Erosive Forces Shape (Inner) Landscapes
Curated by Alessandra Troncone

Erosion is a sculptural more than a geological process: it consumes, it shapes, it smooths, it defines. It also builds – but by removing matter – in pursuit of a point of equilibrium. Though the first image that comes to mind in this process is one of a mountain landscape – the original source of inspiration for this exhibition, born of a reflection on the specificities of the Val Gardena area – it is not only rocky surfaces that are affected by the phenomenon. In general, it refers not only to the *exterior* but also to the *interior* landscape, which equally undergoes actions (no longer physical but emotive) that disintegrate and reduce it, and ultimately shape it. The sliding of land may thus become the sliding of society and the soul in this by no means far-fetched transposition from the environment to human beings, their psyche and their life in the community. Hence, not only mountains, soil and coastlines are eroded, but also values, such as democracy, compassion and faith. In both cases, erosion may result from forces that are churned out slowly – silent, patient activities that take years, centuries, millennia to achieve their goal – or discontinuous but sudden, lively events that determine sudden changes.
These were the cues for *Erosive Forces Shape (Inner) Landscapes*, a narrative stitched around energies that – with outcomes that may be either positive or negative – create new forms and new arrangements, seen through the eyes of artists who describe or include them in their practice. Erosion is thus a process that speaks of the encounter and collision of precarious elements seeking a short-term and long-term stability of their own. Dictated by a variety of agents, the result may be visible and invisible, geological and psychological, environmental and familiar. Rivers, the sea, the wind and glaciers are erosive; time is erosive; memory is erosive; sentiments are erosive; sound is erosive; war is erosive; limescale is erosive; and the human being is erosive. As Terry Tempest Williams has written, "We are eroding and evolving at once".[1]

To speak of erosion is to speak, above all, of natural agents in motion which, favoured by the passing of time – "the great sculptor" (M. Yourcenar) – forge the surfaces with which they come into contact. It is this primordial tension between elements, the unsolved paradoxes and the clash between the biological and mechanical dimension that the works of **Francesco Bertelé** (Canzo, Italy, 1978) summon up on different levels with their subtle balancing acts. At this exhibition, Bertelè presents a polyptych of works drawn from collections that reflect the directions his research has followed in recent years. *We Are on the Verge of a Return to a New Form of Oral Society* (2022) is a sculpture composed of salvaged elements, some natural some manufactured, with, on its surface, a pattern elaborated by a software and drawn by a machine. The inside of a tree trunk, whose concentric circles tell the story of the tree, is thus literally eroded and drilled at different intensities on the basis of an algorithm that respects the density of the wood, seeking – more abstractly than empirically– a final point of equilibrium. Another work on show is a detail from *Mixtopedia*: *tavola# 3: la gorgone, yggdrasill, lo sokushinbutsu e altre storie di legno e di pietra, 2022),* a corpus whose central object is a find from the petrifying spring of the so-called Forest of the Horns of Canzo, where the artist's studio is situated. Presented as a possible comparative table, this collection of objects, a meeting of *naturalia* and *artificialia,* stresses the relationship between body, nature and culture. The petrifying spring is in itself a magical place, where wood is transformed into travertine by the erosive action of water, which in this case adds as opposed to removing. Here the artist has left a cast of part of his own body which in time will turn to rock. The last work by Bertelé on show is *Verge's View* (2020-22), an account of a climb up the rock faces of the island of Lampedusa completed by the artist during the *Hic sunt dracones* project, in which, albeit invisible, the body adheres

[1] T. Tempest Williams, *The Cutting Edge of Time: Erosion of Home*, in Id., *Erosion. Essays of Undoing*, Crichton Books, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2019.

virtually to the irregular eroded surface to become landscape itself. The stratification of geological matter corresponds to that of the different strata of reality contained within the image: the original photo was, in fact, elaborated using AI, thus modifying some of its characteristics and making it a possible access portal from the real to the hyperreal dimension.

Albeit on a more domestic scale, the relationship between body and landscape is also at the heart of the work of **Finbar Ward** (London, United Kingdom, 1990). For his sculpture *Gardener's Cottage I* (2021), he produced a plaster cast of a hole dug in his garden, recording the exact morphology of the soil and the minimal agents that were living in it at that precise moment in time. Responding to the need to freeze that moment in his life story (his decision to leave the city and start a new life in a different context), Ward chose the cast as a way of giving form to absence, to a void, to soil eroded by a personal act that, as a result of this process, becomes memory. *Be In Time, Fruitful Vine* (2021), on the other hand, is inspired by the title of a composition by Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006), a Scottish poet and landscape architect. It is a homage to the word as yet another "shaping" element, but also to a man who gave life to gardens-cum-sculptures in which artistic practice engages in a close conversation with nature.

