



Nature, Art &
H a b i t a t
Residency
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Crystalline Dialogues :
*Fossils, Cheese, and Other Forms
of Transformation*

Shengqi Kong
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Sensing Minerals & Cheese

From Ore to Cheese: Intuition and Transformation

I approach sculpture intuitively, my desire often begins with the wish to become something else, to experience the world from within another form.

In this project, the earliest spark came from an intuitive link between minerals and cheese, both shaped by time, touch into transformation.

When I saw diagrams of mineral cycles, they looked like maps of an amusement park, strange loops of transformation. They made me want to become a mineral and go on an adventure. And I wanted to become cheese, to understand how milk becomes rind.

From zinc casting molds to the textured rinds of Taleggio, I sensed crystallization as a shared logic between geology and fermentation.



Material Gestures

Carving, Casting, and the Touch of Time

Instead of beginning with research, I start by sensing through my hands, letting materials guide the process.

At the Museo della Valle, I saw images of fossils, natural molds formed not by design, but by the solidification of real life. This resonated with a longstanding feeling I have: wooden figures often feel like they could become human, while stone ones seem like real beings trapped and sealed. It's the difference between Pinocchio and Medusa, between becoming and being fixed in transformation.





At NAHR, I attempted to carve the stones, but quickly realized that their material wasn't suited to being shaped by human will.

Some had already hosted small snails or natural marks. I felt that carving into their surface, rather than forcing new forms was more in harmony with their nature. So I began carving forms inspired by the plants and animals I observed here, or hybrids of the two, into the stone walls of the residency garden.



These shapes were then pressed into clay — itself a mineral shaped by water and time, capturing tactile memory like fossil imprints.

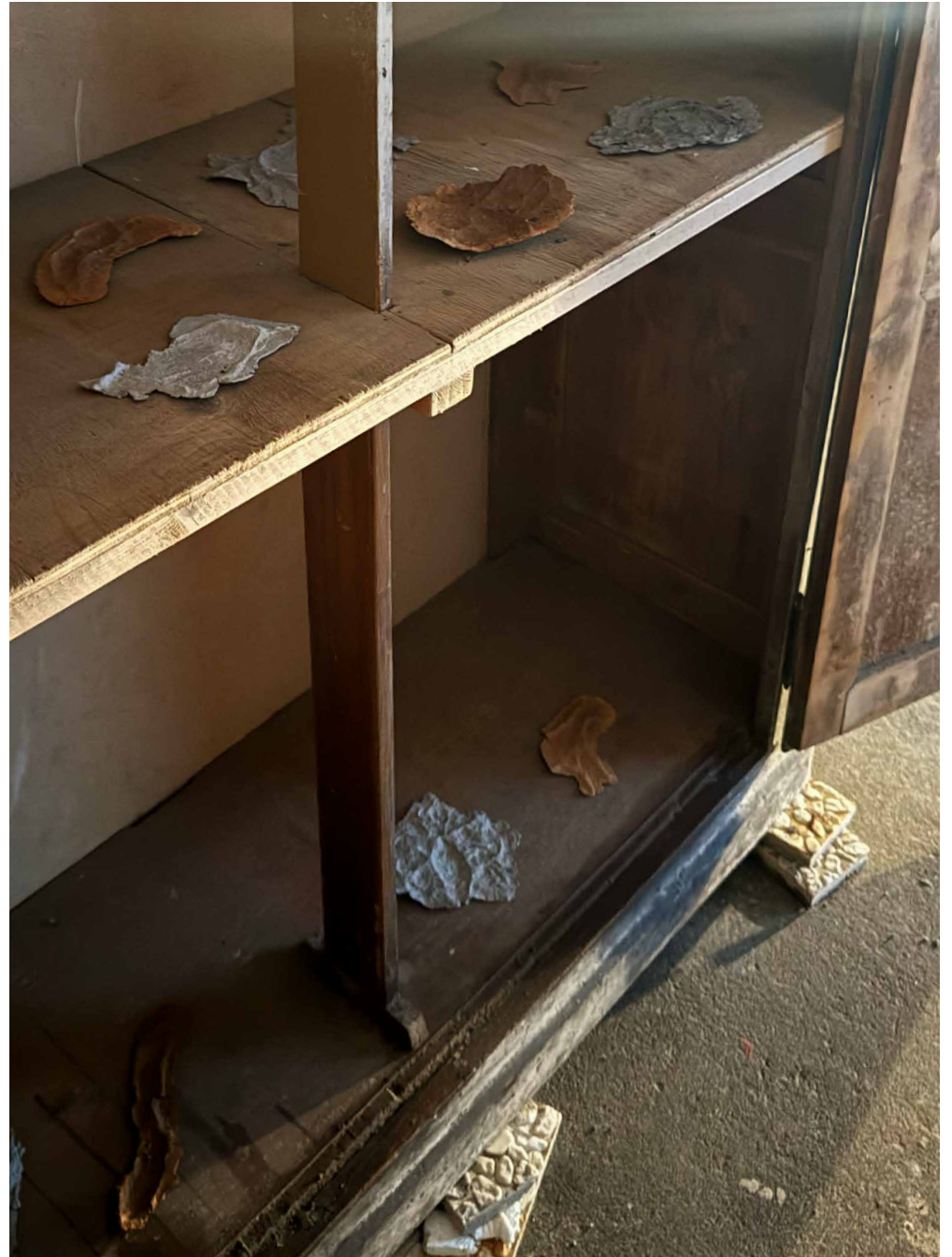


In this soft, receptive material, stone left its trace. One mineral recorded another, translating surface into memory, hardness into impression.

