

**ILARIA CUCCAGNA**

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Ilaria Cuccagna was born in Cesena in 1981. She lives and works between Como and Milan. She studied sculpture and photography at the Academy of Fine Arts of Urbino and at the Facultad de Bellas Artes de San Carlos, Universidad Politécnica of Valencia. After completing her studies she continued to refine her technical skills, working in art foundries both in Italy and abroad. These experiences were of fundamental importance for her research and for developing sensitivity towards her materials. Over the years she has worked as a university lecturer at the Department of Art History at the University of Malta, conducting workshops on sculptural techniques. She is currently a teacher of sculptural disciplines.

Her research is divided between sculpture and site-specific works concerning events that have occurred, processes initiated, alterations of matter that reach their final state only after being subjected to stress. In this sense the artist considers sculpture a performative practice. References to nature and archeology are important aspects of her research: by studying the iconography of classical sculpture she began to consider the archaeological object as a synthesis of nature and culture; a cultural product that nature has reappropriated, transforming it over time. Excavation and discovery, as well as the use of "remains", are therefore part of her practice which in recent years has developed through the organization of thematic cycles, series of works that reflect on recurring concepts such as *"Skin"*, *"Expanded"* and *"Archaeological"*. Plaster, silicone rubber, bronze and polyurethane foam are the materials she prefers to work with.

## WORKS

### **Skin series**

2023-2020

silicone rubber, nails

"Since 2016 I have started making silicone rubber casts on walls or floors of ruined architecture (walls of ancient churches, abandoned houses and floors corroded by bad weather). The practice of treading on reality, as if it were a 3D photograph, has always accompanied me. I have always made negatives to create positive sculptures. In this series of works, on the other hand, the work resides in the mold that becomes the guardian skin of the traces that have marked and define these architectures. In the deterioration lies the expression and their beauty."



## Skin\_Roman walls

2023

silicon rubber, nails

250 x 150 cm

Skin\_Roman walls: the working process documentary:  
<https://www.ilariacuccagna.com/news>

Como, the city where I have lived for about 15 years, is founded on Roman walls built by Gaius Julius Caesar in 59 BC. Parts of the ancient walls that defined the city of Novum Comum still exist today, often not visible to the public, inside private gardens and homes. Part of them are the foundations of a building founded in 1773 and still home the Alessandro Volta classical High School. The president of the Accademia Pliniana in 2023, the year in which the city of Como celebrates the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of its most illustrious Roman citizen Pliny the Elder, invited me to create a work that reflects on the origins of the city while opening a dialogue between the present it is gone. My idea was to focus attention on the subject of the walls kept inside the courtyard of the Volta High School. By creating a skin of silicone rubber, I sealed the texture of those ancient walls forever. Not only. The work recounts the passage of time thanks to the dirt that has clung to the rubber. The transferred traces bring with them the signs, like scars and the shades of color, like the stains of an old lady, tired but proud. The solidity of these precious walls that have spanned the centuries still stand there today, waiting for them to be made worthy of our contemporary gaze.



