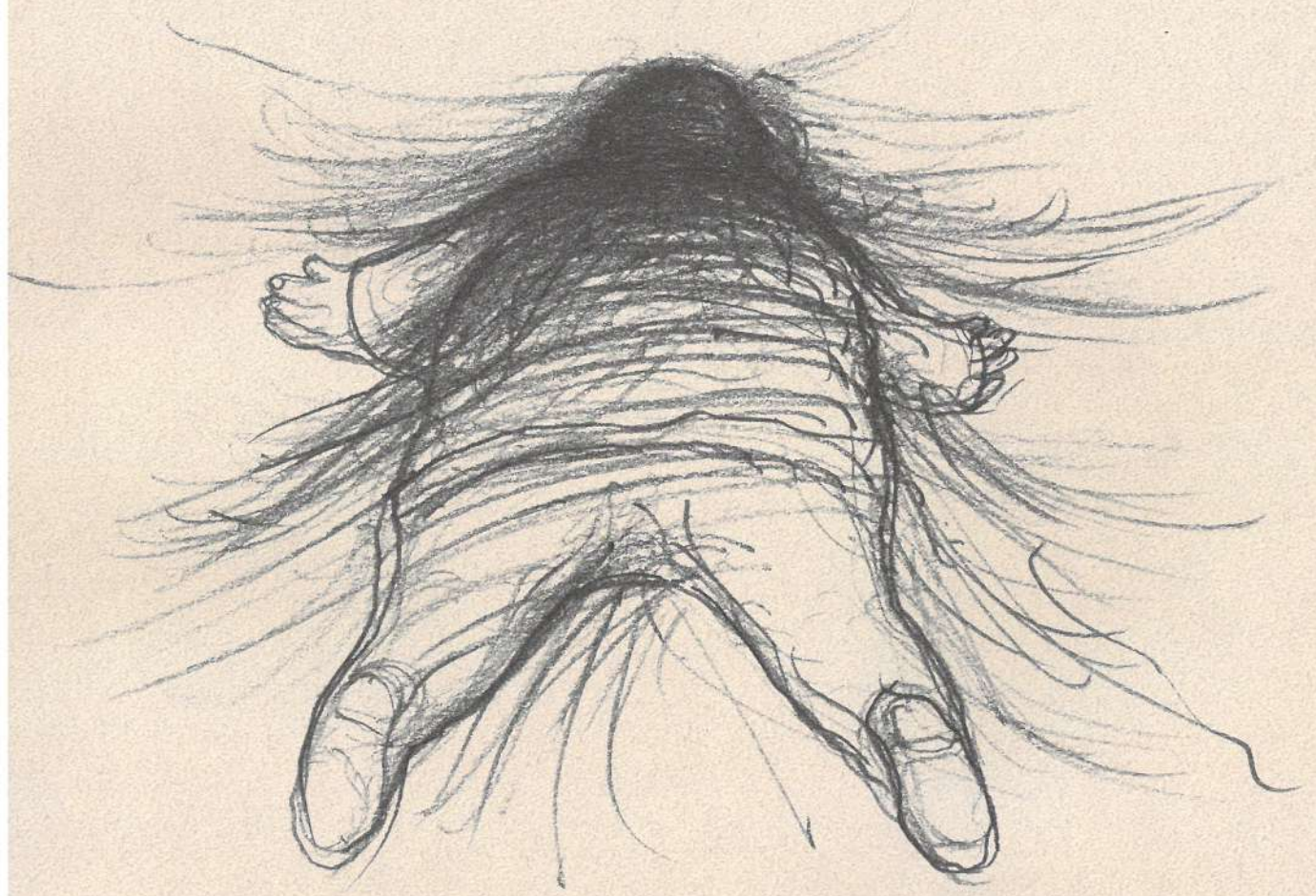


CONTEMPORARY
LYNX

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A falling down dictator is still convinced he's flying

Useless drawings # 36.

