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# Post-enactment. Realising the unrealised work of art

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## Abstract

Negli ultimi anni assistiamo alla realizzazione di progetti artistici nati in una situazione specifica, non realizzati e prodotti poi in altri contesti, in alcuni casi anche per mano di persone diverse. Non si tratta di pratiche di *reenactment*, della ripetizione cioè di un'opera realizzata nel passato, né tantomeno di un *piano b* dell'artista, ma dell'attuazione di progetti che vengono alla luce per la prima volta in un contesto successivo a quello in cui sono stati ideati. In questo saggio propongo di definire queste pratiche con il termine *post-enactment*, individuo le motivazioni per cui sempre di più avremo a che fare con progetti di questo tipo e suggerisco una possibile tassonomia. Uno degli obiettivi è quello di valorizzare la consapevolezza sullo stato di avanzamento del progetto dell'opera d'arte, delle contingenze in cui è prodotto e delle intenzioni dell'artista: una serie di considerazioni utili alla valorizzazione del lavoro dell'artista e del progetto come metodo critico, oltre che come opera in potenza.

In recent years we have been witnessing the realisation of artistic projects that were conceived in a specific situation, not realised and then produced in other contexts, in some cases even by different people. These are not practices of *reenactment*, i.e. the repetition of a work executed in the past, nor even a *Plan B* developed by the artist, but the enactment of projects that come to light for the first time in a context subsequent to the one in which they were conceived. In this essay, I propose defining these practices with the term *post-enactment*, identifying why we will increasingly be seeing projects of this kind, and suggesting a possible taxonomy. One of the aims is to enhance awareness of the state of progress of the artwork project, the contingencies in which it is produced, and the artist's intentions: a series of considerations useful for the valorization of the artist's work and the project as a critical method, rather than only as a work in a state of potentiality.

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## A story of marginalisation

During the pandemic, many projects were put on *standby*, frozen in a space-time that has been described in terms of a suspension and a break from the reality as we knew it. However, after the first few moments of confusion, museums and artists embraced this state of crisis as a situation that could last longer than initially foreseen and faced up to the problem by deploying different strategies in order to keep on doing and not just designing projects.

Many of them opted for a *Plan B* that would allow them to achieve results in a manner different from that which they had at first envisaged. These are solutions inherent in any creative process: economic, logistical, technical or sometimes ethical and moral issues, but in this case, extraordinary issues of public health interfere with and modify an artist's initial idea, making it feasible.

For example, the MAMbo museum adapted Ragnar Kjartansson's performance *Bonjour* (2015), which was part of the exhibition *AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand* curated by Lorenzo Balbi: when the museum was closed to the public, the performance was made available online at specific times on its social media channels, thus restoring the live nature of the work, albeit in an alternative format[1].

Invited by the Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden, but unable to travel to Germany due to the Covid-19 pandemic, David Horvitz developed an idea to give value to his role as a father teaching his five-year-old daughter who had been stuck at home after the schools closed. He designed a series of short lessons and teaching units with her – *lessons* (2021) – which he wrote up and sent to Wiesbaden, asking others to try out the same classes with their children and add their documentation to the display of the exhibition at the end of the project[2].

Other projects seem to have run aground on shoals from which they are no longer able to free themselves for various reasons: we define these projects as unrealised works.

Even if we look only at contemporary art, we can see that there is an enormous quantity of unrealised projects, still largely unexplored, hidden away in both the physical and digital archives of artists and institutions.

Over the last two decades, increasing attention has been paid to these projects (eds. Obrist, Tortosa 1997; Mundy 2013; Scotti 2014): at the basis of this interest are first and foremost the practices of study and research on the archive (Baldacci 2017), the ways of reading and re-reading the history of art and the work of artists, which have increasingly focused attention on apparently secondary aspects, and which have re-emerged as an opportunity to reflect on how history is constructed and narrated.

Studying what does not exist and has not been realised for the most varied reasons, dwelling on absences rather than presences, is an approach whose value is increasingly appreciated, not least from the point of view of a history that is read and re-read in an increasingly less monolithic and more kaleidoscopic way. This approach can enhance narratives and memories, offering alternatives to the dominant ones and

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[1] Streaming was scheduled from 27 February to 1 March 2020. A video is available here: http://www.museibologna.it/collezioni_digitali/101827/id/101898 (accessed 15 February 2022).
[2] *Follow Fluxus 2020 David Horvitz / lessons*, https://www.kunstverein-wiesbaden.de/austellung/follow-fluxus-2020-david-horvitz-lessons (accessed 15 February 2022).

embracing the idea of failure as an opportunity for verification and experimentation (ed. Le Feuvre 2010).

On the other hand, what has not found the opportunity to be realised does not necessarily have less value in terms of vision or quality. After all, the very etymology of the word "project" – from the Latin *pro-iectare*, to launch forward – contains a vision of the future whose value endures beyond its actualisation. We could consider the unrealised project as part of the set of less politically relevant but no less culturally intriguing gazes that are emerging in cultural studies.

