# Massimo Bartolini Hagoromo



# **Massimo Bartolini** Hagoromo

curated by Luca Cerizza with Elena Magini

The broadest exhibition dedicated to Massimo Bartolini (Cecina, 1962) until now, Hagoromo is also the title of a well-known pièce of Japanese Noh theatre. Here the story tells of how one day a fisherman found the hagoromo, the feather mantle of the tennin, a figure from Japanese mythology representing a female celestial spirit of supernatural beauty. To the spirit's request to get her mantle back – without which she could not return to heaven – the fisherman replied that he would only give it back to her after seeing her dance.

Hagoromo (1989) is also the title of what Bartolini considers to be his first mature work. On a brightly lit stage, a musician plays improvised saxophone music. A dancer reacts to the music, moving inside a parallelepiped on wheels that resembles a tiny housing unit. This performance already anticipates some of the themes and characters that have accompanied his research to date: the narrative dimension, which stems from homages, references, and aspects taken from other stories, works and biographies; the relationship with the architectural and spatial question; and the relationship with the language of theatre and performance, also through the use of sound and music. Despite the title and reference to an early work by the artist, the aim of the exhibition is not to present a retrospective path, let alone follow a chronological or thematic trend, in line with the most courageous exhibition experimentation by some artists of the same generation. Rather, Hagoromo is fabricated from a new sound installation - the largest ever created by the artist - especially designed for the museum spaces (In Ià, 2022). By attaching it to the structure used to house the lighting system, the artist has built a continuous wall of Innocenti pipes that wind through seven of the ten rooms of the original core of the Centro Pecci, transforming it into a musical instrument in which the pipes become organ pipes through specific modifications. The English musician Gavin Bryars – one of the most important exponents of the research music that emerged between the Sixties and Seventies – composed a polyphonic score for this work, in which each melody corresponds to a different room.

As this work divides the rooms of the museum in half, providing the possibility of entering from two opposite ends of the exhibition space, viewers can choose from four possible directions in which to walk through the exhibition. A small number of the artist's works spanning the thirty-plus years of his production and ranging across the diversity of languages and materials typical of Bartolini's work are installed along the multidirectional path suggested by the sound work. A video in which a dancer dances hanging from a branch, a series of iridescent surfaces covered in artificial dew, a light bulb that lights up until it explodes and whose sound activates a sound performance, a circular bench from which a wave can be seen rising and falling, a mechanism that makes coins fall from the ceiling, a meticulous wall drawing depicting life-size dust, and the museum custodian showing a hollowed-out pearl to some bystanders are some of the often surprising and alienating encounters that visitors can have in this non-linear path, always defined differently by the spectators' choices and movements, which has always been an essential factor in Massimo Bartolini's work.

Luca Cerizza and Elena Magini

The fruit 1990 Video projection (VHS video) 3'

All of Massimo Bartolini's early works are performance-based, deriving from his studies and acquaintance with contemporary theatre. In this case, the dancer Lucia Biondo (a key figure of other early works by the artist such as *Hagoromo* (1989), which gives this exhibition its title), dances hanging from an oriental plane tree in the Tuscan countryside. Some distance from this scene, double bass player Luigi Mosso improvises music from the choreography that he did not know before. "The dance that composes the music that dances," is what the artist wrote about it.

This initial work clearly reveals Bartolini's interest not only in theatrical forms and performance, but also in the dialogue between different artistic expressions, and he often employs improvisation. Finally, here a form of "deconstruction" is used to break the unity of the relationship between music and sound and encourage us to observe the individual nature of the phenomena.

Leaving aside the linguistic nature of this work, its title refers to the song *Strange Fruit* (1939) in which Billie Holiday sang about the "strange fruits" that appeared on trees in some southern states of the United States, making reference to the bodies of black people hanged from the branches.

Basement 2011 Cast bronze 80×250×270 cm

Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, The Netherlands

This work is a "basement" or, as the artist suggests, the "basement of basements", created through a process of inversion: displaying what usually lies beneath, the earth. An apparently insignificant element, a clump of ploughed earth, becomes potentially eternal through art and its transformation into the material par excellence of sculpture, bronze.