*COIAX 20
26.4.*



'Castello di Ama per l'Arte Contemporanea,' located right in the heart of the Chianti Classico region in Tuscany, Italy, is a project initiated by Lorenza Sebasti and Marco Pallanti. Since 1999 the organisers have invited to Ama some of the most famous contemporary artists — among others: Louise Bourgeois, Daniel Buren, Carlos Garaicoa, Kendell Geers, Cristina Iglesias, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Anish Kapoor, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giulio Paolini, Nedko Solakov, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Pascale Marthine Tayou and Chen Zhen — to create a work of art that will stay in their chosen place in the collection.

A few months ago, I visited Ama and its breathtaking art collection. It was an extraordinary opportunity, courtesy of Lorenza Sebasti, who agreed to meet me and show me around the collection. It was an unforgettable afternoon. Art is everywhere. Strolling along the village's late 18th-century villas and among the surrounding vineyards and olive groves revealed where some of the most precious artworks are hidden. This was the starting point for our conversation...

LORENZA

SEBASTI

*We Owe Everything
to the Land — The Castello
di Ama Collection*

Dobromiła Błaszczyk: It's not just a winery, it's a village, it's an art-space. We are surrounded not just by winery hills but also by art installations, site-specific objects that are an inseparable part of this place. Can we call this the 'Castello di Ama experience?'

Lorenza Sebasti: Yes, exactly. Castello di Ama is a microcosm of time, history, art and wine. One does not exist without the other. Over the years we have sought to achieve a state of restraint, balance and harmony in everything that we do, while upholding a specific sense of place. The Castello di Ama experience is very simply a desire to exalt the territory. Maintaining this linear approach and consistent philosophy has allowed Ama to evolve over time and to expand to reach many audiences, both through our wines and our art.

DB: Is there an analogy between wine and art?

LS: Both are reflections of time and place. At Ama, the artist (like the winemaker) is invited to let his or her sensibility be nourished and inspired by this special sense of place to create art (not unlike a bottle of wine) that is unique and impossible to reproduce. But nature always prevails, both with wine and with art. It's an exasperating thought, a magnificent prospect. As Marco Pallanti, our winemaker since 1982, always says: 'Making wine is no different than conceiving a work of art. The illusion of being able to perfect perfection, the shape of the grape, the colour of the leaves on the vine, and wanting — absurdly — to modify it, extract the nectar, make evident what cannot be seen. But in the end, making wine is nothing more than revealing the grapes. And making olive oil nothing more but revealing the olive. Just as art reveals nature. He reveals it and must recognise its superiority. This is why we love art.'



Ama, photo: Alessandro Moggi



DB: When did you first begin inviting artists to create one-of-a-kind art installations at Castello di Ama? Where did you get the inspiration for this project?

Castello di Ama is a microcosm of time, history, art and wine. One does not exist without the other

LS: We began inviting artists to Ama in 1999, in collaboration with the renowned Galleria Continua of San Gimignano. Our intention for the project was (and is) to reconnect the past and future through works of art by artists all over the world in order to express the notion that nature and culture exist in harmonious balance. As I said before, the artist at Ama takes on a role similar to the winemaker, letting his or her sensibility be nourished by this special sense of place, to create a work of art that is unique and impossible to reproduce, just like the wines that come from our estate. There exists a fitting term in

