



monica sgrò
Portfolio

About and artistic research



Monica Sgrò was born in Milan in 1973. In 2001 she graduated in Sculpture at the Brera Academy of Milan and later earned a teaching qualification and started working as a teacher of Plastic and sculptural disciplines in secondary schools. In 2004, Monica began her career as a professor of plastic arts at the Steiner School in Milan, where the constant pedagogical training helped her gain methods and tools useful for the development of theme-based projects and workshops. Since 2012 she has been teaching at the Liceo artistico statale (Arts high school) “Caravaggio” of Milan, adding her knowledge of the Steiner approach and experience collaborating with other artists to her teaching programs. Her research and teaching activities carried out throughout the years extended her conception of art and teaching more and more, bringing them closer to the notion of ‘contemporary’. In 2013, with the artwork Habitat-corpo, Monica began experimenting with group activities during the initial stages of wool-working and adopting ancient manufacturing techniques. In 2017 she created the site-specific artwork Soglia d’Attenzione for the Abbey of Santa Giustina in Sezzadio (Alessandria). In 2018, she developed her work Pianta Desiderio for the Maio Museum in Cassina de Pecchi (Milan). In 2019 Monica was among the artists of the first edition of BieNoLo with her work Margini19. Currently, she is working on her project Andare con il gregge, which explores the topics of transhumance, pasture farming, and wool supply chain in the artistic residence Aperto 2019, in the territory of the Val Camonica. Monica has been taking part for many years in collective projects such as Educational-art, and with the Wurmkoos Foundation in Sesto San Giovanni (Milan).

Her artistic research is based on an educational and relational approach, and on collaborative workshops and projects, with the use of ancient techniques and natural materials. For many years, the use of wool and the process of manual felting have allowed a combination between the material fabric and the social fabric. The choice of working only with this allows developing and studying artistic and educational courses with professors and students and therefore to enhance the material in its role as a teaching tool. The projects mainly take place in public locations, in particular in those places where wool, which used to be a resource and a hallmark, is not known as it was before, and that caused handicraft, economy, and culture of the field to be neglected. Her strong interest in the world of transhumance, which Monica got to know better by engaging with associations, shepherds, anthropologists, and historians, draws a wider vision out. The idea of “walking following the animals” became an artistic approach of exploration happening between the place and the individual, integrating the passion and knowledge for the wool supply chain and the re-use of the fabric both in collective projects and teaching labs. Transhumance, together with the constant fusion of land, animals, and people, is currently at the heart of her artistic research.

Habitat-corpo

Study of the artist, Milan
April - May, 2013

Meas. 3x1,5 m - 15 kg of blue felt

Habitat-corpo is a large installation made of blue felt that transforms into a shelter. The concept dates back to 2013, during the first workshop on the process of shared felting.
“Taking part in the whole process of felting, walking on the big shape laid on the hot soapy water, barefoot and chanting to find a common rhythm”: art becomes a ritual, during which the work and exchange atmosphere gave room for reflection on the sense of collective shelter instilled by the artwork, with its soft and hollow form. The final appearance of Habitat-corpo shows no internal support, it is hanged vertically, to allow the fabric to move and be moved freely, and to become a kind of skin, protecting and wrapping anyone entering it.







Installation in Roccaverano (AL)

Habitat-corpo

Critical text written by Paolo Mottana

Following the project execution of “Habitat corpo” by Monica Sgrò allows perceiving a rich symbolism that opens up to unexpected interpretations. The focus is on the wool journey. This material, which originally is nothing but the herd’s coat, gets trans-mutated to become a coat through the collective work. Wool is a raw, wild material, it needs to be drenched, soaped, massaged by hands and feet altogether, through a collective work that reminds of grape pressing and that, just as grape does after its transformative process, releases a material which is both its epitome and a symbol of spirituality. Just like grape becomes must and later wine, gathering the alcohol sulfur and the grape juice mercury, similarly, wool gets pressed and handled up till it assumes a new consistence, becoming solid, robust, and uniform. Felting turns out to be a joint work resulting from the use of both hands and feet, the coming together of different bodies, the combination of land and life, presence, contact, and deep mingling. This embrace between bodies and wool comes out of a large surface, with its blue color evoking the transfiguring and nightly power of the starry sky, where the vehemence of visible things fades away and you can feel a sense of descent/ascent and a recurrent feeling of presence/absence.

