

A conversation with Lisa Ponti by Luca Lo Pinto

I met Lisa Ponti for the first time in 2012 in her home in Milan to record the following conversation.

Meeting and writing about people like Lisa Ponti is a privilege. It is, however, difficult to avoid obvious albeit deserved celebration, especially when dealing with someone who shuns it with sincere modesty. Daughter of a giant with a diminutive name, Lisa's life is inseparable from her father Gio, thanks to whom she undertakes a long adventure, marked by encounters and affinities, the two keywords that summarise her existence. Ever since the 1940s, from Stile to Domus, Lisa has been a traveling companion for artists across four generations. Her demeanour, her elegance and her humour are typical of a certain bygone enlightened Milan bourgeoisie.

Lisa's writings are a portrait of her encounters, lit up by poetry and art, and imbued with the artists' rather than the critics' language.

Her modesty led her to organise her first exhibit as an artist at the tender age of 70. Today Lisa, in her nineties, still continues to draw through writing and write through her drawing on A4 sheets of paper with admirable results. The brilliance of her thoughts and her intellectual generosity appear revolutionary even now. For this reason we need people like Lisa Ponti!

LLP: I have so many questions to ask you that I don't even know where to start...

The first times I heard your name was through artists such as Emilio Prini and Luigi Ontani, who talked about you as a real companion for artists. Later on I met Franco Toselli who confirmed your importance. Franco showed me your beautiful drawings.

LP: I was fortunate enough to work for Domus magazine with a father like Gio Ponti who would tell me 'you

do it.' It was great. Things were published freely, everybody knew each other, there was a sense of community. It was a long period, a wonderful one. I was lucky because I met a lot of extraordinary people. Millo [Emilio Prini] for example. Once I went to see him with an artist who was longing to meet him, but he refused to see him. This poor Japanese guy tiptoed away.

LLP: Where you in Rome or in Milan? LP: No, he still lived in Chiavari.

LLP: I read in an interview that your luck lies in your encounters.

LP: Yes, that's true. I am neither a huntress nor a discoverer. Encounters occur. It's important not to disturb them. Like with Franco [Toselli].

LLP: When did you first meet?

LP: In 1967 Franco Toselli rang Gio Ponti's doorbell and said, 'It's Franco Toselli. I want to open a gallery in Milan and I would like to inaugurate it with an exhibition of your work.' Gio Ponti, just imagine, answered, 'Great! Right away! Let's do it!' A week later he stumbled and fell, and broke a femur. He then called Franco and said, 'Listen Toselli, start with somebody else, because this is going to take months.' And Franco Toselli answered, 'But I'll wait.' An unforgettable sentence. Franco's great strong point was to organise Gio Ponti's exhibit without being overwhelmed by him. Being an architect, designer, with thousands of ideas, he could have filled the gallery with those thousands of ideas. Franco distanced himself immediately from Gio Ponti. Ponti later found out that at Toselli's gallery you could find Alighiero Boetti's cardboard plates, for example. Gio Ponti was struck by having met Franco.

LLP: Did your father ever meet Boetti and other artists from that generation? I read that many artists dropped by at your house, from De Chirico to Arturo Martini...

LP: Well yes, more that generation. Arturo Martini, especially, was his most beloved artist. Franco's exhibits were special, done in secret, and nobody came. Alighiero had produced a pile of cardboard plates, something amazing for those years. Nobody had ever done it in a gallery. The only other gallery that Gio Ponti went to, that kept up with the times, was Guido Le Noci's Apollinaire gallery in via Brera, where even Yves Klein had displayed his work. Le Noci was good at what he did, he was very isolated in Milan.

LLP: Was it in Toselli's gallery that you started connecting with these artists?

LP: I was fortunate enough to work for the magazine. In each monthly edition there were many pages left up to improvisation, which were commissioned to artists, and worked on together. Domus was distributed worldwide, in all the most relevant places. It was a wonderful medium. There were so many artists and architects who created things just for the magazine.

LLP: Were you responsible for every aspect of Domus or just for the art section at the beginning?