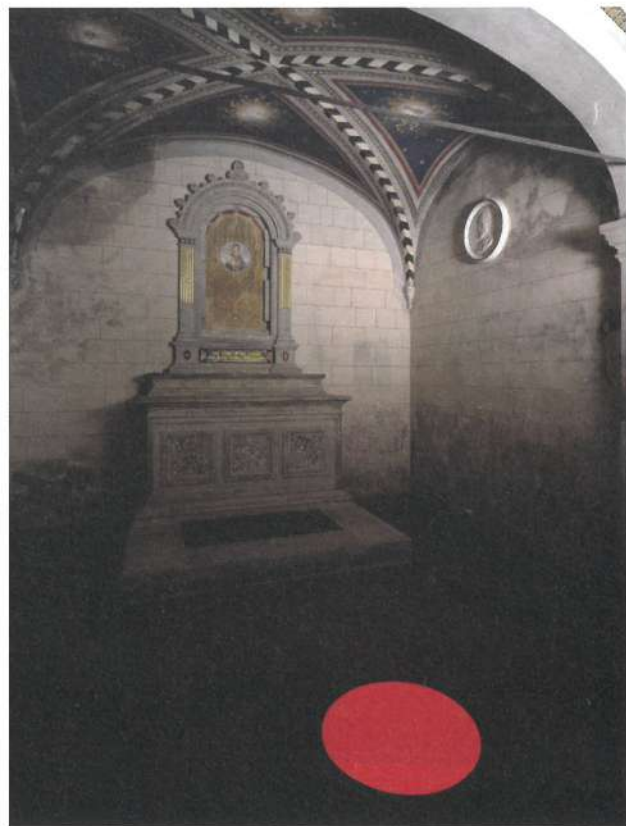
Latin, *genius loci* — the unique ability, potential or power of a place in the hands of man. This undoubtedly inspires our art collection, and our philosophy in general.

DB: You invite artists and they create an artwork wherever they choose. We can find them everywhere around the village but also below it (for example, in the cellars). What does their decision-making process look like?

LS: The initial dialogue with an artist might start in a myriad of ways. Our curator, Philip Larratt-Smith, is often the inter-medium and provides a first introduction. Then, of course, it is fundamental that the artist comes and visits Ama. We invite the artist to stay on the property, to breathe the air, take in the landscape and the light, and drink the wines (of course!). Then, it is up to the powers of *genius loci*, nature's effect on an artist and their willingness to be inspired. Sometimes a project is conceived immediately, other times it takes multiple visits and reflections. The what/where/how/when is left entirely up to the artist.

DB: Is it important for you to have relationships/friendships with artists?

LS: I don't know how much it is important or just natural. Ama is a powerful place. What we create here and what is inspired here has the ability to connect human souls and to truly leave a stitch in time. We have deep-rooted relationships with all of the artists that have contributed to the collection. They come back to visit, or else we find each other all over the world on special occasions.



Anish Kapoor, *Alma*, 2004, photo: Alessandro Moggi © the artist

3: The Bourgeois commission marked a pivotal moment for you. It introduced you to Philip Larratt-Smith, the Canadian art curator who was working with Bourgeois as a literary archivist at the time. Larratt-Smith was later invited to write an essay on Ama's art. But finally, in 2015, you invited him to be the curator. Could you tell us about this collaboration and the role of such an art advisor for collectors?

LS: Philip is an incredibly talented person and his sensibility for art and particularly art at Ama is unique and irreplaceable. He immediately grasped our approach and understood our equilibrium between old and new, between local and global, and shared our nostalgia for the past. He found the distinctive mixture of art, food, wine, architecture and landscape at Ama to be a work of art in and of itself. In his essay, published in our 2015 book 'Growing and Guarding,' he states: 'At Ama, nothing is monumental, grandiose or exaggerated. There is no piece that doesn't blend in harmoniously with the landscape. It's all characterized by a sense of restraint, equilibrium and tranquility. Just like the various vineyards which exalt the fundamental characteristics of terroir, Ama's essence and identity is brought out by art which dialogues directly with the walls of the hamlet and the surrounding land. In this way, Ama becomes a community of ideas and great works of arts profoundly linked to a specific place.'

