



APPOINTMENT WITH THE ARTIST

ARTIST: NICOLA FILIA



**PALMIERI
CONTEMPORARY**



PALMIERI
CONTEMPORARY

“Appointment with the Artist”
NICOLA FILIA

Futur in time

Nicola Filia and Paolo Palmieri
in an interview with Tiziana Casapietra
December 2020

The artist Nicola Filia introduces the residency project "Appointment with the artist", conceived and launched by Paolo Palmieri and Maria Antonietta Collu. The project intends to invite artists to stay in an appartement in the house of Paolo Palmieri, his wife and children, given a space to work on projects. The house, nestled in the green hills of Celle Ligure, overlooks the sea. In the following interview, Palmieri and Filia talk about the project and their vision of art.



Paolo Palmieri and Nicola Filla

Tiziana Casapietra: *Paolo, can you tell us something about the idea for the residency project in Celle Ligure?*

Paolo Palmieri: The project was born from an interest and a passion, not only for contemporary art, but also for encounters. Apart from meeting the artist, the project was furthermore about an encounter with the other. Nowadays physical contact and relationships have become almost synonymous with danger. Therefore, we wanted to find an excuse to stay and feel alive through the pleasure of contact in its most elemental and direct form: the encounter that restores the sense of fullness giving momentum to life. We found this excuse in art. Our project is the story and the result of several encounters. Furthermore, it is, or perhaps above all the story of a friendship. The idea had been floating in my mind for a while, but the final impetus was the conversion of one of our living spaces - La Casetta di Laura - into a vacation apartment, additionally offering space to present artworks. It was the moment when the residency project took shape. La Casetta di Laura became a studio and a living space where artists could be accommodated and where the public could admire not only their works but also their creative process.

TC: *Where did this project originate?*

PP: The name of the project is "Appointment with the artist" and it is inspired by a work by Jonathan Monk which is called "Meeting #49". I purchased it from the Sonia Rosso Gallery in 2003. The artwork comprises the inscription



Tiziana Casapietra and Nicola Filia at the Ceramics Museum of Savona

“Mole Antonelliana Torino April 24, 2014 at noon” written in black adhesive letters in Helvetica style. The inscription announces a future encounter where the artist intends to meet the person who purchased his work.

TC: *So, did you meet Jonathan Monk?*

PP: This was the crucial point of the artwork: having bought it more than ten years earlier, there was a risk for both of us, for me and for the artist, that the other might not show up. Instead, Jonathan Monk was right on time. On April 24 at noon, he was waiting for me at the Mole Antonelliana. I was accompanied by my family with Giuseppina, who was six months old at the time. Jonathan dedicated his entire day to us. As soon as we met him, he took possession of our stroller, and we started chatting and walking through the neighborhoods of Turin. We then met Sonia Rosso, the gallery owner, and went for lunch together.

TC: *How does this project relate to the ones you organize in Artesina?*

PP: One project is the “Pink Rabbit” by Gelitin, an enormous pink rabbit out of wool placed on top of a mountain. For this project I organized a piece of land to put the artwork, which we financed together with a group of collectors

coordinated by the Pinksummer Gallery of Genoa.