LP: I was the editor in chief.

LLP: In the 60s?

LP: No, earlier, already at the end of the 40s, when the head office chose Gio Ponti over Ernesto Nathan Rogers because of a disagreement between publishers. That's when Ponti took me on. My experience had been with Stile magazine.

LLP: In fact, I was about to ask you a question about Stile... Was your father the head of it as well?

LP: Yes, he founded and directed it. You know magazines are love stories, kisses, jealousies between editors and publishers? For example that's how Stile was. Ponti had been directing Domus since 1928.

Gianni Mazzocchi, young publisher and industrialist, was good at distributing Domus on a large scale, but he never thought of transforming it, by allowing total freedom. He was able to distribute everywhere, even in the Moscow and Leningrad state libraries. After a while they fought because Ponti wanted to develop a magazine more about art than just home decor for ladies. At that point a third person intervened, Daria Guarnati, with the magazine Aria d'Italia, which Gio Ponti collaborated on for a few years. It was supposed to be a freer and lighter magazine, following the style of Minotaure. Later Ponti made friends with Garzanti, a large print publisher, who said, 'I will absolutely publish a magazine the way Ponti wants it.' That's how Stile was created.

LLP: So Garzanti was the publisher of Stile ?

LP: Yes. Mazzocchi was extremely jealous. It was as if in show business Greta Garbo had gone to work for Metro Goldwyn Mayer after having made films with Paramount. Stile was created at the beginning of the war and was intended to be the most attractive and elegant of the Italian magazines, even better than the French ones. There were Filippo De Pisis' poems and Giorgio De Chirico's writings, which described the way he painted with irony. Even Arturo Martini had contributed. Then after the war it all collapsed.

LLP: So you were already writing for Stile ?

LP: Yes, small pieces about artists that I liked, for example Gianfilippo Usellini.

LLP: Who were the artists you followed?

LP: Usellini and that sort of genre. All Italian because I was very young and at the time no one travelled. Massimo Campigli was a beloved family friend that we abandoned in a certain way.

LLP: Did he spend time at your house?

LP: Yes. Campigli was a great narrator, an ex-journalist who had become a painter following his wife's suggestion. She was a beautiful Romanian lady called Dutza Radulesco. We lived with him for a few months. He would cook in his big studio, we would eat around the ping-pong table and he would tell us about his war adventures. During that winter spent together he slowly finished a family portrait. We were attracted to him, to his character, then distance grew between us. At a certain point, in fact, he had abandoned the beautiful Dutza and fallen in love with a girl from Como. He married her, and had her dress like his first wife, with sweaters and heavy silver bracelets. My sister Giovanna and I were surprised: 'What's going on? He changes women and transforms them all! How overbearing of him!' Then he found a third one and dressed her the same way. This cooled our relationship a bit.

LLP: So Stile was a magazine that had active involvement with the artists, just like Domus then became...

LP: ...yes absolutely, Stile came to an end because of the bombings. The factories were destroyed and people didn't have the money to spend on magazines, priorities had changed. It had been created in a time

of luxury, with plenty of pages, different types of paper... then it ended up being printed on cheap paper, in black and white with red as the only alternative colour. But it was still beautiful. It was the styling that counted. Things can be done even without resources. Actually, magazines produced with little turn out just fine.

LLP: So starting in the 40s you begin to write actively...

LP: Yes, Domus had passed to Rogers. But the publisher, Mazzocchi, did not want to turn back to Ponti. My father accepted on one condition: that Ernesto Nathan Rogers be the director of Casabella. And that's what happened.

LLP: Why did your father want Rogers to be Casabella's director?

LP: It was a wonderful thing. Two men from Milan, so different in character, destiny, physical appearance. They had become friends, almost keeping it a secret from their editorial staffs, each one defending his own magazine. But there was a great deal of respect, even though they were very different when it came to architecture. Rogers stressed the necessity of taking the pre-existing environment into consideration. Whereas Ponti was all for creating that environment. One designed Torre Velasca, the other Torre Pirelli. In those years public opinion in Milan had started to categorise the two architects. The Pirelli tower was considered a light structure that looked to the future; on the contrary Torre Velasca was considered a medieval tower. Ponti would not accept that it all came down to this. He defended Torre Velasca quite a bit. They had become such good friends that when the anniversary of Rogers' death came around, I was there to give a speech. It's amazing when these things happen between "ge-

niuses”.

