

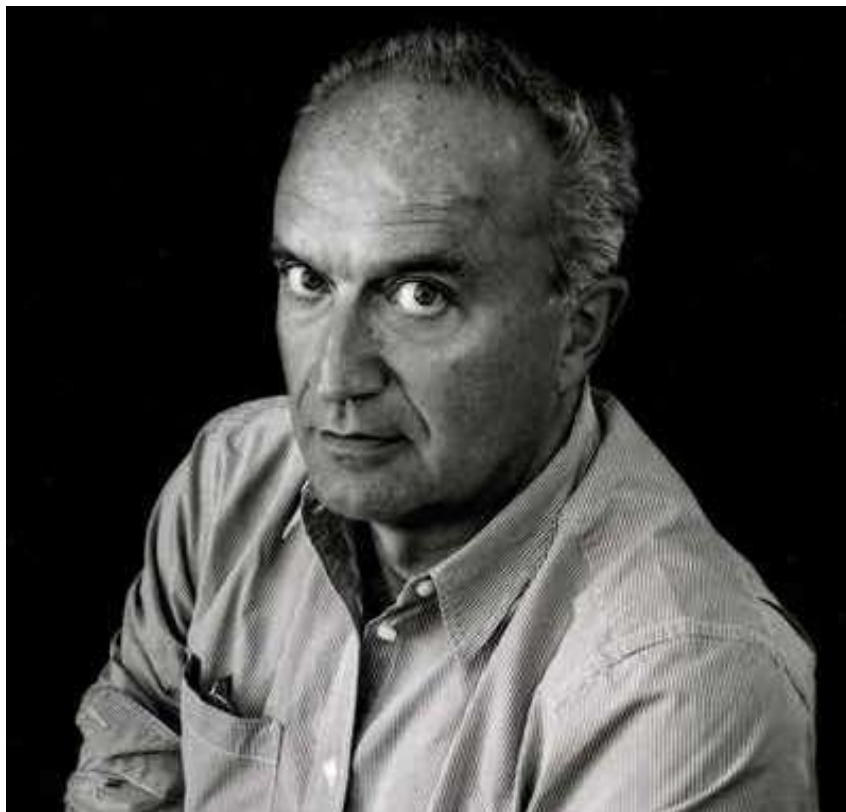
NICOLAS MONTI

Architetto e Land Artist

“Art is a lie that allows us to tell the truth”
Picasso

www.landart.it

Nicolas Monti



Nicolas Monti (Milan, 1956) is an **Italian architect and land artist**, as well as a writer and curator. He grew up in a stimulating cultural environment: his grandfather, Giovanni Monti, an entrepreneur, co-founded the publishing house Longanesi & C. with Leo Longanesi in 1946 and had connections with various personalities in the world of culture and art, including Giorgio De Chirico, who was a regular guest at his home in Milan. Nicolas's father, Mario Monti, also a writer, journalist, and art collector, directed the publishing house from 1956 to 1979.

In this context, Nicolas Monti, already after high school, frequently traveled between Europe and America, coming into contact with the New York art scene, especially with Leo Castelli's gallery. There, he met artists who would visually influence all his subsequent works, including Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Rauschenberg. Inspired by this experience, he embarked on an **independent curator** career in 1979, organizing traveling photography exhibitions in Italy, Germany, Spain, the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

During the same period, he enrolled in the **Faculty of Architecture** at **Politecnico di Milano**, where he graduated in 1984. In 1987, he founded the architecture studio **AMA - Albera Monti Architetti** with Giovanni Albera, still active in residential, corporate, commercial, and hotel sectors, with important private clients such as Adidas, Allianz, Amazon, Banca Generali, BCG Boston Consulting, BNP Paribas, Bosch, Citibank, Google, and Société Générale. Simultaneously, starting in 1984, he initiated his artistic activity as a **Land Artist**, closely connected to architecture.