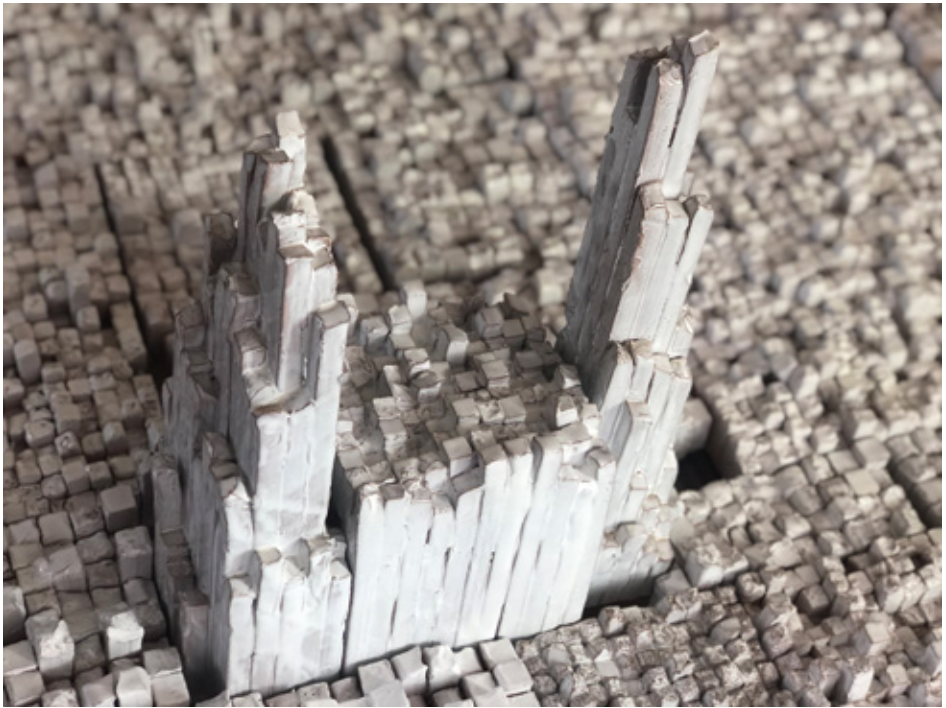
The second project, "The Lost Reflection" by Susan Philipsz, is a sound installation. It is part of my personal collection and was installed in a forest in Artesina. The residency project in Celle is a little different. However, it is still part of the same (my personal) path with respect to art, because "if you are possessed by an idea, you find it expressed everywhere", and you cannot wait to make it happen.

TC: *"If you are possessed by an idea, you find it expressed everywhere", and you cannot wait to make it happen. Do you want to enlarge upon this quote?*

PP: It is partly a quote from Thomas Mann: "If you are possessed by an idea, you find it expressed everywhere, you even smell it." The quote explains what it feels like when you want to achieve something. Something that you do not only have in mind, but something that also resonates within you emotionally. It is like a desire that slowly expands and eventually finds the strength to become concrete.



Nicola Filia and Paolo Palmieri during the installation of the exhibition.



Nicola Filia, "Temporary City," *The City*, 2020. Ceramics, variable dimensions.

TC: *What fascinates you about art? What led you to become a collector and to promote art?*

PP: When I was in high school, we went to Turin to visit an exhibition of the Peggy Guggenheim collection. I was enchanted by the beauty of the works presented, in particular "The Dressing of a Bride" by Max Ernst and "Bird in Space" by Constantin Brancusi, Yves Tanguy, Alexander Calder, Renè Magritte; just to name a few. It was fascinating, how this woman had managed to gather such a wonderful collection.

Starting at the end of the 90's I bought some artworks at the gallery "New Santandrea" in Savona directed by Francesca Pennone (works by artists such as Amedeo Martegani, Miltos Manetas, Monica Carocci, and others); I then began to travel attending exhibitions and visiting museums and artists.

Contemporary art is a sensory experience, I remember a beautiful exhibition which was called "Apocalypse" at the Royal Academy in London where each artist had a room at his or her disposal. In particular, I remember the installation by Gregor Schneider. It was a labyrinth made of secret rooms to explore. Also, I recall the extraordinary sunset at the Tate Modern by Ólafur Elíasson's.

TC: *How do you manage to unify your entrepreneurial soul with the more poetic one that led you to describe art with the words you used above?*

PP: Actually, I personally prefer to express myself by using images. I've always enjoyed taking pictures. I started taking them with an Exacta, an old reflex camera of my father, then with primal digital cameras and finally with a smartphone. I collected thousands of photographs. Nowadays, on Instagram, I recognized that it has become the passion of many. I had an artistic education and for a while I painted large abstract canvases, swirls of color. Nevertheless, in the end, I left art to those who do it professionally and sometimes I deal with what others do. The world of work and "adults" leads to very cold relationships and in this world confronting others often causes complications and problems.

TC: *So, you see art as a child's activity ...*

PP: Art is not a child's activity. It educates us emotionally. It teaches us to listen to ourselves, our sensations and our emotions, and if it makes us feel like children... (things come full circle!).



