

# The Representation of Historical Villages for a New Humanism. Research and Experimentation in the “Lizori Laboratory” in the Heart of Italy

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*The project "Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" proposes the centrality of representation as a thesis for a New Humanism, based on its nature as a relational process with the place and its meanings. The study is developed in the medieval historic village of Lizori, located in the heart of Umbria, Italy, selected as a paradigmatic laboratory capable of demonstrating the broader value of historic settlements. The purpose is to provide a critical and interpretive reading of the quality of dwelling found in signs stratified over time that have achieved a vital balance with the landscape. These results aim to define and share new models of sustainable regeneration that complement the functionalism of contemporary society and address the loss of relational measure characteristic of our cities. To achieve this, the methodological approach involved an international workshop with drawing masters, artists, and researchers, who captured their aesthetic reflections of the village in over one hundred and twenty works, all intrinsically linked to architecture and design. The results were transformed into an exhibition, a pathway designed to help visitors “see beyond”, transcribing the village through drawing to grasp and share perceived meanings. The ultimate goal is to activate the concept of empathy and embodied simulation, informed by the vision of mirror neurons, thereby demonstrating how architecture and landscape, when transcribed by the creative and symbolic act of representation, act as "texts" capable of activating emotional and bodily responses and placing the person and their depth at the center, promoting a genuine cultural path toward a New Humanism.*

**Keywords:** *New Humanism, Representation, Art, Historic Villages, Sustainable Development.*

## Introduction

"Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" proposes an experiment in architectural drawing that advocates for the centrality of representation within a new humanism, understood as a research tool capable of engaging with the depth of the person.

The research starts from the need to identify new models of living, a need clearly shown by the recent pandemic (Zamagni, 2020), a borderline condition that has brought out the urgency of a new architectural thought, focused on the person, on his desires for relationship and nature, which are often ignored by our cities, focused solely on the performance response and an underlying technocracy to which

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the appellation "smart" is linked (Albino et al., 2015; Boykova et al., 2016; Giffinger et al., 2007; Ratti & Mattei, 2013; Roche et al., 2012; Townsend, 2013; Vianello, 2013; Zeng, 2025).

Instead, the study seeks to investigate the value of the small community scale (Bianconi, Filippucci, & Ceccaroni, 2022; Filippucci, 2022), proposing historic settlements as a laboratory for investigation to provide new and useful perspectives for design.

The research is based on the valuable settlement quality of Lizori, a medieval village in the heart of Umbria. Along the olive-groved Apennine strip between Foligno and Spoleto, in exact alignment with the Temple on the Clitunno, the clear triangular design of a hillside castle is nestled halfway up a rocky spur. The place dominates the wide valley, historically (Grohmann, 1981) a "machine for seeing," designed to conquer and govern the territory, even as one is immersed in its vernacular architecture, marked by compact facades and paths that trace the orography, making the contour lines visible (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Lizori, a Hilltop Castle with a distinct Triangular Design, historically serving as a "Machine for seeing" that Dominates the Valley*

Isolated and elevated, the historic village saw centuries of community life. After a long abandonment, it was brought back to life in the 1970s through the initiative of a community led by artists, architects, and young people, under the guidance of Antonio Meneghetti, who reconstructed its forms based on the historic layout and now curates the quality of dwelling.

The Umbrian village offers a treasure trove of lessons that transcend the built forms, proposing a current model of regeneration that succeeds despite the absence of typical services and functions—factors that would otherwise make it unattractive

to contemporary society. Moving beyond regenerative hypotheses often charged with a nostalgic and anachronistic rhetoric of returning to life on distant borders, these cultural heritages should be studied as places that hold a lesson, capable of dialogue, and of offering an alternative meaning to the predominance of the present and necessity.

Like a ruin that, lacking *firmitas* and *utilitas*, only shows its values when attributed outside of functional performance (Purini, 2008), places like Lizori can be discovered as repositories of meanings for dwelling, beyond appearance, possessing a beauty that, although seductive, remains hidden in forms seemingly relegated to the past.

Lizori, an emblem of a vast heritage of historic settlements of similar character, has returned to welcoming people after reconstruction, proposing a "measure" (Purini, 2008b) of dwelling modulated on the person and reflecting the profound reasons for its regeneration. Through its dimensions and the care given to details, it engages in dialogue with those who visit, proposing the value of small things and the theme of the small community, concretely represented by the welcome of a place marked by small houses and common areas, with small squares, meeting rooms, exhibition spaces, and dining areas.

In the permanence of the sign (Parrinello, 2024), what Lizori offers is a different way of relating—a dialogue with the landscape, with nature, with one's own person, and with those one meets—thus changing the way of dwelling, impacting people's lives and their well-being.

The settlement space of historic villages provides an alternative to the logic of the megalopolis due to its landscape and architectural value, highlighting the concept of "smart villages" focused on sharing resources that go beyond concrete and functional services, which, though necessary, are insufficient to offer the true quality of dwelling. In Lizori, shared assets—the "renewable" resources that make the place truly "intelligent"—are those ascribed to the settlement sphere of dwelling, linked to the very concept of architecture and its distinction from mere construction. Architecture is charged with immaterial issues, culture, and what speaks profoundly, what "serves" the person and intersects desires beyond mere need.

The loss of the community dimension, evident in societal data and reflected in our cities' housing models, has liquefied relationships (Bauman, 2000) and the human dimension. Meanwhile, small historic villages, increasingly abandoned today, nonetheless remain as monuments (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2014; Lipp, 2008) and testimonies laden with memory (Feyles, 2012; Halbwachs, 2001), capable of narrating the community's relationship with the landscape, while remaining actively engaged in the dialogue between signs that never cease to communicate with those who inhabit them.

They are certainly spaces outside of time, and therefore utopian (Bloch, 2000; Friedman, 2006; Tafuri, 1966), in the propositional value this vision holds for overcoming the predominance of utilitarianism and functionalism, and for offering a different freedom that transcends those constraints. They are not alternative places, but spaces for rediscovering what is missing in our cities, how to regenerate them, and what to seek to promote a new Humanism—a centrality of the person and their dwelling that has been dispersed by the performance and functional character of our

cities, which, though rich in services and capable of responding to needs, are too often unaware of desires.

