

Soil Practice [an excerpt]

The site-specific installation “Soil Practice”, created by Andrea Caretto and Raffaella Spagna on the terrace of blank, is composed of five elements, inserted in place of some of the ‘floating’ tiles covering the floor. The size of a module, corresponding to a single tile, is 40 x 40 x 4 cm, and two of these elements correspond to the size of the module, while another element is composed of two modules, one of four, and one of six. They contain, respectively: two clods of field soil, gathered at a certain distance from one another because they had different varieties of vegetation; a tank of water filled to the brim; a bit of barren soil; a few clods taken from newly plowed fields to create the *Incubator* used to collect the pits of the fruits eaten by the spectators at the opening event on May 28th. Looking at the two *Clods* (which can't help but remind me of the one depicted by Albrecht Dürer in his admirable watercolor at the Albertina Academy in Vienna), one thinks of the fields they came from, whose contemporary existence and activity is attested to and reproduced here, several kilometers away. On April 16th, the day when the temporal journey of “Soil Practice” effectively began, we look at the infertile soil, barren and ‘empty’, and try to imagine it covered with plants and perhaps fruits, very different from how it is now, before the constant action of the wind and other elements causes those changes that we know will happen (and that will already begin to be seen clearly on the evening of May 28th, after six weeks of exposure on the terrace of blank). Thus the *Incubator*, now containing the seeds and pits it has swallowed, will then bear fruit, its products, and we superimpose on the current image another one that is yet to come, but invisible for now¹.

With regard to the *Sterile Flowerbed*, the element of “Soil Practice” which has manifested the most obvious changes starting from zero on April 16th, it could be said that it acts as a detector of invisible presences, a radiographic device that works in the long run, also showing the change of what it photographs. In fact it is thanks to this, being exactly where it is, completely passive, totally available, for the long duration of a motionless expectation, so that the seeds carried by the wind – which would have passed over that point without being noticed, without leaving any trace – were able to alight, and finding a suitable environment then take root. And finally, at first slowly, then with increasing momentum, they were transformed, each one activating the growth of a plant, mostly trees: Poplars, willows, and blackthorns, which about ten weeks after the start of “Soil Practice” unequivocally reveal their nature, clearly showing the characteristics that allow us to recognize them. And here too, as in the case of the two clods of field soil, the visual contrast with the geometric shape that contained the barren soil, now that dozens of seedlings occupy the surface, emphasizes the effect. Above all, the comparison between the photographic images taken in April, on the days when the process was activated, and those taken in June/July, shows a radical transformation, from sterility, from the apparent stasis of inaction, to the explosion of the energy of growth. That sort of dark L of the early times is now less and less distinguishable, and instead the observer's attention focuses on the seedlings, ever higher, increasingly dense, and more and more similar to the mature ones which must still be found in the places they have come from. And it comes naturally to think of other places that their own seeds could reach over time, thanks to the combined action of natural phenomena that put this process in motion: the rain, the sun, and the wind.

Carlo Fossati, 2009 (translated by Laura Culver)

1: these space-time shifts, activated by thought, remind me of Giovanni Anselmo's work *TUT-TO* [‘tutto’ is the Italian word for ‘all’, or ‘everything’].