

GABRIELE RISSO
VITA IMMOBILE

In Latin languages, 'still life' is translated as 'natura morta,' but that doesn't quite capture the sense of stillness in English. It's the quiet immobility of things that makes a place possible. I would translate it into Italian as vita immobile ('immobile life').

GR



Introduction by Catherine Li: In *Vita Immobile*, Gabriele Risso presents a selection of sculptural works developed since 2024, marking his debut solo exhibition. Presented at The Chapel at Brompton Cemetery, the exhibition explores how sculpture gives presence to space and how ordinary objects, approached through measurement and making, can open onto broader questions of perception, representation, and convention.

The exhibition unfolds across three tables: a circular table at the centre of the Chapel with still lifes, and two side tables with scale studies for large scale works. Organised through interconnected themes, it follows the path of the artist's study series, tracing how he returns to similar compositions as if guided by a rigorous geometric logic, while at the same time probing the truth of sculpture and space through both measurement and imagination. Working from what might seem the most conventional sculptural premise, still life, Risso reconfigures ordinary objects and familiar representations to question how they are seen, both individually and in relation to one another, treating them not as static subjects but as occasions to rethink how sculpture, and the act of sculpting, can disclose form and spatial presence.

Risso works primarily with figurative imagery, which appears less as a fully conscious decision than as a direction emerging through the process of making. Although the work was initially grounded in a more abstract engagement with space and the body, it gradually turned towards representation by beginning from things directly observed and physically accessible within the studio environment. What fascinates the artist is the way figuration opens onto a deeper search for the fundamental nature of things through the most ordinary objects.

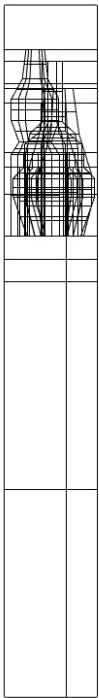
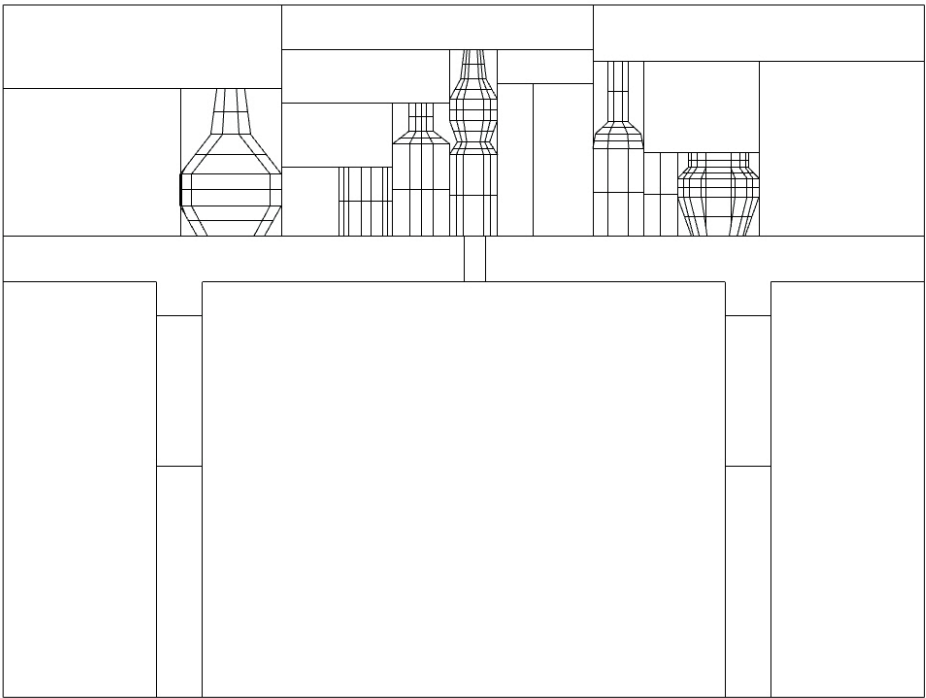
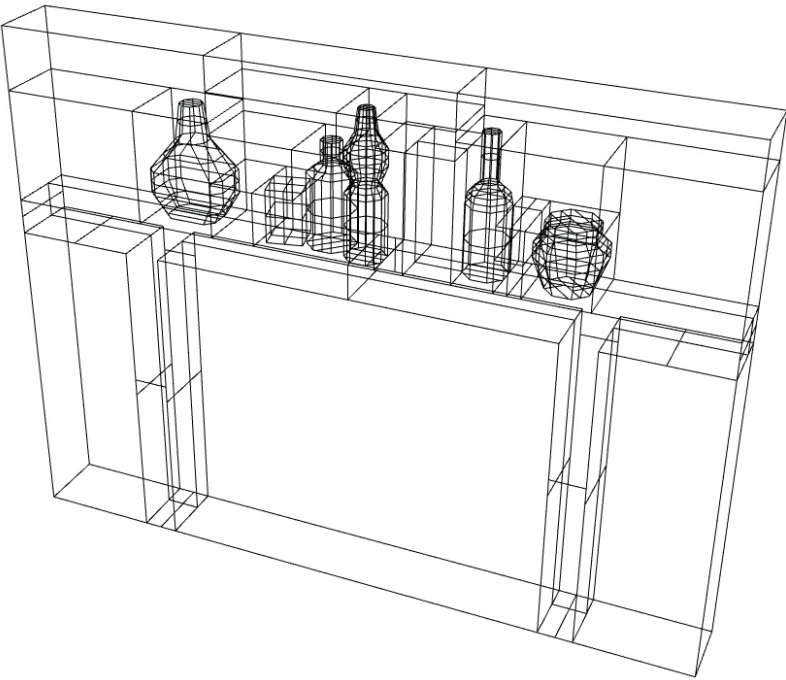
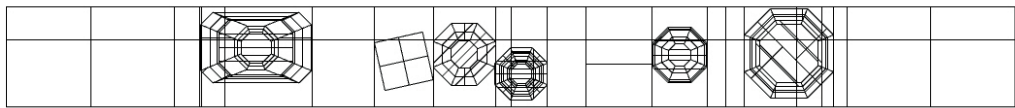
Risso's sculptural practice is profoundly informed by the legacy of pioneering modernist sculptors including Constantin Brâncuși, Alberto Giacometti, Isamu Noguchi and Eduardo Chillida, as well as contemporary artists such as Antony Gormley and Rachel Whiteread. Equally important is the influence of his first sculpture tutor, Massimo Chiappetta, with whom he studied in Genoa, Italy. He returns through them to sculpture's most persistent questions: what is sculpture, and how does it give meaning to space? At the centre of his practice is an ongoing re-examination of the sculptural method itself, particularly through the tension between revelation and concealment in the making process. As Risso has said, this is a way of "purify[ing] the eyes from the most conventional methods" of approaching a simple block of stone.

Conceived in relation to the cemetery setting, the exhibition reconsiders what can be seen and what remains unseen, and to the way the gravestone, as a motif of death, activates space through the slippery quality of stone itself: shifting from nature to culture, from object to landscape, from place to monument. The setting holds particular significance in relation to the artist's own attachment to the gravestone, as seen in his *Stone Tears* series, which is not included in the exhibition.

*I conceive space as a dense and undefined matter.
It is the sculptor's task to give it orientation,
direction, and movement. Only then does form
reveal its own limits, and space becomes palpable.*

GR

Digital drawing of *Centrepiece*, 2024, Concrete, Study model 13 (60 x 45 x 6,6 cm)



Starting from the table

a conversation with
Gabriele Risso

Catherine Li In your table series [fig. 1], why is the space divided and composed in this way? How do you determine those divisions? What kind of measurement are they based on?

Gabriele Risso This is very much connected to Eduardo Chillida. I was really interested in something he said: he once defined space as fast matter, and matter as slow matter. Air is matter too, just a faster one, whereas the matter of a solid object is slow, solidified matter. It is the same idea, really: everything is matter.

So if I consider all space as undefined matter, then it is up to the sculptor to bring measure, to bring order, to bring movement to something that does not have any of that at all. If you look at this slate slab, which is quite beautiful, it is almost like a Mark Rothko – an infinite space. A dark space without definition. Just the frame of a painting, and if you really fall into it, it becomes an emotional space of dark colours. Nothing exists. This is, in a way, emptiness.

And when you carve, you carve vision. As soon as I draw the figure of the table, you begin to see what is low, what is high, what is left, what is right. Then, when I start to carve into it, that carving becomes a way of shaping vision – of carving depth, understanding distances, building an organised world. That is why I really like the flat surface as a metaphor: the flat surface of the slab as without sign, as nothing, as an indifferent space. As soon as you mark it, something happens. At the same time, you end up dealing with something close to a picture, because there is always this sense of frontality, even though I am carving in and making space by subtracting material. It still has something to do with images, with painting.

I am testing the same composition across all the table series. This piece, I want to call it *Centrepiece*, because by evoking the symbolic image of the table, it is like elevating the ground. Carl Andre made a paving and said: this is sculpture, because by making the



Fig.1. *Centrepiece*, 2024 – 29 concrete pieces, study model 1:3, 60 × 45 × 6,6 cm

ground, by making a space for things to be, you create something that was not there before. It is about trying to return to a more original way of thinking, before all the habits and assumptions we have as human beings.

So if this is the centrepiece, then all the space around it is organised in relation to it. This is what gives proportion to the surrounding space. You can imagine its surroundings as a room, and this is the centre, the table in the middle of the room. It simply gives measure to the space around it. That is what sculpture does. If a room is empty, and then you place a sculpture in the middle, the space becomes palpable. It becomes something you can feel.

So again, what gives measure to space is the sculpture. The centrepiece dictates the proportions of the surrounding space. It solidifies the surroundings, it solidifies the room.

CL It makes me think of the way we curate exhibitions. For example, when working on your exhibition, we have to measure the works and then measure the space in relation to them. If we were not placing anything in a space – not organising an exhibition, not installing any work – we might never think of measuring it in that way at all.

It mirrors the curatorial process beautifully, because we do not usually notice space through its proportions until something asks us to. In your case, you were trying to make the round table correspond to the circular aperture above, and we kept looking at the dome simply because it is beautiful, without really thinking about its scale. You were also looking closely at the pillars, the sides of the doors, the divisions between the windows, and the way the walls are split. It felt like you were reading the architecture proportionally. So in a way, it seems that you are reading the exhibition space just as you read the space within sculpture, understanding how the work defines it, and how it makes space more solid, or more palpable, for us.

CL Let's talk about this piece, *Desk* [fig. 2]. What is the process?

GR It is literally a table and a chair. Then I block everything between them. You have the table, you have the chair, and these blocks occlude the spaces between the legs of the chair and the table. I block out the space until the whole thing becomes a solid block. And this work is a very strong reference to Rachel Whiteread.

I am still thinking about the titles. I like to play with them. The ones I call *Still Lives* are obviously still lifes. For this show, I am not sure about some of the titles. Some work well; others do not feel definite yet. Words like *Block*, *Fastened*, *Occluded*, *Wrapped*, or *Enveloped* can give a key to reading the piece, but I do not want to rely on titles that are simply open-ended verbs. For me, that is not enough.

CL I can see that, but at the same time it feels quite different. It may be a kind of homage to Rachel Whiteread, but it is different. She is trying to reveal a space we cannot normally see, often by replicating everyday objects through casting, by taking the cast of the real thing. What you are doing feels different: your focus is on making proportion, looking at the measurement of space. I think that is one of the major differences between you and her. It is like showing a different way of looking at the same thing.

I know that Antony Gormley is also another major influence on your work, and he also looks into proportions. How do you see his work particularly in relation to what you are trying to figure out?

GR For Gormley, everything goes back to his own body. The thing that gives measure to everything for him is always his own body. Then he finds ways to map the inside of the body, and he invents the rules. For example, in works like *Domains*, he uses a system of sticks. Let's say he has six different lengths: the longest is maybe



Fig.2. *Desk*, 2024 – 20 concrete pieces, study model 1:3, 36 × 27 × 27 cm

a foot, then another at three-quarters of a foot, then half a foot, then a quarter, and so on. With these six different lengths, he maps the inside of the body. In this way, he invents the rules of the game, invents a language.

In another work, if the body is made from blocks, he might have five different block measurements, and he uses those to map the inside of the body. Gormley deals with representation in a very radical way, but always through his own body. In that sense, he is close to Rachel Whiteread, because she takes casts of space, while he takes casts of his own body. From there, they build their whole poetics, which is very strong. But that is the starting point for both of them.

CL Looking at these two artists, how do you position your own practice in relation to what Gormley and Whiteread have done?

GR I never begin from casting. I feel close to them, but at the same time what I do is different. If we stay with Rachel Whiteread for a moment: she takes casts of spaces. I do something else. For example, in the work *Desk*, I use the image of the table, but it is not a real table. I use the idea of the table as a starting point for the sculpture. Whiteread remains close to reality. It is an actual table, and she takes a cast of it. What I am doing is different: I begin from the idea of a table and ask how I can sculpt it, how I can construct it, how I can shape it in space.

