

## Middle - Earth

### A Journey inside Elica — 2014

*Curated by Alessandro Dandini de Sylva*

Text by Marcello Smarrelli

Middle - Earth is a region of Arda, the imaginary universe created by J.R.R. Tolkien, who once explained that Midgard and Middle - Earth really were only “two disused and fascinating names for our planet, imagined to be completely surrounded by water”. This inspired us to consider Elica with its several premises around the world as a territory to be searched, explored and mapped, using photography, the artistic media that best suits this sort of challenge. This medium in fact has affirmed itself as the most popular and common language in contemporary visual culture. With the multiplication of photographic devices for every target from amateur to professional, photography is by far the most common media. Everybody feels entitled to make a visual statement and so nowadays, taking photographs (but also studying, analyzing and understanding photography) requires more effort to discern and reveal what this media can really capture. In these times of high image proliferation, in which we are incessantly reached by information, photography has tried to offer an alternative reaction to such visual saturation. And it does so by stubbornly opposing a ‘slow pace’ to the syncopated beat of the ‘society of the spectacle’, carrying out an in-depth investigation of contexts and scenarios in the direction of an ‘image downscaling’. In the wake of 1970s photographers such as Luigi Ghirri and Guido Guidi, a new generation of Italian photographers is expressing a strong

attitude towards this slow-paced vision, that is in fact a way to see better and notice often neglected details. This sort of research which implies a return to traditional techniques and to a form of archaism, is opposed to what we might call the predominating ‘technological trend’, and is also currently embraced by other forms of artistic expression: video art for instance, that is increasingly preferring super 8 film to digital images, experimental filmmaking, and recently rediscovered traditional painting techniques. At this stage of Elica’s radical transformation and reorganization, Fondazione Ermanno Casoli invited the company to entrust two affirmed protagonists of the young Italian photography scene with the task of portraying the company’s identity. This is how Middle - Earth. A journey inside Elica came about, a project Fabio Barile and Francesco Neri worked on for months, focusing their cameras on the people, spaces and activities of the Fabriano born corporation.

In line with its vocation for innovation and improvement, Elica accepted this challenge taking a risk: how can a company that is based on speed and technology, design and innovation, be portrayed by two photographers whose stylistic cipher is a slow-paced vision?

This apparent contradiction gave place to an unprecedented and possibly even more authentic image of Elica, devoid of any patina or filter:

a company with thousands of employees that works on a global scale; a company that does not accomplish itself only in the ‘finished product’ — the cooker hood — but that understands itself as a research and development centre; a company that manifests itself in the details that document the working processes. But above all, Elica is a company made up of individuals, each one with a unique and valued personality that these photos closely represent revealing the deepest and invisible creases, offering an allround portrait. Both photographers relied on view cameras: a device from a different era requiring long exposures. View cameras are analogical and allow no trial and error: they require knowledge of the context, a resolute selection of the subjects, expertise in envisioning the final image. This is why Barile and Neri’s work represents a research of great rigour and quality also reflected in the highly refined prints capable of offering an ‘alternative’ view of Elica, resulting from a descriptive immersion in the company’s landscape. The portraits Neri took in Querétaro (Mexico), Shengzhou (China) and Fabriano (Italy), visualize Elica’s current global dimension an authentic ‘middle-earth’; in the eyes and the poses of the workers one can sense the human factor behind the desks and machineries.

Barile’s still lifes instead manifest his interest for the technological component of industrial research and production. State of the art machineries, workshops and traditional tools become the visual expression of a reflection on the technological imagery and on the crucial role this sector plays for Elica. Ultimately, Middle - Earth represents the nth successful contamination between contemporary art and corporate world: two poles that Fondazione Ermanno Casoli tries to draw closer to each other towards a coexistence, just as Luigi Ghirri who tried to align the different elements of a landscape “as if they were the needle of an imaginary compass indicating a possible direction”.