Como (Italy), the Caesarian walls. Processing steps



## Skin\_Pelle V

2023

silicone rubber, wall residues, nails

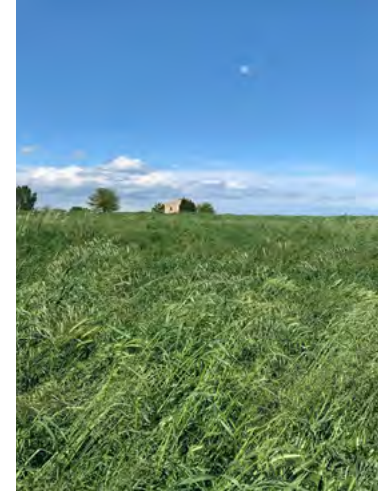
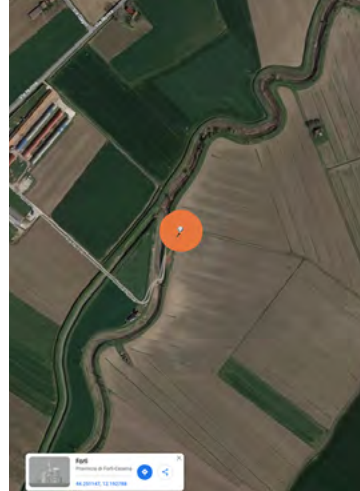
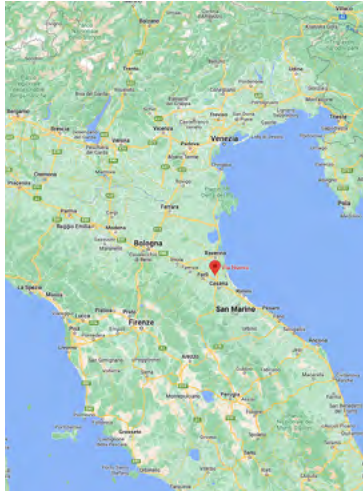
h. 30 cm

It is the trace of an abandoned architecture.  
Inside like flesh, outside like skin\the house is a body that  
no longer taken care of, it yields, deteriorates,  
ceases to live.

"I have observed this house in a place in the Romagna  
countryside for a long time. Years.

In 2023, shortly before the flood that hit Emilia  
Romagna, I decided to tread a detail, a dangerous  
corner of this forgotten house. Today that detail no  
longer exists, except in the space of my memory and in  
the trace of this work."





Ruin in Emilia Romagna (Italy). (44,25095° N, 12,19281° E). Processing steps





Ruined building in Como (Italy). **Skin\_Pelle I** h.30 cm

**Expanded series:  
Grey / Black / Self**

2023-2021

polyurethane foam, Ceppo di Gré ®, Acrylic, silicone rubber

"The playful, tragic and precarious component are the basis of this group of sculptures that I realized during the Pandemic period, from 2021. In the constraint of staying in the studio, I explored the possibilities of a new, easy to find material, polyurethane foam. The idea was to put in contact the countless amount of silicone rubber casts that I had accumulated over time with this new material. The autonomy and stubbornness of the foam intrigued me right away. Material in search of freedom and constant air, ready to rise unexpectedly. These contacts have given rise to sculptures that are sometimes grotesque and sometimes light, on the contrary, tragic and reflective.

My works, whether they refer to the visual dimension of sculptures from the past or make evident trace of architectural or natural surfaces, always continue to give expression to the mutability of matter. The choice of materials and the executive techniques are never casual even if in the creation itself I look for a playful interaction with the elements to which I sometimes entrust the task of self-determination".









**Expanded\_Grey #1** h.58 cm; **Grey #3** h.56 cm; **Grey #10** h.42 cm



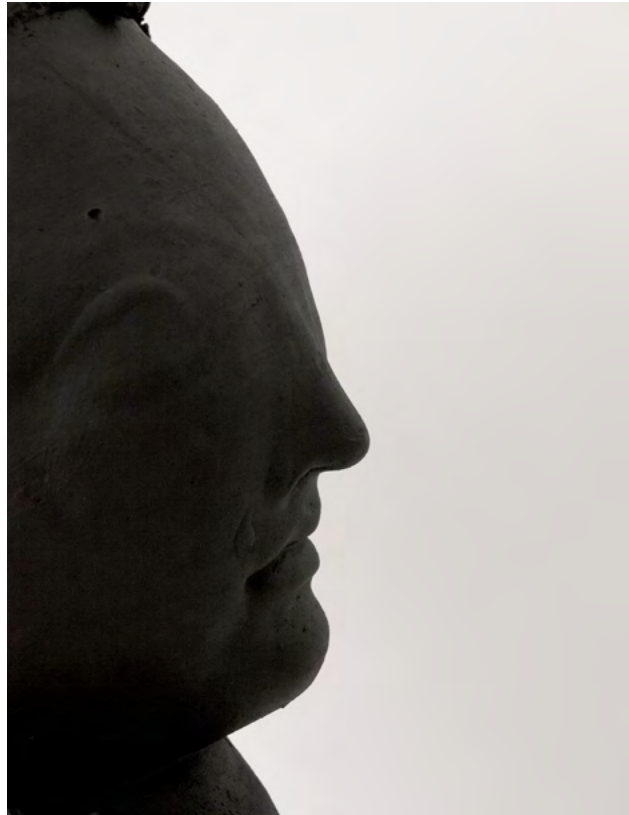
Expanded\_Grey #9 h.42 cm; Grey #8 h.20 cm; Grey #4 h.40 cm





