

CASABIANCA

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CASABIANCA, as it has always been called, was built on the shores of Lake Como in 1930. Architect Piero Ponci designed the villa as the private home of the Rosasco family, who owned a textile enterprise in Como. After the war, the family converted it into the head office of their silk factory and later sold it to Cavaliere Ratti, the founder of another prominent, Como-based silk manufacturer.

Paolo and Antonella De Santis acquired the villa in 2024 to house their contemporary art collection, a passion that the couple has cultivated since the early '80s.

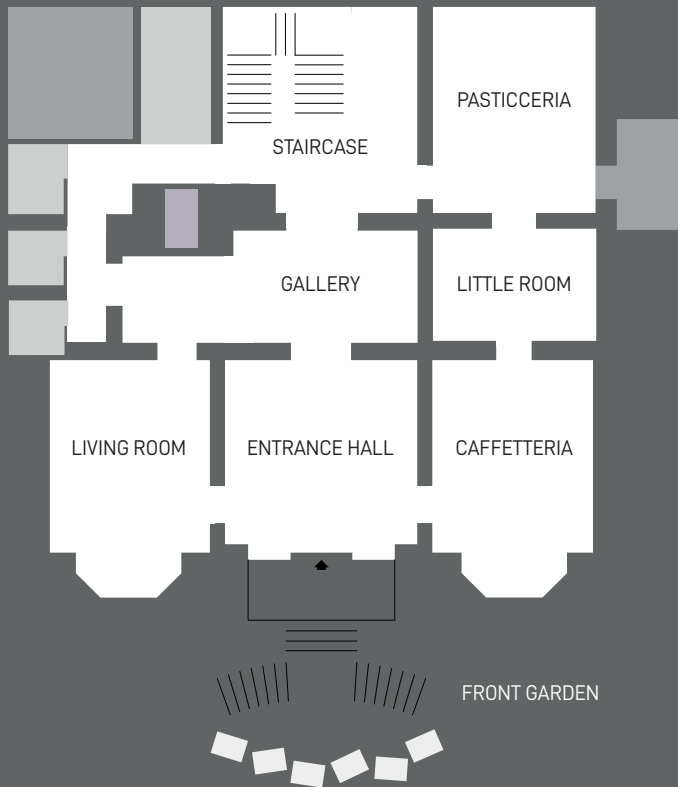
The spark that ignited it all was a ceramic sculpture spotted at La Ruota, the atelier of Ico and Luisa Parisi in the heart of Como. It was in this atelier, a true treasure chest of emotions, that the couple found inspiration, not only in the artwork on display but also in cherished moments of shared dialogue and insights about the art world. That first piece kindled their curiosity and passion for contemporary art, which only grew stronger over time. As the collection began to expand, through moments of rapid progress and cautious pause, they built relationships with like-minded friends and collectors, artists and gallerists, critics and curators as well as at art fairs and exhibitions. And now, from the walls of Villa Mondolfo, a significant portion of the collection has found a new home here at CASABIANCA, where visitors can experience the art firsthand.

FRONT GARDEN

Immediately upon stepping through the front gate on Lungo Lario Trento, the first piece you encounter is *DOVE LE STELLE SI AVVICINANO DI UNA SPANNA IN PIÙ* (2001-2016) by Giovanni Anselmo. Anselmo is a prominent figure in Arte Povera, a term coined by critic and curator Germano Celant in 1967, which has become one of the most important Italian art movements of the last 50 years.

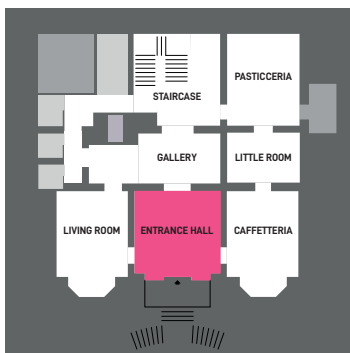
These six slabs of Belgian black granite encapsulate Anselmo's poetic vision, always holding the tension between the force and the weight of the materials he uses and the spirituality of the words that characterize them. Indeed, the work seems to invite the stars, as they move across the sky day and night, to come ever so slightly closer. As the artist himself put it: "It may sound purely poetic, but it is real." A larger version of the same piece is on display as part of the permanent collection of the Venaria Reale gardens in Turin.

