

Kunsthalle Basel

Yuri Ancarani

Sculture

Solo Exhibition



Yuri Ancarani, *The Challenge*, 2016, film still.

February 9 – April 29, 2018
Press Preview February 8, 2018, at 11 am
Opening February 9, 2018, at 7 pm

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1 Yuri Ancarani

1.1 Project Description

This first solo exhibition in Switzerland and first exhibition ever to survey the output of the Italian artist-filmmaker Yuri Ancarani will span his production from 2010 to the present, including a new film installation conceived for the occasion. Such an exhibition is perfectly poised to highlight this seminal artist's impressive career and to present an overview of his films in the artistic context for which his films were originally made. It is also a timely moment to allow audiences who might know one or more film to view the precision and poetry of his fascinating vision across the last 10 years of his practice.

Ravishing in their every cinematic detail, the films of Ancarani (b. 1972 in Ravenna; lives and works in Milan) are engrossing portraits of the more obscure places and sides of our everyday existence. Each follows a peculiar choreography of bodies and places and technologies that constructs an image of labor, the human condition, the mechanical, and the architectural that is as mesmerizing as it is diagnostic. The process and resulting artworks of this artist-filmmaker, who is also professor of video art at NABA - Nuova Accademia Belle Arti (Milan), are methodical and exquisite, exacting and hypnotic. Unlike either the tradition of documentary filmmaking that privileges the collection and exposure of "evidence," or the cinematic tradition that privileges the creation of a narrative, Ancarani's tightly composed, often wordless films have from the start been aesthetically driven—strangely beautiful and poetic engagements with the history of painting and sculpture and sound art as much as with the history of artist-made films, from Andy Warhol to Tacita Dean.

Ancarani will apply his vision to the design of the exhibition itself, having conceived a scenography with different kinds of screening possibilities for each film as well as special attention to the kind of perception particular to an exhibition. His show will include a presentation of the artist's trilogy of short films *La malattia del ferro*, portraying the symphony-conductor-like gestures of a Carrara stone-quarry foreman guiding workers and their forklifts to extract and displace massive hunks of marble with the elegance of ballet, in *Il Capo* (2010); the closed environment of scuba divers on a submarine stationed deep below the surface of the ocean, in *Piattaforma Luna* (2011); and chillingly filmed surgical procedures, performed with the aid of specialized medical machinery, *Da Vinci* (2012). It will also include his film devoted to the spirit of Carlo Mollino, conjured by a medium who "speaks" for the deceased designer-architect, *Séance* (2014), as well as several recent short films, *The Wedding* (2017), revealing the idiosyncratic side of an all-male world and rituals of a Qatar wedding, and *Whipping Zombie* (2017), focused on a ritual of another sort, the so called Kale Zonbi, or "whipping zombie" dance of masters and slaves in a remote Haitian village. Importantly, the exhibition will also feature his first long film, *The Challenge* (2016), presented with a specially conceived immersive projection.

These previous productions, each focused on a different, difficult to access or closed environment, provide the perfect contextualization for a new film installation that the artist wishes to make in Milan's San Vittore prison. Ancarani's new film *San Vittore* (working title) is a project the artist has wanted to realize for several years already. Having already visited the San Vittore prison over the years, Ancarani proposes to make a new video installation from inside this legendary prison, focusing on the peculiar architecture of incarceration and in particular on the wing for female inmates and their children.



Yuri Ancarani, *San Siro*, 2014, film still.

It would serve as a kind of pendant element to his 2014 film *San Siro*, a portrait of another Milan architectural landmark, the San Siro sports stadium, which will also be shown in the exhibition. Although each film can be considered independent of the other, by pairing the two and creating a relationship between them—much as with his films in the trilogy *La malattia del ferro*—the understanding of each becomes even more layered and complex in meaning. In *San Vittore*, the artist would turn his peculiar attention to architectural detail and fascination with different kinds of human labor (whether that of the athlete or of the incarcerated) into a diptych with his previously realized *San Siro*. Ancarani would thus, importantly, complete his long dreamed of tribute to Milan and two of its saints, thus documenting and celebrating the city where he has for 25 years lived and worked, from his student days until now.

