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CLIMATE CHANGE

LUCE, TERRA, OMBRA

Light, Earth, Shadow – and Everything That Remains

Odile Smith

Milan Design Week does something to you. Day one, you are sharp, present, absorbing. By day three, something inside begins to numb. Not from boredom – from the opposite. From the relentless accumulation of beauty, scale, ideas, and spectacle. Installation after installation, each more breathtaking and more temporary than the last. Buildings transformed for a week. Rooms dressed to astonish, then dismantled. The city as a stage that resets every twelve months.

It was in this state – slightly dazed, deeply stimulated, and honestly a little overwhelmed – that we turned off Via Guido d'Arezzo and stepped into the gallery of Pollice Illuminazione.

The shift was immediate. Not because it was quiet – though it was quieter. Not because it was empty – though it breathed. It was something else. A quality in the air, something almost imperceptible, that made you slow down without being asked to. The walls were the colour of earth at dusk: terracotta and shadow, ochre and pale clay. They were not painted. They were not rendered. They were raw earth – argilla, terra cruda – applied directly to every wall surface. And the light, designed with characteristic precision by Pollice Illuminazione, moved across them as though they were alive. Which, in a very real sense, they are.

We had arrived, without knowing quite what to expect, at Terra Migaki Design 2026.

“Not to build something extraordinary for a week. But to give form to a place meant to last.”



A Place, Not an Event

Terra Migaki Design 2026 – held at the Pollice Illuminazione and TPF Projects space on Via Guido d'Arezzo 11/a from 21-26 April – builds on an ongoing programme of research, dialogue and experimentation around design and light already active within the venue.

With the intention of further developing the relationship between material, light and wellbeing, Pollice Illuminazione (Marco Pollice and) TPF Projects (Vittoria Tamanini Pozzi and Giulia Fontana Gilardoni) invited ANAB (Associazione Nazionale Architettura Bioecologica) and the Terra Migaki Design collective to interpret and implement this year's vision. Working together with Arch. Sergio Sabadini (ANAB), The exhibition, titled *Luce, Terra, Ombra* (Light, Earth, Shadow), brought together a selection of artists and makers working with natural materials to give form to this conceptual framework.

What Raw Earth Actually Is – and What It Does

Terra cruda. It sounds ancient – and it is. Raw earth has been used in construction for millennia, across every climate and culture on earth. But the TMD 2026 project, in collaboration with ANAB – the national association for bioecological architecture, demonstrated something essential: that this most ancient of materials is, right now, among the most forward-looking.

But what made this edition different from any temporary exhibition was a decision made long before the first visitor arrived, to genuinely transform the space.

To take the energy that Design Week generates – the attention, the conversations, the momentum – and rather than let it evaporate on Sunday evening, embed it permanently into the walls.

An invitation to explore emerging approaches to materials and the broader cultural discourse connected to sustainability, natural surfaces and bio-based materials. To dive deeper into the dialogue between these materials and light, which is such an - important aspect within this space.

The earth plaster remains, the space will continue to live, to breath, to grow

In a week defined by the temporary, this was a quiet revolutionary act.

Raw earth plaster is a mixture of clay, sand, and sometimes fibres – straw, hemp – specific formulations developed for this project in collaboration with Bericalce. It is, first and foremost, hygroscopic: it absorbs and releases moisture from the air, actively regulating the humidity and microclimate of the space it inhabits.



It does not off-gas. It carries no volatile organic compounds. It accumulates heat slowly and releases it gradually, stabilising temperature fluctuations. It performs acoustically. And because it is never fired – no kiln, no high-temperature process – its embodied energy is extraordinarily low, its environmental impact minimal.

Perhaps most remarkably: it is fully reversible. Remove it from the wall. Re-mix it with water. Use it again. A material that is both genuinely ancient and genuinely sustainable is rarer than we might think.

And then there is the matter of light. Raw earth surfaces do not reflect light in the way that paint or plaster does. They absorb it and give it back transformed – warmer, deeper, with a quality of depth that shifts across the hours. No wall of raw earth is ever quite the same as another. Like a leaf, like a face, it carries the logic of natural variation. The title of this edition was not metaphor. Light, earth, and shadow were its three protagonists – present, active, and changing from morning to evening throughout the entire six days.



