

**Rosa Barba**

EN

*From Source to Poem  
to Rhythm to Reader*

**Pirelli HangarBicocca**

#### Cover

*From Source to Poem*, 2016; 35mm film, color, optical sound, 12 mins (film still)  
© Rosa Barba. Co-production: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux and  
Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, with the participation of Tabakalera, Donostia

#### Public Program | Rosa Barba

6-7 July 2017 Summer Festival

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To learn more about the exhibition ask to the cultural mediators  
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**FREE ENTRY**

# Rosa Barba

## *From Source to Poem to Rhythm to Reader*

**5 May – 8 October 2017**

**curated by Roberta Tenconi**

**Pirelli HangarBicocca**

## Rosa Barba

Rosa Barba's various works, sculptures, films and spatial interventions can only be read within an expanded definition of sculpture. In addition to questions of composition, physicality of form and plasticity, time and temporalisation play a central role in the perception of her work. This aspect, combined with her interest in how film articulates space, sets work and viewer in a new relationship, with the viewpoint of the present moment allowing a new interpretation of the concept of "originality."

Each of her film works is a topographical study of the "modern unconscious"—spaces of memory and uncertainty, which can be read as a reassuring myth despite the instability of the reality they depict. They alternate between experimental documentary and fictional narratives and are not clearly fixed in time. They frequently focus on natural landscapes and human interventions in the environment and examine the relationship between historical records, personal anecdotes and filmic depictions.

Alongside the film works, Rosa Barba's practice also includes more sculptural pieces. These conceptual works use projected images, linguistic memories, and real or imagined objects as their central focus, placing them in an oppositional yet coherent dialogue with each other.

*White Museum (Hirsch Observatory)*, 2010/2015; 70mm film, projector; installation view at Rensselaer's Hirsch Observatory, Troy, Upstate New York, 2015. Photo: Kris Qua  
© Rosa Barba



## The Exhibition

“From Source to Poem to Rhythm to Reader” brings together 14 artworks realized by Rosa Barba from 2009 to the present day, including 35mm and 16mm films, kinetic sculptures and site-specific interventions that establish a strong connection with the industrial nature of the exhibition space.

Conceived as a choreography that embraces the environment as a whole, the exhibition develops according to different times, rhythms and intervals, exalting the characteristics of the space: the film projectors are placed on structures that echo the proportions of the architecture—from the ceiling of the Shed to the columns—while the beams of light rest on different surfaces (for example screens and translucent sheets, but also walls and windows) accompanied by multifaceted sound elements.

The films projected here are being shown in Italy for the first time ever. For example *The Empirical Effect* (2009), an investigation of the landscape around Vesuvius as a field of natural, mental and cultural forces; *Enigmatic Whisper* (2017), filmed in the studio of the artist Alexander Calder (1898-1976); and *From Source to Poem* (2016), a densely layered audio-visual narration. This last work, realized especially for this exhibition, was shot in the National Audio-Video Conservation Center of the Library of Congress in Culpeper, Virginia, the largest multimedia archive in the world.

“From Source to Poem,” exhibition view at CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2016. Photo: Arthur Pequin © Rosa Barba



## 1 *Subconscious Society, a Feature, 2014*

Shot in 35mm, this film reflects on the end of the industrial era and the transition toward a new technological age that is more closely connected with immateriality. Like chapters in a story, places set in suspended time intertwine like a photovoltaic device in which human activity has deeply modified the territory's morphology; the estuary of the Thames branching out across the ground; the abandoned interior of the Albert Hall in Manchester, a Methodist church from the early 1800s; coastal landscapes from southern Great Britain with its Maunsell Sea Forts, military outposts built directly on the sea during the Second World War.

*Subconscious Society, a Feature* alternates scenes that seem to be set in a sort of "future present time." It is a memory theater, an evocative and moldering space where other settings take place in a "future past time" and are rendered through a series of powerful images of bereft objects and industrial sites buildings. In the external shots, we see images of ruins, ships consumed by rust, collapsing piers, in which the complete absence of any human figures reflects the desolation of an obsolete, dilapidated reality. The film thus becomes a journey into the subconscious of a civilization that is gradually losing information about its own past.

