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Giulio Paolini. "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu". Reflections on transparency

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Do you see anything?" Poussin whispered to Porbus.
"No. Do you?" "Nothing."
[...]
"See, here's the stretcher, there's the easel,
then here are
my paints, my brushes."¹

Might we, the viewers encountering Giulio Paolini's works, be contemporary embodiments of Porbus and Poussin? Like them, when finally welcomed into the great master Frenhofer's atelier, do we fail to see anything because we are searching only for what we already know? Or is it only Paolini who identifies with Honoré de Balzac's elderly painter, absorbed in his work—always the same work—for years on end? Or is he making a broader reference, whereby the range of characters in the short story correspond to the elements that form his concept of the author-artist, identified as he who simultaneously sees—as an indivisible whole—the inevitable distance between the work and the viewer, and the all-encompassing proximity between art and its author?

In entitling his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli "*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*," Paolini has chosen to explicitly quote Balzac's story of the same title. However, in accordance with his method—from the accuracy of his numerous texts to the richness of his oral tales, down to the use of a transparent material such as Plexiglas—what the artist manifests sometimes seems to deepen the mystery.² Set in seventeenth-century Paris, Balzac's text revolves around three painters, each of whom finds himself at a different stage of his personal and professional development: the talented debutant Nicolas Poussin, the well-established François Porbus, and the elderly Frenhofer. Past his prime, yet madly brilliant, Frenhofer is obsessed with the idea of attaining perfection and painting an absolute masterpiece capable of grasping the fullness of life. For years he has devoted himself to the same work, developing an obsessive attachment to it. He keeps it hidden, without ever showing it to anyone. Finally yielding to the requests of Porbus and Poussin, Frenhofer agrees to show them his "unknown masterpiece." Once revealed, and seen by Frenhofer through his guests' eyes, the alleged masterpiece proves the very impossibility of the elderly painter's task. In a few lines, the story ends with an image of the artist so shattered by his failure that, before dying, will set fire to his paintings. Initially conceived in 1831 with the subtitle *conte fantastique*, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* revealed its polysemic tendencies early on, engendering several versions of itself. In later drafts, the author transformed it into a *conte philosophique* and finally turned it into an *étude philosophique* through a crescendo of reflections on art and its purposes. Foreshadowing certain themes that define modernity and the related development of art, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* is one of those texts with a prophetic content, capable of suggesting endless hermeneutical enquiries. Far exceeding the confines of literary criticism in terms of its reception, this short story has sparked the minds of writers, philosophers, and

artists. The long list of authors includes among others Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Rainer Maria Rilke, Henry James, Benedetto Croce, Italo Calvino, and Giorgio Agamben.³ As far as artists are concerned, it is worth mentioning at least two. Émile Bernard recounts how Paul Cézanne identified with the painter Frenhofer to such an extent that he would burst into tears at the mere mention of the story.⁴ But it is with Pablo Picasso that *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* becomes a work about modernity, the tangible space in which the story about the painter par excellence unfolds. On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the first edition in 1931, Picasso accepted Ambroise Vollard's proposal to illustrate Balzac's text; some years later, in 1936, he moved into 7 Rue des Grands-Augustins, the very building in which the opening scene of the story takes place. It is here that Balzac sets Porbus's atelier, and it is here that, during a few weeks in 1937, Picasso responded to the horror of the Nazi air raids by painting his celebrated *Guernica*. There is no contradiction, then, in the fact that Paolini's exhibition at Castello di Rivoli, held to honor his eightieth birthday, while not taking the form of a retrospective exhibition, touches upon some of his main themes, beginning with the apparent explicitness of the quotation in the title. The works on display in "*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*," almost all of which were specially created for the occasion, spell out various chapters in an endless search for the very essence of art: its tools; the relation between a work and its inevitable tendency to reveal itself, transitioning to image; the position of the artist, envisaged as someone who fills the double role of producer of the work and first witness to such a process. But in the dense labyrinth of meaning developed by the artist, questions multiply instead of being answered.

