diego zuelli

pdf portfolio

info@diegozuelli.it
www.diegozuelli.it

pattern, per Italia Zokugo, 2020, Italian Cultural Institute of Tokyo
3d computer graphics, dual HD video installation, no sound.

Pattern is a CGI animation that shows a landscape undergoing an eternal present of an orogenesis and destructive event. Three different points in time of the same landscape are combined between the two projections, establishing with the viewer an ever-changing narrative of the same event. The random intersection of the temporal relationships between the two landscapes amplifies the illusion underlying the representation. The two images sometimes appear identical and other times opposite, complicating the condition of suspension, return, repetition. Like a worn-out memory, like a tale told and retold a million times.

installation view video

zampette, ovvero xilomanzia, 2020
- realtime software, 3d computer graphics, monitor, no sound (installation).
- glicè print, 31 x 40 cm (serie of 3 prints)

A 3d graphics app that continuously practices xylomancy, a form of divination using twigs and their position and interaction. Here, the virtually infinite shapes created by the program seem to draw the symbols of an unknown pictographic or ideogrammatic alphabet. The title zampette loosely refers to the expression "chicken's scratch" referring to impossible to read handwriting.

video excerpt
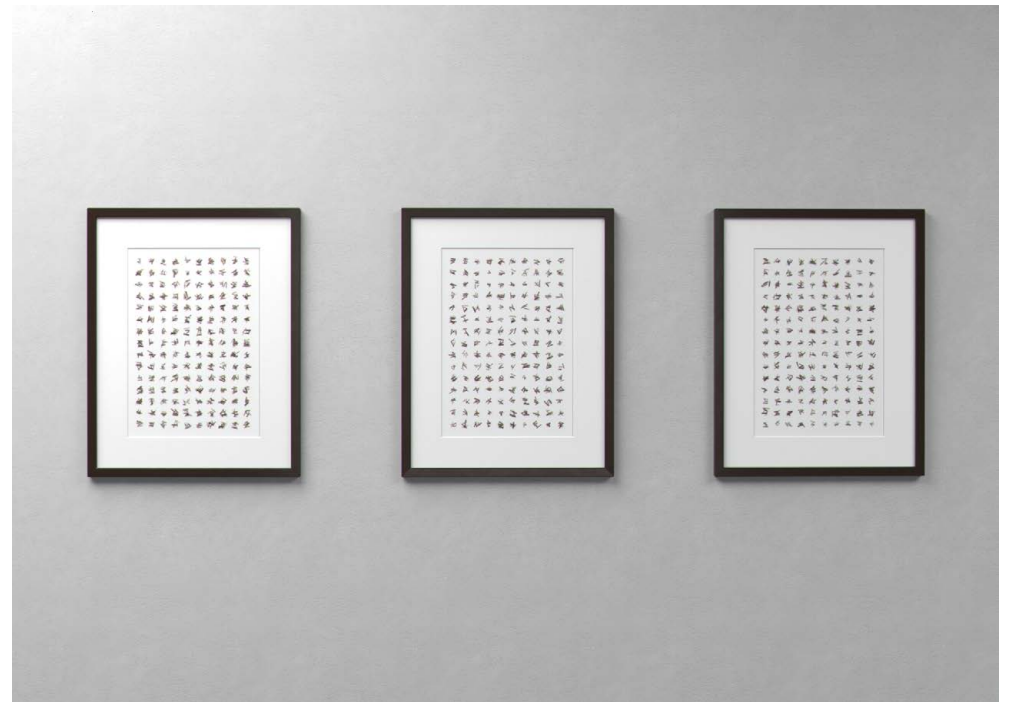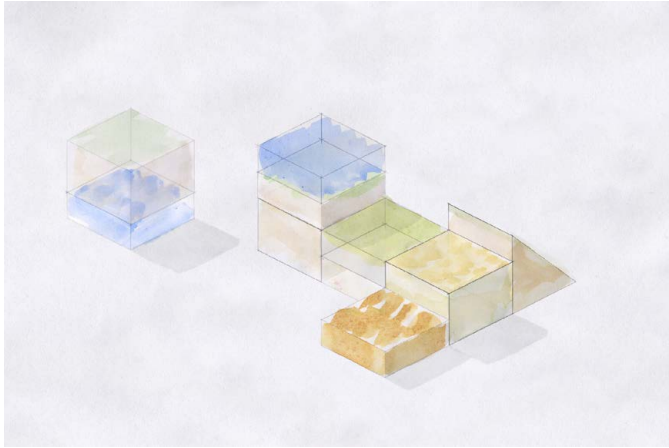
tentativi di paesaggio, 2017
monitor, watercolors, JavaScript, stereo sound

Tentativi di paesaggio (Landscape attempts) puts on screen repeated creations and deletions of a diagram, a scheme, a column chart. It's ultimately an attempt to landscape painting and a parody of representation. Using as formal starting points ecology illustration from atlases and textbooks and an isometric axonometry viewpoint like those of some video games. In the 17th century, Claude Lorrain's overabundant picture production (and that of his imitators) incidentally showed that it's possible to create a large number of landscape paintings using very few starting elements. The computer application of this modus operandi multiplies to infinity the attempts, reaching, as the scribbling and paper sounds help testify, an utter state of futility and perhaps beauty. As trying to describe the continuous geophysical change of Earth's crust and the transformations of the people who inhabits it.

tentativididipaesaggio.diegozuelli.it
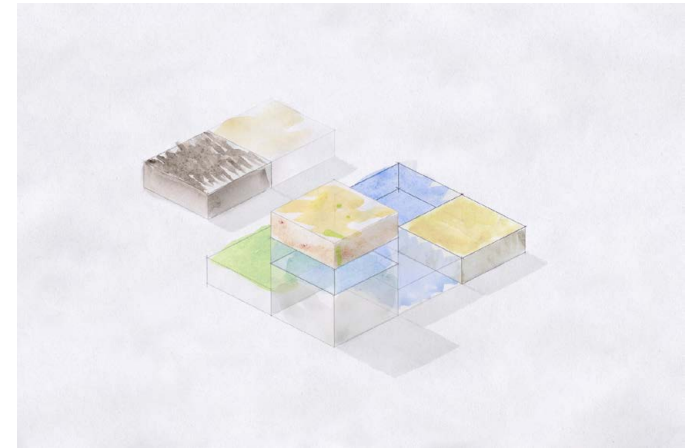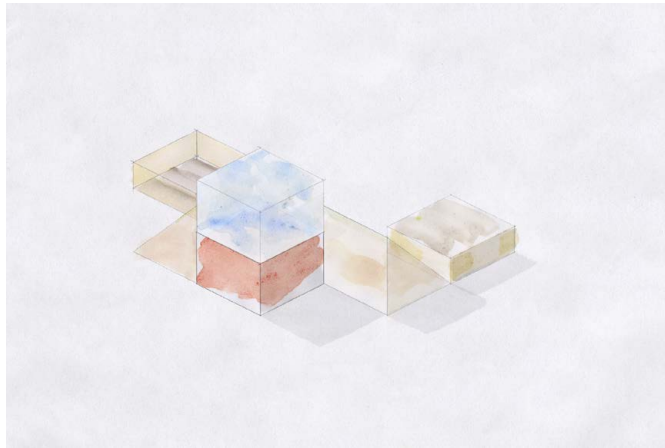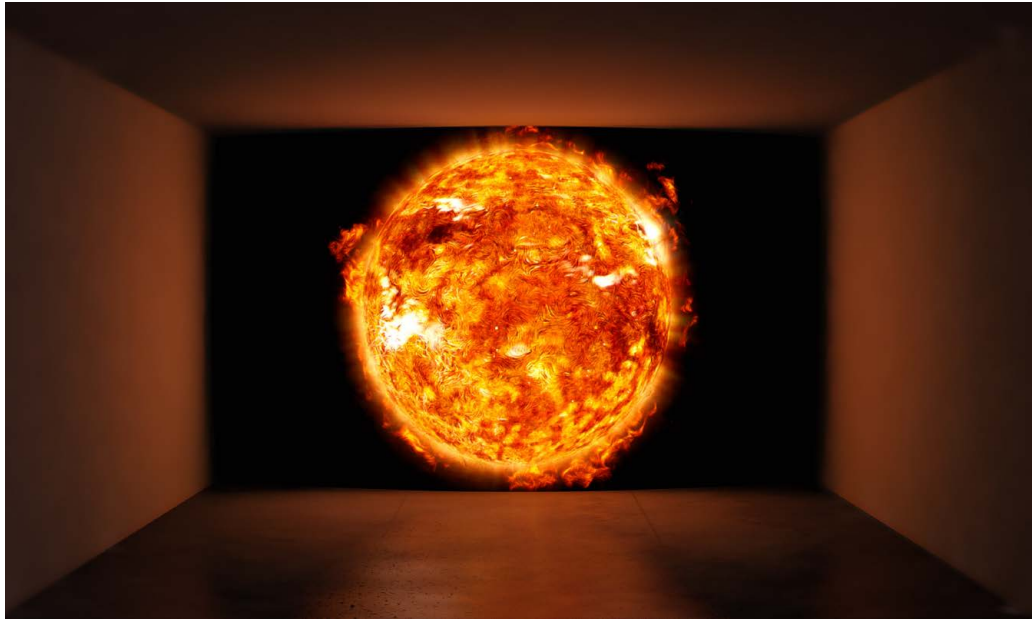
8 minuti luce, 2016
3d computer graphics, HD video installation, painted projection surface, timed spotlights, stereo sound.