It is no coincidence that since the beginning the great surface was designed to become a coat, a monastic coat, coming from previous artworks by Sgrò where the ascending power intertwines with the search for deepness.

What emerges as a result of the repeated alchemical process of dissolution and coagulation (impregnating, wetting, wringing, stepping on,

handling, drying, rolling, laying down, etc.) is a huge coat built vertically, a 3 meters high means of conjunction between the earth and the sky, heavy and open like a welcoming womb. The surface buckles up and vertically reach out, leaving a crack in the front that suggests a potential get back to being a fetus, evoking the Piero della Francesca’s Madonna del Parto, as well as a face with no name of an ascending spirit clotting in the hood of the big monastic coat.

The artwork adepts, who collaborated to its transmutation and were introduced to its presence, can enter its internal surface, a dark and circular spot overlooking outwards and vertically erected. This position generates a movement that is both horizontal and vertical, in a mystical marriage between female and male, night and day, and of course materiality and spirituality, that all are at the heart of every effective expression of symbolism. “Habitat corpo” is a setting where you can see a reinterpretation of the social activity, where the raw material is prevented from its usual role as a heavy material and is projected, through a thick and layered mix of symbolic actions, in an updated multitude of interpretations. The animal coat, in an encounter between earthly and instinctive, is transmuted with the participation and creativity of the people, is a powerful and symbolic concretion, a real “bodily and spiritual habitat”, in a lyrical presence that also serves as an actual space for transformation.

Entering the surface is the equivalent of a gesture of retreat and torsion towards the sky after completing their cooperative task, as in the building of sacred space, at its being born and becoming a part of the world.

Living this habitat means also being reborn, taking part in the material medium, and working to develop its arcanum (the destination of the surface and the gestation), which is the quintessence of the shape, a repository of transformation.

Soglia d'attenzione

Abbey of Santa Giustina in Sezzadio
June 2016 - May 2017

Misure 4x5 m - 40kg feltro colore blu scuro

The group project Soglia d'Attenzione resulted in creating a collective work made of dark blue felt, installed at the entrance of the medieval Abbey of Santa Giustina, built back in 1030 in Sezzadio (Alessandria).

The artwork has a semi-circular and walkable form, environmental dimensions, an irregular edge, and variable width, and is thicker in the middle. It was conceived to be at the entrance of the Abbey, to experience the immersive dimension of the sacred space. Stopping by, you can feel what the artist experienced at the entrance of the building on her first visit: "in the sacred space there was water, a sea that with its current brought me at the central nave, between columns". This inspiration was immediately turned into a drawing and shown to the managers of the medieval site who, after some initial doubts, endorsed the project, allowing to use the farming site of the Abbey and taking charge of the reception and accommodation expenses. The sharing network of the project was started by Sara Sterpin of the association Raglio di Luna and saw the participation of some local associations: Casa Manuelli, "Il Chiostro" hostel in Alessandria, the Soggiorno Borsalino foundation and the game room of Alessandria. This concept has fascinated hundreds of participants who, during four days of work, made possible the creation and the collocation of the artwork. With their valuable intervention, some medieval art historians, who also contributed to the artistic process, gave further insights into the fascinating history of the Abbey.





