

Mythological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel

Fabio Barile

The work begins from a cartographic axis: the Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, led by Clarence King with photographer Timothy H. O’Sullivan, across the American West between 1867 and 1872.

Transposed to Italy, the parallel shifts north and meets a geology that takes the form of cult. Its point of arrival is the Vulcano Laziale, the volcanic apparatus of the Colli Albani, a quiescent caldera twenty kilometres from Rome. Here the structure of the mountain coincides with that of myth: a volcanic cone whose explosive activity hurled stones read as celestial signs, and the crater lake of Nemi, for centuries the site of the sacred wood of Latium.

The work moves on two planes. In the field, the photography crosses the caldera drawing on the method of the first explorers — almost a homage owed. Its centre shifts to the studio, where heterogeneous materials are transferred or painted onto the walls: geological diagrams, ancient iconography, reproductions of Grand Tour paintings. The Tables come from this second plane, a space where geology and mythology settle with no hierarchy between scientific datum and sacred image. Diagram and prodigy share the same visual field.

On the summit stood the temple of Iuppiter Latiaris, its position translating the mountain’s activity into religious form. Livy recorded a rain of lapilli on Monte Cavo as a prodigy and fixed its ritual answer, the novendiale sacrum, to be repeated each time the mountain spoke. The god of lightning and the volcano share one grammar.

On the slopes, in the crater of Nemi, lay the sacred wood of Diana Nemorensis, who owes her name to the wood, nemus. Here the cult rises from wood and water: the crater basin filled to become the speculum Dianae, the wood that rings it. One geology generates two orientations, one toward the sky, one toward the earth.

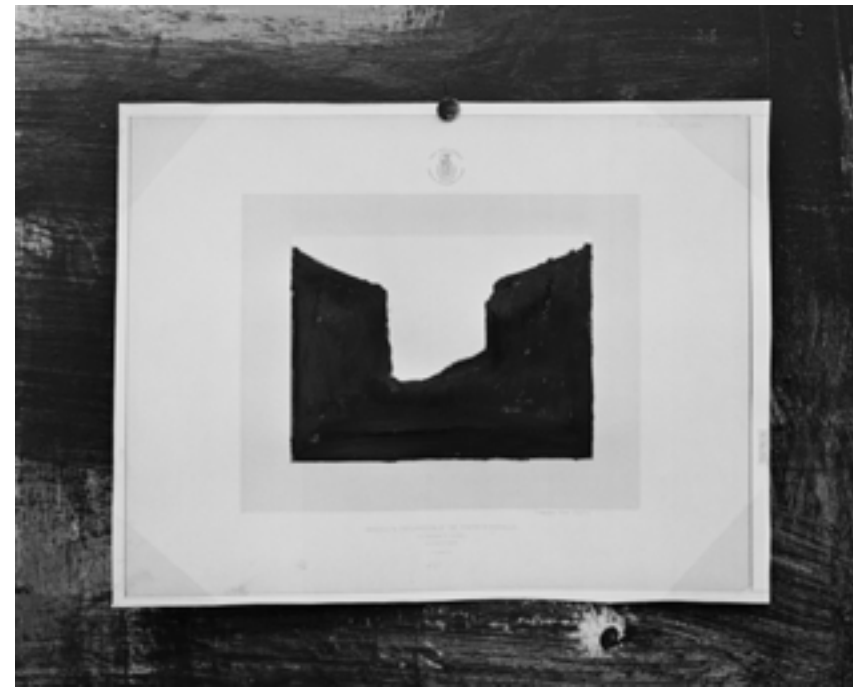
From here the work follows two lines that cross: one along the summit, one descending into the wood of the crater. Two readings of the same volcanic structure — a territory already populated by images, where geology, myth, iconography and observation are different ways of looking at one place.





Table No. 1

(After Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel)





Plasticine model of Lake Albano.





Table No. 7
Volcanic lightning.



Diana Nemorensis.



Jupiter Latiaris.