The Lizori case study is proposed as an experimental laboratory for understanding fundamental design issues, representing a possible contemporary practice of geo-architecture (Portoghesi, 2005), and a concretization of the concept of sustainability in the need to promote settlement interventions in relation to the environment, harmoniously integrated with the landscape and the cultural context. An expression of responsible architecture (Settis, 2015), truly sustainable because it is founded on history, place, and the search to preserve environmental balance, Lizori shows itself as a model of regeneration for the activated processes capable of enhancing the genius loci (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

The recovery of architectural heritage is inseparable from its relationship with the landscape and the care for nature, proposing logics and processes underlying the reconstruction of spaces that connect the natural macrocosm to the human microcosm, offering places and meanings to be discovered that open up into a social, cultural, artistic, and therefore existential dimension.

Representation is inserted into this coordinate, by virtue of its status as the soul of the project (Purini, 2022), just as the score is for music—that which transcends time and bodily experience. Drawing is proposed as an ineluctable condition for investigation (de Rubertis, 1994), thanks to its ability to go beyond appearance (de Rubertis & Soletti, 2000) and to transcribe what is "presented" in a new form, multiplying its meanings and revealing what would remain underlying.

This is what the term "*re-ad-prae-sentare*" expresses, with "*re*" being an intensifier expressing repetition, "*ad*" a complement of purpose indicating the goal for which the action is performed, "*prae*" a particle that moves what happens in space and time, and "*sentare*" which derives from the verb "to be". Representative research is configured as the repeated action of putting forward for a goal, a process intimately linked to the project in which the existing is grasped and the intrinsic values of the person are revealed.

The representative challenge is thus proposed as a necessary condition for promoting a new humanism, for offering a "cure" with architecture and place (Bianconi, Filippucci & Ceccaroni, 2022): designing the village in its landscape, the underlying relationships with the architecture, the quality and beauty of the place, the meanings of history and their relationship with the community, is proposed as an innovative path for its ability to transfer that action that regenerates those who live in these places. Drawing thus emerges, in the centrality of a design and architectural thought, with its artistic vocation becoming a key element of the path, in an experimentation that is not limited to the case study, but offers itself as a response to the cultural need to rediscover the meaning of our dwelling.

## Literature Review

Historic villages like Lizori serve as reference coordinates for a new humanism because they emphasize not only the formal and spatial qualities of an abandoned and regenerated historical settlement, but, above all, the process of discovering the balance of signs.

As the result of an evolutionary process of selection and adaptation (de Rubertis, 2008; 2012), the settlement space, through its conformation, dimensions, and context, exalts the act of seeing (Wenders, 1992), which is always a creative act (Arnheim, 1965; Kepes, 1944), a process of abstraction and signification (Filippucci, 2012) activated here particularly in the relationships between the historical signs of design culture and the ineluctable value of nature and the environment.

The landscape is thus rediscovered as idea (Zagari, 2006), regulated as "a certain part of territory, as it is perceived by populations whose character derives from the action of natural and/or human factors and their interrelationships" (Consiglio d'Europa, 2000). The pre-eminence of the eye, affirmed with Modernity (Purini, 1983) poses the image as a key issue of contemporaneity (Pinotti & Somaini, 2016), requiring multiple levels of reading and a new centrality for the study of perceptual processes (Gregory, 1998). However, the focus of the definition is not the genesis attributable to the territory or the environment, but rather the effect on the person in their community dimension (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2018b).

The landscape is both content and container (Gibson, 1950), cultural product and process (Zagari, 2006), concept (Purini, 2021) and conceptualization of what is observed (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2018), and a figurative interpretation of the system of signs (Filippucci, 2013). The landscape is the sky and the horizon that supports reality (Bianconi et al., 2021), connected to our emotions (Bianconi et al., 2021), what we in fact "represent" first "inside the head" (Cennini, 2003), that "internal design" by Federico Zuccari that generates the "external design" (Zuccaro, 1961) and which thus directs our design relations with reality (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2019).

Perception and representation find a contemporary challenge in the landscape, linked to humanism and the centrality of the person. A pure and ethereal term (de Rubertis, 2006), the landscape is structurally associated not so much with the image as with meanings, which are fleeting (Barthes, 2001) and multiple (Venturi, 1967), overcoming the romantic reductivisms of the mere picturesque (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2010).

It is interesting to highlight the aesthetic impact of the landscape, noting how it is often constructed by human action without intentionality (Purini, 2021), offering itself as a commons (Ostrom, 1990; Settis & Mengo, 2013), a functional value for individual and collective well-being.

Perception, however, does not concern the intellectual sphere alone. As Merleau-Ponty analyzes, the set of different sensations constitutes a horizon of meaning "undivided with my total being", capable of grasping, even in landscape and architecture, "a single structure of things, a single way of existing that speaks simultaneously to all the senses" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). There is a corporeality of architecture, which seems obvious since it is represented in the forms of the built environment, and a corresponding corporeality of the landscape, which derives from the materiality of the territory experienced in the perceptive sphere—the same sphere that, at a closer distance, activates our relationship with what is built. It is not a mere intellectual, cognitive, or emotional matter; perception involves our corporeality as well as the physicality and spatiality of what is captured by observing.

Representing landscape and architecture means, therefore, proposing a new operational humanism because "perception is not something that happens to us or

that happens within us; it is something we do" (Noë, 2006): even when we look at a landscape and experience architecture, our eyes move, our body holds a posture, we rotate our head. These are activities that also concern our physical sphere, sometimes unintentionally, representing the way we explore reality. In perceiving—in this creative re-elaboration of stimuli (Goldstein, 2007; Gregory, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Rock, 1983), in the signs (Kandinsky, 1926; Klee, 1956) that are the graphic primitives (Filippucci, 2012) of the point and the line—we implicitly transfer our presence into that relationship between stasis and movement (Lynch, 1960; Sancar, 1986) which represents our conquest of space. Our involvement is heuristic and aesthetic, centering a "science of consciousness" (Chalmers, 2014) that marks the experience (Husserl, 1960; Peirce, 2008) and in representing leads to "giving body to the mind" (Clark, 1998).

As Heinrich Wölfflin already noted at the end of the nineteenth century (Wölfflin, 1886), every place marks the experience because our bodily perception feels the physicality of the architectural elements, with large rooms that make us breathe more deeply and narrow proportions that take our breath away. These are some of the conditions that alternate in Lizori in an extremely interesting way, involving us in a continuous solicitation of our perception, projected towards exploration in the alternation of open and closed spaces, and in the relationship between the details of the built environment and the breadth of the landscape. In this alternation of sensations that seems to reflect the heartbeat, our behaviors change (Gramann et al., 2011), we move, talk, and think (Ritchie, 2021) differently.