The work is comprised of two phases: First, the projection in the dark room shows a 3d computer graphics representation of the sun, adorned with solar spots, lively and smoldering, with vivid, teeming, almost "living" details. The sun undergoes a slow but relentless revolution on its own axis. After eight minutes (the time the light of the sun takes to reach the Earth), the second phase begins. The slow fade-in of the spotlights in the room, illuminates the walls and the projection surface evenly, gradually washing out the video-projected sun. All you see is a "mask", the stencil that is contour, frame, and contrasting ring of the projected image: a negative/double of the pristine sun, but cold and empty. After a while, the lights fade out and the white and black surface will again leave room to the projection – which, in fact, had never been discontinued. These two phases follow one another at regular intervals, creating a turnover of different and interchangeable "light phases" depending on the interpretation one gives to the first and the secondo phase. Sun and light, instead of being synonyms as usual, became opposites.

installation view video
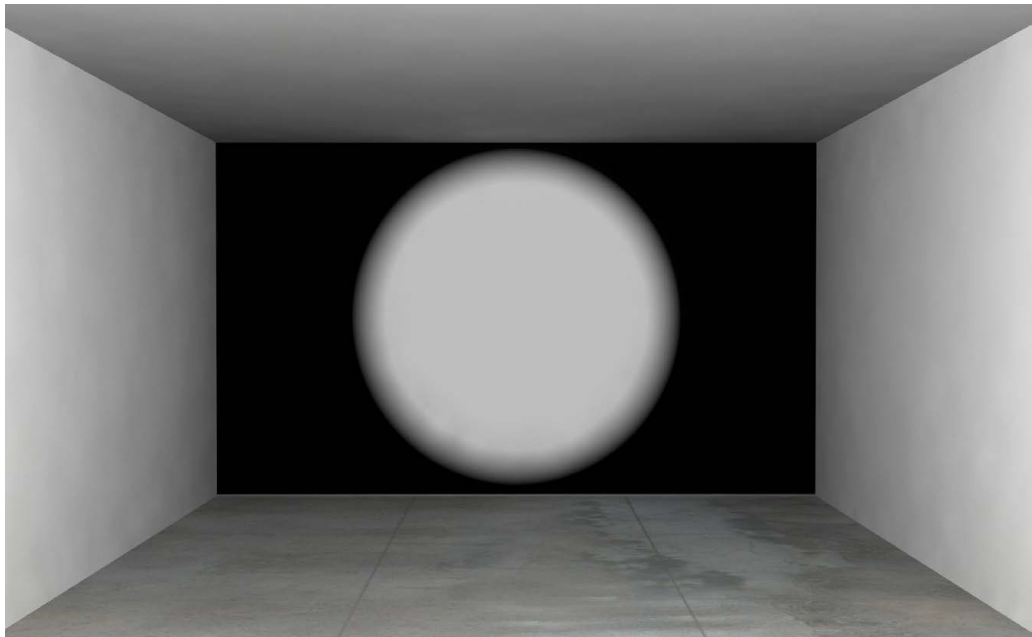
non essere sicuri non è vero, 2016
three-channel videoprojection installation, 3d computergraphics, looping videos, no sound

Three video projectors mismatched in lighting power, resolution and throw length converging their light beams to let the videos interact. The only action you can see is not depicted in any of the three videos comprising the installation. It appears only as the three projections intersect, as a Venn diagram. Combining different data to obtain a new, floating, meaning.

installation view video
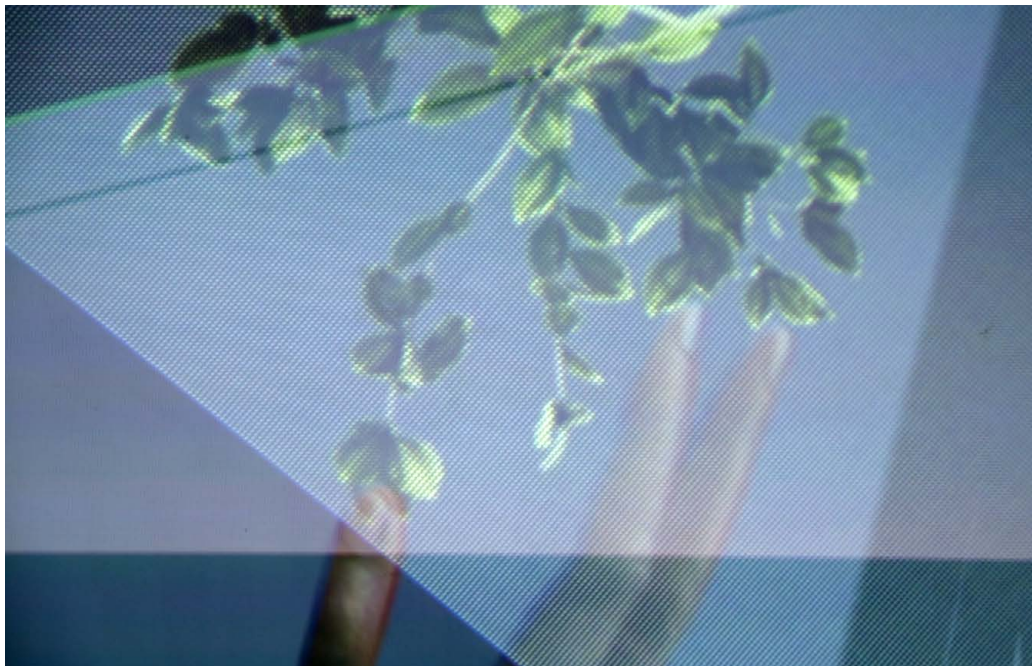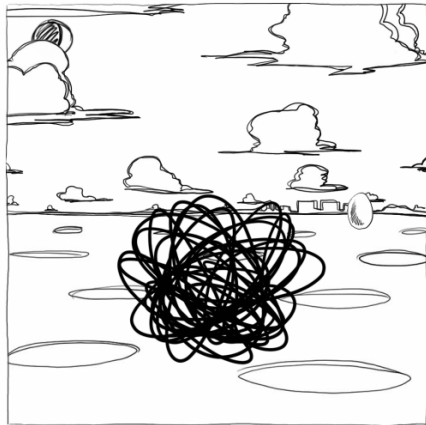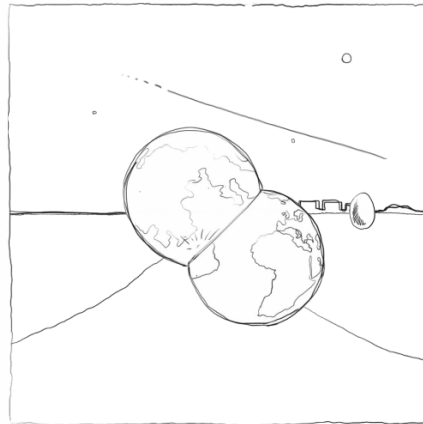
combinazioni semplici - The simple Combinations, 2015
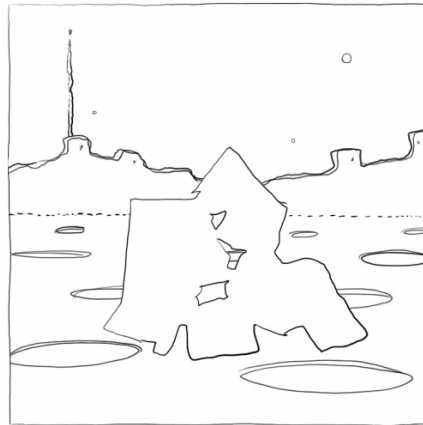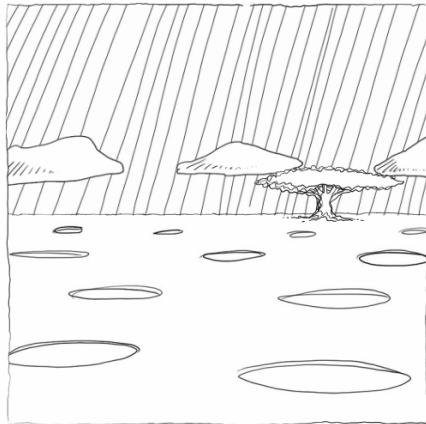drawings, software, GIF Animations - flash web applet - iOS and Android app
courtesy: Contemporary Locus, Anna and Francesco Tampieri