GROUND FLOOR



ENTRANCE HALL

Welcoming visitors to the entrance hall of CASABIANCA is a site-specific installation by Giulio Paolini, which seeks to "explain" the spirit of the entire collection, among many other meanings. Entitled *HABITAT* (2025), it comprises four busts, two depicting the Venus of Arles, representing Aphrodite, and two Antinous Capitolinus, Emperor Hadrian's young lover. Rounding out the installation are 29 frames with a series of 17 photographs that capture the inseparable bond between the collectors and the two villas: CASABIANCA and Villa Mondolfo. The latter residence is still home to many of the earliest works in the collection from the '80s and served as the inspiration for the entire project. Paolini's poetic vision, which both conceals and reveals the artist, the work and the viewer, also implies—and in fact initiates—a certain complicity with the patron.



COVA CASABIANCA

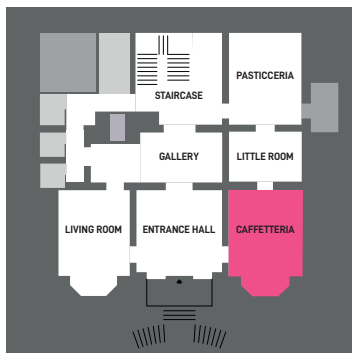
CAFFETTERIA

COVA CASABIANCA is located on the ground floor, featuring additional works from the collection, some of which are site-specific commissions.

In the *caffetteria*, entrance to COVA CASABIANCA, the small tapestry *SEGNO E DISEGNO* (1990) by Alighiero Boetti animates a niche in the wood paneling. Boetti created this piece as part of a lifelong series with the help of Afghan embroiderers, who gave the artist's words and phrases profound meaning using only a needle and colored threads.

Above the benches in the café, two nearly identical works by Mario Merz face each other, each of which encapsulate recurring and defining themes of his body of work. *LUMACA* (1975) on the left-hand wall depicts a snail that seems to create a drawing with a trail of clay, while *UNTITLED* (1976) on the right-hand wall features two spirals and two snails that form a vortex setting the compositional axes in motion. The numbers and words allude to the Fibonacci sequence, a theme that appears in much of the artist's work.

You can find another work by Mario Merz (in this case a sculpture) in the collection on the first floor in Room 5.



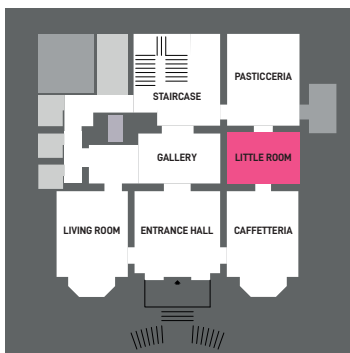
COVA CASABIANCA

LITTLE ROOM

The *saletta* features an original fireplace as well as a chandelier and a piece on the side wall by Flavio Favelli, who was born in Florence in 1967 and currently lives and works in Bologna.

CRYSTAL MURANO (2025) combines a collection of Murano chandeliers with a protruding fluorescent neon light. The collectors asked the artist to find a creative way to repurpose the old glass arms from a chandelier that once hung in Villa Passalacqua for this piece.

SUBLIME PORTA (2025) is a site-specific commission designed to bring light and life to an otherwise anonymous wall. To create this piece, the artist used salvaged antique gilt mirrors bearing traces of life. Here, too, he reclaims and assembles discarded and forgotten objects (the golden mirrors), granting them a new sense of dignity and vitality through art.



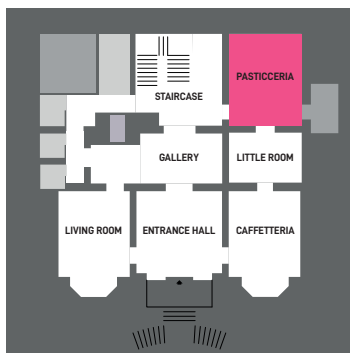
COVA CASABIANCA

PASTICCERIA

The *pasticceria*, the heart of COVA CASABIANCA, is dedicated to the site-specific work *LEG(G)ENDA LACUSTRE* (2025) by Francesco Simeti. Born in Palermo in 1968, Simeti has been living in New York for many years and is known for his public art installations that push the boundaries of traditional language and iconography. Simeti welcomed the challenge of dressing an entire room at CASABIANCA.

The artist covered all the walls of the *pasticceria* with his installation, which features flowers, plants and vegetation—a testament to nature's capacity for astonishing beauty once given the chance to flourish.