Prototype,  
Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico. 2014





Elica plant at Mergo.  
2014

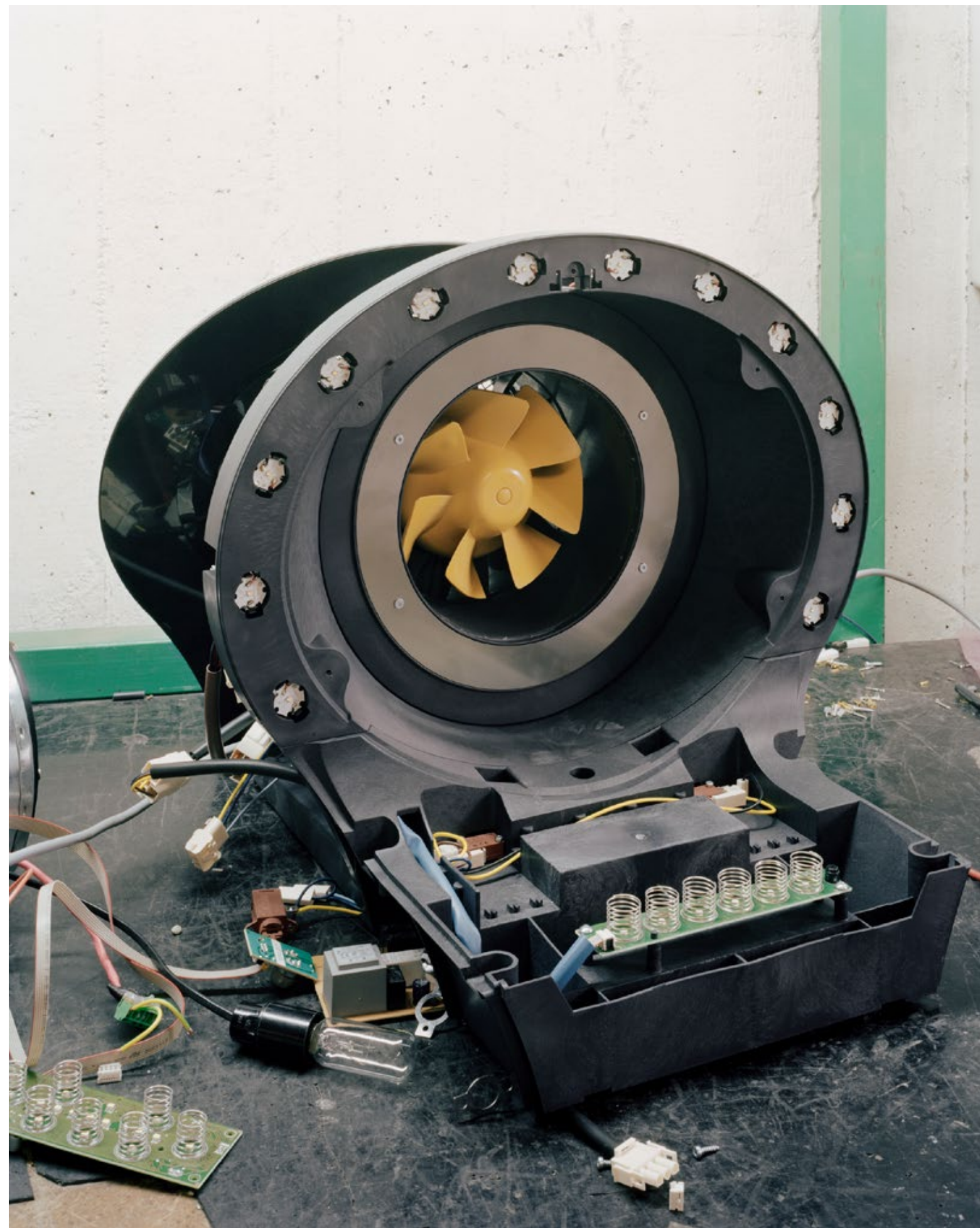






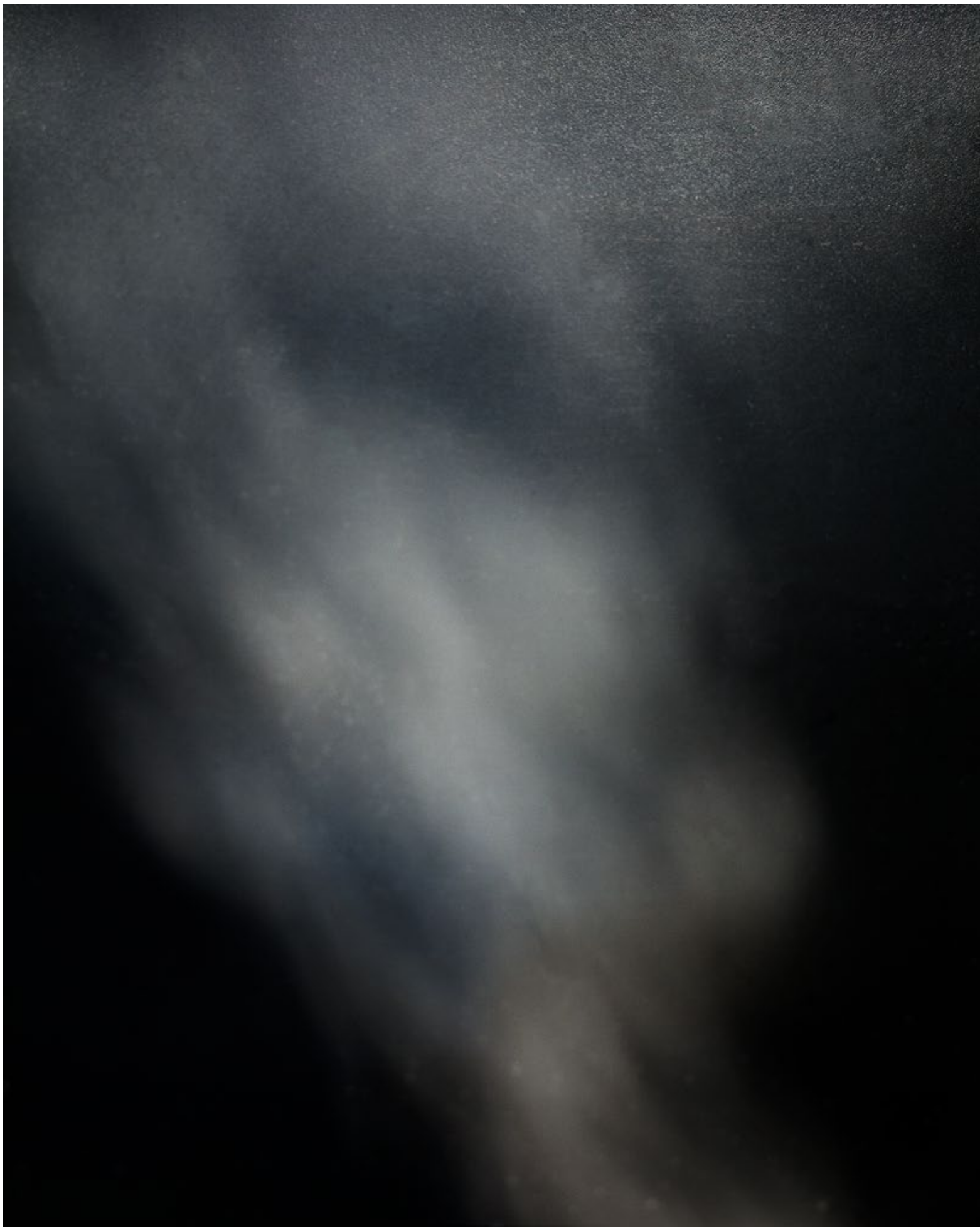


