

“City, a heap of broken words”

Octavio Paz

Drains, cracks in the asphalt, a doorman, water leaks, women waiting, angular housing blocks, trees aligned with mathematical precision, unused sidewalks, nannies, insect-like buses, and a deafening twilight. Images of a suspended landscape that occupy the final six minutes of *L'Eclisse* by Antonioni (1962). The city, in its desolation, in its carefully maintained abandonment, offers no resolution whatsoever to the erotic tension between the two —wonderful— human bodies that have wrestled with their emotions during the film’s preceding two hours. On the contrary: the urban landscape is not a backdrop, but the protagonist that opens the wound, that lays bare an anxiety that does not cease. A form of existential suspension that is, at once, emptiness and density.

My fascination with Antonioni, and my affinities with the work of Ludovica Carbotta, reside in what might seem like a minor gesture: how to make the street speak, how to make the things of the street speak. How to let a crack in the asphalt move us. How to know how to listen to surfaces, textures, pipes. Tire marks imprinted on the asphalt, crushed cans, bicycle locks, abandoned mattresses form a basal sediment upon which other cans, and other marks, will also exercise their right to be crushed. The city accumulates in layers of wear, in minimal repetitions, in gestures that are erased almost as soon as they occur.

The artist forces changes of scale and transforms her objects through actions of erasure, crushing, tearing, distortion, so that their functionality is annulled and their disability deliberately amplified. Thus emerges a landscape that cannot —and does not want to— maintain high levels of performance or productivity. A landscape that does not erect the pillars of capitalism, but rather embodies, in its very precariousness, the materialization of a will to resist: a form of protest made matter.

The columns, designed to be seen from all 360 degrees —maximum visibility, uninterrupted circulation of information— have slowed down, collapsing into themselves. The layers of paper parody the permanence of official monuments, and spread their wings in order to escape. Soon they will become part of the urban phantasmagoria. In the face of the joint operations of privatization and deregulation, the two pillars of our society, the system persists despite instability. It endures only as long as it is maintained: an antagonistic form sustained through continuous effort, repetition, and care. But the lock does not secure closure, the advertisements advertise nothing, and the mattresses offer no rest. These physical incursions reconfigure not only the terms of political action, but the very imagination of the urban.

The city reinvents itself every day. That is where the play lies. Children, who defy the finitude of matter, propose infinite paths within illusory labyrinths. Or perhaps those children's models are nothing more than exact reproductions of an adult world that has forgotten how to play: a world that loses its way, that fractures under the weight of its own gravity. The city, because it reinvents itself every day, must also die every day. It rises, wears down, and nullifies itself. And so, when night falls, it must surrender to that fall —like a dry bark— let itself go, in order to begin again.

A choreography that begins and ends and begins again. An inventory of possible encounters —always provisional— with which we attempt, groping, to trace some understanding of who we are.

Ester Partegàs

Enero 28, 2026

Ludovica Carbotta lives and works in Barcelona. She has a Master of Fine Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London (2015). Her work was presented at the 58th Venice Biennale, May You Live in Interesting Times (2019), curated by Ralph Rugoff.

Among her recent solo exhibitions are: Builders of worlds very similar to our own (Fundación Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2025), Monowe (Liste Art Fair Basel, Basel, 2024), Monowe (film, Appel Housewarming Programme, Amsterdam, 2024), Very Well, on My Own (MAMbo – Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Bologna, 2024), I come from outside of myself (European Pavilion, OGR, Turin, 2022), Growing Pains (Sala Verónicas, Murcia, 2021), Paphos (Bombon Projects, Barcelona, 2021), Die Telamonen (Bündner Kunstmuseum, Chur, Switzerland, 2020), Monowe (Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, 2019), smART (Rome, 2019), Artissima Present Future (Turin, 2018), Marselleria (New York, 2018), among others.

She has received the Ariane de Rothschild Prize (Milan, 2011), the Gallarate Prize (2016), the International Gasworks Fellowship, London (2016), and the Special Mention in the ITALIA Prize, MAXXI Museum, Rome (2016). In 2017, she was an associate researcher at the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, and in 2018 she received the New York Prize, ISCP/Columbia University.

Her work is part of public and private collections, including the Castello di Rivoli (Turin, IT), Macro (Rome, IT), Museo MAGA (Gallarate, Milan, IT), IVAM (Valencia, ES), GAM (Turin, IT), Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Turin, IT), Fondazione CRC Cuneo (Turin, IT), the Rothschild Collection (United Kingdom), and the OlorVisual Collection (Barcelona, ES).

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