Paper pattern and e wool positioning - Agrarian area of the abbey



Felting



Final installation viewed from the altar



Final installation viewed from the entrance

Pianta Desiderio

MAIO Museum, Cassina De Pecchi, (MI)

July - October 2018

Meas. 1,5x3,5m- 16 kg of untinted felt

This project, commissioned by the local administration of Cassina de Pecchi and curated by Gabi Scardi, had the purpose of promoting the Maio museum among the public, through a permanent installation on the last floor of the building. The original idea behind the concept, immediately shared by the referents of the museum and the administration, was to work on the wishes of individuals and physical distance, to build a workgroup that would reflect on the actual needs of the community, bringing to light the reasons of such distance. Each workday started with a ritual, the wool seeding, taking place in the park that surrounds the Maio museum. The workshop participants could, while blowing on a wool clump, make a wish and then let the clump softly drop on the grass.

The first phase saw the collection of the itineraries made through Google Maps and of their photos. The itineraries were then drawn and transferred on tracing paper to be projected on a wall. The result was a paper pattern according to the needs of union and wish previously discussed by the group. Through the combination of visual and narrative elements brought up during the process, an imaginary network of wishes and needs progressively took shape, which then translated into the felt artwork Pianta Desiderio.



<https://vimeo.com/539347818>

<https://vimeo.com/539346483>



Wool seeding - MAIO Museum





Work stages: Paths- Projection and composition of the paths - Paper pattern making



Wool positioning



Felting



Final collocation of the work

Pianta Desiderio

Critical text writtend by Gabi Scardi

Pianta Desiderio, by Monica Sgrò, is an artwork developed as a collective work, thought by the artist, and realized with a group of people. In this artwork, Sgrò declines, through a deep renovation, different compositional elements already found in previously artworks, from the collective work to the use of felt, to its site-specific features. Take the spacious sculpture Habitat-corpo developed vertically and made of felt derived from colored virgin wool; or Soglia d'Attenzione, an environmental installation in blue felt and having a semicircular form, derived from a site-specific project developed inside the Abbey of Santa Giustina in Sezzadio.

Pianta Desiderio was designed with a strong connection to a specific location, which is Cassina de' Pecchi. The result, having a shape that evokes a felt carpet, was located on the last floor of the Maio museum, precisely in the tower that was once surrounded by a farmhouse and that still represents the center of the town.

To Monica Sgrò this artwork represents a new and critical stage of a journey in the making, as well as deep and progressive learning of new ways of creating and feeling.

Pianta Desiderio results from the contribution of a definite number of people who took part in its realization, which is stronger than in the previous artworks by Sgrò.

The process involved several stages and resulted in an actual shared process.

In the first stage, participants were invited to draw the itinerary from their home to the Maio museum and to take some photos on their way there.

Approximately 80 testimonials were collected.

In the second stage, the participants, together

with the artist, created a paper pattern composed of their different itineraries and photos taken in the area. During all the stages, the participants had conversations and spoke of current events in particular. The visual and narrative elements of this process let emerge essential values and wishes that were crucial to all the participants and that, together with the itineraries and the photos, contributed to the construction of an imaginary network. The result was the picture of a new "potential place", an enjoyable and desirable place. On these grounds, started the collective work on felting, which is the transformation of the wool into felt. This activity is core to all the recent projects developed by Monica Sgrò.

The felt is a material derived from the sheep's fleece, which is a pacific and gregarious animal. You can get felt through the ability of the wool fibers to join without the use of additives or mechanical procedures, such as the use of a loom, but only through hand pressure, which gives the whole process a strong symbolic value. Hence, wool incorporates work, rhythm, and body movements. The artworks by Sgrò recall a cultural tradition linked to felt, that lives in different parts of the world.

With Pianta Desiderio, after the contribution of many people to the drawing up of itineraries and photos later reported on the felt, dozens of people worked together to realize the drawing on the big surface. Fluidity marked the artwork both in the colors and the shapes, evoking a landscape with roads and rivers, and the globe as well. Lines come from the direct contact with the material and the materiality of movements, as well as from the personal experience of the artist and a process

resulting from sedimentation, absorption, and re-elaboration.