The unrealised project occupies a marginalized territory somewhat similar to the low definition *poor images* described by the German artist and theorist Hito Steyler as the proletariat of images when compared to HD images (Steyler 2009). In this sense, the unrealised work could also be compared to the desire of the images – about which W. J. T. Mitchell pondered the question "What do Images Want?" – likening them to the aspirations of black minorities and of women (Mitchell 2006).

Looking solely at the 20th and 21st centuries, the reasons for this marginalisation are numerous, in my opinion, and by no means obvious: except for Utopia as a design category, the History of Art has been conceived of as a history of artefacts, even though it could have also included a history of ideas (and the processes involved in their elaboration), the boundaries of which have instead stabilised around other disciplinary areas. It is only very recently that this assumption has been challenged and critically confronted in various ways: one thinks of the case of conceptual art and the processes of dematerialization (Lippard 1973) which since the 1960s have discussed the very concept of the work of art and its definition.

Amongst the main reasons, we could easily consider the logic of the market and its related success, which has rewarded the production of the object rather than the idea: the system of the fruition of the work is also part of this dynamic and explodes in the proliferation of exhibitions from the second half of the 20th century onwards, which for the most part consist of exhibiting objects endowed with an *aura* able to attract the public.

However, in recent years, along with an increased interest in the unrealised project, we also see its usage. I am thinking in particular about the realisation of works of art that are considered unrealised or unfinished after the design stage. This is actually happening in several fields, well beyond the boundaries of the visual arts, and concerns the completion, exhibition, presentation, staging and publication of unrealised and unfinished projects of one's own or of others, realised during their lifetime by their authors or posthumously in the most diverse fields. One thinks of *The Disappearance of the Painter* (*La Disparition du peintre*), a script of twenty pages written by the French philosopher Michel Foucault for a film about the series of works

Pablo Picasso dedicated to Diego Velásquez's *Las Meninas*. This film was not made until 2020, when it was filmed and released under the title *Le Subtil Oiseleur, Foucault de Velázquez à Picasso* directed by Alain Jaubert[3]; or *The Pale King*, an unfinished novel by David Foster Wallace, published in 2011 thanks to the work of its editor Michael Pietsch and the will of Wallace's agent and widow Karen Green (Wallace 2011). Another example is *The Mastaba*, the only permanent artwork by Christo and Jeanne-Claude to be created posthumously by the foundation set up by Christo prior to his death[4].
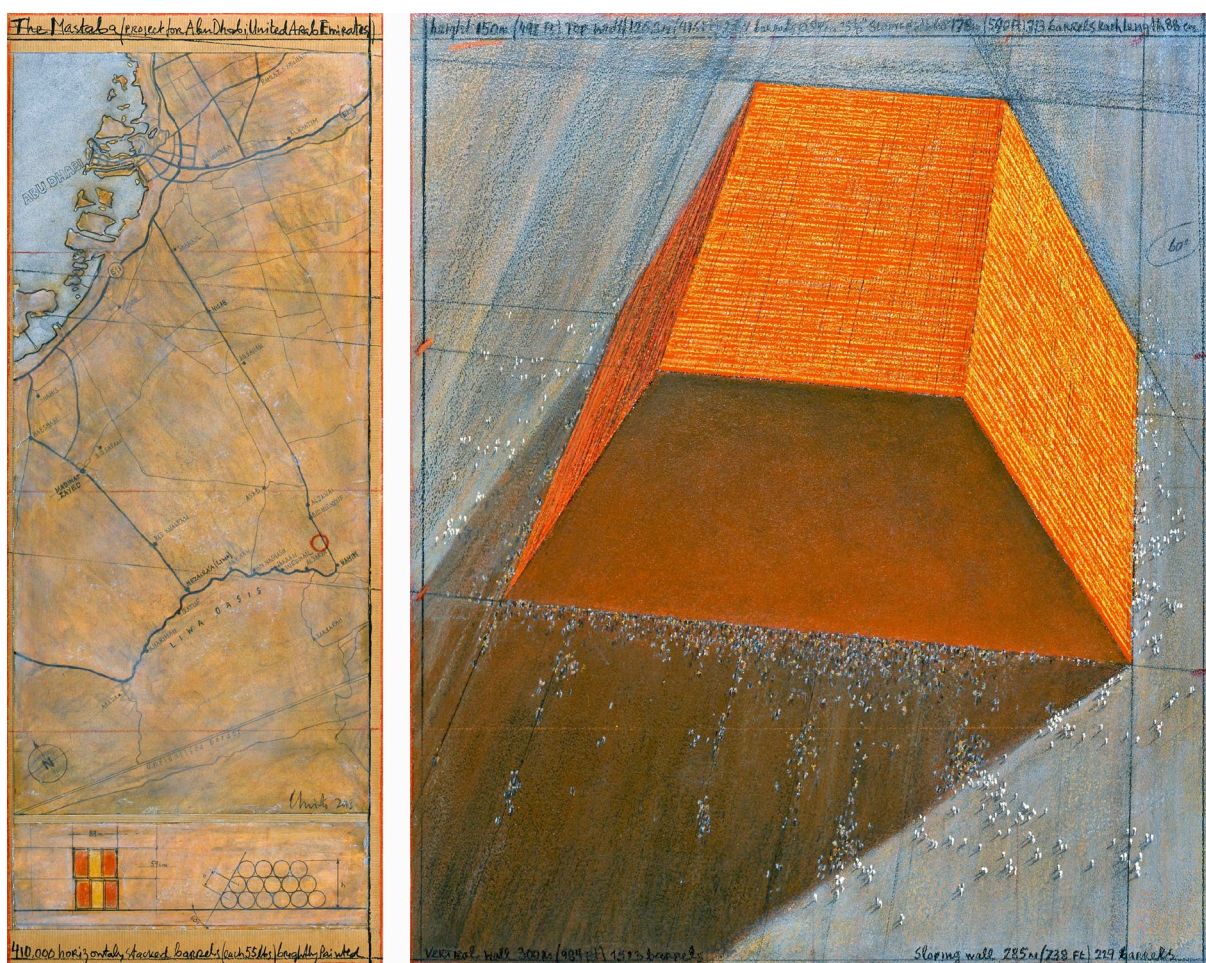