Having been "portrayed" at the moment of its greatest purity, the work can be considered a monument to the earth in absolute terms, as a founding element for the artist's thought and work. Finally, this earth ready to be sown can be interpreted as a monument to the work of those who transform the soil into nourishment.

Irrigation 1995 Cibachrome print on aluminium 100×150 cm Intesa Sanpaolo collection

A jet of water photographed against the backdrop of a cloudy sky also represents a meeting between two different states (vapour and liquid) of water, a recurring element in Bartolini's work. On the other hand, the title suggests the possibility of applying to the sky a practice usually dedicated to the earth. In this early photographic work, as in many other works by the artist, a series of apparently opposing elements coexist in a synthetic image.

#### Rooms 1—10

Lost wax 2017–2022 Bronze casting of each element between 6×4 cm and 1×6 cm

The work consists of a series of 60 numbers represented in birthday candles that record the artist's age cast in bronze. The wax is "lost" in the casting process just like, it could be said, the time of life that has passed. Updated for this exhibition, which takes place in the artist's 60th year, the work also becomes a kind of time structure, a timeline that runs through the exhibition space. Given that all the candles are positioned the same distance from each other, the placement of the work delineates the round trip that viewers can take through the exhibition, as if to create a loop that denies the linearity of time.

Extra Distance 1997 Electric motor, aluminum, rubber tracks, golf ball 20×20×8 cm

"Extra distance" are the words printed on a golf ball that is transported by a small vehicle, an allusion to "pathfinders" used on the Moon or Mars for scientific research. This is the first work in which the artist uses a motor, which moves through the corridors of the museum, remote controlled by the guardians.

#### Studio Matters 1994–2022

The Studio Matters are a series of small-scale works, each entirely different from the next, which Bartolini has produced occasionally and for many years in his studio and in absolute autonomy. Methodologically, they differ from the majority of works produced directly by the artist, from series that even last for many years (see Dews), or works created by outsourcing, i.e. by technicians and collaborators based on the artist's project. Although created as part of this occasional and small-scale production, the Studio Matters encapsulate some of the cardinal principles of the artist's production typical of other types of works. As is the case elsewhere, here the archive theme is important as these works are made up of materials that have been collected and stored, even for a long time. in the artist's studio. On the other hand, there is a recurrent theme of the combination, juxtaposition, and collage of apparently very different materials, which is also found in large works. The Studio Matters represent perhaps the most playful, personal and ironic aspect of Bartolini's practice, in which the distance between thought and time in the work seems to shorten in an almost childlike game, like small accidents facilitated by creativity and chance.

Dark Dark eyes (Studio Matters) 2014 Ceramic mug, postcard 15×9×8 cm

This work is part of a group of broken objects joined and separated again by an image-gap. In this case, a postcard of a Windrush (GB) demon separates and unites a Chinese rice bowl, as if the spirit were emerging from the bowl itself.

Dew 2020 Pearlised paint on aluminium, synthetic dew 100×100 cm

These works are part of a series that continues over the years with different variations on the same idea, as is often the case in the artist's works. Here, it is a series of paintings in which an aluminium base (the first examples were made of wood) is first covered with an iridescent, shimmering colour that instigates movement and then with an artificial emulsion that simulates dew. Although they may seem to be abstract forms. these works refer to one of the main themes in Bartolini's work: the natural landscape. As the title suggests, the "dews" can in fact be read as windows onto which dew has settled and from which a changing landscape can be seen, just as the colour of these paintings changes with the viewer's movement. At the same time, these works create tension between the two-dimensionality of the painting and the three-dimensionality of sculpture, between the background (the landscape) and the foreground (the dew), between movement and stasis.