Pianta Desiderio is a map that was gradually composed bringing together personal experiences and collective memories. This artwork fully clarifies the sense of time and space, the idea of movement and travel, the vital force coming from working, interacting, and living together.

The realization also involved some ritual actions, that added deepness to the project. During the process, the group performed a propitiatory rite for the wool sowing in the park that surrounds the museum. The grass of Cassina De' Pecchi became a big carpet that absorbed all the strength coming from hand gestures and the energy of all participants, who sowed their wishes.

Biennolo '19 - Margini

Stanza delle scoperte - Trotter Park, Milan
May 2019

Meas. 2,30 x1,15 m (12 carpet-forms) 4 kg

The project Margini '19 – Trotter Park - BienNoLo was specifically designed for the Trotter Park and involved the students of class 4D of the school “Casa del Sole” with the help of the teachers Paolo Limonta and Antonella Meiani, together with the associations Amici del Parco Trotter Onlus, Via Padova Viva and passerby. The workshop took place both in class and in the backyard of the Stanza delle Scoperte, built in memory of Bruno Munari. Students drew what they imagined could come alive in the backyard and then covered them in wool creating small paper patterns. Later, the unique compositions of the students were brought together to create a single large shape inside the backyard. Children laid the wool on the surface of the shape that was previously traced on the floor, recognizing features and qualities of their drawings. The last phase was a sort of interpersonal challenge, where every participant, including children, laid on the big felt carpet, each bringing their body closer to another person, with the purpose to perceive and experiment borders between people. Laid in different positions, intertwined one on another in a body-made mosaic, each of them decided where their corporeality ended and where someone else's started, choosing together where to divide their “carpet shapes” or where to include another person. This principle of inclusion and separation brought up during the workshop, was a constant in the following phases of the project as well. The carpet shapes which resulted assumed an organic value, spontaneously evoking the external surfaces, such as animal skins and tree barks.







Previous page: Workshop in the Stanza delle scoperte backyard - Trotter Park
Above: Felting



