

by her own movement at Fonderia 20.9  
exhibition essay by Angelica Rivetti (translated from Italian)

The exhibition originates from the book that Sonja Thomsen published in 2020 entitled "You will find it where it is: a reader": a complex and layered meditation that combines artistic practice, scientific issues and feminist theory through alternative gazes: from eighteenth-century mathematician Maria Agnesi, to nineteenth-century writer Margaret Fuller, to Lucia Moholy's photography and Maria Nordman's conceptual sculpture, passing through Goethe's color theory and Thomsen's own life experiences.

The installation choices place an articulation of multiple levels at the center, reflecting the visual and material structure of the book. The gallery is activated by an alternation of wall images, movable objects bordering between sculpture and installation, plays of light, shadows, superimpositions, transparencies, projection, and colors. The artist conceived the exhibition in response to the space. First and foremost as an iterative and meditative space in which to experiment with conceptual solutions and unexpected visual approaches.

Among images and sculptures, the written word, the only one present in the entire room, also emerges strongly. The text, contained in the first pages of the artist's book, is taken from the novel *A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines* (2006) by American astrophysicist Janna Levin. From these words emerge central points of Sonja's work particularly on the importance of the gaze, light and the ability of the human eye to perceive the periphery. Indeed, light is for her the main material on which to build her artistic practice: "as photographers we are taught to sculpt with light. Light is the key. Light allows us to see, seeing is a way of knowing. Light is color." Light then as a synonym of knowledge, of unveiling a truth, as an element capable of appropriating space and image in order to attract "a particular vision that opens to discovery."

The entire exhibition is articulated by consistently keeping at the center of the narrative Agnesi's mathematical curve and the modulation of this form, which becomes for the artist almost an obsession, a visual module from which to draw further interpretations: it is a clear reference to the eye (and thus to the gaze through which light is captured and perceived), as well as to the womb. The latter also indicates a specific part of the female body, and from here the reference to the title of the exhibition is immediate: "by her own movement" in fact takes up an essay found within the writing "Laugh of Medusa" (1975) by the feminist critic Hélène Cixous, who invites women to liberate their bodies from the preconstituted language based on a conventional and purely masculine vision of society. But that circular form also becomes in the course of the artistic process a burden that weighs on the curve, a reference to the difficulties that women artists and others are often forced to face. From this thought all the works on display are lowered, as if the gallery ceiling ideally identifies the weight of the patriarchal society that tends to oppress and sometimes suppress female creativity.

Another recurring element is the image of the snakeskin, which here becomes a reference to change, temporal circularity, movement and the iconography of Medusa-which entered popular culture as a dangerous and monstrous female character –. This idea of negative femininity is the legacy of a patriarchal view that found one of its most terrible expressions in the witch hunts of medieval times. It is no coincidence that this cultural legacy led to the mistranslation of the "curve of Agnesi" into "Witch of Agnesi": this happened because the mathematician and philosopher Maria Gaetana Agnesi in her treatise *Istituzioni analitiche ad uso della gioventù italiana* (1748) decided to call the mathematical

curve "versiera," a term derived from Latin that at the time in Italy was also an abbreviation of the word "avversiera," meaning female devil; hence the English translation led to the pun with the term witch, which becomes for today's audience an obvious example of gender language discrimination.

Constant, then, is the presence of the triangular shape. In the words of the artist herself, "triangles are about relationships. Light triangulates when it refracts. Triangles have a multiplicity of possible shapes, they are able to create complex and stable forms." But the triangle also dialogues with the circle-it is clear in the small image on the wall at the end of the main room that sees the snake mute compose a triangular structure and a sphere in the center-as a citation to the mother's womb. But the circle is also reinterpreted and reinterpreted by Sonja through the series of mobile sculptures entitled weight of possibility: in these works the circular movement leading toward the helical structure is central: this refers on the one hand to the studies related to genetic research (and thus to the shape of the genome) that marked the artist's undergraduate years as a biology student; and on the other hand to the conception of time understood in this work as a spiral that Thomsen recounts through the different generations of women mentioned in her book, freeing herself from any kind of narrative structure related to linear temporality.

For this reason, too, along with women from the past, Sonja also inserts her own personal experience, which the viewer can encounter by descending the stairs: here the image of the artist's mother holding a triangular mirrored sculpture introduces the domestic dimension of the video installation entitled Tethered to You placed in the room below in which Sonja's hands are busy performing a "magic" trick where a Mobius curve is cut so as to create two interconnected circles. The birdsong in the background is suddenly interrupted by the crying of her son. This sound becomes a disturbing noise for the viewer who is invited here to a reflection on the complexity of bringing together multiple movements and roles in one body: the artist, the woman, the daughter, the mother. Through, then, a narrative composed of spatiotemporal multiplicity and through the prominence of light as both material and metaphor, Sonja leads the viewer to unprecedented reflections and the possibility of imagining new post-patriarchal futures.