Representing the landscape and architecture means making this experience alive, which, in the case of Lizori and the small historic villages, proves capable of generating an action of "care" on those who live there, by virtue of the ability of the eye to convey most of our sensations (Pinotti & Lucignani, 2007). As demonstrated with experimental paths focused on perceptual analysis, life is better in places like Lizori (Figure 2); we have a feeling of calm and well-being that impacts our person (Bianconi et al., 2019; Bianconi et al., 2022; Meschini & Seccaroni, 2024).

Architecture and landscape, with their qualities, meanings, and values, thus reveal themselves as a form of care that concerns not only our depth but also our corporeality, as highlighted by recent literature that is rediscovering the value of emotions and sensations in correspondence with the action of the environment in which we live (Bianconi et al., 2020a; Cappelletto, 2010; Gallagher, 2006; Higuera-Trujillo et al., 2021; Nanda et al., 2013; Papale et al., 2016).

"Lizori: Signs and Dialogues," starting from these hypotheses, aims to demonstrate the centrality of representation as an act of consciousness and knowledge, and the concretization of relationship and empathy. If the landscape, the architecture, and what surrounds us are observed distractedly, they remain a background and noise, not fully engaging us, stopping outside our lives. If they do not find their vitality within our figuration, they are consumed in the image. If they are not associated with operational meanings, with the deep search for orientations and sense, everything is impoverished into a background that does not involve our emotions, our body, or our being. The representation of what is external, what is other, involves those who allow themselves to be captured, thereby realizing that distances have been overcome.

This is how "multi-component" processes are ignited, as neuroscience explains, with the coexistence of a "basic empathy" (Basic Empathy) linked to the affective sphere that provokes a vicarious response to the emotions it arouses (Low level: mirroring), and a "reenactive empathy" (Reenactive Empathy), which leads to the involvement of the cognitive sphere and therefore requires attention, memory, imagination, and high-level decoding (High Level: Mentalizing); all aspects that structure the sphere of drawing (Stueber, 2006).

From this point of view, the interpretation of empathy articulated at the beginning of the twentieth century by the German philosopher and psychologist Theodor Lipps, a scholar of aesthetic psychology, is interesting. For Lipps, knowledge occurs first in "sensible perception", through which "I know things," then in a second phase of "Internal perception," which allows one to "know about myself," and finally in "empathy," which is the moment that makes "the other is known" (Lipps, 1906), allowing us to grasp "the objectivization of the life of the ego in the object" (Donise, 2019).

In the perception of architecture and landscape, active and creative involvement is not a choice but a necessary response to a stimulus. For Lipps, this stimulus either creates an agreement, resulting in positive empathy, or a conflict, resulting in negative empathy (Lipps, 1906). One may suffer from a wounded landscape or disfigured architecture because empathy activates a reaction of a design nature, which is projected back to the positivity of dwelling as a creative action.

Between interiority and exteriority there is always an oscillation between subject and object which, as Edith Stein explains, in its being "the specific way in which we encounter the other" (Gamarra-Caffieri, 1988), makes one's own experience intertwine with that of those who are other than us, "as if" we lived it ourselves. This process develops in the landscape and in architecture (which are inanimate bodies) because it develops in a "counterfactual process of pretending (fiction, simulation) by the interpreter, of an agent's point of view and mental state" (Rainone, 2005). By recognizing an identity (Filippucci, 2018) in it—which is a projection and testimony of culture and the meanings of the place—we implicitly subjectify it, looking for a place in which to reflect ourselves. Only in this way, assuming it has something to tell us, can our emotions become involved (Niemic, 2002), and can we enter into a relationship.

We are social beings; relationships influence us, making us become mimetic (Dawkins, 1976; Jablonka & Lamb, 2005) in a process that is not necessarily intentional (Blackmore, 2000). The empathy to which the landscape refers, in this representational centrality, is configured as a consequence, as a "mechanism that is undergone," a consequence of seeing. The feeling of the other in us becomes an "embodied simulation" (Palmiero & Borsellino, 2018): "with the word embodied we want to emphasize two points: first of all, cognition derives from types of experience that depend on the fact of having a body endowed with different sensory-motor capacities; secondly, these individual sensorimotor abilities are themselves inscribed in a broader biological, psychological and cultural context" (Varela et al., 1992).



**Figure 2.** The Outcome of Perceptual Analysis, demonstrating that the Village's Environment Generates feelings of Calm and Well-being

The representation of architecture and landscape is born through an internal simulation—a drawing of what is seen and that has created a resonance—from a reinterpretation of what immediately created a perceptive-emotional impact in the vicarious sphere, but which then must be understood in a process that requires multiple cognitive aspects (Boella, 2018), fully involving our knowledge, experience, and culture.

The relationship between architecture and landscape found in the quality of what is seen is, however, only an image in the mirror: a reverberation of time that has passed (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2019), of the society that designed it with its work (Filippucci & Bianconi, 2017), of the reasons and therefore of the values that generated the place (Filippucci, 2022). In its signs, we seek and find ourselves in reality, reflecting ourselves here. Otherness is reflected in us, and we thus feel those signs in empathy as if we were living them ourselves, even if they are outside of us. This condition is explained by the Orphic myth of Dionysus as a child, an expression of vitality, who by the deception of the Titans finds himself paralyzed in the reflected image—which, according to Franco Farinelli, is not his face, but that of the earth (Farinelli, 2009)—which immobilizes him because it disorients him, preventing him from understanding the boundaries between the self and otherness.

In order to make a culture of humanism concrete and not just theoretical for the project, "Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" aims to offer a game of mirrors, reflections of reflections, perspectives of perspectives. In this continuous cross-reference between corporeality and incorporeality, between sensations, emotions, and signs, drawing implements a strategy of involvement, resulting from what has been captured by the eye, and how the landscape and architecture have captured the observer, but also serving as a process to activate the same condition for those who will be confronted with these evoked landscapes.

It is essential to explain the hypotheses proposed by the theory of "mirror neurons," that resonance mechanism that is undergone in experiencing the emotions of others. Mirror neurons are "that way of understanding that, before any conceptual and linguistic mediation, shapes our experience of others" (Sinigaglia & Rizzolati, 2006). These "come into operation in observing an action carried out by others as if they were following it in the first person, recognizing the intentionality that is at the base" (Fogassi et al., 2005). Action is the vehicle of meaning (Gallese, 2010), that perception that involves all corporeality, that representation that merges object and subject—a process that therefore does not arise from the stimulus of signs but from drawing, from creative and interpretative dialogue, from the underlying design intentionality that guides it. It becomes interesting to highlight how the "function of mirror cells would therefore lie not so much in the disturbed action as in the intentionality associated with the action that serves the understanding of the goal rather than the use of the movements necessary to achieve it" (Palmiero & Borsellino, 2018).