Expanded\_Grey #6 h.25 cm; Grey #7 h.32 cm; Grey #5 h.82 cm





Expanded\_Black #1 h.49 cm; Black #2 h.43 cm

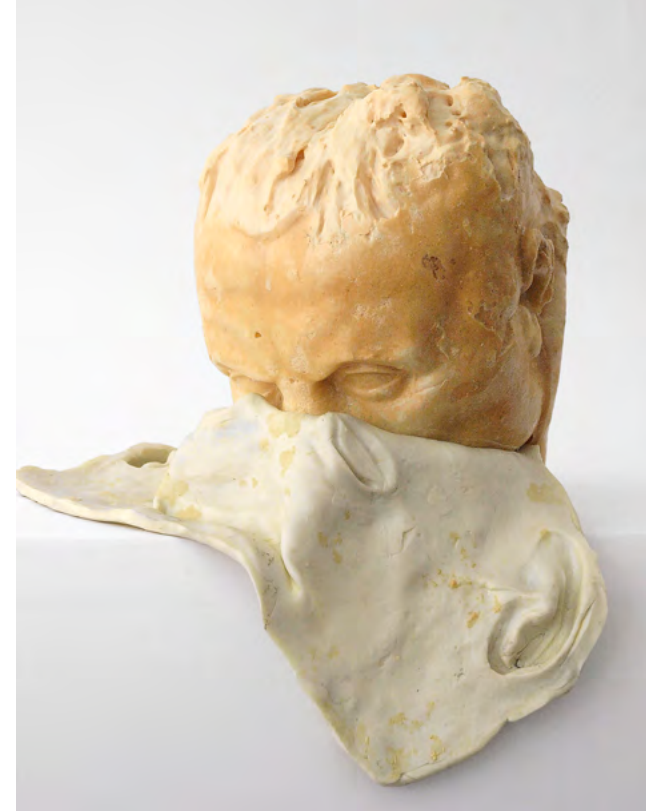


## Expanded\_Self VI

2021  
foam, silicon rubber  
h.28 cm

"My interests have led me to intensely observe photos of works of painting and sculpture printed on paper. The history of art studied together with the analysis of the three-dimensionality and shapes of Greek, Roman and Renaissance sculptures in particular remained in my eyes. I think these forms are now part of the visual and cultural heritage of our civilization. They are forms that themselves become basic material, foundations for a new contemporary dimension."





**Expanded\_Self III** h.35 cm; **Self VI** h.28 cm; **Self II** h.32 cm



## **Archaeological series**

2022-2020

bronze, plaster, silicone rubber, iron, iron oxide, sea salt, time

"I learned to see nature and culture in the same element, the archaeological one. The archaeological fragment in its partiality contains culture and also contains nature which sometimes preserves it, sometimes deteriorates it. The archaeological fragment has the power to refer to a completeness even if it does not belong to it. And this is what fascinates me that I can't resist. The challenge is to try to create something new that is steeped in the ancient.

The title to which these works belong refers to the technique of making them. In some cases, the opening of the mold reveals the shapes that, as in an archaeological find, give light to objects that are often incomplete and deformed. Following this logic, the sculptures are placed on the borderline between being created and rediscovered objects. In other cases, by arbitrarily sculpting sculptures that have already been made, I rediscover their pulsating core, their essence. To fuel the distance from my authorship and the sense of self-generative randomness, the sculptures undergo an oxidation process only partially under my control. This physical reaction allows, in fact, the emergence of salt on the surface, which creates corrosion and blooms, as well as color changes."



