

The background is a vibrant blue surface with a regular pattern of small, dark, circular perforations. On the left side, there is a large, irregular, orange-red shape that resembles a piece of textured paper or a leaf. It has a rough, fibrous texture with visible creases and some small dark spots. The shape is positioned diagonally, with its top edge towards the upper left and its bottom edge towards the lower left.

Michelangelo Russo
Jennifer Jabu

VELE



I have a Michelangelo Russo painting which dominates one wall of my music room and has been a constant companion to inspiration for everyone who has moved through there for the last 15+ years.

It's not the only Russo work in my collection and the more recent Russo/Jabu works serve similar functions in different spaces.

- **Mick Harvey**, July 2022

VELE

“Can you think of occasions when your first response to a work of art has been, immediately and overwhelmingly, physical instead of intellectual?”

- Ben Brantley, Chief Drama Critic New York Times

‘Vele’, the new exhibition from Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu continues their unique exploration of abstraction, (most recently presented in cCorda), and creating also a series of smaller, more playful pieces, also related to Michelangelo’s WAX series (2002-2006) where large pieces of materials (hessian, cotton and denim) were roughly stitched together before being painted with encaustic.

My first impressions perhaps oddly, immediately suggested, among other things, elements of the Baroque. Two significant visual characteristics of the Baroque being rich, (regal), colours like ‘royal’ violet and gold, as in ‘Odra su Viola’. Forms redolent of the drapery which seem to float across the surfaces as they do in Baroque paintings and also physical manifestations of drapery in sculptures like Bernini’s ‘Ecstasy of St Theresa’. These exquisite moments encapsulate the function and nature of such drapery while removing us again entirely from any figurative base.

It is also interesting to note as an aside, that, as Hollander and Steele say in their book ‘Fabric of Vision: Dress and Drapery in Painting’, that ‘Painters might use drapery to infuse their canvases with extra vitality and raw beauty ... to suggest human power or true divinity’.

That I should refer to the Baroque in no way suggests that this may in any way a connection in any sense other than my mind, my experience, with which it resonates for me. After all, it is merely an aside, for the work is robustly abstract and is never attempting to be anything else or to be corralled into a fixed relation to a figurative source.

Ben Brantley’s question is entirely relevant to this work. Vele’s component works address us directly and uncompromisingly with a direct raw power. They cannot be passed over lightly. They possess a force which engages viscerally and all the formal elements at play contain this force. Colour I have referred to already but consider also the powerful binary tonal contrasts such as in the elegant, quiet harmony of ‘Bianco su Grigio’. It is in this work as if the delicate white fabric form has simply floated down to rest on the surface of the stony grey base, as if that were always going to be the timeless finality of the resolution of these two elements.

In mentioning raw power I do not mean mere ‘force’, for the power may be expressed forcefully or quite subtly but always with strength and persistence, and the two examples I have cited exemplify this range.

In ‘Odra su Graph’ the fabric sits on the surface like a Centurion’s cloak flung on a black marble floor. (I am stuck in these analogies I’m afraid). The dynamism is fixed forever. The moment is always now.

There is a stronger, deeper dynamism governing the inter-relationships of the fabric elements and the cardboard and wax partner components. I do not speak of foreground or background as these can be pejorative terms. Both of these fields are equally active and present, neither is subservient. The ‘free’, organic nature of the fabric component plays against, and with, the geometrical character of the other component, an opposition which is constantly operant, and alive. The degrees of contrast differ from work to work.

The textural qualities of these works are enormously significant and are a vital part of their engagement of the viewer. Brantley’s statement again comes into play. These surfaces are entirely seductive. They invoke in us an innate desire to touch, to taste. The fingers itch with sublimated desire, the mouth salivates unconsciously, the tongue tingles. The interplay between the two textures accentuates each, and they ultimately find a formal resolution of their two characters which serves only each to enhance the other like an opposition which has achieved a negotiated peace. In none of the works does one aspect or character dominate the other, another perfect dynamic.