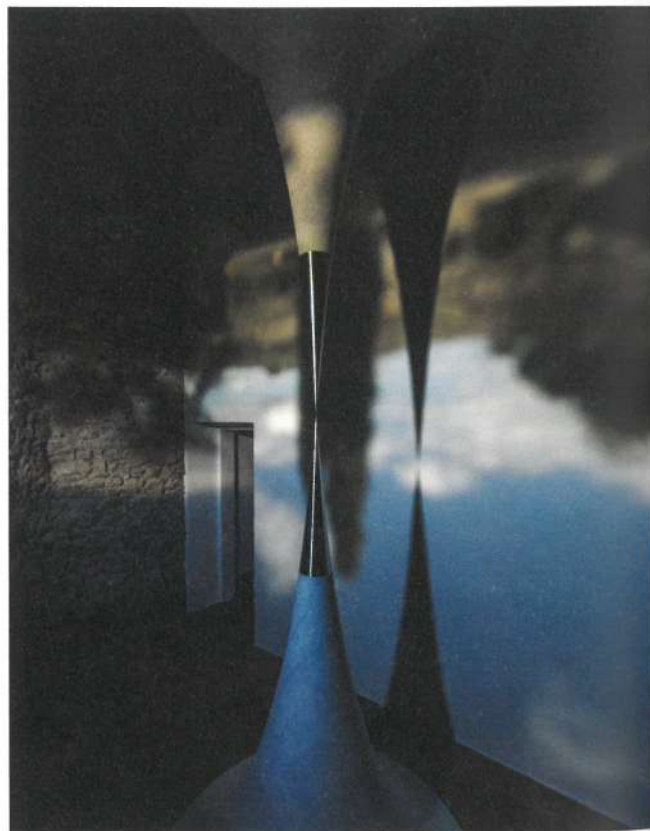
Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Confession of Zero*, 2014, photo: Alessandro Moggi © the artist

DB: In Ama we can see works by Louise Bourgeois, Daniel Buren, Roni Horn, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, and Michelangelo Pistoletto, just to mention a few. All of the artists from your collection are well-known. Is it important for you to work with established artists? Do you follow any rules when it comes to collecting?

LS: We are extremely proud to have worked with each and every one of the artists to date. We rely on Philip, of course, to introduce us to new artists and trust in his understanding of our project to propose collaborations with like-minded artists. That said, there are no rules or *strategy* to our approach. It's about sensibility; the greatest moment is sitting down together at Ama and feeling each other out. It never grows old to see the ways in which this place inspires others, and in turn, how it forces us to constantly mould and change the way we view our own livelihood.

DB: 'We are guardians, not owners,' you said some time ago. Is this the way you approach works?

LS: We owe everything to the land, to this physical place rooted in time. In everything that we do, whether wine or art, we are simply responsible for transforming something from one state to another. Temporary or permanent, what matters is that it reflects the terroir and exalts our mission. We don't *buy* or *commission* works — we collaborate with the artists, and they ultimately choose whether or not





to leave their mark here at Ama. It therefore becomes our responsibility to take care of their works, just like we take care of our vineyards.

DB: When I visited your collection a few months ago, Anish Kapoor's chapel was the most mystic experience. On the other hand, a statue by Louise Bourgeois, which the artist created for Ama in 2009, gives me the most personal and intimate touch of the collection. Can you give an example of one artist in the collection whose artworks exemplify your personal vision of Castello di Ama?

LS: A tough question, as I truly believe that each and every work of art has exalted my personal vision of Ama. I am inspired by many great artists, but my encounter with Louise Bourgeois was especially important to help me dig deeper into myself and understand my limits and ambitions versus listening to my soul. Marco, on the other hand, resonated greatly with Daniel Buren's work 'Sulle vigne, punti di vista,' which with its mirrored, windowed, marble walls lends contemplation on perspective. This different way of considering the vineyards inspired the wine *Haiku*, an alternative reflection of grape varietals inherent to the estate.

DB: Who will be the next artist invited to Castello di Ama? Could you tell us more about your plans for the future regarding your collection?

LS: In 2019, we proudly welcomed the American artist Jenny Holzer to Ama, and she, too, was taken aback by the beauty and uniqueness of this place. She envisioned an open-air opera and designed a garden that has been growing and taking shape over the past year. We will inaugurate her work in the summer of 2021. As for the future, one of the defining aspects of our collection is that it has never held any expectations; everything has culminated naturally and harmoniously and we have vowed to continue this way. Certainly, welcoming an artist like Holzer carries an important value for us and for Castello di Ama. We continue to feel proud to be connected to these incredible international artists and hope that the world is able to recover from its current state in order to allow us to move, travel, meet, discuss and take in art as we used to, which is an essential part of cultivating a collection.

DB: Ending our conversation, I would like to thank you for this experience and showing me around the collection. ●