For her, it is the imprint of a real space. What she has done is extraordinary, and I learned a great deal from her. I am grateful to her, because she made space itself into a protagonist: space as a material, space solidified. That is a beautiful and important achievement. For me, I want to go further. I do not want to take a standard table or standard measurements. I want to design the table itself, and determine the spaces between things through the act of making. That process is the work. I want to create measurement, to think about measurement, and not to take it as something given. So yes, I am dealing with similar questions, but I am not taking casts from reality. I am trying to construct those relations sculpturally.

CL Is this process of measurement similar to the way Antony Gormley uses his own body to create a language, or do you think it is different?

GR It is a bit different. The measurements I arrive at are not invented in the same way. He really invents a system for mapping the inside of the body, which is extraordinary. For now, that is not what I am doing. In the end, because I work with stone, and because stone is very important to me. If I have to draw a table, or a chair, or anything, I think in this way: I am drawing something very conventional, very, very conventional, but I begin from the idea that not even the space around the object exists – space and object are the same thing. Until I begin to set limits, nothing exists. Cutting space is really what I have been doing.

So yes, I feel like I am a son, or a kind of disciple, of them. We could say Antony Gormley and Rachel Whiteread are like my father and my mother – they are of an age where that is almost literally true. Maybe Gormley could even be my grandfather. But I would not exist without them. They educated me. And I think I am slowly

arriving at my own way of making and thinking, which is related, but at the same time, hopefully, distinct.

CL I think it is really interesting to speak about the artists who influence you as parents, and it actually makes a lot of sense. There are already so many talented artists ahead of us, but that does not mean we need to stop making, or stop creating. It means we need to create more, think more, and go beyond them too.

GR Yes. My mentor always, from the very beginning, told me that you should look at and study the great masters of our time.

CL But if Rachel and Antony are your parents, how about Noguchi?

GR Well, I love Noguchi, and I will always continue studying him.

CL I think Noguchi creates a universe, because he seems to care about more things. There is the human body, daily objects, furniture, but also landscape – almost everything.

GR Yes, and that is why I love Noguchi. But at the same time, you can love all the artists in the world and still have affinities you cannot help. My mentor always pushed me to look at Brâncuși and Noguchi more than anyone else. But I could not help feeling much closer to Giacometti. Not necessarily more, just closer, closer in the way things felt to me. And they are completely different kinds of artists. I forced myself to look at Brâncuși more. But in the end, because of who I am, I found myself elsewhere. You really understand your affinities when you try to make sculpture yourself.

I wish I could be closer to Noguchi or Brâncuși, but I find that I have to stay with something very basic – like reality. When I finished my studies, I wanted to leave behind the happiness of studying and simply begin making sculpture. I remember wanting to do something, so I took three objects and tried to begin by representing them. And then I realised that what came out was something very real, very honest – something that truly came from me.



Appear, 2020, concrete, 30 x 35 x 11 cm.

CL Could you say a little more about that starting point? What was your background, and what led you to sculpture?

GR It was always sculpture, although in a slightly different way from here. In Italy, art education is still very traditional: you choose a department, just as you do at the RCA for your Master's. So in Italy, I applied to the sculpture department for my BA, and then again for my MA. I studied sculpture throughout my university years.

But I also have to say that I went to art school without any real idea of becoming an artist. I knew nothing about art before that, really nothing at all. Before art school, I was not very good at school in general. I got to a point where I either had to go to university or start working. I did not want to work, but I also did not want to study economics or anything like that. My parents knew I was good at sport, and I was very good at running. The coach at school said to them, "If Gabriele stops being lazy and comes every day, he could become a professional athlete." So I thought, fine, I will run. I preferred that.

At the same time, my parents said, "Let's think of an option B." Art school was really the only option. Then I went and met my sculpture professor, who immediately blew my mind. Very soon after, I realized I did not want to run. I did not have a real passion for it, but this man, my professor, made me deeply care about what he was doing. So I said to myself, I want to become like him. His name is Massimo Chiappetta. He initiated me into art, and from the very beginning, he made me understand that becoming an artist was an extraordinary ambition. For the first five years at university, I was really just trying to begin, trying to look at everything, but mainly at what he suggested.

In the final year of my studies, I was living in Paris on an Erasmus exchange at the Beaux-Arts de Paris. It is an amazing art school compared with the one in Milan, which has a big name, but it is terrible in terms of facilities; there were no proper workshops, not even proper spaces to work in. In Paris, the environment was much more supportive. They had a workshop for every material. I remember not knowing what to do, so I just went into every

workshop and treated it as an exercise, trying to improve my skills with different materials. I learned to forge – they had an amazing forge, so I started working there. I made some pieces that I really liked. Sometimes I think that if I had been able to continue with the forge, my work would have become completely different.

The work I made there was very Eduardo Chillida. You know, Picasso said, “I wanted to become like Cézanne, and then I became Picasso.” Picasso is Picasso, of course, but I understand something of that feeling. I was looking at Chillida, studying him, and making those forged works under that influence, though in a different way.

At the time, I really loved working in the forge, and I wanted to continue. I even asked the teacher if there was another forge I could use somewhere around Paris, but the only option was too far away, so I could not continue. I really wanted to, but it did not happen.

Then, after finishing university, I suddenly found myself alone, without a university or a studio. I felt I needed to start again from zero. Not because all those years of study were not beautiful or important – I learned so much – but because I wanted to forget everything for a moment and find a way to begin.

CL Was that the point when you began making the still lifes? How did you arrive at that direction?

GR I remember I had a group of objects in the middle of a table, and I started asking myself: how can I understand the way these things stay in space? So I made a small block of clay, and then, using straight angles, I tried to locate points – this point here, that point there – shaping the form in that way [fig. 3]. I was so happy because it felt honest to me, deeply honest. But as soon as I showed it to a couple of friends or my mentor, they said, “Here you need to deal with Gormley. This is clearly a reference to Gormley. You need to understand what you want to do with that.” I was disappointed because, when I was making it, I felt it came from a very honest place. But yes, definitely, that kind of work was too close to Gormley.



Fig.3. *Rooms*, 2019



Fig.4. Paris, 2019

Then I remember again having a group of objects in the middle of the table, looking at them, trying to understand their relationships. Instead of measuring them in a direct way, I began making drawings of the relations between objects. That really started in Paris after university. The more time I spent with it, the more I saw that what I was doing was quite strange. I was building a block around the objects and then opening the space back up again. [fig.4] In a way, I am still doing that now. What I am doing now in the table series is still returning to that: taking a composition and looking at it through different variations, trying to sculpt it again, trying to sculpt it better.

There was a period when I made a large-scale commission of a human figure, and that brought the question very strongly: should I move towards figuration of the human body? I always knew from the beginning that I wanted to deal with figuration. I never wanted to begin from abstraction. I always wanted to engage with the long history of art attempting to represent the body, animals, and the world around us. When you deal with figuration, you deal with everything. The objects I used were really just a pretext to begin, a pretext to make sculpture, because I needed to begin somewhere. And that search inevitably led me into representing things as they are, or almost as they are.

CL You mentioned in our previous conversation that you are particularly drawn to the methods of stonemasonry. Could you explain that again, and why it is so important to you?

GR I am particularly drawn to the tradition of stonemasonry developed during the construction of Gothic cathedrals. These practices rely on a sophisticated knowledge of stereotomy: the cutting of solids, and therefore of space itself. Historically, these techniques belonged to architectural construction, but my ambition is to free them from their purely functional role and return them to the artistic act.

But when I represented something like cloth, I ran into difficulties, because the methods of stonemasonry cannot process that directly. That made me question representation, and I thought, in that case, I would need to use compasses, because they are the most accurate and efficient tool.

CL So you cannot use stonemasonry to make something like cloth?

GR Actually, you can, because if you look at medieval draperies, they are much more geometric, much more rigid. The process is conceptual.

CL So it becomes more imaginary, and you are not trying to make an exact replica?

GR Yes, because that is not the goal. It becomes an invention of cloth, something that has nothing to do with real cloth. It is simply cloth in sculpture.

Revealing the shape only partially always left me unsatisfied. It shows the process, but looks unfinished, it feels like an abandoned work. Yet that process shows how things occupy space within the block of stone. The block is, in a sense, a room. What obsessed me was this idea: if the block is like a dark space, then by cutting into it you bring light into it. There is something about taking position, revealing the world, founding a place. Even when I was doing something small, metaphorically I wanted the block to be much bigger than me, much bigger than everything – huge blocks. Sometimes I dream of sculpting blocks as large as buildings, simply out of the desire to sculpt the entire world. Anyway, if your goal is to reproduce the world exactly, then the best way is with compasses.

CL You have always been especially interested in stone as a material. Perhaps we could begin with this work, *Stone Tear* [fig. 5], which I really like. It seems to involve a much lighter touch than your more recognisable, highly refined still life works, but there is a profound line of thought behind it.



Fig.5. *Stone Tears*, 2024



Fig.6. *Stone Tear*, 2024, Local stone, Serra Riccò. 113 x 82 x 47 cm

GR Yes, it is an ambitious project, and it began from a gravestone I made for my grandmother in Serra Riccò. [fig.6] I was actually writing about this yesterday for a residency application:

“A project that holds significant meaning for me: it consists of nine boulders upon which I will enact simple interventions to give them measure. Similar to a cosmogony, on each boulder I will sculpt a horizontal plane resting on the ground, thus defining their relationship with open space. Next, the height will be determined, along with the four cardinal directions, in order to define a space. The blocks will be in dialogue with the boulders that house them, as well as with each other and with the surrounding space.

What I understood while doing this work was the creative power of the sculptor to give measure. Certainly, a stone has body and limits, but these are not visible unless they are exposed by an artist such as Lee Ufan. The transition from nature to culture, and therefore the human capacity to transform something from nature into something nameable, is an original act. A stone can be small, large, or the mountain itself, but it has no measure. A block has measure, proportions, and limits; it is already sculpture.

Regarding these thoughts on stone, I was very struck by how Noguchi, with very few interventions, gave orientation, movement, and direction to stones while leaving them mostly unworked. When I had the chance to see them in person last year, I was impressed by the way those sculptures stood in space.”

I do not think I explained it very well when I said that stone has no limits. What I really mean is that I came to think of space as a dense, undefined matter because I work with stone – not because I began from some abstract philosophical concept. Stone gave me that way of thinking.

Stone is hard. You cannot work it fruitfully without knowing what you are doing; otherwise, you get tired. You need to know what you want. Stone forced me toward this. So I need to be clearer that it is the stone itself that produced this way of thinking in me.

Again, stonemasonry is a tradition I love very much, but it is also tied to labour: carving gravestones, working for architecture, working for buildings. It is a craft, a trade. There is art in it, of course, but not necessarily sculpture as I mean it. I know many stonemasons with extraordinary knowledge, but they are not sculptors. And I think that if some of them were to add just a little of the sculptor's way of thinking, of questioning more deeply, they would realise how rich and incredible their knowledge really is.

CL Could you say more about your resistance to being categorised as either abstract or figurative? Earlier you also mentioned wanting to approach a very conventional subject through a highly unconventional process.

GR Yes, that is my aim. Because what I am doing is, in one sense, completely conventional.

CL What feels conventional here?

GR What I mean is the subject: a table, bottles, ordinary things. These are conventional images. If Paul Klee draws a tree, he generates a tree. Cézanne paints a still life, and he reads it as geometric forms. Then what matters is the way they avoid being conventional in the act of making. I also try to look at conventional images in a way that purifies my eyes from conventional ways of seeing them

CL So what is the link, for you, to Paul Klee and Cézanne? They are both making images in ways that resist direct imitation. Their work feels generative rather than illustrative. But in your case, the process also seems very rigorous, very measured, very clear. So what makes your approach unconventional?

GR What I represent are conventional things: a table, bottles, containers, they are all very ordinary images. I am not really questioning the subject itself. What I hope is not conventional is the way I sculpt them. Of course, I know that using ordinary images can easily push the work toward something almost pop, because it gives people something immediately recognisable. Everyone knows what a table is. Everyone knows what a bottle is. But I remember once telling my mentor, Massimo, that I had been selected for an important competition with what felt to me like a very banal idea. He said something I didn't quite understand at the time, and I am still thinking about it: perhaps an image that seems banal is not banal, depending on what you do with it.

For example, *Open Table* [fig. 7] may seem banal: a table with objects on top. But hopefully it is not banal, because underneath there is the cross as a symbol that gives orientation to space. They are not simply legs; they are what gives direction, foundation, grounding. Then there is the horizontal circular plane that raises the ground. And on top there are containers, but they become offerings. Through their form, they suggest an upward movement, an ascension. I wrote about it like this: "The sculpture draws on the



Fig.7. *Open Table*, 2025 – carved block Irish blue stone, Study model 40 × 40 × 32 cm

archetypal form of the table as a place of gathering and exchange. *Open Table* evokes hospitality and encounter, transforming a familiar domestic object into a symbolic and spatial form."

CL Could you return to that moment after Paris – after the fascination with the forge, and after your earlier ways of working – when you began again by placing objects in the studio and starting with the bottles and table works?