He draws materials, technical tools, and relationships with various suppliers from architectural practice, and these elements are often involved in the construction process of his artworks. In contrast to architectural practice, his artistic work is kept in a more private and "playful" sphere, free from external rules and imposition. His interventions are closely tied to his daily life, often stemming from the experiences he is undergoing at that precise moment; there is nothing premeditated, everything is spontaneous and sudden. The intervention location, materials, and characteristics result from chance encounters while walking, traveling, visiting places, or working on construction sites.

Through his actions, Nicolas alters nature, buildings, or the city around him with signs, objects, or installations that may have lasting or transient characteristics over time. This process aims to question and reveal the elements that make up a landscape, environment, or room, challenging their meaning and social role, often in an ironic and purely creative manner. His artistic production could be divided into three areas that he defines as **ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE**, **URBAN TRACES**, and **DESTROY & BUILD**. Each of them is linked to the way Monti, in his daily life, experiences nature, the city, and his work as an architect.

Among his notable curatorial projects are exhibitions at the **CP International Center of Photography** in New York, **PAC - Pavilion of Contemporary Art** in Milan, **Palazzo delle Albere** in Trento, **Palazzo Rosso** in Genoa, and the **Archaeological Museum** of Bergamo.



ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



Sand Castle

Rimini-Riccione (IT)

1984

After his degree in architecture in 1984, Nicolas Monti took part in a sand castle building competition as he was recognized as the sole Italian expert in sand castles, following several articles he had written on the subject. Monti's project simulated a future archaeological excavation, the area of which was marked with a fabricated sign claiming sponsorship from the Archaeological Department of the Italian Ministry of Culture. The excavation, carried out with the use of bulldozers, brought to light the remains of a presumed beach resort destroyed by an atomic catastrophe, including human skulls. Monti captured the attention of journalists and TV crews, turning the event into a spectacle with over six hundred spectators. The project was executed in collaboration with renowned Italian architects.

ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



Mangroves on Parade

Mauritius

2000

During a stay in Mauritius, Nicolas Monti, while driving along the southwestern coast, was attracted to a particularly picturesque site: the sea was eroding the island's only salt pan, and instead of building expensive and disruptive embankments, the locals adopted the simple and ecological solution of planting mangroves.

He persuaded the local workers to plant the remaining mangrove saplings in orderly rows, resembling soldiers on parade, from which the project's title derives.

In the late afternoon, before sunset, knowing that he wouldn't have another chance to return to the site, fortunately, his "green soldiers" presented themselves impressively. Monti took some photos, waited for high tide, and was rewarded with a rainbow.

ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



Tracks in the Grass

Marche (IT)

2004

In this project, Nicolas Monti, inspired by a simple green field, sought ways to make the landscape more intriguing. After a few days of observation, he decided to create an abstract composition, aiming not to compromise the existing work of the farmer. Using parallel lines, electricity poles, and isolated olive trees, he crafted a linear and clean composition, interrupted only when a natural obstacle or human-made structure required it.

ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



Cowebs

Combloux (FR)

2008

Nicolas Monti, while hiking in the woods of Haute Savoie, found himself marveling at cobwebs with intricate shapes previously unnoticed. Noticing the difficulty in photographing these webs designed to escape the notice of their prey due to lighting conditions, Monti envisioned what they might look like when transplanted outside their natural habitat. Collecting spiders carefully, he established a new colony on a topiary discovered in a village cemetery. The shrub's form proved ideal—neither too sharp nor lacking in human influence. The spiders seemed to appreciate their new abode, resulting in a green and vibrant skyscraper adorned with meticulous, sun-catching webs.



The Nest

Haute-Savoie (FR)

2014

In 2014, Nicolas Monti, by chance, conversed with workers at a French Alps granite quarry. They shared plans to recover semi-finished stones from an early 1900s railway construction site, believing the site would interest Monti. The location, within a dense forest, revealed a chaotic pile of large stones being moved by bulldozers and sold for chalet gardens. Monti proposed creating a sculpture by rearranging the stones, resulting in an evocative oversized stone nest with a central egg. Despite capturing photos, upon his return with a professional photographer and plans for aerial shots, the work had progressed, and his installation was unrecognizably altered.