A program made for Contemporary Locus' website, and a cellphone app for Apple and Android phones and tablets. Everyday, the current day, month and year digits are transformed in a mathematical seed that guides the creation of a drawing. An algorithm, a simple combination (the precise term in maths), composes together various drawn elements forming an animated picture. Everyday a new picture is composed. The number of drawn elements is finite, meaning that overlaps and similarities can occur. The algorithm is designed to create a picture with every past, present and future date, till 31.12.9999.

combinazionisemplici.diegozuelli.it
(required Flash Plugin, now discontinued)

Dante e Tolomeo, 2014,
360 degree dome video-projection, 2' 30", 5.1 surround sound

a 360-degree videoprojection, specifically prepared for the Pino Torinese (Turin) planetarium. An ascent from a dark and deep pit, heading towards the skies. Showing the behind the scenes of the planetarium and 3d computergraphics tech, as a Dante's Divine Comedy ascent, and its Ptolemaic system view of planets and stars.

installation view video
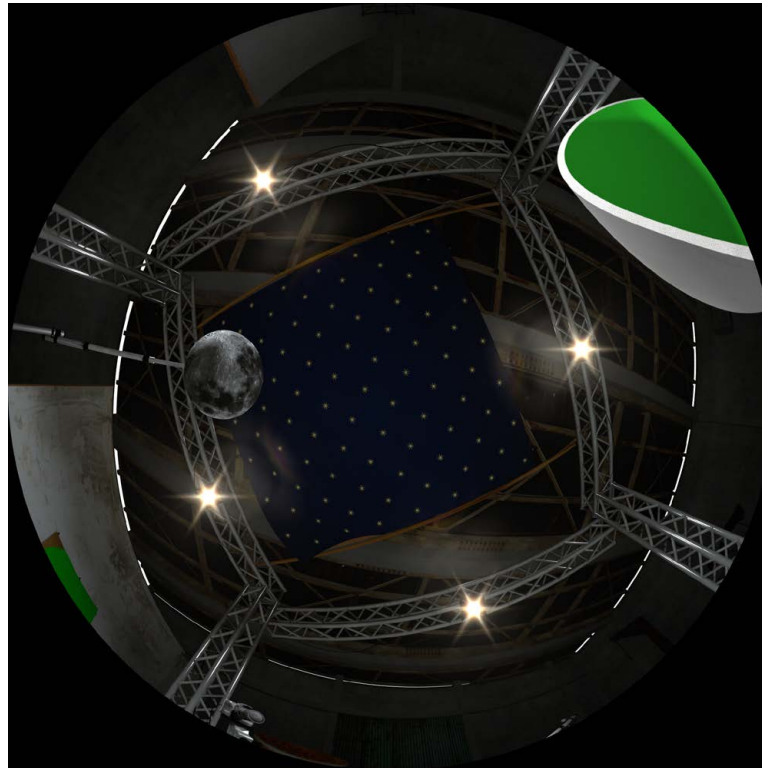
le parti non vere, 2013
hd video projection, 3d computer graphics, stereo sound