Fulling





Above and previous page: Inclusion and separation
Next page: Carpet-form



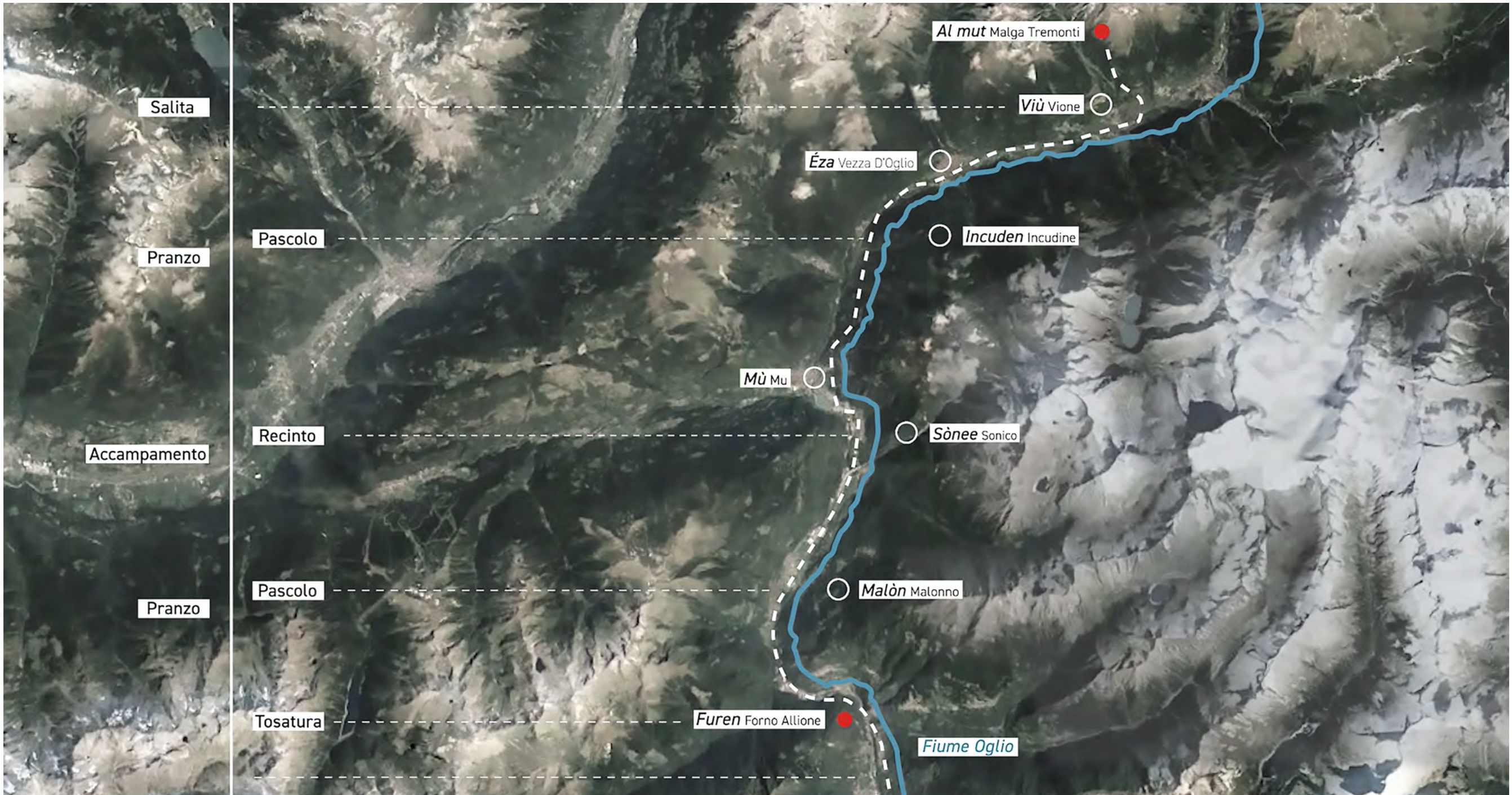
Trapelà col timignol

Andare con il gregge

Palazzo Martinengo, Headquarter of Macil Centro per l'itineranza e la lana Malonno (BS)
Valcamonica, 2019 - Undergoing

The shared project Andare con il gregge, was promoted by the art residence Aperto Art on the border 2019, and curated by Giorgio Azzoni of the cultural district of Val Camonica, in collaboration with the association Coda di Lana of Malonno. Its purpose is to enhance the local territory and the transhumance, with particular attention to the wool supply chain and the re-use of wool. The project articulates in several activities: following the animals during transhumance as art, taking part in workshops to introduce the life of a shepherd to students, attending training activities with teachers and citizens, developing the felt collective work. The unique experience of the transhumance, open to everyone, will follow the path traveled by the shepherd Lorenzo Bona and his herd through day and night, on the territory of Malonno and its neighboring towns. By taking part in all the stages of the wool processing (shearing, washing, carding, felting, and spinning), both the technical and anthropological characteristics of the fabric will emerge, as well considerations useful to the realization of the final artwork. The wool pennant, which will show a word or phrase in Gai, the jargon of shepherds, chosen and then sewn by participants, will be placed in Palazzo Martinengo, house of the Macil center and the association Coda di Lana. Felt artist Barbara Bordini, who has been collaborating with Monica for years, and the association Coda di Lana, will lead the practical activities.