Installed in the space of the Pirelli HangarBicocca Shed, once the epicenter of the first industrial area created in Italy, *Subconscious Society, a Feature* harks back multiple meanings, sparking a reflection on traces of the past and the way the surrounding landscape has been deeply altered. For the artist,



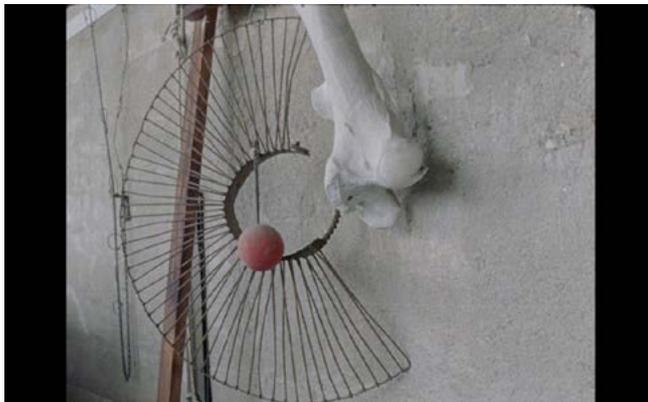
*Subconscious Society, a Feature, 2014*; 35mm film, color, optical sound, 40 mins (film still)  
© Rosa Barba

film editing is an instrument that can be used to reflect on how any human construction, through its own characteristics, is in fact an archival tool as well.

## 2 *From Source to Poem, 2016*

With *From Source to Poem*, Rosa Barba further investigates places dedicated to conserving and passing on culture and memory. The film recalls the trilogy *The Hidden Conference* (2010–2015), a project through which she explored the museum storage spaces of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Musei Capitolini in Rome and the Tate Modern in London. The trilogy features an imaginary conversation between the works held in those invisible spaces: inaccessible to the general public and belonging to different eras. *From Source to Poem* re-





Rosa Barba, *Enigmatic Whisper*, 2017; 16mm film, color, optical sound, 8 mins (film still). Film commissioned and produced by Calder Foundation, New York, in collaboration with Victoria Brooks © Rosa Barba. Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, c.1968 © 2017 Calder Foundation New York, all rights reserved.

Previous pages: *From Source to Poem*, 2016; 35mm film, color, optical sound, 12 mins (film still) © Rosa Barba. Co-production: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux and Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, with the participation of Tabakalera, Donostia

flects an image of the western world as it is archived in the National Audio-Video Conservation Center of the Library of Congress, located on the Packard Campus in Culpeper, where countless materials both digital and analogue are conserved. A vast number of the archives' holdings are sound material (audio recordings, wax discs, vinyl and LPs); a sonic memory that the artist rescues and mixes in the soundtrack as a means to set in motion otherwise unlikely dialogues. This new film draws on the artist's characteristic approach of architecture and landscape: *From Source to Poem* ex-

plores the internal and surrounding spaces of this emblematic building, showing devices that store our collective heritage. The film camera swings slowly around spaces which almost appear to be abstract despite the frenetic activities of cataloguing and conserving, and extraneous to human presence. This materializes through fragments of texts, speeches and recordings that come from the archive and in which we recognize different languages. The camera also captures panoramic views of deserted lands—an environment in which activities that are strategic for human society are carried on, and a habitat that Rosa Barba identifies as an archive—lingering on several energy production facilities, that are described by the artist as sources of blinding light.

Crucial aspects of Rosa Barba's poetics return in this film, from the reflection on the spaces of conservation to the relationship between past and present, and the suspension of chronological time. In the artist's words, «With this new 35mm film I'd like to further examine the geographies we create around us. I'd like to start a dialogue on the meaning and content of the collective effort in storing cultural values.»