Nicola Filia, Megalòpolis, 2020. Ceramic, cm.19x18x10.



Nicola Filia, Megalòpolis, 2020. Ceramic and video (detail).

TC: *How did you meet Nicola Filia with whom you started this project in Celle?*

PP: I met Nicola, thanks to my wife. We went to visit him in his "atelier" in San Pantaleo in Sardinia. From this moment on we stayed in touch.

I was impressed by Nicola's artistic ability and determination. I particularly liked the work he presented at the Museo Man in Nuoro, "Un Bosco di Alberi Bianchi" ("A forest of white trees").

TC: *Can you tell us about this work? What struck you about it?*

PP: It is an exciting museum work of great visual impact, delicacy, and strength. At the same time there is a certain fragility. It reminded me of an installation by Xavier Veilhan, "The Forêt", in Grenoble, even if Xavier used completely different material (rolled up cloth instead of ceramic).

TC: *Nicola, Paolo mentioned the work you presented at the Man in Nuoro, "Un Bosco di Alberi Bianchi". Would you like to tell us about this work?*

Nicola Filia: "Un Bosco di Alberi Bianchi" is a metaphysical forest, made of clay trees painted white. It is an ideal place for the soul. It was the director of the Man, Christiana Collu, who elicited these words from my deepest inner self. I still owe Christina so much. The trees, without branches and leaves, are

ethereal, pure, light, threadlike. Inside this wood, there was a clearing. This center was intended to attain enlightenment.

Consisting of 100 sculptures, the installation was exhibited for a whole month in the main hall of the Museum. Simultaneously there was the anthological exhibition of Marc Chagall. I would like to mention an incident that happened several times, namely that of some visitors who were not capable of physically entering the artwork. It was either respect or fear that led them to observe it from the outside only.

It took three years to create the sculptures for the forest. Today part of the installation is permanently exhibited at the Grande Miniera di Serbariu in Carbonia. Another considerable number of pieces are in private collections.

TC: *Nicola, what will you be presenting in Celle?*

NF: In Celle, I will present the project "Temporary City", in a site-specific installation. A big ceramic city, modular, glossy white, a bombed city in Syria. Decayed and uninhabited. However, also a crowded, contemporary city, like an almost meaningless anthill, where everyone is chasing after something they will never have. A social position, an economic climb, a taking over of everything and in the end, the loss of self.



Nicola Filia

TC: *I like your words: in the city everyone is chasing after something they will never have... Why do you lose yourself by taking everything?*

NF: It's the city life. I'm thinking of Cagliari in Sardinia (which is actually the largest city where the quality of life is still acceptable), but especially Rome, Milan and so on. City life is regulated by rather fast rhythms, which force people's minds to "compartmentalize" their tasks automatically. Starting from the alarm clock in the morning, inevitably trigger mechanisms lead you to organize your tasks, respecting a whole series of civil and democratic rules regarding interaction and mutual respect. There is for example the subway and its escalator etiquette. The right side is for those who stand and the left side clear

for those who want to walk. In our society of metropolises where haste and rush determine our lives, because everything is objectively distant, there is an unconscious chase after mathematical functioning and growing numbers. I believe that the mind unconsciously devotes himself to improve the position of the mortal body on the planet aiming to give economic value to everything. I decided to live and work in Sardinia because I personally believe that the most important research in this life is the inner one, that of personal and spiritual elevation. At that point, if you ascend, you get rid of the common weights and burdens and you begin to understand that true wealth is time and space, not the bank account.

Over the years I have met some very rich people who owned a lot, often inherited from their fathers. Probably there is only one of them who is in line with my thoughts and lives an extraordinary life. Many instead are lost and continue to wander in a limbo made of fears and uncertainties, where being rich is just a sentence.