The representation of landscape and architecture as an empathic path and as an application of the theory of mirror neurons places the action of drawing at the center, offering an experimentation focused on identification that intersects wide and new fields of investigation. Architecture and landscape, due to the complexities and contradictions (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2021; Venturi, 1967) of which they are

harbingers, generate multiple emotions and meanings, impacting pathos but not activating real empathy because they do not express defined objectives. The intentionality of representation, on the other hand, is proposed as an instrument of empathic pervasiveness, involving in identification through what is experienced, projecting oneself into the same path of knowledge and discovery. The drawing thus transcribes the landscape and architecture into a new sphere of search for meanings, concretizing and dematerializing them, making them at the same time material and virtual, bodily and spiritual, harbingers of the need to transform perceptions, ideas, emotions, meanings, into "words," into facts. It is not, therefore, a matter of simple images or forms, but it is the representation of the person that is proposed as the true theme of research and experimentation for a new humanism.

### **Methodology and Methods**

"Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" is part of a continuous path of study, research, and enhancement promoted by the Antonio Meneghetti Foundation for Scientific and Humanistic Research and coordinated by the author.

Since 2016, Lizori has served as an open-air laboratory for research on architectural and landscape drawing, as well as a setting for various educational initiatives. Issues related to the representative challenges (Filippucci, 2021) posed by the place materialized in a comparison among different national schools on the theme, summarized in the volume "Il Prossimo Paesaggio" (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2018), offering reflections on the basic concepts that fuel interest in the study of places.

Following this initial outcome, the international call and volume "Digital Draw Connection: Representing Complexity and Contradiction in Landscape" (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2021) were created. The work reinterprets, extended to the sphere of landscape, the issues present in the famous bestseller "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" (Venturi, 1967). Featuring an introduction by Jim Venturi (son of the great protagonist of postmodern architectural thought), the dialogue on the proposed themes involved eighty-one authors from thirty universities across all five continents (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2021).

The research activities led to analyses and reconstructions of the village (Bianconi et al., 2019), with the Foundation supporting the development of in-depth studies on possible specific interventions (Filippucci & Bianconi, 2018) and on cultural and technical aspects, such as experiments using biosensors and digital procedures to analyze the perceptual impact of spaces on those who inhabit them (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2018; Bianconi et al., 2020; Bianconi et al., 2020; Meschini & Seccaroni, 2024).



**Figure 3.** Artists and Researchers engaged in the Three-day in situ Workshop, focusing on Drawing and Dialogue as both a Relational and Intellectual Process.

Lizori has been a unique venue for meeting and discussion. In addition to conferences and seminars, the village first hosted a Summer School on “Cultural Landscape and Heritage Skills” (June 2018) (Bianconi et al., 2019), and subsequently a workshop, “Hortus Lizori” (July 2022), focused on the representation and design of the landscape. This educational activity was aimed at European doctoral schools (Bianconi et al., 2023), serving as a cultural proposal to rethink the sustainable development of our places through drawing.

Together with Franco Zagari (Zagari, 2006; 2017), one of the major figures in the international debate on landscape who sadly passed away shortly after this extraordinary meeting, and Matteo Clemente (Clemente, 2015; Clemente et al., 2017), a professor at the University of Tuscia, a representative challenge was implemented as a necessity rather than a mere prerequisite. Due to its qualities, Lizori can only be transformed through design proposals if they project beyond reality, beyond limits, beyond the present time, and beyond the image, through that concrete yet somewhat impossible evocation and abstraction that serves to capture the meanings of the place.

The result is a representative corpus that reveals utopian reflections, an approach that has always been fundamental for architecture (Argan, 1979; Benevolo, 1960; Friedman, 2006; Rogers, 1965; Tafuri, 1968). The results of the proposals, elaborated by the doctoral students after the workshop, were also collected, along with critical reflections, in the volume “Hortus Lizori” (Bianconi et al., 2023). The representative corpus also substantiated the “Hortus Lizori Exhibit” exhibition, which became a permanent exhibition in the Ducal Palace of the village. This visual narrative also

functioned as a territorial attractor, registering over four thousand visitors in one year and, in effect, doubling tourist flows.

The project "Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" fits into this flow of activities, involving representation experts selected for their distinctive qualities and valuable research, all constantly in dialogue with the themes of dwelling. Recognizing the limitations of previous activities, more experienced and mature figures were involved, capable of offering their skills and ability to detect the qualities of the place through drawing.



**Figure 4.** *Preliminary Works Documenting the Narrative Journey and Cultural Proposal Stemming from the Deep Intertwining of Lizori's Architecture, Landscape, and Art*

In this context, the tested format of the three-day in situ workshop (5-7th July 2023) was proposed, focused on drawing and dialogue (Figure 3), after which the works were re-elaborated and acquired by the Foundation to be exhibited and to disseminate the research results. The artists and researchers were primarily identified in connection with architectural representation, chosen for their prominence in the cultural debate: Franco Purini (academic and a major reference point for drawn architecture), Gian Piero Frassinelli (the last architect of the famous Superstudio), Ruggero Lenci (Full Professor of architectural composition at "La Sapienza" and a multifaceted artist), Stefano Bertocci and Sandro Parrinello (Full Professors of drawing at the

University of Florence and experts in life drawing), Emanuela Chiavoni (watercolorist and Full Professor of drawing at "La Sapienza"), Valerio Morabito (professor of landscape architecture at the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria and international artist), Raffaele Federici (painter and professor of sociology at the University of Perugia), Elisabetta Silvestri (local painter), and three expert watercolor artists from different schools: Fausta d'Ubaldo (Roman, linked to the Pedro Cano school), Fabrizio Ciappina (Messina architect with a doctorate in architecture), and Claudio Patanè (Catania architect with a doctorate in representation).

These authoritative figures were joined by more emerging artists and scholars from different schools and heterogeneous fields, all with over twenty years of experience in representation, attentive to the landscape and interested in architecture understood as art. Each stands out for their own language, specific research theme, and skills. Coming from different areas of the peninsula, each contributed images and cultures reflecting the richness of the Italian landscape, offering multiple paths of discovery and reinterpretation of the qualities of the place through different representative techniques.