Setting out from long experience working with wood, **Arnold Holzknecht** (Bressanone, Italy, 1960) proposes an approach to sculpture that erodes without squandering the material in excess. His surfaces, in which painting and sculpture meet with a geometrical rhythm, are engraved, cut and eroded but only minimally, so that the marks are perceptible only from specific angles; the artist's intervention provokes fractures that create depressions, imaginary grottoes, a refuge for tiny creatures, thus simulating the modelling of a hypothetical landscape. Some of these fractures are stitched with barbed wire, determining a new structure for matter that leaves the scars of its wounds visible.

Once upon a time there was the concept of "endemism", a phenomenon whereby plant and animal species were exclusive to a certain territory. With the increase in the mobility of human beings and thanks to curiosity for the exotic – not to mention as a response to massive climate change – the sense of the specific nature of a habitat has been transformed as a consequence, allowing for unforeseen incursions and inclusions, traces of a deliberate or random transit that took place in very remote times. In *Dust Suns* (2020), **Vibeke Mascini** (The Hague, the Netherlands, 1989) focuses her attention on the movements of Lepidoptera – butterflies and moths – that over the centuries followed natural air currents or were carried like relics in modern vehicles. After gathering the remains of these insects from antique taxonomic collections, she trapped the dust and fragments in superimposed aeroplane portholes. The electrostatic force imprisoned in the glass ensures the temporary stability of these trails, which become traces of a landscape still liable to changes. The title of the work refers to the German physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's experiments on electrostatic charges with the use of coloured dusts.

The marks left by human beings on the landscape and their capacity to influence the life of other species return in a video by **Milena Bonilla** (Bogotà, Colombia, 1975). Entitled *An Enchanted Forest* (2014), it narrates the research project of a group of scientists who, between 2002 and 201, traced the trails followed by red deer in the Šumava National Park, on the border between Germany and the Czech Republic. They discovered that the deer never cross the border drawn during the Soviet period, even though the fence was knocked down in 1989. The biologist Marco Heurich explains this phenomenon as a consequence of the transmission of information from does to fawns which, generations on, shape the behaviour of the herd. The construction of a physical border thus brands the landscape and the species that inhabit it, influencing their long-term behaviour – a form of silent but by no means effective erosion.

Can sound have erosive power? Can it shape matter with its vibrations? In the oeuvre of **Arturo Hernández Alcázar** (Mexico City, Mexico, 1978), the answer is clearly affirmative. Fascinated by the "gashing" of mountains for industrial purposes – whereby the removal of enormous amounts of material literally erodes these millenary colossi – the artist has recorded the sound of their collapse at a quarry in Monterrey, in Mexico. He combines the sound with traces of porphyry from a quarry in the Ortisei area to create an original site-specific installation entitled *Absent Mountain (Fall)* (2022). In it, megaphones, tools for controlling public places, amplify the sense of an oppressive action that pervades across the entire exhibition space.

According to a study by the University of Michigan, human activity provokes erosive phenomena on continental land surfaces tenfold those caused by all natural processes put together – especially in the fields of agriculture and construction. It is not hard to imagine, therefore, how this statistic may be affected by an event such as war, which not only brings violence to the natural and urban landscapes, but exerts a forceful effect on the *inner* landscape, too. Responding to the Russian army's invasion of Ukraine on February 24 2022, after an initial moment of shock, incredulity and paralysis, in her studio in Amsterdam **Alexandra Kadzevich** (Odessa, Ukraine, 1992) began scrutinising Ukrainian second-hand sales websites. She soon assembled an archive packed with images of all sorts of commodities that people had hurriedly put up for sale with a view to abandoning their homes or simply to scrape some money together. They included a large number of mirrors, hastily photographed by their owners on their mobile phones in the most diverse contexts, without caring about their reflections of the surrounding environment. Starting from these photographs, Kadzevich painted a new set of canvases entitled *Mirrors* (2022), a story of the consequences of the war in which the conflict itself is not evoked directly but becomes all-permeating. As we "spy" people in their apartments in Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkov and Mariupol through their mirrors, we become *voyeurs*, but we are also forced to take note of the erosion of domestic environments and family affections caused by such a large-scale dramatic event.