

YURI ANGARANI

SCULPTURE

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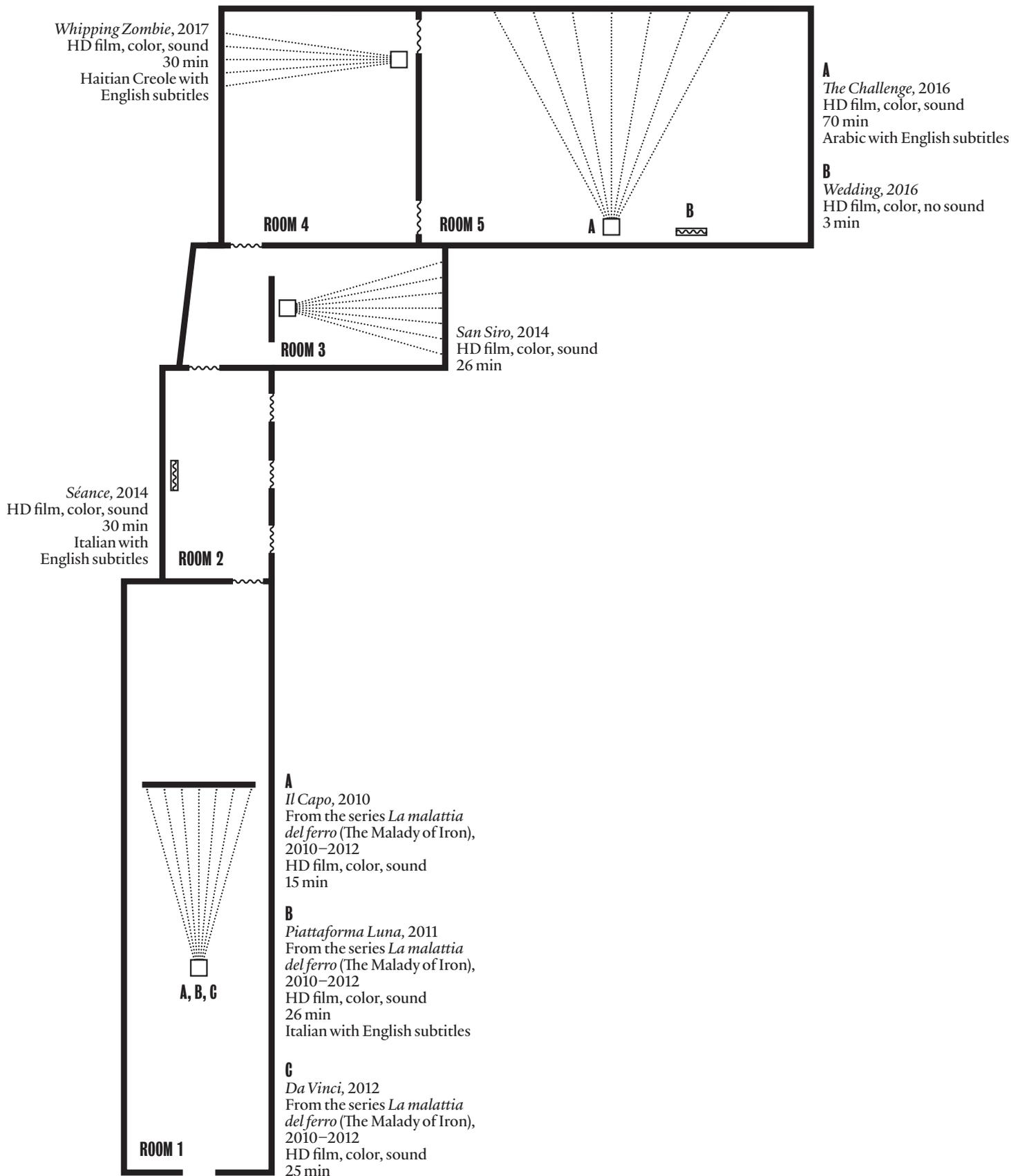
Kunsthalle
Basel

