

Fabio Barile
Works for a Cosmic Feeling
Matèria — Rome
2021



A dialogue between Mauro Zanchi and Fabio Barile

MZ: *Through the imaginal investigation of Works for a Cosmic Feeling (2018-2021) what have you put in place compared to your previous research?*

FB: My previous research always had to do with a tangible reality, or at least perceptible as such, with a coherent theme that gave the perception of being able to concretize the subject in a defined form. The erosion of the coasts or the geological landscape are limited themes, in a sort of particle form, therefore enclosed in a very specific space of ideas. In the latter body of work, however, the particle shape sensation lives in the individual images, but vanishes in the general vision. The thematic explosion gives the general perception ondulatory characteristic, in the indeterminate sense of quantum mechanics, difficult to define, as if it remains an idea in a form always raw, that never collapses into a point-like state. Another element is that the working methodology develops the theme itself, in the sense that, to talk about complexity and becoming, I try to build a work that is in constant transformation and behaves like a complex system.

MZ: *In the ever-expanding relationship between images and current reality, how do you use the photographic medium within the immersive process of your gaze (contained in turn in a dimension, both spatial and conceptual, more complex and in the making)?*

FB: I have often been tempted to leave the photographic medium to solve the problem of its structural limitations, but every time I repeated to myself that it would take me at least 10 years to get to an adequate level of confidence with another medium. So I decided that instead of rejecting the limits of traditional photography, I had to anchor myself to those limits, trying in a sort of way to enlarge them from the inside, trying to modify the space of possibilities. This has to do with what photography is capable of in general, but also and above all with my mental space and my mindset. I mean my work as an exploratory exercise through which to verify how far I can go. So whether it is an image taken from the internet, a landscape, a “sculptural” object that I build, an engraved plate or a 3D scan made with the iPhone, everything goes in the form of a bi-dimensional photographic image, which can take a symbolic form or be a document of the experience. Apart from the images directed on the plate, everything passes through the lens of my large format camera, which works as a ritual, this practice brings every structure, method or process back to the same level, traditional photography acts as a universal translator. Using photography as a final product and cultural code, I also create links with its history, borrowing methodologies and linguistic codes present within it and re-meaning them for my own purposes.

MZ: *What value do you give to interconnectivity, especially in reference to the choice of projecting the 229 images (within the structures designed ad hoc by Etaoin Shrdlu Studio for the exhibition in the Materia Gallery, which open up further questions related to the sculptural medium) in a looped flow, deputy to trigger multiple trajectories?*

FB: Interconnectivity is a sort of by-product of the various trajectories in my work and by-products are exactly what interests me. I am fascinated by the emergent properties of matter, so I am interested in everything that is not programmed and emerges from pre-existing structures. When I say matter, I also mean cultural matter of course. The structure and design of the exhibition are also by-products or rather, consequences. The idea of the projections was by the curator Alessandro Dandini de Sylva who, unable to reduce the quantity of images for the stratigraphic aspect of the work, thought of these devices as a means to multiply the space of the gallery and make it possible the use of the 229 images. The design of the structures, designed by Etaoin Shrdlu Studio, on the other hand, are the product of a work of transformation of the book design, which they had made shortly before the exhibition and which was announced as a finalist for the MACK First Book Award on the day of the opening. The result is a sort of infinite book, an immersive device that generates random connections between different things, or sometimes, immerses the viewer in an ocean of moving clouds or in claustrophobic images of dense forests.

