with its imposing size: can that legend be true? There are so many stories around the Corviale, they are wonderful and identity-forming. The people wanted to share their stories and we listened, in silence.

Giulia Pardini



Laura Melero
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de arquitectura
en un 2.º curso de arquitectura
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INTERVIEW WITH ELENA MAZZI

Giulia Pardini: Elena, you were invited to participate in a residence in Berlin at the ZK/U as part of the Magic Carpets platform. Can you tell us about the theme that was suggested to you and about your research?

Elena Mazzi: ZK/U invited me to carry out a reflection on practices of sharing and support within the cultural sector, mainly in the Berlin area. I found this project on the artistic community to be of fundamental importance, especially in a city that focuses greatly on cultural openness and artistic offerings. Not surprisingly, the community of cultural workers in the city is international and varied.

Already interested in the topic for obvious personal reasons, I decided to collect a series of documents already published on the topic with the help of Lotta Schäfer, curator of ZK/U. At the same time, I started to interview cultural workers in Berlin (artists, curators, event organisers, directors of small and medium institutions, activists and managers of non-profit spaces), asking them how they were able to manage their financial situation, and what difficulties they encountered along the way.

GP: During your research in Berlin, you focused on the relationship between contemporary artist – work/ minimum wage. What did you understand from this research?

EM: Above all, I aimed for an inclusive perspective that went beyond the city of Berlin, comparing methodologies and possibilities to understand how to work best. What I found is that, unfortunately, there are difficulties present in almost all European countries and elsewhere, although in different ways. During the months of my research, I was particularly struck by the fact that cultural workers themselves lacked awareness and were ignorant of possibilities and their own rights. Thus, they accept unfavourable proposals and contribute to the poor



management of the cultural sector. I decided to tackle this first hurdle by doing a practical exercise during the final workshop, where participants were encouraged to reflect on the management of their time, both real and ideal, and compare the two.

GP: From your point of view as a young artist who works in Italy but has had several work experiences abroad, how are artists treated professionally in Italy? Do you think the Italian situation is in line with what's happening in the rest of Europe?

EM: The situation in Italy is pretty dramatic, but it's not necessarily worse than other countries in Europe. During the workshop, we gave participants from around the world a small anonymous survey. Although the sample size was limited, it confirmed what I had seen in other statistics in my research: artists often do not break even even minimally with the production costs of their work, nor do they often receive compensation for the exhibits they create, nor are they always reimbursed for expenses like travel, transport and setup of the work. I think it's necessary to rethink this working structure, which puts the artist in the condition of accepting any offer without any kind of critical reflection, personal or collective. Mostly I think we need to rethink the role of the artist in contemporary society. They are often not considered active subjects, but rather time wasters who would conduct their artistic activities for passion or personal need regardless of the com-

pensation received. These are truthful conditions, but must be recognised by society as characteristics intrinsic to artistic practice, to be safeguarded and supported with cultural policies that are conscious of the fact that the artist is a professional, and not a hobbyist.

GP: During this research, did you have the opportunity to work with groups located in Berlin? What was the response from them?

EM: Two months isn't a very long time to do research in an unknown place. The response has been active and interesting, although I didn't manage to map out all the situations I would have liked, mainly because of time constraints. I would have liked more exchange with the group of activists that won the The Berlin Fact Finding Committee, in residence at ZK/U, who were working on the same themes in those months but weren't as active as proposed.

GP: Do you foresee further development on the research you started at the ZK/U in collaboration with working groups in Italy?

EM: I'm doing this research out of personal interest, and the exchange with colleagues in Italy is more frequent within circles of friends. I would like there to be more debate and dialogue about this. Actually, many artists and workers are hesitant to talk about it, and I think this comes from a sort of shame in dealing with financial topics, as there has historically been in the cultural field. But, with a typically Italian

attitude, it's easy to complain. I think we should all commit ourselves to legally working on our rights and on the possibilities provided to us, without shame. Only in this way, starting to refuse unfavourable situations that are degrading to our work, can we improve our status. Let's learn to say no.



