

# ASSAGGI D'ARTE

STORY *by* ELEONORA COZZELLA  
PHOTOGRAPHY *by* STEFANO BARONI, EMILIO TREMOLADA *and* LIDO VANNUCCHI

NELLE SCULTURE DI ANDREA SALVETTI ANCHE  
IL PUBBLICO FA PARTE DELLA PERFORMANCE



ALBERO



Meat that roasts under a mound of earth, wheels and obelisks carved in nougat, houses of lasagne and fortresses of polenta, pheasant cooked in boiling bitumen, intestines stuffed with what life has to offer (edible or not), roasted pigs disguised as trout, bread trees and lamb-shaped moulds in which lamb is cooked. The creativity of Andrea Salvetti, who originally trained as an architect (he left university a few exams before finishing), designer, sculptor, restorer, painter, creator of works that flit between art and craft, between aesthetics and functionality, between nature and culture, is an adventurous expression of food as nourishment for the mind and sustenance for the body.

He is an artist who likes to “make hands think”. It might be in the forging and shaping of aluminium – his favourite material – for Monozoo, his first collection in 1990 of chairs featuring surreal animals that established him as

a popular designer. Or it might be to shade a garden with a tree composed of 9600 aluminium leaves that are embossed and welded together. It might even be to make a sculpture for a town square such as *Mazzolin dei Fiori*, a ‘refuge’ 5 metres in diameter and 4.40 metres high made of 1500 aluminium flowers that reflect different climatic conditions, presented in 2011 at the *Material Worlds* exhibition organised by Sotheby’s in Gloucestershire.

The work of his ‘thinking’ hands is a continual investigation of earth. Earth that flourishes, earth where the dead repose forever, earth on which buildings are constructed, but also earth as a space for living or an incubator where people have their roots, where culture and ideas are born, where children are raised and where one decides to build a home; a maternal womb that nurtures a seed and ripens a fruit. A mass of infinite energy that absorbs every other energy, earth is

a departure point for the sky. It is no more evident than in one of his most famous works, *Corno*. Aluminium and cable, 11 metres high with a diameter of 90 cm at the base, *Corno* was erected at Piccolino in the Dolomites. It was supposed to be for a temporary exhibition, but in the end the sculpture has become permanent.

People asked him why he made a horn like that, jutting out in front of the mountain against a backdrop of the green Badia valley. “I thought that art should be immersed in nature with the same posture and intention as the animals and people of a place. A horn is a symbol of strength and pride, a weapon for conquest and defence that lifts the gaze to the sky,” he explains. The desire to look elsewhere is typical of Salvetti. To look beyond time, beyond the material dimension of the present and beyond the definitions imposed by art and the art of food.

In this context, his food art performances, that do not ignore the *Eat Art* of Daniel Spoerri, but in a sense supersede it, are a demonstration that the eating public is an essential element to the work itself.

It’s a hunger for art rather than art you eat. In surpasses the idea – that was, in its time, sacrilegious – of the cannibalisation of art that was introduced by Piero Manzoni in Milan in 1960, with a performance entitled *the consumption of dynamic art by the public*. Manzoni stamped his fingerprint on some hard-boiled eggs that were then eaten by spectators, the eggs as ‘relics’ becoming an instrument of communion with the ‘magic’ physicality of the artist.

This concept was further developed by Daniel Spoerri, an exponent of Nouveau Réalisme, father of Eat Art and the architect of the artist-public-object





— MAZZOLIN DI FIORI

dialogue that plays out in his cooking at the Spoerri restaurant in Düsseldorf, but above all in his 'snare pictures'. These are multi-material artworks that capture otherwise ephemeral tables covered with the leftovers and objects of an abandoned meal that are fixed with resin and hung as a canvas.

Salvetti's participative works take the concept even further. In them, the sensations of the eater are as important as the creative moment itself, sensations that only make sense when they are shared.

This is a common theme in his work and reappears in his installation and design pieces (all unique – serial pro-

duction is not for him) such as the *Ortofrutta* collection – tables and chairs assembled from elements that resemble fruit packing cases, and also in the *Apparita* chair – a sheet of lacquered fibreglass laid over a chair that is a comfortable throne, simple and yet majestic. "My work involves the user, who is an integral part of it. Interaction with the user makes the works what they are and the works are better when they have been used," he says.