The character of each component is also never the same from one work to another. Contrast for example ‘V. 3GRIGI SU GRAPH [6146]’ with the aforementioned ‘V. OCRA SU VIOLA[Q30]’ whose richness is at the top of the scale whereas in ‘V. 3GRIGI SU GRAPH [6146]’ two greys are the only ‘colours’ present, the fabric resembling the informality of discarded rags on a city street. Nonetheless there is elegance here and as always, sophisticated composition.

My references to Baroque drapery or rags in a city street are not in any way analogous to, or connected with a narrative or an image. I merely invoke such relationships in terms of character and formal correspondences, (just as the title ‘Vele’ means ‘Sails’)

It all comes down to Duality. Two elements with a bounded area. Two colours, two tones, two textures and two forms. Sounds simple put like that.

But it isn’t ...

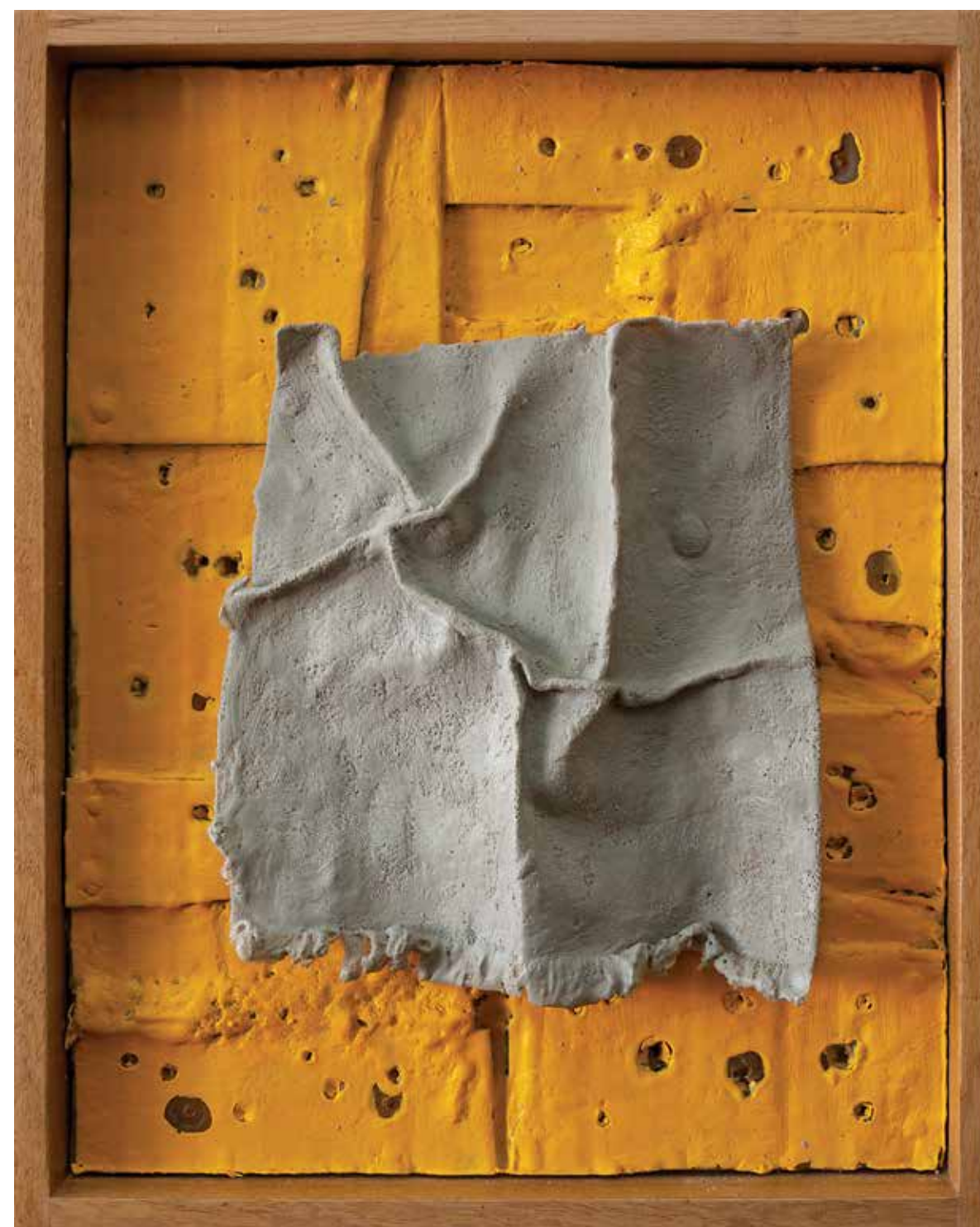
- **Sean Kelly**, July 2022

Cover: **V.ARANCIO SU CELESTE [Q30] 2022** (detail)

Left: **V.PURO SU ROSSO [Q30] 2022** (detail)



V. BIANCO SU GRIGIO [3628] 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 36 x 28



V. GRIGIO SU GIALLO [3628] 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 36 x 28

VELE

Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu have constructed an exquisite liminality in delicately hand-stitched fabrics hovering over their encaustic cardboard backdrops.