Ravishing in their every cinematic detail, Yuri Ancarani's films and videos are hypnotic studies. Each follows a peculiar choreography of bodies, places, and technologies that constructs an image of the human condition that is as mesmerizing as it is diagnostic. This first exhibition ever to survey the output of the Italian artist will span his production from 2010 to the present, providing an overview of the precision and poetry of his vision. **EN**

While having chosen the Italian word for "sculpture" as his title, Ancarani has never actually carved, chiseled, or indeed sculpted in the classical sense. Yet it is the creation of something in the order of the sculptural—through film—that is a recurring concern. That is to say, the spectator's own vantage point and body position while viewing his films, and, perhaps most importantly, a complex dimensionality within the image itself preoccupies Ancarani. Maybe the fact that he has chosen to be an artist who makes films rather than a filmmaker speaks to his desire to establish another kind of experience.

Nevertheless, to date Ancarani is perhaps better known in the world of cinema than in the art world, having won some of the most prestigious awards at international film festivals. Despite this, he considers museums and exhibition spaces a more fitting setting for his work. This is partly due to his conscious dissociation from both commercial and documentary filmmaking, in which experimental methods like his are rarely appreciated. His idiosyncratic process means he never knows what any one of his films will actually be or be about before they are made. Instead, they "are born from the experience of the realization itself," as he explains—a methodology that can make the creation of his films time-consuming and stressful, but also lends them their peculiar intensity.

There is a certain meticulousness to the result. Indeed, more than narrating moving images, Ancarani arguably composes individual image frames—each strange and compelling on their own—that happen to move. Their center of gravity is often an analysis of a certain type of masculinity, featuring the machine-amplified bodies by which it is buttressed and the possessions and rituals by which it is perpetuated. The work of filmmaker Stanley Kubrick immediately comes to mind, his fascination with the mechanisms of power mirrored in his



own cinematic control, but also the deadpan observational tactics and cropping of photographer Luigi Ghirri, and the almost sculptural depth of Byzantine mosaics: an odd melange, to be sure.

The exhibition opens with the artist's trilogy, which goes by the name *La malattia del ferro* (The Malady of Iron), an examination of labor and the relationship of man to machine. The first in the trilogy, *Il Capo* (2010), portrays the symphonic conductor-like movement of a Carrara stone-quarry foreman who majestically guides workers and their excavators to extract and displace massive hunks of marble. Framed by a stunning landscape, Ancarani's camera closely follows the "boss," his rough hands, including several stubbed fingers, making a wordless, gestural language the heart of the film. The second film in the trilogy, *Piattaforma Luna* (2011), plunges both camera and viewer inside a hyperbaric chamber in the depths of the Ionian Sea. It captures the curious quotidian habits and safety procedures of men temporarily living on an offshore natural gas-extraction platform. The environment is cramped and hazardous, and one senses that a false move or a hatch not properly closed could endanger all crew in a place that looks simultaneously caught in the past and strangely futuristic. Sound is central to all of Ancarani's films, and explicitly so here. The viewer is surrounded by the drone of the underwater vessel, along with the men's voices rendered cartoonish and alien through exposure to helium gas. The last in the trilogy, *Da Vinci* (2012), is a chillingly filmed surgical procedure, performed with the aid of the eponymous medical robotic machine, named, in turn, for Italy's master inventor. The tone of the film is, fittingly, as antiseptic as a sanitized hospital room, while human organs and flesh are abstracted in this reflection on how bodies are mediated by technology, cut open and operated upon through the distanced, clinical movement of a joystick.

The second room of the exhibition features *Séance* (2014), a film devoted to famed polymath and mysterious hermit Carlo Mollino (1905–1973). The groundbreaking architect, engineer, race-car and furniture designer, decorated stunt pilot, inventor of downhill ski techniques, and fervent occultist secretly owned an 18th century villa in Turin. He never spent a single night there, but adorned it with fantastical curiosities and used it as a backdrop for his equally secret pornographic

photography sessions. Ancarani's camera captures the oneiric splendor of the eternal bachelor's labyrinthine home, moving along with the shuffling caretaker of the Casa Mollino in the presence of a medium through whom Mollino "speaks," recounting his life, restless spirit, and erotic adventures.