LLP: Today it seems to be more difficult. There's more individualism. In the last few years art has become a profession. Luigi Ontani always says that he has never defined art as a profession. Now there are so many people employed in art...

LP: You are right...

LLP: When you start writing actively for Domus, who are the artists - after Usellini's and Campigli's generation - for whom you felt excitement or for whom you felt a spark. Lucio Fontana, for example, did you hang out with him?

LP: Fontana is an example of eternal friendship. We had a lot of his stunning ceramics at home. He was a really nice genius, so fresh, he had character and everything. He hadn't come out with the term "spatialism" yet. He had great instincts. I'll tell you about an episode. In 1951 he made a splash with that neon on the Triennale's grand staircase. Ponti went to see it and he liked it very much. So he wrote an article for Domus where he stated that at the Triennale Fontana had curved a lightning bolt. Fontana was so touched that he wrote him a letter that was almost childlike in its innocence. Another funny anecdote is that at first he wouldn't say "neon", but "neum". It was such a new technique that he would pronounce it with a Milanese accent.

LLP: So Domus was an instrument that helped artists assert themselves...

LP: ...yes. It was a time when people didn't travel much. The magazine was fundamental, because unlike books,

with no images, it reproduces the artwork instantly, almost in real time. *Domus*, in fact, had a great impact worldwide. And even if it wasn't all translated it didn't matter. It would get the message through. That's how one could see Yves Klein's works, or Fontana's transition to cuts. That's the reason I still hold that magazine close to my heart. There were just a few of us working at the drafting office and we would have to fill the fifty-seven pages that composed the magazine. Mazzocchi, the publisher, who was a gentleman, always expected the magazine to end on page fifty-seven on the agreed-upon date. We always reached page fifty-seven, but there were some pages we wouldn't number, so we actually had a lot more. Mazzocchi always pretended not to realise. He was a great publisher. He never interfered with our autonomy.

LLP: Among the Arte Povera artists was there anybody who you felt especially close to on a personal level?

LP: Mario Merz. I met him through Franco Toselli. Mario Merz is a guiding light, he's fantastic. Toselli displayed his famous hanging grey raincoat. Exhibits that nobody really noticed. In Italy you can find individual courage, but it's not collective, in the press and media.

LLP: Speaking of Merz a beautiful sentence of yours comes to mind, 'Prini first glimpse of sunrise, Agnetti the poet, Mario and Maria Merz: they gave me supreme light.'

LP: I remember going out to eat so many times with Mario Merz, drinking a lot, and him saying, 'We need more men like Franco Toselli!' Franco was a unique, special person in that period in Italy. Even today, if he's not convinced by an exhibit, he won't do it. His exhibits might have been attended by few people, but they all

paid a lot of attention to his programme.

LLP: Going back to your writing, I am curious to know something more about L'Armadio Magico , the fairytale book published in 1946.

LP: We were evacuated to the countryside, and being the older sister I had to take care of my younger brother and sister. So I would tell them stories, taking inspiration from anything, I would improvise here and there to pass the time. At a certain point my father encouraged me to write down those stories. L 'Armadio Magico started in the freedom of my home, not with an editor. The text was accompanied by some beautiful illustrations by Ettore Calvelli.

LLP: Looking at the fairytale book and at your drawings, I get the idea that you are a person who has always taken children, their language and way of thinking very seriously... In a certain way you remind me of Enzo Mari and his sincere respect for children.

LP: Yes, absolutely.

LLP: Even though you were 70 years old at your first exhibit, have you always liked drawing?