GR I did it unconsciously. In the end, I wanted to deal with figuration. The reason was that I simply could not begin from abstraction. Perhaps I could have taken a more non-representational direction, thinking about space in a more abstract way, coming from the body, like Chillida or Noguchi. But instead, I just started from what was in front of me. I wanted to begin somewhere, and I began by looking at something directly in front of me [fig. 5]. That choice then determined the direction of the research. I do not mean compromised in a negative sense, now I am very happy with where it has led me. I still find it very interesting because of the questions it keeps opening: what is representation? What is figuration? What is a conventional image? What does it mean to work after so many centuries of tradition? That is exciting to me. I think I am mixing the two things a little: a kind of cosmogony, a generation of the world, through the representation of ordinary things. The work just took that direction, and I followed it. And yes, as I said before, my affinity with Giacometti was very strong, perhaps stronger than with Brâncuși, I am afraid.



Rizzo's drawing of the proposed full-scale arrangement for *Open Table*

finding ways to represent the space around objects, or the objects themselves in relation to the space around them.

CL So in a sense, you are not really studying still life itself – you are studying the space around it.

GR Yes. But as a sculptor, I need to make sculpture. Or I make a small-scale model, because a model of a table is fine – it becomes more like a study, almost like in architecture. These are objects with a scale I can afford to work with. I just began from there. But if I could make larger sculptures, maybe I would move away from the table, away from still life, and toward other things. So it is always a mixture of what you can do and what is actually available to you. It is very realistic.

CL That is interesting, because people often become fixed on the bottles, or on the final image in your work, and then immediately relate it to artists such as Morandi, simply because that is what they can recognise. But perhaps it is similar to Picasso: he used women repeatedly as a subject, but the subject was never really the point. What mattered was how he made the painting, how he reinvented the figure through painting.

GR Yes, that is true. I like Picasso. At the same time, what is great about Picasso is that he invented an incredible language, but what he did always came from real life. If he was with a woman – if he was with Marie-Thérèse – that entered the work. If she was emotional, that entered the work. The paintings become intricate and inventive, but you still feel that they are tied to something real, to something lived. Sometimes you can see that the woman is crying. Or you can feel the sadness of war in the drawings he made during the war. That is what is extraordinary: he is a great inventor, but the work is also intertwined with life. So even the most invented language becomes emotional, because it is bound up with what he is really living through.

CL So is that where the theme of still life really emerged?

GR Still life came more than a year later. At first, I was simply doing things: putting a few objects together, accumulating them, arranging them, measuring them, because I enjoyed that process. Then, when I first began to show the work, people started saying immediately it was like Morandi. Which was a surprise to me, as it never came to my mind before simply because he is a painter and he deals with problems that are completely different from mine. He deals with tonalities on a two-dimensional realm, and I don't. And I realised that simply by placing objects in a different arrangement, I could keep asking questions. In the end, I was never really interested in the subject itself. I was not especially interested in the objects I was representing. I just wanted a few things in front of me so that I could try to make sculptures.

So still life came because I accepted that I was going to represent objects. But for a long time, the works could easily have remained untitled. If I represent objects, then yes, it becomes a still life. But I am not really interested in still life as such. I am interested in



Hand Studies, 2020

CL Let's talk a little more about the exhibition itself. It has a very short run, only four days, as it takes place over Easter weekend. At the Chapel, events can normally only happen at weekends, since weekdays are primarily reserved for funeral services, so in this case we have four days because of Easter. How do you feel about that duration?

GR Even if it had not been Easter, I think I would still have chosen the longer weekend. A lot of friends said to me, "Be careful, because it's Easter, many people will go away." So probably, if I had chosen the previous weekend, more people might have been able to come. But at the same time, I did not want everything to feel rushed. Just the idea of arriving on Saturday morning, installing the work, and then having to take everything down again the next day did not appeal to me at all. I would have had no time to appreciate all the effort that went into it. Within four days, I thought it was the better option. Even if many people are away for Easter, at least I have time to enjoy the work a little, to spend time with it, even to get bored with it, and to have time for contemplation. When everything is rushed, you do not really have time to contemplate. And contemplation needs time.

CL Let's talk about the design of the exhibition and the choice of works. We had quite a few different plans at the beginning. One question was whether to focus on the works you are best known for, or to move more towards site-specific and experimental pieces, such as *Stone Tears*, or works that would respond more directly to the Chapel and to the cemetery. There were several possibilities. Are you happy with where we arrived in the end?

GR One of the first ideas was to make a model of the Chapel. In a way, that would have suited my way of making things. It could have become a site-specific work, because it would have been the Chapel itself seen from a sculptor's point of view, so to speak. But the idea never really grew strongly enough on its own. Maybe if we had had more time, I could have included it as one of the works in the show. I did some sketches and very small maquettes, but nothing truly convinced me. The idea did not yet feel strong enough to be developed fully into a work. Also, I ended up giving priority to a couple of other works that I really wanted to complete for this exhibition, so I kept it as something to do only if there was time. As we were saying in January, if I had the time, I would try. If we were able to extend this show, or do something again in May or June, then perhaps I would have more time to develop something specifically in response to the Chapel, such as a model of it.

We also discussed making larger-scale works that would stand directly on the ground and enter into dialogue with the architecture in a more immediate way. That too could have become interesting if I had had more time to study and think it through. But realistically,

I could not afford to do something like that, not in terms of time, nor in any other sense. And anyway, if I were to make a work on that scale, I would want to do it in stone. I would not want to use another material. At least, for the kinds of ideas I began to have in mind, stone would be essential.

In the end, we excluded the idea of showing *Stone Tears*. That was actually a difficult decision at first, because *Stone Tears* felt very closely connected to the cemetery, since it begins from the gravestone. But we decided instead to go with the works people know me for more clearly, which are the still lifes.

CL Yes, I think that was partly because the more experimental works were very interesting conceptually, but they had not yet been developed as fully. The ideas were strong, but in terms of execution, the final realisation did not yet feel as complete as some of your other works.

GR Yes, but I think it was also about showing what people know me for. The project of *Stone Tears* is very clear to me. I know how to do it, and I think it would make a great deal of sense in relation to the place. I would really enjoy doing it. But at the same time, in the last few years, as I have slowly started showing my work, I have also slowly become known for certain things, for the works I have actually exhibited.

So for a first solo exhibition, it felt like a good occasion to do something like a kind of summation, or dissertation, of what I have been researching and exploring over the last few years. In the end, what I am showing here is the result of the last four or five years of research, even if the individual works are more recent. I have been thinking about still life since around 2020, so the exhibition became a way of showing that body of research.

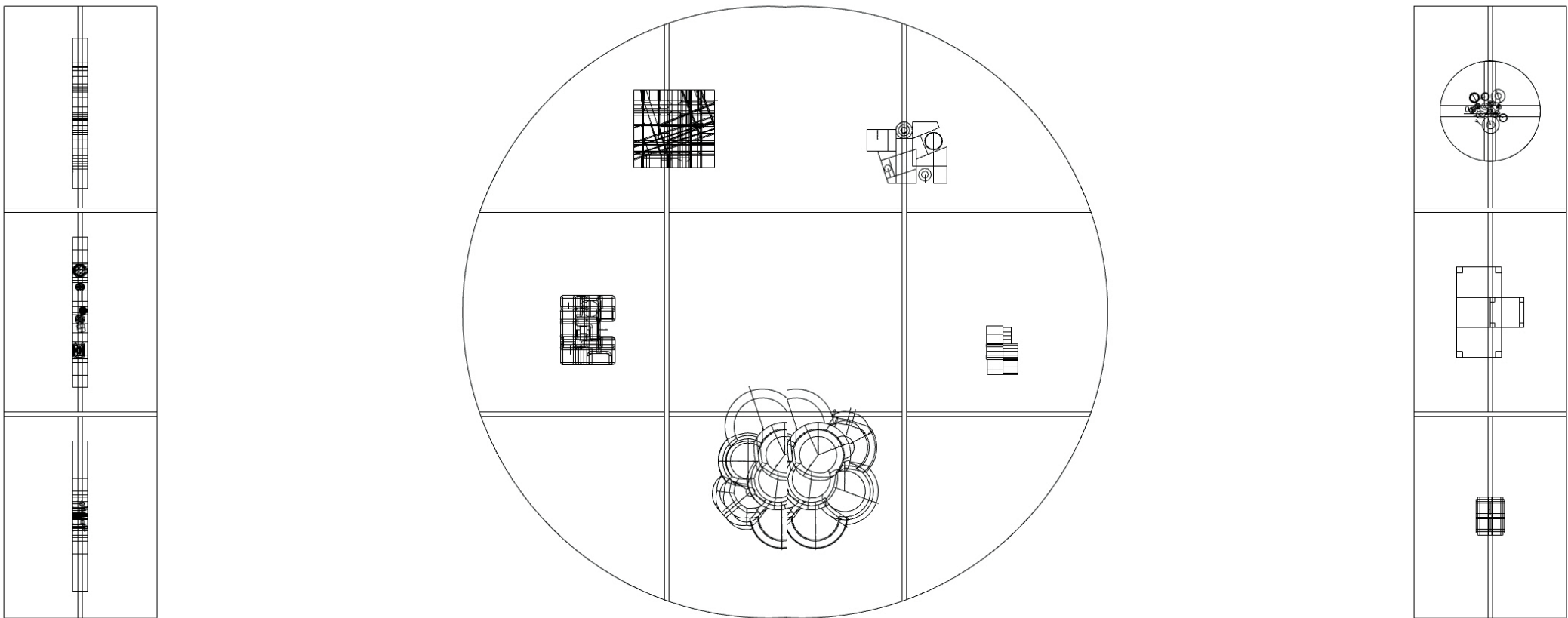
CL In thinking about the display, we wanted to respond more directly to the Chapel and its surrounding space, right? What are your thoughts on the design of the three tables – the large round one at the centre of the Chapel, and the two rectangular side tables? I know there was a great deal of measuring involved as we planned the installation, so what led you to the final arrangement as it is now?

GR It is not really site-specific in the strict sense. What is site-specific, rather, is the display: the tables themselves, the design of the installation. That is where the response to the space happens. The round central table is almost the same diameter as the operture of the dome. So the central table corresponds almost exactly to that opening, while the two side tables have the same width as the diameter of the round table. They also relate to the side doors, almost blocking them. I liked the idea of leaving only the south and north entrances open, so that there is an entrance and an exit. People come in through one side and leave through the other. There is something quite strong and symbolic in that. It creates a kind of passage, while also functioning as a welcoming and open gesture that naturally brings people in.

When you see a really good exhibition – and I am not saying mine is that – you come out changed. even if only slightly. So I like the idea that you enter through one door and leave through another. It is very simple, but also quite beautiful. That, metaphorically, is part of what art should do.

So we kept the south and north entrances open, with the two side tables closing off the east and west. Then the main round table sits in the centre. On it I show five still life works, which present different ways of approaching the same question, one work leading into the next. On the side tables I show the table series, which made sense to install in a more linear way.

In the end, I realised that what mattered most to me was to show the process. I asked myself: do I want people simply to see the most beautiful pieces in my studio, or do I want them to understand how one work led to another? I decided that the process was important. So I wanted the exhibition to show that process, simply.