From Fellini's attitude of showing in his films false and "true" elements next to each other, *le parti non vere* shows spatially displaced and abandoned things, like on a film set or a theatre stage, apparently in a cause and effect relationship. With a sort of "behind the scenes" mood. But everything is, of course, 3d computer graphics.
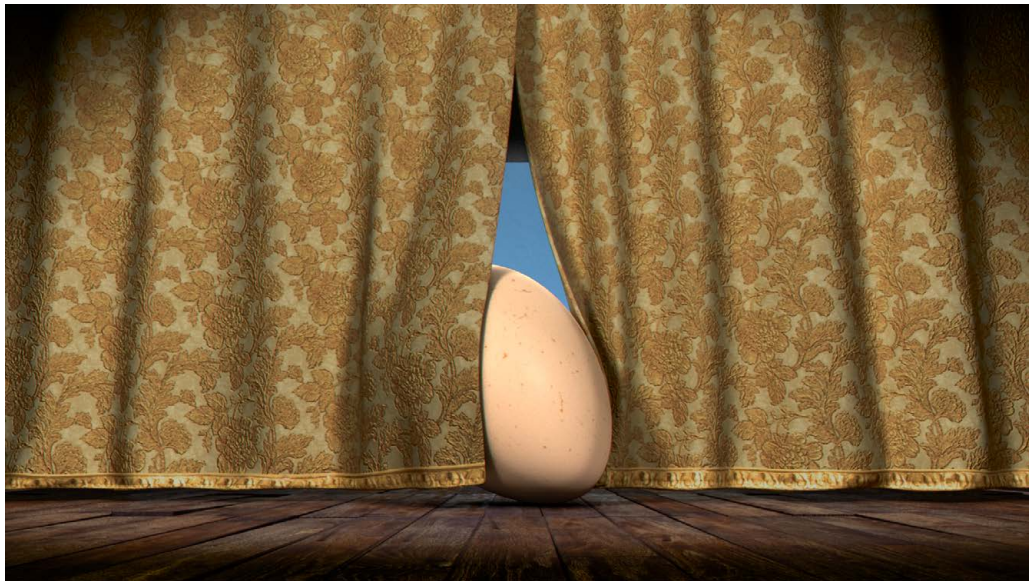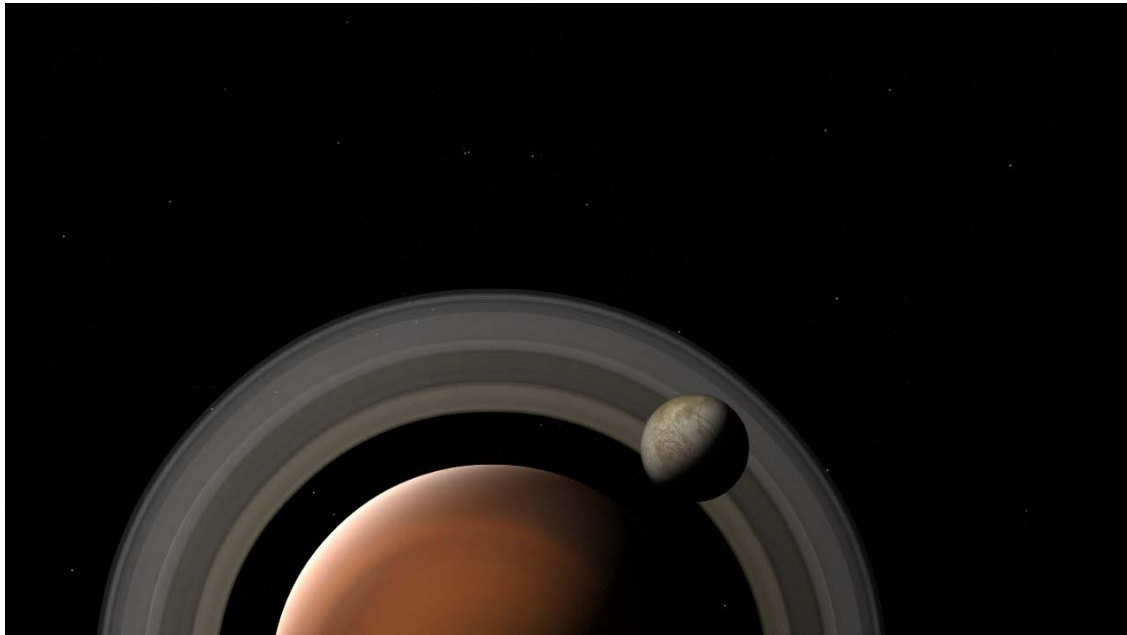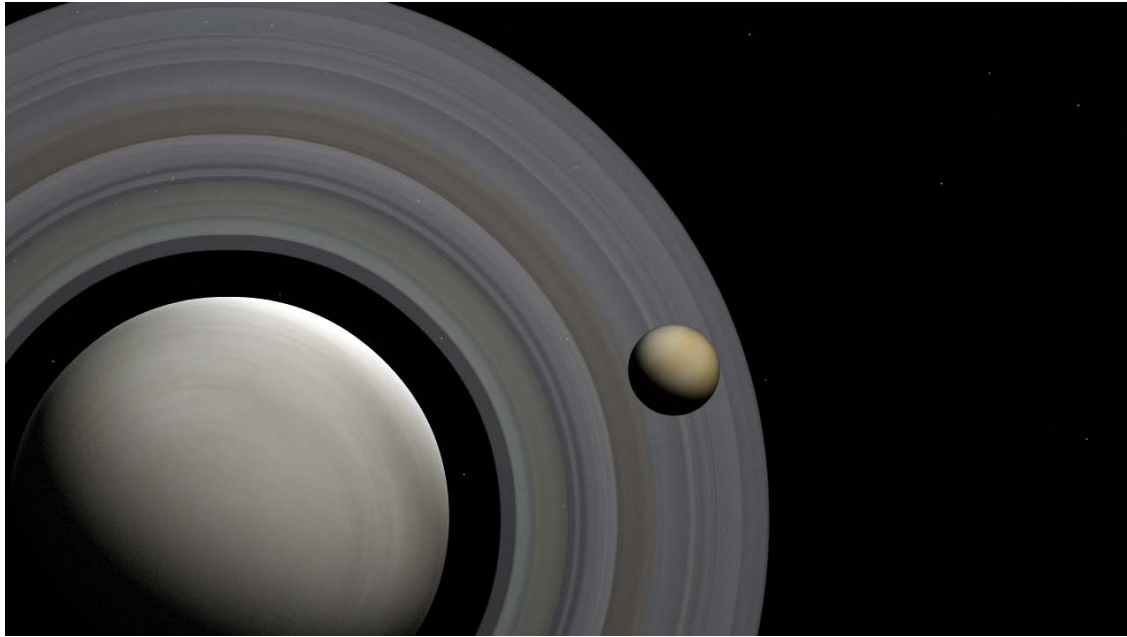
il complesso dei pianeti, 2013
software, hd video projection, computer graphics, stereo sound

This work is an effort to visually reach and depict some of the infinite combinations we can find in outer space. A software continuosly recombine finite graphics elements to compose on screen always different animations. With infinitely diverse combinations of rings, planets, light conditions and celestial bodies movements, no animation will be seen twice. The sound score is random-generated as well: a bandoneon plays notes and chords following only a few timing rules.
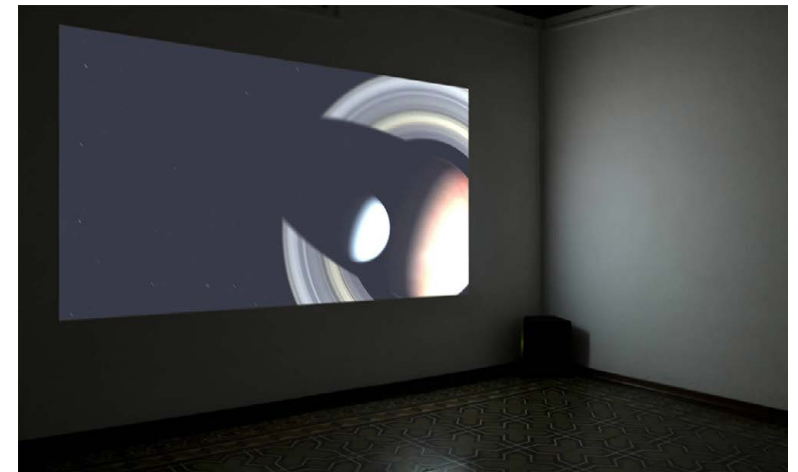
meccaniche terrestri, 2012
dual channel HD video on blu-ray, 2' each, (loop)

I'm very often asked about the techniques I use in my works. On hearing that everything they saw is fake, they look somehow incredulous or puzzled, as if they couldn't accept a very well established and renowned technique, used almost in every field: from paper advertising to TV shows and cinema.

Now I'm finally showing them (deliberately lying) what they like to think about my work: "it's all true: filmed with a camera, on an actual set, with real lights and props". Showing them a fake behind the scenes could lead them to think more about how perceived reality is just a common and easy trigger to pull. A cultural, more than visual, trigger.

On two opposite walls, there are two video projections, showing both videos at the same time.

tappezzeria, 2011, HD video, 2' 18" (loop) on Blu-Ray disc, stereo sound

This video shows a series of combinations between three different materials/surfaces, on three different objects. The soundtrack is a sequence of chords played with three instruments: harpsichord, viola, flute, which interchange one another in time with the three objects appearing on the screen.