MZ: *I'm interested in deepening the idea of time that marks the sequences of black and white photographic images in the darkened spaces of the Materia gallery. And further I would like you to guide us into the rhythm of time alluded to both by the five projectors and by your interiority that hooks the personal times of the users who arrive at the exhibition site.*

FB: The projection times were decided on the basis of the kind of images and the relative print size chosen for that image, while the durations emulate the time fruition of an ideal print. The projected images 2 x 2.5 metre for example, have a duration of 1 and a half minutes each. The installation is conceived more as an exhibition that slowly changes shape, rather than as an images slideshow. The difference in the timing between one projector and another generates ever changing relationships. As an example, when the projector B2 has finished his cycle and has started again, the projector D1 is still at one third of its total life, these differences generate chaotic combinations and the interesting thing for me is that in these random combinations, not programmed, everyone can see a different meaning, which is not intrinsic to the images. In this way, the space that is generated is always personal and defined by the casual encounter with the images.

MZ: *How did you conduct the principles of inconsistency and imperfection within the asynchronous and dynamic flow of your images?*

FB: I try to make inconsistency and imperfection the engine of my work, many titles start with “Attempt to” because for me they are all attempts to do something, maybe I should put it in the general name “Attempt to Make Works for a Cosmic Feeling “:). Consistency for me is a bit like walking one road, with shoes suitable for that road and at a very precise pace, obviously I’m taking it to extremes, however, the point is that nature, understood as everything that exists, doesn’t work like that. Evolution takes existing structures and readjusts them for new purposes, in a path made of trial and error. To quote I don’t remember who, evolution is not an engineer who designs from the beginning, but a craftsman who works with what he has, in these terms, the walk we were talking about, could be a mountain path, full of hills and valleys, with snowy areas and ones full of stones, which we have to walk with shoes with spil heels or two different kind of shoes, let’s say that for me it is essential to undertake the path in this way.

MZ: *You investigate a complex and evolving organic system. You use photography as a stratigraphic tool. You try to make visible the interaction between apparently distant elements and times. What surprised you in this imaginative relationship with reality and what appeared in this subtle journey?*

FB: The work emerged from the type of practice that has gradually been structured over time. Working from the beginning on long-term projects on issues such as transformations and the limits of vision, I realized that I could not maintain uniformity within the project if not forcing change. From when I started a project to when I finished it, my approach to photography changed, so over time I realized that, beyond the theme of the work, the other aspect that interested me was just how my method changed, in relation to how I changed. In practice it was a process of acceptance and enhancement of my specific characteristics, therefore not pursuing an ideal path, but using those characteristics as starting material and core of the work. So I began to think about my practice in the terms of becoming, the change no longer as a problem but as a resource. Unlike previous works, in Works for a Cosmic Feeling this aspect is not simply present on its own but has become a conscious part of the research, in practice it is both theme and method, together with the other themes that interest me. Photography has therefore become a stratigraphic tool, in which recent things engage with things of the past, and all together constitute a dynamic entity. As in the human being for example, more recent structures such as the prefrontal cortex have formed on older structures and between them there is a constant interaction and interdependence, so I feel that I cannot abandon previous themes such as geology, because they are deeply intertwined with the rest of the work. For example, when I photograph moving clouds, I try to create an interaction between Alfred Stieglitz’s Equivalence and the wave packets of quantum mechanics, engaging my interest in science on the history of photography, which is the medium I use. Returning to the question, unfortunately I can’t get too clear a look at what I’m doing because I’m fully immersed in it, indeed this dialogue is a

great way to think about it. Maybe I’ll be able to clarify everything in a few years.

MZ: *Does the dilated succession of images in your exhibition immerse the viewer in a continuously unresolved present?*

FB: By continuously unresolved present, I mean the feeling of incompleteness generated by the condition of the viewer in never being able to exhaust the experience of the exhibition, both because it is extended over a long time, and because the chaotic and random structure always makes it different, this alludes to the condition of the human being compared to the enormous vastness and complexity of natural processes.

