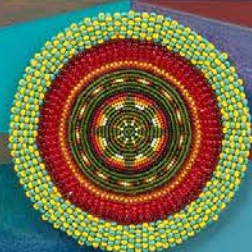


# Vault™

Australasian Art & Culture



ISSUE 46 • MAY to JULY 2024

Yvonne Audette, Christopher Bassi, Lynda Benglis, Mike Brown,  
Puuni Nungarrayi Brown, Mario Cristiani, Ellen Dahl, Jeffrey Gibson,  
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Ron Mueck, Anna Park, Lee Salomone, David Walsh & more

AUS \$24.95 NZ \$29.95

ISSN 2208-3057

46



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# THE LONG LINE

*VAULT* spoke to Mario Cristiani, co-founder of one of Italy’s most loved contemporary art spaces, Galleria Continua.

WRITTEN *by* GRACE SANDLES

The walled medieval town of San Gimignano in Italy is much loved for its picturesque architecture. Tourists come for the marvellous medieval towers and overpriced restaurants, but among the hordes you will find art aficionados who have made the pilgrimage to Galleria Continua, a contemporary art space with international showrooms that has its flagship outlet in the quaint town.

You know in the film *Dead Poets Society* when Robin Williams says, “And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for?” Well, speaking to Mario Cristiani crystallised that moment for me. We first spoke briefly during Sydney Contemporary 2023. He had promised a friend here that he would come in return for support on a reforestation project, he told me later over Zoom. Galleria Continua was presenting a solo show of British sculptor Antony Gormley, but really it was a research trip to see if it would be possible to organise a public exhibition of – or gauge if any collectors wanted to buy – Gormley’s work. Or, as Cristiani puts it, “more for putting the work of this [special] artist in the conscious[ness] of the people [of Australasia].”

Now, relying too much on quotes is a poor writerly technique, I know that, but I’d like to posit that in some special circumstances, like this one here, there really is no better way to learn what someone is about than to hear it straight from the horse’s mouth – not least when he speaks so poetically. You might then wonder why I didn’t just publish my conversation with Cristiani as a straight up interview, and the truth is that I barely spoke or even asked many questions. I was far too enthralled. Let that be my disclaimer as we move forward.

Cristiani, alongside Lorenzo Fiaschi and Maurizio Rigillo, founded Galleria Continua in 1990. Today, they have spaces in Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, Rome, São Paulo,



LORIS CECCHINI  
*Arranging Proximities*,  
October 29, 2023 - March  
31, 2024  
UMoCA - Under Museum  
of Contemporary Art,  
Colle di Val d'Elsa (Siena)  
Courtesy Associazione  
Arte Continua, San  
Gimignano







ANISH KAPOOR  
*Descension*, 2015  
steel, water, motor  
500 x 500 cm  
Courtesy the artist and  
Galleria Continua





*“Artwork, even if you are not from the same culture, with your eyes you see the same object ... Creating one piece for the common language in the long term.”*

Paris and Dubai, each with a slightly different focus. The original location though, in an old cinema, is still the gallery’s flagship outlet. San Gimignano is a small, walled medieval town known as the Town of Fine Towers, and it was the perfect place to establish a gallery named Continua because “art is in every part of the town, in the church, in the private house, in the architecture of the building ... that survived many years – the change of the world, the political power, religious power that survived and connected many generations.” He later adds that “art is survival. It’s a concept for trying to survive in the long term ... Carpe diem has two interpretations, and one goes outside of the time [to] the long line of art, from Leonardo da Vinci to Gormley.”

At the same time as they opened Galleria Continua, the partners established a non-profit arm of the business, Associazione Arte Continua, to support specific public art projects. Cristiani, who is the president of the association, notices my fervent head-nodding. “For you it’s interesting to understand this connection between one market activity and one social activity?”

The Associazione Arte Continua uses public art as a vehicle for various community and educational projects. For Cristiani, it is all about bringing things together in service of a holistic “model of enterprise, an enterprise open to the contest, the social contest, solving problems for the people, organising [society] better economically and culturally and giving the opportunity to grow up in culture. We open these two activities, one profit, one non-profit.”