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It became a form of mimicry, echoing how fossils are formed in nature, through pressure, contact, and time.



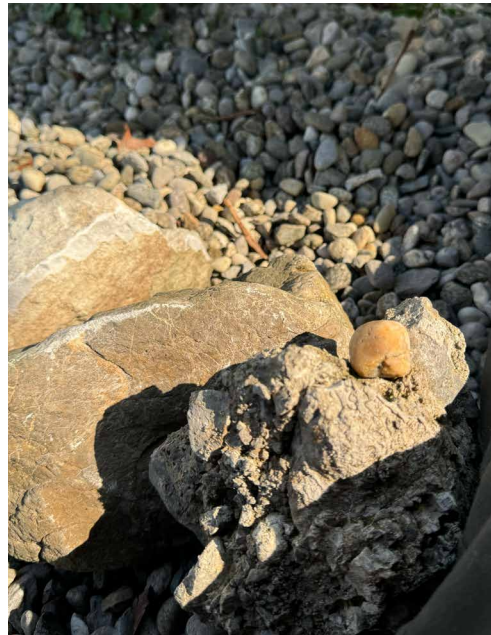
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Surrender and Collaboration

Broken Stones, Human Limits, and Mineral Intelligence

Moving through the valley, I felt how small and fragile the human body is within real nature. Carving the local stones only confirmed this, they would break, resist, refuse to become what I imagined. I let go of the desire to shape them into recognizable human forms. Instead, I began listening to their nature.

Some stones had small shells already attached, they were already alive with time. Rather than forcing, I worked with their surfaces, letting their own textures guide the carving.



At the same time, I observed how humans have always transformed minerals with intelligence and craft, turning stone into plaster, firing clay into brick, forging metal into tools.

So I sculpted two discarded bricks I found embedded among the stones, and paired them with rusted metal fragments, shaping a hybrid sculpture that spoke of decay and use.



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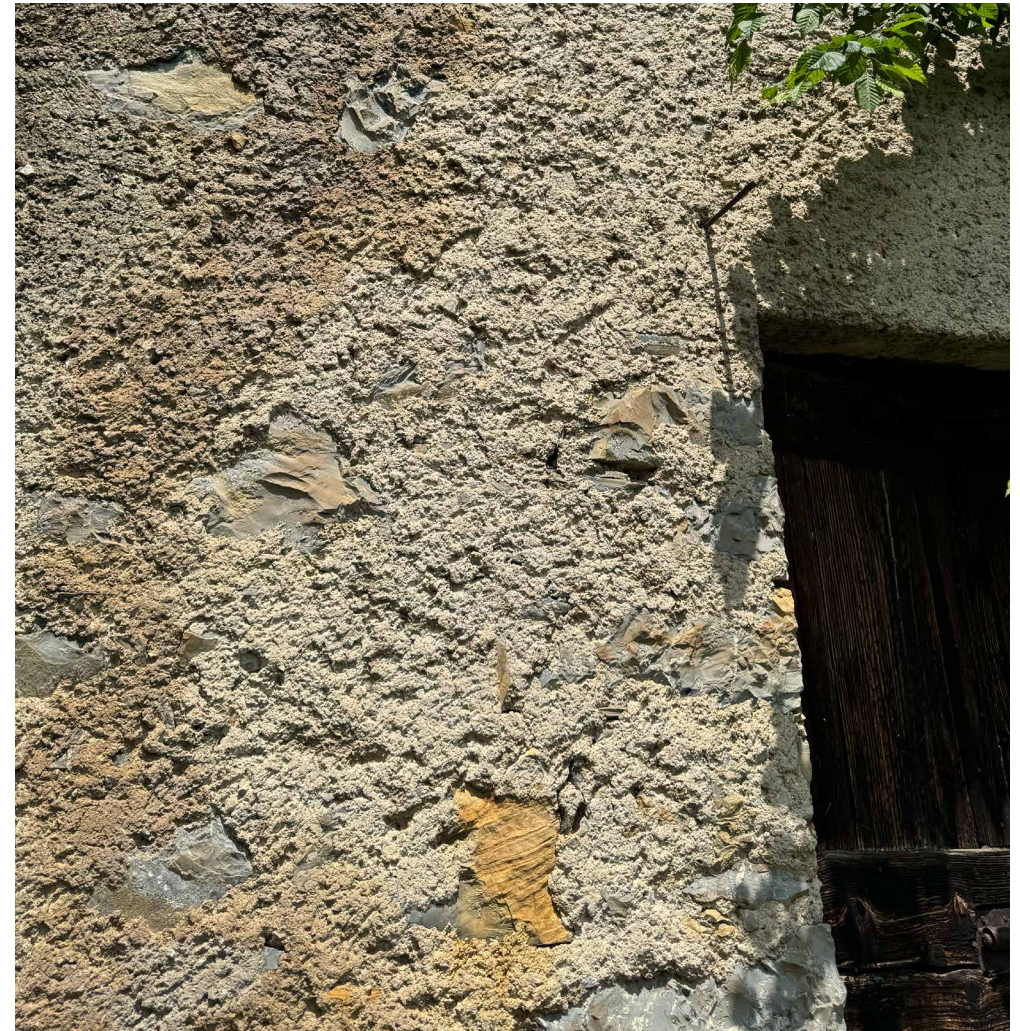
Sensing Through Surfaces