The interpretive reading of the signs of the landscape and architecture, offered by the experts, was transcribed into representations that embody the matured understanding. With intellectual generosity, not only the results are shared, but also the processes and the construction of the very idea of the place, summarized in the catalog (Bianconi et al., 2024a) and in a volume that integrates the generating reflections (Bianconi et al. 2024b). Over one hundred and twenty works concretize the dialogues between the signs, offering us a mirror to look at the place. A story of the place is thus born, one that can be experienced through the work carried out by drawing experts, a narrative path that has become a cultural proposal on the intertwining of architecture, landscape, and art (Figure 4).

This gave rise to the exhibition, aimed at involving a wide audience and sharing the results and methodologies of the implemented path, which is important for raising awareness of the value of our heritage. The collection of works, enhanced by descriptive panels, as well as physical and digital models, videos, and scientific books, has been exhibited first at the Ducal Palace (Figure 5) of the village and, since September 2024, at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts in Turin (Figure 6).

To highlight the quality and impact of the research, it should be noted that this process achieved international resonance, being presented at the United Nations in New York during the "SDGs Weekend 2023", and recognized as a Best Practice for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 11, and 17).



**Figure 5.** Installation View of the Inaugural Exhibition at the Ducal Palace in Lizoni, designed to Disseminate Research Findings and Valorize the Architectural Heritage



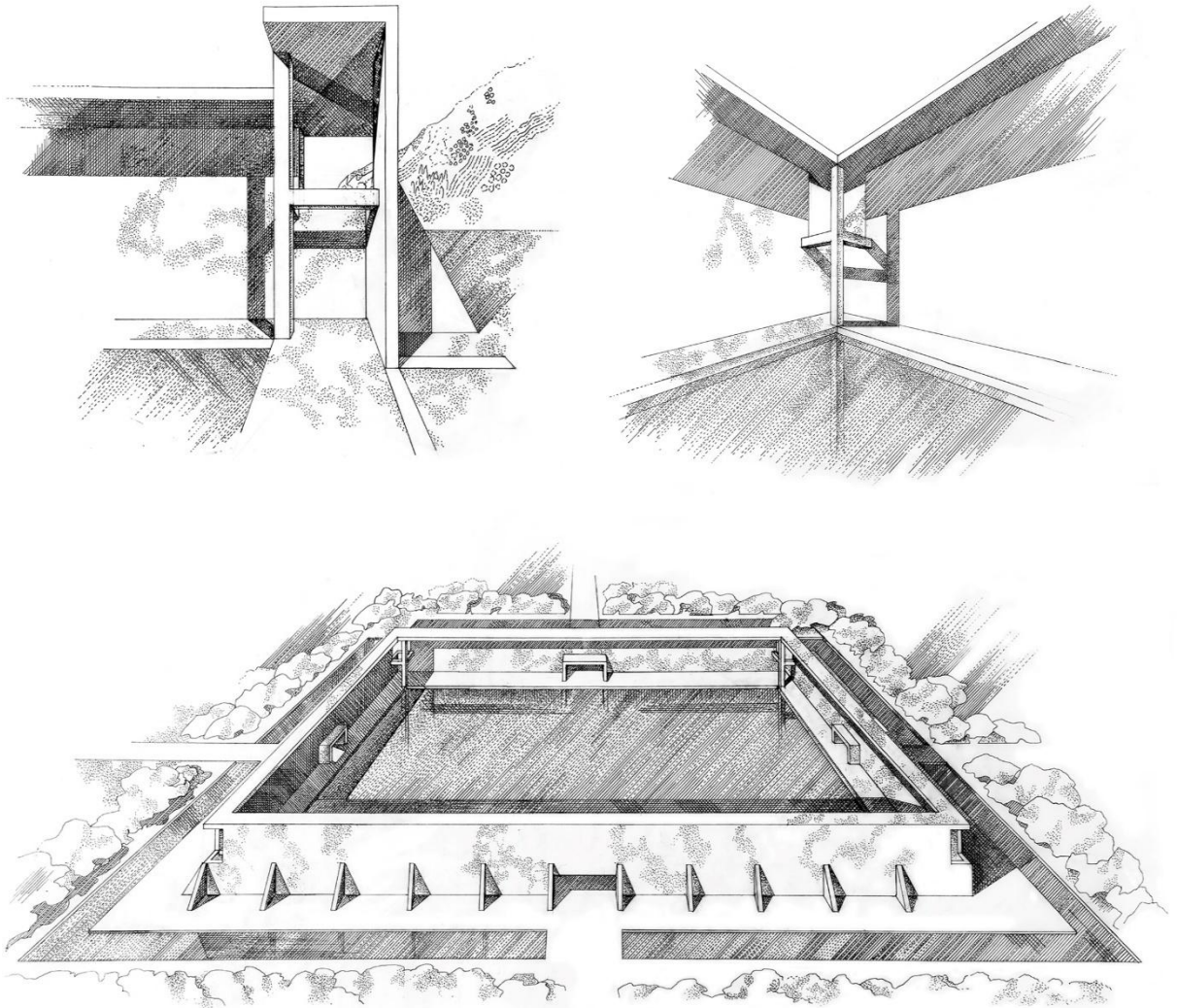
**Figure 6.** Exhibition setting at the Albertina Academy in Turin, promoting *Interdisciplinary Dialogue*

## Results

"Lizori: Signs and Dialogues" is presented as a body of work that expresses a common contemplative research on the place, its beauty, and its capacity to generate care. Drawing proves to be a fundamental tool for analyzing, knowing, and communicating the profound "poetry" that springs from the place. The over one hundred and twenty works that articulate the dialogues between the signs are the direct result of this investigation, an exploration concerning both the landscape and architecture of Lizori as well as the culture and depth of the person who represented them.

The analysis of the results can begin with the vision proposed by Franco Purini (Figure 7), who, faced with the beautiful Umbrian landscape, observes the undecipherable spatial enigma that the more one observes, the more it escapes. For the master of architecture, the only way to understand such an original place is to grasp it in its absence, through memory and reinvention. This mental rediscovery materializes in the hypothesis of a tall square enclosure which, by concealing the

surroundings, reveals only the extension of the sky mirrored in the water. His graphic projects, dense with lines and fields, echo Rationalism and the classical tradition, with clear citations that refer to metaphysical suggestions.