#### Rooms 2—8

In Ià

2022
Aluminium pipes, clamps, egg tempera on wood, windchest, motors, toothed cylinder
Environmental dimension
Courtesy Centro per l'arte contemporanea
Luigi Pecci and the artist

This new monumental work, specially conceived for Centro Pecci, is the backbone of the entire exhibition. Attached to the technical grid that runs along the ceiling and houses the lighting system of these museum rooms, the artist has built a continuous wall of Innocenti pipes which winds through seven of the ten rooms of the original core of the Centro Pecci, dividing them in half and leaving it suspended a few centimetres above the ground. In Ià is the largest work created by the artist and the most ambitious evolution of a series of sound works in which (as of 2007) Innocenti pipes, usually used in building sites, are transformed into organ pipes and thereby into musical instruments. In this case, the musical composition was entrusted to the well-known musician Gavin Bryars (Goole, United Kingdom, 1943) who created a polyphonic score in which each melody corresponds to a different room. The composition thereby creates a layered soundscape that is always in motion depending on the times and ways in which viewers move through the space. As suggested by the title - which also alludes to the dominant key (A) of the piece – the music is always "beyond", in the future, never fully experienced by a single listener in its entirety.

Conveyance
2003
Painted stainless steel, engine, water, mud
Ø 265×40 cm
Private collection, Turin

As is often the case in the artist's practice, this work uses a type of furniture (here it is a seat) but it makes significant changes to it, often making these living elements mobile through the use of mechanical devices and the interaction of the viewer/ user. In this case, the initial minimalist form is innervated with the life and movement of a conical wave that continues to rise and fall. At the same time, this form is a place of encounter and contemplation for one or more people. In this as in other works, Bartolini isolates an object, a form or a natural phenomenon in order to observe it more carefully, as if it were a stage in a journey of knowledge. In this case, however, continuous observation of the phenomenon can lead to a trance state, where the supposed knowledge is transformed into a new and perhaps higher form of consciousness.

Conveyance, 2003



Untitled (And the Penny Drop) 1999–2022 Coin-counting machine, coins Environmental dimension

A coin-counting machine has been altered to drop 50 lire coins produced in 1999 and a few one penny coins from the ceiling. Through one of the many processes of transformation and metamorphosis that the artist also applies to the machine, what was once a counting mechanism now measures time: in the repetition of an apparently meaningless action, the coins become like sand in an hourglass. The idiomatic expression "and the penny dropped" can be translated as "having suddenly understood or realised": a play on words which the artist uses to highlight the epiphanic and surreal nature of the work. After all, here as elsewhere, for Bartolini the work of art is an instrument of awareness, a stage in a process of discovery and knowledge of the individual and the artist himself.

Cameo (Studio Matters) 2008-2012 Clay 19,5×16,5×3 cm

A fracture in a piece of dry clay becomes part of a portrait of a woman in profile.



Manca anima 2016 Neon 60×10×3 cm Private collection

"Manca anima" (lack of soul) is a phrase found among the grafitti on the walls of Palazzo Steri (Palermo) and rewritten in red neon. Victims of the Spanish Inquisition were detained in this palace, used as a prison. Here, as in other works by Bartolini, the political dimension, the observation of social injustice, is linked to attention to the existential and human dimension.

Wavelet 2020 Audio file 1'01"

This work consists of audio captured by a spectator at a concert of the renowned classical pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli while he was performing the Claude Debussy piece that gives the work its title. The impromptu recording contains the moment when the pianist interrupts the performance due to a sudden illness, and the applause of the audience that follows.

My Second Homage: to Cristina Campo (Studio Matters) 2001 Gold, alabaster, pearl

Earring 35×10 mm, glass 9×10 cm

In 2000 Bartolini started a series of works, mostly small in size, inspired by details of the work or biography of artists and friends to whom they are homages. The protagonist here is the writer Cristina Campo, whose book *Gli imperdonabili* (1987) is an avowed reference for the artist, and above all for the importance given to attention as the most legitimate form of imagination.

# Rooms 5—6 Door jambs

Shock Absorbent Drop (Studio Matters) 2011 Silicone Ø 1 cm

A drop of silicone is applied to a wall, as if to suggest a small bumper that, at the same time, resembles a tear or dewdrop. As is often the case in Bartolini's work, the simplest materials take on different meanings through forms of transformation into materials or, as in this case, through the capacity of the imagination which leads us to read an object, material or form in unexpected ways. It could be said that here, as in other works, the artist follows the principle of "incarnation" typical of the Catholic religion and its visual culture.