Painting, Mergo.  
2014



Motor Group, Prototype Laboratory,  
Fabriano. 2014

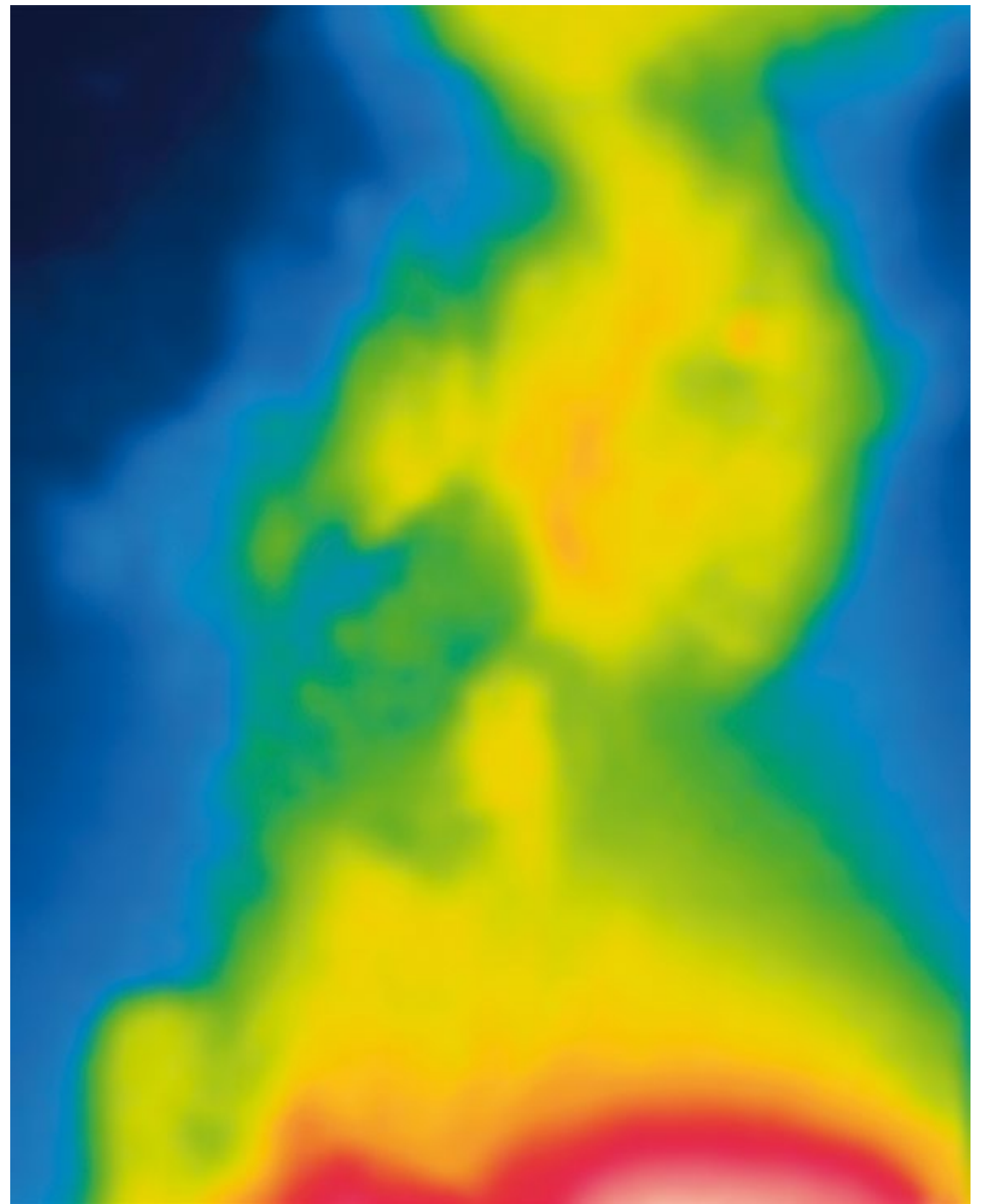