This is even more so with edible artworks and the artistic-gastronomic performances of the Lucchese artist are obviously inspired by this principle. As a young man he was torn be-

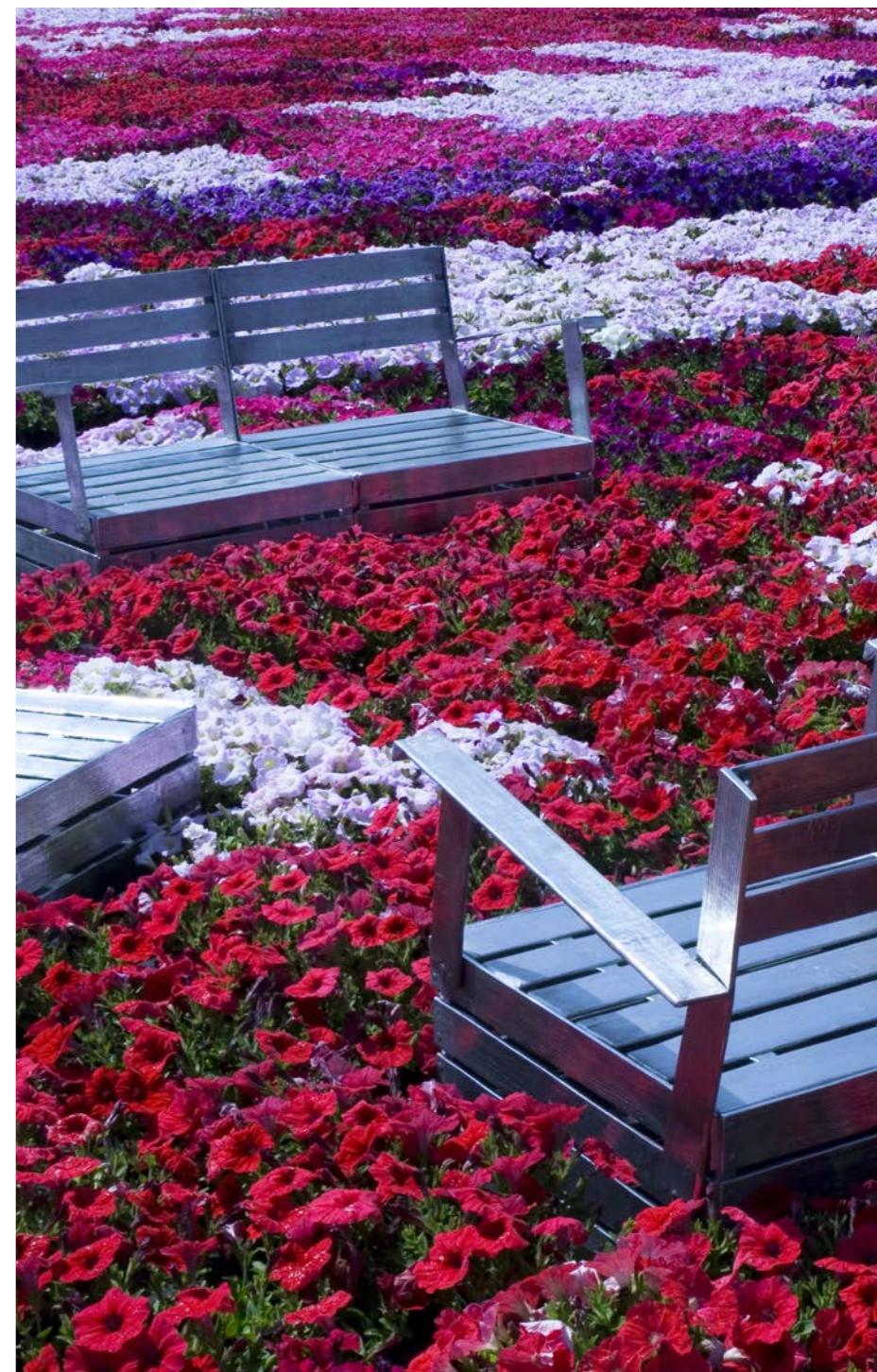
tween art school and catering college, and now says he wants to open a restaurant.

What would be on the menu? And above all, how would the food be served? Firstly, guests would arrive an hour before dinner, because part of the process is the preparation of the food (and sharing the anticipation) and, even before that, the construction of instruments for cooking. These include such things as the *Fire Sculptures*, sculptural aluminium forms of a tree, a lamb and a pot that are baked on a great brazier outside for several hours. These were presented for the first time at the 48th Venice Biennale and re-presented last May at the Food Art Philosophy conference 'Convergence on Pollenzo' organised by philosopher Nicola Perullo at the University of Gastronomic Sciences. The project is a perfect example of the contamination between art and food in which content, creator and consumer of the content are all together parts of the work. When the forms – that contain bread, meat and vegetables respectively, but that do not reveal if they are cooked sufficiently or too much – are taken from the fire, they are opened and shared as a banquet, and can be more or less tasty.

