

PRESS RELEASE

Francesco Arecco. Proximity.

Curated by Ilaria Bignotti

From May 16th to Saturday June 22nd, 2024

Opening on Thursday May 16th, at 6.00 pm

Exhibition venue

IAGA Contemporary Art

Cloșca Street, n. 9-11, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

The exhibition can be visited for free from Tuesday to Saturday, from 2.00 to 6.00 pm and by appointment.

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IAGA Contemporary Art is pleased to inaugurate Francesco Arecco's new solo exhibition, an artist represented by the gallery for over a decade.

The exhibition, curated by Ilaria Bignotti, consists of seventeen works, including an environmental installation, fifteen sculptural works specially created for the 2024 exhibition, and one from 2020. Born in Gavi, Piedmont, in 1977, where he lives and works, Francesco Arecco is a sculptor who primarily works with wood, his preferred material called upon to give life to a surprising sculptural alphabet that has emerged, with coherence and vitality for over fifteen years, sometimes from precious essences, carefully selected, sometimes from reclaimed elements.

In this exhibition, which sees an interesting presence of painting intervening on sculpture, key elements of Arecco's poetics and found, such as **the choice to intervene as minimally as possible on the material**; the desire to highlight what is visible yet often forgotten or latent, primarily the constitution of wood itself and its fascinating possibilities; **the pursuit of a poetics of small symbolic gestures (weaving, folding, embedding, splitting, supporting...)** that become

allegories of fundamental acts (loving, living, nourishing, resting...) entrusted to the personality of the vegetal and often mineral origin material (consider the use of stones grafted in wood); the conceptual work of unity and its ever-changing germination, where the principle of variation serves to divert reasoning, in a maieutic manner, from the fixity of the rule; the desire to establish a close relationship with the viewer, in a mutual gaze request that animates and energizes the work, making it an active participant in everyday life; the great awareness of space as a place of experience of time and of the relationship between people; the great awareness of space as a place of experience of time and of the relationship between people; the need to tell stories through objects, stories that often arise from an intimate matrix and become reflections on universal themes – the relationship between Man and Nature, between Individual and Community, the theme of Resilience as a bond between artists and the community.

These are the themes that become, as Ilaria Bignotti writes in the critical text in the catalog, "tools of a peremptory and rigorous work, translating into very clean forms, bordering on essentiality, often of environmental matrix or however linked to a very close relationship with space. [...] large cycles of works necessary to define and address a problem, cycles that are never disjointed from each other but always aimed at highlighting the great, heroic role of sculpture as a paradigm of existence, honoring its ethics and reiterating, if necessary, the possibility, for art, to redeem humanity from denial, violence, pain."

In this broader context, the project of this exhibition, has, as the title clearly states, "Proximity".

The artist himself explains: "In recent years, the West has been the protagonist of a radical reorganization of social relations based on the concept of 'distancing'. The fear of relating to the 'other' generated by the pandemic, combined with the radicalization of digital processes increasingly supported by government policies, is at the center of a now daily life where social interaction in the absence of physical presence appears not only possible but also normal. The consequences of this phenomenon are obvious to everyone. [...] With the works in this exhibition, I would like to reflect on the themes I have mentioned above. I would like to work with my forms, mainly with wood but also with other materials. [...] The concept expressed will be the following: the proximity of the spectator to the artwork, with installations that impose physical contact with the sculptures; the physical proximity between bodies, represented (and symbolized) by sculptures placed at different distances from the usual canons of diptychs and triptychs to which we are accustomed; the boundary, an artificial line that stands between similar bodies even clearly complementary; the proximity that makes us understand how similar apparently different entities are when seen side by side; the proximity that draws close, given by elastic wooden planks holding

objects; like embraces that can be read as positive or negative; the proximity of wooden planks lying together, representing the equality between those who sleep together – or between those who, after any life path, have reached the end of their days; interpenetration and inclusion as extreme forms of proximity, represented by matryoshka sculptures”.

The works on display prominently highlight the themes underlying the project: observe “WATCH, 44°38’55.52” N 8°47’21.82”, " the only work dated 2020 and formed by a table of oak from the port of Amsterdam and a headboard of ziricote, dipped in blue. The title refers to a precise geographical point: the maximum distance the artist was able to reach by leaving his home in compliance with the lockdown restrictions. This sculpture also launched the international project conceived by Arecco himself, the Art Seed Project with which he asked artists from all over the world to perform an aesthetic act within the distance imposed by the lockdown.

Sister work to “WATCH” from 2020 is “Tre uomini di mare”, 2024, where the mahogany board has been soaked – note the alteration of the wood pigment – while at the base are three holes for ropes: also “WATCH” it is made of wood from the port of Amsterdam and thus tells as a story of distances, findings, and prosody among the shapes and events of things. Also of notable interest is the installation “Il novero dei veri amici”, 2024, formed by eight buckets belonging to an ancient community well, arranged to form a temporary sculpture, which can change its conformation on the ground. Visitors are invited to write the names of their closest friends – their true friends – and place these names, written on fabric fragments provided by the artist, inside the buckets. Among other works, some of large dimensions are worth mentioning. For instance, “Vieni qui”, 2024, a base formed from an old butcher's block, on which the artist has drawn the footprints of his two feet, or rather, has drawn those of the left foot, a piece of the right one, and has then indicated with five small circles the tips of his toes of the right foot.