Fig. 1: Christo, *The Mastaba (Project for Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates)*. Drawing 2013 in two parts. Pencil, charcoal, pastel, wax crayon, enamel paint, hand-drawn map and technical data, and tape. 77.5 x 30.5 cm and 77.5 x 66.7 cm (30½ x 12 in and 30½ x 26¼ in). Private collection. Photo: André Grossmann © 2013 Christo and Jeanne-Claude Foundation.

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[3] *Le Subtil Oiseleur, Foucault de Velázquez à Picasso*, dir. by Alain Jaubert (Éditions Montparnasse, 2020). See also: Sforzini 2022.
[4] *The Mastaba. Project for United Arab Emirates since 1977*, https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/the-mastaba/ (accessed 15 February 2022).

## Post-enactment practices

On the subject of the realisation *a posteriori* and in different circumstances of works of art considered as unrealised, I have elsewhere defined these as *post-enactment* practices: this concept relates to those instances of realisation that foresee the staging, the setting up or the concretisation of a work originally conceived in a specific situation, not realised, and then produced in another context, in some cases even by different people (Modena 2021b).

Some clarifications and a more precise definition are required, starting from a series of questions which it is helpful to pose in order to assess the boundaries of these practices, which I believe will become more and more widespread in the near future.

In the case of works *post-enacted* by the same artist – or indeed by others – what happens to the idea of site-specificity, for example, if a project imagined for a precise place and time can be realised in different ways and contexts and sometimes even by different people?

And as to posthumous works, what is the boundary between an operation that can be said to be consistent not only with the design intentions but also with the will and poetics of the artist, and a version that is deemed inadequate or should be defined in another way (e.g. as *post-enactment*)? What about *instruction-based artworks*? Is their implementation superfluous to the functioning of the artwork? Is it a completion, a reenactment or a *post-enactment*? When should an unrealised project be called such, and when is it fixed to such an extent that it becomes a work *tout-court*, even through its exhibition or publication?

Limiting myself to the context of the visual arts, the reasons why I believe we will increasingly have to deal with problems of this kind are at least threefold, and they are linked to the context in which the work of art is produced, the entry of the artist's archive/estate into the art system and finally the current theoretical and cultural debate.

The first reason I suggest is based on the fact that artists' studios have increasingly become *project-obsessed machines*, places where proposals are constantly produced for competitions, calls for proposals and commissions, which are not always destined for success and, therefore, we would say, for the most part destined for non-realisation. It does not take a fine mathematical calculation to understand that when a project wins, most of the projects developed for a single occasion will remain on paper and on the artists' hard disks. In this regard, the art historian and theorist Boris Groys has spoken of the necessity to be aware of a more general tendency to design continuously in which we are all involved on a daily basis, each in his own field. In his opinion, this is also why the art project should be considered an art form in itself:

[…] The formulation of projects is developing into an autonomous art form whose significance for our society has yet to be adequately understood. Irrespective of whether it is realised or not, every project presents a unique vision of the future that is itself fascinating and instructive. Frequently, however, many of the project proposals that our civilisation is constantly producing are lost or simply thrown away after they are rejected. This careless approach to the art form of the project formulation is quite regrettable, really, because it often prevents us from analysing and understanding the hopes and visions of the future that are invested in these proposals, and these things can say more about our society than anything else (Groys 2008, p. 100).

From a point of view more closely bound up with the art system, a second reason is that *post-enactment* is also destined to become more and more widespread for the reason that it constitutes an approach peculiar to artists' estates and archives. This is a relatively new phenomenon which is spreading rapidly as an institutionalised way of preserving an artist's cultural heritage and creating value for his/her work on the market. In this sense, under the guidance of the heirs and the scientific committees, it is logical to work on existing works, but also to push towards experiences that can complete unfinished or unrealised artworks, as well as to produce posthumous multiples to sell as a form of self-financing (Wurtenberger 2016d).