*In Ià* (detail), 2022 Photo © Margherita Villani







# Notes on the music for Massimo Bartolini's In Ià ("in there")

Massimo's installation consists of scaffolding which is transformed into organ bars. The scaffolding-organ runs through 7 rooms of the museum with a total of 36 pipes - 5 to each room. with 6 in one room (Room 3). None of the notes are duplicated. The range of these organ pipes covers three octaves, from the very lowest C to B natural (below middle C). The bottom octave consists of wooden pipes (stopped), the middle octave of metal pipes (stopped) and the top octave with open metal pipes. Stopped pipes are slightly softer than open ones, but in reality, wooden pipes are quite loud anyway.

The physical situation is such that the music as whole cannot be experienced in its entirety. A listener moves from room to room, travelling through different measures of music in sequence. The only vantage point from which one can experience the entire piece would be from a position high above the whole space, or from a flying drone. Interestingly, in musical terms, this is not unlike some experimental/conceptual works I made in the early 1970s where, in principle, it is impossible for a listener to ever experience the whole work and only the composer knows the totality.

At first sight the musical notation looks like an orchestral score where the top lines (Room 1) might be the flutes. Room 2 the bassoons, Room 3 the French horns and so on, down to the bottom line (Room 7) being the cellos and double basses. However, we have an unusual situation here, where the score differs from the normal practice and is more like a graph.

As in a traditional orchestral score, the notation designates two "directions" of sound. One we can call horizontal, where we move forward in time bar by bar, with bar 1 at the beginning and bar 12 being the last one. The other we can call vertical, which shows all the sounds – the seven rooms – happening at the same time so all seven rooms in each column would be heard together, and at the same dynamic level (but of course in different spaces).

With each room there are two lines of music with the lower line having the deepest notes. I have only used the lowest octave (indicated by the sign "8va") in rooms 1, 3, 5, and 7, so that those in between – rooms 2, 4, and 6 – would not be overwhelmed. If every bar had the lowest notes, then the sound would get very muddy, dense and uniform. And in each bar, there are gaps, allowing sounds from adjacent rooms, and even further perhaps, to be heard like echoes from each space.

30 years ago, James Lingwood from Artangel had set in motion a very different, though comparable, collaboration between sculptor and composer when Juan Muñoz and I worked on *A Man in a Room, Gambling*, and which resulted in a profound and lasting friendship. Given that it was James who also brought Massimo and I together for this project, it is already clear that the consequences will be the same.

Gavin Bryars Billesdon April 27, 2022

Hum
2012
Sound installation, engraving, one copy, on 12
inch vinyl, picture disc format, wall painting,
turntable, amplifier
Environmental dimensions

Many of Bartolini's works have a narrative matrix. They are constructed as stories, or originate from a fact or an episode, most often related to the life and career of other visual artists, musicians, writers, poets or philosophers. Some of these works can be read as homages to the obsessive talent and idiosyncrasies of these figures. In this case, the work's starting point is the famous classical pianist Glenn Gould who, at a certain point in his career, decided to abandon live concerts and instead sought greater performance precision only in the isolation of the recording studio. Bartolini asked the baritone Nicolas Isherwood to dub the pianist's typical murmur as he performed J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations, as if it were "a song from the depths, a music within another music" (Massimo Bartolini), Engraved on picture vinyl with an image of the god of the night and of sleep Jagannath, this recording is played in relation to three walls painted with colours that - according to synesthetic thought – correspond to G. Orange is given predominance as it is the colour that Gould himself, at the suggestion of his tuner Charles Verne Edquist, recognised as G. As in other works by Bartolini, an apparently insignificant matter such as a murmur is redeemed and brought to a "higher" state through the transformational power of the artistic language.

Pin on Nail (Studio Matters) 2013 Drawing pin, nail 8×1 cm

Another extreme example of the artist's capacity to work with insignificant and physically minimal elements in order to elevate them to exemplary value, often through the embodiment of a linguistic exercise. In this case, a drawing pin nails a nail, as if to literally create a further "point", a celebration of exactitude.

Practical tools such as nails and drawing pins hold nothing to the wall but themselves.