Digital drawing of the *Vita Immobile* exhibition layout in the Chapel

Digital drawings of exhibited works

Standstill, 2024

Divide, 2025

To Emerge, To Separate, 2025

Fasten, 2025

Grembo Plastico (Plastic Womb), 2026

Tavola Muta, 2024

Centrepiece, 2024

Room, 2024

Open Table, 2025

Desk, 2024

Interlock, 2025

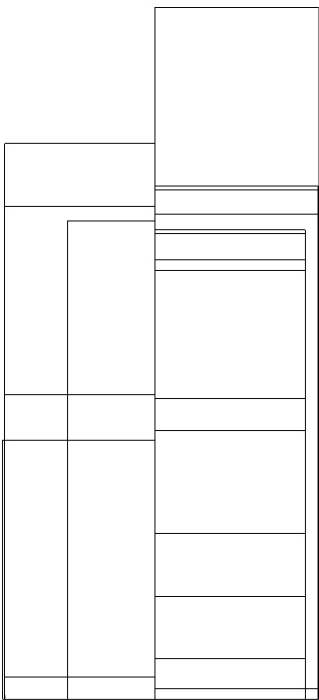
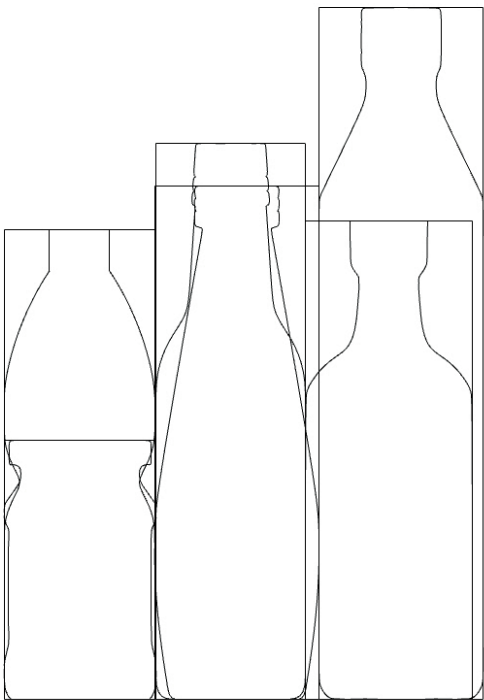
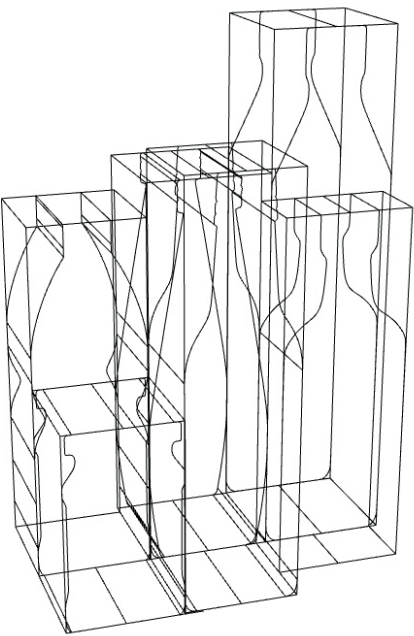
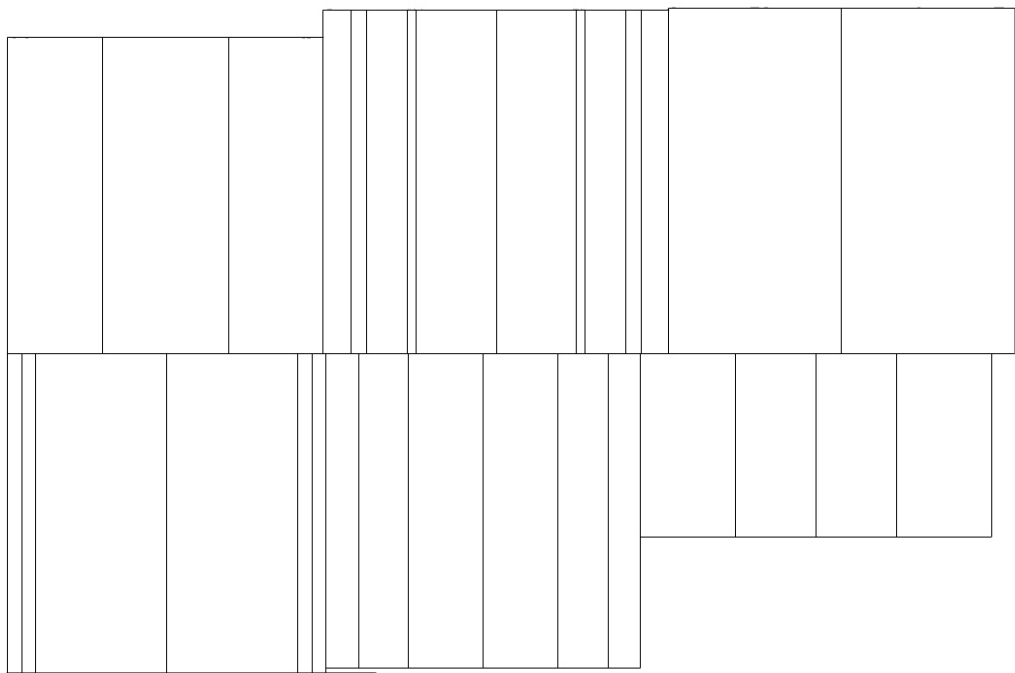
When you cut the stone, are you cutting the solid or the void?

The outside or the inside?

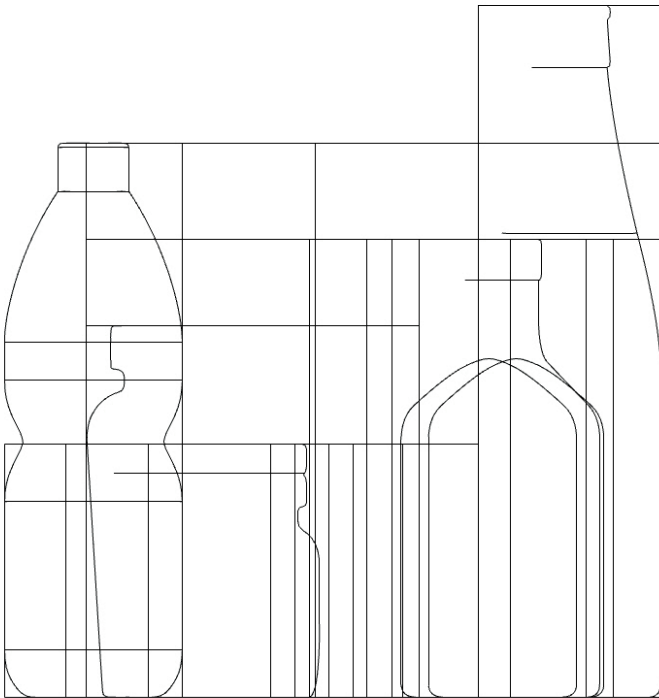
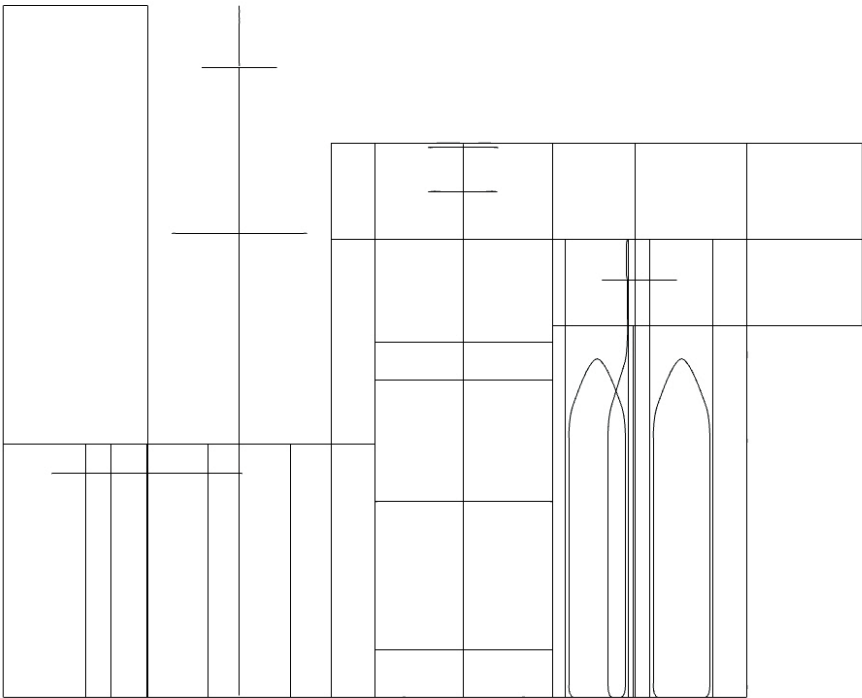
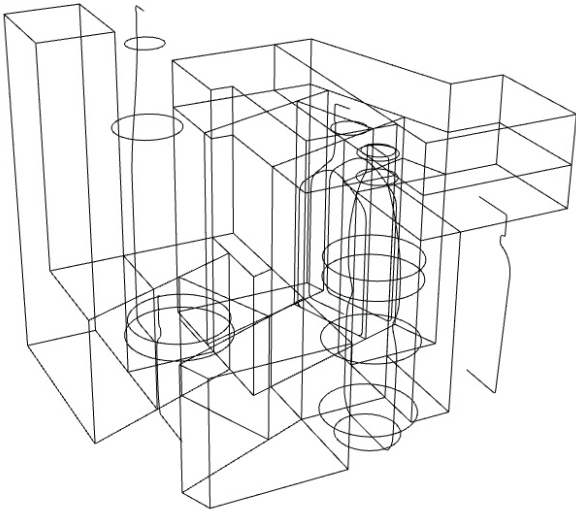
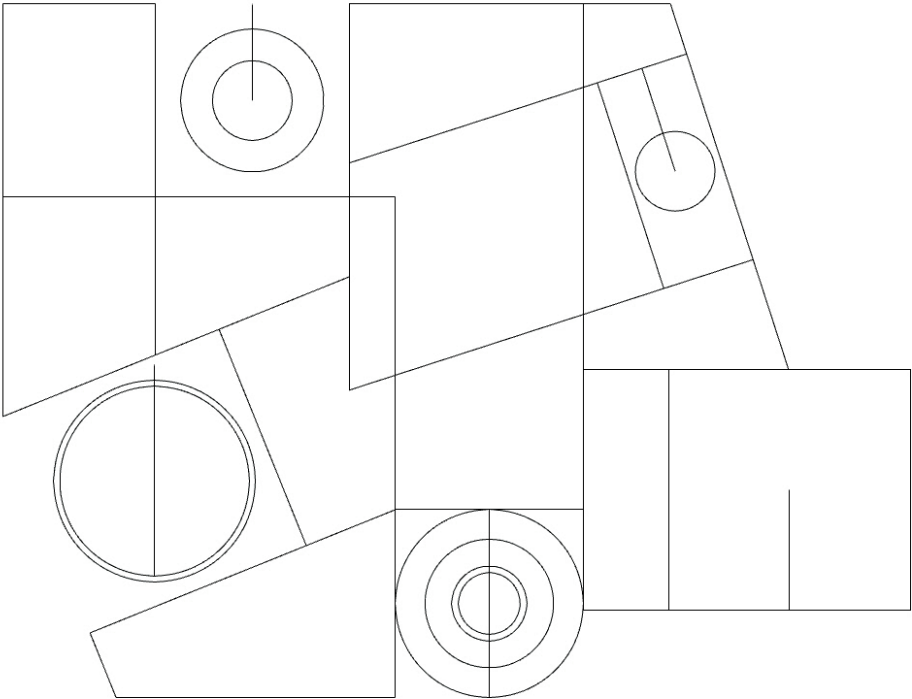
The stone or the space around it?

Massimo Chiappetta

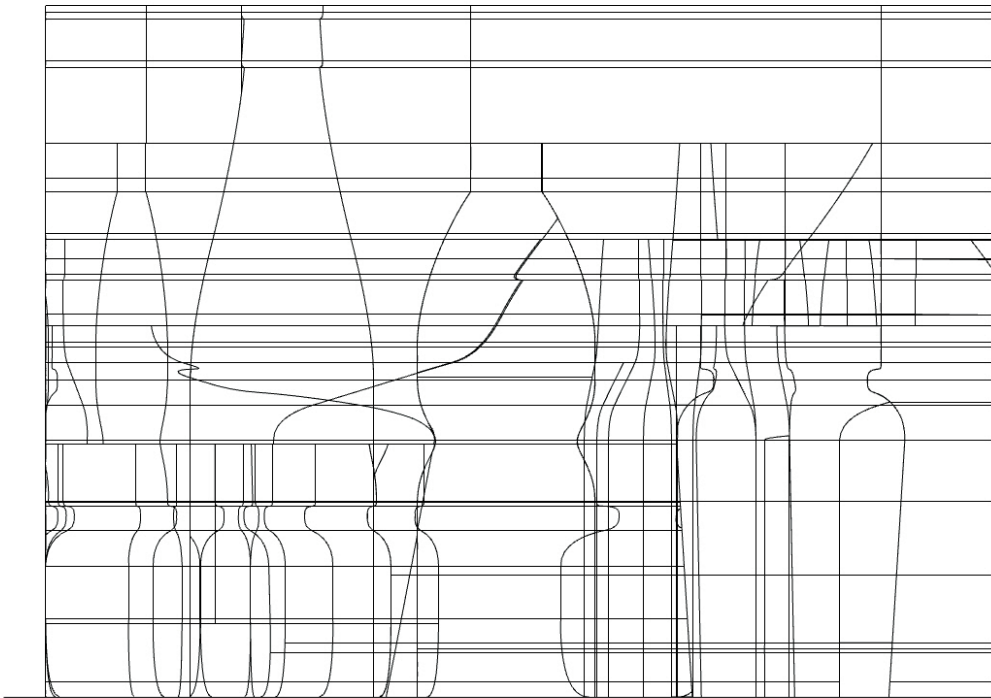
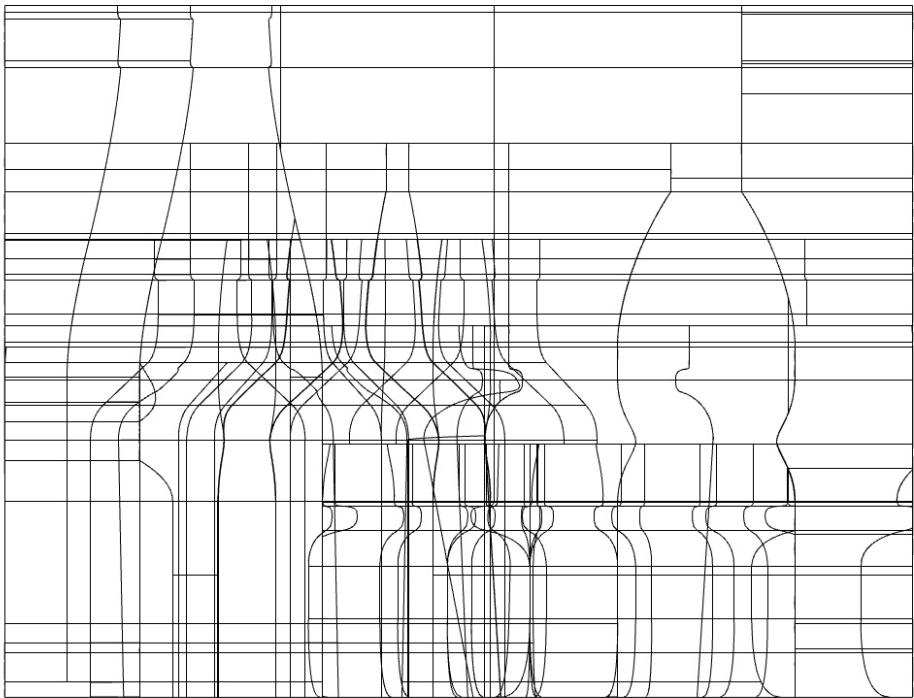
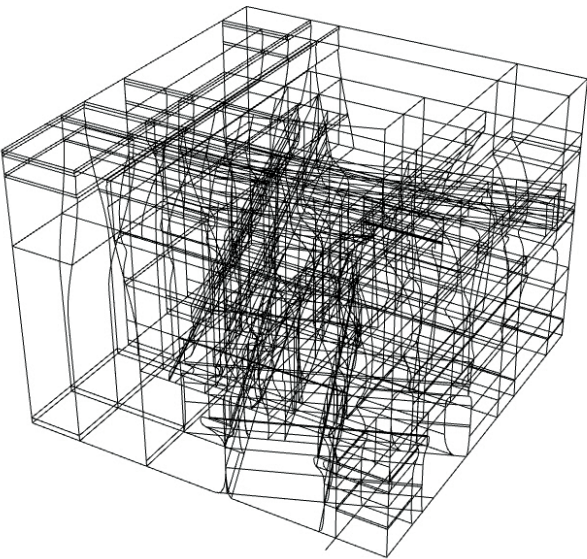
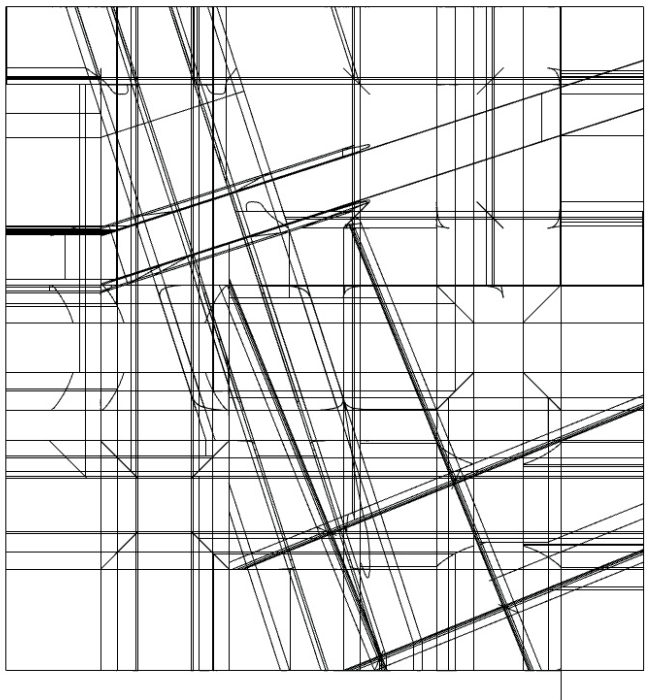
Digital drawing of *Stanstill*, 2024
carved block Lavoux limestone, 28 x 21 x 13 cm.