A final reason is more theoretical. This definition represents a cross between two concepts: the prefix *post-,* which indicates the status of being later in time, and the concept of *enactment*, which, alluding to the performative nature of this process, cannot but recall the idea of *reenactment*.

As regards the first theme, the *post-enactment* refers firstly to a realisation made afterwards, later than the generation of the idea. Therefore, it can only lead us to think of post-modern practices aimed at reading and re-reading, chewing history over and again, in order to design the new. A newness that, if no longer original, nevertheless remains authentic (Krauss 1981), as well as a tool for re-reading the past, reflecting on the present and imagining the future. In this sense, the category of *postproduction* – famously codified by Nicolas Bourriaud at the beginning of the 2000s – also comes close to *post-enactment* in its reliance on the existing, combining its objects, forms and the world itself (Bourriaud 2002). However, within the concept we are trying to define, the dimension of creation *a posteriori* is entirely predominant compared to that of montage.

The implicit evocation of *reenactment* is the other pole: the result of a reflection conceived in the study of history as an activity of *revival and living history*, in the artistic

sphere, *reenactment* becomes a way of reactivating the meaning of performances and exhibitions and has seen a growing diffusion ever since the early 2000s.

The variety of reenactment practices and their proximity to the concepts of quotation, sampling, copying and appropriation in the visual arts and those of cover, remake, re-edition and interpretation in music, film, theatre and literature leaves ample room for investigation within this variety. In this regard, Cristina Baldacci has recently proposed an initial definition of the concept as an action of: (re)appropriation; (re)interpretation; (re)construction; (re)mediation; (re)circulation of images and later (re)contextualizing them (Baldacci 2022, p. 178). Still, it maintains a key of interpretation explicitly focused on the idea of *repetition*.

*Post-enactment*, on the other hand, moves in a different direction because it does not intend to repeat something but rather to bring it to life for the first time.


**Taxonomies and interpretative categories**

Some case studies can help define the boundaries of this practice better and organise an internal taxonomy from which, as we will see, many critical problems emerge. One of the most evident is that in order to clarify what a *post-enactment* is, it is necessary to know how to define what is an unrealised project and what is a realised artwork.

Apparently simple, this task becomes unexpectedly complicated as soon as we try to tackle it: there are, for example, works that are unfinished and finished at the same time, projects that are intrinsically unfeasible, such as utopias or theoretical exercises; there are projects with no end and therefore intrinsically never-ending; not to mention the fact that even so-called finished works – as Cesare Pietroiusti effectively clarifies in the contribution published in this issue – may never be defined as such and could be understood as a work in progress ("opera al gerundio").

This is not the occasion to go deeper into this theme, which remains in the background of a debate that is by no means resolved. Rather, here I intend to present a series of cases of *post-enactments* categorised from the simplest to the most critical and complex, also in methodological terms.

The first type is made up of artworks designed at a specific time by the artist and then realised later by him/her in different contexts. This category is followed by unrealised artworks completed after the artist's death. A third group is made by unrealised projects *post-enacted* by other artists as a conscious form of homage. A particular case is that of the *instruction-based artworks* and the possibility of these being defined as *post-enactments*. This proposal for classification is concluded by the

unrealised project that finds a differently completed form on being exhibited and/or published.


### A. ~~Un~~-realised artwork

The first category concerns works that are designed by an artist in a precise context and then realised by her/him, at a distance of time and under different circumstances.

A clarifying example is that of *Iggy Pop Life Drawing Class* (2006-2011) by Jeremy Deller, initially designed for the Smithsonian and then realised in 2016 thanks to the Brooklyn Museum and the New York Academy of Art, where the singer posed as a nude model in front of twenty-one artists.

Making an artwork in a different way from the initial intentions but in the same chronological and contextual framework is part of a normal process of adjustment that every project has always put in place to adapt the initial idea to its actual feasibility (Modena 2016). However, taking a closer look, it is different in the case of a work already presented as unrealised in exhibitions and publications that is then realised years later and in a different context. In this case, the artist himself had described this project as a failure and had therefore somehow fixed it as an unsuccessful opportunity, only to realise it afterwards. The project had, in fact, been exhibited in 2012 in his retrospective *Joy in People* and published in the catalogue section entitled *My Failures (2004-present)*. In his own words, it was «a section of work that I hoped to be able to do, but was unable to do» (ed. Rugoff 2012, p. 194).

The project was also archived as an unrealised project in 2013 in MoRE[5]. After all, one of the aspects that characterises the formula with which each artist donates a digital copy of the project to the museum-archive is the possibility of realising the work if future conditions allow it. This is a clause that, on the one hand, protects the artist and the intellectual property rights on the project considered as a realised work. But, on the other hand, it allows MoRE to identify a project as "unrealised", thus freezing a stage in the life of the artwork and at the same time assigning the correct value to the non-teleological process that characterises its history.