MZ: *When we observe a thing as a whole, or a concept in its widest complexity or contemplate a vast landscape, we rarely even grasp the presence of the evolutionary process in progress or the series of subtle relationships that bind all the living forms collected at that particular moment. Works for a Cosmic Feeling seems to be the translation into work of a cosmological narrative through images, where the projections of those who throughout history have tried to grasp the connections between micro and macro, between transitory and perennial, between uniqueness and multiple, between the individual and the universal. The neo-Platonic visionaries of the Renaissance were able to connect what happens in the universe with what beats in the heart of the human imagination, building theaters of memory capable of condensing all the declinations of the possible and all the projections of the imaginable. How did you intertwine scientific themes with the warp and weft of visions of art and the photographic medium?*

FB: Our mind tends to simplify complex things, because otherwise it could not manage them, which is why we often seek consistency or the idea of perfection, they give us a sense of control. In Works for a Cosmic Feeling it might seem that I am looking for a structural order of things, a junction between macro and micro, or a supreme truth, but in reality this is not the case. My aim is to make visible the idea you are talking about in the first part of the question, the fact that there is a level of complexity in the things that we should always keep in mind in order to have an open look at the world. My research does not have to do with a sort of cosmic balance, but with the exact opposite. In this sense, in my work I try to generate disorder, bringing together things that apparently have nothing to do with each other, such as the “coldness” of science together with moments of my personal life. To the images that recall scientific concepts, for example, I flank portraits of my wife, who participates in many photos and is my spy in the history of art, or of my parents, of whom I am the extended phenotype. I believe that through the scientific method, a formidable tool of knowledge, the human being, looking for the absolute order of things, also highlights its exact opposite, that it is the imbalance that activates every process.

MZ: *What is concentrated in the ideal map (of all the possible exhibition scenarios), printed on the large sheet available at the entrance to the gallery? What correlations did you want to create between the semi-immaterial flow of innumerable visual combinations determined by the different times marked by the five projectors and the condensation of the 229 images on the surface of a paper support?*

FB: The poster was born from the need to have a device that could contain all the information on the titles of the works and act as a navigator within the exhibition. Often the images are linked to processes or ideas that are difficult to grasp, the titles therefore help in reading the images, to each projector has been assigned a code which is shown on the poster and therefore indicates which images could appear on that screen. In fact, the poster, due to its size and the darkness in the gallery, has become a device to take home, in which the total perception of the exhibition is possible. It is a satellite view of what happened in my mind, it recalls the idea of a contact sheet or the entire layout of the book, in fact it is a mental map, a concept which was the starting point of this path .

MZ: *Speaking of the fragmentation of photography, of the notions of uncertainty and flow, how did you put the Taoist concept of the ‘spirit of the valley’ in open dialogue with Romain Rolland’s ‘oceanic sentiment’?*

FB: The conceptual ideas behind the work or rather the aggregating ideas are the result of processes of realization that gradually happen over time, the idea of oceanic feeling is an idea that pervades all the works, and it was suggested to me by the text that Naomi Itami had written for my project on geology “An investigations of the observable laws in the composition, dissolution and restoration of land”, but it was not an idea from which to develop a project, I simply realized that this idea of belonging to the cosmo was already present in my work. Then I discovered the spirit of the valley in Réda Benkirane’s book of interviews “The theory of complexity”. In the interview dedicated to Edgar Morin, the scholar says that in the writing of “The Method” he approaches the idea of complex thought and describes it in terms of the Tao as the valley that welcomes all the waters that flow inside it and underlines the Latin origin of complexity, The Complexus as “that which is woven together”. This idea of weaving together confirmed to me that there was a philosophical path for what I was doing. Returning to Taoist ideas, the work has also to do with the abandonment of the ego and in these terms, when you ask me “how did you put in dialogue”, I realize that I haven’t done anything and that the dialogue was self-generated; there is a sort of Bottom Up approach and from a certain point of view I feel like an agent of the evolutionary flow, my behaviors are the layering of billions of years of history over which perhaps I have no control, what I do is part of my extended phenotype. I like to think that nature is chaos that finds a way and, in a sense, I would like my work to manifest this idea.