Interestingly, Monti's few internet-posted photos became a piece of fake news. UFO enthusiasts claimed the images depicted a mysterious Siberian crater in an entirely inaccessible region, sparking a new unexplained "scientific" mystery.

ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



Strawehenge

Talamone (IT)

2019

During a period in Maremma, the artist stumbled upon a flat farmed land, reclaimed from marshes and surrounded by dark wooden hills. The freshly harvested wheat field was adorned with scattered straw bales, sparking Monti's fascination with the compacted straw's beautiful texture. He envisioned the possibility of rearranging the bales into a monumental and rectilinear pattern. Intrigued, he contacted the sharecropper, who found the idea amusing and agreed to help. It could be seen as a burial ground for agrarian kings, featuring massive memorial markers reconstructed with each new harvest. Alternatively, it might represent temporary watch towers guarding a rapidly shifting border. Perhaps it's a steeplechase course awaiting giant athletes or oversized trained beasts. Another perspective suggests a checkers game requiring large teams to move a pawn, taking years to complete an endeavor difficult to monitor without a hot air balloon or a drone.

ANTHROPOMIZED NATURE



URBAN TRACES



Electric Dreams

Milan (IT)

2008-2009

During Milan Fashion Week, Nicolas Monti conducted an intriguing experiment with two Videowalls, redirected with the collaboration of a technician. These screens included a permanent installation and a temporary one, with one screen mounted on wheels for the occasion.

In a unique moment of lack of programming, contrasting instructions were randomly inserted to explore the possibility that Videowalls, despite being electronic devices, could express autonomous content. The response was surprising: both reacted similarly, generating essential yet pleasant geometric compositions characterized by points, simple shapes, colors, and numbers.

This experiment raises questions about the potential expressive autonomy of such devices in moments of inactivity, even though their fundamental nature remains that of programmable tools.



Narcissists Anonymous

Milano (IT)

2020

In 2020, during the first Covid-related lockdown, the artist discovered a new and unexpected expressive opportunity: the unique chance to repurpose large urban advertising spaces left unused by advertisers into new contexts for artistic interventions. Massive surfaces, strategically located along some of the busiest streets, typically saturated with commercial images and messages, appeared desolately empty.

Thanks to the collaboration of agents who allowed the artist to use their billboards for an "artistic" installation, albeit for a limited period, these spaces were filled with reinterpretations and fragments of the artist's photographic portrait taken by Carlo Casana.



Golden Shroud

Vienna (AT)

2021

The maintenance work at Servitenkirche in Vienna required protecting the paintings above the altars from dust using plastic sheeting. An initially considered purely functional solution, however, would have marred the interior of the church for months.

For this reason, Nicolas Monti, drawing inspiration from an ancient Catholic custom, particularly prevalent in Germanic culture countries, of covering sacred images with a purple veil during the Lenten weeks leading to Easter, proposes an alternative idea to cover the works. The artist suggests using golden sheets that evoke the Austrian Baroque tradition, which employed skillful gilding to highlight the whiteness of some stuccos in the details of sacred representations.



Painting Sidewalks

Paris (FR)

2022

As early as 2016, the artist had experimented with using the sidewalk as a canvas. After surpassing the playful aspect of the initial experience, the focus shifted to the desire to achieve a more aesthetically satisfying result.

The project's idea is to transform the sidewalk, an omnipresent and often melancholic element in the urban environment, into a colorful, joyful, and pleasant space.

Nevertheless, the artist reassures that just a few days of normal wear or a decent rainfall are sufficient to restore the pavement to its original appearance. Once again, Monti works on the ephemeral and transient effect of his installations, offering various imaginative possibilities within our everyday lives.



Concealed Chandeliers

Spetses (EL)

2022

Nicolas Monti's interventions extend beyond nature and urban spaces to interiors and furnishings.