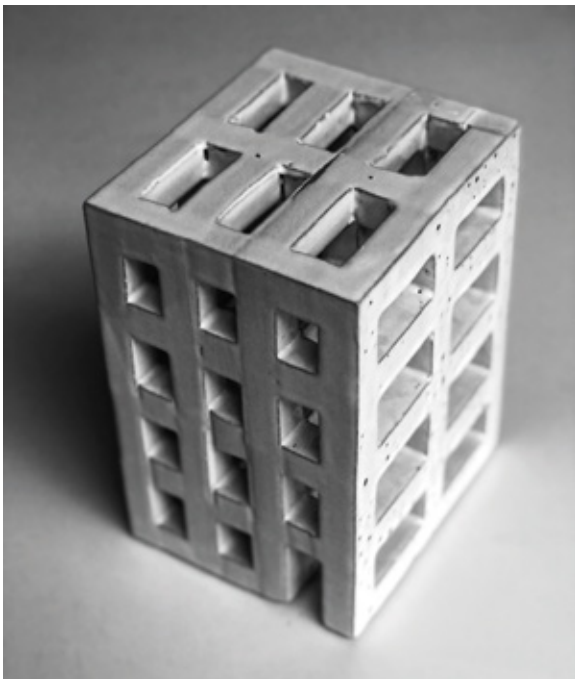
TC: *An unconscious chasing after mathematical functioning and growing numbers. That suggestion is very interesting. Do you want to take this thought further?*



*Nicola Filia, "Temporary City," The City, 2020.
Ceramics, variable dimensions.*

NF: Yes, with pleasure. I think it's like the law of addition and removing. A clear mental position. In my case it is almost like a diet for the brain.

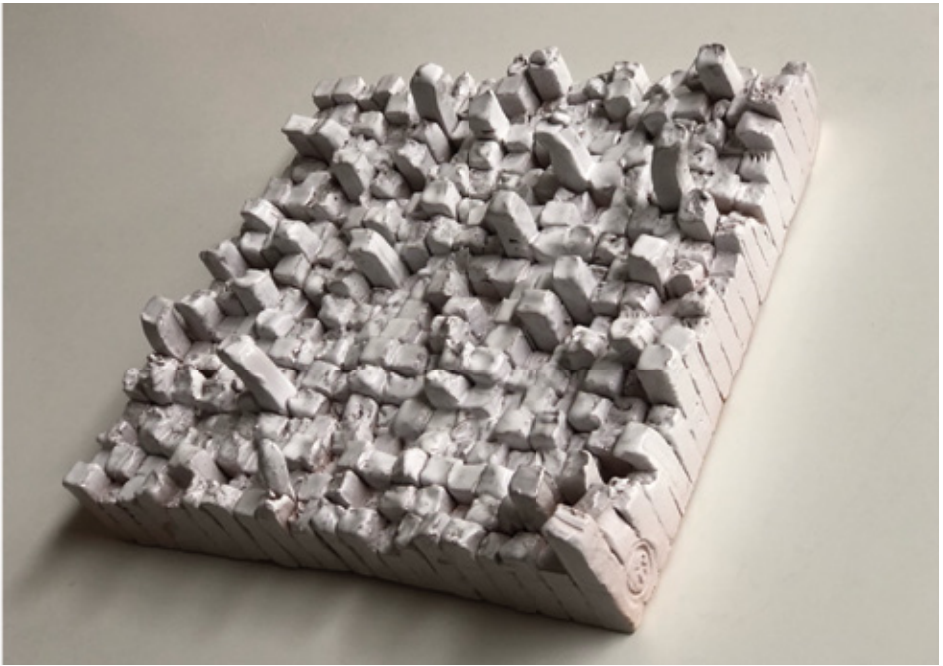
I compare it to ceramics. When you start working with the earth, one of the first things that naturally comes to mind, as if by instinct, are the textures, the imprints on the surface created through stamps. Then comes the surface treatment, then the engobes; in short, there is a tendency to stratify form with more and more layers that are not necessarily superfluous, but, when added to the previous ones, create mathematical passages. It seems to me that the same thing also happens in our lives. We tend to overwrite information, needs and consequently properties, without realizing that in the meantime the gift of life is flowing. And we spend too much time doing things that we don't enjoy. When I decided to work with clean and essential forms and monochromatic glazes and started creating without using decorations or applications, I found my way into bowls and vases. Minimalist and clean. As a result, I found myself. Thanks to ceramics. I lost my way only when I began to concentrate on the commercialization of the object, which was necessary. Today when I make objects I do it only for myself. The process of removing in ceramics immediately captivated me, because I was able to dominate my mental appetite that led me to add. As a result, I learned to remove. I also follow this philosophy in life trying to simplify as much as possible.