“No wall of raw earth is ever quite the same as another – like a leaf, it carries the logic of natural variation.”

Ten Artists, One Material, Infinite Conversations

What made “Luce, Terra, Ombra” extraordinary was not just the choice of material, it was what happened when ten artists, each with a radically different practice, were asked to work directly onto the architectural surfaces. Not to hang work on walls, but to make the walls the work. The result was a stratification: a layering of voices, techniques, and intentions that accumulated across the space and deepened with time.

Massimo Chiappetta – “Il Muro è Silenzio” to the window through which natural light enters and the street is brought into dialogue with the exhibition. Earth and sky form the plastic and spatial essence of the symbolism of the wall.

The sculptor created two island walls – connected, concave and convex – of raw earth that animate the journey through the room, leading ultimately



Silvia Moro – “L’Origine – Hortus Animae” hand-painted hemp fabric panels made with Stamperia Bertozzi and Danzotex. Working with the ancient techniques of printing and the use of rust, she produced what she calls a sky of wind and earth.

Hortus Animae – a garden of the soul – Moro decorated the walls prepared with raw earth surfaces developed by Arch. Sabbadini with Bericalce, alongside



of compacted earth tiles: a more controlled and efficient process that reduces installation costs and time without sacrificing the properties of the natural material. Raw earth, reclaimed.



caught in the frenetic use we make of them, become silent, waiting presences — a fossilisation of time in which things are in constant movement.





Kristina Cella – *“Held Within”*
Beginning from a primary gesture – hands joined to form a cavity, an interior space, a centre – Cella builds

forms that develop into vessels. The hands become measure and origin. The void becomes an active place capable of holding space, form, and time.



Irene Finocchiaro – *“Vessels”*
Exploring the relationship between body, cavity, and containment, Finocchiaro transforms earth into

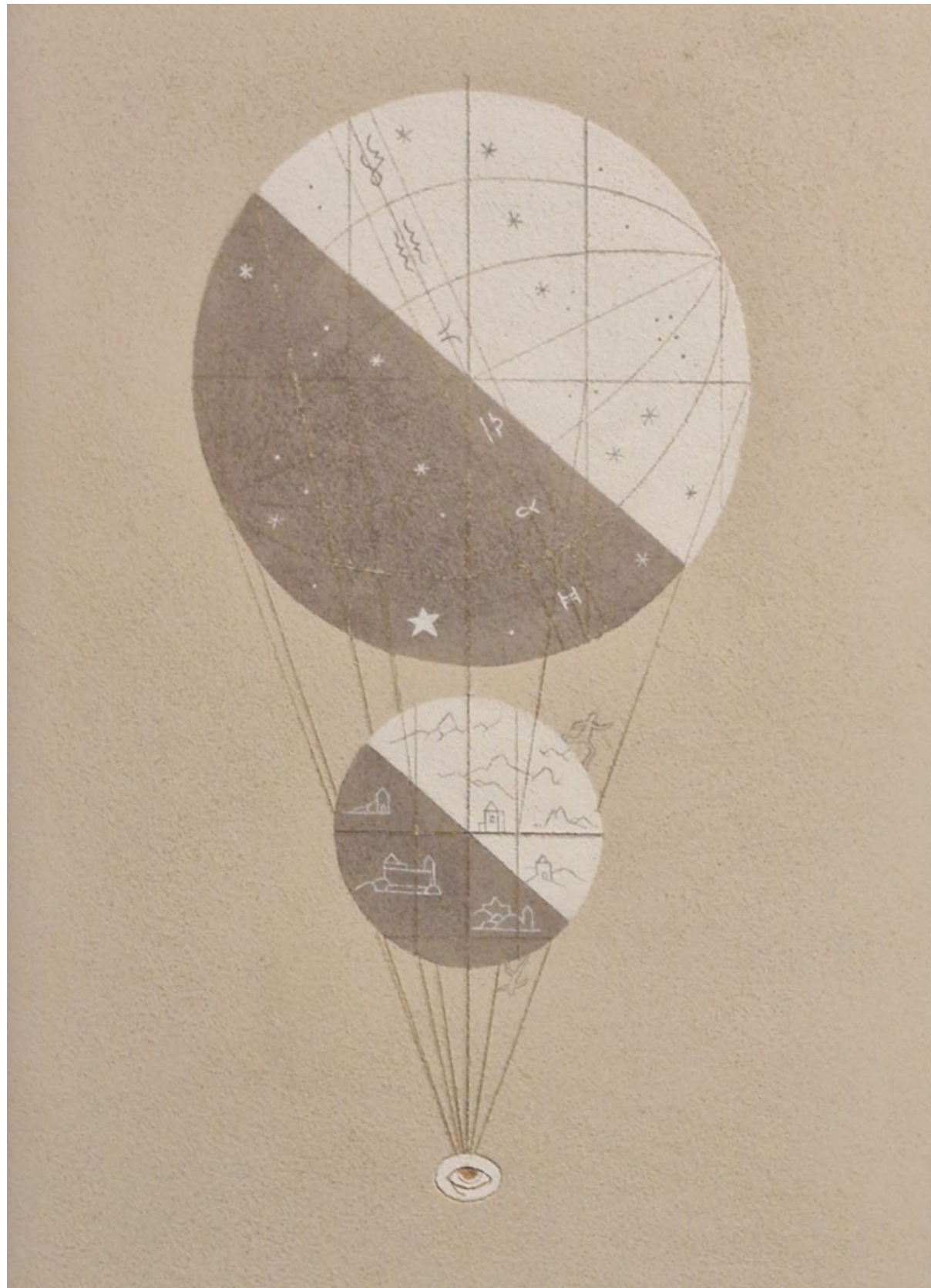
organic forms that recall what is normally hidden – the viscera, brought outside the body. The vessel takes on a biological and sacred dimension simultaneously.



