

*PAINTING STONE* is the fifth exhibition at Villa Lontana which references the Santarelli Collection as an archive and starting point for its curatorial thinking. Our focus is on how stone has been used as a surface with which to create something new – another layer and therefore another surface. Among the greater focus on classical statuary, the Collection contains oil paintings on stone dated between the XVI and XVIII century, many coloured marbles and architecture fragments from Imperial Rome and a selection of Paesina stones which have been the starting point around this exhibition.

The Paesina stone is a variety of Alberese limestone found in Italy's Northern Apennine area. It is said originally to come from the Florentine hills. It is the most singular example of 'pictorial stone' in the limestone family because of the depictions it enables it is also called: landscape stone. Painters and engravers used it as a background in oil paintings, where the landscapes depicted on these stones by nature were completed by the artists' additional imagery. The specificity of these works on stone bears a close relationship to non-linear 'histories of painting'. The artworks incorporate the stone's geological colour and pattern as landscape and/or as background for the painting. The surface of the stone is used to stimulate relationships with its natural formation of geometric patterns and tonal nuances, some of which suggest a more 'expressive' gestural instigation.

Adelaide Cioni, Isabella Ducrot, David Kakabadze, Lucy McKenzie, Anne Minich, Francis Offman, Christopher Page, Delfina Scarpa, Mario Schifano, Jeffrey Stucker and Vivian Suter respond in different ways to unpack and enjoy the complexities, dynamics and visual excitement to be found in painted marble. "If you look upon an old wall covered with dirt, or the odd appearance of some streaked stones, you may discover several things like landscapes, battles, clouds, uncommon attitudes, humorous faces, draperies [...] Out of this confused mass of objects, the mind will be furnished with abundance of designs and subjects perfectly new." (From "A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape" by Alexander Cozens, ca. 1785).

Germano Celant's seminal essay "Framed: Innocence or Gilt" *Artforum* (summer 1982) proposed painting as an indexical metaphor for how we see and relate to our surroundings. For him, the term painting opened the possibilities of a form of critique beyond the specificity of 'the medium' and 'the substance' of paint itself to the space of our existence – whereby our vision is a 'collective surface, existing in time'. This could perhaps be infinite unfolding. Why is it that a painting is fundamentally conceived of in terms of the finite object and not as a property of a continuous surface existing in time *ad infinitum*? The concept of the painted surface is often confused with that of 'the canvas.' Celant suggests that painting can be thought of as an enormous roll of diversified fabric, woven in a single piece and unrolled in time and in space. This surface extends for miles and miles but never appears on display. Its continuity is interrupted and broken up—cut into—to form innumerable fragments and portions of canvas (paintings), creating intervals and separations the understanding of which could greatly influence our way of thinking about and seeing painting, or for that matter continuity in the history of art.