He enjoys transforming objects, as seen here in a well-lit church in Spetses, Greece, where he turned golden chandeliers into light and minimalist volumes.

As Nicolas Monti quotes: "It was a quick *divertissement* that inserts a touch of modernity into the heart of an Orthodox iconography that has remained unchanged since its origins".



Holy Door

Milan (IT) and Paris (FR)

2023

For this project, Nicolas Monti reinterprets the concept of the Holy Door: a basilica that embodies a metaphor rich in symbolism, a threshold normally impenetrable, which can be crossed only under certain conditions.

Quoting the evangelist John, "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9).

Similarly, the artist imagined that even the monumental door of a bourgeois building could take on a meaning understandable only to those who have crossed it. Even if a plastic sheet is enough to conceal its nature and a blade to pierce the veil.



DESTROY AND BUILD



Building in a Box

Istanbul (TR)

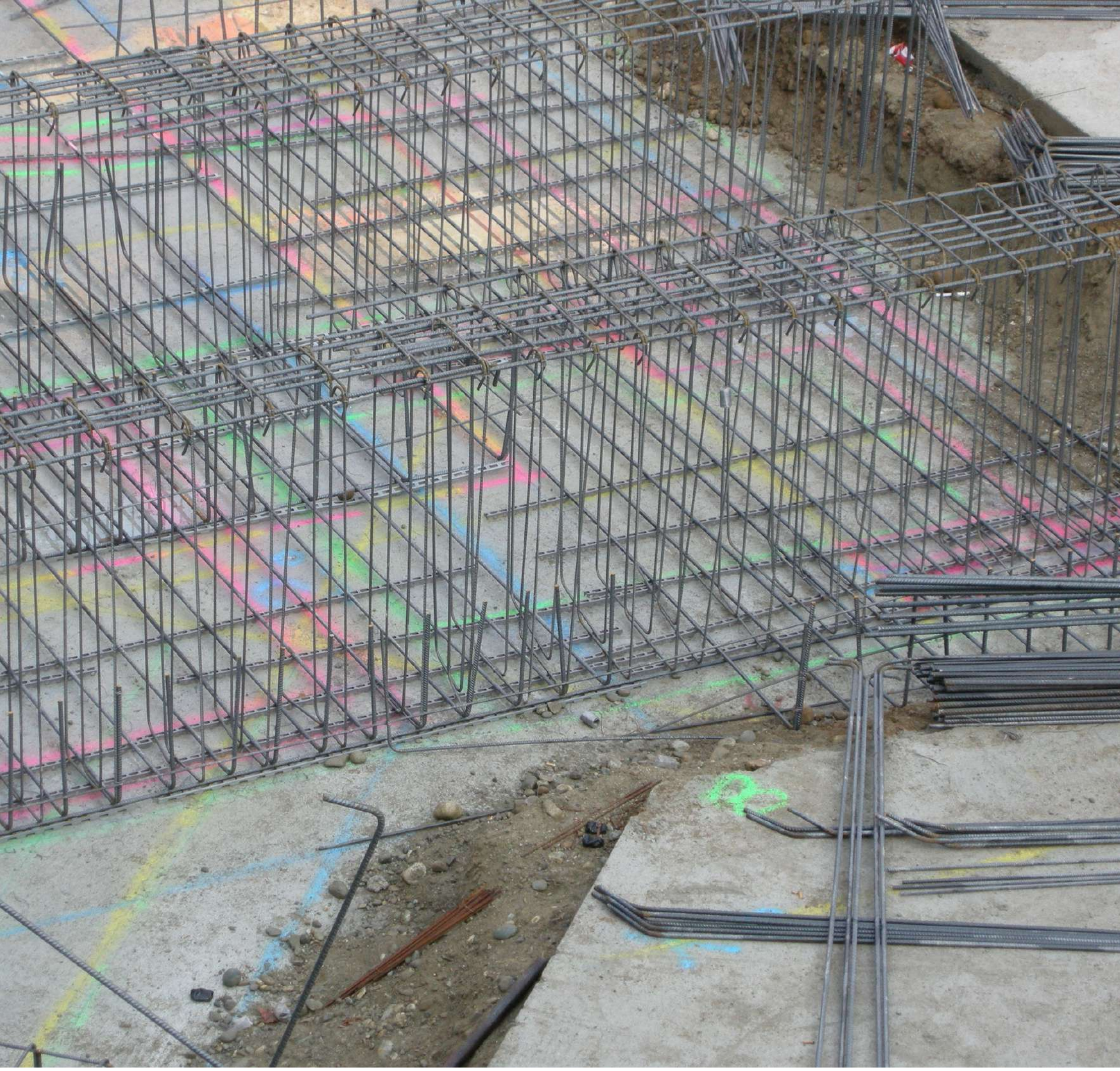
2007

A dilapidated building from the 1940s was slated for demolition. The location was no more than a block away from the Blue Mosque in a highly trafficked street. Therefore, it was very visible and ideal for something that would capture attention and arouse curiosity.

The artist and architect decided not to give any hint of what was to come, creating an unfathomable box of neatly arranged wooden planks, with a strong character derived from the texture of the material used rather than from decorative or "architectural" details. For practical purposes, only a wooden door and a first-floor wooden bay, for evacuating demolition materials, were allowed.

A local civil engineer allowed Nicolas Monti to design his first and so far only building without windows.

DESTROY AND BUILD



Caged Geometrics

Milan (IT)

2003

In this project, Nicolas Monti sketches the foundations of a building he designed using spray cans of various sparkling colors.

Subsequently, a series of metal cages were constructed and positioned according to the drawings, creating a 3D network, thus transforming a two-dimensional painting into a genuine sculpture.