The print on the large, semi-transparent glass window, which can be seen from both sides, is also by Simeti. Among the greenery, a tumultuous whirl of water appears, perhaps to remind us of the fragility of our planet today.



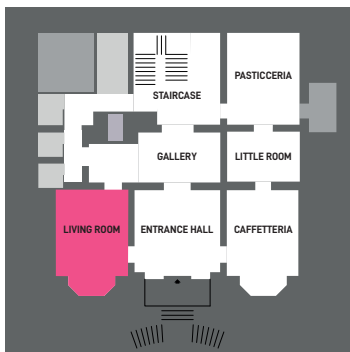
COVA CASABIANCA

LIVING ROOM

The living room features Marina Abramović's *HOLDING EMPTINESS* (2012). In one of her signature self-portraits, the Serbian artist and major global pioneer of the Body Art movement is shown with her eyes closed and holding a volume that has been reduced to air, creating an almost magnetic connection between the artist and the audience.

On the side wall is a black enamel disc on aluminum by Massimo Bartolini, entitled *50* (2012). Upon closer inspection, you see that this is not, in fact, a disc but a polygon with *50* sides, each representing a year of the artist's life.

Massimo Bartolini, born in 1962, still lives and works in his hometown of Cecina. He represented Italy at the 2024 Venice Biennale, filling the entire Italian Pavilion with his installation *Due Qui/To Hear*.



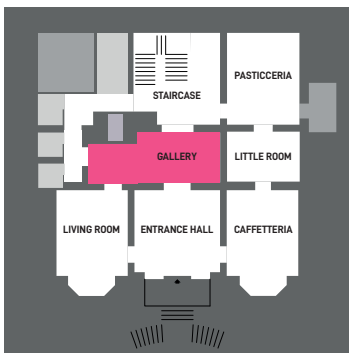
GALLERY

From the entrance hall, pass through the large arched doorway to find Joseph Kosuth's *TWENTY LOCATIONS OF MEANING* (2015). This installation by the American artist, a driving force in conceptual art since the '60s, features twenty neon lamps on three walls, each displaying the word "meaning" in a different language.

On the back wall, Haim Steinbach's *UNTITLED (KONG, BOOKS, SCULPTURE, HEAD, TOTEM)* (2024) plays with the relationship between the artist and the collectors. The books and small sculptures on the titular shelf are elements the artists deliberately chose for the piece, including the iconic Kong, a symbol Steinbach has used for years to "sign" this style of work.

The collectors selected a small ceramic figure from their library at Villa Mondolfo for this installation. The seated figure by Ico Parisi is reading two books they find particularly meaningful: Homer's *Iliad* and Gombrich's *The Story of Art*. Two additional small heads/sculptures in the installation, created by artists and friends Davide Sprengel and Michelangelo Salvatore, also come from the De Santis' private collection.

As a counterpoint to Kosuth's more conceptual work, there is a gem by Mimmo Paladino on the small wall directly opposite. Paladino's *SENZA TITOLO* (2021) reminds us that figurative art – here in mosaic form – is as relevant and as captivating as ever.