Ancarani's films have been shown at some of the most prestigious national and international museums and exhibition contexts. Despite this attention and indeed confirmation, the range of his filmic practice has not until now been shown on a grand scale. His exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel aims to remedy that and allow a greater understanding of the complexity and artistry of Ancarani's oeuvre.

Connected to this, the exhibition will be followed by the publication of the first monographic catalogue on the artist, a co-production of Kunsthalle Basel and Castello di Rivoli in Turin. The catalogue will survey the artist's filmic production and will include newly commissioned essays.

1.2 CV

Born 1972 in Ravenna, Italy. Lives and works in Milan, Italy.

AWARDS (SELECTION)

- 2013 - "Best International Short Film", RIDM – Montreal International Documentary Festival, Montreal (CA)
- Short Film Grand Prize, IndieLisboa, 10th International Independent Film Festival, Lisbon
- 2012 - Grand Prix "Lab Competition", Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival (FR)
- "Best documentary", New Horizon I.F.F, Wroclaw (PL)
- 2011 - "Best Short", L'alternativa- Barcelona Independent Film Festival (ES)

SOLO SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2017 - *Biennale of Moving Images*, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (CH)
- 2016 - *Bora. Museum Calls the Artist – AMACI*, Museo del Novecento, Milan (IT)
- 2015 - *The Malady of Irony*, HIT Gallery, Bratislava
- 2014 - *Yuri Ancarani*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (US)
- *La Malattia del Ferro / Die Krankheit des Eisens*, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin
- 2012 - *Ricordi per moderni*, Museo Marino Marini, Florence (IT)
- *La malattia del ferro*, ZERO..., Milan (IT)
- 2010 - *Made in Italy*, N.O. Gallery, Milan (IT)
- 2009 - *Souvenir*, Studio di via Ariani, Ravenna (IT)
- *Pink Flag*, T.I.C.A. Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art, Tirana
- 2008 - *In God We Trust*, PlacentiaArte, Piacenza (IT)
- *Rendering Video, Yuri Ancarani, Kjersti Sundland*, T.I.C.A. Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art, Tirana
- 2007 - *Yuri Ancarani*, N.O. Gallery, Milan (IT)

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

- 2016 - *Studio Systems*, The American Academy in Rome Gallery
- *People Like Us*, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart (AU)
- *Architecture of Life*, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (US)
- 2015 - *Ennesima / Umpteenth*, Triennale di Milano, Milan (IT)
- *GLOBALE: Exo-Evolution*, ZKM, Karlsruhe (DE)
- *Body-Me: The Body in the Age of Digital Technology*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt a. M. (DE)
- *Artists' Film International*, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul (TU)
- 2014 - *Shit and Die*, Palazzo Cavour, Turin (IT)
- *Inside*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris
- *Puisqu'on vous dit que c'est possible*, Saline Royale d'Arc et Senans (FR)
- *The sea is my land. Artisti dal Mediterraneo*, La Triennale di Milano (IT)
- *Premio Italia Arte Contemporanea*, MAXXI, Rome
- *In forma di ceramica*, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice (IT)
- *Video screening 25*, Zero, Milan (IT)
- 2013 - *The Sea is my Land*, MAXXI, Rome
- *Off course Fuori rotta*, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice
- *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th International Venice Biennale, Venice
- 2012 - *Le Associazioni Libere*, La Maison Rouge, Paris
- *Sotto la strada, la spiaggia*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin

1.3 Images (selection)



Yuri Ancarani, *The Challenge*, 2016, film still.



Yuri Ancarani, *Da Vinci*, 2012, film still.