"*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*"

"*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*" is also the title of the large-scale work that marks the beginning of the exhibition itinerary. This installation takes its cue from *Disegno geometrico* (Geometric drawing), 1960, a key work in Paolini's career and one that the artist never relinquished, except for a short period of time.⁵ The literature on this work is extensive; in what follows, I will only provide a few remarks and quotes by the artist.⁶ To begin with its description, *Disegno geometrico* is a rectangular canvas painted white on which Paolini has chosen "to copy, according to the right proportion, the preliminary drawing for any drawing, which is to say the geometrical squaring of the surface."⁷ "The squaring of the canvas," he notes, "is a fact, a pre-existing, anonymous, and neutral image."⁸ The diagonal lines defining the center of the canvas are traced in red ink. Using a compass, Paolini has marked the medians in black. Despite its professed accuracy, the work is imbued with a dizzying range of meanings, insofar as it addresses profound ontological questions pertaining to the very nature of art, including the possibility of freeing the painting from its eternal state of subordination vis-à-vis a given image by acknowledging it as a self-standing entity. According to Paolini, squaring "did not represent the subject of the medium on which I had traced it, but was rather a way to qualify the medium on which I was operating: to qualify it as an absolute and undefined presence, as opposed to a way of conveying an image established once and for all."⁹ While in his statements Paolini usually describes this as his "first painting," in the notes he drafted while preparing the exhibition at the Castello he refers to it as his "first (and last) painting."¹⁰ The artist's words spark a doubt. Is *Disegno geometrico* Paolini's last painting because he does not regard any of his subsequent works as paintings? Or is "painting" to be understood in a wider sense, as a synonym for artwork, suggesting that the artist's entire career unfolds according to a broad circular movement, where beginning and end coincide?

Starting from the outline of *Disegno geometrico*, Paolini has developed the structure that determines "*Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*." This installation has been conceived for the large hall on the second floor of the Castello, a majestic space designed by architect Juvarra with a square plan and marked

by a high, exposed brick vault. Amplified to suit its setting, *Disegno geometrico* acquires in “*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*” a highly tactile, three-dimensional body. The other three walls, in addition to *Disegno geometrico* itself, feature as many variations of it, with further rectangular surfaces squared by tracing lines directly on the wall, and in each case marked out by frames defining their position. The floor and aerial space host the elements that constitute the compositional structure of the original work. Through the concreteness of the museum hall, the long lines traced on the floor using red and black adhesive strips match the outline of the diagonals and medians drawn on the painting, while each of the eight squaring points, originally marked with a compass, is represented by an easel. In turn, each easel supports a transparent case with paper fragments from the artist’s studio in Turin. We glimpse a range of different subjects, including perspective grids, cosmic trajectories, and photographs of ancient statues, according to a free sequence of sketches and cut-outs that seem to evoke a broad catalog of possible images that have been envisaged yet immediately discarded. Hanging from the ceiling at the center of the room, hovering above a ninth easel, is another display case. Open in such a way as to reveal its lid, background, and paper mat, the case is empty. Like *Disegno geometrico*, a work that presents no images yet potentially includes them all, the open display case fluctuates in space like a potential idea that is not bound to be expressed in just one particular way. Its presence brings the number of display cases included in “*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*” to nine. Paolini has chosen this number to refer to the nine letters that make up the name Mnemosyne, the personification of memory in Greek mythology: “Nine the points of intersection of the original squaring, nine the easels, just as nine are the letters that make up the name of Mnemosyne, the mother of the nine Muses who knows the secret code announcing and revealing the ‘truth’ of the work. Essential and unknown, the artwork is the first (and last) material testimony evoking the absolute image,”¹¹ the artist writes. In this case too, his statement opens new doors, raises new questions. One of the possible references is to other works Paolini has devoted to Mnemosyne, starting in 1979.¹² With regard to his *Studio per Mnemosine* (Study for Mnemosyne, 1979–80), the artist has stated: “Hence, the overall reading of the work tends to pursue the fate of dispersal, to follow an indecipherable point of infinity that prevents us (just when it seems to suggest it) from pronouncing that name.”¹³ Indeed, in “*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*” too, the Goddess’s name is never uttered, while the eye follows the multiple vanishing points that, from their easels, the transparent display cases open up on the walls.