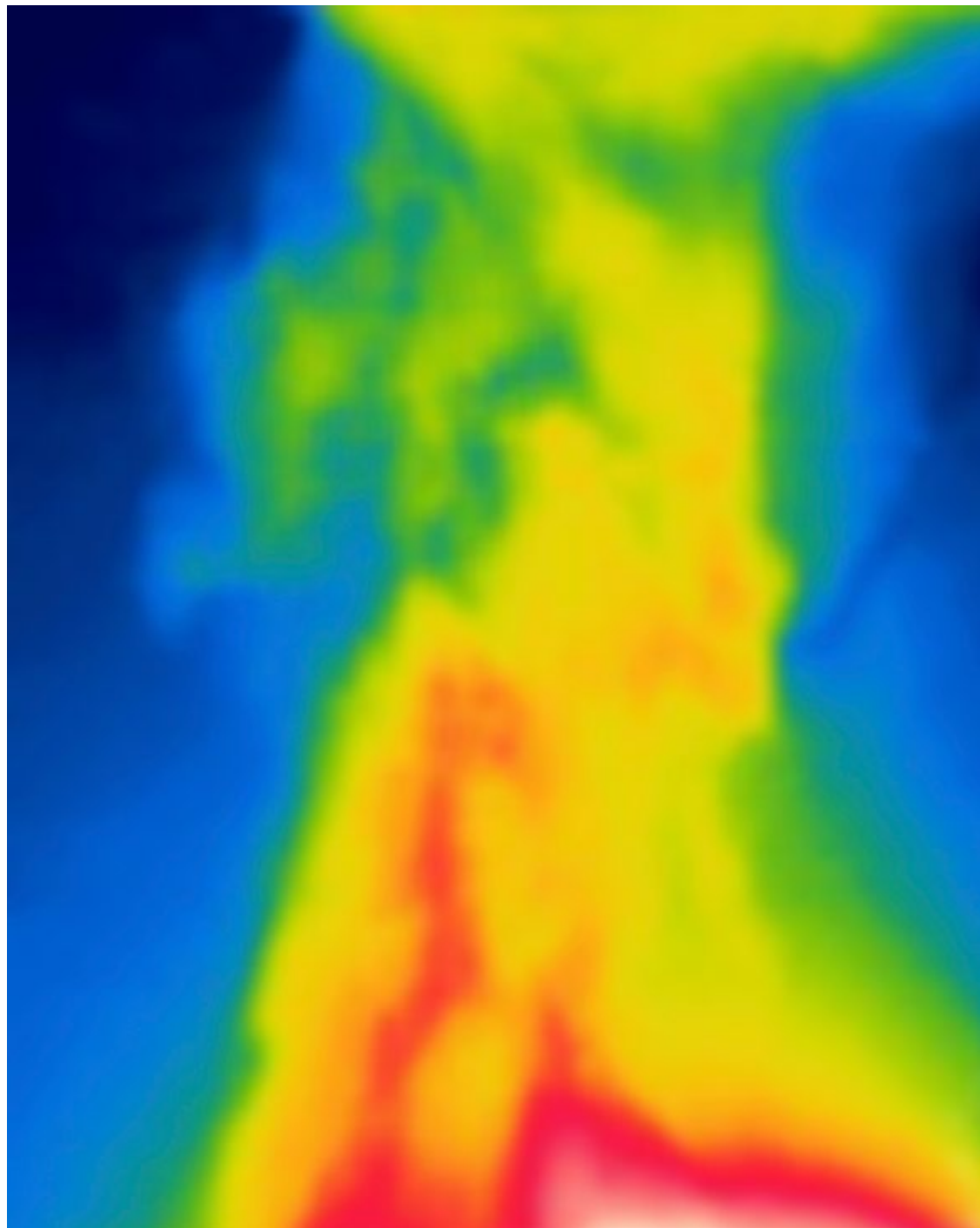
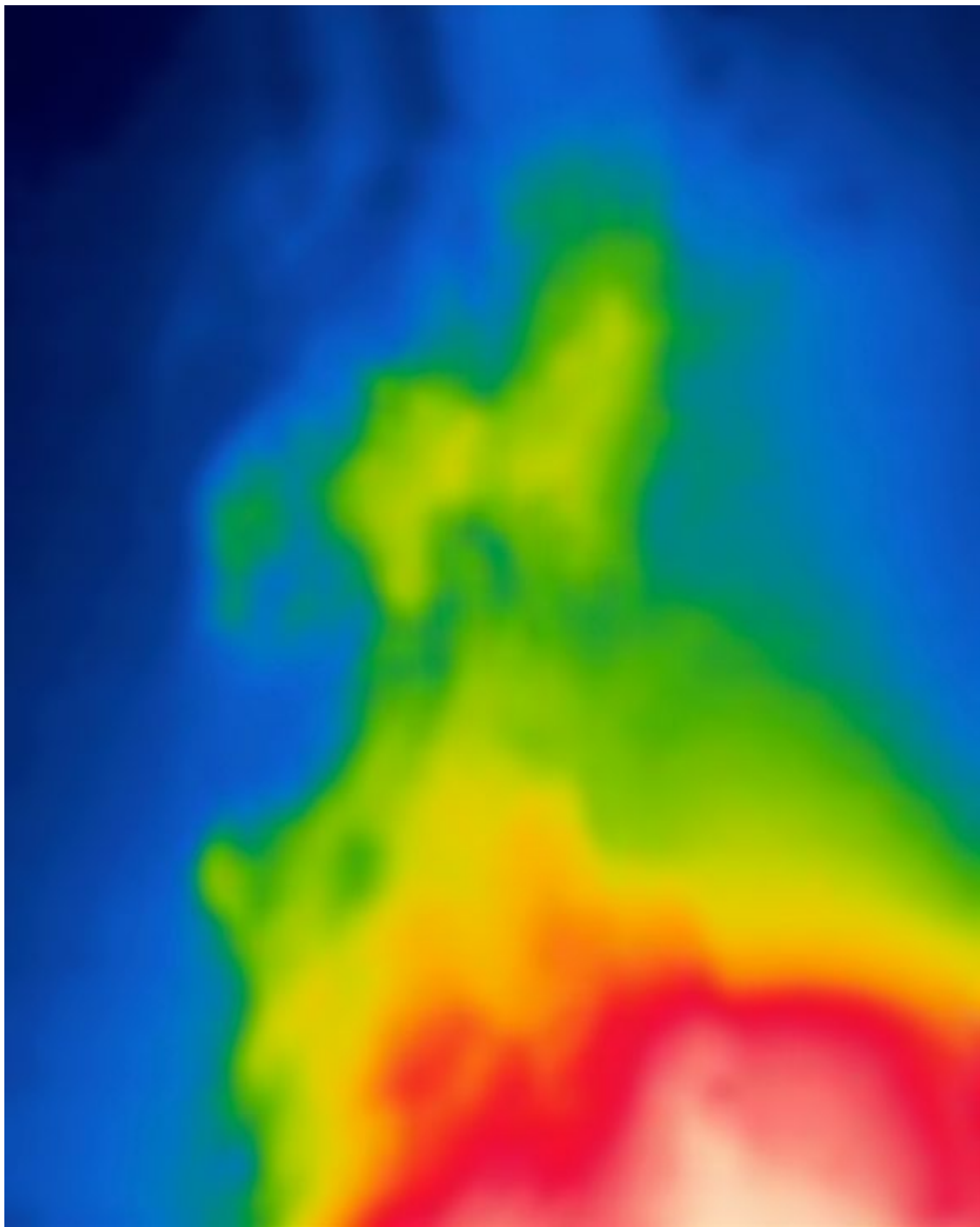