Archaeological\_It's not yet / It's not longer 2022, bronze, silicone rubber, plaster. Variable dimension

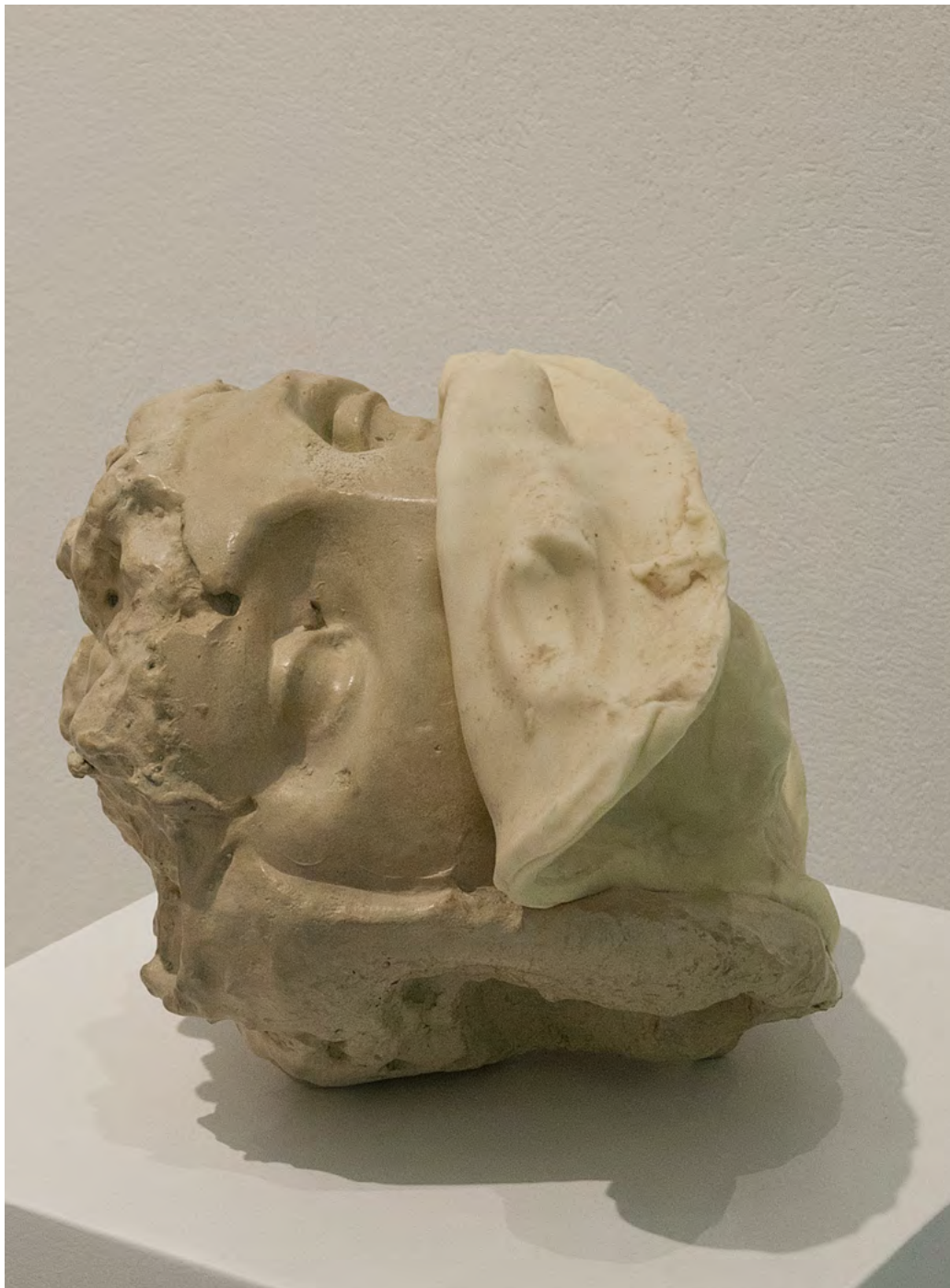


**Archaeological\_Self II**

2021

patinated bronze, silicon rubber

h.20 cm





**Archaeological\_Venus** 2021, plaster, sea water, oxide, mushroom, Ceppo di Gré®, time, h.35





**Archaeological\_Sculpture's heart**

2021

plaster, sea water, iron oxide, time

h.75 cm

h.50 cm





## Archaeological\_Emerged

2020

plaster, sea water, iron oxide, time

h.37 cm

h.42 cm



The cultural artefact of the past is often attacked or modified by natural elements. What the archaeologist rediscovers is always a new cultural object on which nature has exerted its strength.

Starting from this principle, I imagined the emergence of the Italian symbols of underwater archeology, the Riace Bronzes, made up of sea water. Two columns stand out, as if the sea and marine sedimentations had incorporated the two archaeological icons, crystallizing them.





## Alba Fucens

2018  
bronze, bones and black marquina marble  
50x60x24 cm

Alba Fucens is an archaeological site, a Roman colony located in the province of Aquila, in Italy. I visited this site in 2016 and was impressed by the total immersion in the surrounding mountainous landscape. the impression that time in that place had stopped for