This is an entirely experimental process, as sculptors typically create sketches and scale models but don't usually shape their artworks using drawings as a physical foundation. Monti chooses to use a steel grid to preserve transparency, ensuring that the colored paint remains visible, contrasting with the grayness of the metal superstructure.



Rags in the Sky

Milan (IT)

2019

A construction company, aware of the eccentricities of the architect Monti, offered him the opportunity to create a fast installation while they were erecting scaffolding to renovate a skyscraper. This temporary installation was made using plastic canvases slowly unfurled over three consecutive days. Instead of immediately securing the canvases to the steel structure, they were allowed to freely flutter in the wind gusts for a few hours each day, and then rolled down to a new height. The purpose of the project was to protect the street from falling debris.

DESTROY AND BUILD



Polka dots

Milan (IT)

2019

For architect Nicolas Monti, an installation involving extensive demolitions always represents an excellent opportunity to explore new artistic ideas.

In this specific case, the artist decides to experiment with a repetitive pattern of irregular dots on all vertical and horizontal surfaces, creating a simplified version of Yayoi Kusama's artwork, with an accumulation of dots both on the floor and on all walls.

This small divertissement, like all of Monti's installations, is destined to disappear in a few days, but it serves as a pleasant diversion from the construction site routine and a broad reflection on the construction and interpretation of urban space.



Corona Stores

Milan (IT)

2021

During the period of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, many shops in Milan remained closed and vacant. These empty spaces became for Nicolas Monti an additional opportunity for reflection on urban places and new opportunities for creating works of art. With the help of various shop owners, he occupies the storefront spaces, filling the void with the presence of objects and materials—a reinterpretation of the commercial places that populate our daily lives.

DESTROY AND BUILD



An Imaginative Carpentry

Paris (FR)

2023

Taking advantage of the partial renovation of a building, I did a low-cost experiment on how, through a retro engineering operation, to invent an imaginative carpentry: in theory it could have been used to create windows of different shapes and sizes in a solid bricks wall.