Vertigo

After the first room in the exhibition, which is structured in such a way as to be perceived as a single work, the second one unfolds through a polyphony of seven works arranged so as to create a dialog with Carlo Randoni’s late-eighteenth-century Neoclassical architecture.¹⁴ As the artist notes, each work “records an event that manifests itself in various ways: skies, places, and figures rediscovered through the images of the history of art follow one another and create a spacetime filled with unexpected visions.”¹⁵ Paolini has chosen to call this room *Vertigo*. In addition to the literal dizzying range of meanings engendered by the works here, the reference seems to be to Alfred Hitchcock’s famous 1958 film. As an Italian viewer, Paolini actually first came across it as *La donna che visse due volte* (The woman who lived twice), a creative title whose allusion to the concept of double he must have found intriguing. As crucial aspects of the artist’s research, the themes of the double, of the painting within a painting, and of a place within a place occur throughout the works on display in this room.

In *Vertigo*, 2020, a photo of the sky printed on a piece of fabric is juxtaposed with other photographs, empty frames (with and without glass), canvases, frameworks, and empty passe-partouts. Resting on the floor is a wooden pallet painted gray. Identical in shape to those used to carry goods, this pallet

both directly supports and is surrounded by the various elements that make up the work, serving as its intentionally instrumental and transitory base. Two of the photographs show the same pallet, again partially covered by a series of empty frameworks and images of the sky. The photograph placed horizontally on the pallet shows the latter on a floor with the same Venetian terrazzo as this Castello room. In this play of mirrors, the various elements seem to spring dynamically out of the old fireplace in the hall, as traces of the works that the Castello has housed, or perhaps—more accurately—of the works that Paolini himself has displayed so far, or could have displayed, in the museum. Incorporated by the artist into this new work designed for the exhibition, the two stucco putti marking the fireplace seem to be presenting the whole art piece, as though transformed into an original version of the “pages” (*valletti*) featured in many of Paolini’s works.

The Castello has been included in the artist’s research ever since its opening exhibition *Ouverture* in December 1984, in which he took part. It now becomes the unmistakable point of reference for another three works in this room. *No Comment*, 1991, is a lightbox featuring a plan of the room on the third floor of the Castello for which it had originally been designed.¹⁶ The plan is superimposed on a color image of the sky. Like a double statement, undeniable and yet invisible, the work explores its own role and setting, confirming its own presence by projecting the image it bears towards the actual sky.

Mounted on a wall, *Promemoria* (Reminder) portrays some halls of the Castello in a fully recognizable form. This work consists of nine plates that turn the Castello into an imaginary theater housing leading characters in art and literature. The first figure in this unique parade is Luigi Pirandello, stooped over a typewriter. Paolini has been drawing inspiration from this author ever since his debut, with *Ipotesi per una mostra* (Hypothesis for an exhibition, 1963), the very first exhibition project he ever developed, and never realized, with the aim of exploring the presence of viewers as an integral part of the artwork.¹⁷ The next plates feature other distinguished guests, including—in order of appearance—Raymond Roussel, Marcel Duchamp, Lucio Fontana, Fausto Melotti, Giorgio de Chirico, Italo Calvino, Salvador Dalí, and Fernando Pessoa, all masters whose writings and works have accompanied the artist throughout his career. Some are apparently portrayed in the act of welcoming potential viewers; Duchamp is shown conversing with Paolini.