LP: Yes. I was Gio Ponti's right-hand man, he would spontaneously confine me to decorative arts. He would say, 'Let's do a plate this big and with so many flags' and I would obey. With a father there's obeying and disobeying, but there's no freedom! As a pastime I would draw fairy tales using tempera on cardboard. I would spend hours working on it. Very different from what I do now, which takes me an instant to draw.

LLP: Do you draw everyday now? Is it a constant oc-

cupation?

LP: I found this “industrial” system. I use A4 sheets of paper, which have standard measurements, and that the world will never run out of. I have some stacks of them right here. I have imposed on myself this method that forces me to use the A4 format which is universal. I don’t even have the curiosity to use a wider type of paper.

LLP: Apart from the brush strokes, what impressed me about the drawings is the use of words. They are rhymes or short poems. For your generation poetry has been a vital idiom to grow, learn and play with, all at the same time.

LP: The words I write are actually drawings themselves; some are illegible because they are written backwards.

LLP: When I say poetry I mean it in a general sense, like a way of living art poetically, approaching it with serious lightheartedness. I’m referring to artists like Boetti, De Dominicis, Ontani...

LP: My drawings are executed with that very spirit. Many were created in this house.

LLP: Has this house where we currently are been a meeting point like the one on Via Randaccio?

LP: Less.

LLP: The house on Via Randaccio can be referred to as a “live” Domus...

LP: Well, I lived there for 80 years. It was the first house

designed by Gio Ponti. We organised so many parties, meetings and dinners there. There was a kitchen and a big living room with three tables that we would line up to fit about thirty people. We would all eat together, toast together, and maybe somebody would sleep over. Alighiero [Boetti] spent a month in Via Randaccio, after his car accident in Liguria.

LLP: How was Alighiero?

LP: Magnificent. He was extremely generous. He made a lot of drawings and would give them away very spontaneously. He was also very curious about life and people. He observed and read. He was generous even when it came to thoughts and ideas. He had a lot of them. But I never interviewed him in Domus . I wrote him a poem for an exhibit organised in Germany.

LLP: The act of sharing among artists didn't necessarily translate into something professional...

LP: They were more human rather than professional relationships.

LLP: You can sense it in your writings. There is no distance, typical of the art criticism of that period. You put yourself at the same level as the artists, you were able to capture even the least visible aspects of their works. Your writings on art are among the most beautiful things I've read. For example this on Ontani: 'I want to speak in my way (his way) about Ontani, the artist, the equilibrist (I imitate him as an apprentice, a clumsy one), and to say that it wins me over to see that he's not scared if the horn turns into a tongue, unties, its tail and in nature, word thought figure, and latches the tip of the nose to chance. (Only way back when were the good and the deceitful separated). Rest. Rest and

pause to explain the exhibit, where the Rose Clown, dressed as the Knight, from the garden to the Villa, opens the doors from the branch-corridors to the eight dedicated leaf-rooms. The Venetian room, and the self-portrait room, the rooms of the pleonastic objects, the monsters, the two headed androgynes and the grotesques, the tableau vivant and fun in painting, the room of the seasons, the room of travel and homage... A place of harmony, the park is outside, the swaying banner, almost like an alder leaf, the feel of the wind. Like curtains inside. The Thousandarts is guarding the entrance. The Magic Carpet is on the first floor, let's fly away...¹

LP: It is such an inspired text that I don't recognise myself as the author. It was inspired by the artist. It wasn't hard to write. It came to me automatically. On-tani turned himself into to this text.

LLP: Another beautiful one is this about Robert Mapplethorpe:

Concentrazione, controllo. Le foto, poi, non si tagliano. Basically, the idea is full negative. The act of taking pictures is exciting. You can't crop. I don't have a pre-conceived image until I take it. Then I control.

Taking pictures, I learnt a lot about people but I don't use this as a tool to get to people. The photograph is an intimate event. Qualche foto a colori. Ma che colori? Not random colours, etc...

This way of playing with different languages really struck me, naturally shifting from Italian to English. It made me think of Emilio Villa who loved experimenting with different languages. It's amazing to see it applied in an art review inside a very institutionalised magazine such as Domus.