**Figure 7.** *Concealing the Surroundings with an Enclosure to reveal the sky mirrored in water, resolving the Umbrian Landscape's Indecipherable Spatial Enigma: Franco Purini, Indian Ink on Glossy Paper*

Gian Piero Frassinelli (Figure 8) focuses his approach on the hermeneutical interpretation of the ancient village, treating it with an anthropological method, as an ethnographic object to be interpreted and listened to. His work, entitled "Listening to the Voice of an Ancient Village," uses photomontage to conceptually make the ruined village interact with his Superstudio's "Continuous Monument". This is a symbolic and dreamlike comparison between the ancient and a futuristic modernity,

hypothesizing that it can welcome new inhabitants and show its resistance to technocratic aggression through the quality of historical signs.

Ruggero Lenci (Figure 9) concentrates on Lizori's compositional and harmonic qualities. The work "The Silla Tower in Lizori" is a musical transfiguration of the tower and the walls, employing the use of AI in the construction of the idea. Through a kind of anamorphosis, the painting brings out pentagrammatic streaks from the stone surfaces, which are then translated into a contemporary sculpture that appears as a modern armor for a place of celebration.



**Figure 8.** *Anthropological Reading applied to Lizori, Symbolizing the Confrontation between the Ancient Village and the Futuristic Modernity of the "Continuous Monument": Gianpiero Frassinelli, photomontage*



**Figure 9.** *Musical Transfiguration of the Tower and Walls, Employing Anamorphosis to Reveal Pentagrammatic Streaks and Linking Architectural Composition with Musical Notation: Ruggero Lenci, painting*

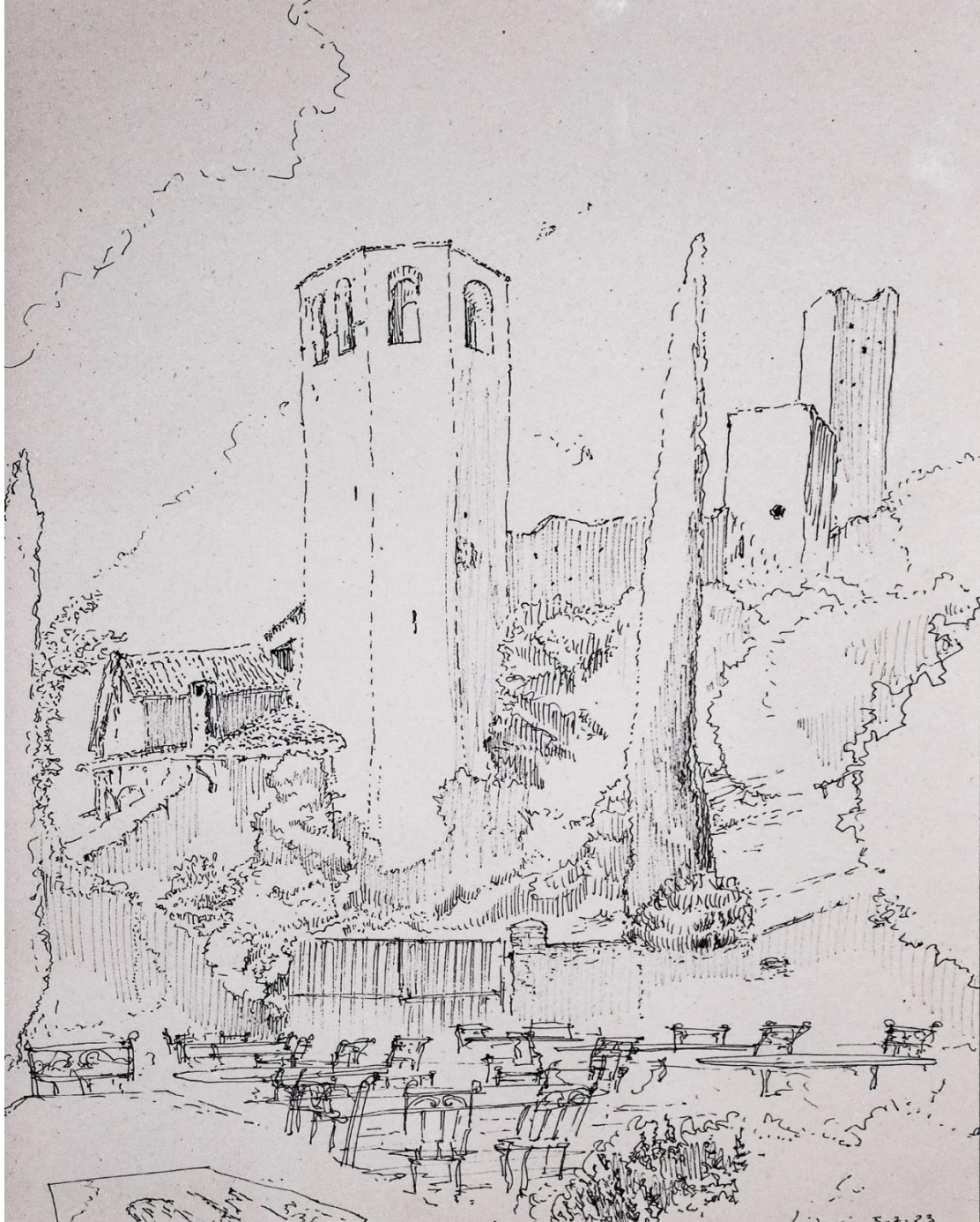


**Figure 10.** *The "Giants of the Landscape," Figures made of recycled Elements rendered Bidimensional against the Outer Walls, Symbolizing the Territory's Assembly and Transformation: Valerio Morabito, painting*

The exploration continues with the allegories of Valerio Morabito (Figure 10), who populates the village with mythological figures. "The Giants of the Doors" guard the entrances, raising questions about the surrounding landscape. "The Giants of the Landscape", fast and agile, become two-dimensional leaning against the external walls, in an allegory of assembly and continuous transformation of the territory.

Sandro Parrinello (Figure 11), with the "Tactus" series, captures the essence of Lizori as a place suspended in time. Fast and incisive drawings reflect the intimate connection between time and the creative act, by virtue of a unity between time, gesture, spaces, and meanings.