MZ: *Conceptually, what does the image blur (and the blurry idea) represent for you?*

FB: The idea of a blurry image is borrowed from Hiroshi Sugimoto’s work on architecture. In that work, if I remember correctly, he wants to allude more to the idea of the architect rather than the architecture itself. For me, however, blur can mean more things. For example, the blurred eye of Sveva (my wife) simply represents the inability to understand when immersed in a situation or mental condition, because we are so close that we cannot see the details. Other images, such as those of the movement of clouds, refer to this metaphor of the theory of complexity, in which it is said that a cloud is not like a clock whose functioning can be understood by taking it apart piece by piece and then reassembling it. A cloud must be studied as a whole, it will never be understood by breaking it down into its essential parts. From a conceptual point of view, my images of clouds want to allude to the fluidity of uncrystallized ideas, a condition in which I hope to be. I want to finish with a quote by Edgar Morin that I had underlined and which, rereading it now, makes me vibrate: “The only knowledge that is valid is that which feeds on uncertainty, and the only thought that lives is the one that stays at the temperature of its destruction “.





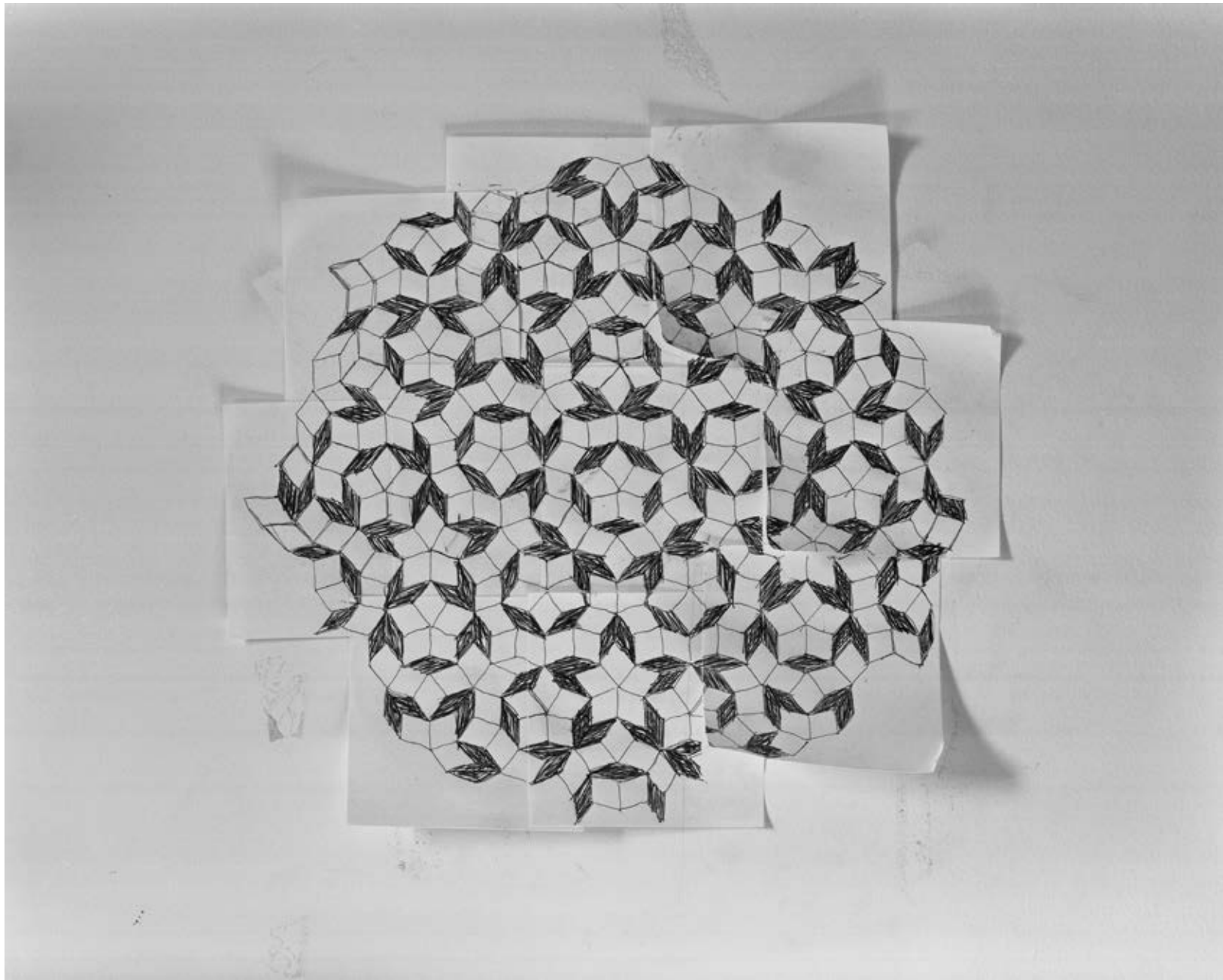




Attempt to build the wing of a bird.
feather, play dough and various pieces.
2020



