

VELASCO VITALI



© Gianni Mania

Journal #9 presents *Hand Gestures*, a film by Francesco Clerici.

The film follows the process of creating one of artist Velasco Vitali's sculptures, from wax to bronze, at the Fonderia Artistica Battaglia in Milan. It observes a team of skilled artisans working in a century-old foundry, unveiling a technical culture—the tradition of lost-wax casting—that dates back to the 6th century B.C. Past and present mingle in a hypnotic space of gestures and sounds.

Italian sculptor Giacomo Manzù once said that sculpture is "a gesture of the hands, a gesture of love." This film is a cinematic transposition of that phrase and, at the same time, a tribute to manual labor, collaboration, and cinema as a form of visual storytelling.



HAND GESTURES

Francesco Clerici
Italy, 2015, 77'

IN DIALOGUE WITH THE DIRECTOR

Why did you choose to make documentaries?

Francesco Clerici*: I like to play with reality and the narrative of reality, experimenting with what one discovers in life rather than inventing stories. I aim to find precious aspects of people, places, traditions, or processes to preserve their intangible heritage made of sounds, images, voices, and rhythms.

How did this documentary come about?

FC: It began with my work with Velasco Vitali and witnessing the wonder of his artistic creations every day for many years. The moment this idea was brought to life through the artisans of the Battaglia artistic foundry, in the process of lost-wax casting, I was there as a witness. I felt like the first spectator of something hypnotically fascinating, and I wanted everyone to see and experience it with the same sense of wonder and fascination with which I was experiencing it.

A moment in the process that you are particularly fond of?

FC: I couldn't pick just one. But perhaps seeing the film at the Beltrade cinema in Milan and hearing Luigi (ed. specialized worker at Fonderia Battaglia) say, "But why are these spectators watching us work the way we do every day? What is special?"

The documentary you wish you had made?

FC: Maybe *The Secret* of Cyop and Kaf (Italy, 2013). But honestly, I'm glad that others made the documentaries I love precisely because they made them the way they did. I often wish I could re-edit a documentary I didn't like and do it my way—that's the one I would have wanted to make.

Your documentary in the drawer?

FC: It depends on which drawer I open.

*FRANCESCO CLERICI Director

A graduate in Art History and Criticism from the State University of Milan, Francesco Clerici has collaborated since 2009 with CICAÉ (Confédération Internationale des Cinémas d'Art et d'Essai). He teaches Theories and Practices of Art Documentary at the University of Milan and holds courses for Italian universities and institutes (IULM, Raffles Milano, University of Roma Tre, Bicocca).

He collaborated with artist Velasco Vitali from 2009 to 2019 and, since 2018, with the National Museum of Science and Technology "Leonardo da Vinci" in Milan. His work is primarily dedicated to documenting intangible heritage and technical-scientific craft processes. His first feature-length documentary, *Hand Gestures*, was presented at the 2015 Berlin Film Festival in the FORUM section, where it won the FIPRESCI International Critics Award.

Since 2018, he has made a series of "documentary portraits" of personalities such as Gillo Dorfles, Enrico Cattaneo, Giancarlo Vitali, and Michele De Lucchi.

His works—ranging from augmented reality projects to short films, experimental films, and documentaries—have been presented at festivals around the world (London Film Festival, Viennale, RIDM Montreal, Sarajevo Film Festival, and many others), as well as at venues including the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the British Film Institute in London, the Irish Film Institute in Dublin, Cineteca Mexicana in Mexico City, Busan Film Center, Moscow Documentary Film Center, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Barbican, MART in Rovereto, MAXXI in Rome, and Palazzo Reale in Milan.

In 2018, the Grenoble Film Library dedicated a retrospective to his work.

His latest documentary films include *La Paz del Futuro* (co-directed with Luca Previtali) and *Enrico Cattaneo. White Noise* (co-directed with Ruggero Gabbai), both of which were presented at the Rome Film Festival in 2022. His experimental short *Even Tide* won the special jury prize at the Turin Film Festival in 2023. The short *The Ice Builders*, co-directed with Tommaso Barbaro and shot in the Himalayas, was presented at the 72nd Trento Film Festival in 2024, where it won two awards.