Claudia Mendini – “Cosmographiae”

Working the relationship between light, shadow, time, and the cosmos, Mendini uses the ancient technique of sgraffito directly on the wall,

reproducing an image from the treatise by Martinus Cellarius. Raw earth returned to a cosmological dimension: humanity has interpreted its relationship with the cosmos since its earliest days.



Beatrice Loda (les.mural) – “Respirare”

Interpreting raw earth as a sensitive surface, Loda works through sgraffito – a process that demands slowness,

incision, and gradations visible only through light. She translates the texture of the Persian carpet into the surface of the earth. Breathing, in the most literal material sense.



Iwo Soczewka – *“Out of Khthôn”*

Investigating the chthonic dimension of earth – what belongs to the subsoil, to what lies beneath the visible surface –

Soczewka builds surfaces from layers in subtle ochre, grey, and iron-rich tones, then partially excavates, scratches, and erodes them to reveal the strata beneath. A slow archaeology of matter.

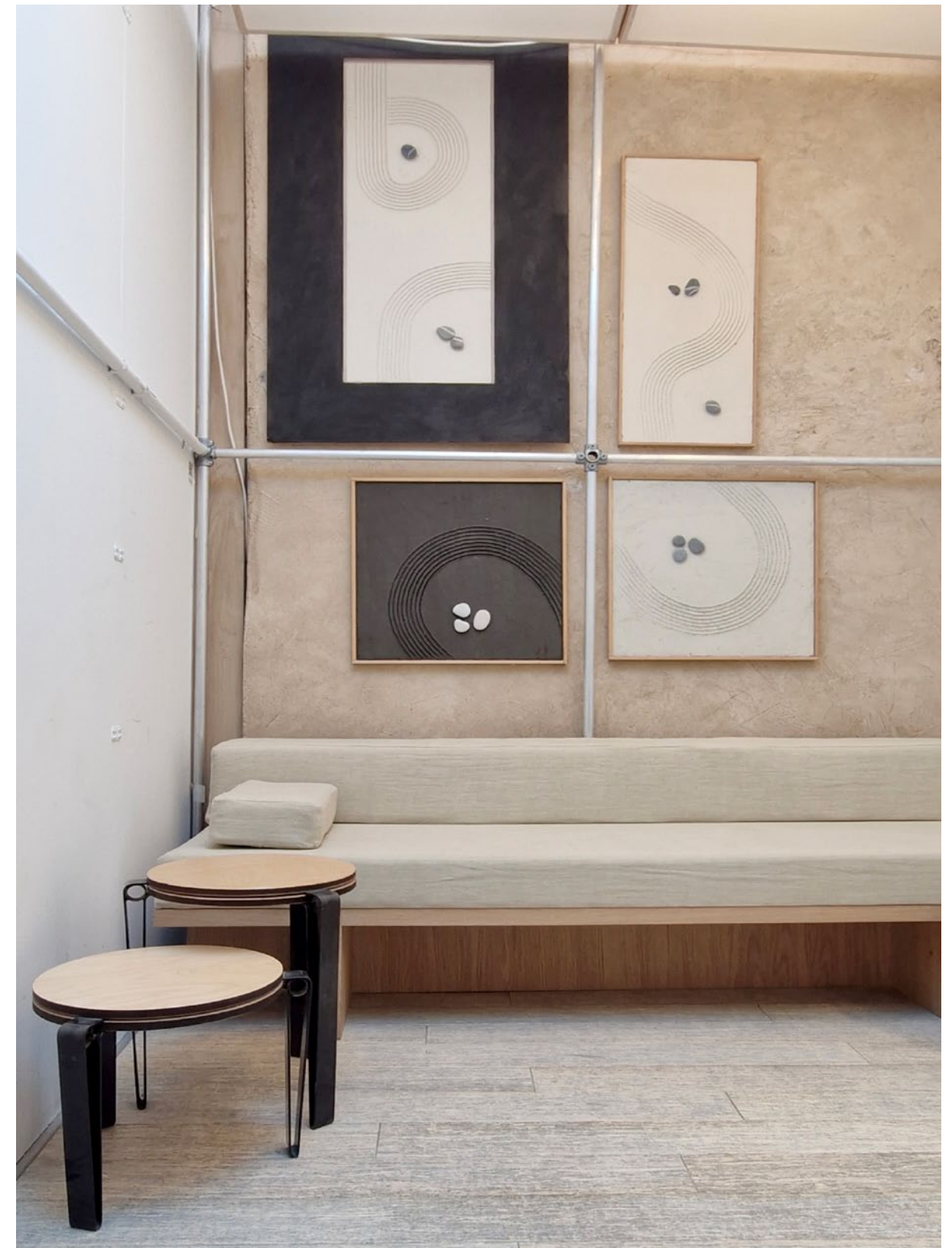


Massimo Maffi – *“Giardini Zen / Fasi Lunari”*

Panels born from the essential gesture of working earth as a living matter, charged with time and memory. Maffi seeks equilibrium between mark and void, presence and silence. Earth as

meditative surface, capable of holding time, memory, and stillness.

An entire room space created together with Arch Sergio Sabbadini, “Clever light” of Pollice illuminazione and flooring by Hempwood.





**A Threshold Room:
Where Earth Becomes Life**

To move through the space at Via Guido d'Arezzo was not simply to walk from room to room. It was to pass through a sequence – a deliberate choreography of material, light, and meaning.