It's a work commissioned for an exhibition on the connections between photography and other media. I chose to start preparing my work thinking about set photography, and the attitude advertising photographers have towards certain assignments. They change positions, lighting and framing in countless combinations and variants, just to be sure to later be able pick the "best" shot, thus hopefully avoiding any further effort due to some inscrutable client needs. The author gets lost in the process. According to the kind of picture we're looking at, it is sometimes possible to infer who shot the photo and what the subject meant to them. What can we gather from a serialized photo shooting like the one described above? And what instead from a computer graphics work?
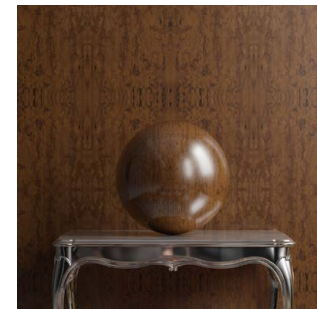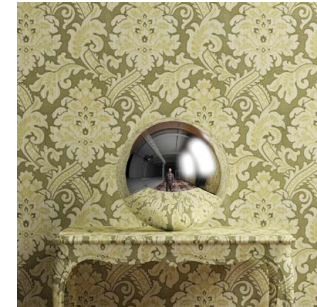
non c'è suspense, né morale, né cause ed effetti, 2010. Two channel HD video
installation, stereo sound. Betta Frigieri Arte Contemporanea

The title of this work is a quotation from Slaughterhouse Five, a novel by Kurt Vonnegut. "There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, nor causes, no effects." This sentence can be used as a leitmotiv for the biological and natural world, because of the way it manifests and develops itself. The dual channel video installation for Betta Frigeri's space emphasizes on the waiting and impending awareness that nature can arouse sometimes. Often feelings are left out but, as a matter of fact they are always perceivable as long as nature is present in our lives. It answers only to randomness and to its own needs, it's erratic and unpredictable, incumbent on us (from Latin, present participle of incumbere, to lean upon).

The video installation is staged in two rooms, connected by a staircase. The soundtrack of the slow asteroid rotation on the first floor is a series of scientific sound recordings taken with underwater hydrophones in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. In the basement floor, the audio track is composed of re-processed radio waves recorded by NASA deep-space probes orbiting around remote planets of our Solar System. The first video has high-angled shots, from Space to Earth, showing various cuts from the Earth surface, while the basement video is composed of low angle shots, looking upwards, from the Earth to the sky. On walking down the stairs that connect the floors, the audio tracks merge and blend together, so that, at least ideally, these two opposite shots intersect each other.

The deep-water recordings used here are known because they haven't been identified yet. These sounds are often captured by hydrophones placed at great distances from one another, even at opposite ends of the Pacific Ocean. In time, this has led to assumptions on the large-scale origin of this still unknown phenomenon. On the contrary, the radio emissions recorded near Jupiter and Saturn by Voyager and Cassini deep-space probes were identified with utter precision: they had to do with natural events such as aurora borealis or passages through the magnetic field of a planet, comparable to known terrestrial phenomena.
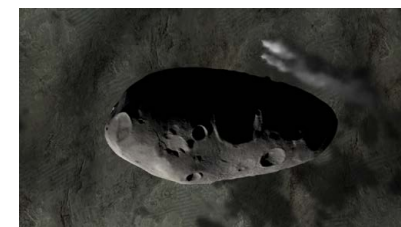
la solita, cosmica mancanza di significato, 2010. Plotter print, 80x53cm each

These two photographic prints were showed in the *non c'è suspance, né morale, né cause ed effetti* solo show. A sort of fake "behind the scenes", since the asteroid is completely made with 3d computer graphics, both in the video and in these prints. The title is a quotation from Philip K. Dick. (*The World Jones Made*, 1956).
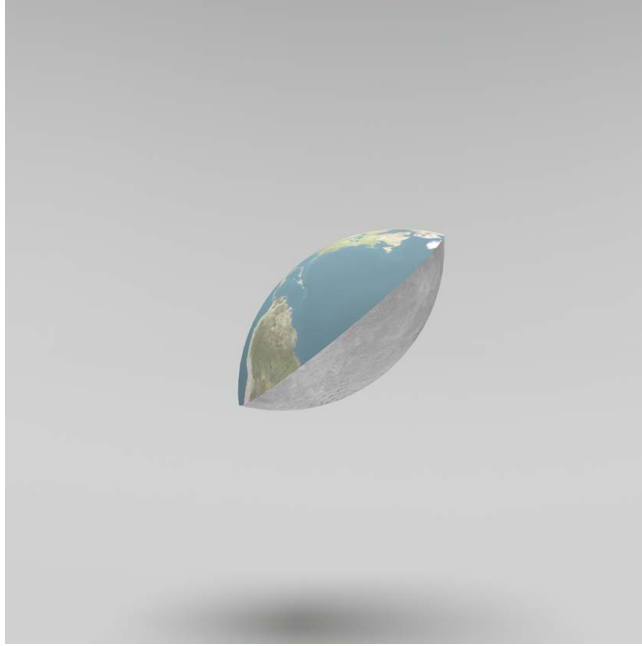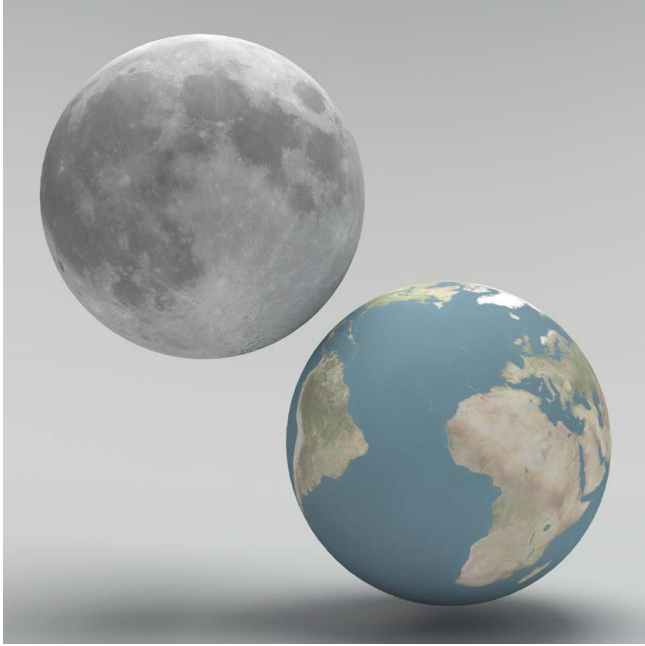
Insiemistica celeste: disgiunzione, intersezione, unione, sottrazione
2010. Plotter print, 30x30cm (50x50cm framed) each

Venn's diagrams and Boole's algebra, fundamentals of sets logic: union, intersection, subtraction (La teoria degli insiemi). This kind of algebra is also the base for a 3d computer graphics tecnique: two or more geometric primitives are put toghether and then joined/ subtracted/ intersected to create complex shapes.

(title translation: *celestial set theory: disjunction, intersection, union, subtraction*)
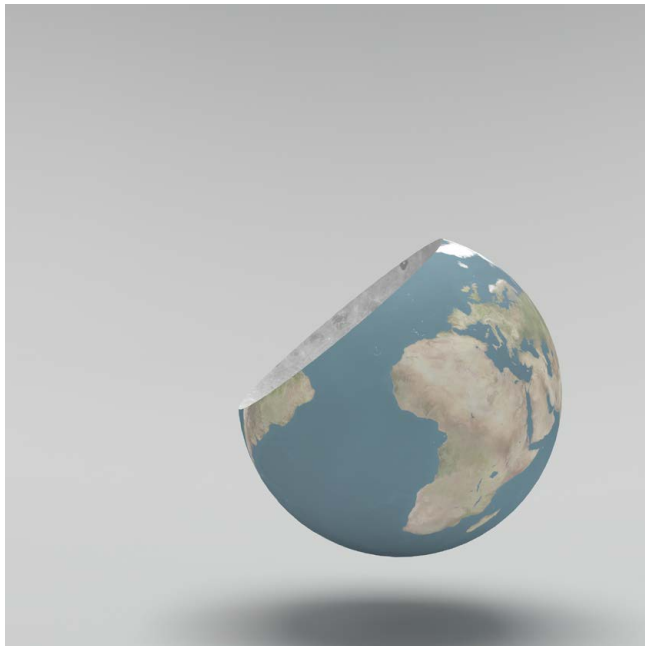
(installation view*)*
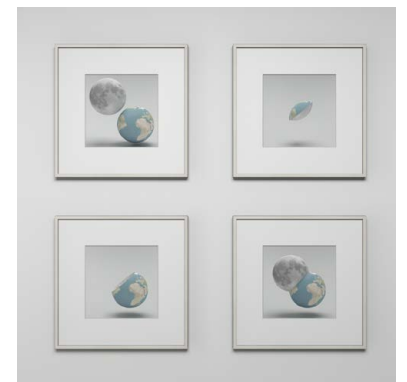
diversa proiezione, 2009, computer graphics, HD video installation, sound, 10' (loop)

The *Studio G7* art gallery in Bologna (Italy) has a pretty challenging space for videos, since it's a narrow, small and almost square room, with ancient and uneven medieval walls. Projecting a video onto these walls promised to be a real nightmare, so I decided to enhance the site-specific characteristics, working on purpose on a distorted projection and including the stream of water that naturally flowed under the ancient gallery walls (the Aposa stream).