### 3 *Enigmatic Whisper*, 2017

Shot in 16mm inside the studio of artist Alexander Calder (1898–1976) in Roxbury, Connecticut, the film draws a poetic portrait of one of the protagonists of twentieth-century art. Through images of tools and work materials, still conserved as Calder left them, as well as the natural external context,



THE CITY, HOWEVER, DOES NOT TELL ITS PAST, BUT CONTAINS IT LIKE

THE LINES OF A HAND, WRITTEN IN THE CORNERS



OR SEEN FROM

OF THE STREET,



ABOVE LIKE A SIGN.

Rosa Barba evokes the American artist and the creative process that characterized his practice. ***Enigmatic Whisper*** is focused on the meticulous filming of one of Calder's mobiles—kinetic sculptures that are among his most iconic works—that we can see hanging from the ceiling of the studio. The rhythm of the film, with often sudden changes of scene, is enunciated by drum and trumpet sounds, as well as by those emitted by the kinetic sculpture in movement.

#### 4 ***The Empirical Effect, 2009***

Mount Vesuvius and the inhabitants of the little town of Ottaviano—set on the slopes of the volcano—are both protagonists of ***The Empirical Effect***, a film in which the artist centers on an evacuation exercise that in reality never took place. In a fragmentary sequence of images, shots of the volcano alternate with scenes of a staged escape and views of oneiric encounters within an abandoned observatory near the volcano crater, including a black and white extract of a film shot by the brothers Lumière in Naples, in a continuous interchange of genres that encompasses from documentary to imaginary narration.

The characters involved in the film are survivors of the last eruption that took place at Vesuvius in 1944, who today live in the so-called “red zone.” What emerges is the portrait of a

population living in an ongoing state of alert, amid memories of past devastation and concerns about imminent danger. The voices of the protagonists make up the film's soundtrack, establishing a poetic dialogue between a landscape dense with buildings and its inhabitants.

The film set around Vesuvius is exemplary of the blurring of fact and fiction typical of her film work. «The volcano Vesuvius has been always a protagonist I wanted to work with. To me it's like a metaphor for the complex relationships between society and politics in Italy. It's unpredictable, powerful, destructive and based in the middle of a densely populated area alongside the Mediterranean coast. No one is able to control this immense force of nature and yet it connects the inhabitants and their environments with an invisible tie.»

#### 5 ***A Home for a Unique Individual, 2013***

This work is made up of a synchronous projection of two 35mm films on a central screen: on one side are projected aerial shots of trailer cities and streets that take on an abstract connotation; on the other side, fragments of text that seem to describe the activity of the film camera.

Rosa Barba has asked a drummer to read these text-images like a music score and play them on several typewriters as drum set. In this way the text is inscribed into the film, which is screened in a loop and visible as a whole from both sides of the screen, with both images converging and superimposing on one surface.



*Spacelength Thought*, 2012; 16mm film, projector, typewriter. Photo: Roberto Ruiz  
© Rosa Barba

The artist deconstructs the notion of narration, highlighting its elements: photograms, sound, text and words. Similar to a novel in the making, *A Home for a Unique Individual* can be read as a narrative landscape in which signs and languages form layers and are transformed through the movements of the film camera, in a scenario that is apparently static and rendered even more enigmatic by the sound of typewriter keys that accompany its screening.

## 6 *Hear, There, Where the Echoes Are*, 2016

With *Hear, There, Where the Echoes Are*, Rosa Barba creates a sound-and-light installation in synch with the rhythm of a drumbeat melody. Filling the environment and its visitors with flashes of light and color, the work is composed of four 16mm and one 35mm film projectors, each paired with a colored glass filter suspended from the ceiling and a screen.

As the artist explains, «the various frequencies of the drums are each assigned to one film and are transmitted as rhythmic light by means of mechanical shutters that are mounted in front of the respective lenses. The light is “pumped” into space, and light and sound take on three dimensional forms.» The rhythm of this musical improvisation performed by Chad Taylor—one of the most important contemporary drummers in the US—is a spatial-temporal experience in which the visitor is invited to move through, highlighting the performative dimension of Barba’s production.