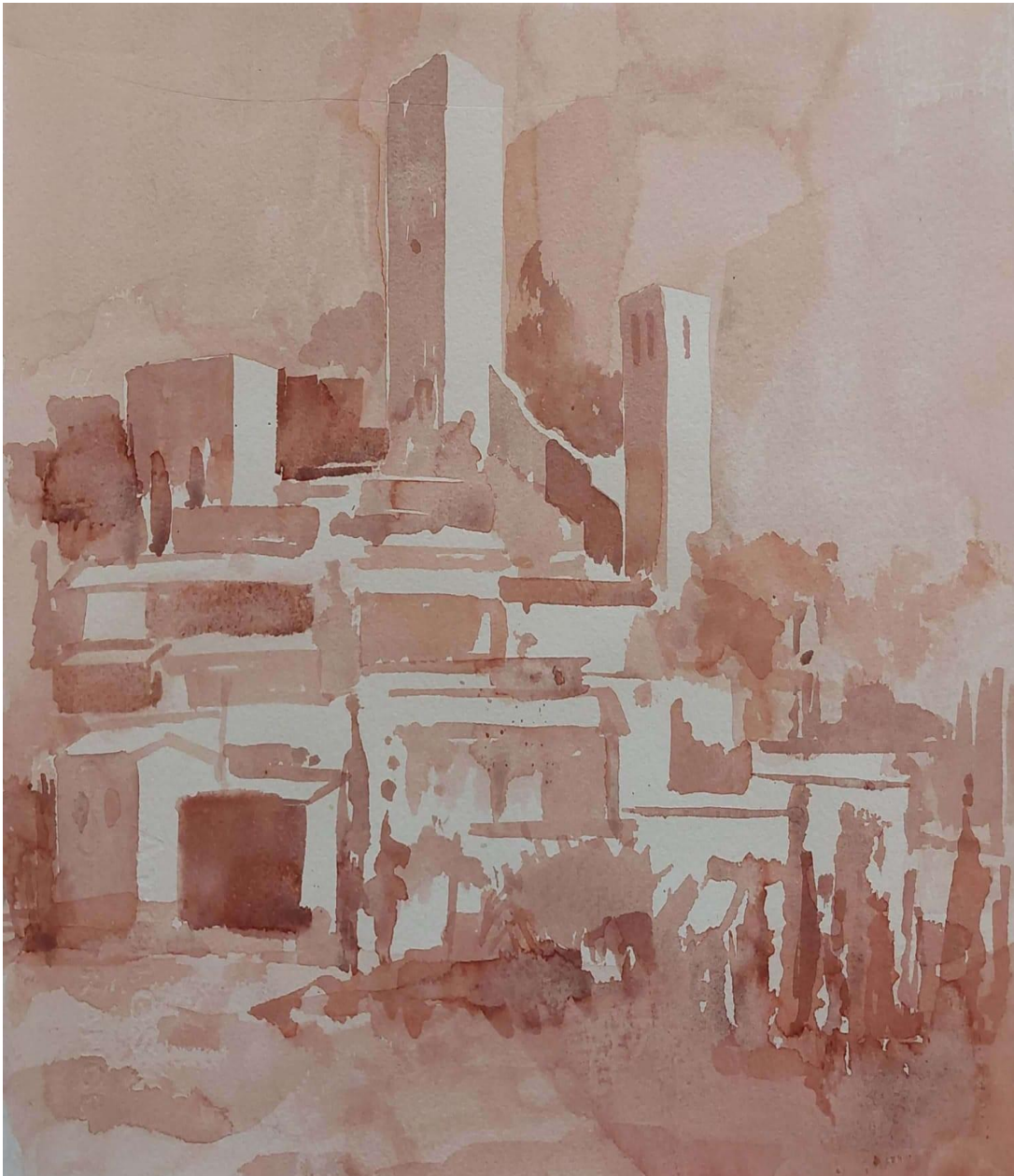
Claudio Patanè (Figure 12) conceives drawing as a poetic act of endless referral and description. The work elaborates a slow and reflective narrative, suspended in the light of watercolor. To understand reality, a series of artistic and utopian design investigations transform it into a celestial observatory, symbolizing the themes of welcome, friendship, contemplation, and peace.



**Figure 11.** *The "Tactus" Series and the Intimate Connection between Time and the Creative Act: Sandro Parrinello, ink on cardboard.*



**Figure 12.** *A Narrative Transforming Lizori into a Celestial Observatory atop the Trinci Tower, embodying the Themes of Contemplation and Peace through Utopian Design Investigation: Claudio Patanè, Watercolor and Pastel on Cardboard*



**Figure 13.** *The Dual Identity (diurnal/nocturnal) of the Landscape, aiming to render the Place's Visible and Invisible Value through Critical and Emotional Interpretation: Emanuela Chiavoni, Watercolor.*

Elisabetta Silvestri seeks the “Vision of its deep root” of the village, identifying it with harmony in an allegorical representation, while her pictorial cycle uses the synesthetic relationship between music and place and the superimposition of musical scores to read the image of the village.

Raffaele Federici with "No postcards from Lizori" explores the thin line between existence and abandonment, rejecting the superficiality of the "postcard" to reflect on the loss of the Greek cosmos. Lizori's beauty invites the recovery of amazement in front of the world.

Emanuela Chiavoni (Figure 13) reflects on the double identity of the Lizori landscape, diurnal and nocturnal, inspired by hermits. Her work is a narrative graphic composition that attempts to render the visible and invisible value of the place, representing a critical and emotional reworking that goes beyond mere observation.



**Figure 14.** *Dreamlike Atmospheres, framing Symbolic Landscape Fragments in a sacred Format to Rediscover Lost Myths and the Illusion of Eternity: Fausta D'Ubaldo, watercolor*

Stefano Bertocci, with "Lizori, the care of things", uses watercolors and pen drawings to document the carefully restored village. He focuses attention on the relationship between the internal landscape of the built environment, treated in an almost minimalist way, and the external landscape of the valley, which also appears to be designed.

Fausta D'Ubaldo (Figure 14) uses watercolor to evoke dreamy and indefinite atmospheres in her "Polyptych". The work represents Lizori as a place suspended

between imagination and memory, a refuge to find lost myths, an ethereal research that reveals the values of the landscape in signs and symbols.

Fabrizio Ciappina (Figure 15), with "Lizori and his landscape", uses watercolor to renounce the seduction of the visible and focus on the identity of the village. His is an imaginative and creative reading that builds a theoretical landscape, capable of projecting the place, through its very Mediterranean light, into a parallel and idealized dimension, so resistant as to absorb any change in time.

Overall, these works offer a deep and articulated vision of the village of Lizori, demonstrating how the interdisciplinary approach, which combines art, architecture, and meanings, can bring out the beauty and wisdom of the place, in a direct dialogue with the person.