INTERVIEW WITH VIRGINIA ZANETTI

Giulia Pardini: Magic Carpets partner Ideias Emergentes' suggested theme for your residence was memory in textile. How did you approach this?

Virginia Zanetti: I considered the theme of memory from both a recent and historical perspective, generally. When I approach a new project, I try to stay open and listen, collecting lots of inspiration and information from people and places. I researched local history by visiting places of artistic and cultural value, and I tried to capture images of the collective subconscious. Both methodologies led me to choose materials and techniques already shared by the community. To create the work, I chose to use natural linen, combined with traditional Guimarães hand embroidery. The former was cultivated in the past by families and then became an industrial and exported product, and the second is the pride of local craftsmanship. I decided to embroider textile memories into fabric in the form of text, creating a short circuit with the etymology of the word text. Then I tried to give shape to the most storied iconographic vision of the country: the caravel, a strong symbol for the birth of Portugal as a nation in collective memory. In my project, this ship,

invented to sail even in unkind winds, became an expedient to creating multi-level collective action as it is a metaphor for exploration, overcoming limits and crises.

GP: You live in Prato, famously linked to the textile sector: Guimarães, the city that hosted you for this residence, has a long history in the textile sector. Did you find a link and some correspondence between the two cities?

VZ: I found many similarities with Prato: both cities were founded near a river, in a rural area, where the economy has changed from family-level to mechanical industrial production. They were both hit by the 2008 crisis, which led to the closure of several businesses, leaving Chinese companies responsible for businesses they speculated on. Other companies have reinvented themselves by moving toward computerization and innovation. Capitalism and, before, colonialism, with their exploitation of human and environmental resources, are effects of human greed, and inevitably lead to a state of crisis that must be overcome in order to reimagine what is real.

GP: Your residence project involved a performance featuring elderly people from two nursing homes in Santa Casa da Misericórdia, some of whom had worked in fabric factories in the past. What can you tell us about the performance?

VZ: The project included several workshops and performances, culmi-

nating in a final action: supporting two sails in the wind at the highest point where you can see the city and the horizon and imagine the sea. I started in the two rest homes, where I chose a room to weave a personal dialogue, where each person wrote a memory in one sentence. Then I found a public space where I spent ten days in a row embroidering the sentences onto two sails, with other women: on one sail, we placed the question that became the title of the project, on the other, we transcribed the memories, maintaining the same handwriting for each one. The final part was to build and support the sails in the wind. The initial idea was to bring elderly people out of the nursing home, together with others, to take a little trip, but I had to alter the project to protect them from the wind and cold. So, there were two parts: one in the garden of the nursing home and one on top of Pehna Mountain.



There, the cold and wind were very harsh and the performance because a real act of resistance and challenge to the storm. The first sail had *Para onde estamos indo?*, embroidered in blue and various symbols of natural elements, followed by the second sail, with the community's memories embroidered in grey.

GP: You've had the opportunity to work with elderly people, especially those affected by Alzheimer's, in the past. I'm thinking of your project, "Muri", at the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation in Florence in 2017.

What role does memory play in your work?

VZ: Memory is a key aspect to understanding human beings. I'm interested in investigating collective and personal memory. By caring for and being conscious of memory, we can live better in the present and imagi-

ne our future. There is definitely a strong autobiographical component in the work I did with the Alzheimer's patients for Palazzo Strozzi, and in the project *Save Delete*, which examined the phenomenon of the removal and deletion of memory, done with a group of minorities.

GP: Will the research you started in Guimarães have any further development, in Italy for example?

VZ: The project I've started will definitely be developed further. Each one of my projects comes out of the previous ones. Considering that I am in Italy now and that a month is a very short time to complete research, the project will continue to take form here.



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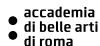
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