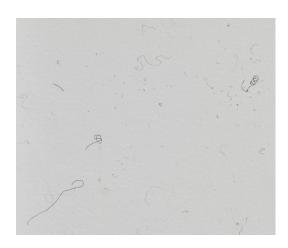




Dust Chaser
2016–2022
Pencil and ink on wall
Environmental dimensions

This installation, as monumental in size as it is visually elusive, stems from a series of drawings in which the artist reproduces life-size dust and hairs in pencil. Like other works on paper, this series is based on a slow and disciplined, almost meditative exercise, as if to expunge the artist's will. In this version for Centro Pecci, the motif of these drawings was applied directly onto the museum walls during a workshop Bartolini held with some students from the Florence Academy of Fine Arts: Viola Baroni, Jessica Brunelli, Martina Greco, Andri lacomelli, and Valentina Serio.

Dust Chaser (detail), 2016



Revolutionary Monk 2005 Iron, electric motor, wood, bronze 133×44×44 cm

This bronze statuette comes from an original mid-19th century teakwood statue from Burma. It depicts a monk in prayer, caught in the typical position – not perfectly symmetrical – of the Bodhisattva. This figure is the predestined Buddha who refuses enlightenment to continue teaching. In this sense the statuette, with its circular and perpetual motion, perhaps represents the symbol of an energy always spent on others. At the same time, this same, potentially dangerous movement may represent an action of social change.

Dew 2022 Pearlised paint on aluminium, synthetic dew 100×100 cm

Dew 2022 Pearlised paint on aluminium, synthetic dew 100×100 cm

Basement 2012 Cast bronze 75×264×289 cm Enea Righi Collection, Sacerno

Dew 2008 Pearlised paint on aluminium, synthetic dew 150×150 cm

Basement, 2012 Photo © Margherita Villani



Drawing of trees 2008 Ink on paper 200×300 cm

In the folds of a sheet of paper, previously and casually folded and unfolded, trees are drawn as they appear at that moment in the artist's garden. This work is part of a series that was started in 1995 and is still ongoing and, like other series of works on paper, it is based on a process that follows a set rules adhered to by the artist in order to achieve ever different results. In what appears to be a meditative practice, the different works record time through the organisation of the garden and changes in nature.

*Drawings of trees* (detail), 2003 Photo© Alessandro Zambianch



#### Performance

Double Shell
2001–2022
Hollowed out pearl (diameter 9mm), custodian
75×264×289 cm
MMK Collection, Frankfurt

Every Friday, Saturday, Sunday at varying times. For info www.centropecci.it

"Safeguarding is like creating", wrote the philosopher Martin Heidegger (Holzwege, 1950). Custodians, experienced men and women whose role is to protect and preserve, are featured in many of the artist's performance works. In this work, first performed in Pisa in 2001 and repeated on other occasions, a pearl has been hollowed out by removing the grain of sand concealed within it (the pearl starts off as an irritation around a grain of sand which then forms to protect the shell). A museum custodian holds this pure form in his fist and, when he wishes, he shows it to visitors. This hollowed-out pearl is, on the other hand, also a micro (im)possible space, preserved within the hand that fulfils the function of the shell which is a place of preservation within the macro space that is the museum.

Ouverture for Pietro 2006

In collaboration with Pietro Riparbelli Plastic box, light bulb, performer Lamp, microphone and stand, audio track 60×60×15 cm Giorgio Fasol Collection / AGI Verona

Execution calendar available on: www.centropecci.it

A plastic case contains a light bulb that is switched on, and when it reaches maximum brightness it explodes. The sound of the explosion is recorded, sampled and performed live in a composition by Pietro Riparbelli, on a schedule followed during the course of the exhibition. As in other works by Bartolini, a form of circular energy fulfils a transformational, metamorphic capacity when it creates new life from the termination of a previous life.

First movement
2016
Performance with Pietro Riparbelli
Active speakers, audio mixer, microphone

Exhinbition opening

An example of the various installation- and performance-based works that use music and sound as a fundamental element. As in other cases, here too Bartolini uses mechanical systems to construct interactive situations. The machinery is used here in the limitedness of its possibilities. An electrical generator powers all the electronic instruments and lights used for the concert. The sound of the same electrical generator becomes part of the music both directly and sampled, and manipulated live by Pietro Riparbelli. The performance lasts as long as the petrol to produce the electricity lasts.