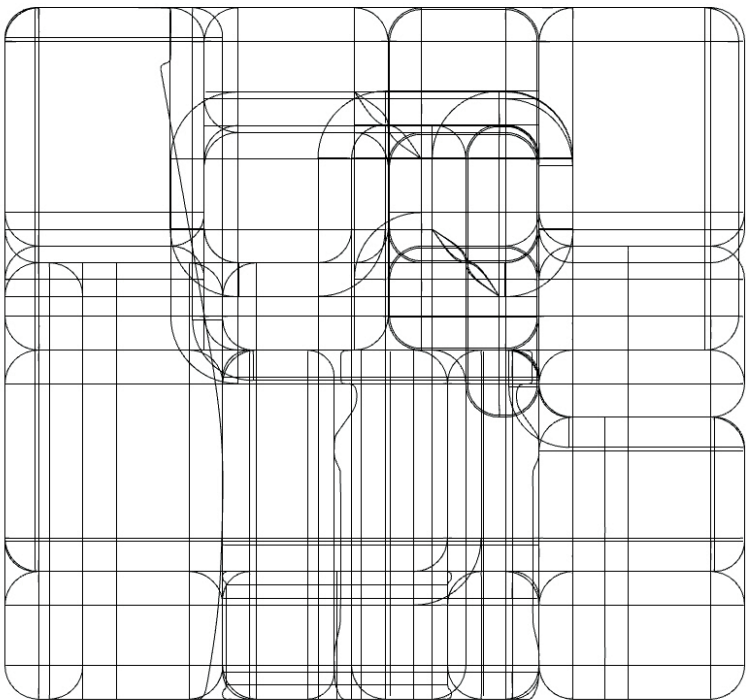
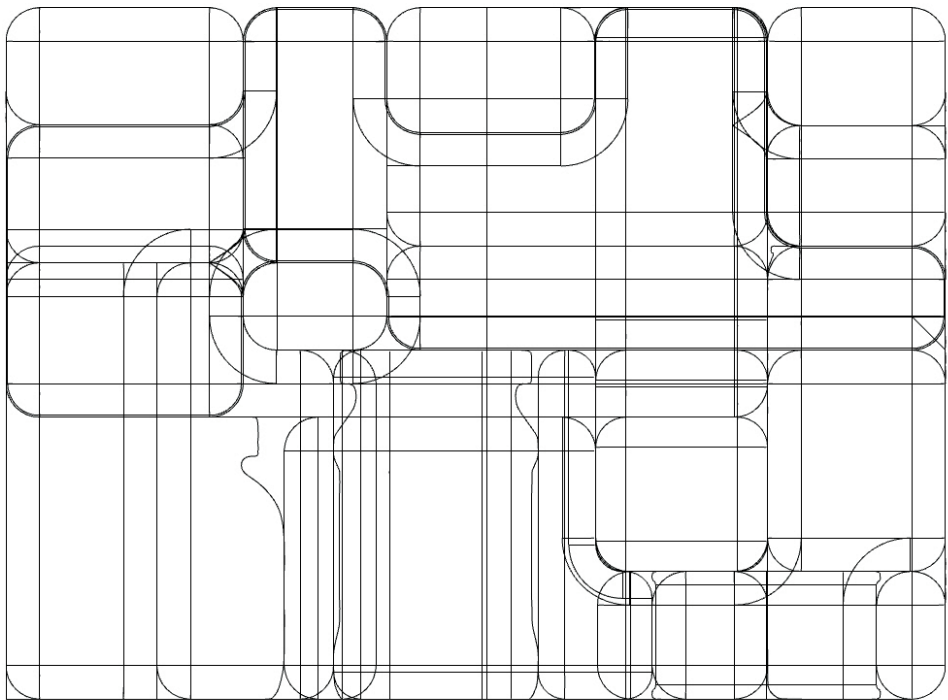
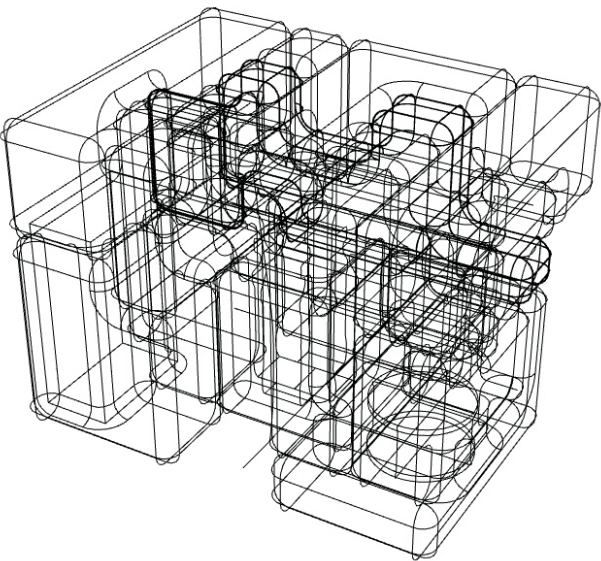
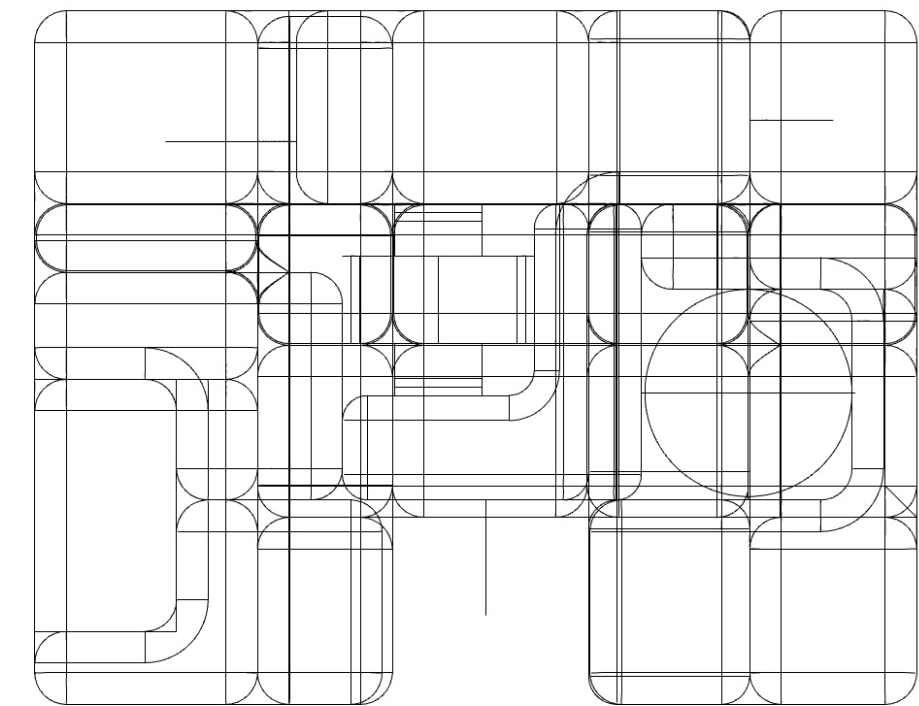
Digital drawing of *Divide*, 2025
9 Lavoux limestone pieces, 32 x 24,5 x 25,7 cm.