**Figure 15.** *The Seduction of the Visible for an Imaginative reading that Constructs a theoretical Landscape, Projecting a Resilient Lizori into an Idealized, Parallel Dimension: Fabrizio Ciappina, watercolor*

### Discussion

The representations embody what Lizori, in its capacity to foster well-being, has produced in those who sought to share its experience. Entering the richness of the narrative within the body of works evokes the sensation of a "physical

involvement," which is the basis of the aesthetic experience. This triggers "the imitation of the movement or action observed or implicit in the work, while simultaneously increasing our emotional responses through observation" (Cappelletto, 2010). Embodied simulation therefore operates through the mirroring of the movement frozen in the finished work, in the drawing. This interpretation is particularly relevant to those involved in design, who recognize in the work the gestures and representative actions necessary to execute it (Gregory, 2023).

In the corporeality of perception, in the landscape, and in the works as games of mirrors, there is therefore a "hand-to-hand with art" (Cappelletto, 2010), which allows one to "leave the body while remaining in it" (Gallese, 2010), leaving the earth to move toward the sky. The proposed path thus carries the value of a foundational idea that elevates representation to a mirror reflecting the meanings and pathos discovered in the place.

In the drawings, the image is only partially reflected, yet the sky is always visible. Allowing oneself to be captured by these representations, as well as by their silences and suspensions, does not only lead one beyond reality, beyond the earth through art, but also manages to give words to the unspeakable, to give shape within us to the experience that the artists lived, and which, upon observation, can be revived in us as if the action of representing were our own. In the signs of the works, and in the processes activated to understand their meaning, poetry is experienced and, at the same time, we are invited to action—as if we were the ones drawing—to confront those relationships between architecture and landscape that transcend the image.

The hidden qualities of the place are thus enhanced, transfigured in the figuration of an ineffable landscape, one that cannot be captured, immobilized, materialized, or consumed. Drawing "serves" to evoke, dream, hope, and desire, helping us understand what is deepest, what feeds that beauty with which no design sign could freely confront itself.

By engaging with the masters' representations, in their act of giving body to what they have experienced, a perspective is not imposed, but rather an "automatic, non-conscious, and pre-reflective reproduction of the other's states of mind" is proposed. These states of mind certainly stem from the impact Lizori had on them and the resonances it activated. The exhibition thus creates an "affective attunement" (Stern, 2019) and the masters' intentions are understood because they are shared at the neuronal level "according to an unmediated resonance prior to standard simulations" (Gregory, 2023).

Since the boundary between doing something and imagining it is not so wide, it is understandable how the "as if" peculiar to mirror neurons actually represents further support in the process of the relationship between architecture, landscape, and its representation. The intercorporeality between the representations, the landscape, and the authors themselves, "allows us to map the relationship of identity with others while preserving their otherness" (Gallese, 2010). The empathy created by the representations with the place is structurally distinguished from emotional contagion in an "emotional co-participation that never appears passive because it is reinterpreted and filtered by past experiences, capacity, and a whole series of personality variables" (Gregory, 2023), by those who enter into a profound relationship, with

design intentionality, with these representations. The landscape, "things, objects, acquire full significance only insofar as they constitute one of the two poles of a dyadic dynamic relationship with the acting subject, which constitutes the second pole of this relationship" (Gallese, 2006), where what resonates does not erase the substrate of experiences, knowledge, sensibility, and the very intentions that animate observation.

### Conclusions

In the eighth canto of the *Odyssey*, Ulysses, in disguise at the court of the Phaeacians, hears his own story from the voice of a blind minstrel. Upon hearing the narration, "he took with both hands the wide crimson mantle, pulled it over his head and hid his noble face, ashamed that the Phaeacians should see his tears stream down from under his eyelids." Alcinoös, the king of this mythological people, interrupts the minstrel, because the feelings of sadness resonate even within him, understanding that "the guest suffers too much from the song we have heard" even without grasping the reason. "Tell me what is the land and the people and the city, and your name," the king asks, knowing that the sharing of the generated feeling can lead to revealing the person still closed in on himself. "Ulysses, son of Laertes, I am" (Canto IX, v. 21), replies the hero.

Hannah Arendt observes that Ulysses "had never wept before [...] certainly not when the events he now hears narrated had really happened. Only by listening to the account does he acquire full notion of its meaning" (Arendt, 1987). Narration and representation are what generate empathy in the Greek hero, offering consciousness, a gift that is received. The act of self-revelation, through the name given by the father and by history, demonstrates that representation makes identity discoverable as a social gift and a form of self-awareness.

This same empathy and awareness are generated by representation in architecture and landscape. These are not external and extraneous objects; their meanings are multiple and therefore not univocal, capable of generating sensations and emotions and marking history, but not of generating a process of empathy and self-discovery. This condition is achieved by narration and representation, a reflection of the creative act of perception that engages the observer with the complexities and contradictions of the landscape. A play of reflections and gazes is triggered, involving the body of the landscape and architecture, linking the place and the people, and delving into the soul, where the signs can resonate. Through the stories condensed in the design, and through the works of those who know and can share the *pathos*, one enters into a relationship with the earth and the sky, with the present and memory, with needs and desires. By going beyond the image, one arrives at the comprehension of that beauty which heals, of that action of regeneration that the place has upon the person.

Lizori leaves a mark on those who enter into dialogue with it, but the works, in this system of mirrors, manage to generate empathy and are configured as masters, bringing the invisible to light and creating consciousness and awareness of the values of the place. Perception, understood operationally as a creative act, thus involves the whole person, including their corporeality, in order to offer that good

originally generated by the space and here reflected in a fertile hybridization with the culture that represented it. These foundations transcend purely functionalist aspects and do not ascribe landscape and architecture to a hedonistic sphere; one thus arrives at an empathetic understanding that acts at the foundation of our existence, marking our actions and guiding our representation. In the project visions of "other" places, one finds reflections aimed not only at recounting the qualities of the place but at reviving the values of dwelling with vitality.

Immersing oneself in the exhibition allows one to "learn to learn", to understand the other and a different vision of reality through affective attunement. "Lizori. Signs and Dialogues" is not a point of arrival, but a seed sown for growth, a mirror that enriches consciousness and illuminates us about ourselves and the other. It takes us elsewhere. Beyond the place. Perhaps it also disorients us, annihilates us, dislocates us. But it does so in order to rediscover ourselves. Despite the complexity of the issues raised, the project presents an operational strategy for the sustainable development of our places, one that is clear and simple, since it is "only" about representation.

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