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Among the exhibitions closed to the public during this period of medical emergency, there is also *Each Second is the Last* by **Maria Elisabetta Novello** at the **Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma**, inaugurated on 3 February.

Since we cannot invite you to visit the exhibition, we dedicate a special focus to the artist featuring the **streaming of the performance *Sursum Corda*, held at Galleria Fumagalli in 2017.**

The link to watch the video is included at the end of this focus.

## MARIA ELISABETTA NOVELLO



Maria Elisabetta Novello, Galleria Fumagalli, Milano, 2017. Ph. Lucrezia Roda. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

Maria Elisabetta Novello was born in Vicenza in 1974, lives and works in Udine. After her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice concluded with a thesis in painting, in 1999 she won a scholarship at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, thus starting her career.

Since the beginning of her artistic experience, she has experimented and alternated the practices of sculpture, drawing, installation, photography and performance. **Her research is carried out through the use of unusual materials such as ash, soot and dust, tangible signs of the flow of time, of the fragility of existence and the radical mutation that matter undergoes in a world in continuous creation and, therefore, transformation.**

Maria Elisabetta Novello exhibited her works in international exhibitions, such as *Modus* - Collateral Event of the 57th Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Ca' Faccanon, Venice (2017) and *Round the clock* - Collateral Event of the 54th Biennale di Venezia, Spazio Thetis, Venice (2011). In 2020 the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome dedicates to her the exhibition *Each Second is the Last*, preceded by the solos at the Castello in San Vito al Tagliamento (2018) and Casa Cavazzini Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Udine (2015). She was awarded the following prizes: "Premio Fabbri" (2015), "Premio acquisto per la nuova collezione d'arte contemporanea del Credito Cooperativo di Udine", "Premio

Fondazione VAF" (2014), "Blumm Prize" (2013), "Premio Combat" (2012), "Premio Arti Visive San Fedele" (2010), besides the already mentioned "Premio Borsista 83°ma Bevilacqua La Masa" (1999).

## THE PRACTICE



Maria Elisabetta Novello's practice begins with the choice and collection of the material (often ephemeral and impalpable elements such as ash and dust) which is then manipulated and assembled: sometimes the action of the collection is an essential part of the work, the performing action becomes the work.

**This choice of materials is aimed at searching for the tangible signs of existence and fragility of things.**

The research takes various forms: with ash the artist creates, for example, the *Paesaggi* (Landscapes) and the *Orizzonti* (Horizons) made by packing the material into plexiglas cases or panes; she makes large floor drawings, writings or figures reproducing embroideries; with the powders archives, collected together with other urban finds, she creates metaphorical images of the spaces investigated; moreover, with the project *Sursum Corda*, born in the context of the performing action, she records the rhythm of the fundamental actions of existence (breath, heartbeat, emotions).

Maria Elisabetta Novello, *Paesaggio*, in *Modus*, Collateral Event of the 57th Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Ca' Faccanon, Venice, 2017. Courtesy the artist



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *Ricamo*, ash installation, environmental dimensions, First Prize VAF Foundation, Museo Schauwerk, Sindelfingen, 2014. Ph. Pierluigi Buttò. Courtesy the artist



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *Specie di spazi*, ash installation, environmental dimensions, in *CHRONOS*, Palazzo Barbò - Torre Pallavicina. Bergamo, 2017. Courtesy the artist

## THE ASH



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *Paesaggio (Bianco)*, 2012.  
Ash, plexiglas, iron, 90x120 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

One of the favoured media of the artist is ash: treated in a sculptural way it is enclosed in cases or attached to plexiglas panes to create plastic and vibrant images, showing all the shades of color - from white to black - of the *Paesaggi* (Landscapes) and the *Orizzonti* (Horizons); but ash is also used to generate intense and poetic embroideries or writings on the floor.

Ash is naturally in continuous movement and transformation, it crosses the anthropological, private and public, social and relational memory. Instead, the artist tries to immobilise it in a simulation of solidity that contrasts with the very nature of the material, being light and ephemeral.

**Traditionally associated with the end of earthly things, ash best represents the existential drama suspended between life and death.**

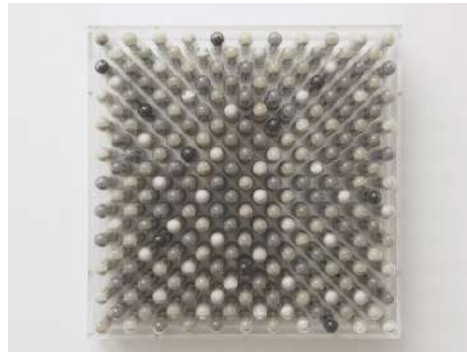
**«Morte, vita, / la morte nella vita; / vita, morte, / la vita nella morte» («Death, life, / the death in life; / life, death, / the life in death»).** The verses from *Il canto delle crisalidi* by Carlo Michelstaedter, take shape in Maria Elisabetta Novello's works.