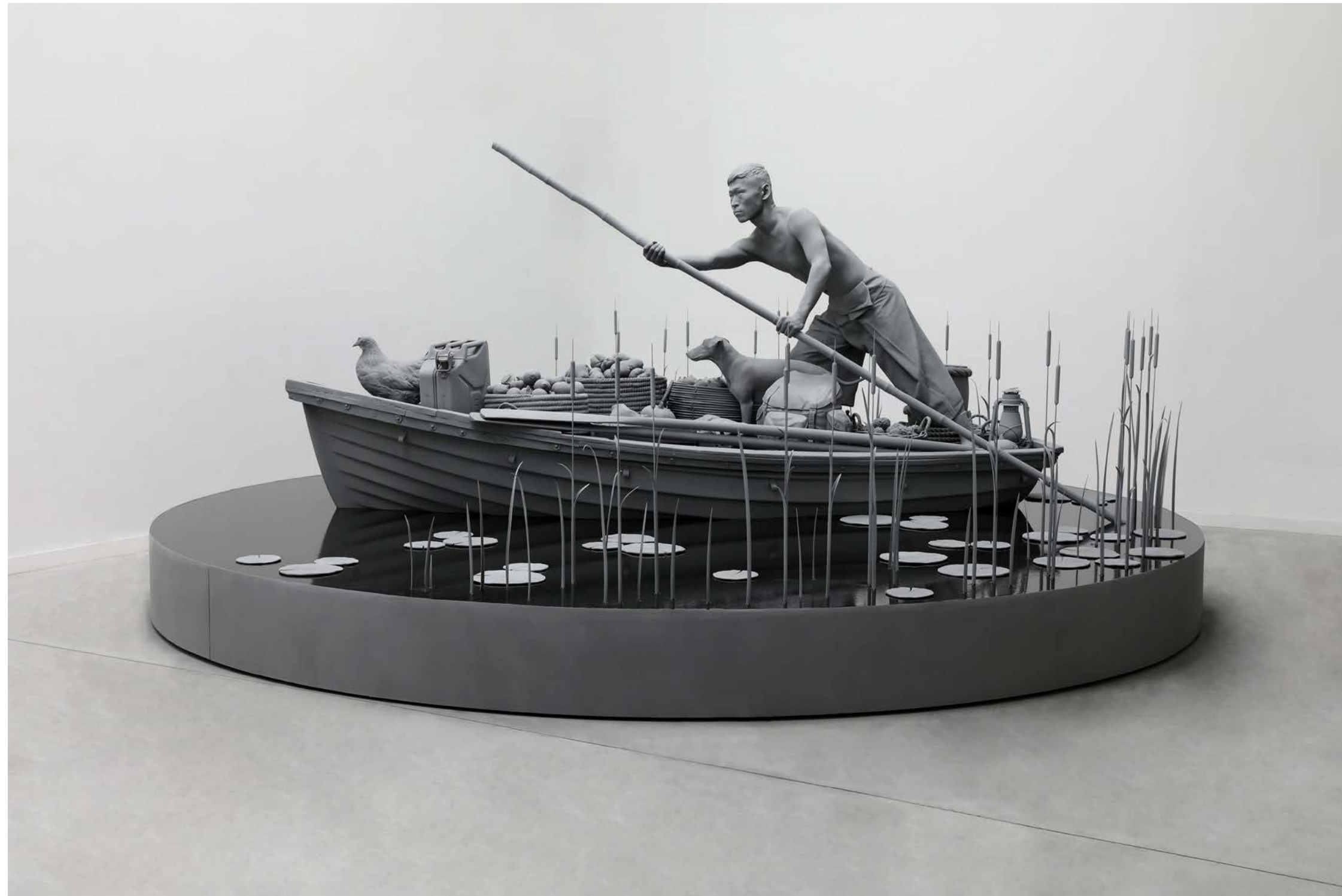
Cristiani didn’t come from art; he came from politics. But the way he describes art is as a medium for communication: “Artwork, even if you are not from the same culture, with your eyes you see the same object ... Creating one piece for the common language in the long term. The artist is the poet in that sense. I talk

about poets because the Italian language is made by Dante Alighieri, he is a poet.”

That aforementioned reforestation project? He was, for a long time, a member of the Italian Greens political party. Now, he uses his work as a gallerist and supporter of artists to enact what he calls “social alliance[s].”

“Now we do the reforestation of the popular area in one town near Florence, in Prato. And in that town, the artist gave me the work for free, a donation. Me, I invite friends, a collector to support this donation, take on the artwork and give money. And we are financing the reforestation of this area to create a barrier of green filter for oxygen between the big road and the houses of the people. It’s an alliance, a social alliance, between artists, collectors, the people and the environment.” **V**

Galleria Continua has outlets in San Gimignano, Italy; Beijing, China; Les Moulins, France; Havana, Cuba; Rome, Italy; São Paulo, Brazil; Paris, France; and Dubai. [galleriacontinua.com](http://galleriacontinua.com)



Top left  
Portrait of Mario Cristiano  
Courtesy OKNO Studio

Above  
HANS OP DE BEECK  
*The Boatman*, 2020  
polyester, steel, wood,  
MDF, epoxy, glass fiber,  
polyamide, synthetic  
gypsum, coating, reed,  
glass, PA, rubber, bamboo  
180 x 400 x 400 cm  
Courtesy the artist and  
Galleria Continua

Right  
ANTONY GORMLEY  
*Fai spazio, prendi posto – Making  
Space, Taking Place*, 2004  
7 castings in spheroidal graphite  
iron, different sizes  
Arte all'Arte IX - Stazione FFSS  
(binario 2), Poggibonsi (Siena)  
Courtesy Associazione Arte  
Continua, San Gimignano - Italy

Far right  
CARTSEN HOLLER  
*RB Ride*, 2007  
carousel: 12 gondolas  
(max. 24 persons),  
4 revolutions per hour  
plinth diameter: 16.75 m,  
min. height 3.5 m –  
max. height 10.5 m  
Arte Pollino un altro Sud project –  
San Severino Lucano (Potenza)