On the literal surface, one finds a protruding textile fragment, rich with myriad allusions from the veiled face of the inconsolable Virgin Mary to the draped togas of the Roman aristocracy, strengthened by the unique pigments featured in this body of work. Akin to Mark Rothko's experiments with colour fields yet with an ancient twist, the complex and sometimes jarring pairings of tones across the entire chromatic scale brings to mind a cornucopia of objects and chronologies ranging from the crimson red of a medieval wax seal (cf. V.ROSSO SU NAPOLI |Q30| 2022) to the lush imperial purple of Augustan Rome (cf. V.OCRA SU VIOLA |Q30| 2022).

Yet juxtaposed against these floating amorphous forms with jagged edges, is a solid background of sharp lines and urban structures. Reminiscent of the distinctively Italian Aeropittura movement of the 1930s, born from the complex interplay of technology and politics due to the rise of fascism and Mussolini, there is no better setting for these works. Almost 100 years later as the 21st century unfolds with climate change, wars, pandemics, and the gradual erosion of civil rights across the world, there is a suggestion through these pieces of the delicate cosmic equilibrium present in our world, with one material delicately balanced on another.

However, the artists' final message is one of hope. With the exhibition's Italian title Vele translating to 'sails', one cannot but think of the strong winds of change propelling humanity forward into a better future, capable of surviving even the roughest of waters. These pieces show opposing colours can work together, conflicting materials can rest on each other, forms anathema to each other can remain whole and ultimately, peace can reign supreme despite our differences.