Another case is the story of the unrealisation of a series of works, at the centre of the project by the Italian artist Sergio Lombardo, who won funding from the Italian Council to produce three black laminated wood *Superquadri* and others works which

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[5] MoRE. a Museum of refused and unrealised art projects, the museum and digital archive active since 2012, was born from an idea of Marco Scotti and myself and dedicated to the conservation and valorisation of unrealised projects by artists of the 20th and 21st centuries. The project in question is available at the following link: http://moremuseum.org/omeka/items/show/7.

the artist had designed but never made, between 1965 and 1966, with the explicit intention of re-reading that experience several decades later[6].



Fig. 2: Sergio Lombardo. *Dai Quadri ai Superquadri. 1961-1966* (24 giugno 2021 - 25 settembre 2021), Galleria 1/9unosunove, Roma, installation view, foto di Giorgio Benni, courtesy Sergio Lombardo e 1/9unosunove.
Da sinistra: Sergio Lombardo, *Progetto per numero (n) elementi uguali componibili*, 1965; Sergio Lombardo, *Superquadro con taglio ondulato*, 1965; Sergio Lombardo, *Superquadro angolare ondulato*, 1965-2020.

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[6] The projects and the realized artworks have been shown in Sergio Lombardo's exhibition. *Dai Quadri ai Superquadri 1961-1966* at the 1/9unosunove gallery in Rome (26 June – 25 September 2021).

## B.     Post-enactment as posthumous artwork

A second typology is that of unrealised or unfinished projects realised as posthumous artworks by the artist's heirs or curators.

A recent case that has aroused much interest is the project of the above-mentioned Christo (1935-2020) and Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009) for the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, realised after the death of both artists. *L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped*, dated "1961-2021", was in fact installed from 18 September to 3 October 2021. The work was created by the artists' estate, and Christo's nephew Vladimir Yavachev supervised the project. On the website, we can read that: «Per Christo's wishes, *L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped* was completed by his team after his death»[7]. Based on this statement, it is, therefore, a posthumous "completion" of Christo's wishes, as will be the case of another work indicated on the website as to be completed: the aforementioned *The Mastaba*, a project conceived in 1977 and to be built in Abu Dhabi, a monumental and permanent work (the only one of its kind by the two artists known for their temporary installations) made up of 410,000 multi-coloured barrels forming a truncated cone architecture[8]. The foundation is thus taking over their design legacy, whose practice, as we know, spanned decades and is itself an integral part of the artwork whose organization was divided into two phases: «A hardware period, and a software period» (Barliant 2020). The first was related to design and structural planning, the second to the involvement of people in installing it and to ways of financing it.

Matthias Koddenberg from the Estate emphasised, «The team is currently working on that project, which will be the last one. Of course, there are many unrealised projects. However, those were only ideas and never concretised. They cannot be realised by the Estate or Foundation. It was only for the Arc de Triomphe and *The Mastaba* that all decisions had already been made by Christo»[9].

A more complex case is that of *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island*, a project by Robert Smithson (1938-1973) dating back to 1970, realised on the occasion of the retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, thanks to the artist and partner Nancy Holt and the non-profit association Minetta Brook. For one week, from 17 to 25 September 2005, a boat towed a barge landscaped

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[7] L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped. Paris 1961-2021 https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/arc-de-triomphe-wrapped/ (accessed 15 February 2022).
[8] *The Mastaba* will be Christo and Jeanne-Claude's only permanent, large-scale public artwork, and also their final project. Per Christo's wishes, *The Mastaba* will be carried out by his nephew Vladimir Yavachev, who has worked with the artists for over three decades and most recently directed *L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped*.
[9] Personal comment by the author, 2 March 2022.

with earth and trees along the Hudson River in New York, just as the artist, who died in an airplane accident at the age of 35, had sketched in a drawing that is the only existing documentation[10].

A similar case is that of *Subterranean Tropicália Projects* (1971) by the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980): conceived as a public installation for Central Park in New York and never realized, the artwork will be realized 51 years later in a scale-down version (PN15) at the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens in May 2022[11].

Recent art history is full of similar examples, such as Chen Zen's (1955-2000) posthumous works based on the many projects that remained on paper (Chen Zen. 1991-2000 unrealized 2007) and included in his *catalogue raisonné* (*Chen Zhen. Catalogue Raisonné* 2000). Or *Untitled* (1992-95) «a never-before-realised sculpture»[12] by Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) produced for the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale curated by Nancy Spector in 2007, two circular pools in Carrara marble on which he worked on several occasions and of which there are several design versions.

The posthumous realisation of works based on artists' projects is as intriguing as it is controversial, as it is the posthumous *tout-court* realisation of new editions of multiples, which has long been debated. In some cases, this option is explicitly considered in the artists' last wills and testaments. The British sculptor Henry Moore, for example, made clear that he forbade the making of new editions of multiples after his death, except for the completion of those that would have been in production at the time (Wurtenberger 2016c); a similar position to that of Robert Mapplethorpe, who authorised the posthumous completion of previously approved photographic series (Wurtenberger 2016b).

This theme opens up further reflections on how the concept of *post-enactment* can also be applied to reproducible artwork, but especially on when and how a photograph or a series of multiples can be said to be "finished" or "realised" (ed. Modena 2021a).