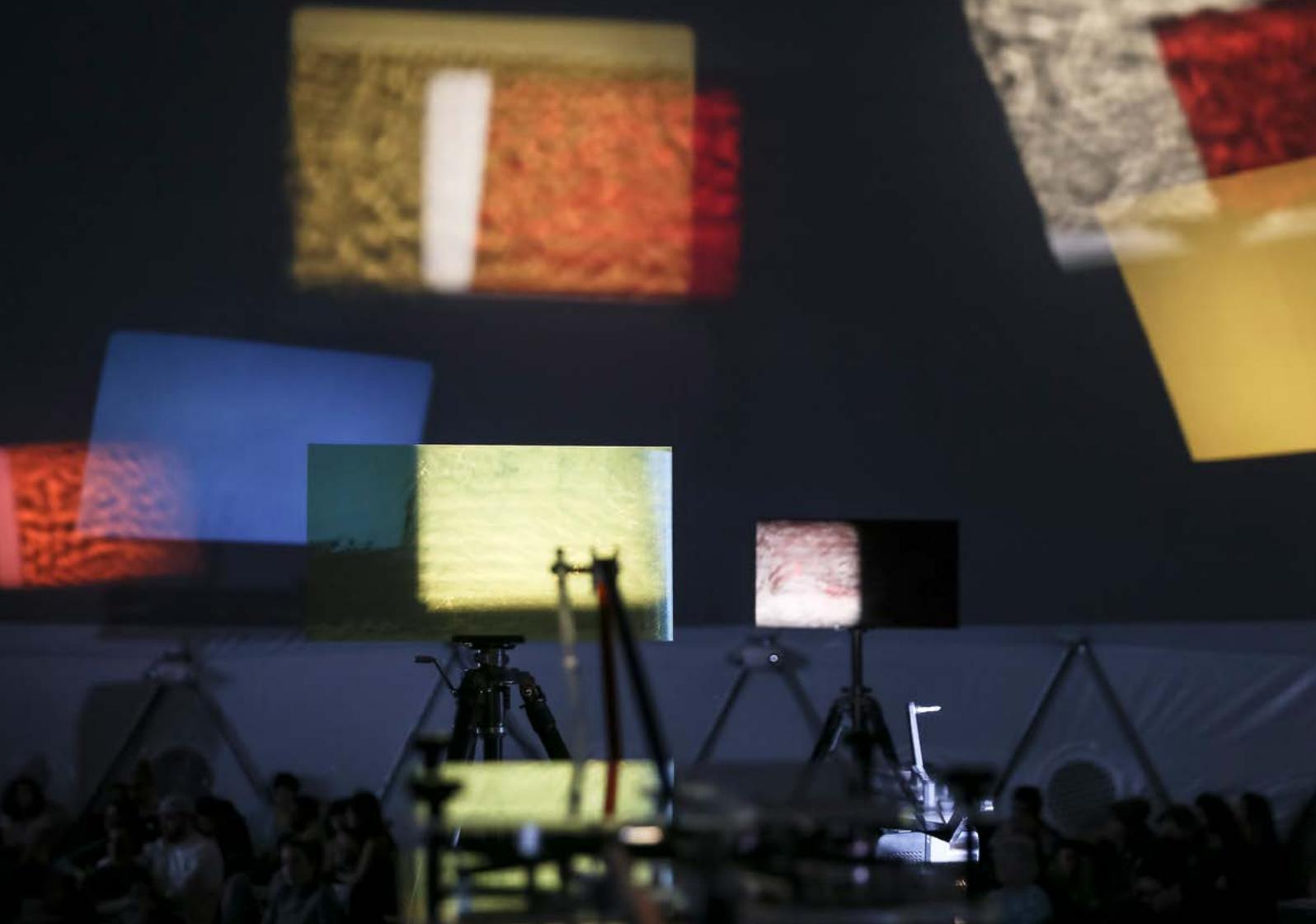
## 7 *The Long Poem Manipulates Spatial Organizations*, 2014

## 8 *Spacelength Thought*, 2012

## 9 *Sight Enables Us to Appreciate Distance*, 2013/2016

## 10 *Boundaries of Consumption*, 2012

«Barba’s films, installations and publications all raise the question of cinema as a kind of writing» notes the critic Melissa Gronlund, underlining the central role played in her works by the written word and the idea of the physicality of a film projection, usually perceived as something purely immaterial.