Aspiration Test, Elica TechLab,  
Serra San Quirico. 2014



3D Printed Remote Control, Fabriano.  
2014









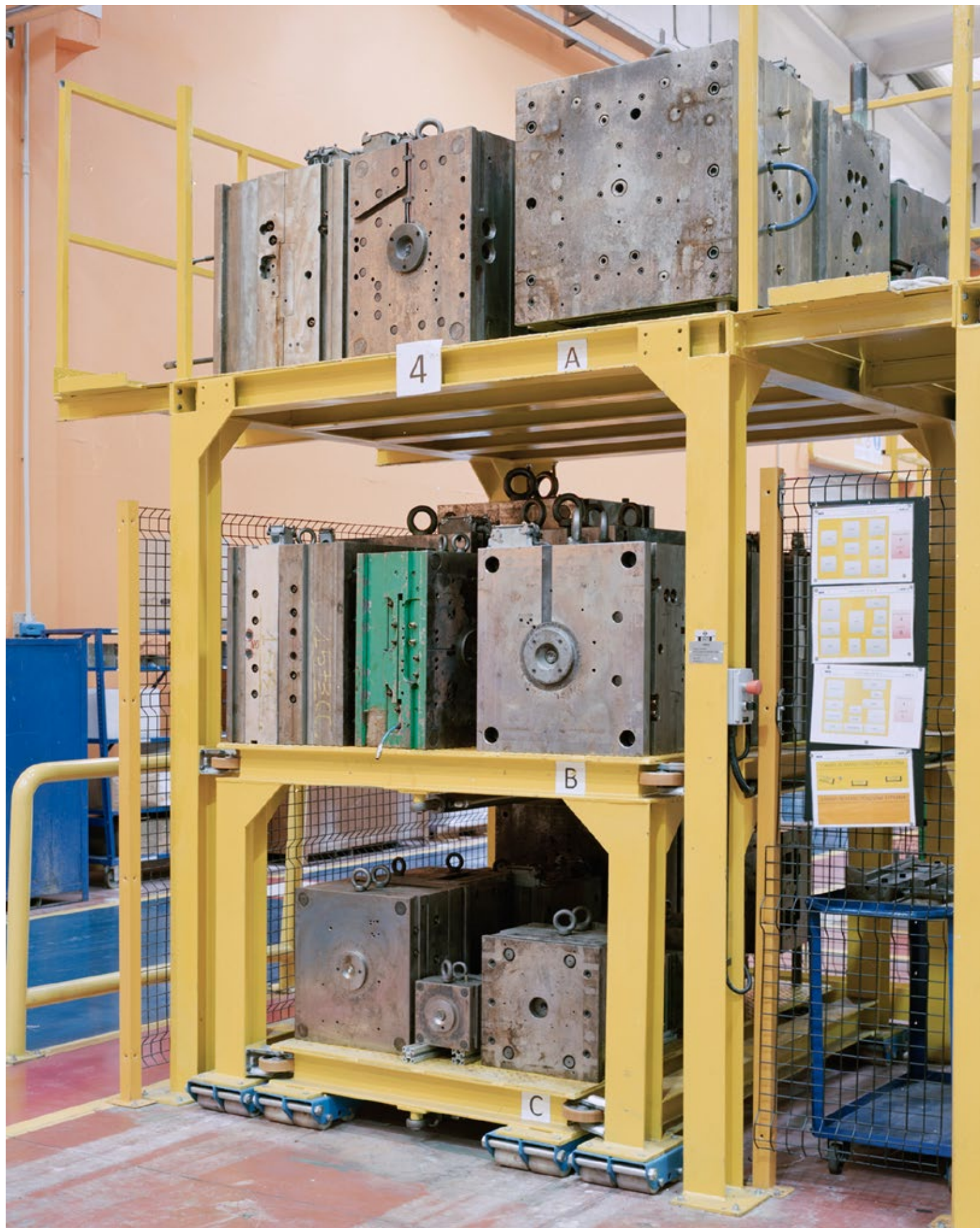


Untitled,  
Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico. 2014



Untitled,  
Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico. 2014





Elica plant at Mergo.  
2014



3D Printed Remote Control, Fabriano.  
2014





Elica plant at Mergo.  
2014



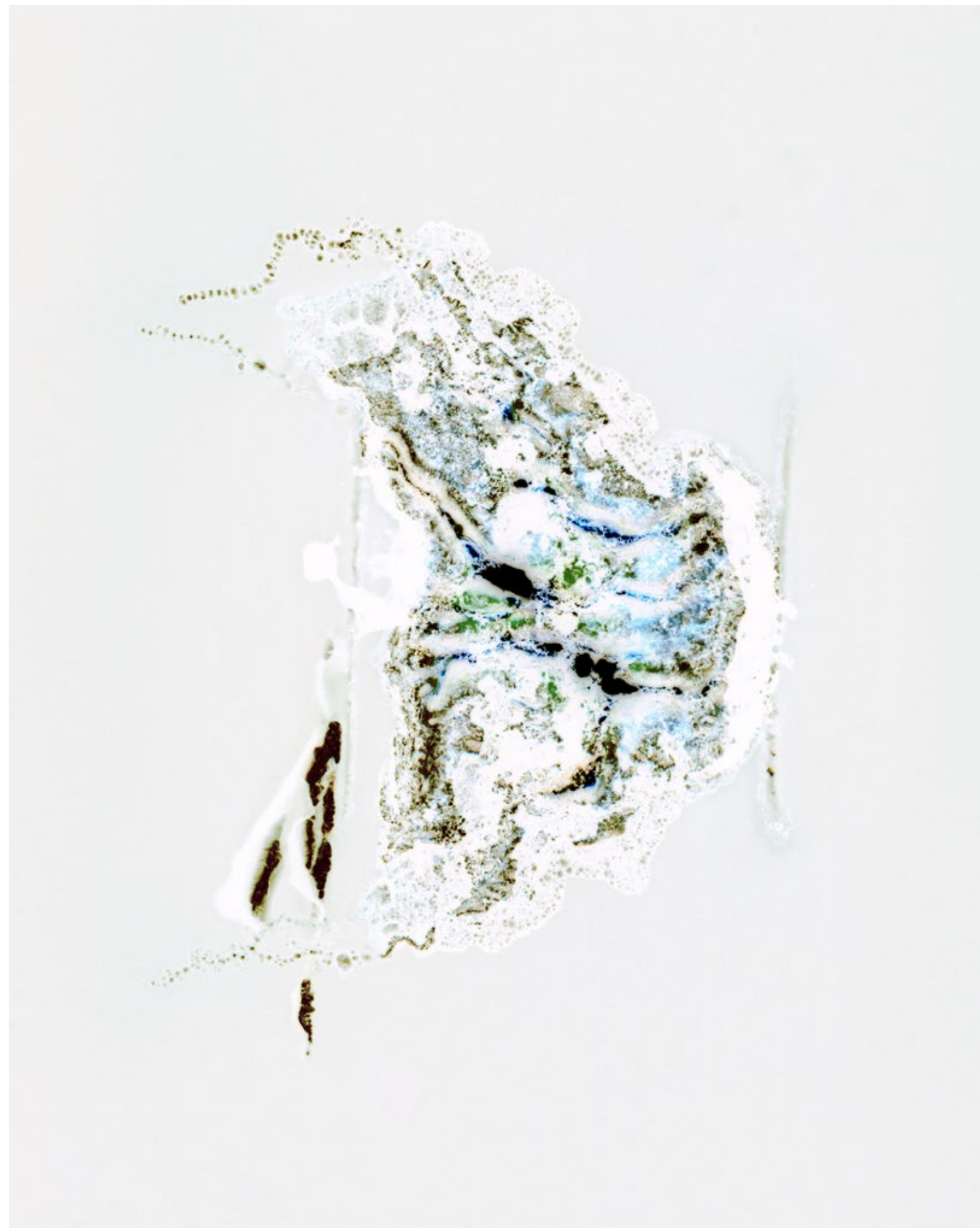


Untitled,  
Elica plant at Mergo. 2014

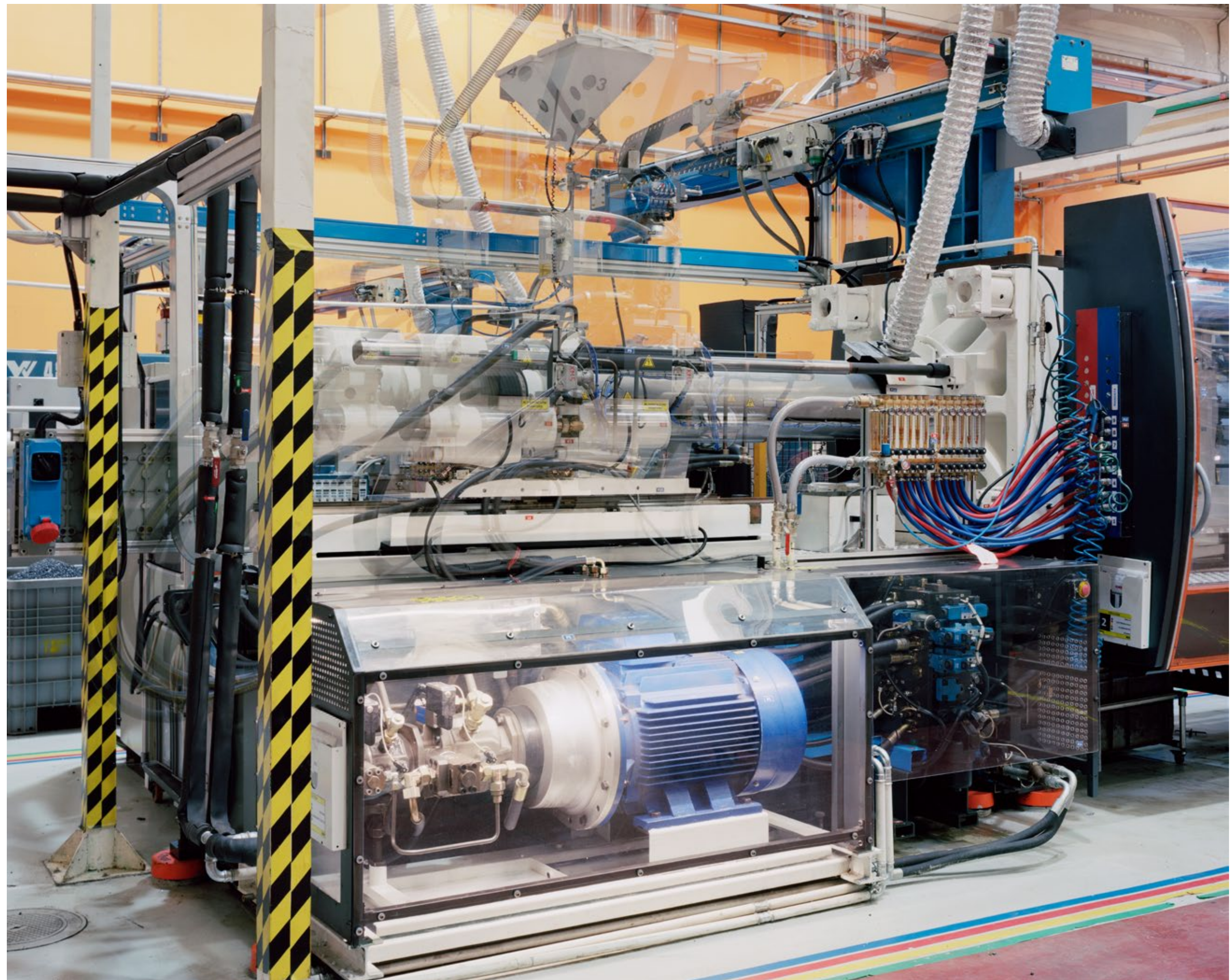












Elica plant at Mergo.  
2014





Sound test room,  
Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico. 2014





3D Printed Remote Control, Fabriano, 2014





Tracking Test on Plate, Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico, 2014





Life Test, Elica TechLab, Serra San Quirico, 2014



**Fabio Barile**  
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Graduating from FSM in Florence with a degree in photography in 2007. He started his photographic research in 2005 with a project about coastal erosion, which affects 1500 km of Italian coastline. The resulting project, “Among” aimed to investigate natural processes of the landscape. Over the last few years Barile’s work has been driven by an interest