Traces of painting underline the relationships between people, between distance, connection, eternal or temporary separation, love and memory, desire and forgetfulness: two sculptures, both titled like the exhibition, “Prossimità”, 2024, are each formed by two parts of wood – chestnut and poplar – dated 1520 by the Carbon-14 diagnostic method, originally joined, highlighted by the artist with a pictorial intervention.

Then there are works that speak of solitude and hospitality: “Tienimi qui”, 2024, are two sculptures formed by strips of different wood essences. In the center is the hard ebony, at the sides they open, curved with steam as is done with wood used for musical instruments, tongues of samba and maple that hold, as their title suggests, small colored objects, and that can also accommodate other elements that the future owner of the work may want to entrust to them.

Instead, “Cent’anni di solitudine”, 2024, is formed by two lists of ebony wood that expose, embedded in them, a bicipital quartz: the mineral, if it does not grow from a rock but forms “in solitude,” becomes bicipital and to do so takes a century.

When present in some works, the color fills a single shape, which over the years has become the artist’s seal: the berry of the Yew plant, scientifically called aril. Considered since ancient times a magical tree, a bridge between death and life, its berries are edible.

The seed they cover is poisonous: deadly. Arecco brings to light this ancient knowledge that revolves around an apparently insignificant natural element: art as a way to highlight what our eyes do not remember to see.

He thus creates three works: among these, the largest is entitled “Taxus Baccata L.”, 2024, where the image of the berry is given in black acrylic, enormous, on three doors of ancient wall cabinets. Wall cabinets were functional to save space in homes, they had to be almost mimetic, not evident, and often were covered in the same color as the walls. Here the aril screams their presence. As Ilaria Bignotti wrote in the critical text in the catalog, Arecco’s solo exhibition is “made up of many stories translated into sculptures [...] We can stay a little longer with these works, or we can say goodbye to them and go out for a walk. They remain there, living by living us. They are of us image, prostheses, tension. They relate to us, close and far away.

The exhibition is completed by a catalog in English, Italian and Romanian containing the exhibition views and reproductions of all the works, with a critical text by Ilaria Bignotti.

The artist, Francesco Arecco

Francesco Arecco is a visual artist originally from Gavi, Piedmont, where he was born in 1977 and where he lives and works. The artist has exhibited in various solo exhibitions in Italy and Europe, including, mentioning some: *Waiting For You* (2019, Romania), *Il privilegio del fulmine* (2017, Italy), *Nascondimento* (site-specific installation, 2013, Slovenia). He has also had the opportunity to participate in numerous group exhibitions, including: *L'Arte della Sostenibilità* (2017), *Times and Genesis* (2016), *Tutto ho posto sotto i tuoi piedi* (2015), *E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle: l'approdo* (2013, 2012, 2011) and others. He has also participated in several art awards and competitions, receiving recognitions and special mentions.

He is a sculptor who primarily works with wood, his preferred material called upon to give life to a surprising sculptural alphabet that has merged, with coherence and vitality for over fifteen years, sometimes from reclaimed elements.

Ilaria Bignotti

Born in Brescia in January 1979, Ilaria Bignotti holds a Ph.D. in Theories and History of Arts and serves as a Scientific Curator of Artist Archives and Estates; she is an independent curator and art critic. She is a member of the Curatorial Committee of ArteJeans, a project focused on contemporary arts for the establishment of a Museum-Archive of Jeans in Genoa (since 2020). She is also on the Scientific Committee of the MoRE Museum, a museum of refused and unrealized art projects (since 2011). Specializing in modern and contemporary art history (XIX, XX, and XXI centuries), she contributes to the new five-year course "Dell'Arte" by DeAgostini Scuola for Secondary Schools and Universities, authored by Ernesto Luciano Francalanci (first edition 2021). Since 2003, she has conceived, organized, and curated international exhibition projects, working for extended periods with Museums, Institutions, and Foundations in Italy and abroad. She serves as a Visiting Professor and Adjunct Faculty at Italian and international universities. She is also a Court Expert in modern and contemporary art for the Brescia Court. From 2003 to the present, she has authored over a hundred books, including catalogs of modern and contemporary art for curated exhibitions, and has written numerous essays and contributions in scientific monographs and reasoned catalogs.

IAGA Contemporary Art

IAGA Contemporary Art Gallery was founded in 2014, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in the Transylvanian region, by Alberto Perobelli, entrepreneur and collector of modern and contemporary art: starting from the acquisition of the works of the great masters of the Italian post-

war period after the Second World War, through his activity in Romania, began to deepen the research and languages of young local artists and founded the project of a gallery to give voice to their works, in a careful and original dialogue with artists from other Eastern European countries, without forgetting the young Italians and the middle-aged.

From 2014 until now, the result is an intense activity of the gallery, coordinated by Rosalba Di Pierro, Gallery Manager, hosting six exhibitions a year and with an active participation in art fairs in Northeast European countries, with a careful presence at Italian fairs.