This imaginary museum towers above *Dall’Aurora al Tramonto* (From Dawn to Dusk), 2020, a new work that also evokes the Castello and refers to *Padiglione dell’Aurora* (Aurora pavilion), an installation that Paolini brought to the stage of the Castello’s theater in 1988–99 as a spectacle culminating in the idea of “‘seeing’ the light of the performance.”¹⁸ Much like the original composition, this work is a structure enclosing fragments and reproductions of other artworks, which can be identified with those featured in the original installation. In this case, the whole structure has been transposed into a table-sized format, condensing the pavilion into a sort of microcosm dense with ideas and projects: “an echo of the past,” the artist states, “which today formulates a reflection on the idea of measure, of fullness and emptiness, everything and nothing, displaying its countless possible combinations.”¹⁹

At the centre of the room stands *Senza più titolo* (No longer titled), 2010, a work whose structure evokes an ancient Greek temple with columns that establishes a close dialog with the Neoclassical style of the room, creating a bewildering play of reflections. The work consists of a platform surmounted by Plexiglas cubes which, in turn, support a plaster colonnade. The columns—some missing, others fragmentary—mark out a transparent cell that can be associated with the sanctum where the deity’s image would be kept. In this case, the idea of inaccessibility is expressed by four statuettes of Carabinieri in full uniform. This central area is filled with sheets—significantly, transparent ones—often marked by thick abstract strokes. A full-scale hand seems to be grasping some of these drawings, in a gesture that expresses a constant attempt to fix and define the artwork,

which, tautologically, is *Senza più titolo*. Here Paolini literally brings us face to face with one of the great mysteries in his art. He confirms this perspective in the poem of the same title published in *Recital*: “But what, then, does art represent? / Everything and nothing: it represents itself.”²⁰

In the subsequent two works on display in this room, the artist continues his reflection on space and time. The wall-mounted *A occhio nudo* (The naked eye), 1998, is a photographic negative of a star’s brightness, which the artist chose from the many astronomical images in his collection.²¹ Next to this reference to an infinite and remote time and space, the artist has arranged the new work *Omega 1948–2018*, 2019, whose title suggests it is the concluding piece in this room. This is a rare instance in which Paolini has included some biographical details: the work is a blue velvet jewelry case, resting on photographs printed on transparent tracing paper and portraying people dear to Paolini, as well as pictures of the artist himself, including on the day of his First Communion. The casket contains a watch and other pictures; some are rolled up in such a way as to conceal their subject while serving as a support for the watch. “This Omega wristwatch,” says the artist, “was given to me for my First Communion in 1948 by my godfather, Dr. Giovanni Schrey, and it shared my existence for seventy years, up until the year 2018. So over a long period of time that dial has witnessed the whole succession of events that have shaped my life; now that it has been laid to rest, it remains the most authoritative witness to this stretch of time.”²²

“The End” without an end

The three rooms through which the exhibition unfolds may be seen to evoke as many moments in the process of knowledge-acquisition, according to the dialectical method defined by philosophy: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis can be identified with the first room, “*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*,” expressing the idea of a work that eternally returns to itself, to the point of bending time and the surrounding space according to its own geometry. The antithesis can be found in the next room, *Vertigo*, where a range of works refer to the concept of the space housing them—from the Castello to the sky and outer space. This includes different forms of time, from the finite time of human experience to the infinite one that we can only imagine. Following this reasoning, the third and last room ought to correspond to the synthesis, as the reconciling or overcoming of the previous moments. However, in choosing to entitle this room “*Fine*” *senza fine* (“The end” without an end), the artist appears to be evoking the complex structures of ancient rhetoric, thereby confirming the need for an investigation that can never be exhausted. Especially designed for this exhibition, the seven works displayed here explore themes such as the origin of images, their enduring presence, and the secret relation between the artist and his atelier, delving into mysteries whose depths Paolini has never been afraid to fathom.