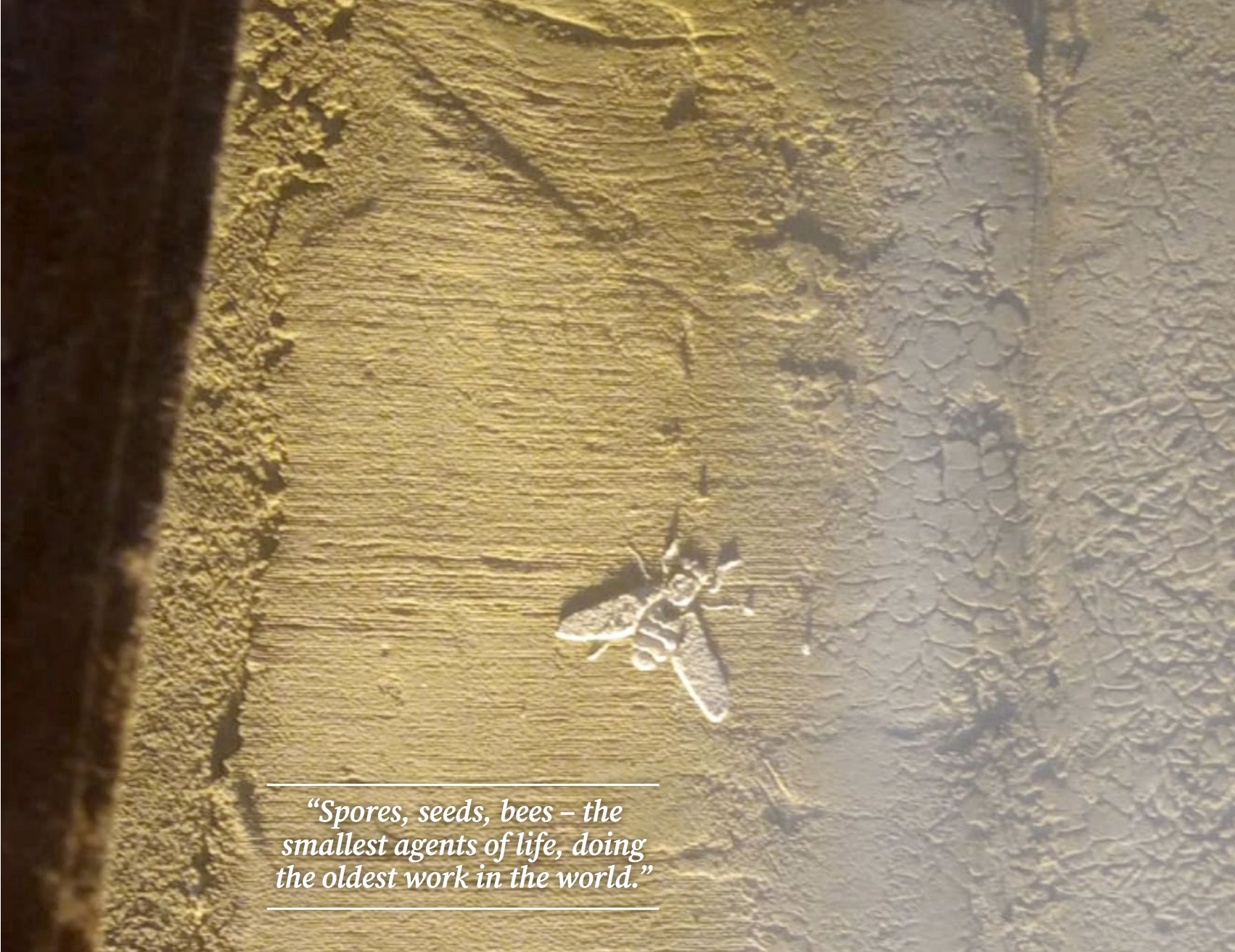
The second room was concerned with something different: with life in the act of becoming. With the invisible systems that sustain existence. Here Silvia Moro populated the surfaces with imagery drawn from the generative logic of the natural world: spores drifting through space, the geometry of seeds, the essential presence of bees – those small architects of ecological continuity whose work underpins so much of what we eat, grow, and inhabit.

It was not decoration. It was a vocabulary. Each motif carried the weight of biological reality: spores as the first act of propagation, seeds as the

encoded promise of future form, bees as the living thread between plant and fruit, between solitude and community, between what exists and what comes next. To quote the artist “ a joyful dance of living beings”.

Together they formed a visual language that was both scientifically grounded and deeply felt – a threshold space, transitional by design, preparing the visitor for what awaited beyond.

Because beyond that room was the area dedicated to biophilic design. And the passage through Silvia Moro's living imagery was not accidental – it was an initiation. A reminder, delivered through spore and seed and wing, that biophilic design is not about aesthetics. It is about our fundamental connection to living systems. And that connection, the room seemed to say, begins at the cellular level: with the smallest agents of life, doing the oldest work in the world.



