

The starting point for the exhibition *MEMORY GAME* at Villa Lontana is a nineteenth century chest of drawers comprising numerous coloured marble samples used during the Roman Empire. The object is part of the Fondazione Santarelli Collection, which is treated as an archive to develop the curatorial projects of Villa Lontana. Each sample comes from a different quarry and location within the extended colonies of the Roman Empire: Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Libya, Macedonia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. The chest of drawers, together with the *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica* Treccani are presented in Villa Lontana's garage space alongside works by Tauba Auerbach, Cyprien Gaillard, Susan Hiller, Thomas Hutton, John Latham, Charlotte Moth, Rosalind Nashashibi + Lucy Skaer, Olu Ogunnaike, Giorgio Orbi, Andrés Saenz de Sicilia + Emiddio Vasquez, Edoardo Servadio and Joëlle Tuerlinckx.

The chest of drawers is an object that provokes us to think about geographies and memory games in conjunction with the political, economic and geographic expansion of the ancient Roman Empire. "Those who still wander around the Palatine Hill, the Forums, the ruins of the baths and other monuments, will see small flakes and fragments of various kinds of coloured marble, standing out among the stones and the loose earth, especially after the rain. These fragments are not stones originating from the soil of Rome, but come from all parts of the Empire." This passage comes from the seminal text *Marmora Romana*, written by Raniero Gnoli in 1971 after his visit to all the main places and monuments of the Mediterranean basin where there are ancient marbles, retracing the paths of Faustino Corsi.

Rome is a city built on tufa and travertine. Coloured marbles were imported by the Romans from around the Empire, creating an artificial geology which then became the symbol of Rome abroad -- even if not originally autoctonous to the city.

Disks, squares of serpentine, porphyry, slices of columns, repositioned to live in other forms and other bodies in a continuous transhumance from Rome to Constantinople and beyond. The stones move: they move from one building to another, from one city to another; they are reborn, they do not age and never die. The history of man is accompanied by the movement of stones and those who love stones find in them the secret soul of the earth.

The chest present in this exhibition, attributed to the Belli brothers, is comprised of fourteen drawers containing 560 samples of coloured marbles. It was common use in the 1800s for these marbles to be dug out of the earth and then cut to make such 'campionari' (furniture). The chest includes all the types of marble used during the Roman Empire, each coming from a different quarry and location within the extended colonies of the Romans, mapping geographic territories and networks with histories and memory. The enormous quantity of stones transported to Rome from all the regions of the then known world entails a complex organization, ranging from the workers involved in quarries and transport, to the reception and distribution offices in Ostia and Rome. During the Republic, the quarries were all privately owned; later on, the most important ones became part of the imperial patrimony either by conquest, purchase or inheritance. The introduction of many foreign marbles dates back to the end of the Republic. Marble became a form of propaganda, where the use of certain stones signified the conquest of certain regions. The workers

inside the quarries were mostly slaves or condemned (*dannati ad metalla*) both for common crimes and, at the time of persecutions, for religious reasons.

The first edition of the *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica* Treccani (known as the Treccani *Encyclopaedia of Ancient Art*) was published in 1960; in a later edition from 1995, the definition of the word 'marble' is accompanied by a photograph of this very chest of drawers (previously in Franco Di Castro's Collection) present in the Santarelli Collection, which is in itself a collection of marble statuary and coloured marble fragments.

Paola Santarelli used this chest to devise an imaginative game of memory, which she played with her children. They had to name the samples by sight and match their locations, without turning them over to check. The chest was devised to render a catalogue of the richness of the quarries' product and simultaneously to show how the samples look and feel, giving the viewer a tangible experience of their qualities. The furniture – drawers, chests, display cabinets -- made to contain and present their collections of objects (organised by type, source, colour, etc.), belongs to the tradition known by the German word 'Wunderkammer', generally translated into English as 'cabinet of curiosities'.

The city of Rome can itself be thought of as an archive, with numerous sets of drawers containing various 'Wunderkammer' collections of architectural periods, dating back to the pre-Roman Etruscan era, or even earlier, to the times of its agricultural territories – along the banks of the River Tiber. The Tiber's underground tributary rivers continue to flow below the city. The objects, with their personal and/or cultural value, become embedded in the fabric of the city to which we, as its current inhabitants, add the experiences of our times with their varying and different values. Our personal, collective and cultural memories form part of the rich metaphorical sedimentation of the city and its continuous evolution, which we can set out in parallel with its geological and geographic specificities.

*MEMORY GAME* presents the different ways in which contemporary artists respond to geography, history, trade and economies: craft, tradition and re-invention, geopolitical structures and networks of power, transaction and exchange, economies and histories. A number of these artists have responded directly to the ideas underlying the exhibition by making work specifically for it. The matter of archives and of how to respond to collections are present as real and urgent questions in each artist's contribution.

In *Life: A User's Manual*, Georges Perec outlines the impossible task of attempting to list forgotten words. Ironically, the name of the person doing so, Cinoc, is not a 'real' name, but one arrived at through layers of mishearing what in living memory was already a name given through cultural assimilation.

This exhibition is curated by Dr. Jo Melvin and Vittoria Bonifati with the support of the Fondazione Dino ed Ernesta Santarelli. Special thanks to Paola Santarelli for letting this exhibition happen and for letting us share her personal connection with these objects.