If we were to search for a point of access to this room, we might start with “*I would prefer not to*,” 2020. This work consists of a wall-mounted color photograph and copies of hand-written notes in black ink, most of which are arranged on a lectern except for one, which has slipped to the floor. The photograph is of a self-portrait by the young Joshua Reynolds, executed between 1747–49.²³ Out of the almost thirty self-portraits painted by Reynolds, an artist keen to cultivate his public image, Paolini has chosen the only one in which the painter depicts himself with the tools of his trade: easel, brushes, and *maulstick* (the support used by painters). However, despite the considerable interest in artistic tools that Paolini displays in his works, these details are omitted in the photograph based on Reynolds’ portrait. Paolini instead focuses on the painter’s face and on the gesture made by his left hand, which shields his eyes from the light. What he may be looking at we cannot tell, but presumably he is intently gazing at something far in the distance. Paolini’s work is designed in such a way that the figure’s action enters into relation with the easel and the notes on it. The sheets are juxtaposed. Written in nervous strokes, and filled with the kind of erasures and corrections typical of someone

racking his brains to express himself, these notes seem to withdraw and resist any effort to read them. The only exception is the sheet on the floor. In legible handwriting, Paolini has jotted down in English the sentence “I would prefer not to.” Once again providing a dense literary reference in this exhibition, the statement in question unequivocally refers to *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, a short story written by Herman Melville in 1853 in which the Wall Street clerk answers all requests from his boss with this phrase. As in Balzac’s case, Paolini has chosen a deeply polysemic text, which has inspired investigations from philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, and Giorgio Agamben. Drawing upon the well-known formula that defines the protagonist, Paolini dives into the heart of the story. Out of the many interpretations provided, I believe that Agamben’s comes closest to the artist’s intentions. The scholar notes: “As a scribe who has stopped writing, Bartleby is the extreme figure of the Nothing from which all creation derives; and at the same time, he constitutes the most implacable vindication of this Nothing as pure, absolute potentiality. The scrivener has become the writing tablet; he is nothing other than his white sheet. It is not surprising, therefore, that he dwells so obstinately in the abyss of potentiality and does not seem to have the slightest intention of leaving it.”²⁴ According to Agamben, the formula “I would prefer not to” is the “formula of potency.”²⁵ This, I believe, accounts for Paolini’s interest in the clerk, including his awareness that Bartleby’s behavior is extreme. Is it perhaps from the edge of this precipice that Reynolds is gazing down at the abyss below?

If there is a place where the “abyss of possibilities” is ever-present, this is probably the artist’s studio. *Il modello in persona* (The model itself²⁶), 2020, takes us into Paolini’s studio in Via Po, Turin. This installation consists of two facing, slightly offset easels. One bears a color photograph offering a glimpse of the atelier that captures the exact arrangement of some of its furnishings: the baroque chairs, the Plexiglas bases used as tables, and the metal archive draws. We see two works from the artist’s private collection, including a copy of an engraving by William Hogarth, *Hogarth Painting the Comic Muse*, 1758–64, executed by the English painter on the basis of his last self-portrait, and repeatedly redeveloped over the years.²⁷ The other easel that makes up this installation is set with its back to the viewer and supports a Plexiglas sheet. Between the two easels, resting on a transparent base, is a plaster cast of a young man holding a globe. This is a reproduction of a 1885 bronze by the Neapolitan artist Vincenzo Gemito, a work repeatedly cast by the sculptor and which in turn is a copy of a Hellenistic bronze statue of Narcissus discovered in Pompeii in 1862 and probably based on an earlier statue.²⁸ The model to which Paolini refers in the title is presumably this cast, including the extensive series of copies and further models associated with it, according to a succession whose starting point cannot be identified. But here there is something more that we do not see. Or rather, it is something so evident that perhaps Paolini is playfully concealing it, just as his cast figure plays with the globe it is holding. In the wellknown myth, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection (and dies when he realizes that he cannot grasp it). Couldn’t it be that this ideal model, Narcissus, who is facing us (“itself,” as the author states) embody the very idea of image? It is Narcissus, yet at the same time it is the image (any possible image) that allures the artist and engages in play with him. As viewers, we find ourselves outside the circumscribed space of the work, at which we gaze from behind an easel, like meddlers interrupting the painter’s work. It is as though the artist were telling us that this whole scene—this comedy—is unfolding in the studio, where he would usually be the only witness. Significantly, Hogarth depicts the painter’s muse.