The result was a site-specific video projection, as sloping as the walls, showing a room identical to the art gallery screening space. A room within a room, filled with water and a deforming "perspective box". Ancient and clammy walls submerged by water; constantly changing, bending and deforming in time (a whispering and windy sound as its soundtrack).

From that experience, I derived an autonomous video art work. where it's the water level to be disjointed, not orthogonal, not natural anymore. A heterogeneous liquid, deformed by the white cube moving walls. Besides the small submerged steps, there is no human intervention or presence.

The audio track is a mix of different wind gusts echoing in the hollow space and a piece from Olivier Messiaen, a French composer. The Russian film director Aleksandr Sokurov said about him: "Sometimes, when I listen to Messiaen, it seems to me that I am not listening to music but to the instrument tuning up all by itself. There is no composer, just a piano in an empty room, and the sound." Again, no human interventions.
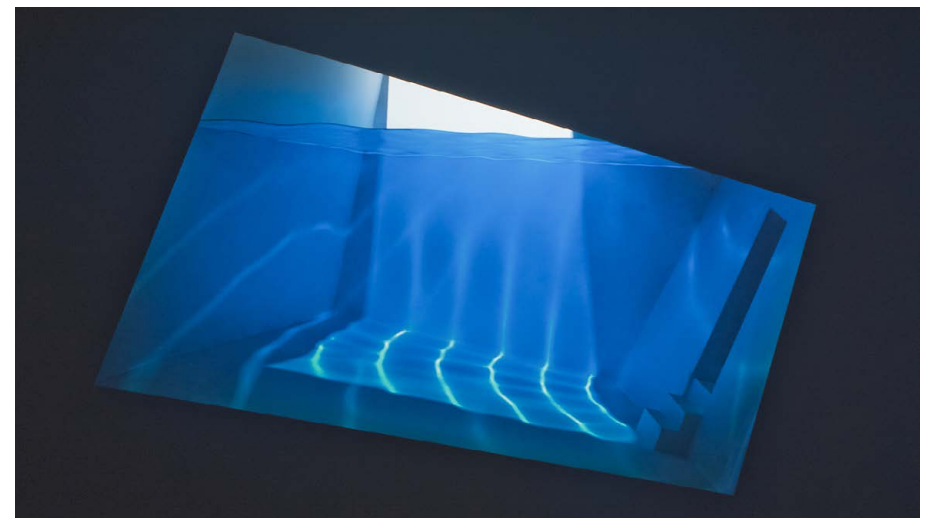
cornell box, 2009. Lambda print on forex, 100x53cm

On Googling "Cornell box", the search results will be a series of pictures taken from two very specific areas: web sites about US artist Joseph Cornell's (1903-1972) works and pages from the Cornell University's web site (New York), documenting photographic and 3D computer graphics experiments with the "Cornell Box". The two Cornells are absolutely not related to each other, but the connection, even if arbitrary, is very clear. Artist Joseph Cornell made boxes filled with assemblages and collages of salvaged materials (newspapers, magazines, toy parts, geometric solids, art prints). Those art works are widely known as Cornell Boxes. In 1984, Cornell University experimented with computer simulation to study the actual dynamics of light propagation, in order to find an algorithm to create images as resemblant as possible to pictures of real objects. A sample scene was then created: a box, with a light on top and simple objects inside. Still nowadays, this is one of the most common test set for 3D computer graphics software. Once again called Cornell Box.

This print puts side-by-side two Cornell boxes, compares them, mixes them. Underlining formal and thought similarities. Showing connection that was found only through the Internet and search engines, which linked an artist to a visual research usually unrelated to art.
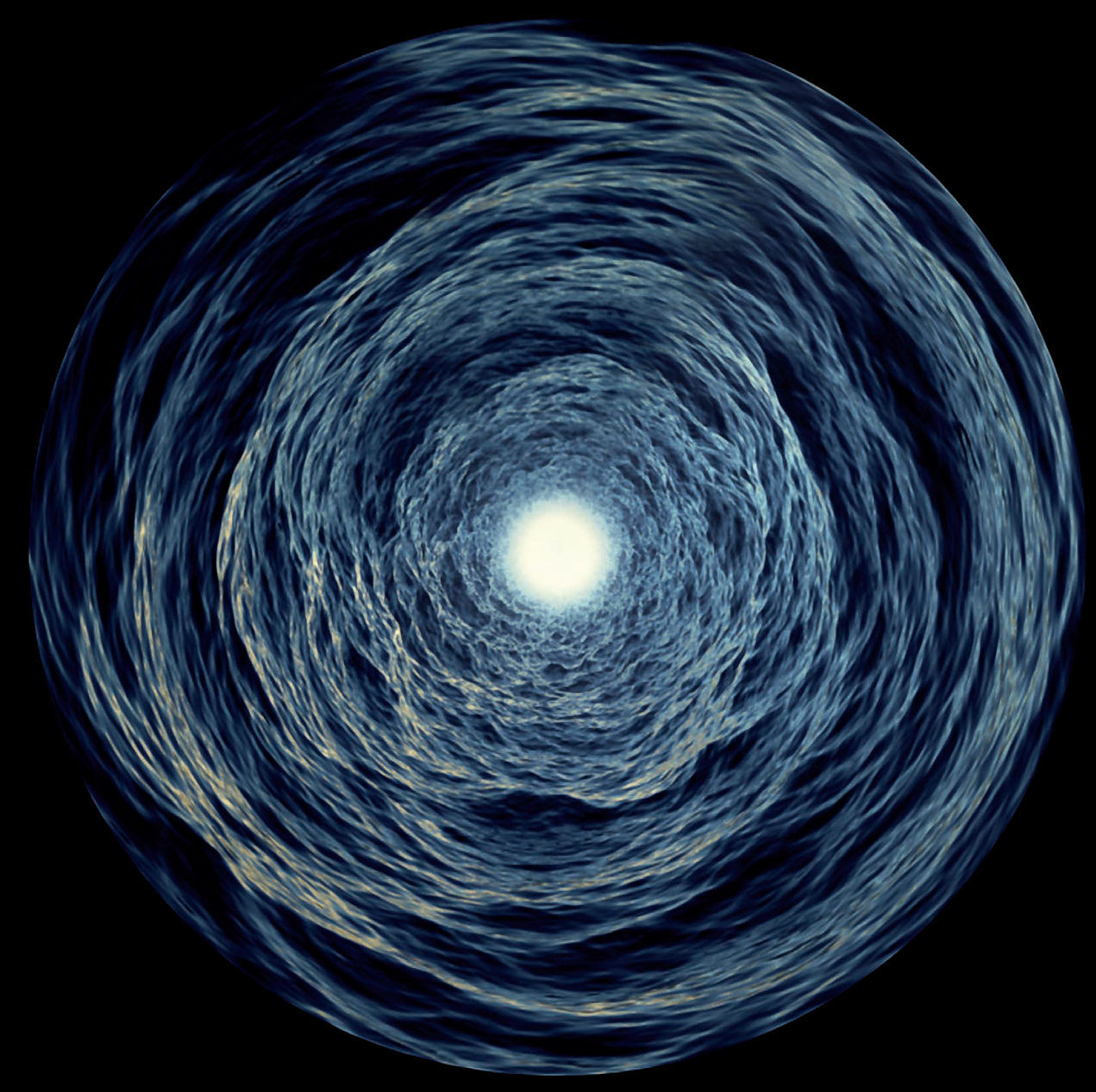
rotazione n.1, 2008, computer graphics, HD video installation, stereo sound, prepared projection surface. 2' (loop)

Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama,* Edgar A. Poe's *A Descent into the Maelström*, Correggio's *L'assunzione della vergine* - Holy Virgin's Assumption in Parma. Such artwork titles aim at suggesting a direction, a movement, a vector: may it be straight, rectilinear, ascending or descending, it is always associated with a rotation or a revolution on the movement axis. These artworks describe very different situations and subjects, in times and cultural contests far from each other. Nevertheless, they have in common some unconventional descriptions of fluids materials (i.e. clouds or water), depicted differently from their usual shape or appearance, as if they were descriptions of some plastic, solid and very dynamic fluids. Correggio's clouds and Edgar A. Poe's Maelström are fluid sculptures! They are main characters, not just mere background elements. The "cylindrical sea" depicted by Clarke is an architecture, a mystery and a crawling presence.

(installation view*)*

3000 esposizioni ultrarapide, 2003. Computer graphics, DVD videoprojection, no sound, 2'(loop).

An Eugenio Montale's poem *(Il tuffatore - The diver)* talks about the infinite lapse that spans from the diver's jumping to touching the water. Infinite time like the Zeno's paradox: Achill and the Turtle. Start and End. But infinite time in-between. Sort of a contradiction, but really true if we think about our internal, subjective way of perceiving, feeling, time.

Cinema, DVDs, VCR tapes and all kind of film and video works have a finite and precise length of time. I've tried to reproduce with those "linear" media the kind of "infinite feeling" that glimpses every now and then in our lives. And the looping, not finished, perception that we have of our most inner, deep memories.
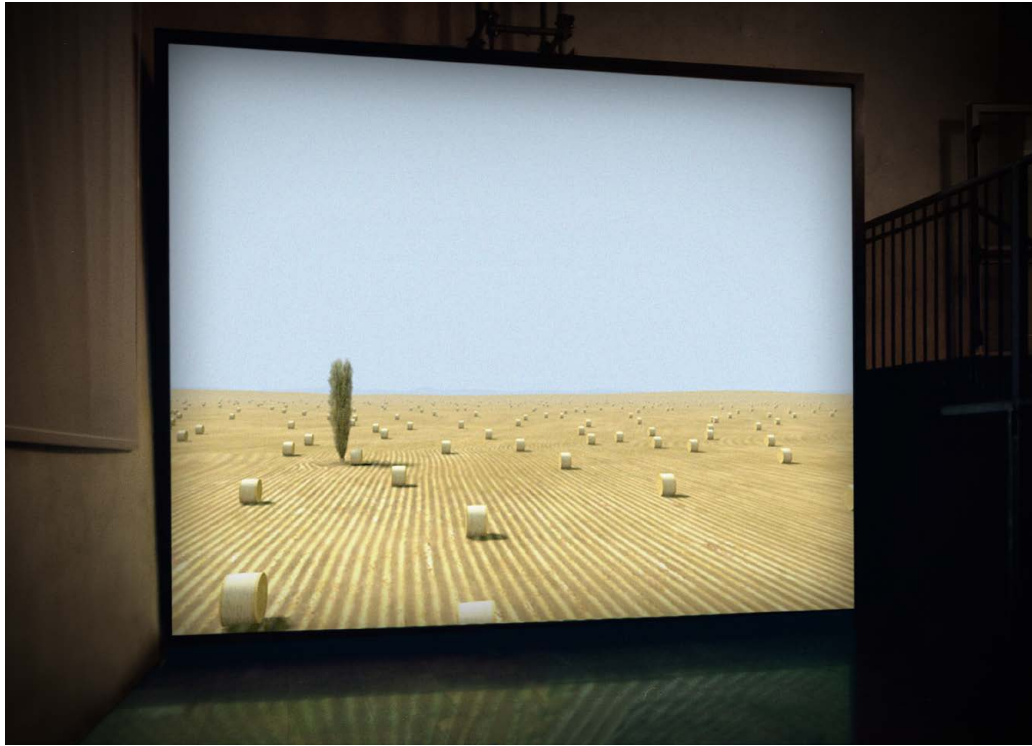
3000 esposizioni ultrarapide, 2002. Computer graphics, video projection, DVD, 2' (loop)
(2009 edition in HD video), no sound.

This video work revolves around the way we perceive the perspective illusion so common in art since
Renaissance. The camera slowly spins around an hollow landscape, showing only thousands of round bales
then, from the left, a populus tree comes in. Suddenly, every aspect of this perspective-hints-filled
landscape is different: the image switched us to a new way of looking at it, since a new kind of shape has
been introduced, giving the view a completely different visual equilibrium.

*"We haven't seen the Earth, nor anything of it, if we've seen it without letting go of its movement.
We need to move more quickly and more like it; letting that bell tower flee, reaching it, moving it,
putting it back among the hills opening out, in the poplars round dance, playing hide-and-seek"*
(Jean Epstein)
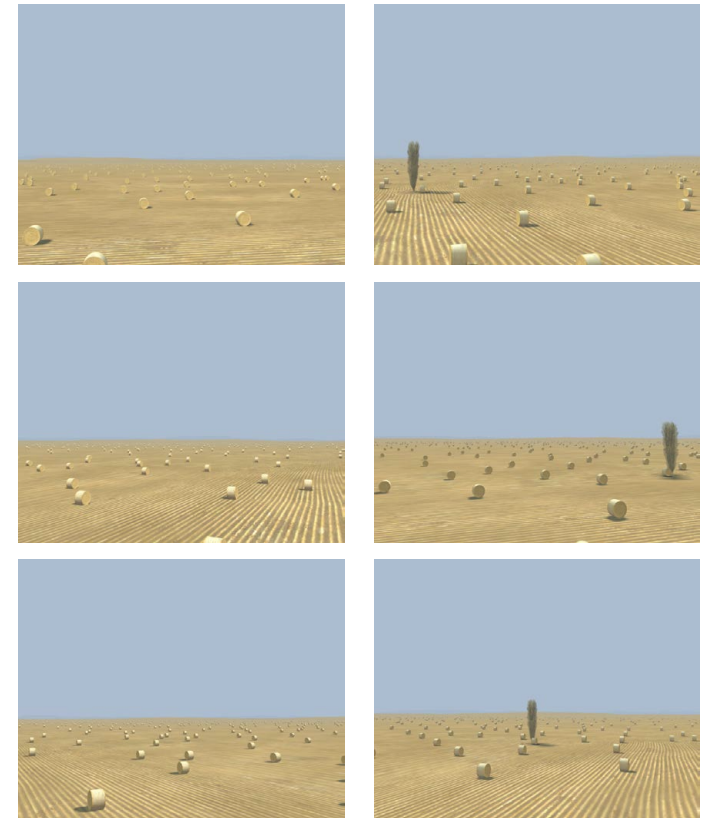
texts