LP: Those were lucky times and a series of happy coin-

cidences. You had Mapplethorpe, me writing like that and a magazine to publish it.

LLP: When you speak of Domus you describe it as “a magazine without intermediaries”.

LP: Yes, it's very important. It was Domus' secret. Everything came out of an affinity among people. It was as if two extremely distant antennas were calling each other. This brought about unexpected results and one would lead to another. For example, I went to America to spend a month at Charles and Ray Eames' house. Not that it was planned. We enjoyed each other's company and so I seized the opportunity to observe their way of life, of working and not working up close.

LLP: Were they friends of your father's?

LP: No. Friends of mine. My father was older. LLP: Why did they invite you to stay with them?

LP: They were associates of Alexander Girard's, who had organized an exhibit in Kansas City on Mexican Pueblo figurines. Girard told me, 'Why don't you come here to Kansas City and we can meet up with Charles and Ray [Eames]?' It was so unexpected that I said 'Why not!' I took the Milan-Kansas City plane right away. As soon as I got there I saw Ray and Charles shooting away with their Rolleiflex cameras hanging from their necks. I found myself in the midst of a mental and artistic situation they helped me discover.

LLP: Did you meet the Eames in Italy?

LP: Yes. Charles had come to Italy to promote his famous chair and we had bonded through his great sense of humor. We had published the chair in Domus with

one of Steinberg's grandma-style shawls. This really amused him, and he took a liking to us. After some time he sent us a series of photographs of his house. I chose the ones where the fog was so thick that one couldn't even see the house! He said, 'These people from Domus really have fun.' That's when he invited me over, suggesting that I visit the exhibit in Kansas City before going to stay with them in Los Angeles. Charles came to pick me up at the airport and I realised that he spoke this Californian English which for me was incomprehensible. Whereas in New York, because of all the Europeans living there, it felt like being in Milan, there nobody spoke French or Italian. All they spoke was this mysterious language. I lived with the Eames from morning to night, following their everyday life. Charles was working on the production of an aquarium for the State of Michigan; he would research it by travelling and studying. While they were working, I would wander around the studio, a warehouse very similar to my father's. Gio Ponti, in fact, did not have a studio with a door, corridors or rooms, but a very big industrial warehouse, all open, with many tables where everybody worked together. Of course one had to be in a good mood, otherwise it was very easy to quarrel. I remember that the Eames would make a lot of films, and music with films.

LLP: Like the famous Powers of Ten.

LP: Yes. They were very well-crafted didactic films.

LLP: Like Munari...

LP: Poor Munari did have a thing for didactics. Being such a genius he could have taken more chances. Instead he was fixated on didactics, and this was the reason for his holding back.

LLP: Did you meet Richard Neutra during your stay in Los Angeles?

LP: I had met him at our house in Milan. He would come over to eat. What a wonderful guy! I would like to show you that issue of Domus where there is an article by Sottsass - brainy - about Neutra in California. It explains perfectly how Neutra had nothing to do with California. He was a pure Austrian. He wrote it so well, Sottsass, that it would be great to find it.

LLP: Going back to didactics, I am interested in exploring further what you said about the Eames compared to Munari.

LP: Poor Munari was impeded by many issues in his city, in Italy, and in his own home, which Charles and Ray were free from. Here in Italy Munari was entrapped by this history of applied arts and didactics. I'll tell a story. The Triennale had dedicated an exhibit to him when he was already old. In the basement he had set up some big white posters and some chalk so that the children could draw freely. I remember Munari went down with the lift to find the room full of children, who instead had already realised that these stiff posters could slide easily on the linoleum floor just like sleds. So they beat Munari at his own game. He thought, 'I will give you freedom to draw your own hieroglyph' ... But no, they would get a good running start and slide like speedboats in the empty room. I am convinced that it really struck Munari. Sometimes children just go beyond us.

LLP: So did you know Munari well?

LP: Yes. He often came over to eat at my parents'. He had a lot of fun inventions. Once he came to visit us

and told us that he had walked through the park up to a little house, where he left a note on the door. 'I came twice but you weren't there. I will come again.' He would do these types of pranks. I think he had the habit - typical of Milan - of systemising; The Eames instead didn't systemise because they had large industrial commissions to produce a given object, and they went wild with everything else.