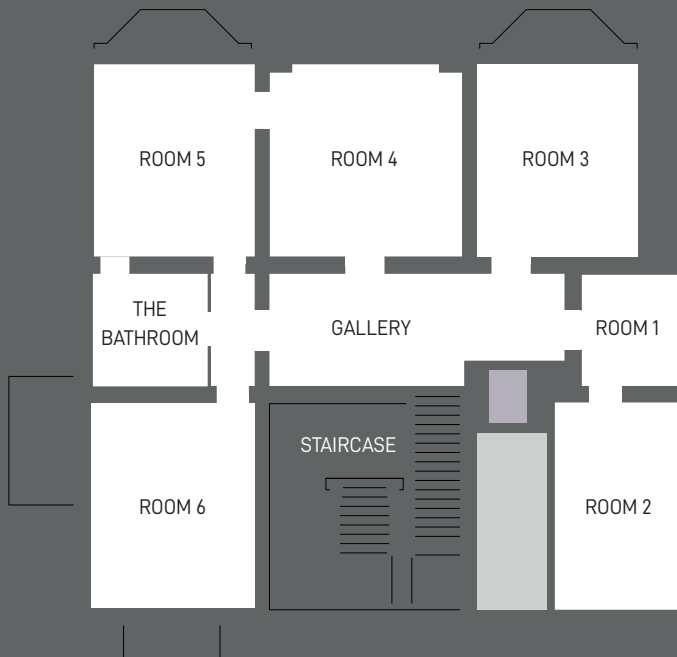
STAIRCASE

On the right side of the staircase is Su-Mei Tse's *TREES & ROOTS #4* (2011). Born in 1973, Tse is a Luxembourgish musician and artist. This piece features a beech tree in its winter dormant state with its roots cast in bronze, engaging in a dialogue (not only imaginary) with the ancient cedar seen through the large window and bringing light and life to the marble staircase and the surrounding space. The artist received the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2003 for the best national participation.

Stefano Arienti's site-specific commission *SASSOLINI VERSO CASA* (2025) is displayed along the entire staircase. For this piece, the artist created a carpet/rug that not only interacts with the view of the garden through the large window but also establishes a direct connection with the collectors' home. On an early summer day, Arienti photographed the lawn, paving and gravel of their garden and then reworked the images to create a piece rich in meaning and allusions.

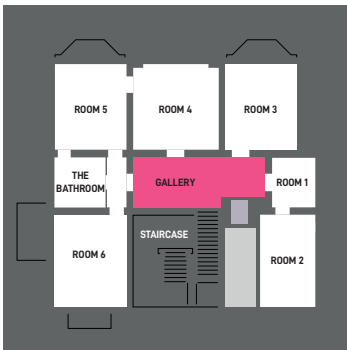
Marzia Migliora's *PIER PAOLO PASOLINI* (2009) unfolds along the three walls surrounding the staircase to the upper floor. Born in 1972, Migliora lives and works in Turin. In this work, the artist brings to life a phrase uttered by the poet in his final interview, the day before he was killed. The words, still profoundly relevant today, call for collective awareness.

FIRST FLOOR



GALLERY

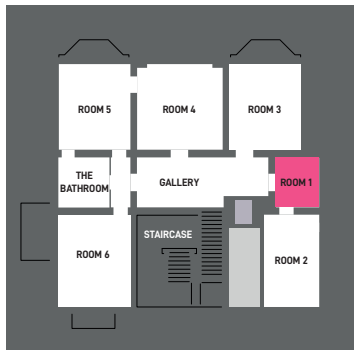
A large work by Emilio Vedova, *NON DOVE* (1987), dominates the upstairs hallway. The piece belongs to a series from the mid '80s entitled *Dischi, Tondi e Oltre*, which references the circular format often found in Renaissance painting. Vedova was a central figure in the Informal Art movement of the '70s and '80s, in which European artists reacted against Minimalism and Conceptualism in the American art scene. This piece gives the viewer a sense of how much of himself the artist invested in the art of creation, using light and shadow, line and color, to form a vortex that seems to burst out of the canvas.



ROOM 1

This small room on the right is occupied by a single installation: *NON HO L'ETA* (2023) by Francesco Vezzoli. Placing a Roman marble head from the Flavian period (late 1st century AD) on top of a body sculpted from pink Portuguese marble, the artist creates a sculpture reminiscent of Praxiteles' *Venus*. The sculpture speaks of the passage of time as well as the enduring mystery of the feminine. It was originally exhibited in Rome's Palazzo delle Esposizioni as part of the major 2023 exhibition *Vita Dulcis*, in which the artist reappropriated historical artifacts and gave them new meaning in today's contemporary context.

Francesco Vezzoli was born in Brescia in 1971 and currently lives and works in Milan. Hailed as one of the most prominent contemporary Italian artists on the international scene, Vezzoli's work has been selected to represent Italy at the Venice Biennale three times.



ROOM 2

Alfredo Jaar's neon sign *SI BALLAVA E ANCORA SI SPERAVA* (2018) illuminates the back wall. The Chilean artist, who lives in New York, seems to remind us that we are directly impacted by what happens around us.

On the right wall, Alberto Garutti's large *ORIZZONTE* (2021) is part of a project that began in 1987 and was cut short by the artist's death in 2024. Through this project, Garutti sought to connect all his collectors, if only symbolically, using the line separating the black and white surfaces.

Pier Paolo Calzolari's *MOTHIA A OH* (1986) is on the left wall. The piece features Calzolari's signature elements: a white salt surface rippled with undulating horizontal lines within a lead frame. This piece is part of a series the artist created in the '80s that is inspired by the island of Mozia, an ancient Phoenician colony in Sicily.