In the sculpture *The Long Poem Manipulates Spatial Organizations*, for example, the projector is set at a 45-degree angle, breaking the traditional geometry of the screen. The projection is a montage of uniform fields of color, in which a linear succession of letters cut out directly on the celluloid compose a sort of “visual poem,” underlining how each word consists of an organized group of signs.

The decomposition of language through the linear running of the film returns in *Spacelength Thought*, a projection of light in which a typewriter impresses—letter after letter and directly on the celluloid—a text that proves almost indecipherable to the eyes of the visitor. During the projection, film accumulates progressively on the floor, almost as if—as the artist explains—«in a Turing machine a code were recited mechanically and unveiled through the projection, creating a kind of poetry line—an imagistic form of language: at the same time an enigmatic machine and an openly spread process.»

In *Sight Enables Us to Appreciate Distance*, the screen is not a neutral surface designed to host a projection, but coincides with the actual source of the images. The work is constituted by a luminous box in which approximately 132 meters of film, set up on 24 lines running in different speeds, form a moving text piece, in which the LED lights reveal the materiality of the celluloid film. The text deals with themes connected with the definition of space, and the title of the work refers to a famous definition by French theorist Henri Poincaré (1850–1912): «However, sight enables us to appreciate distance, and therefore to perceive a third dimension.»



*The Empirical Effect*, 2009; 16mm film transferred to video, color, sound, 22 mins (video still) © Rosa Barba

Previous pages: *White Museum - Live*, 2016; performance, MoMA PS1, Long Island, New York, 10 April 2016. Photo: Charles Roussel © Rosa Barba

In *Boundaries of Consumption*, the passage of celluloid through a pile of boxes for film spools unexpectedly generates the movement of two small metal spheres set at the summit of this precarious structure. The result is a projection that fills the wall with the shadows of two continuously vibrating spheres.

**11** *Coupez Ici*, 2012

**12** *Only Revolutions (...that get accomplished...)*, 2012/2017

**13** *A Shark Well Governed*, 2017

In this series of works that alludes to 1960s kinetic sculptures, the film is separated from the projector and set in such a way as to highlight its material qualities.



*Boundaries of Consumption*, 2012; 16mm film, modified projector, film canisters, 2 metal spheres; installation view at Albertinum Dresden, 2015. Photo: Bernd Borchardt © Rosa Barba

For *Coupez Ici*, the artist has gathered the starter clips of films (that part of the film showing instructions for projectionists) from all over the world and inserted them within a light box hanging on the wall. Driven by motors, the clips run ceaselessly in loops, replicating the rotary movement of film projectors: a simple device through which Rosa Barba highlights those aspects of projection of a film that usually remain invisible to viewers.

*Only Revolutions (...that get accomplished...)* is based on a similar mechanism; in this case the light box is mounted on a narrow base and set on the floor, assuming a sculptural form. Inside is a length of 16mm film with signs made by hand. As the artist notes, the artwork recalls «a continuous thought with endless revolutions.»

In the most recent *A Shark Well Governed*, 35mm film loops are winding around a light cube: an endlessly spinning and evolving thought, projected on a three-dimensional screen.

#### 14 *Perpetual Response to Sound and Light (at HangarBicocca)*, 2013/2017

*Perpetual Response to Sound and Light (at HangarBicocca)* is conceived as a self-responsive structure in which each element—such as the sound of trains passing on rails near the exhibition complex and the architecture of the space—take on central roles, creating a connection between inside and outside. A white light installed outdoors at the front of Pirelli HangarBicocca and timed according to noises coming from the nearby railway illuminates the Shed and its visitors through a door that works as a transparent screen.