LLP: I get the impression that thanks to your long experience in Domus you became a bridge between the world of art and that of design...

LP: As for art, the real contribution came from Franco Toselli, who enabled us to anticipate many things. He wrote wonderfully, even though he denies it. Franco, as Merz used to say, was needed by the artists; he had a sort of antenna that allowed him to understand them.

LLP: Tell me about Mario Merz...

LP: Merz was like an astral being from another world. He also wrote for Domus . Without the editor noticing, we were able to publish his texts exactly as he sent them in. He typed, leaving a lot of spaces between words. Beautiful texts about infinity, the cosmos, etc... He was glad he had this opportunity. He loved writing. It came to him easily, it was part of his being. I had the pleasure of spending evenings and dinners with Mario and Marisa that went on and on, in complete freedom. We never planned anything like, 'May I come over and interview you and then publish it in Domus ?' The result would come later.

LLP: Not long ago I interviewed Mario Pieroni, who told me something curious. He thinks that dinners should be organised before the exhibits, because it's thanks

to dinners that exhibits are thought up, not vice versa. That's how he was able to organise the first exhibit with Gerhard Richter. Basically, it's about activating a dialogue, a meeting, without really knowing where it's going to go.

LP: I agree.

LLP: It is no coincidence that in many of the photographs that appear in the catalogue of the exhibit, you are at the dining table with the artists. I found a lovely dedication by Emilio Vedova: "Between Vedova and Restany there is a bridge for Ponti's daughter".

LP: Vedova was good, a great personality. The magic word for everything, and in particular for Domus is "affinity". I have never had a mediator. If there was affinity, everything became easy. An example. When the TWA terminal, designed by Eero Saarinen was inaugurated at New York's JFK airport, we received Charles Eames' photographs, who was there at the inauguration. Obviously these were not press office photographs. But it didn't create any problems because we had a close relationship based on trust. People abroad loved the magazine, even though they didn't read the texts; they would look at the styling of the images. Domus has been a little ongoing miracle. I would rarely leave Milan, but for example if Tappio Wirkkala traveled, he would always send photographs. It was he who sent us beautiful images of Les Corbusier in Chandigarh, without me moving from the table or without us paying for them. These relations helped a great deal. The same with Ettore Sottsass: whenever he went around the world and found something he liked, he would send us pictures.

LLP: Among the many artists that you encountered,

who you shared experiences and adventures with, Agnetti, Prini and Merz are among those, as we said, with whom there was a particular affinity. I am curious to know when you met Emilio Prini.

LP: Through Franco Toselli. From the very beginning we had a connection, but I was above all amazed by his integrity and his severity. The point is that he has to be present and absent at the same time. Someone else would have said, 'I want to be somewhere visible;' instead he wants to be in an almost invisible spot, but wants to be there. The relationship between his work and the place he's in is also very important, a relationship which he might deny. I'll give you an example. The artwork you see reproduced in the photograph on page fifty-two of a certain catalogue is not the actual artwork, but instead a photographic reproduction on page fifty-two of an artwork that is not what is there. In reality, this is true, but nobody thinks about it. He, instead, wants you to think about it.

LLP: How would you describe his work? LP: It's not easy.

LLP: He seems to "highlight" something that already exists, rather than personally "creating"...

LP: Yes, he points out and highlights something that hadn't been pointed out before. But he doesn't do it as if it were a simple mechanical contradiction as in 'others ignore it, I point it out.' That would be too simple, and he is not simple.

LLP: Have you seen the exhibit in Strasbourg [Fermi in Dogana, Ancienne Douane, 1997]?

LP: Yes, my son Salvatore was the photographer for

the exhibit and so we all went. It was like part of a work by Emilio Prini. Beautiful. There were two parallel green boat bows leaning against the wall. Then there were some crates, stacked on top of one another. I remember him complaining because the workers weren't setting them up the way he wanted. Millo [Emilio Prini] wants things done a certain way and not everyone can understand and produce them. This way he also provokes negative reactions, but his being so demanding is part of the job, it's necessary.