- **Thomas Sutherland**, July 2022



V.ROSSO SU NAPOLI |Q30| 2022

encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
cm. 30 x 30

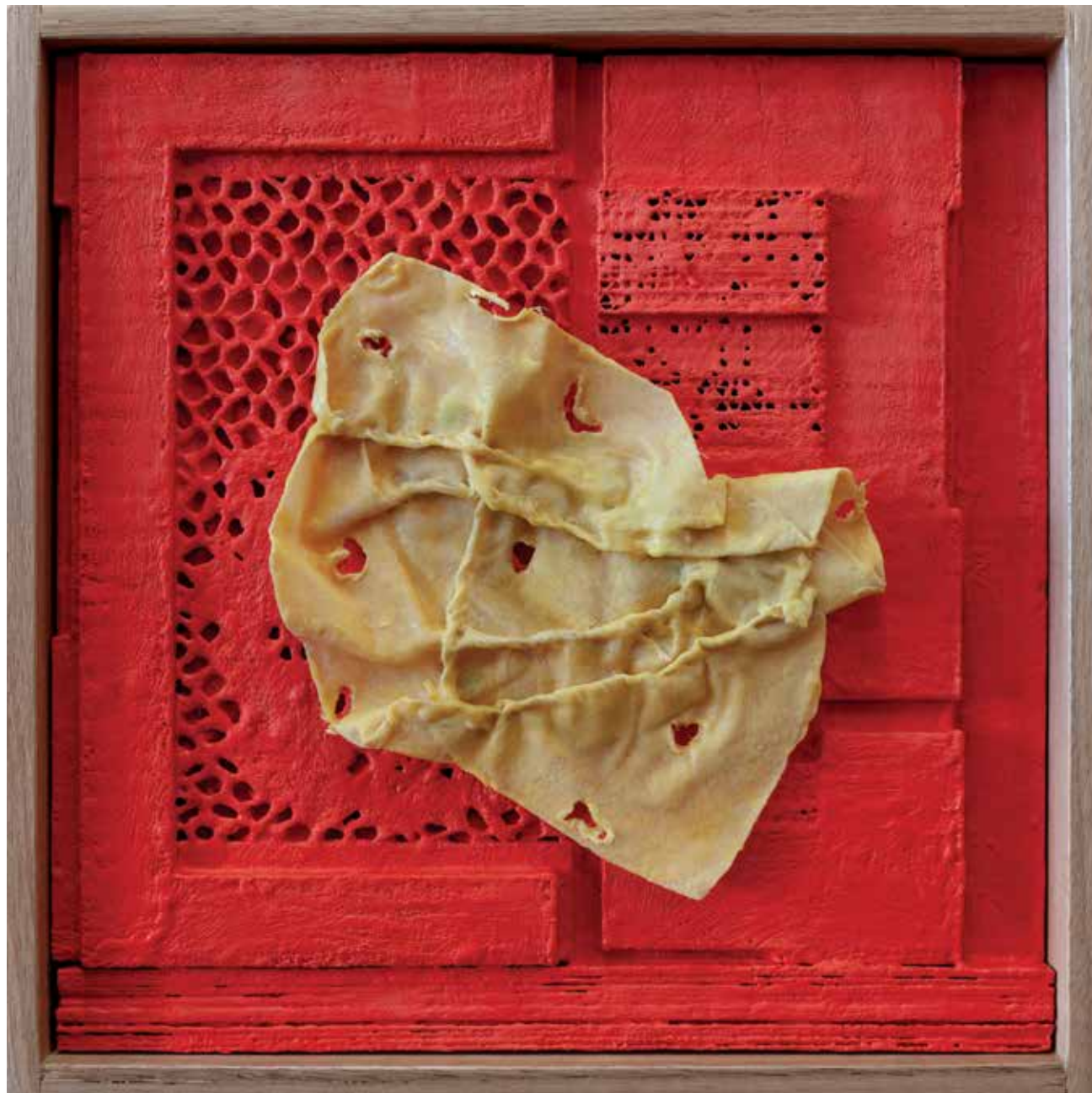


V.OCRA SU VIOLA |Q30| 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 30 x 30



V.BIANCO SU PUROMAL |Q30| 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 30 x 30

VELE



V. PUROMAL SU CORALLO | Q33 | 2022

encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
cm. 33 x 33

Allusions

I remember many years ago, coming across a Roman encaustic portrait dating back to the first century ad. It was in an exhibition at the Museum of Victoria. I was astounded by its vibrant deep crimson hues and pristine seductive surface. 2000 year old pigment that had lost none of its vibrancy or chroma (red being one the least light-fast colours and most susceptible to fading).

The works of Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu strike me with the same clarity and intensity.

These carefully constructed works immerse one in a world of allusions. A world that is both painterly and sculptural. Colours being chosen either for their chromatic intensity or subtle neutral tonalities and surfaces for their three dimensional qualities.