centuries was real; around there were no references to the contemporary era. Not far from the site, on the same day I found bony remains belonging to animals that had once grazed in those fields. The similarity between those bony remains and the capitals of the columns seen within Alba Fucens were extraordinary. I therefore decided to make bronze columns whose bases and capitals were the two animal finds found near the site.

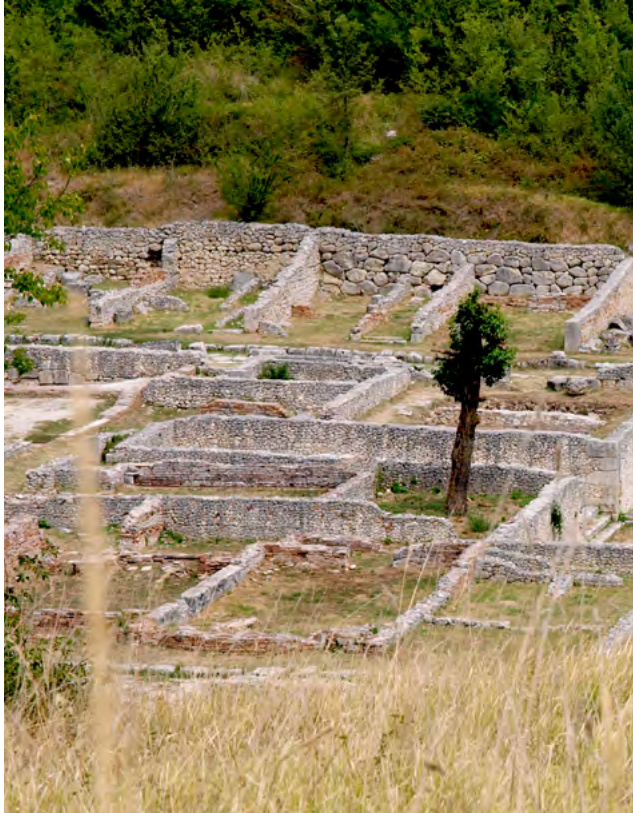


**Alba Fucens**

2018

bronze, bones, Travertine  
20x60x15 cm





The archaeological site of Alba Fucens in Italy





## Natural Culture

2019

sea salt, mushrooms, time

30x25x25 cm

Natural culture is part of titled Archaeological series. In this work I started to explore the relationship between man and nature, in particular the relationship between the cultural product of man (such as the remains of works of art, the scraps of material processing etc ..) and the natural elements. The proximity of these shapes and textures creates short circuits in the memory, awakens memories and at the same time stimulates curiosity in discovering new forms and connections within the sculptures. In natural cultures the real presence of two mushrooms determines the meaning of the work; a culture that becomes natural again because it is nature itself that regains it.