Yuri Ancarani, *Piattaforma Luna*, 2011, film still.



Yuri Ancarani, *Il Capo*, 2010, film still.



Yuri Ancarani, *Whipping Zombie*, 2017, film still.



Yuri Ancarani, *Séance*, 2014, film still.

1.4 Press Clipping (selection)

15/3/2017

The Opulent World of Qatari Falconry



HYPERALLERGIC

FILM

The Opulent World of Qatari Falconry

Yuri Ancarani's documentary *The Challenge* immerses viewers in the dazzling subculture of ultra-wealthy sheiks who practice falconry.

 Sean Hogan

14 hours ago



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani (all images courtesy Atopic Films, Dugong Production, La Bête, Ring Film)

Close to 100 falcons swarm in a gargantuan, high-ceilinged warehouse. Two men wearing thawbs (the traditional Arab garb consisting of a white headpiece and robe) slowly walk the perimeters of the room, spreading seed for the hungry birds. The score (from Lorenzo Senni and Francesco Fantini) uses woodwind, synthesizer, and xylophone in a manner cheekily reminiscent of the swelling, dramatic strings in the scores of film composer Bernard Herrmann, a frequent collaborator of Albert Hitchcock who served as sound consultant on *The Birds*. As more food hits the ground, many of the falcons land until only a few flutter around the emptying indoor airspace. The scene stretches over three minutes of wordless action, men feeding and falcons being fed.

This pure cinema — the reliance on juxtaposed moving images and little else to convey meaning — is typical of Italian director Yuri Ancarani's documentary *The Challenge*, screening this week at the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society of Lincoln Center as a part of the annual New

<http://hyperallergic.com/365110/the-opulent-world-of-qatari-falconry/>

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Directors/New Films series. Composed primarily of long, contemplative shots, the film waits 18 minutes into its 70-minute run time to introduce dialogue. Even when the characters — wealthy Qatari sheikhs obsessed with practicing falconry — do speak, the dialogue is not always of much consequence to the plot, typically an observation or an aside between two individuals. In the style of directors Bill and Turner Ross (*Western, Contemporary Color*), Ancarani's camera wanders around the edges of action and focuses its attention alternately on the action or the periphery, whichever is most engaging in that moment. This roving focus results in a film that amounts to a series of short vignettes about this subculture, detailing the lives of the men and their relationships with their falcons in the lead-up to a falconry competition. This impressionism makes for a beautifully lensed documentary.



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani

Opulence and excess are the lifeblood of *The Challenge*, most evident in how the competitors travel from their urban homes to the desert competition. One group of falconers roams the sands in a massive caravan of trucks, Jeeps, and SUVs. Another group rides the streets on a fleet of motorcycles with a golden bike riding point. A black Lamborghini and a spotted jungle cat are the prized possessions of one subject, and he uses the luxury automobile to bring the pet as his plus one.



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani

The falcons are the most exalted of the men's possessions. We see a falcon auction being streamed to a flat-screen television in an ornate salon. Two of the aspiring falconers sit on a couch while one of them bids via proxy, telephone strapped to his ear. As the duo watches the auction, they coldly comment on the attributes of the bird up for sale ("nice face," "good legs") as if it were inanimate. Viewers might experience a pang of outrage that the falcon in question eventually sells for \$24,000, but Ancarani avoids passing judgement. The film's free-floating framing helps the director present this world of unbridled materialism without imposing any particular perspective on the follies of the idle rich, a feat made all the more impressive by the fact that — aside from a shot of competitors praying toward Mecca — we are given no insights into these men's lives beyond their love of falconry.



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani

The director also blunts the potentially inflammatory impact of this type of conspicuous consumption by showing moments of camaraderie between man and beast. The aforementioned Lamborghini owner shows great affection toward his big cat, reaching over to the passenger's seat while driving to stroke

its furry cheek. Later, in a room full of gold-hued, plush couches and chairs replete with gilded molding, we see a man looking at his phone while a falcon perches on his left arm. The falcon bucks forward and backward and lifts its tail; the pair exchange a knowing glance, and the man moves the bird away to defecate. Even a crude moment like this can be heartwarming when it evinces such affection.