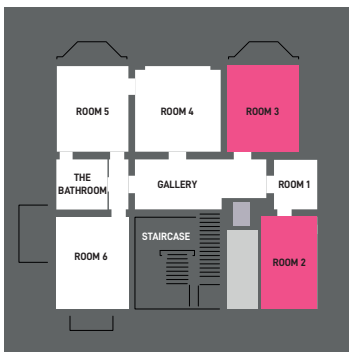
Another piece by Garutti is placed on a pedestal, *11.568 METRI: IL PERCORSO DAL MIO STUDIO ALLA CHIESA ROSSA DI DAN FLAVIN* (2021). In this piece, the artist uses a coil of brass wire to represent the distance between his studio and the church in Milan known for its Dan Flavin installation.

ROOM 3

Michelangelo Pistoletto's *BUCO NERO* (2010) fills the entire left wall of the room. This emblematic work by the artist was exhibited at the Louvre in 2013. A partially blackened mirror and a gestural mark create a sense of disorientation in the piece, sending the visitor and the surrounding space into its void to become one with it for a fleeting moment.

At the center of the room, two extraordinary figures ignite the scene: South African artist William Kentridge's *PAPER PROCESSION IV* (the yellow sculpture) and *PAPER PROCESSION V* (the red sculpture), both from 2023. Here, the artist unfolds newspaper clippings with the thousands of words that animate them in a dynamic style that evokes music and dance, both ever-present forces in this great artist's videos and theatrical works. As an interpreter of social and civic engagement, he describes the history of South Africa and beyond, as exemplified by his monumental frieze *Triumphs and Laments*, which he installed along the Tiber in 2016. Unfortunately, the piece is no longer visible due to the eroding effects of the elements.

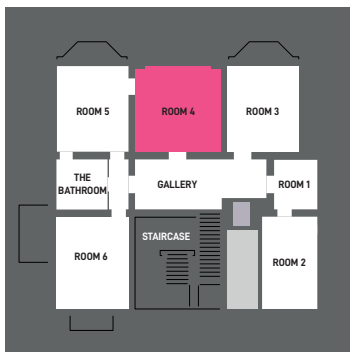
On the short wall, a small tempera on paper by Atanasio Soldati, *COMPOSITION* (1941-47) lightens the interplay between Kentridge and Pistoletto, bringing us back to the order of purely abstract lines and colors.



ROOM 4

The undisputed protagonist of the central room, accessed through the center door of the hall, is *PAETE* (2000), one of Anselm Kiefer's extraordinary *Donne dell'antichità* (*Women of Antiquity*). Here, the subject is the Roman matron Arria (1st century A.D.), who stabbed herself to death to inspire courage in her husband, Caecina Paetus, a Roman consul condemned to death. When he hesitates to take his own life, Arria seizes the dagger, pierces her breast and hands it back to him saying: "Paete, non dolet" ("Peto, it doesn't hurt"). For viewers with patience and curiosity, Kiefer pairs this dramatic sculpture with a large double panel bearing the names and stories of other great women of antiquity, written in his own hand.

Anselm Kiefer is one of the greatest living artists of our time. He is the creator of the *Seven Heavenly Palaces*, dominating the vast nave of Hangar Bicocca in Milan and has transformed his studios in Barjac and Croissy, France, into city-like laboratories and museums of unimaginable scale and expressive power.

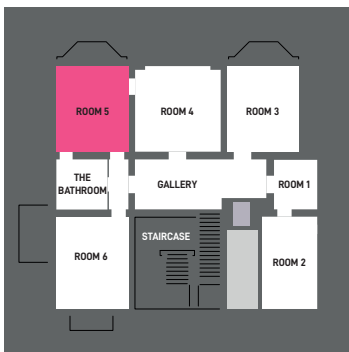


ROOM 5

Two masters of the Arte Povera movement are found in the corner room (along with two more in the last room). A piece by Mario Merz, whose snails we have already encountered in *caffetteria* on the ground floor, is in the center of the room. *UNTITLED* (2003) is a sculpture made of wood and iron that expresses the artist's radical approach, both in its materials and its formal appearance, and recalls his most iconic motif, the igloo. Though not documented, many believe that this is Merz's last sculpture before his death in 2003.