Just as it happened with *White Museum*—a project initiated in 2010 in which the artist transformed buildings into enormous projectors emanating light into the surrounding landscape—in this work at Pirelli HangarBicocca the external influences of light and sound seem to frame the internal structures, creating what Barba defines «another image experience of this landscape.»



## Selected Exhibitions

Rosa Barba was born in Agrigento, Italy, in 1972. She studied at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany, and at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, and currently lives and works in Berlin. Numerous institutions have held solo shows of her works, including: the Palacio de Cristal, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Secession, Vienna; Malmö Konsthall, Malmö (2017); n.b.k., Berlin; CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2016); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge; EMPAC, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, Upstate New York (2015); Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2013); Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich; Jeu de Paume, Paris (2012); Mart Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Rovereto (2011); Tate Modern, London; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2010).

Rosa Barba participated in a number of different international events, including three editions of the Venice Biennale (2015, 2009, 2007), the São Paulo Biennale (2016), the Sydney Biennale (2014), the Berlin Biennale (2014), and the Liverpool Biennale (2010). In autumn 2016 MoMA PS1 in New York held a special evening event dedicated to Barba's projections and performances. The artist's films, installations and sculptures

Previous pages: *Perpetual Response to Sound and Light (at the Locker Plant)*, 2013; installation view at Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, 2013 © Rosa Barba

Opposite page: *The Long Poem Manipulates Spatial Organizations*, 2014 (detail); modified projector, plinth, stencil cut 16mm film, color; installation view at Albertinum Dresden, 2015 © Rosa Barba



have won numerous awards, including the PIAC Prix International d'Art Contemporain of the Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco (2015), and the Nam June Paik Award (2010) as well as numerous awards at international film festivals such as, most recently, the Curtas Vila do Conde International Film Festival, the Ann Arbor Film Festival (2016), and the CPH:DOX Copenhagen (2015).

*Only Revolutions (...less abstract symbols...)*, 2015; 16mm film, light box, motor.  
Photo: Bernd Borchardt © Rosa Barba



**This publication accompanies the exhibition “From Source to Poem to Rhythm to Reader” by Rosa Barba**

**Lenders**

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Rosa Barba

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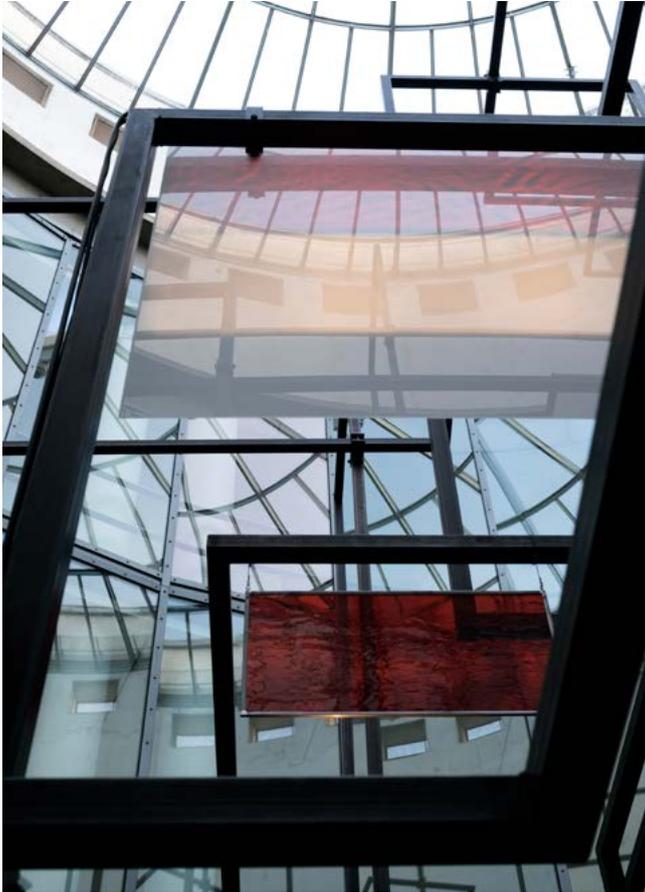
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*Blind Volumes*, 2016; exhibition view at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 2016.  
Photo: Mizuki Tachibana © Rosa Barba