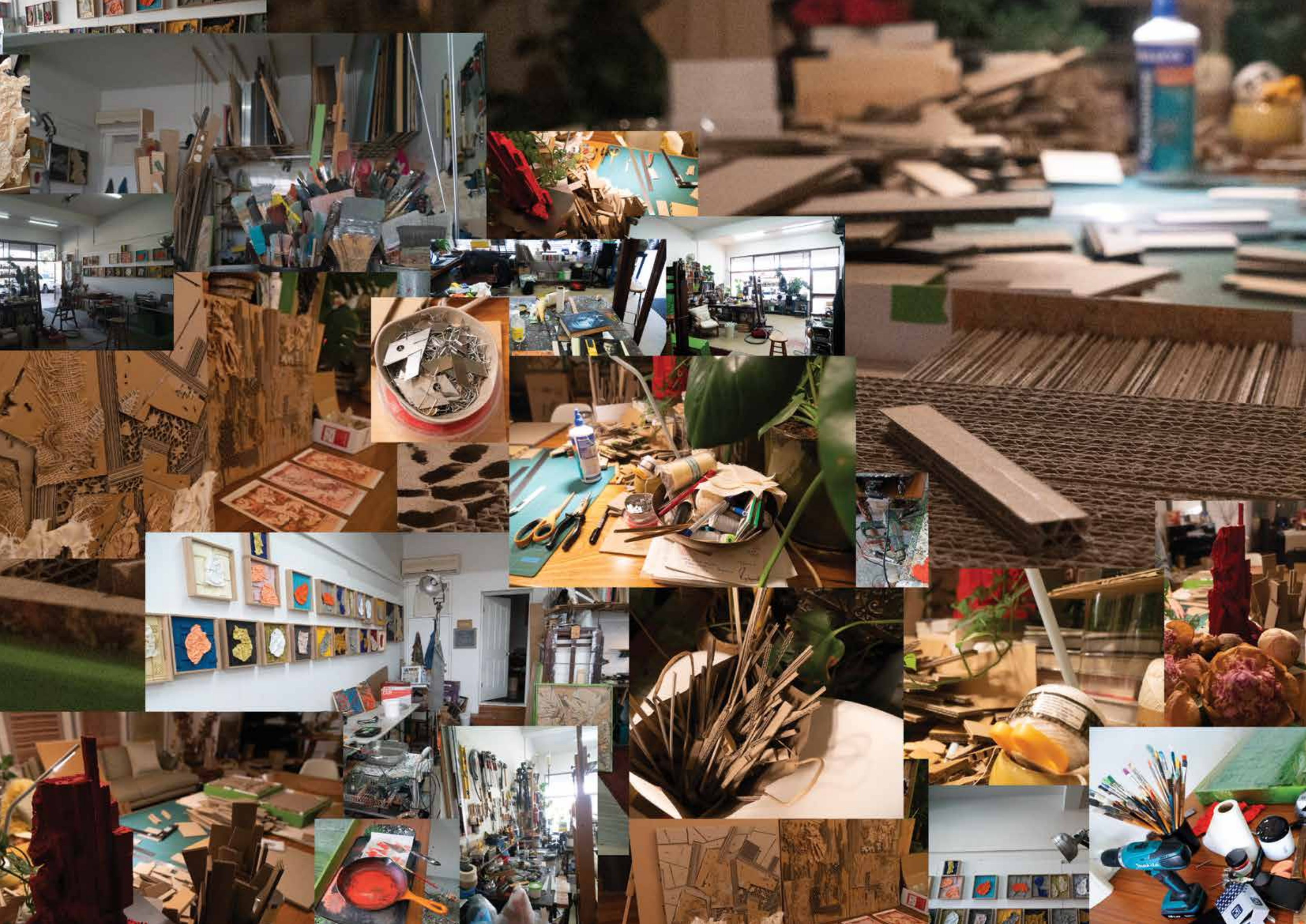
Pieces of fabric are hand-stitched and ruched. They are then coated in wax, suspended above an encaustic construction, and float in low relief. These organic forms exude a strong presence. They have an iconic nature reminiscent of fragmentary remnants of the past, in stark contrast to the constructed worlds they float across. There are many allusions moving from the Roman to the Renaissance and beyond. Ghiberti's bronze doors for the Duomo in Florence come to mind, as do fragments of classical statuary, Joseph Beuys' Fat Corner, and Jim Dine's Objects. In some cases the work pops with chromatic intensity and in others it reveals a translucency not unlike Vellum or skin.