Nicola Filia, *Palace*, 2018. Ceramic, cm.16X13X20

TC: *Would you like to talk about your interest in ceramic materials?*

NF: I discovered ceramics by accident, finding a piece of clay in my father's painting studio. I remember that I fired my first pieces in the red hollow brick factory on the outskirts of Carbonia. In the meantime, I finished high school and moved to Cagliari to study foreign languages and literature. Cultivating my passion, I went deeper and deeper, carried away by the world of glazing, fire and surprising effects. Later, I was lucky enough to meet a great potter from Deruta, who taught



Nicola Filia, "Temporary City", The City, 2020. Ceramic, cm.40x40x8cm.40x40x80

me the ancient techniques of working with a pottery wheel. Thanks to his dedication and the possibility to work on a pottery wheel, my objects were selected by B&B Italia, the company I worked for over 15 years.

Before opening my business in Olbia, I studied ceramics extensively, attending the Contini Institute in Oristano as well as various specialization courses. In Faenza I spent 15 days between the Art Institute and the Cimatti Laboratory. In this search of knowledge, lost in a labyrinth of technique, my love for ceramics gradually decreased. For some years now I have decided to stop working on commission and started to focus my attention on my inner research. So, the final product of ceramics moves into the background and the process that functions as a means of expression (telling a story) moves into the foreground. This process is almost like a translator of emotions, and that's exactly how I find myself. I've always rejected the idea of being a ceramist, because it's a world where I don't belong. I have certainly been part of it, but everything has changed.

TC: *I was struck by the sentence: In this search of knowledge, lost in a labyrinth of technique, my love for ceramics gradually decreased. Would you like to elaborate on that?*

NF: : I've always thought of ceramics as a drug. It's comparable to an addiction. You constantly need to create, fire, glaze. You realize your mistakes and

you start over. You fire everything and then you inevitably improve, because your passion makes you work 12 hours a day, continuously. Then, by chance, something turns out great, just because you mixed two incompatible glazes that, at a thousand degrees, have separated, creating an extraordinary effect. There are too many variables in ceramics. A lifetime is not enough to understand them all.

And it was when I looked at myself from the outside. I saw myself inside a forest (also my work at the MAN in Nuoro in 2008). I was lost, almost desperate. On the one hand, there was the growing production (at the time of B&B Italia), on the other hand, there was the need to be something else. Just for me. In that moment I realized that my passion for ceramics was over. I rejected the idea of transforming my life into a life inside the ceramics business, because I felt small and incapable. I felt like I was trapped in a labyrinth. So, I decided to go back and start over. Now ceramics and I are good friends. We respect each other.

TC: *It seems to me that the concept of the work of the forest and that of the city are very similar.*

NF: : Thank you... I would say more than similar. They are actually part of the same idea, the same path. Even if paradoxically, it started from the end, and goes backwards.



Nicola Filia, "Temporary City", The City, 2020. Ceramic, cm 20x20x7

I've recently realized that myself. Nature, and the forest in particular, tend to be a place where fugitives looking for inspiration, relaxation and meditation gather. Nature in general is like a meeting point for souls fleeing the cities....

Chronologically, I first described this place, the forest, and then started again from the beginning. However, it is always about man's relationship with nature... a bit like my project, "Megalòpolis", a journey backwards, from where it ends to where it began.

From post atomic cities to Nuragic ones. Another important element of this research, which links these two dynamics, is that of energy, of coal. My hometown is Carbonia, a territory as famous for its mines as the entire Sulcis Iglesiente area.

My city was born due to the exploitation of the mines. It is a planned community, in the middle of the Fascist period, inaugurated by the Duce himself. In reality, what has remained of this attempt of progress, (not only in Carbonia) is only disaster. Hectares of territory were exploited, made sterile and poor. There are excavated mining areas and remains of inert materials everywhere. Steel factories have polluted entire coastal areas, as in Portoscuso. All in the name of progress that was regression in the end. An illusory semblance of



Nicola Filia, *The Orange City*, 2020. Ceramic, cm.43x7x3

well-being that soon revealed its true identity. It has given itself a "Temporary Future". A future which is not lasting, a timed future. Going back from there will be an impossible task. What is done is done. The bitterness remains in the mouth and for me there is a need to express this point of view and feeling of powerlessness through ceramics and other materials.