Nomadism and transhumance as practice to investigate still existing eco-systems, their subsistence and productivity



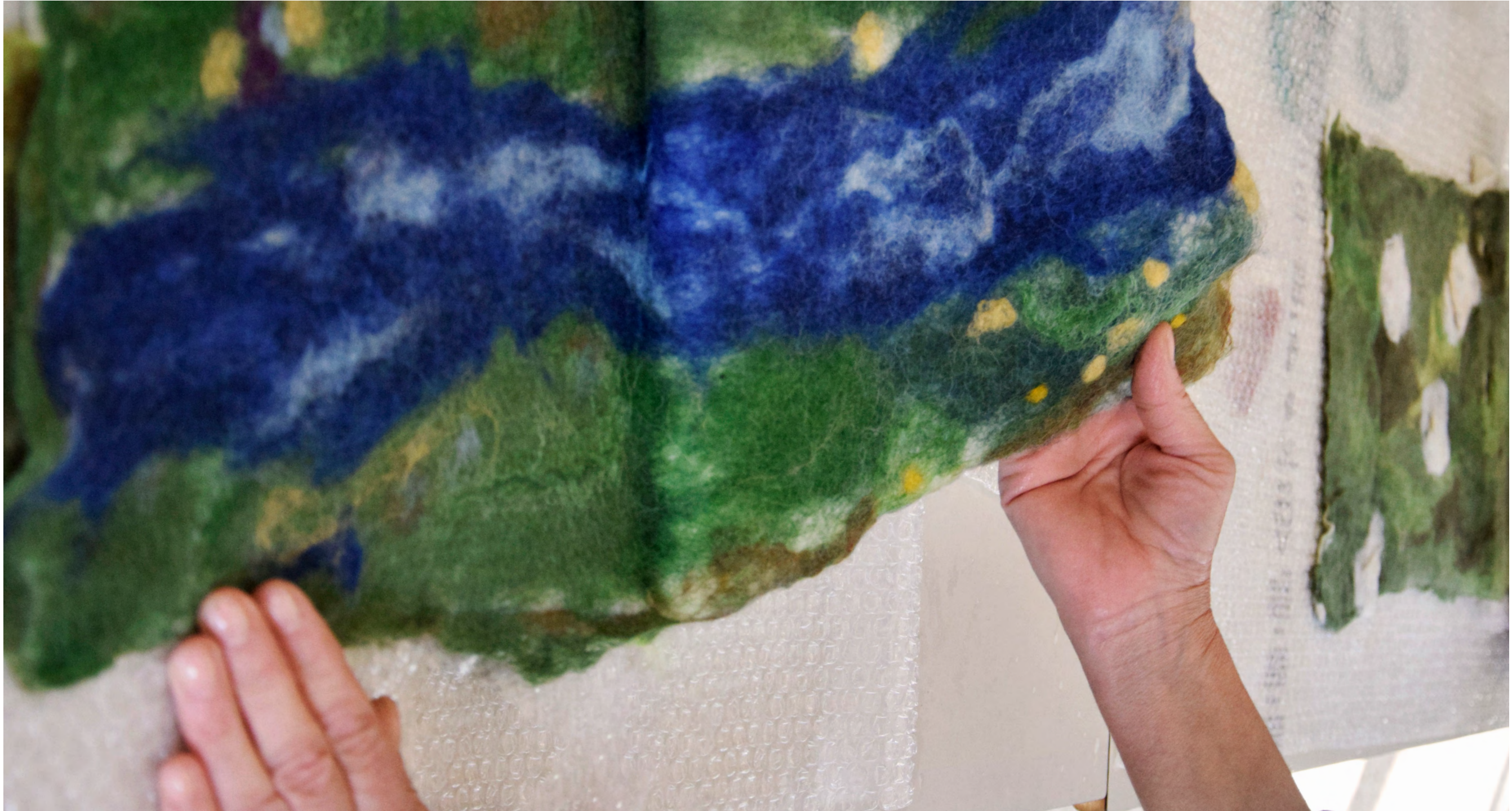
Opening image: La pastora Debora
Left: Workshop "Relational ball of yarn"
1st of December 2019

Training workshop with the elementary teacher from Malonno April 2021
Next page: Felt books





Felt book making



Videos

<https://vimeo.com/user138339546>

Photo credits

Antonio Maniscalco
Rossana Baroni
Federico Brunetti
Flavia Mora
Coda di lana

Graphic layout

Andrea Atzeni



Contacts

+39 3486923817
sgro.monica@libero.it