Although they do not fall entirely under this definition, a related category is made up of those works that are stage or re-staged with a greater degree of freedom of interpretation than the intentions of the deceased artist. These purposes are sometimes explicit and sometimes less so. Often these are forms of adaptation of the artwork from one space to another. In this case, it is not the work that is not realised, but rather the project of setting it up, and therefore the completion takes place in a way

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[10] A a short documentary about the project is available here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IOS3N3HMro (accessed 1st February 2022).
[11] The project is currently being realized in conjunction with the Americas Society the Projeto Hélio Oiticica Foundation, and Lisson Gallery, which represents Oiticica's estate (Duron 2022).
[12] https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/exhibitions/felix-gonzalez-torres-america (accessed 1st February 2022).

that is sometimes arbitrary or according to a method of interpretation that the curator reserves for him or herself.

A well-known case is *METRO-Net World Connection, Ventilation Shaft* by Martin Kippenberger (1953-1997), reconstructed posthumously in 2003 at the Venice Biennale. The work is part of a visionary and unfinished project that envisaged the construction of a series of entrances to an imaginary underground with attached ventilation shafts. This would, in the artist's intentions, have connected the entire world as one big city: in 1993, one was built on the Greek island of Syros, in 1995 in Dawson City, Canada, and in 1997 in Leipzig, Germany. The same year, Kippenberger exhibited a portable entrance at Documenta in Kassel and an equally portable ventilation shaft at Sculpture Project in Münster. The latter work was reconstructed posthumously in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003: the criticism was that it was exhibited indoors, whereas the original project was for an outdoor urban space (Wurtenberger 2016a).

### C.    Unrealized artworks post-enacted by other artists

There are cases in which a *post-enactment* is made by another artist. Most of the time, this practice takes the form of a homage from one artist to another. This attitude contributes to drawing a line of continuity between research and generations.

An example in point is *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* (*Homenaje a Ana Mendieta*) by Tania Bruguera. The work is an early project by the Cuban artist that began as a thesis at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas San Alejandro in Havana in 1985 and continued for about ten years until 1996. The operation is interesting for us from several points of view. In recreating the works of Mendieta (1948-85) or also in the making for the first time of those not realised by the artist who died in circumstances that have never been clarified, Bruguera defines a form of *Political Timing Specific Art* for performances of a precisely political nature, the remaking of which cannot in her opinion be described as a reenactment because of the new connotations it takes on in the historical moment in which it is made (Bruguera 2019).

Moreover, this practice constitutes at the same time a particular form of appropriation and homage.

In this category, we could also include the case illustrated here by Cesare Pietroiusti of the so-called "opera al gerundio", a finished artwork that continues to be finished and refinished by contexts and occasions, which he analysed in relation to Pino Pascali's *Stuoia* o *Tela di Penelope* (1968).

A singular case is the intersection of two very similar unrealised projects that will lead, at least as intended at the moment of writing, to a *post-enactment*: *Ottante Atlantico* (2019) is an unrealised project by Ettore Favini conceived for the International

Competition *Leonardo e il Viaggio. Oltre i confini dell'Uomo e dello Spazio* for the selection of artworks for the Leonardo da Vinci airport in Fiumicino. Taking inspiration from some of Leonardo da Vinci's studies, Favini proposed the creation of a globe map of the world in which to give shape to the seas and bodies of water. The project was not selected: shortly afterwards, the artist became aware of a very similar idea by Italian artist Alighiero Boetti, who in the mid-1970s had imagined a world map which would only show the reliefs and depths of the sea but which was not realised because scientific data were not available at the time, probably for geopolitical reasons (Cherubini 2016). From this meeting of (unrealised) projects, the artist has developed the intention of creating a homage work, which might therefore take the form of a very particular form of *post-enactment*.

### D.     Post-enactment and instructions

A fairly frequent category in contemporary art after the conceptual art which developed it is that of the instructions as artwork: in 1967, in his essay *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, the American artist Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) made it clear that the realisation of an artwork can be delegated. LeWitt developed this idea for his *Wall Drawings*, drawings designed to fit into exhibition spaces of various kinds: some would be made by the artist, others by his assistants, and after his death in 2007, under the supervision of his studio and his daughter Sofia LeWitt.

With regard to our theme, it is legitimate to ask to what extent instructions are a project – a project not yet realised – or whether it is better to define them as finished works at the origin of which there is, in turn, a project: the project of a work that consists of instructions.

In LeWitt's case, the realisation of the work is not a secondary aspect but an essential part of its nature: that is, the projects of the wall drawings are made to be realised and not to live as instructions or as works-projects. Considering that Sol LeWitt has likened them to a musical score «that could be redone by any or some people» (Zevi 2012, p. 109), they also evoke – with necessary caveat concerning the issues of the authenticity of the work (Donati 2012) – the distinction made by Nelson Goodman between so-called autographic arts (e.g. painting and sculpture) and allographic arts (such as literature, music, architecture, dance, theatre) (Goodman 1968). This is to say art made on the basis of a score or instructions and therefore not falsifiable, but rather validated on the basis of the correct reading of the original: their implementation over and over again could even correspond to the idea of reenactment.