#### Ballad for a Tree 2003–2022

Exhibition opening

Saxophonist Edoardo Marraffa, a long-time collaborator of the artist, performs a solo for a tree outside the Centro Pecci (15/9/2022 only). This performance, performed in different places and by different musicians on various occasions, is one of many examples of the artist's interest in nature. In what seems to be a homage to another living being, almost a serenade, the artist's ecological sensitivity and his trust in the tree's sensitivity, and in the possibility that it can listen to the sound produced by a strange bird, a human, can be perceived.

*Sallad for a Tree, 2008* Museum Serralves, Oporto Photo © Attilio Maranzano



# **Massimo Bartolini** Biography

Massimo Bartolini was born in Cecina (1962), where he lives and works. He studied as a surveyor in Livorno (1976–1981) and graduated from the Accademia di Firenze (1989). He teaches visual arts at UNIBZ Bolzano, NABA (Nuova Accedemia di Belle Arti. Milan) and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Bologna. Also following his experiences in the world of theatre. Massimo Bartolini's first works were performances involving live music, theatre machinery and dancers. Thereafter he devoted himself separately to installation and performance, thereby isolating the actors from the theatrical machinery and the stage in order to create a space that directly alters the viewers' perceptions also through an architectural narrative. Bartolini's typical attitude is one of extreme openness across mediums, which he uses and reinvents in unorthodox wavs. He uses an extraordinary variety of languages and materials: from performance works involving temporary actors, the public or the architectural space, to drawings produced over deliberately long periods of time; from large public installations often created with the collaboration of other hands and knowledge, to small sketch-works assembled in the studio; from complex sound sculptures to photographs and videos. Bartolini is one of the most internationally-known Italian artists. Since 1993. he has exhibited in numerous solo and collective exhibitions in Italy and abroad. Solo exhibitions include: Senza titolo & Artra (Milan, 1993), Giò Marconi (Milan, 1995), Henry Moore Foundation (Leeds, 1996), British School at Rome (Rome 1997, with Martin Creed), Casa Masaccio (San Giovanni Valdarno, 1998), PS1 (New York, 2001), Museum Abteiberg (Mönchengladbach,

2003). Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci (Prato, 2003), GAM (Turin, 2004), Museu Serralves (Porto, 2007), CaixaForum (Barcelona, 2007), Ikon Gallery (Birmingham, 2007), Museion (Bolzano, 2010. Con Stefano Arienti), Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu (Torun, Poland, 2011), Auditorium Arte (Rome, 2012), MARCO (Vigo, Spain, 2012), The Fruitmarket Gallery (Edinburgh, 2013), SMAK (Ghent, 2013), Museo Marino Marini (Florence, 2015), Fondazione Merz (Turin, 2017), Palazzo Oneto (Palermo, 2018. Evento collaterale Manifesta 12), CSAC (Parma, 2020), He has also held several solo exhibitions in the galleries that currently represent him: Massimo De Carlo, Milan (since 1997), Frith Street, London (since 2002) and Magazzino. Rome (since 2002). The most important collective exhibitions include: Campo 95 (Corderie dell'Arsenale, Venice, 1995), Fuori Uso (Pescara, 1996), Stanze e segreti, (Rotonda della Besana, Milan, 2000), Ecstasy: In and About Altered States (Moca, Los Angeles, 2005), Track (Ghent, 2012), One on One (Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2012), Le Futur derrièr nous (Villa Arson, 2022). He has participated in the Venice Biennale (1999, 2001 (side event), 2009, 2013), Valencia Biennale (2001). Manifesta 4 (Frankfurt, 2002). San Paolo Biennale (2004), Pontevedera Biennale (2004), Shangai Biennale (2006 and 2012). International Triennale of Contemporary Art (Yokohama, 2011), Documenta 13 (Kassel, 2012), Etchigo Tsumari Tiennal (Tokamachi, Japan, 2012), Kathmandu Triennale (Nepal. 2017). Pune Biennale. (India. 2017). Yinchuam Biennale

(China, 2018), Bangkok Biennale (2020),

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