The Biophilic Design Space – Roots, Research, and Human Wellbeing

Just beyond this explosion of life was a space where the Journal of Biophilic Design hosted its talk.

A space to softly introduce the Journal's work, its editorial mission, and its growing community to an audience of architects, designers, researchers, and practitioners who filled the room and stayed long after the programme had ended.



A space shared with Malara Associati whose commitment to the principles of Biophilia are clearly outlined in their book and whose contribution to the coming to life of this project was fundamental.



A Week of Living Ideas – The Full Programme

The curatorial thinking that shaped the walls also shaped the week. Every event in the programme was designed not to produce content for the moment, but to plant conversations that would continue long after Design Week had dispersed.

Stefano Casciani in dialogue with Mario Cucinella and Mario Ermoli – an evening examining sustainability and the image of architecture in the age of artificial intelligence. What does it mean to represent natural materials honestly when AI is reshaping how we see and communicate design?

Live performance by Veronika Koprivica – music in the earth-covered space, testing how raw earth absorbs and returns sound as it had been absorbing and returning light all week.

Biophilic Design in workspaces hosted by the Journal of Biophilic Design – with Lucilla Malara and Donatella Mongera (Malara Associati), Elisabetta Tonali (Materia Vera), and lighting designer Martina Frattura. What does biophilic design look like not on paper, but in a budget-constrained office in central Milan?

Professional seminar with the Ordine degli Architetti di Brescia and the Ordine degli Agronomi di Milano – 4 CPD credits, addressing raw earth as a practical building material: its behaviour, applications, and relationships with light, colour, and space.

“Il Risveglio della Terra” – Sunday 26 April, 9am. An hour of meditation and live music curated by Sahaja Yoga Milano, with harmonium and tabla, in the earth-plastered space in the early morning light. Slow. Deliberate. Attentive to the body as well as the eye.

An extensive week not only of talks and seminars but also a great place to meet, talk and laugh.



**45 people • 5 organising bodies • 16 partners
12 technical sponsors • 1 media partner**

That is not a niche project.
It is a movement gathering density.

One Drop, Many Ripples – and They Are Still Moving

It would be tempting, in writing about a Design Week installation, to use the past tense throughout. But that would misrepresent what was built at Via Guido d'Arezzo.

The walls are still there. The earth plaster still breathes. The studio that was transformed during Fuorisalone continues to function – as a place of research, of conversation, of material experiment – week after week, through the months that no design press will photograph or cover.

What we witnessed at Terra Migaki Design 2026 was not an event with

a closing date. It was the moment a drop hit the water – and the ripples are still expanding. Forty-five people, from entirely different disciplines and backgrounds, converged around a single shared conviction: that the way we build and inhabit space has direct consequences for human wellbeing; that natural materials are not nostalgic but necessary; and that the most radical act in a week of spectacle is to do something that lasts.

Architects. Artists. Craftspeople. Lighting designers. Agronomists. Researchers. Institutions. Not waiting for the mainstream to catch up. Already building, already teaching, already transforming the surfaces of the spaces we inhabit.

***“Fuorisalone gave them a moment of visibility.
What they have built will outlast it.”***



Biophilic design is hitting mainstream media but could risk becoming just a visual language rather than a design conviction, where nature appears

as backdrop rather than system. This project stands as evidence of something different. Something growing. Something real.

A Note from the Journal

We were honoured to be a media partner and active contributor to Terra Migaki Design 2026 – and to make our debut in the Italian market in a space that so perfectly embodied our values: raw, honest, grounded in the living world, and built to last.

The conversations grounded in shared values, begun in that clay-walled room

in April – with Malara Associati, Pollice Illuminazione and TPF projects, then with the architects and designers who filled the biophilic space, with the artists whose work now permanently inhabits those walls – are ones we intend to continue, develop, and deepen throughout the year. And beyond.

This is the space to watch in Milan. We will be watching it closely – and we will be back.

Stay with us ... there is much more to come

Odile Smith is Commercial and Sourcing Director for the Journal of Biophilic Design. Odile has the greatest Black Book in Biophilic Design there is. Please reach out to her directly with enquiries about designing, sourcing and specifying with Biophilic principles.

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