

THE WAY TO OBSCURITAS

Silvia Morandi's Journeys into and around Paper

Obscuritas is the black tip of an iceberg. Like an iceberg, it is primarily white, and it moves almost imperceptibly, yet constantly. Its movement is not only horizontal; it takes place at the molecular level, permeating every microscopic fold of the form. The iceberg itself transforms ceaselessly, mingling with other elements that are no less mutable and vulnerable to global change: atmosphere and seawater. The inside and outside of the iceberg are distinct, and yet metamorphosis reigns universally.

Through the metaphor of the iceberg, a specific line of artistic research undertaken by Silvia Morandi from 2020 to the present can be introduced. The roots of Morandi's process lie deep in physical existence, beginning with the color white. Its parallel protagonists are the human body and paper, a dynamic and precisely white material that has linked nature and humanity since the first century AD. Within the iceberg metaphor, one must admit that the color black is unexpected, but it asserts its right to exist when the color white plays a key role. Opposites (and everything in between) are crucial for metamorphosis. At its core, the working process from which *Obscuritas* emerged draws from driving forces of change—dynamics that affect the material world and human beings as the meeting points of body and psyche, as well as all living beings.

The latest phase of Silvia Morandi's research began in the spring of 2020, a dark time for humanity, when the earth experienced temporary liberation from oppression on one hand and the tragic retreat of its all-too-arrogant inhabitants on the other. Starting from this "zero point" of human existence, and from the radically new experience of our era, the video performance *White Zero* examines the most intimate interaction between the body and white paper.

A paper dress, hand-sewn by the artist, becomes the protagonist. The setting is a completely empty and equally white room in her apartment. No traditional division of roles between the human body and dress can be recognized here; both act as inextricably bonded primary elements. The agitation of this inseparable unit is constant, but often imperceptible. It shows no predetermined direction: not even a distinct beginning or end. The unique human-paper assemblage eludes any fixed form. It is exposed to vibrations. There is action everywhere, even where there is the appearance of calm.

If we accept that the human body remains hidden here, almost entirely merged with the white paper, then the crease comes into focus as the driving force. As Gilles Deleuze explained, the fold acts as the epicenter of all phenomena. The fold embodies and reflects not a substance or element,

but a transformation—the processes, the events, and the constant metamorphosis to which all matter is subject. Folding and unfolding can produce unpredictable results and new connections, as a fold creates the sudden juxtaposition of formerly opposite points.

The fold is therefore not only inherent in paper, but also in the body itself: in everything that happens in the body at its points of contact. *White Zero* thus forms a network of microscopic events, of barely visible collisions, catastrophes, and rebirths. They do not involve paper and the body separately, but take place in the liminal space that connects paper to the intimate shocks to which the performer is exposed.

In this way, Silvia Morandi actively engages with the forced or self-induced isolation and emotional and social alienation of today's society. In answer to these conditions, she offers the prospect of reconnection with the forces of the earth, so long as we look beyond dichotomies of human and matter and recognize the human as a knot among knots in a web of relationships—a network of chemical and emotional processes in dialogue with creation.

White Zero is a kind of ground zero of performative art itself: the performer avoids any direct manipulation of the paper. She does not claim it. She never opposes or faces it. Our bodies become the receptors of everything that happens inside and outside of us—including great upheavals in a difficult era. The body and paper encompass this reality; from this their relationship materializes. Silvia Morandi has continued her research in this direction from 2021 to the present, unfolding new hybridizations of body and matter, always inspired by the expansion of human identity and the relationship to other life forms.

The project *Anima Condivisa* (Palais Mamma Museum Meran, in collaboration with director Alexandra Kaufmann, curated by Miroslava Hajek, September 2021) is the photographic rendition of the coexistence and mutual discovery of the artist and a rescued swallow, fallen from its nest one month too soon and unable to fly. Alexandra Kaufmann's photography reveals what happens in their physical, immediate proximity. The body becomes the site of this simultaneously earthbound and spiritual encounter, reflecting the mysterious interrelation of humanity and the cosmos.

This performative research has no time limits. It draws from the relationship and its smallest developments, including moments of everyday care and pauses, playful provocations, and tender connections. Human and swallow build mutual trust, communicate and act together, and live in increasing symbiosis before saying goodbye. They become participants in a natural choreography.