In a very measured way, in this final room Paolini has arranged other works related to the idea of image. “Just as we cannot ascertain the origin of the image we are now observing, similarly we won’t be able to see what will happen later,” the artist writes. “The constant becoming of art history,” he adds, “occurs through successive transformations of the secret and absolute hallmark of the artwork.”²⁹ The enduring myth of Narcissus is featured again in the wall-mounted work *L’immagine*

di un'immagine (Narciso) (The image of an image – Narcissus), 2020. Next to it we find *L'immagine di un'immagine (Plotino)* (The image of an image – Plotinus), 2020. Both works are photographic collages creating a dialog between the concept of image as a longed-for destination and as an illusion from which we need to escape. The mystery of art, its tendency to contemplate itself, is explored in *“Fine” senza fine (Vis-à-vis)* (“The end” without an end – Vis-à-vis), 2020, the work that gives the room its title. This installation consists of two photographs that, like mirror images, depict two profiles—the right and left sides of an ancient head. On the floor, in the space in front of and between the two images, is a base with the plaster fragments of a female torso, some of which have fallen to the ground. The overall composition evokes the idea of a silent conversation, or rather of a dialog that art holds only with itself. That’s how the artist becomes a viewer.

As stated at the beginning, this is not a retrospective exhibition, meaning one that brings together an artist’s most significant works. However, it reflects the same intention to present the main themes that have marked the artist’s career. As though playfully alluding to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (1787), *“Il catalogo è questo”* (“This is the catalog”), 2020, arranges on a transparent table a small chest from which—as though from a book that has not yet been bound—a series of paper drawings spill out. Rather than Leporello’s list of Don Giovanni’s amorous conquests, the work presents drawings exploring the relation between the space portrayed and the surface on which this depiction has been executed—a theme dear to Paolini. “It is like an inventory of the pages that make up a catalog. On each page I have listed, in pencil, the possible multiplications that this piece of paper might undergo,”³⁰ the artist explains.

At the center of this last room, ever-present within the visual field disclosed by the other works just described, is *Deposizione* (Deposition), 2018–20. The title can be taken to refer to the specific iconography of Christ’s body being taken down from the cross. The work, which develops the concept of “fall,” features a suitcase from which a tail coat has fallen to the ground, along with its buttonhole, waistcoat, shirt, and white gloves. Sticking out of the suit pocket is a bundle of folded sheets of paper. These items of clothing evoke the memory of the person who has worn them, an absent body whose identity remains unknown, although the most obvious hypothesis is that this is the artist himself. Like an event envisaged before its occurrence, might the work be interpreted as the project for an “exit from the stage”? There is a small clue: the buttonhole is a yellow rose, which is also the title of a short story written by Borges in 1960. It describes how, as he is about to die, poet Giambattista Marino sees a woman arrange a yellow rose in a vase. He begins to recall his own verses, but then, “Marino saw the rose as Adam might have seen it in Paradise, and he thought that the rose was to be found in its own eternity and not in his words; and that we may mention or allude to a thing, but not express it; and that the tall, proud volumes casting a golden shadow in a corner were not—as his vanity had dreamed—a mirror of the world, but rather one thing more added to the world.”³¹ Paolini seems to be bringing us face to face with the revelation that struck the poet Marino. But, are these the words concealed in the sheets of paper in the pocket of the suit?

¹ Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), p. 40.

² I am grateful to Giulio Paolini for the enlightening conversations we had about his works over the months leading up to the Castello di Rivoli exhibition, and for his patience in answering my questions. The remarks made in this text take their cue from these conversations.