However, in some cases, the interpretation of the score becomes even redundant because the work gives itself precisely in its nature of instruction: think of the work of artists such as the already mentioned Cesare Pietroiusti, who has been, among other

things, the author from 1997 onward of *Non-Functional Thoughts*, a list of instructions to be followed by the reader and which have been published in small volumes as well as on a dedicated website[13].

Similarly, instructions have also been included in curatorial and exhibition practices: *Do it!* is an exhibition format born in 1993 from an idea of Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist – who has devoted much attention to the theme of the project and the unrealised project[14] – during a conversation with artists Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier. It is a collection of projects that are formulated by artists to be exhibited from time to time, forming a continuous exhibition. They are published in several volumes, some of which are available online such as the one published in 2020, during the lockdown: *Do it (home)*, a collection of projects to make at home.

Even in this case, then, those who follow the instructions at home on the basis of Pietroiusti's proposals or those of the artists invited by Obrist do not actually realise something unrealised, and do not create a *post-enactment*, but rather contribute to the actualization of a project which is self-sufficient and complete in itself.

However, there are artworks made of instructions that we could define as post-enactment practices: this is the case of works that the artists would have liked to realise but were unable to do, and they have therefore adapted to project formulas that could guarantee their future viability.

Think of Edward Kienholz's *Concept Tableaux*, conceived between 1962 and 1967: these are projects and instructions for realising complex and expensive installations that the artist was unable to due to financial or logistical problems. Kienholz then assigned the projects to a future execution, formalising them in bronze plates and a description framed and signed by the artist: a strategy that some say he jokingly intended as «a practical record the pieces he didn't have the time, money, to make» (Hopps 1996, p. 89).

Therefore, the eventual realisation, as in the case of *The State Hospital* conceived as a *concept tableau* in 1964 and realised two years later, involves a real *post-enactment*, so much so that others were sold in their project version and never realised.

Marina Pugliese's idea for a *Museum of Projects*, proposed in the context of ICOFOM's 20th International Conference in 2004 and dedicated to the relationship between museology and intangible heritage (Pugliese 2004), also went along these lines. In her opinion, a sustainable way to the establishment of new museums – obviously in the knowledge that this was not suitable for all artists and forms of

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[13] Cesare Pietroiusti, *Pensieri non funzionali (1978-2015)*, http://www.pensierinonfunzionali.net/ (accessed 1st February 2022).
[14] Among the various initiatives in which he has been involved is the AUP, Agency of Unrealized Projects: https://aup.e-flux.com/ (accessed 1st February 2022).

expression, but for many of those that characterise the contemporary world – could be that of acquiring only projects and project-materials and creating the works ex-novo each time. This is a proposal that would cut the costs relative to huge storage spaces for the collections and those of conservation to enhance the production aspect (the loan would therefore consist in the authorisation to realise the project).

### E.      *Displayed unrealised projects as post-enacted artworks*

Finally, I would also like to consider the exhibition of these projects as *post-enactments*: that is, I would like to argue that the exhibition or publication of an unrealised project can constitute a form of *post-enactment*, or rather that these are transformative actions that lead to an, albeit different, finiteness.

We can cite many cases of exhibitions, both online and in a physical space, which in recent years have included unrealised projects, but also exhibitions that have made this their central theme, from *The Gallery of Lost Art*, a wide-ranging digital exhibition (2 July 2012 - 3 July 2013) curated by the Tate and dedicated to lost, destroyed, cancelled or unrealised works of the 20th and 21st centuries[15], to the recent *Vincenzo Agnetti e Paolo Scheggi. Il tempio. La nascita dell'Eidos* (7 September 2021- 6 March 2022) at the Museo del Novecento in Milan, curated by the artists' estates and dedicated to a single four-handed unrealised project.

MoRE has also organised physical and virtual exhibitions[16] , including the recent *Hidden Displays 1975-2020. Progetti non realizzati a Bologna* (7 October - 8 December 2021) in the project room of the museum MAMbo in Bologna.

Exhibiting an unrealised project involves a process of transformation of documents in order to translate and communicate the idea: the exhibited documents can be the most diverse, from maquettes to drawings, from notes to renderings, from photographic collages to videos. Selecting the most appropriate ones from those available and displaying them gives a form and an aura to the project, which transforms it into something else, updating the idea, albeit in a different way from that initially intended.

In the case of *Hidden Displays*, for example, the project for Piazza Matteotti in Imola (Bologna) proposed by Luca Vitone was presented through what we could define as new form proposed by the artist. *Foglie al vento* (2010) was conceived as an installation under the porticoes of the square: a series of lamps would project on the

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[15] *The Gallery of Lost Art*, 2012, available from: <http://galleryoflostart.com> [from July 2012 to 1 July2013]. (accessed 1st February 2022).
[16] *More Spaces, Percorsi Nell'archivio del non realizzato*, Parma, Palazzo Pigorini, 25 September - 31 October 2015; *WunderMoRE*, Roma, foyer Carlo Scarpa, MAXXI, 7 March - 8 July 2018; *Proposals, dreams and utopias from Zagreb. A selection of unrealised and refused art projects by MoRE Museum*, Zagabria, Ivan Picelj Archive, MSU, 9 November - 8 December 2018.

ground the shapes of the leaves of the Ginkgo Biloba, a tree whose resilience would become a tribute to the victims and survivors of all wars. The design material was accompanied by Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem *Soldati* (1918): as part of the exhibition, Vitone decided to introduce a sound contribution, recording a chorus of voices superimposed in a not entirely homogeneous way and recorded together with his students from NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti) in Milan.