A large canvas by Giuseppe Penone, *PELLE DI GRAFITE, RIFLESSO DI "FLUORITE"* (2003), brings us back to the central themes of his work: living nature, skin marked and shaped by time, and matter giving substance to things. All these elements exist within a natural scenario where everything evolves and transforms.

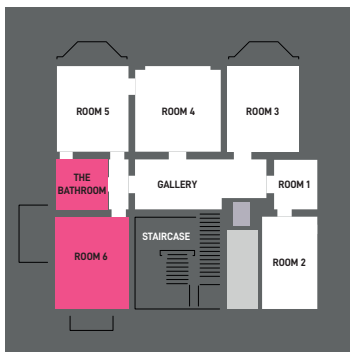
A piece by Carla Accardi entitled *NERO* (1966) hangs on the wall by the entrance. This exceptional artist experimented with non-traditional materials like Sicofoil from the 1960s to the 1980s. Using this malleable, transparent plastic instead of canvas allowed light to shine through the paint and become the dominant feature of the work – a revolutionary break with tradition.



THE BATHROOM

The next small room looks much the same as it did in 1930, when it was designated as the owners' bathroom. Much of the original structure has been preserved, including the Carrara Viola marble walls and floor, as well as the bathtub and sink, which tell a story of their own.

History is also at the heart of Luigi Ontani's artwork *CARBONERONE* (1999) in the center of this room. In one of his signature self-portraits, the artist appears here as Nero with the characteristic irony—both sad and slightly unsettling—that defines his work. The lyre, musical notes, flaming hair, darkened skin and crossed eyes almost make us sympathetic toward a figure who made history by dishonoring The Roman Empire.



ROOM 6

The final room features two more masters of the Arte Povera movement. To the left as you enter is a large work by Gilberto Zorio, *STELLA POZZUOLI* (1987). Here, the star—a motif that has defined the artist's work for decades—is rendered in charcoal on a surface containing traces of sand from the island of Stromboli and copper sulfate. These materials are emblematic of this remarkable artist's aesthetic.

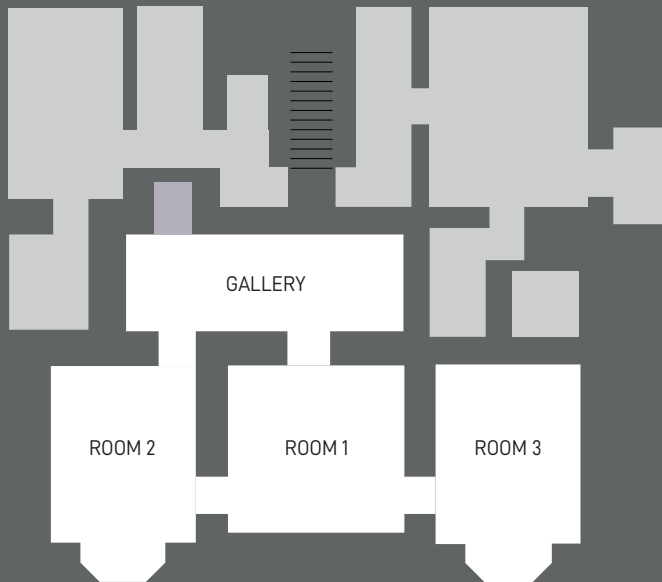
On the opposite wall is Jannis Kounellis' *UNTITLED* (1980), which captures the essence of the artist's approach. Born in Greece but adopted by Italy, Kounellis uses basic materials, such as iron and wood, to express his artistic vision. His work fueled the *Poveristi* revolution, which defies all limitations and conventions, as if to say that even with minimal resources—hardly anything at all—art can still speak volumes.

In this final room, we are also drawn to an enigmatic white mask that covers the face of a woman who is gazing at us. It is *VB.B.033* (2021) by Vanessa Beecroft, the artist who has made women the central figures of the iconic performances she has staged around the world in her unmistakable *tableaux vivants*.

Born in Genoa in 1969, Beecroft has been living and working in Los Angeles for years.

Finally, on the wall to the right of the back window, is another work by Emilio Vedova: *UNTITLED* (1961), tempera and ink on paper, rendered entirely in black this time.

AGORÀ



The Agorà is a space reserved for temporary exhibitions, presentations and workshops.

Open on Tuesdays from 3 pm to 6 pm,
Wednesdays to Sundays from 11 am to 6 pm,
closed on Mondays.
Last admission at 5:30 pm.

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