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *IO SONO QUI*, ash installation, environmental installations, Sant'Elena, Venice, 2013.  
Courtesy the artist

For Maria Elisabetta Novello, ash means also color: the different combustion residues are characterised by slight chromatic nuances, from the black of the soot to the very light grey (almost white) of ash dust. She proceeds with minimal variations, nuances, working on the absence, on what no longer exists in its original form but which has been brought to new life by the artistic intervention.

The works created with these impalpable powders contain a sense of uncertainty, of transition between one condition to another, between the material and the immaterial. They evoke the terrestrial dust as well as the clouds of fine debris dispersed in the cosmos.



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *221 Campionature di cenere e carbone*, 2012. Ash, coal, glass phials, plexiglas, 35x35x12 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli





*Maria Elisabetta Novello. Liridi, Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo, 2012. Ph. Pierluigi Buttò.  
Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli*

## THE ARCHIVES

In 2014 Maria Elisabetta Novello has started the series *Sopralluoghi*, a series of investigations of places from which the artist picks up the dust, equipped with brushes and small shovel like an archaeologist of the contemporary.

She collects dust and other remains by keeping them in archives. These are materials that are produced in nature without the contribution of human being. Dust, dry leaves, pieces of wood, cobwebs are some of the elements to which the artist gives new life.



*Maria Elisabetta Novello. Each Second is the Last, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2020. Ph. Pierluigi Buttò. Courtesy the artist*

Dust, for example, a symbol of abandonment and forgetfulness, naturally lies on surfaces, and even if eliminated by human action, it regenerates itself as a record of the fleeting passing of time.



*Maria Elisabetta Novello. Each Second is the Last, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2020. Ph. Pierluigi Buttò. Courtesy l'artista*

**«The collected dust will be taken from the place in which it generated itself, the place which generated it. The collected dust will be preserved between two panes of glass, in a box: contemporary slides for the study of history, of memory and oblivion.»**

**Giorgia Gastaldon**

## SURSUM CORDA

Maria Elisabetta Novello's practice is also expressed by the work *Sursum Corda*, a complex project based on the feeling of rhythm of life (breath, heartbeat, emotions), presented for the first time at Galleria Fumagalli in 2017.

*Sursum Corda* is another tool to reflect on the theme of passage and threshold: in this case the work investigates the border between public and private space, between the world of the viewer and of the artist, who **opens her inner boundaries, starting from the awareness of being and the fundamental actions that keep it alive.**

The project consists of a performance, «unrepeatable, like any moment of life», during which the artist opens up to dialogue with the other thanks to the amplified auscultation of her own heartbeat and breath. The performance is accompanied by graphic representations, photographs, audio recordings that constitute the material collected during the preparation phase.



Maria Elisabetta Novello, *Sursum Corda*, Galleria Fumagalli, Milano, 2017. Ph. Lucrezia Roda. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

The performance *Sursum Corda* was first held at Galleria Fumagalli in Milan on 19 January 2017, with the collaboration of dancers Roberto Cocconi and Luca Zampar, and was restaged on 20 and 21 January.

In the following days, the video of the performance was projected in the gallery spaces, which became a container of memory presenting the documentation of the project and its process.



**The video of the performance**  
***Sursum Corda* by Maria Elisabetta Novello**  
**with the collaboration of Roberto Cocconi and Luca Zampar - Compagnia AREAREA**  
**in on view at this [LINK](#)**  
**typing the password: [Sursum](#)**

*The video documentation of the performance was shot and edited by Lucrezia Roda, Guido Rizzuti and Andrea Angeli*

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To learn more on the artist's work, visit Galleria Fumagalli [website](#).

Texts partially drawn from the catalog *Grigio in Grigio* with texts by Fabrizio Meroi and Giorgia Gastaldon, published by studiofaganel (Gorizia, 2018) on the occasion of the solo exhibition by Maria Elisabetta Novello *Grigio in Grigio* held at studiofaganel (12 July - 21 September 2018); and from the text of the performance *Sursum Corda* provided by Galleria Fumagalli during the solo exhibition *Sursum Corda* at the gallery (24 January - 16 February 2017).

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