LLP: Another personality I would like to delve into is Tommaso Trini. Did you know him well?

LP: For many years the column "exhibits" was curated by Trini. He was very knowledgeable, very gracious, very good.

LLP: What was his peculiarity?

LP: He wrote very well and he knew that his texts were read by people from different backgrounds. He wasn't judgemental. He was always extremely late with deadlines, maybe because of his pursuit for perfection. The magazine *Data* was important as well; it was secured in Agnetti's warehouse. Vincenzo Agnetti is a person who slipped away from everyone and continues to slip away. He was a genius.

LLP: Underestimated till this day...

LP: I remember a conference he held in Rome at Graziella Lonardi's Palazzo Taverna. At a certain point he said, 'Justice is amputation' while miming it with gestures. A young student from the audience got up and protested, asking him what his political point of view was. Agnetti stopped, stared at the boy with his ce-

lestial look in his eyes and said, 'Speak in your own words.' This boy, in fact, was only repeating the political slogans of those years. Those were political times. The day after he participated in an art conference at the National Gallery of Modern Art and discussed math exclusively. A girl got up and asked about this choice. Agnetti answered, 'Why? Do you want to see blood?' He wanted them to understand that one can allude to revolution even while just talking about math. These public speeches for him were a great challenge. During the inauguration of his retrospective at PAC in Milan in 1980, he lay down on the ground because he had had too much to drink.

He used to drink and cry often. He would hug even the toughest art dealers. On that occasion we took him back home in via Randaccio, where we had organised an after party, but because of the situation, my sister sent back all of the cakes. Everyone was so used to coming there that many people showed up anyway, even though we didn't have anything to eat. Agnetti was lying on a bed, blissfully. I remember that Alighiero Boetti walked in the room and they talked seriously, a rare thing between two artists. I regretted not having a recorder at hand...

LLP: Was there an artist who Agnetti had a special bond with?

LP: He was very good friends with Piero Manzoni, a few years younger than him. They shared many ideas. They both drank a lot, but the difference was that Agnetti would drink wine and then throw up, whereas Manzoni would keep it all in. There was a special harmony between them.

LLP: Curious. Two very different artists. Both very complex. Manzoni's work appeared simple, accessible on

the surface to a certain degree, while Agnetti's work appears difficult, and less readable.

LP: Yes, this is true. And Agnetti was a writer. He came from that world. He played with images and with the writing of images. "Forgotten by heart," like the title of his book, is a key sentence. According to Vincenzo, things are "forgotten by heart"; like food, we eat them and they become part of ourselves, and are transformed into something different. Another of his distinguishing features was falling. I have more memories of him lying on the ground than standing on his feet. It was as if he felt that he couldn't grasp reality. It wasn't a coincidence that he displayed his falling in four sculptures and four photographs, at the last exhibit at Franco Toselli's before his death. The fact of him lying on the ground was his idea of the world. He did all kinds of things. Once he climbed close to a lamppost in front of the window in Via Randaccio, another time he walked like an equilibrist on a metal bar supporting the ceiling of his studio in Via Macchiavelli 30. He did these very fast and physically risky actions. He and Piero Manzoni.

LLP: But did you ever meet Manzoni?

LP: Never in person.

LLP: And Castellani?

LP: Yes but Castellani was self-controlled, he treaded lightly, he was very good, a revolutionary. A very self-conscious and precise person.

LLP: What relationship did you have with Luciano Fabro?

LP: Fabro was mysterious. I wouldn't know how to describe the key to unlock him. He was astonishing, independent, free, not tragic.

LLP: And did you meet Luigi Ontani in Rome or in Milan?

LP: In Milan I think. I remember him being always the same, extremely elegant. There were always his suitcases with all his changes of clothing at my house in Via Randaccio. Enchanting, complex. Ontani was perfectly in control of himself. Immensely polite. Very generous, hospitable.

Well... what a lovely crowd!