in science in relation to art - both conceived as tools for a better understanding of reality. His long-term project, “An Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution and Restoration of Land,” examines the manner in which geomorphology acts upon the land, serving as testimony to the vastness of geological time. The work employs photography to stimulate a deeper understanding of the landscape and our connection with the natural environment.

“At first glance, Fabio Barile’s practice could be said to follow in the long tradition of Italian landscape photography which includes practitioners such as Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi. On closer inspection, however, the images in An Investigation hew to a tight conceptual framework that belie their simplicity, asking deeper questions about the nature of Time, and geologic time questions whose philosophical implications underpin scientific endeavor, human perception, and the unknowable forces of creative destruction at work in Nature”  
L. I. Naomi Itami

**Selected exhibitions**

2022  
Fabio Barile & Domingo Milella — Le Forme del Tempo  
Terme di Diocleziano, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, Italy  
Regeneration (Group exhibition)  
American Academy in Rome, Italy  
Di Roccia, fuochi e avventure sotterranee (Group exhibition)  
MAXXI, L'Aquila, Italy

2021  
Di Roccia, fuochi e avventure sotterranee (Group exhibition)  
MAXXI, Rome, Italy  
Works for a Cosmic Feeling  
Matèria, Rome, Italy      2020  
Group exhibition, On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world  
FOAM Museum, Amsterdam.

2019  
Group exhibition, On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world  
50th edition of the Rencontres d'Arles, in collaboration with FOAM Museum.  
Fabio Barile & Domingo Milella - The shape of time  
Centro Arti visive Pescheria, Pesaro, Italy

2018  
Osservare la terra — a dialogue between contemporary photography and the historical archive of ICCD about photography as a tool for observation  
ICCD — Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome, curated by Benedetta Cestelli Guidi

2017  
An Investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution and restoration of land,  
Matèria, Rome

2015  
Homage to James Hutton  
Matèria, Rome, Italy

**Publications**

Fabio Barile & Domingo Milella - The shape of time, Fondazione malaspina edition, 2019  
Fabio Barile & Francesco Neri, Middle-Earth a journey inside Elica, 2014  
Vision And Documents Box, Documentary Platform, 2010  
Diary N° 0 - Things that do not happen, 3/3, 2009