**1** *Subconscious Society, a Feature*, 2014; 35mm film, color, optical sound, 40 mins. Courtesy of the artist

**2** *From Source to Poem*, 2016; 35mm film, color, optical sound, 12 mins. Courtesy of the artist. Co-production: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux and Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, with the participation of Tabakalera, Donostia

**3** *Enigmatic Whisper*, 2017; 16mm film, color, optical sound, 8 mins. Film commissioned and produced by Calder Foundation, New York, in collaboration with Victoria Brooks © Rosa Barba. Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, c.1968 © 2017 Calder Foundation New York, all rights reserved. Courtesy of the artist

**4** *The Empirical Effect*, 2009; 16mm film transferred to video, color, sound, 22 mins. Courtesy of the artist

**5** *A Home for a Unique Individual*, 2013; 2 x 35 mm film, b/w, sound, 14 mins. Courtesy of the artist

**6** *Hear, There, Where the Echoes Are*, 2016; 4 x 16mm projector, 35mm projector, 4 glass filters, screens, sound. Courtesy of the artist

**7** *The Long Poem Manipulates Spatial Organizations*, 2014; modified projector, plinth, stencil cut 16mm film, color. Pedro Barbosa Collection

**8** *Spacelength Thought*, 2012; 16mm film, projector, typewriter. Courtesy of the artist

**9** *Sight Enables Us to Appreciate Distance*, 2013/2016; 70mm film, aluminum, LED, motors. Private collection

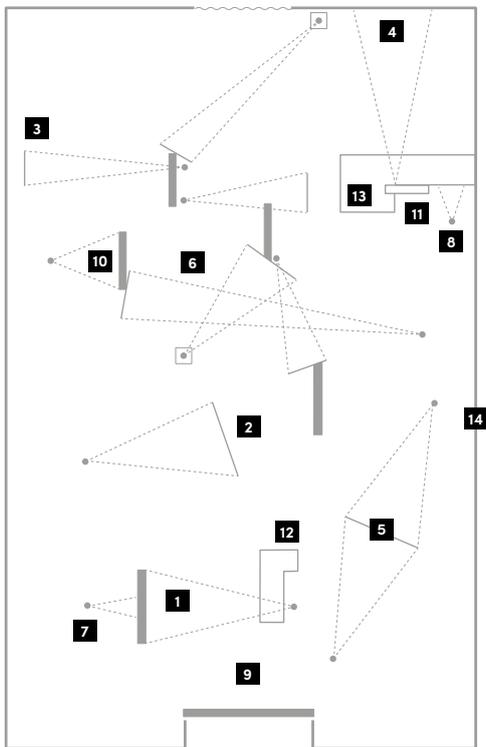
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**11** *Coupez Ici*, 2012; 35mm film, light box, motor. Private collection, Santa Margherita Ligure

**12** *Only Revolutions (...that get accomplished...)*, 2012/2017; 16mm film, light box, motor. Courtesy of the artist

**13** *A Shark Well Governed*, 2017; 35mm film, handwritten with ink, light box, motors. Courtesy of the artist and Vistamare di Benedetta Spalletti, Pescara

**14** *Perpetual Response to Sound and Light (at HangarBicocca)*, 2013/2017; spotlight, sound, specially programmed Max/MSP patch. Courtesy of the artist



Entrance to the exhibition "From Source to Poem to Rhythm to Reader"

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: *Shed*, *Navate*, and *Cubo*.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca.

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