In the process, an unexpected side effect emerged, with an overlap of styles, which refer from a Haussmannian architecture to an almost neo-Gothic revival

DESTROY AND BUILD

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- "Egitto, frammenti di un'antica civiltà," **Civico Museo Archeologico**, Bergamo, 2002.
- Curated exhibitions at **Spazio Design San Fedele**, 1990-1993, Centro Culturale S. Fedele, Milan: "Il design degli occhiali"; "Favolosi, ma sinceramente falsi - Gioielli americani 1930-50"; "Design per la tavola"; "Bruno Giardino, Progetti di Design"; "Strumenti di scrittura, dalla penna al computer"; "Hecho en Mexico - Gioielli messicani 1930-50".
- "Cunha Moraes Viagens em Angola, 1877-1897," 11th Photography Meetings, **Casa Museo Bissaya Barreto**, Coimbra, 1991.
- "Africa Then, Photography in Africa (1840-1918)," funded by grants from: NEA - National Endowment for the Arts, NEH - National Endowment for the Humanities, NYSCA - New York State Council on the Arts, **ICP - International Center of Photography**, New York, 1987.
- "Fotografia in Africa 1839 -1918," **Museo Provinciale d'Arte**, Palazzo delle Albere, Trento, 1981.
- "12 Italian Photographers," **Asilomar Conference Center**, Pacific Grove, 1981, **Istituto Italiano di Cultura**, New York, Tokyo, Madrid, 1981-1982.
- "Emilio Sommariva", **Museo Civico**, Lodi, 1984.
- "Luca Comerio. Primi documenti di fotogiornalismo", **Palazzo Rosso**, Genova, 1980; **Galleria Civica**, Modena, 1979; **PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea**, Milan, 1979.

PERMANENT INSTALLATION

- "The Guardian," 2019, Tarquinia, Porta Nuova area, exterior of a private residence. [Link to artwork](#)
- "Roots and Trees," 2015, site-specific installations for the offices of a consulting company in Milan. [Link to artwork](#)
- "Steel Flowers," 2012, permanent installation at the Museum of Military History in Vienna (Heeresgeschichtliches Museum). [Link to artwork](#)
- "Concrete," 2012, Muscat, Oman, with the contribution of Muriya Tourism Development. [Link to artwork](#).
- "Memories," 2010, Porquerolles, France, permanent installations within a winery. [Link to artwork](#)

PUBLICATION

- “L'architettura del Call Center”, Firenze: Alinea, 2004;
- “Egitto - Frammenti di un'antica civiltà - Una collezione di fotografie del XIX secolo”, Bergamo: Civico Museo Archeologico, 2002;
- “Il gioco della seduzione”, Novara: De Agostini, 1996; Mediterranean Houses in Italy, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili (Spanish, English co-editions), 1992;
- “Cunha Moraes. Viagens en Angola”, 1877-1897, with António Pedro Vincente, Coimbra: Academic Association of Coimbra - 11th Photography Meetings, 1991;
- “Italian Modern: A Design Heritage”, New York: Rizzoli International Publications (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1990);
- “Africa Then. Photographs 1840-1918”, New York: Knopf, London: Thames & Hudson, 1987, Paris: Editions Hologramme, 1989;
- “Emilio Sommariva”, Lodi: Comune e Banca Popolare di Lodi, 1984;
- “Luca Comerio, fotografo e cineasta (1878-1940)”, Milan: Electa, 1979;

OTHER PUBLICATION

Also contributions to several exhibition catalogues and to the ICP World Photography Encyclopedia. Articles published in:

Italia - AL, AReA, Bagno design, Bollettino per Biblioteche, Blu & Rosso, Business, Colore, Corto Maltese, Il Diaframma, Domina, Domus, Geodes, Il Giornale dell'Ingegnere, La Gola, La Mia Casa, Luce & Design, Modo, OFx, Panorama Mese, Personal Time, Progettare, Progresso Fotografico, Ufficio Stile, Zoom;

Portogallo - Nova Imagem;

Giappone - Camera Mainichi;

Stati Uniti - Aperture, Food Art.

Photographs published in various architecture, design and photography magazines and in Alvaro Siza, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1993.



CONTACTS

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