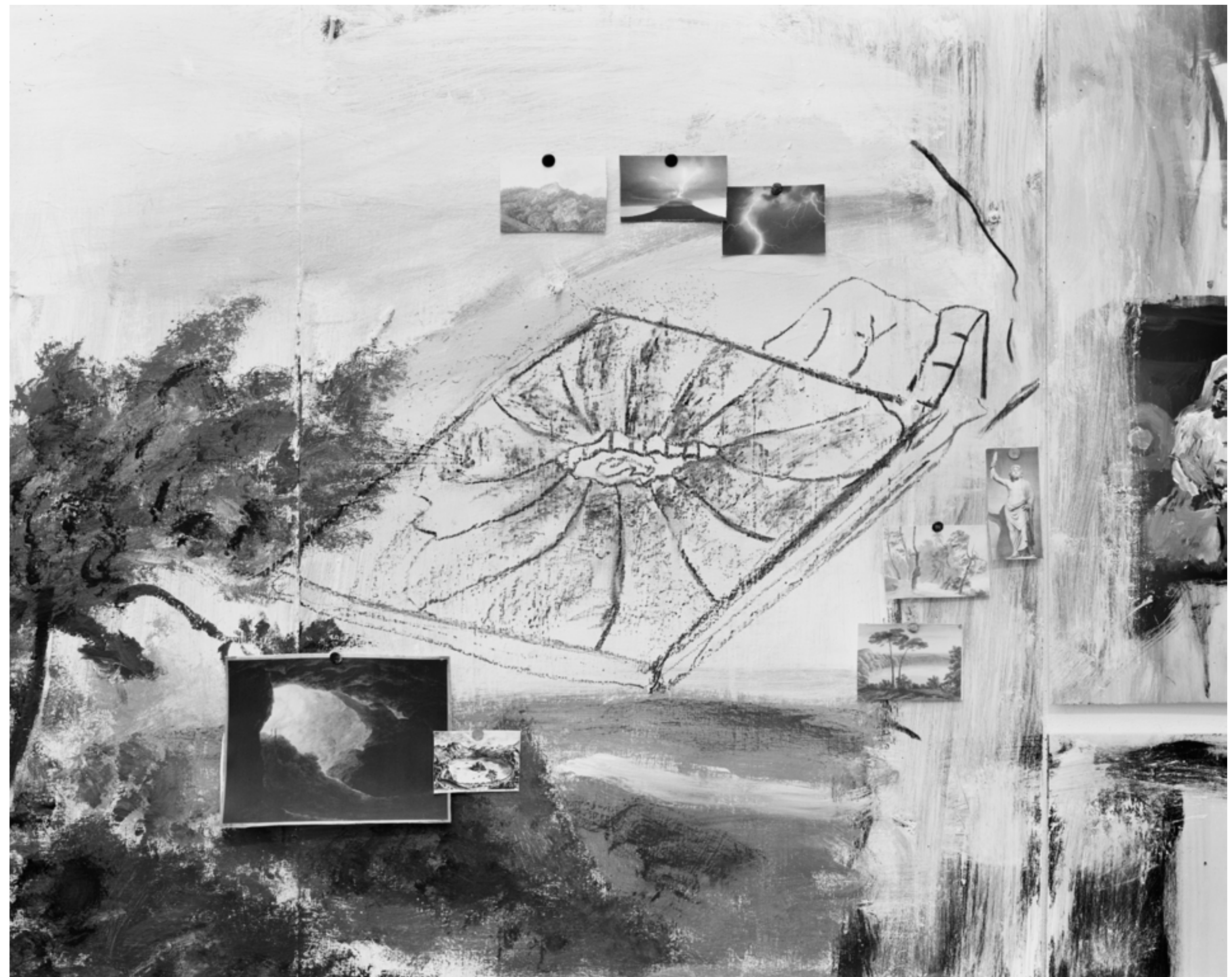


Table No. 6
Caldera formation.





Table No. 3
(After John Robert Cozens, Lake Nemi, Italy c. 1777)



Table No. 8

(After John Robert Cozens, Lake and Town of Nemi, Italy c. 1779)



Table No. 4
(After Thomas Girtin and J.M.W. Turner, after John Robert Cozens, Lake Albano from Palazzolo, 1794–97)



Table No. 5

(After John Robert Cozens, The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo, Italy c. 1783)



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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 costline. 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”I. I.Naomi Itami

Selected exhibitions

2026
No Place like Home — Italian photography since the 1980s,
SCHAUWERK Sindelfingen, Germany

2025
No Place like Home — Italian photography since the 1980s,
Kunsthalle Darmstadt, Germany
On the Edge of the Eyelid,
Nivola Museum, Orani (Nu)

2024
The Secret of the Deep Time,
Verwey Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands
Works for a Cosmic Feeling,
Witty Books, Turin

2023
Tre-di-ci ,Sguardi sui musei di Lombardia (Group exhibition)
Palazzo Reale, Milano, Italy

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 beetween 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

Among (When the Sea Comes In) — Witty Books 2026
Ashes — Aniene 2026
Works for a Cosmic Feeling — Witty Books 2024
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 — Fondazione malaspina edition, 2014
Vision And Documents Box, — Documentary Platform, 2010
Diary N° o - Things that do not happen — 3/3, 2009