While the film's visuals are striking throughout, they become truly transcendent during the climactic competition. Once the contest starts, we hear the commentary of an announcer over footage of spectators listening to the play-by-play from the sidelines or from inside their cars. As the competition progresses, we see shots of the main event as relayed on a free-standing jumbotron screen installed in the desert. When the announcer's tempo and volume escalate, the perspective moves to a camera attached to the competing bird's head. This shaky vantage point shows the caravan of luxury SUVs and dots of human beings from the sky. The camera darts around the desert landscape, occasionally concentrating on one of the pigeons loosed by the falconers.



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani

At the climax, most viewers will realize that they do not actually know the rules or objectives of falconry. The sport's popularity has been in steady decline in the Western world since its peak in medieval times. Up to this point, Ancarani has made no effort to explain the rules, but we see them play out firsthand in the film's final minutes. Using the perspective of the falcon to present the action of falconry to an audience for the first time makes for a breathtaking ending full of graphic glory.

For film lovers curious about this unique activity and subculture of the super-wealthy, be warned: a major challenge in *The Challenge* is staying awake in the first half of the film. The paucity of dialogue and strict reliance on leisurely visuals might necessitate some caffeine before a screening. The final competition, though, is a visceral portrayal of a rarely seen experience, meriting the big screen afforded to such cutting edge work at New Directors/New Films.



Still from *The Challenge* (2016), directed by Yuri Ancarani

The Challenge screens March 16 at the *Museum of Modern Art* (11 West 53rd Street, Midtown, Manhattan)
on March 19 at the *Film Society of Lincoln Center* (65th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, Upper West Side, Manhattan) as part of the *New Directors/New Films* series.



 comments (0)

November 7, 2014

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Yuri Ancarani

HAMMER MUSEUM

10899 Wilshire Boulevard

September 27–January 19



In a dark and cushioned gallery, Yuri Ancarani's trilogy of short films *La malattia del ferro* (The Disease of Iron), 2010–12, plays on a seamless loop. Each lush 35-mm segment focuses on an “unseen” form of labor, reveling in the dexterity of machine-amplified human bodies: the micro movements of a da Vinci surgical machine inside the abdomen of a patient; the macro movements of two excavators with enough force to break a mountain into slabs, directed by the flicks and waves of a quarry chief; and the human movements of submarine sailors systematically manipulating the ergonomic suits and bulkheads and diving bells that house them at deadly depths.

Throughout, Ancarani's camera marvels at technologized, ultra-human extensions of labor. What is shown is no mean “work” but is in fact highly specialized, not to mention dangerous. Lurking under the smooth cinematography is the sense that the slightest error could be catastrophic: death by crushing for the sub crew or *il capo*, peritonitis for the patient under the da Vinci. This thrill—that such precision can be accomplished with an alien-looking apparatus—is paralleled in the apparent mastery of the filmmaker over his own, lensed extension. As his subjects go beyond their normal abilities, the artist sees as never before.

At the same time, Ancarani's films indulge in a technohumanist vein—in shots of the quarry chief's dense, glossy chest hair, or in a sequence where the robosurgeon's servos cycle through their range of articulation. Never mind that the doctor-operator almost certainly makes more than the quarry foreman—the value placed, seemingly, on mechanical sophistication over bodily risk. Surplus value be damned. Labor here obeys a “beautiful choreography.” *Il capo* stabs a stub-fingered hand into the air, stopping the excavator's claw. A sci-fi sound track sucks and groans as the da Vinci plunges into the abdomen, into the frame.

— Travis Diehl

Diehl, Travis, *Yuri Ancarani*, in: *Artforum*, 7.11.2014