In another way, regarding an idea in which only a digital collage existed (*Al riparo!*, 2010), David Casini specifically produced the prototype of a composition of tiles with which he would have liked to arrange the paving of the portico of Via Mascarella in Bologna.

The narrative of failure and non-realisation becomes central, even beyond that which characterises the formal boundaries of the realised work, an aspect that is in fact clear to those artists who have decided to exhibit their unrealised ideas, giving them an identity as a work: this is the case of the aforementioned section of the exhibition *My Failures (2004-present)* by Jeremy Deller, but also of Cesare Pietroiusti who in the exhibition *Lavori da vergognarsi ovvero il riscatto delle opere neglette. Una retrospettiva di Cesare Pietroiusti* (Galleria ZooZone, Rome, 28 April - 15 June 2015) – later re-presented in the solo show at MAMbo in Bologna – exhibited his failures[17].
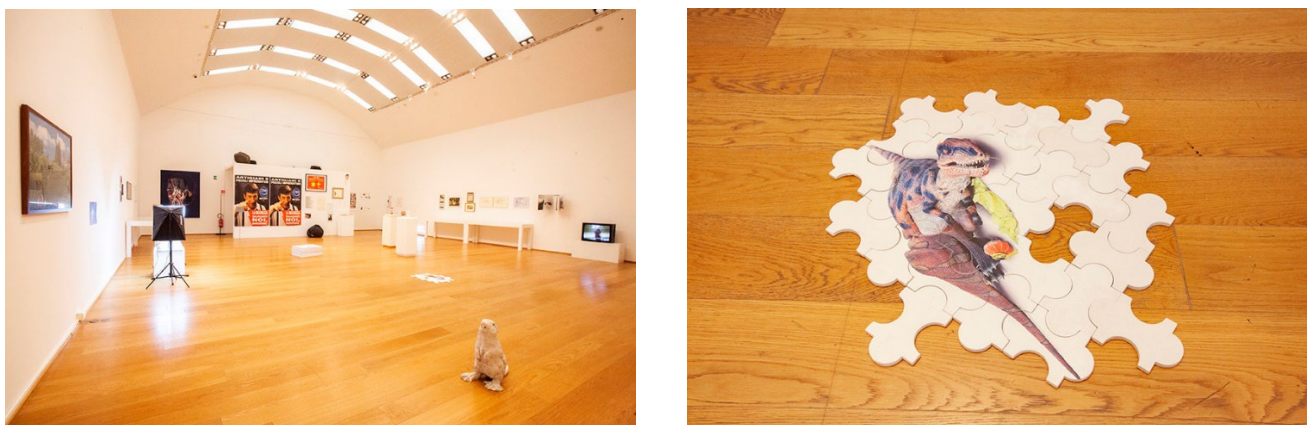


Fig. 3: *Hidden Displays 1975-2020. Progetti non realizzati a Bologna*, installation view and – on the right – detail of *Al riparo!* By David Casini, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Project Room, photo Sara Montali, Courtesy of Istituzione Bologna Musei.

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[17] *Cesare Pietroiusti. Un certo numero di cose / A Certain Number of Things*, curated by Lorenzo Balbi (Sala delle Ciminiere, MAMbo, Bologna, 4 October 2019 - 6 January 2020).

## Critical issues and research perspectives

*Post-enactment* practices pose stimulating questions from a critical point of view: there are many questions that this type of production raises and will increasingly raise.

The first aim is to enhance awareness of the state of progress of the artwork project, of the circumstances in which it is produced and of the artist's intentions: a series of useful considerations, I believe, for the valorization of the artist's work and the project as a critical method, as well as a work in potentiality and actuality.

In addition, the current re-reading of the history of art and of exhibitions in the light of perspectives other than the univocal ones that have contributed to its constitution may lead to a reflection on the role that these projects have not played and the reasons for the failure to realise them, in many cases attributable to the system and not only to logistical issues: what can we say about a museum that announces the acquisition of ten, twenty, thirty unrealised projects to be programmatically included in its collections if not that it is committed to giving space to ideas for more than their success or otherwise, but rather for their quality and their vision of the future? The practices of preserving and valorizing unrealised projects through *post-enactment* actions (in the form of exhibitions and actual realisation) are ultimately a form of recycling: what has been discarded, rejected or only sketched out is reused in an ecological and sustainable way. Giving a voice to the absent and offering a second chance to ideas can thus be a way of treasuring a past that has not been actualised but may make sense to consider in the present.

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