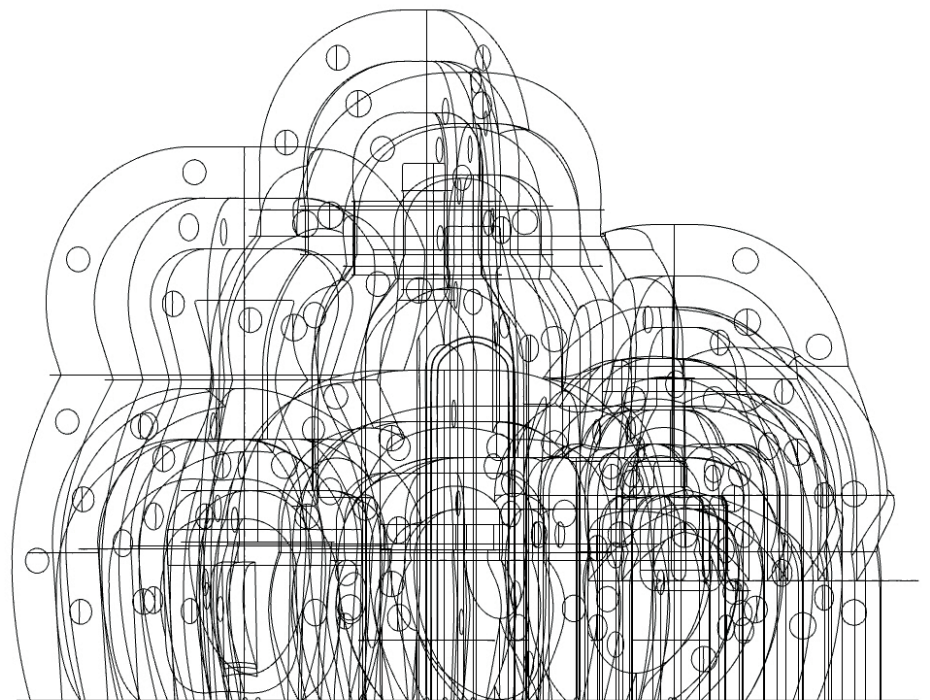
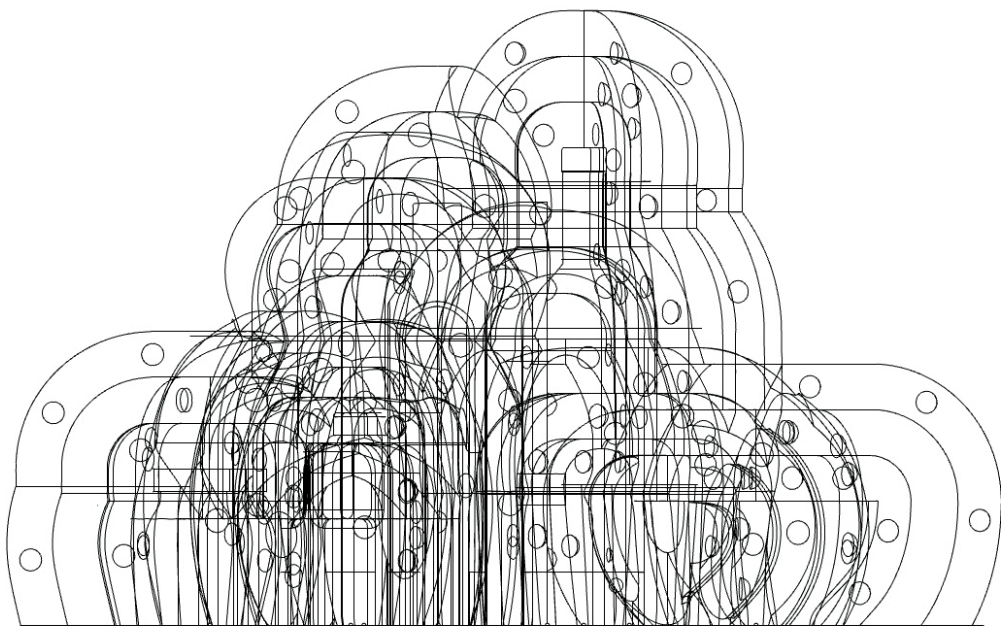
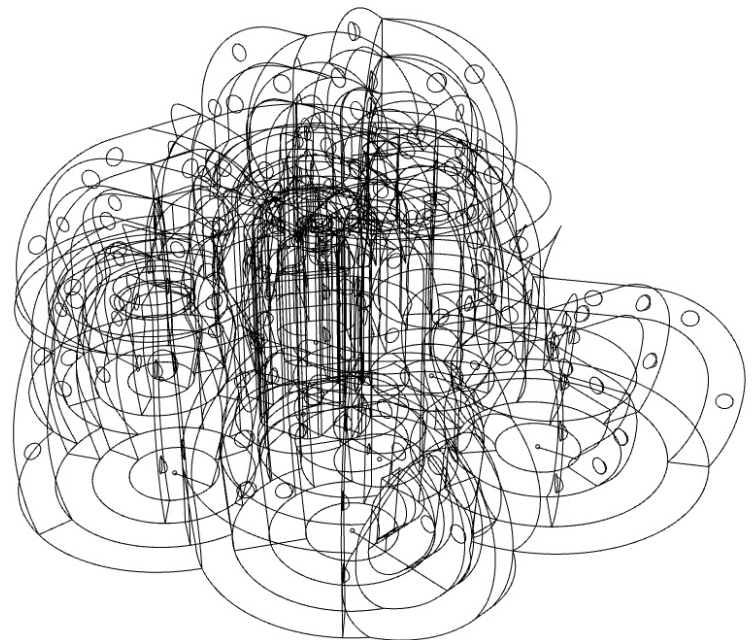
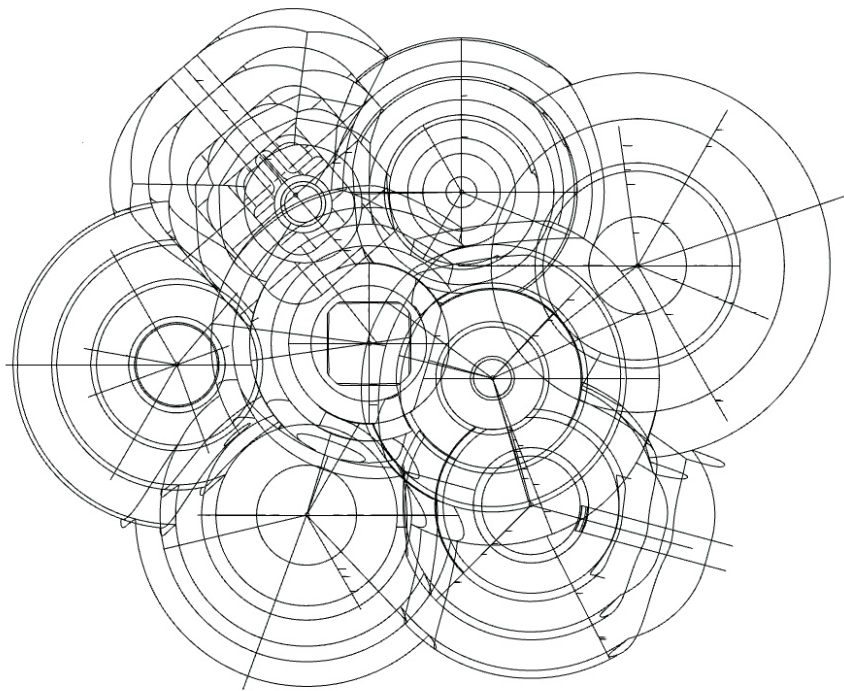
Digital drawing of *To emerge, to separate*, 2025
107 jesminite pieces, 32 × 31 × 23,5 cm.



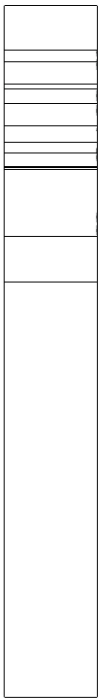
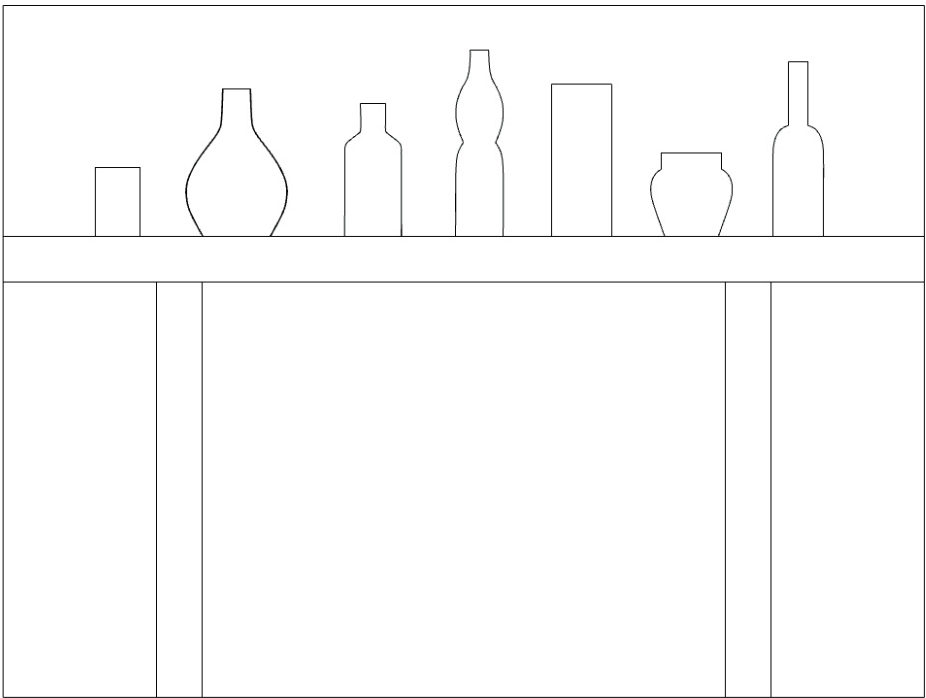
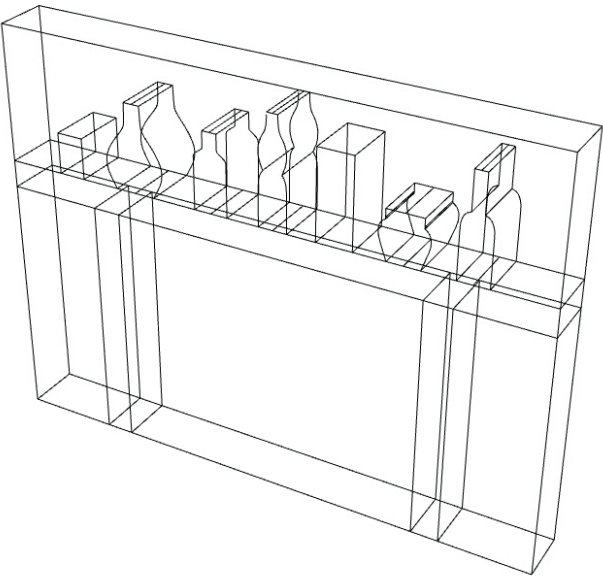
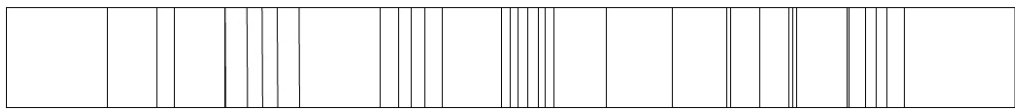
Digital drawing of *Fasten*, 2025
20 jesmonite pieces, 22 x 20,3 x 28 cm.



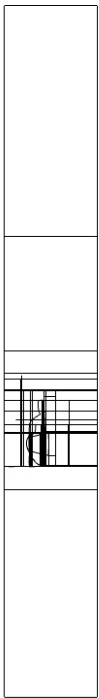
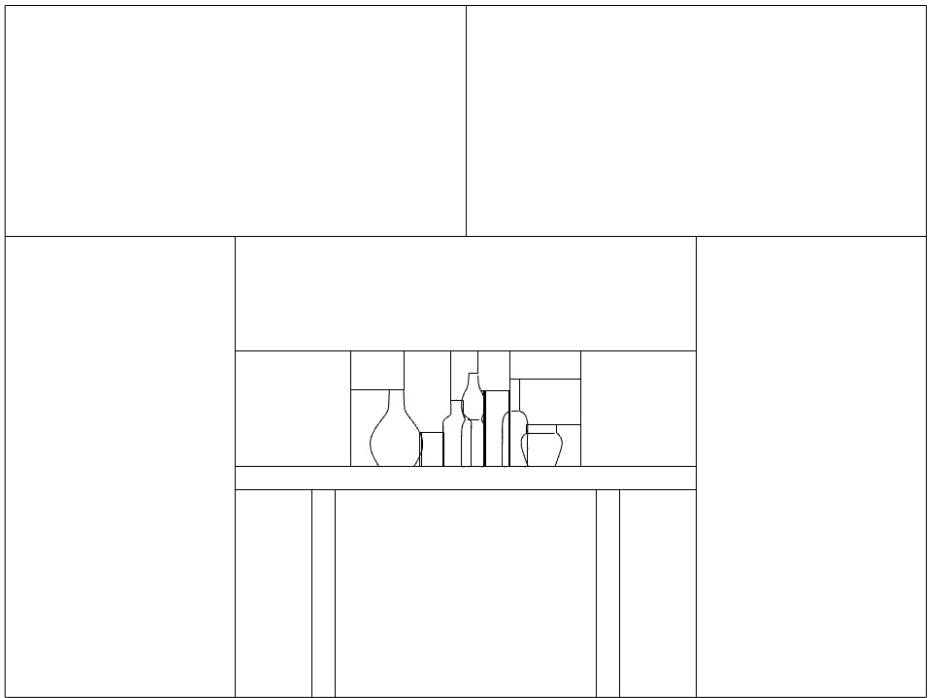
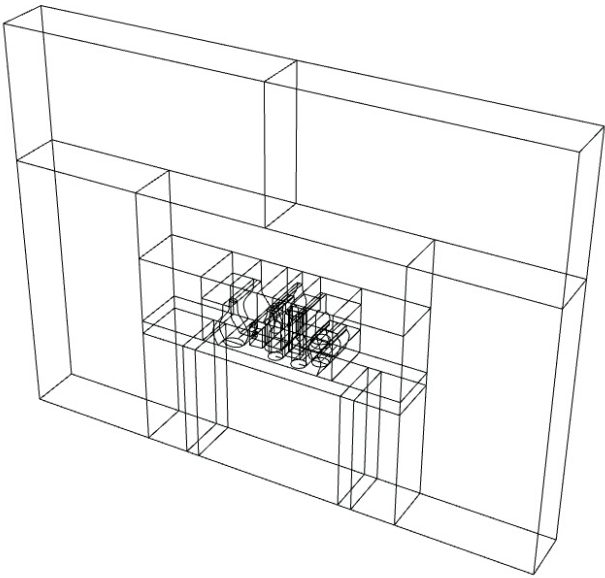
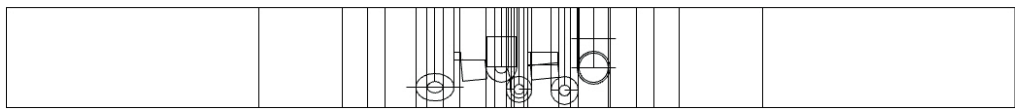
Digital drawing of *Grembo plastico (plastic womb)*, 2026
81 plaster pieces, 66 x 54 x 41 cm.