³ Concerning the various editions of this short story and the critical literature surrounding it, see the bibliographical references in Honoré de Balzac, *Il capolavoro sconosciuto*, ed. Davide Monda (Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2019).

⁴ Émile Bernard, *Ricordi su Paul Cézanne e lettere inedite* (1907), in *Cézanne. Documenti e interpretazioni*, ed. Michael Doran (Rome: Donzelli, 1995).

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- ⁵ A well-known series of photographs by Brassai shows Picasso at work in the atelier in Rue des Grands-Augustins. In his written account, however, the photographer mistakenly refers to this as Frenhofer's atelier rather than Porbus's. See Brassai, *Conversazioni con Picasso* (1964) (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 1996).
- ⁶ Today, the work is part of the Fondazione Giulio e Anna Paolini collection in Turin, after having been in Ippolito Simonis's private collection for some years.
- ⁷ On *Disegno geometrico*, see Giulio Paolini. *Catalogo ragionato 1960-1999*, ed. Maddalena Disch (Milan: Skira, 2008), p. 49. Among recent studies, see Fabio Belloni, *Giulio Paolini. Disegno geometrico, 1960* (Mantua: Corraini Edizioni, 2019).
- ⁸ Germano Celant, *Giulio Paolini* (New York: Sonnabend Press, 1972), p. 15.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ¹¹ Giulio Paolini, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," plan for his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, autumn 2020, with texts by the artist, unpublished.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ On *Mnemosine*, 1979–80, see Giulio Paolini. *Catalogo ragionato*, p. 428.
- ¹⁴ Francisco Jarauta, "Percorrere il destino della dispersione / To Pursue the Fate of Dispersal," in *Teatro di Mnemosine. Giulio Paolini d'après Watteau / Theatre of Mnemosyne. Giulio Paolini d'après Watteau*, ed. Bettina Della Casa (Bellinzona: Edizioni Casagrande, 2015), p. 55.
- ¹⁵ Maria Grazia Cerri, "Le decorazioni," in *La Residenza Sabauda. La Collezione*, ed. Ida Gianelli (Rivoli–Turin: Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and Milan: Skira, 2008), p. 574.
- ¹⁶ Giulio Paolini, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," plan for his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, autumn 2020, with texts by the artist, unpublished.
- ¹⁷ On *No Comment*, 1991, see Giulio Paolini. *Catalogo ragionato*, p. 696.
- ¹⁸ On *Ipotesi per una mostra*, 1963, see Celant, *Giulio Paolini*, pp. 34, 35–36.
- ¹⁹ Giulio Paolini, "Padiglione dell'Aurora," in *Giulio Paolini* (Rivoli–Turin: Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1999), p. 28. On *Padiglione dell'Aurora*, 1988–99, see Giulio Paolini. *Catalogo ragionato*, pp. 856–57.
- ²⁰ Giulio Paolini, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," plan for his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, autumn 2020, with texts by the artist, unpublished.
- ²¹ Giulio Paolini, "No longer titled," in *Recital*, second volume published for this exhibition, p. 43.
- ²² On *A occhio nudo*, 1998, see Giulio Paolini. *Catalogo ragionato*, p. 840.
- ²³ Giulio Paolini, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," plan for his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, autumn 2020, with texts by the artist, unpublished.
- ²⁴ This work is now in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
- ²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 253–54.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.
- ²⁷ A copy of the engraving is now in the Royal Academy of Arts, London. See <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/hogarth-painting-the-comic-muse-1>
- ²⁸ Gemito first came across the Hellenistic bronze while visiting the collections of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, where it is still stored. A version of Gemito's sculpture may be found in the Villa Pignatelli collection in Naples. For an in-depth discussion of Gemito's work, see Salvatore Di Giacomo, *Vincenzo Gemito, La Vita – L'opera* (Naples: Achille Minozzi Editore, 1905).
- ²⁹ Giulio Paolini, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu," plan for his solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, autumn 2020, with texts by the artist, unpublished.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Dreamtigers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 38.