The structure of a forest #1.
2018



Penrose Tiling drawing on post-it notes #2.
2020



Sveva as Janus Bifrons.
2020

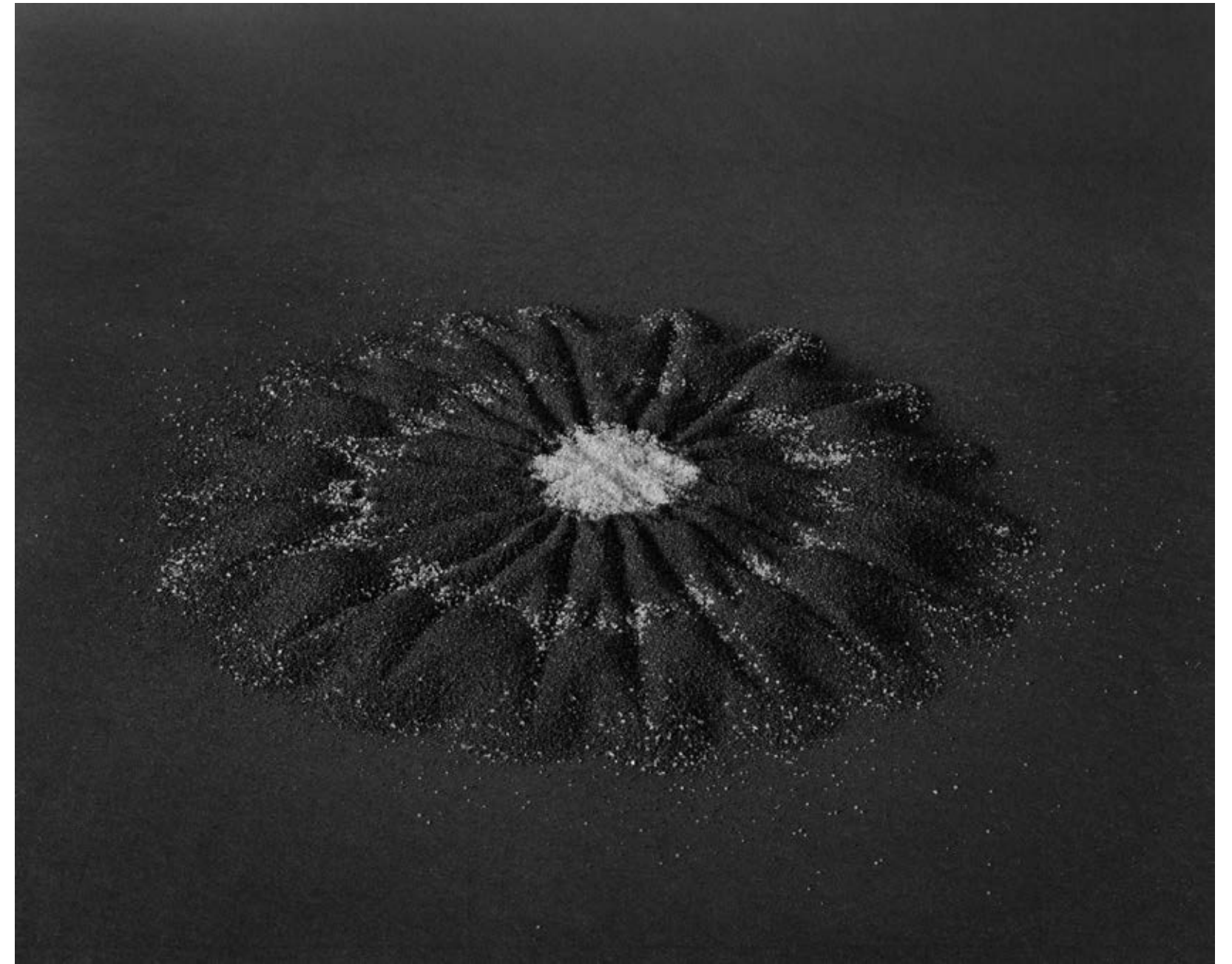








Evolution of a cloud, 4 shots.
2019

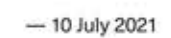




Thinking at the vision of the birds.

2020





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Fabio Barile was born in Barletta (Italy) in 1980 and graduated from Fondazione Studio Marangoni in Florence in 2007. In the same year he was selected as one of 15 finalists of the ‘Atlante Italiano 007’ award and his work was exhibited at MAXXI, Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo, in Rome.

He started his photographic research in 2005 with a project about coastal erosion that affects 1500 km of the italian coastline. This project, titled ‘Among’, launches a research path focused on the investigation of the natural processes of the landscape. This work is part of ‘Visions and Documents’, a ten-book set published by Documentary Platform and has been exhibited in several group shows, for example: ‘Tempi Osceni. Moments de la photographie contemporaine italienne II’ at the Centre d’Art Dominique Lang and at the Athens Photo Festival in 2009. In the same year, he had his first solo show, ‘Diary n°o, things that do not happen’, as part of Fotografia, Festival Internazionale di Roma.

In 2017, following his solo show at Matèria, Barile exhibits a selection of works from his body of work “An investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution and restoration of land” at the National Archive for Cataloguing and Documentation in Rome, in dialogue with