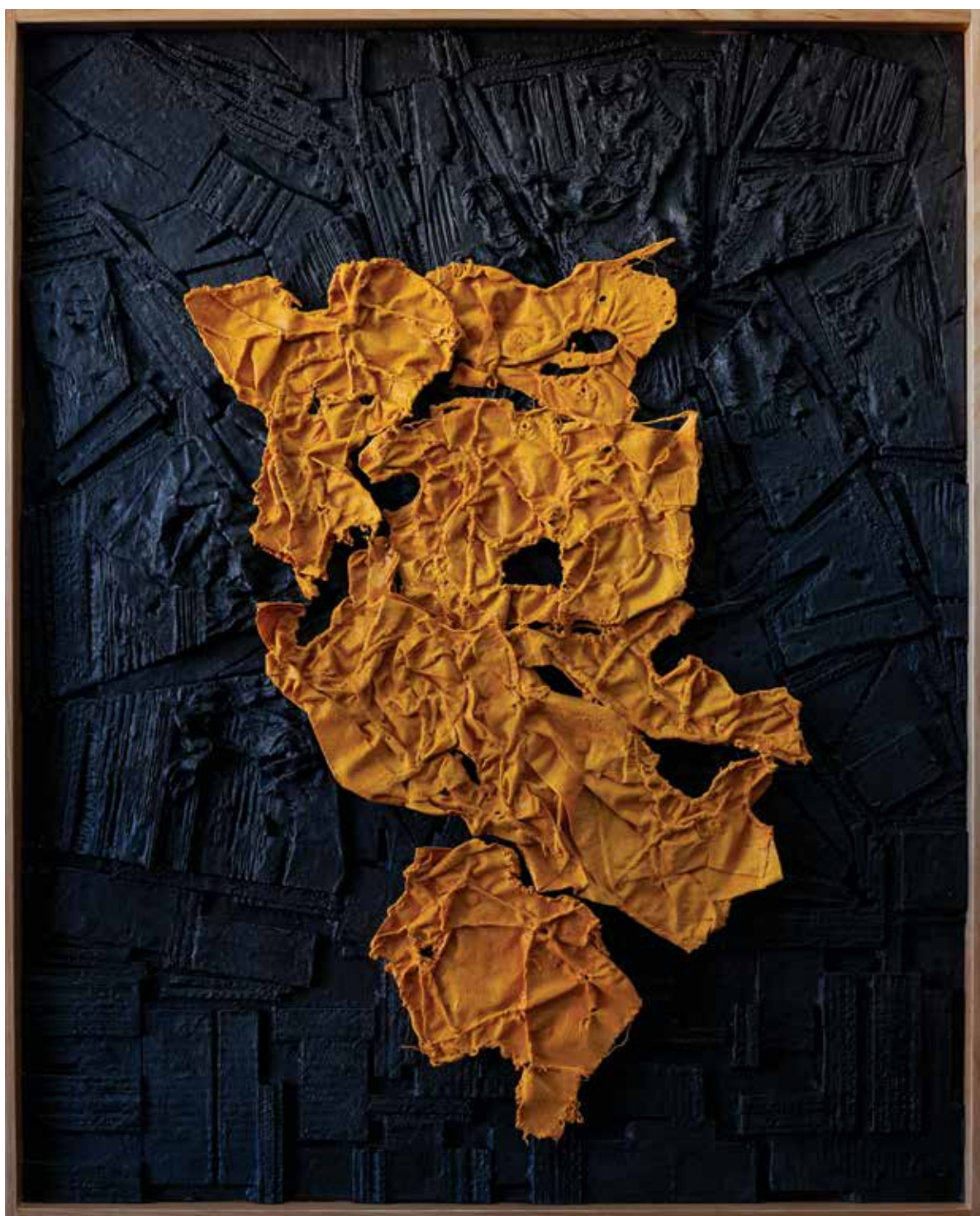
Beneath these suspended elemental forms are intricately cut and layered assemblages of cardboard painted in encaustic. They allude to architectonic structures, surfaces, and details. In some cases, bold diagonals introduce a vorticism element into the composition, creating movement and counterpoint to the central floating, organic form. In others, there is a sense of three-dimensional geometry reminiscent of an aerial city view, or the solidity of a concrete-cast form.

The playfulness of these oppositions sets off a chain reaction of allusions. They reach out from the archaic past, through the innovations of the twentieth century, into the future. The personal backgrounds and histories of Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu are also intimately laced through these works. Freed from figuration, they tell us about their personalities and emotions, through colour and texture.