The pleasure of the taster is secondary. What is under scrutiny is the process. This point is even more obvious in *Petrol: oxidised bitumen, pheasant, potatoes and cabbage*. *Petrol* was a project developed for the 'With great pleasure' exhibition in 1999, and modified in 2005 for the Art Way of Thinking Workshop on art and contemporary culture. It was also performed privately for international guests at Tenuta Serore on the Lucchese hills – part of an old village that Salvetti and his wife bought and restored as a woodland retreat. *Petrol* involves dipping ingredients into incandescent bitumen. When the bitumen solidifies, the food is freed from the hard block that surrounds it with a hammer. The food's taste is tainted by the cooking substance, but it is nonetheless edible. After the initial perplexity and strong odour of fuel, the taste could best be described as pleasantly unpleasant (intending with this oxymoron the sensations where the confines of pleasure and its opposite are combined, like for example a tickle: a pleasant pain for those who can't stand being tickled).



— ORTOFRUTTA





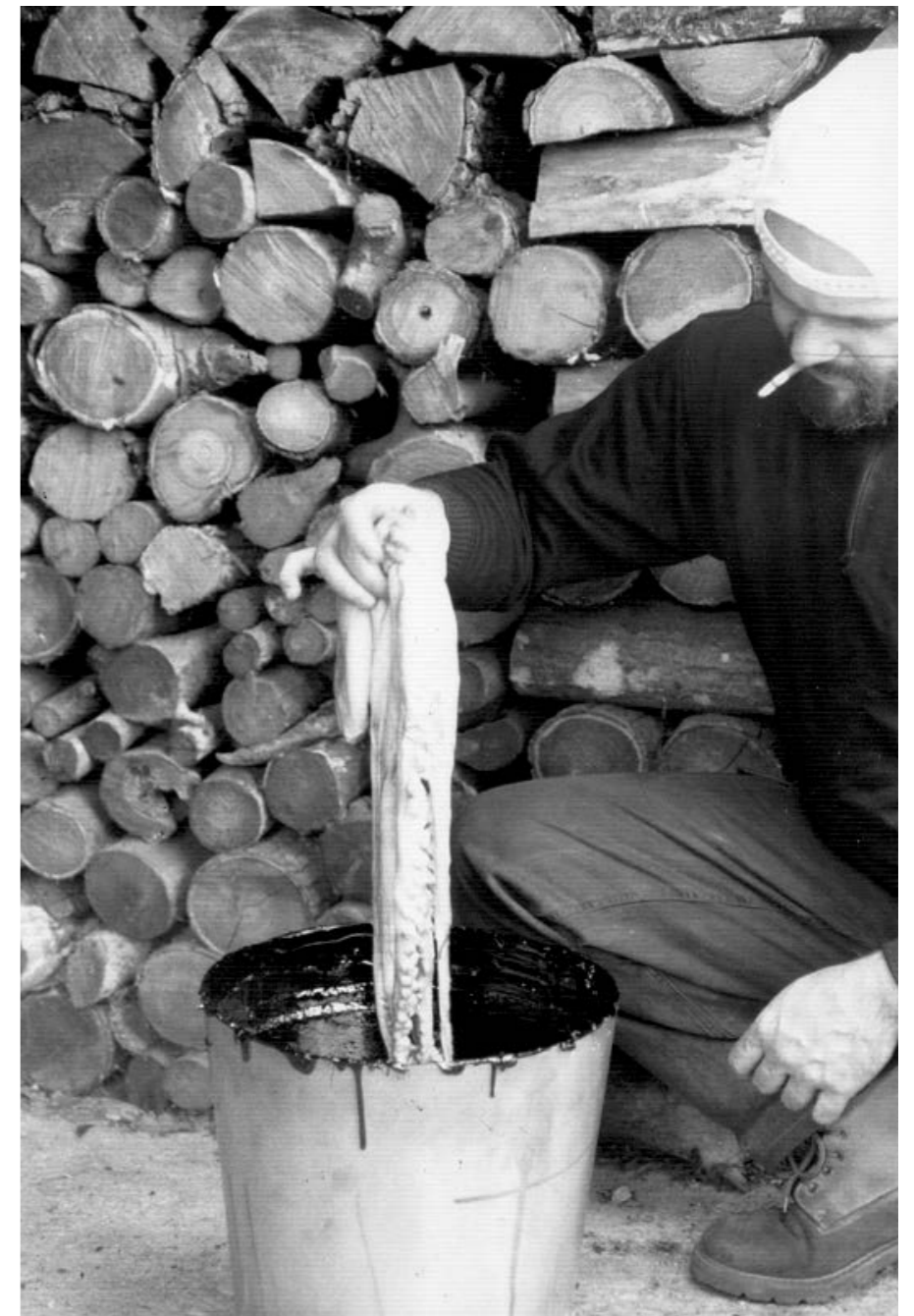
TERRA TROIA

Where does this idea come from? "I imagined a civilisation of the future," explains Salvetti, "that has destroyed everything good and beautiful by blindly following industrial development based on consumption and profit before progress; a distorted and smoky scene that has consumed all the available resources, including water. It's a deep layer between culture and nature where memories drift and the impact of fuel is heavy, where I wanted to push the physical limit between good and bad."

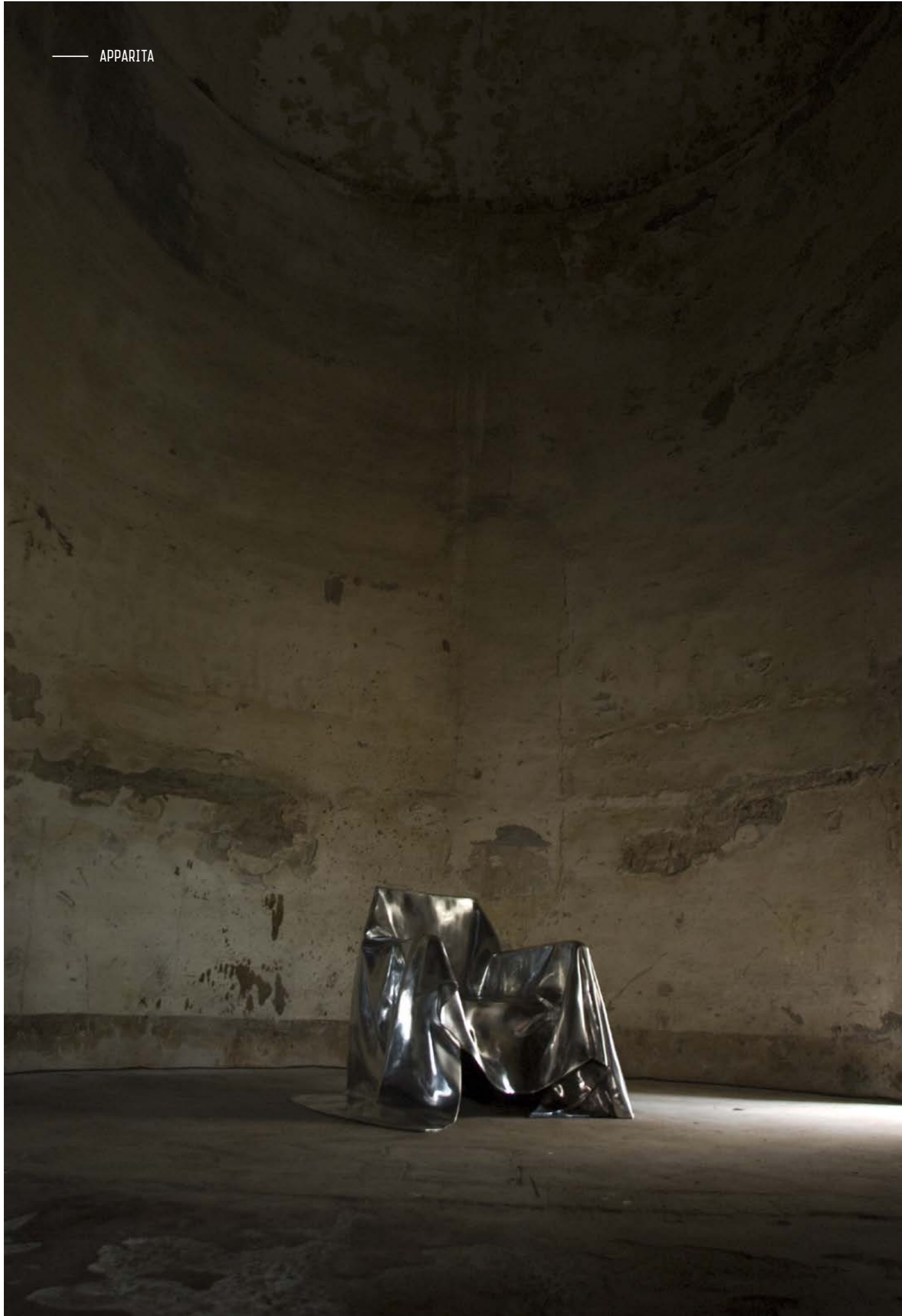
Thoughts provoked by timeless art interrogate the future, but also the past, as with the *Architecture of hunger and thirst*, presented in a recent art show at the Ciocco Estate in Tuscany's Serchio Valley, inspired by his edible artworks that attracted so much success at the University of Pisa in 2009. The idea, in its simplicity, is profound. Hunger and thirst are fortunately no longer protagonists in Western civilisation, but in times gone by a meal was a conquest. In this particular *Ar-*