## **Sali minerali**

2017

white onyx / sea salt

bardiglio marble / Breton salt

brown antique granite / cyprus salt

pink quartzite / himalayan salt

variable dimensions

(text by Angela Madesani)

The reflection in this work is on the relationship between salts and minerals of different origins. Various types that originate abstract compositions in space. It seems to be, in this way, in front of delicate still life of Morandian reference. Cuccagna further explains: «At the same time the visual relationship between a salt and its mineral tells two stories: the destruction of a volume which crumbles into dust, or the construction of a volume that is generated from its own rubble». We are faced with a construction and a deconstruction of the whole, a fundamental reflection of his research.





**Migratio**  
**Mdina-Valletta**

2016  
silicone rubber, wall residues, nails  
150x250 cm

During the period of residence on the island of Malta, I learned of the strong tensions existing between Mdina and Valletta, respectively the ancient and today's capital. These contrasts, which for various reasons have continued until today, date back to 1530 when the Order of the Knights of St. John arrived in Malta to settle there permanently. The aristocracy of Mdina immediately opposed the Knights by forbidding them access to the city. This was one of the reasons that contributed to the Order's construction of Valletta. The official story instead tells that the aristocracy of Mdina welcomed the Order well. Of this version there is a propaganda painting created in about 1750 by Antoine De Favray commissioned precisely to manipulate the reality of the facts and therefore alter the historical memory of that event. Reflecting on this false historical and on the persistence through the centuries of tensions between the inhabitants of the two capitals, I wanted to create a metaphorical bridge of union by moving a symbolic element of the city of Mdina within the walls of Valletta. Part of the oldest city walls belonging to the church of San Pietro in Vincoli were trodden and transported to Valletta as an invitation to the reconciliation of the two cities.









## Vivrà finché ne avrai cura

2016

Serizzo stone, moss and bronze

12x22x13 cm

20x22x13 cm

The series born from experimentation of encounters between different materials. Inside the wood of Torno, on Lake Como, I've selected some stones partly covered by moss. The second element is the bronze, product of an artificial process. By identifying the humidity like the common denominator between the natural and artificial element the whole idea behind this project is to create a single alive sculpture. In fact the natural bronze oxidation process is being emphasized by the presence of moss humidity. In this context the owner of the artwork plays an essential role for the work destiny. In fact the sculpture can keep its metamorphosis only with the maintenance of humidity conditions. Otherwise the process of change will stop.









The forest of Torno. Como Lake, Italy



## Modellare l'informe

2016

dust, postal waste and hair

7x7x7 cm each

The word "shapeless" describes everything that is formless and without a specific shape. It's usually related to the wastes. I wanted to confer dignity upon the dust, my hair cut off and postal waste, realizing defined cubes of 7 centimetres on each side (the size of the palm of my hand).

In the difficulty of achieving my goal, trying to model these different materials, I've created three infinitely perfectible solids.







## Sculptura

2014 - 2004  
bronze, red Travertine  
10x27x10 each



this small composition represents my idea of the history of sculpture. When I was student I made a small Venus of Milo, in which I provocatively had cut off the head, to set it on one knee. Being one of my first bronze castings, the sculpture came out full of imperfections and shortcomings. For me, that little newborn sculpture and so strongly already lived, represented a work of recovered archeology; the archeology of the sense of sculpture itself. 10 years later, observing this old work and continuing to reflect on the idea of time, sculpture and materials, I took a new step. I juxtaposed to the small bronze a stone parallelepiped, with the same size as the sculpture. The stone volume is immediately became a sculpture, this time contemporary and minimal. Stone and bronze are the materials of sculpture, it can easily be said that these two materials constituted the history of sculpture from its origins until today.

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