If that Roman portrait, viewed so many years ago, could speak, I'm sure it would have something to say about civilization, tradition, and personal spirituality. The iconic nature of these works speak directly to the continuance of this conversation.

- Mike Wedd, July 2022





V.OCRA SU GRAPH |1-800| 2022

encaustic on cardboard, rope and canvas on wood panel
cm. 100 x 80



V.PURO SU VERDE |1-800| 2022

encaustic on cardboard, rope and canvas on wood panel
cm. 100 x 80



V.ROSA SU GRIGIO [Q33] 2022
 encaustic on cardboard, rope and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 33 x 33



V.CELESTE SU OCRA [Q33] 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 33 x 33



V.CELESTE SU BLU |2333| 2022

encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
cm. 33 x 23

VELE

The visceral work of Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu deconstruct materials often associated with waste-cardboard, twine-and embalms them entirely into a renewed life. Literally the humble box, repackaged.

An abandoned wasp nest, the cracked surface of mud plains, fossils frozen in time to complete worlds derived of complex layered structures amongst a skyline, the work shifts from macro to micro interpretation simultaneously, and in constant flux.

The works invite the viewer to build this world in their mind as forms, compositions and colours evoke familiar memories that sit just out of mind's reach.

I am reminded of Bernard Rudodsky's – Architecture without Architects in how our built worlds are derived from spontaneous and continual activity of people with a shared heritage or experience. The viewer is rewarded to discover the intuition encapsulated in what may initially appear as accidental within the works.

The meticulously placed compositions carry wonderful ambiguity in their interpretation, while the encaustic qualities of the work, as it reacts to its conditions, make them living artworks to enjoy.

- **Kelwin Wong**, July 2022



V.3GRIGI SU GRAPH |6146| 2022
 encaustic on cardboard and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 61 x 46



V.GIALLO SU GRIGIO |6146| 2022
 encaustic on cardboard, rope and canvas on wood panel
 cm. 61 x 46

Michelangelo Russo was born in Campobasso, southern Italy in 1962, Michelangelo is a visual artist and musician. He started painting at the age of 12 when he started frequenting the studio of a well known local painter, Franco Iannelli, learning various painting techniques. He had his first solo show at the age of 15.

During the 80s Michelangelo studied architecture and graphic design in Pescara and Roma.

In early1990, after staging several shows in Italy, Michelangelo travelled to Berlin where he felt a strong affinity with the city’s artistic energy. He established a studio in the heart of East Berlin, which at this time, shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, was a fertile artistic ground for young pioneering artists. At the end of 1993, Michelangelo moved to Melbourne to continue in pursuing his career in both painting and music. Michelangelo’s work features in private collections all over Australia as well as in Cuba, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the USA.

Michelangelo is also a talented musician. He has played in several bands in Italy, Germany and Australia. He has extensively toured Europe playing concerts and experimental music festivals appearing on several seminal recordings. Since 1994 he has collaborated widely with musician/songwriter/producer Hugo Race, and composers/musicians Wendy Morrison and Andrew Ogburn amongst others, appearing in many projects, recordings and performances

Jennifer Jabu was born in 1973 in Sarawak, on the remote island of Borneo, into a family with deep seated attachments to their ancestral village communities. Attachments that have been nurtured carefully and continue to this day.

Jennifer moved to Melbourne at the age of 14 to study and completed a Bachelor in Architecture, a Masters in International Urban & Environmental Management and a doctoral candidacy at RMIT. Jennifer’s training brought her to see painting, architecture and sculpture as disciplines that influence, and are complementary to, one another. This realisation, along with inspiration from broad travels, memories of textile weaving in the longhouses of Borneo and strong Iban headhunter traditions have all formed a basis for a fluid view of transforming life experiences and memory to art.

A resident of Melbourne with a love for skylines, Jennifer brings architectural precision and fluidity to her work.

The collaboration between Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu starts in early 2019 during the preparation of “Cartoni containers contained” exhibition at Fortyfive Downstairs Gallery Melbourne, August 2019.