images sourced from the archive itself. In 2019, alongside Domingo Milella, he participates in his first major museum exhibition ‘Le Forme del Tempo’, curated by Alessandro Dandini de Sylva at Fondazione Pescheria Centro Arti Visive in Pesaro. Between 2019 and 2020 Barile participates in the major touring museum exhibition ‘On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world’ held at 50th edition of the Rencontres d’Arles, FOAM Museum in Amsterdam and at Le Lieu Unique in Nantes. In 2020 a portfolio of his most recent works was published on FOAM Magazine #57 ‘In Limbo’ and in the same year he was one of the five artists working with photography, chosen from UNESCO to work on the most recent italian sites entering the UNESCO World Heritage. In 2021 the book Works for a Cosmic Feeling is among the finalists of the MACK First Book Award.

Selected exhibitions

2020
Group exhibition, On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world
Le lieu Unique, Nantes.
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
Group exhibition at Villa Celimontana, MAPS|SPAM
Società Geografica Italiana, Villa Celimontana, Rome
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

2014
Group exhibition at MAXXI, Open museum open city
MAXXI, Rome
Fabio Barile & Francesco Neri, Middle-Earth a journey inside Elica
Elica Showroom, Milan

2011
Group exhibition at Museo Pino Pascali, Giovane fotografia di ricerca in Puglia, Museo Pino Pascali
Polignano a Mare

Publications

Di roccia fuochi e avventure sotterranee - Quodlibet/Ghella, 2020
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° o - Things that do not happen, 3/3, 2009