The third room trembles with the sounds of *San Siro* (2014), for which Ancarani cast his gaze on Milan's "temple of football," the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza, known as San Siro, home to A.C. Milan and Inter Milan. One never witnesses a game being played, but instead sees the stadium's turf, the machines that maintain it, flocks of birds, and the steady stream of almost exclusively male fans as they traverse the sharp angles and spiraling spiraling ramps of the stadium's concrete architecture. Through Ancarani's lens, this stadium, originally built in the 1920s and named after the saint Siro, becomes an allegory for a testosterone-fuelled, almost futuristic, *Bladerunner*-like world.

The fourth room, with its corner projection of *Whipping Zombie* (2017), focuses on a remote Haitian village and its so-called "Kale Zonbi," or "whipping zombie" traditional dance, caught on film apparently for the first time. Through trance-inducing percussion and flagellation, the dance reenacts the violent bodily gestures of both master and slave, as if to exorcise a harrowing past. In turn, those strokes of ritualized whipping by Haitian men are perversely echoed in their daily life, found in the repetitive strokes of their manual labor. Devastating and transcendent, the film channels trauma and death, intercut with twilight images of a local cemetery, desolate poverty, and spectacular nature.

The final gallery features *Wedding* (2016), a mute, but penetrating observation of a groom's rituals in a Qatar wedding where not a single female is in evidence. It joins Ancarani's longest film to date, *The Challenge* (2016), presented here at grandiose scale as an immersive projection, complete with arm cushions inspired by those found in Arabian lounges. The film carries us across the Qatari desert towards a falconry competition, chronicling the unbridled excess and materialism of young Qatari Sheikhs. Throughout, Ancarani's camera is neither still nor objective. And at moments, the film's flickering view seems to be that of a prized falcon—searching, anxious, closing in on its prey.

While *Whipping Zombie*'s landscape is lush, its people dirt poor, and their bodies gripped in the shackles of labor, *The Challenge* is its obverse pendant. It represents the *ennui* of the idle rich, carried by their luxury cars, gold-plated motorcycles, and private jets across an arid landscape along with their pets and other toys. A cheetah rides with its owner in a Lamborghini upholstered in yellow leather, a private jet's only passengers are a single Sheikh with a slew of perched falcons whose heads sway with the plane's movement: each of the film's images is more surreal than the next. What is one to make it of all? In an interview, the artist notes, "In my films I never express my point of view out loud—I prefer to remain in silence.... It's important for the spectators themselves to have an experience and to draw their own conclusions from it. [*The Challenge*] is certainly the most silent of all," adding that it is precisely this silence that compels spectators to radically confront what they see.

At a moment when the perniciousness of male privilege is being widely exposed, Ancarani creates neither a celebration nor an explicit indictment, but instead an urgent and necessary unveiling. What his exhibition as a whole compels us to see is masculinity: its hero myths, its egomaniacal foibles, and the societal and architectural structures that keep it alive. Like Ancarani's lens, a visitor to the exhibition can take time and wander, connecting the threads between the artist's films. And it is precisely in their interrelatedness that one senses the implicit politics that Ancarani is constructing across his oeuvre just as within each carefully sculpted element of it.

Yuri Ancarani was born in 1972 in Ravenna, IT; he lives and works in Milan, IT.

Following the exhibition, the first monographic catalogue on the artist will be published in a co-production of Kunsthalle Basel and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. It will survey the artist's filmic oeuvre and include newly commissioned essays and a conversation with the artist.

The exhibition, catalogue, and the production of *San Vittore* is supported by the Italian Council in collaboration with Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. The exhibition is additionally supported by the Volkart Foundation and Alcantara SpA.



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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German

4.3.2018, Sunday, 3 pm

Curator's tour with Elena Filipovic,
in English

19.4.2018, Thursday, 6:30 pm

Guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children's tour *I Spy with My Little Eye!*

4.3.2018, Sunday, 3 pm

8.4.2018, Sunday, 3 pm

A tour and workshop for children aged 5–10,
in German, by reservation only:
kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Film premiere and artist talk

April 2018, precise date to be announced

Premiere screening of the artist's newest short film,
San Vittore, followed by a public talk with
Yuri Ancarani, in English and Italian.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to Yuri Ancarani.

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More information at kunsthallebasel.ch.