Massimo Marchetti
Three working terms for a consideration in progress

Classicism

Diego Zuelli's work has some classical nature. One would classify it more spontaneously as a painter's rather than a video artist's work, as it is a process of figurative reconstruction rather than mere reproduction. These works are usually widescreen projections, and such a format collocates them in a visual status similar to fresco paintings: it is necessary for the image to have some "breathe". It is not just a technical linguistic fascination, since in most of Zuelli's works landscape is the dominant element. A metaphysical, silent, absolute scenario. In the extreme measure of the image, the basic elements of vision are manifested as monads – a term used to title one of his artworks in 2008 – thus revealing within the world's variety just a few archetypes which contain all that is necessary. Therefore, the crucial element of this research is the strength used to dominate the formal archetypes, and one might recall Cezanne's words as well as the elegant rhythm expressed in Sol LeWitt's solid geometry.
The mysterious precision of these images elevates them to immutable myths, as in Meccaniche terrestri - Terrestrial Mechanics, where planet Jupiter, lying on the cornfield, almost resembles the allegory of an allegory. If we think about the mythological-astrological triumphs of the Estense Renaissance, in the rotating sphere one can perceive the echo of a dismembered Classicism that is then restored as an anagram. A neo Neoclassical art? The assonances with Etienne Boullée's architectural visions can reveal to be more than peculiar. As in the human-divine tension. The "behind the scenes", when it is shown as in Terrestrial Mechanics or in the series of prints related to Non c'è suspance, né morale, né causa ed effetto –There is no suspense, no moral, no cause and effect, is a demystifying gap that only seems to get back to a more human dimension with some irony, but actually complicates everything and makes it more enigmatic.
The image recurring in Zuelli's work is "heavy" not because of its subject but for the density it reveals when lingering in the observation of it. The paradox in this relationship is that the absolute immateriality of a projected light becomes the means to express a "weight". As regards this representation of the stylistic device where heaviness and lightness coexist, a working comparison might be done with Dosso Dossi's Giove, Mercurio e la Virtù – Jupiter, Mercury and Virtue, the famous sixteenth-century painting that depicts the lord of all gods (Jupiter once again) while absorbed in painting a bunch of butterflies, but the perimeter of the canvas doesn't show us if he's reproducing real models or if he's imaging them spontaneously. Rewriting the experience of Real overturns into the very idea of creating from nothing, in a spiral where it is impossible to pinpoint a start or an end. What makes the artistic use of computer technology particularly interesting is what such a creation can be hiding. The artist is always the creator of a self sufficient reality, but in this lab practice the reference to the real world undergoes a further, crucial mediation, since it is elaborated through another language. Once the inputs are received, the computer works automatically according to specific codes, and it is indeed this elaboration step, free from any human intervention, that males Zuelli's work so appealing. It is fascinating to think that in this artist-machine dialectic the "real world" is not at all at the core of his art but it is simply mentioned for convenience, as if it were just a shared language used to understand each other. One can get swayed and start thinking of a Golem activated by typing the word "Truth" on the keyboard, more or less as Rab Löw did. The observers find themselves in the middle of a dialogue they have just partial access to, but that is right enough to trace another world, which is in full numeric, behind the image, and that somehow really exists. As if this image were right an allegory.

Imitation

In Zuelli's videos, the imitation of nature surprises for its thoroughness and verisimilitude. It has to do just partially with the classic "mimesis" challenge, an effective demonstration of how the results one can get if capable of using this technique with skill and expertise can be almost indistinguishable from a cinematographic image. Nevertheless, it would be reductive to focus only on this virtuosity, but it should be questioned to what extent nature (for itself and in itself) can undergo such an analysis, or, better said, if its reference model isn't already a synthetic image of nature, assimilated through the computer filter. In the Seventies pictorial Hyperrealism already dealt with the question of a "realistic" dialogue between traditional Figurativism and photography, taking representation beyond the normal perception of things. But Zuelli's works are not very realistic: they're mostly visions that lead the observers to sharpen their attention for a higher level of mental reality, the one that pertains to the hidden functioning of phenomena. Starting from the most simple ones – the wind blowing on a cornfield, the lapping of water, shimmers on a surface – we can spot them out with a feeling that is slightly unsettling and exciting at the same time, as if we were dealing with a math formula, a number, which could include something larger than reality. Flemish painting is undoubtedly a cogent reference, as Zuelli pays explicit homage to it in one of his first works. The analysis of the matter constitutes the reason for a survey on the textures that a given software can develop. This is the result of a pragmatic culture, based on data that need to be identified and interpreted. In its seeming linearity, this operation can be located in the hundred-year-old question of the "book of nature", which is to say all those endless efforts to give to a word, or, better said, to a "sign" the necessary depth to symbolically synthesize the complexity of creation. From many points of view Zuelli's work follows this tradition, from the cosmological "cut" of some of his images to his tendency to clearly mark the elements of the representation, so that they are ready for being potentially catalogued in their most recognizable form.
Nevertheless, the outlines of this concreteness quickly turn slippery: as Antonioni stated, the closer one gets to the image focus, the more one gets lost. In these works, in the image of a maelstrom, in that of a threshing machine revolving on its axis or of a sea rock, what are we looking at exactly? It is in the endless reconstruction of the world that art carries out that we can notice how the discourse doesn't come to an end and that it doesn't add up. There is no trace of mirroring in Zuelli's works, there are no "landscapes" but exit points from the world which are generated by the juxtaposition of various levels, by the minuteness of details: computer graphics is an instrument just as capillary as words can be when it comes to confuse the parameters of our experiences through deceit. Still according to Antonioni, behind an image there is always another one. Showing an incongruous "behind the scenes" becomes the way to reveal something else to our look: art can show front and back of things betraying and being faithful to them at the same time, since there is no coincidence between these two concepts but a depth that can hide an abyss. At last, being pragmatic just means being efficient posers.

Experience

The portion of the world reconstructed by Zuelli has a scent of absolute which induces a pondering attitude. We get acquainted with a thorough exploration of the image with a sluggishness that reverses the principle of rapidity pertaining to computer technology. The circularity of some videos is not just the result of their loop structure, but derives also from shapes, tracking shots or internal movements of objects. By repeating something identical with no beginning nor end, time withdraws and disappears. It is almost a recovery of the lost lapse Dorfles talked about, of the experience of pausing that in the overall economy of our existence is often annihilated but that is still pivotal for us to sense the passing of time and its discontinuity. Actually, Zuelli's works create thick pauses. The observers are no longer someone to talk to following a preconceived agreement, they are not offered something they can expect, but above all they are decoders in charge of deciphering images related to sounds which are often rarefied.

Zuelli takes the device of computer graphics, mostly linked to the monitor image, to the cinematographic field, thus giving a precise reading key. We are used to this technique in animation movies, but for the most part it has to do with technological updating of traditional cartoon drawings. Instead, in a pictorial dimension like this one, the expression gets loose…, since the wide-screen projection takes place in a dark environment, a hybrid territory is set off, where videogame images intersect references to fictional simulations as well as to engineering projects.

What such a device can offer is a proto-cinematographic mechanism through which one can experience the sense of wonder. This kind of experience can be traced in the purely iconic trait of cinema, the one that then had to come to terms with all the narrative implications: i. e. the "visual machines" of the Nineteenth century such as panoramas and dioramas, where the most daring trick created an illusion of naturality by means of the superimposition of real details to the fore, that, playing with the limits of our perception, broadened their "truth" to bidimensional sets. A contagion between two kinds. It was the culture that saw Méliès' great success, and that would quickly decline when early Hollywood Realism made it to the scene. The high level of optical illusion in Zuelli's images allows us to experiment with plausible sensorial reactions: doubly (just doubly?) deceitful scenarios in Terrestrial Mechanics, surfaces that change their condition due to almost viral combining devices in Tapestry (another allegory of computer viruses?) activate answers that expand the scope of our sensations, thus starting a process of knowledge. A contamination based on the ability of the eye to sense the whole from just a splinter, thanks to a synaesthetical operation. And if it's true that an image never runs out of what it stands for, the fragments shown in Zuelli's work can even be hiding an abyss.