

#onlineart #meettheartist

**MARIA ELISABETTA NOVELLO
MEETS
LÓRÁND HEGYI**

Invited by Galleria Fumagalli, art critic Lóránd Hegyi asked artist Maria Elisabetta Novello a few questions about limitations and changes in life, as well as in her artistic practice, caused by the pandemic.

Focused on an extensive investigation of the traces left by the passage of the anthropological time, Maria Elisabetta Novello admitted to having contradictory feelings toward the present: fear of a time threatened by an invisible enemy and, at the same time, nostalgia for an exceptional – and even more ephemeral – present.



Maria Elisabetta Novello, April 2020. Courtesy the artist

Lóránd Hegyi: «Dearest Maria Elisabetta, I see in your work, in your thought, an active sensitivity and empathy, which is also offensive in the sense of the *vita activa* as understood by Hanna Arendt: a participatory – and not only meditative – approach to the complexity of unlimited reality, which you enter through a method of connecting and reorganising the different natural, material and anthropological elements. Have the tragedy of the epidemic, the brutality of the disease, and the experience of the human's extreme vulnerability had an effect on your work?»

Maria Elisabetta Novello: «The vulnerability, the fragility of human being is a constant thought in my research and the tragedy that we are currently experiencing is definitely entering my work. First of all, I find myself thinking about how distressing it is not to recognise and see this invisible threat that has haunted us recently – and which will persecute us again. At the beginning of this epidemic, after a first moment of bewilderment, I believed to be safe, closed in my corner of paradise, wishing to contemplate my own time and interiority. However, this moment of detachment amplified how important it is to relate to the world and to the other. We missed and we continue to miss the activities that connect people with each other, we lack the fundamental condition which allows human beings to live on earth. The human instability, which is often hidden – but now visible to everyone more than ever – leads me to think even more obsessively about our precarious balance and about the relentless flow of existence.»

L.H.: «Don't you feel a need – an external pressure – to change your method given this limit imposed by the pandemic? Can you always find your way to continue your research?»

M.E.N.: «The pandemic imposed restrictions on us. We cannot act in the same way, and the activities – which have characterised our human condition so far – may have to be rethought; all this could be a turning point, a new beginning. Hopefully art will continue to exist, it will change according to its time, and will establish new ways of communication. My investigation will continue on its way: studies concerning time, the archiving and recording of each moment, the sense of temporal uncertainty, the material and the immaterial, the visible and the invisible. I guess that art and thought are extraordinary possibilities that allow us to be at home but at the same time elsewhere, to bring out the dimension of time even from the immobility of an image, to reveal a presence even in the absence.»

L.H.: «A strange coincidence: you are experiencing a brilliant, happy period of your life, with the birth of your baby Margherita, you are at home, surrounded by the harmony and intimacy of this sweet new experience; you are working peacefully, and at the same time, outside your place of residence and creativity, in this very moment, one of the most dramatic global crises determines life. Your sensitivity, the subtle and poetic subject of your work, your aesthetic thought toward a vital and balanced reorganisation of the different elements based on the processing and transformation of materials, to find an authentic and relevant metaphor for human attitude, represent the direct opposite of the brutal pragmatism and reckless utilitarianism of the crisis. This paradox, I think, does not cause a change in your path, does not stop you, does not force you to create another narrative. The consistency of your work remains intact - something that impressed me deeply. What do you think about it?»

M.E.N.: «Margherita is pure energy, is making, is discovery and relationship with the world, Margherita is life. On the other hand, there is what I never wanted: there is a threat, and the fear of the unknown. While before this crisis it was difficult to understand the world, now there is a world that I no longer recognise and that I really cannot explain to my daughter. Often my work is closely linked to an existential reflection in which time plays a central role. In these months I have hoped that all this would pass quickly, but at the same time I was afraid that this time would end. Contradictory feelings. What I feel is a sort of stealing from this time in progress because, despite the current tragedy, I feel nostalgia for the present. I mean it in a paradoxical way because it is not the nostalgia for something I have experienced but it is the nostalgia for a present time; as evoked by Borges' poetry, it is melancholy, it is the restlessness triggered by the inability to enjoy the present. A strange feeling related to time and affections that I had rarely experienced before. Despite the paradoxical circumstance and the current crisis, I guess that the poetics of my work and the aim of my research – with its materials and the use of body as an instrument that measures space and time – are now an attempt to live the present in the awareness of our own action, trying to put all this into the immortality of the work.»



Maria Elisabetta Novello during the setting up of the solo exhibition *Each Second is the Last*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2020. Courtesy the artist

To learn more about the artist → [Maria Elisabetta Novello](#)

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