*chitecture*, houses and buildings are constructed with the simple foods that sustained our ancestors for centuries: polenta and turnips, mushrooms and pumpkin, a little cheese, bread and chestnuts, pasta (this in particular is an Italian symbol). Enormous *soufflès* are cooked in sculptural forms that take the shape of a house, opened and served by the artist in a dinner-theatre scene without so much as a nod to the traditions of the table. It's an experience that begins as an aesthetic appraisal and passes through a degustation to a full appreciation of the scope of the work. Drinks are included, water and particularly wine, that for many people is a luxury; a precious asset. In one scene, spectators must drink with a straw from a low fountain sculpture. The act of bending over to drink uncomfortably recalls the value of something we take for granted.

There are perhaps many things that we take for granted in our lives, and there is a sharp reminder of these in *Life Tube*, perhaps the most cerebral



Biennale di Venezia, 1999

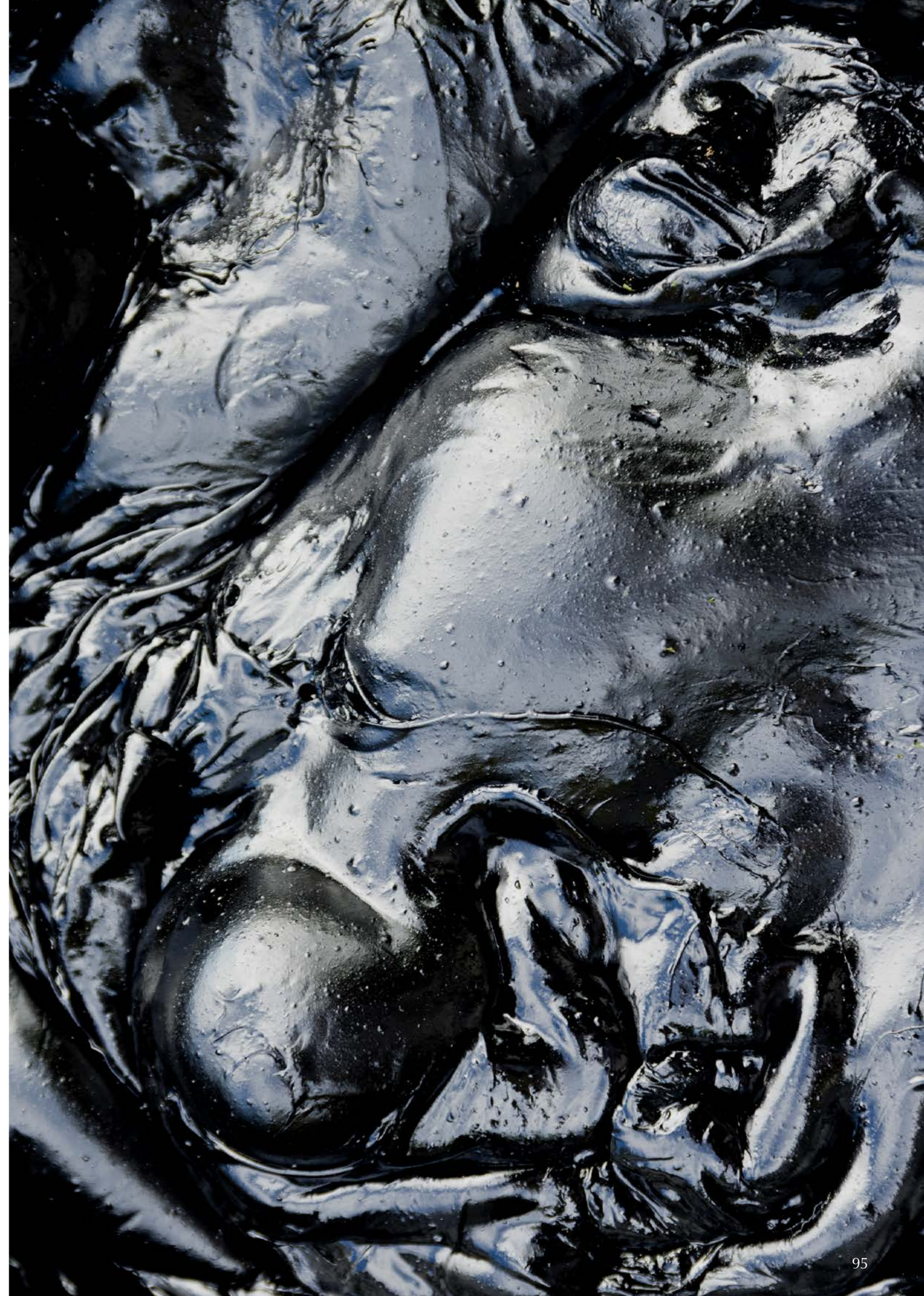


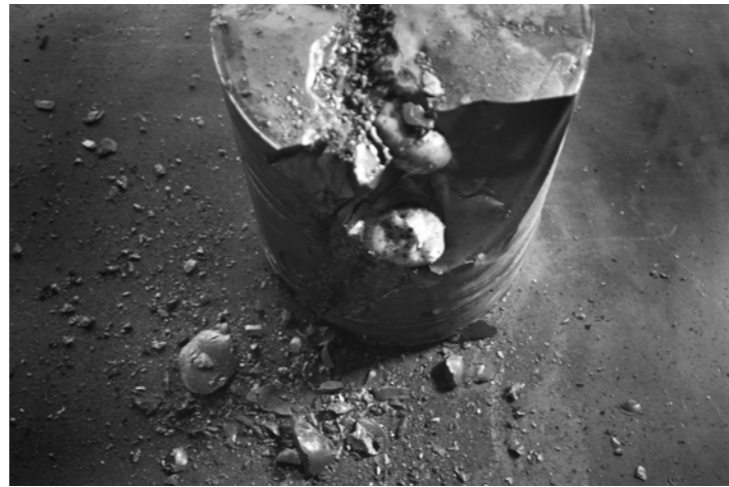
and at the same time visceral (literally) of Salvetti's edible works, developed together with chef Damiano Donati.

From the "cream of boiled rabbit lightly blended with olive oil, then chopped finely with creamed potato and the addition of carrots in small pieces with a few drops of lemon juice, that transforms into a hake then a dish of raw white fish with anchovies, fish bones and toads, actually frogs..." to the "sweet and sour spring onions that are mixed with chocolate and a short crust pastry with traditional rice, sultana, cinnamon, cane sugar with ricotta and scotch that wets the *buccellato* sweet bread with an aroma of bitter coffee", there is the life of each of us, all the food that we eat, from the first baby foods to the first solids and onwards. There are also metaphorical ingredients: toads to swallow (*'rospi da ingoiare'*, swallowing toads, is an Italian expression meaning swallowing pride or digesting unpleasantness), bitter mouthfuls, as well as moments of sweetness; strength, energy, one after another, in continuous motion. Everything in a tube, a life tube; an intestine. Salvetti and Donati worked for hours and hours cooking, marinating, chopping, cutting julienne and inserting all these life ingredients into a natural pork intestine, presenting it in the form of a tangled gut (the colours also recall raw entrails) just as life can be intricate, surprising, fluctuating, strong and raw. The food in life tube, very good to taste section by section, is a kick in the stomach when seen together. A beautiful kick in the stomach to which the artist responds: "The reduction of very different substances into a uniform mass is an attempt to move attention from the aspect to the concept. The life of that tube, that grinds everything and that leads to the beginning of the end, represents our passage through this world, as if through that tube we could understand the characteristics of an individual. I wanted to represent life through everything that we eat in due course. That tube is what we are, it represents the bounty of our path, describes every subtlety. Every intestine is different."

The appearance in the end is not important, because it is not the gastronomic critic Salvetti wants to win over, even if this is exactly what he does.

# PETROL 2013





# LIFE TUBE