TC: *Tell us about the other materials you choose for your work.*

NF: The latest material is aerated concrete. It's a lightened concrete that's easy to work with. By cutting it into slices, cubes, parallelepipeds, or splits, I have created a collection of limited-edition cities, almost like artist's proofs, intended for something I have in mind, like transforming them into a monumental intervention.

I have also created corten steel towers, originating from steel boxes that were then superimposed and welded together to become tall sculptures, representing the contemporary towers of Babel in cities of the future. I also used perforated terracotta, both pure and carved, split and cut it and heated them up in the oven at 1000 degrees. I transformed the pieces into bombed and abandoned buildings. With a welded mesh, for example, I created the great city of iron, currently on display in Abbasanta. It is 6 meters high. A great incompleteness left to rust.

Now I'm planning to work on reinforced concrete, even if after visiting Uncini's exhibition at the National Gallery, I had serious second thoughts. I recognized myself immediately and I decided to take a break to look for an alternative solution, technically speaking, to create volume.

TC: *Let's end with your first work and the work you're currently working on.*

NF: It's hard to say exactly what my first work was. I grew up in my father's painting studio, among oil paintings and canvases, between Indian ink and turpentine. All extraordinary memories. I can still recall the scents years later. With him I participated in the realization of cribs in churches, both in terracotta and in scenography... I remember the large wooden panels and the tempera paintings. One of my first paid jobs was the realization of representative objects. I am pretty sure that it was for a Social Winery. Then, there were also the wedding favors for the witnesses of my godmother's wedding. However, I remember very well when B&B Italia confirmed their decision to include me in their Luxury Collection as a supplier of objects. I was 27 years old, and I have already had 9 years of laboratory experience behind me. I was self-taught in the garage of my house in Carbonia. The last few months I have been preparing for my next solo exhibition at the Arborensis Diocesan Museum in Oristano. It is an extraordinary museum that will host my *Via Crucis*, an installation of almost 50 ceramic sculptures that will depict the Way of the Cross. The anthropomorphic sculptures will be divided into 14 stations, 4 sculptures per station. A unique work that I will not repeat.

Nicola Filia is an artist, sculptor and ceramist. Born in Carbonia in 1975, he studied at the Art Institute Carlo Contini of Oristano, which was founded in 1925 by the sculptor Francesco Ciusa. After university studies, he left to devote himself to ceramics: from 2002 to 2016 he designed and created objects for B&B Italia. In the same years he held lectures and workshops on the design of ceramic objects at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence. Among his major exhibitions are the solo shows *Un Bosco di Alberi Bianchi*, curated by Cristiana Collu, Museo Man, Nuoro 2008; *Temporary City*, curated by Paola Mura and Efsio Carbone, Centro d'Arte e Cultura il Ghetto, Cagliari 2018 and the group exhibition *On Flower Power*, curated by Marti Guixè, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome 2019; *MEGALÒPOLIS*, curated by Paola Mura and Baingio Cuccu, Nuraghe Losa November 2019 – November 2020. His installation *Un Bosco di Alberi Bianchi* won the international award “Un Bosco per Kyoto” in 2015 and is permanently exhibited at the E.A. Martel Museum – PAS in Carbonia. His work “Temporary City” has been selected for the Biennial of Ceramic Art 2019 at the Cluj Museum in Romania. His sculptures are part of private, national and international collections. He works in Sardinia between Olbia, where his studio is located, and San Pantaleo, where he exhibits his works.

* * * *

Tiziana Casapietra is a curator and journalist in contemporary art research. She has been the Director of Savona Ceramics Museum since 2018.



© Palmieri Contemporary, Celle Ligure
Printed on December 10, 2020

graphic: hello@spazio-blu.com

PC

PALMIERI
CONTEMPORARY

www.palmiericontemporary.com