Curriculum Vitae :

Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu - Selected Solo Exhibitions		1991	<i>Askartaz</i> at Babylonia, Berlin, Germany.
		1988	<i>Africa Musica e Legna da Ardere</i> at Grigio Notte, Roma, Italy.
		1977	<i>Michelangelo Russo</i> at Galleria il Punto, Campobasso, Italy.
2022	<i>cCORDA</i> at Alexandra Club, The Green Room, Melbourne.		
2021	<i>cCORDA</i> at Studio 11, Owen Dixon Chambers, Melbourne.		
			<i>cCORDA</i> at Fortyfive Downstairs Gallery, Melbourne.
Michelangelo Russo and Jennifer Jabu - Selected Group Exhibitions			
2022	<i>Big Sculpture 'small works'</i> One Star Gallery, Melbourne.		
			<i>PICES group show</i> , Phillip Island.
2020	<i>Inaugural Group Show</i> One Star Gallery, Melbourne.		
			<i>Image_Object MONAFOMA 2020</i> at Poimena Gallery, Launceston.
Michelangelo Russo - Selected Solo Exhibitions			
2019	<i>CARTONI Containers Contained</i> in collaboration with Jennifer Jabu at Fortyfive Downstairs Gallery, Melbourne.	2004	<i>Arte di Ritorno</i> at Sala dei Chierici, Biblioteca Berio, Genova, Italy.
2016	<i>Bestie e D'intorni</i> at Bird's Gallery, Melbourne.	2003	<i>Seta: Traditions and Visions</i> at Exhibition Building, Melbourne.
2010	<i>Silence</i> at Anita Traverso Gallery, Melbourne.	2002	<i>Art Fair</i> at Exhibition Building, Melbourne.
2007	<i>Petals and Thorns</i> at Anita Traverso Gallery, Melbourne.	2001	<i>Smoulder</i> at Art House Gallery, Sydney.
2005	<i>Wax</i> at Silvershot presented by Artefact, Melbourne.	2000	<i>Quattro</i> at Chiara Goya Gallery, Melbourne.
2002	<i>Iso</i> at Goya Galleries, Melbourne.	1999	<i>11th Incontro Annuale</i> at Spazio Viola, Pavia, Italy.
2001	<i>Michelangelo Russo</i> at Goya Galleries, Melbourne.	1998	<i>Christmas Show</i> at Art House Gallery, Sydney.
		1997	<i>Boys in Town</i> at Art House Gallery, Sydney.
			<i>10th Incontro Annuale</i> at Spazio Viola, Pavia, Italy.
2000	<i>Reticoli</i> at Art House Gallery, Sydney.	1996	<i>Christmas Show</i> at Art House Gallery, Sydney.
1997	<i>Gold</i> at Goya Galleries, Melbourne.	1995	<i>Inaugurazione Spazio Viola</i> at Spazio Viola, Ciego de Avila, Cuba.
			<i>Red Ribbon</i> at Palazzo Tursi, Genova, Italy.
1996	<i>For the Love of Orange</i> at A.R.T. Gallery Eden, Melbourne.		<i>Darbo Gelsomino Negri Russo</i> at George Paton Gallery, Melbourne.
			<i>Songlines from Distant Lands</i> at Cathedral Room ANZ Gothic Bank, Melbourne.
1993	<i>Paintings by Michelangelo Russo</i> at Foy & Gibson Gallery, Melbourne.	1989	<i>5 Artisti da Pescara</i> at Galleria Cesare Manzo, Pescara, Italy.
			<i>Animals</i> at Universita' Occupata, Pescara, Italy.
			<i>Malerei Fotografiche Emulsion und Acryl auf Linewand</i> at PillangGallery, Berlin, Germany.

Many thanks to :

Simon Calabria, George Cociglia, Leaonardo Di Fabio, Mick Harvey, Andy Evans, Emilie Jabu, Sean Kelly, Anthony Menegazzo, Edwina Preston, Thomas Sutherland, Mike Wedd, Kelwin Wong.

Right: V.CORALLO SU GRAPH |Q33| 2022 (detail)



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