The performances *Charta* (Around the Corner Festival, Berlin Moabit, August 2022) and *Border* (Basis, Social Activation Hub Schlanders, September 2022) give new momentum to Morandi's research on white paper and introduce a

collaboration with the Polish dress designer Krystian Filip. In *Charta*, the paper dress designed by Filip becomes a contact element between body, air, and the architecture of a metallic outdoor staircase. Conceived as a multi-layered confluence of membranes rather than a real dress, this work opens the relationship between performer and paper to the outside world. The cavities and the sturdy parapets of the stairwell are resonating bodies for new interactions, sudden tensions and states of transition. The body is now exposed through the paper and beyond, but the solidity of the material, together with its lightness and transparency, still remains an epicenter—a kind of light diffuser—of the whole event.

In *Border*, the interaction of the performer and the same dress is transported to the interior of an old barracks. The action takes place between time-worn walls and a glass barrier that separates the building from the outdoors. Spectators follow the artist first from outside and then from inside, sometimes experiencing her presence through glass reflections and sometimes directly. The performer sways in a spacious hall, concealed at times by sturdy walls. Layers of the dress can be added and removed. The movements sometimes approach dance, but never break the link between human and paper.

Thus the path is paved for *Obscuritas*, and for the work phase begun in 2022 as part of Silvia Morandi's artistic residency at Scope BLN. Here the color black emerges, following the variations on white and its interactions with the performer's body in different spaces. This opposite point on the color spectrum does not remain abstract. It is embodied again in paper as a creative partner and connecting element in a wider environment. Collaboration with other artists is expanded, and the border between performance and other areas of research is further explored. A new, original paper construction by Krystian Filip and a sound installation by the Italian composer and sound-art performer Massimiliano Cerioni come into play.

In the Basement of Scope BLN, *White Zero* is shown for the first time as the starting point and foundation of Silvia Morandi's line of research. The video work is supplemented with photographic fragments—stills from the film, revealed in all their technical imperfection. They act as folds among a potentially infinite array of other folds.

— Michele Fucich

English translation from original German text by Molly Haig

Obscuritas Credits

Curated by: Michele Fucich

Concept and artistic direction: Silvia Morandi
and collaborators

Live performance: Silvia Morandi

Costume design: Krystian Filip in collaboration
with Silvia Morandi

Sound installation: Massimiliano Cerioni

Photo and video documentation: Kaya Neutzer

ARTIST NOTES

White Zero: The Rustle of Nothing

In *White Zero*, Silvia Morandi creates a dress by hand, sewing together thin sheets of white paper. The sculptural membrane evokes the realm of insects while also calling to mind a uniform from the medical field. It renders visible the relationship between the solid wall and the internal movements of the body.

Through progressive accumulation and dissolution of layers, the three-dimensional rotation of this envelope-like assemblage amplifies the intimate perception of the body and underlines the hybridization of the elements.

The range of motion is limited to a corner of the empty room. The incrementally evolving forms and the rustling of paper become a visual and auditory intervention, mingling with the sense of danger and risk perceived outside the sealed room.

The performance was first realized on May 2nd, 2020, during the lockdown red zone. It was presented for the first time on the digital streaming platform for Free Performance Art Festival in collaboration with Artperforming Festival (Rome), curated by Kyrahm Kessa and Gianni Nappa. In December 2020, during the second period of Italy's lockdown red zone, Morandi created a second video performance of *White Zero* in the same room.

About the Sound

Massimiliano Cerioni recommended the use of Luc Ferrari's acousmatic work *Presque Rien avec Filles* (1989) to accompany the *White Zero* video. Ferrari compared his piece to an impressionist painting of girls having a breakfast on the grass, a scene which evokes the same intimacy experienced in *White Zero*. The combination of Ferrari and Morandi's works builds a synesthetic contrast between the solitude of the visuals, and the outdoor, communal sensation of the sound. It also creates a consonance between the white lighting and the sharp environmental noises coming from a field recording, combined here and there with fragments of female voices.

Obscuritas' sound contrasts that of *White Zero*, underscoring the yin-and-yang perception of opposite colors. While *White Zero* is confined—existing in a dark basement—*Obscuritas* is easily visible through a large gallery window at street level. *Obscuritas'* sound is intentionally more dramatic; it describes the encounter with black paper in darkness. Its form is a cyclical breath that starts as a thread, thickens, almost screams, rains, and then releases itself. Some elements of the sound result from heavily processed male humpback whale's song. These animals are capable of diving in apnea to ocean depths where there is no light, and yet sound can still be heard.