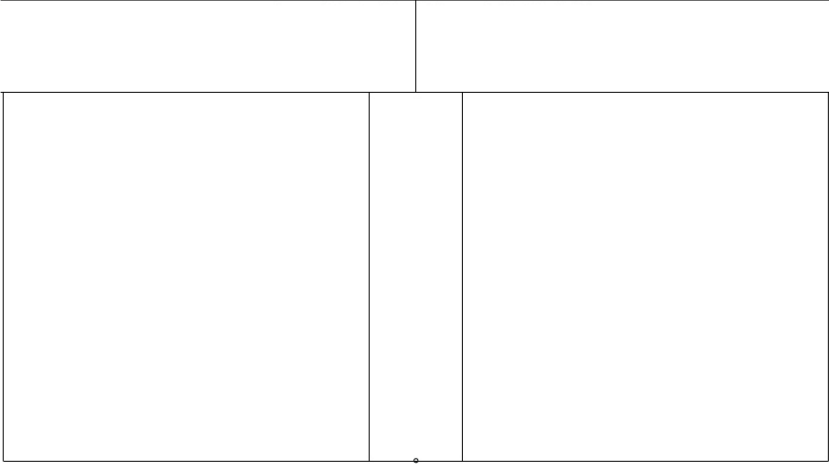
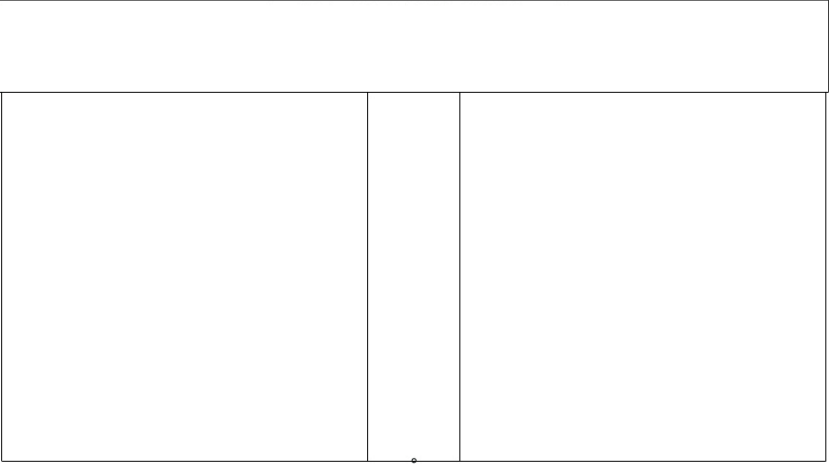
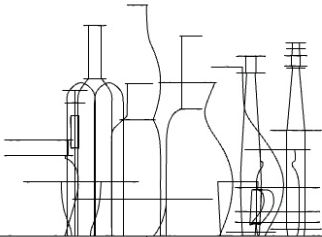
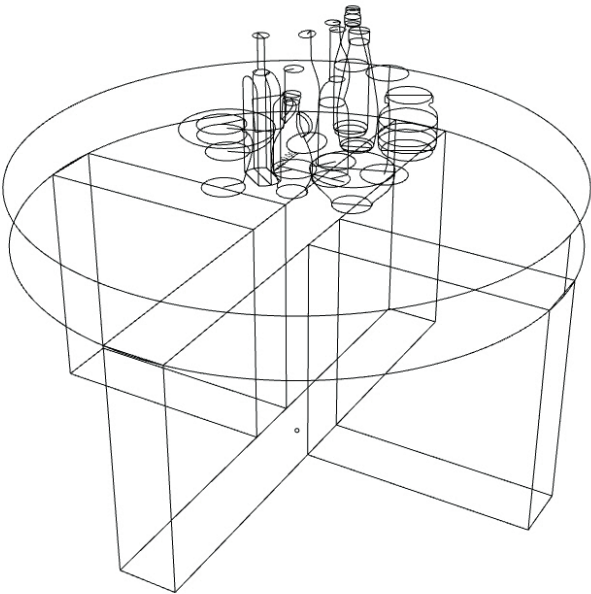
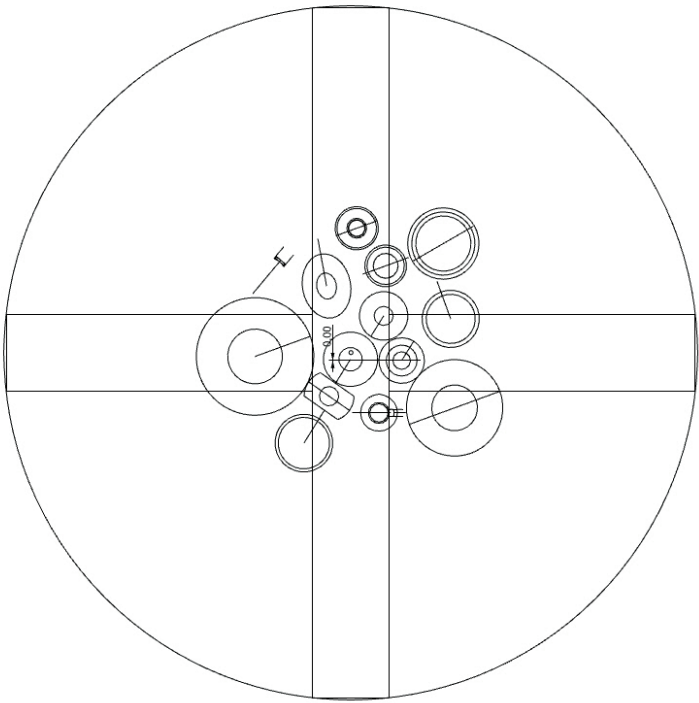
Digital drawing of *Tavola muta*, 2024
Concrete, Study model 13 (60 x 45 x 6 cm)



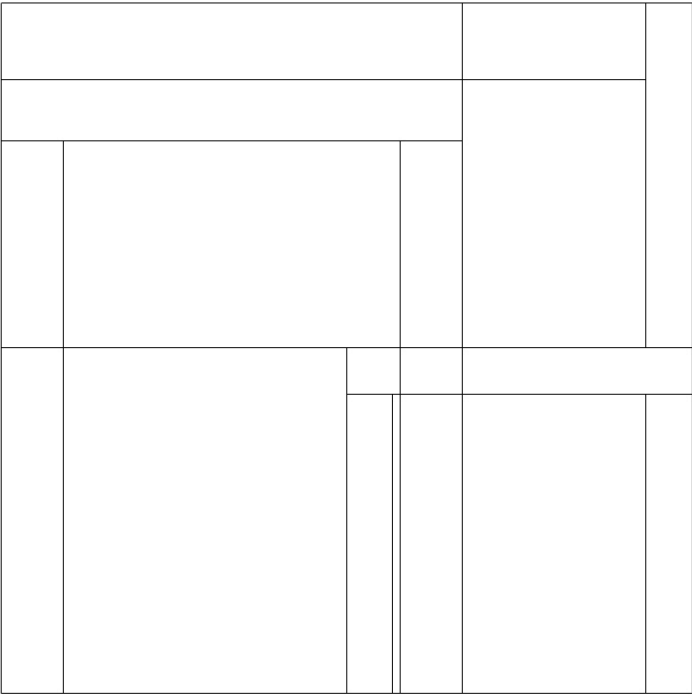
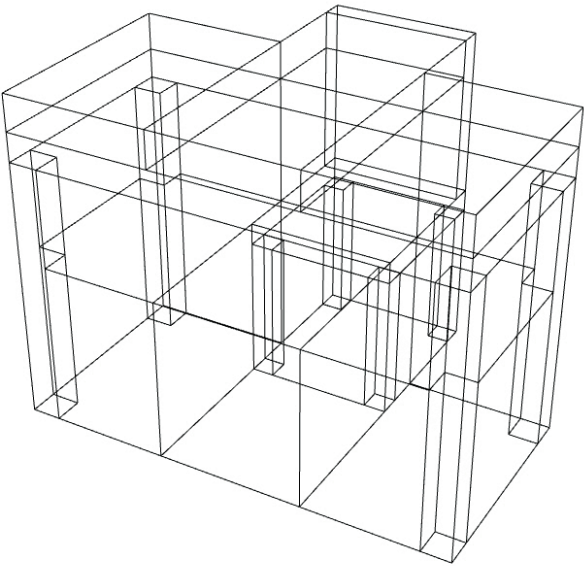
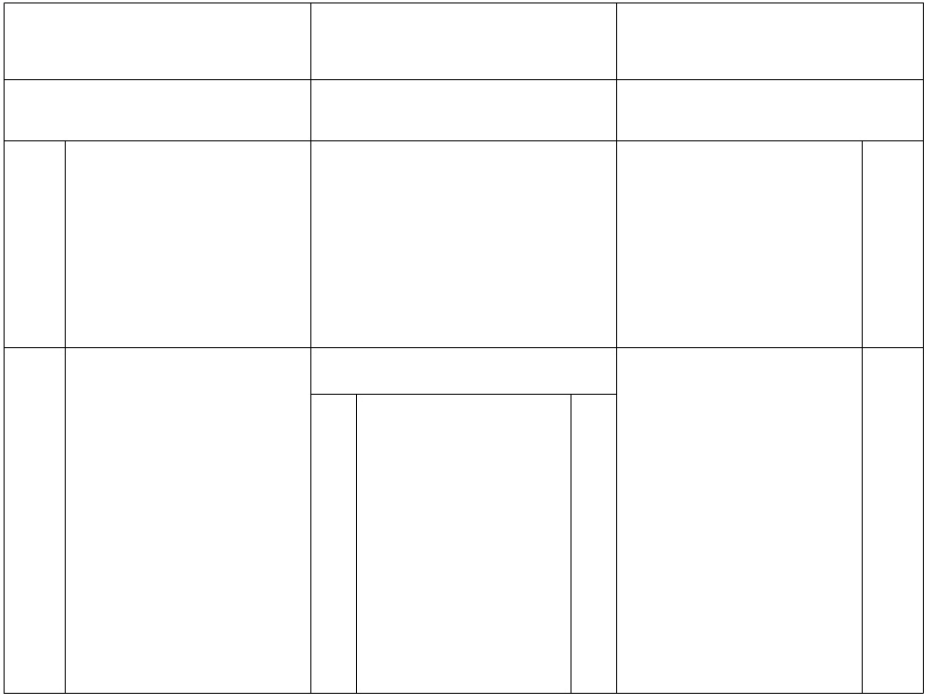
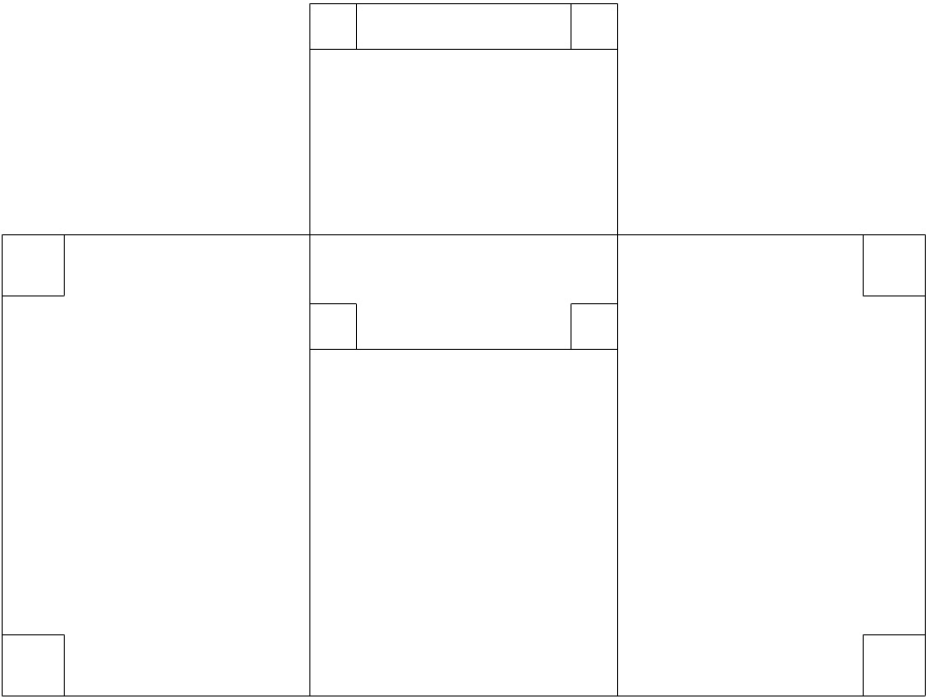
Digital drawing of *Room*, 2024
Lavoux limestone, 60 x 45 x 5,5 cm.



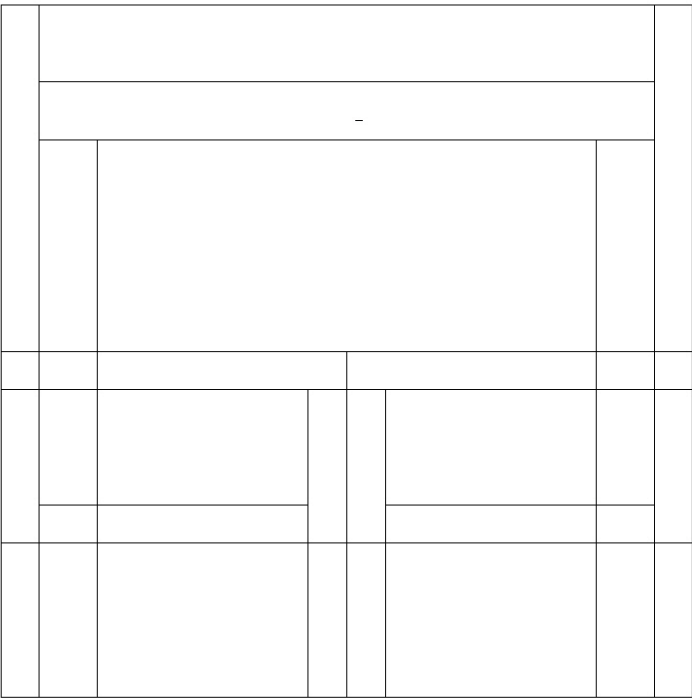
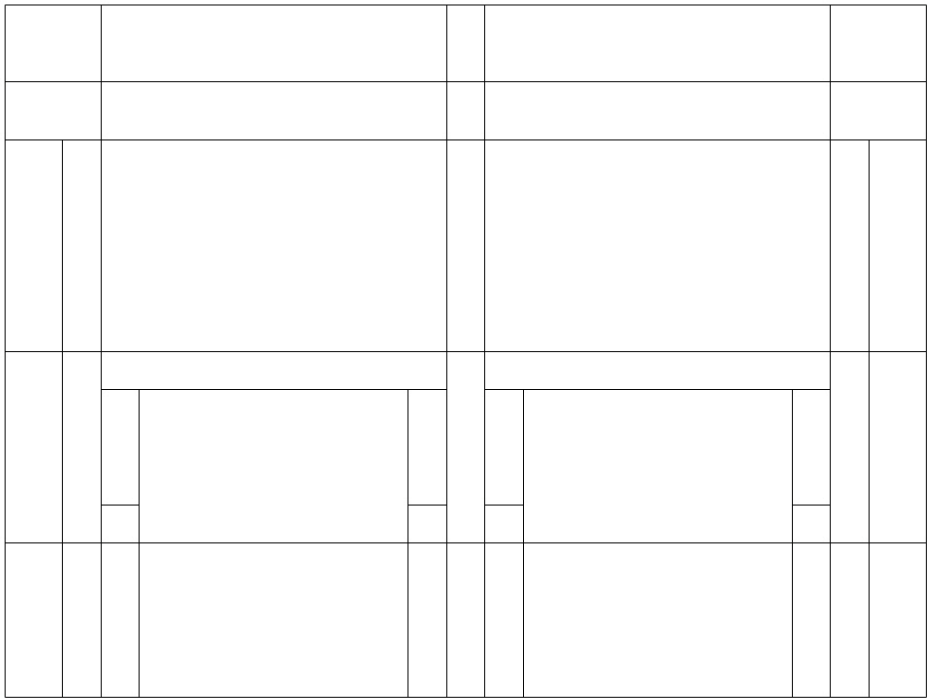
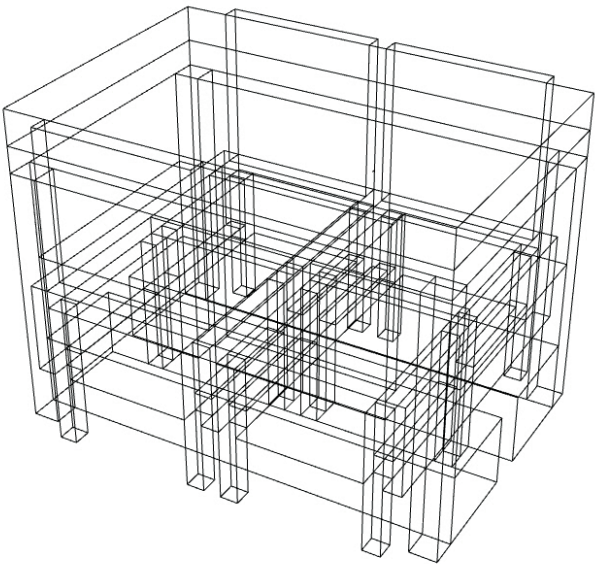
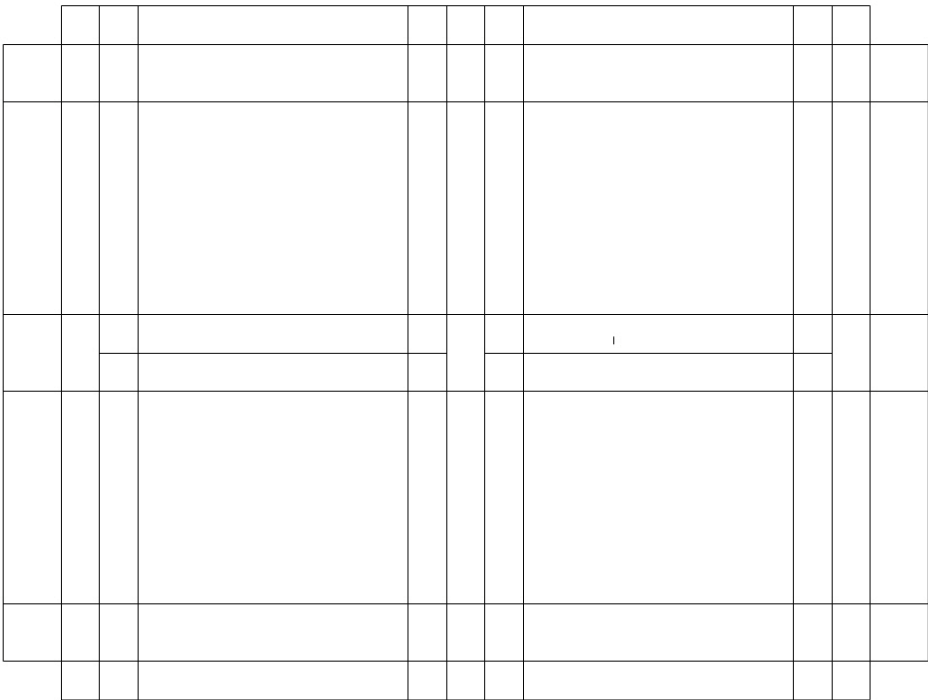
Digital drawing of *Open table (model)*, 2025
carved block Irish blue stone, 40 x 40 x 32 cm.



Digital drawing of *Desk*, 2024
20 concrete pieces, Study model 13 (36 x 27 x 27 cm.)



Digital drawing of *Interlock*, 2025
38 plaster pieces, study model 110, 9 × 9 × 12 cm

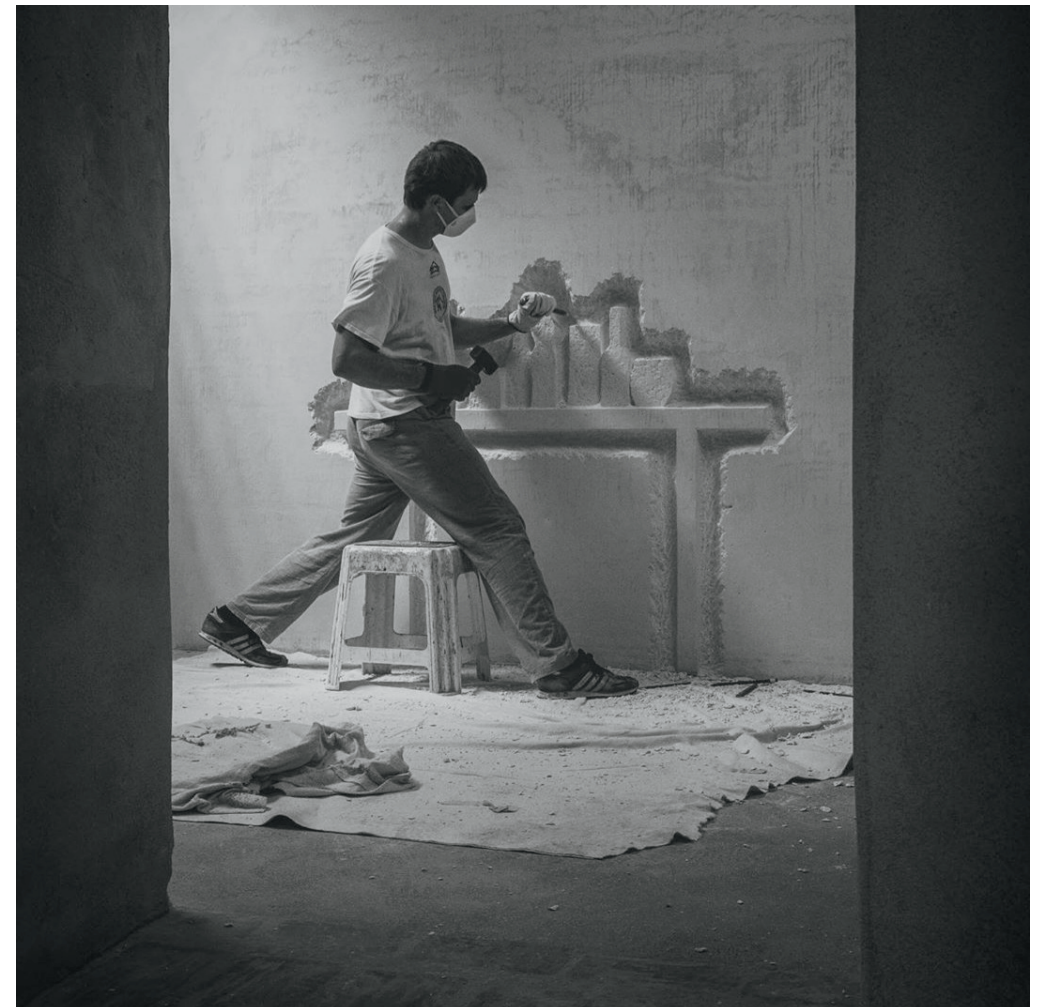


About the artist

Gabriele Risso (1992, Genoa, Italy) is a sculptor currently living and working in London, UK. He studied Sculpture at the Ligustica Academy of Fine Arts in Genoa and the Academy of Fine Arts in Brera, Milan, before continuing his training in Paris and London. These diverse experiences have profoundly shaped his approach to sculpture.

In 2020, he was commissioned by the Salesian community to create a permanent, site-specific installation for the Museo Casa Don Bosco in Turin. Since then, he has continued to develop his practice through exhibitions across the UK. He became a member of the Royal Society of Sculptors in 2024, and in 2025 he was awarded the Marsh Award for Best in Show at the Society's Summer Exhibition and selected as a finalist for the First Plinth Award.

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Gabriele Risso, in the making of *La Mensa (Table)*, 2020



About the Friends of Brompton Cemetery

Brompton Cemetery, consecrated by the Bishop of London in June 1840, is one of Britain's oldest and most distinguished garden cemeteries. The Cemetery is Grade I Listed on the Historic England Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, and all of the cemetery buildings are Grade II* Listed.

The 39-acre (16 hectare) site lies between Old Brompton and Fulham Roads, on the western border of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, then a distant suburb and now a populous and diverse community in the heart of London.

The Friends of Brompton Cemetery work to preserve this remarkable site as a model of an historic cemetery with an active role in modern society. We help restore and maintain the Cemetery's buildings, monuments and landscape, and encourage their full use by those sympathetic to the importance, beauty, heritage and fragility of this significant Cemetery.

We offer guided tours of the Cemetery every Sunday, as well as a range of Special Interest tours, including International Women's Day, Symbolism, Musical and Theatrical, Catacombs, and Common Graves. We also organise a varied programme of arts events and activities in the Chapel. The Friends run the Information Centre at the North Lodge, which is open daily, where our knowledgeable volunteers welcome visitors from around the world and offer specialist guidance.

The Friends of Brompton Cemetery is a charity working in partnership and close cooperation with The Royal Parks. We are an independent organisation with our own strategy, structure and governance. We are members of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends and the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe.

As an independent organisation entirely reliant on the work of volunteers, we are always keen to recruit people with the time and energy to contribute actively to our activities. Donations are also very welcome to help us with our work. We are a registered charity (no. 1181027).

For information on joining us as a Friend, volunteering with us, supporting our work through a donation, and our latest tours and the Chapel's programme, please visit our website: brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

If you use social media, you can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram: @FOBCofficial.

About the Chapel and the Chapel Arts Programme

Designed by architect Benjamin Baud and completed in 1842, the Chapel stands at the heart of Brompton Cemetery as a Grade II*-listed building. Built in the neoclassical style, it comprises a circular domed nave encircled by a colonnade, inspired by the plan of St Peter's in Rome, with two side aisles forming a cross-shaped layout.

Originally constructed for funeral services, the Chapel continues to serve this function today, while also accommodating a programme of weekend activities and short exhibitions. Brompton Cemetery is a much-valued place for local residents and visitors to London alike, and even short exhibitions in the Chapel can attract significant visitor numbers.

The Chapel underwent major restoration in 2018 as part of the Brompton Cemetery Conservation Project, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Royal Parks, and The Friends of Brompton Cemetery. The works included substantial repairs and improved access, helping to secure the building for continued public use. Filled with natural light and noted for its strong acoustic qualities, the Chapel provides a unique setting for exhibitions, performances, and intimate gatherings.

The Chapel Curator of Friends of Brompton Cemetery, Catherine Li, coordinates and curates the Chapel's arts programme in collaboration with volunteers. The programme includes exhibitions, music events, and a wide range of community activities. Its aim is to support care for the Cemetery while encouraging activities that bring together history, art, and local life, through partnerships with artists and local organisations to develop exhibitions and events that respond to the site and its surroundings.

Contact: chapel.arts@brompton-cemetery.org.uk



GABRIELE RISSO: VITA IMMOBILE
3 - 6 April 2026

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