Touch, Texture, and Sensory Imagination

I've always been drawn to how a visual form might activate other senses, how looking might evoke touch, hearing, or even smell.

During the workshop on fresco, I was particularly intrigued by the use of local limestone powder and its connection to the textures of buildings in the valley. It made me want to experiment with this kind of tactile surface.

Due to time constraints, I couldn't prepare traditional plaster. But this desire to work through touch led me to use cement instead, exploring how its weight, grain, and surface could carry sensory memory.



When I began carving into the stone wall, I noticed a strong, almost sulfuric smell. Gracia later explained it came from natural deposits — a mineral presence like what you'd find near thermal springs, lingering on the surface of the rock.

This encounter reminded me that materials speak to all our senses, not just the eye — and that their presence is never neutral.

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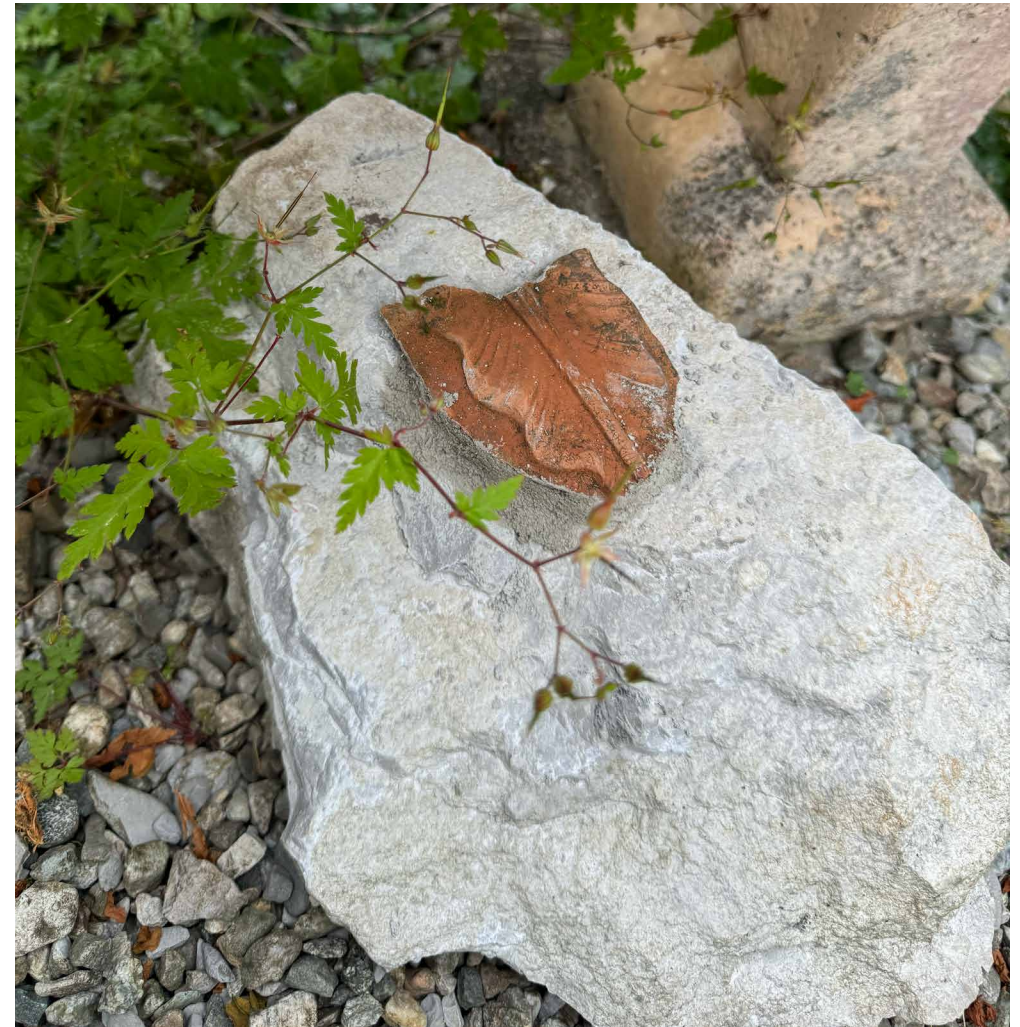
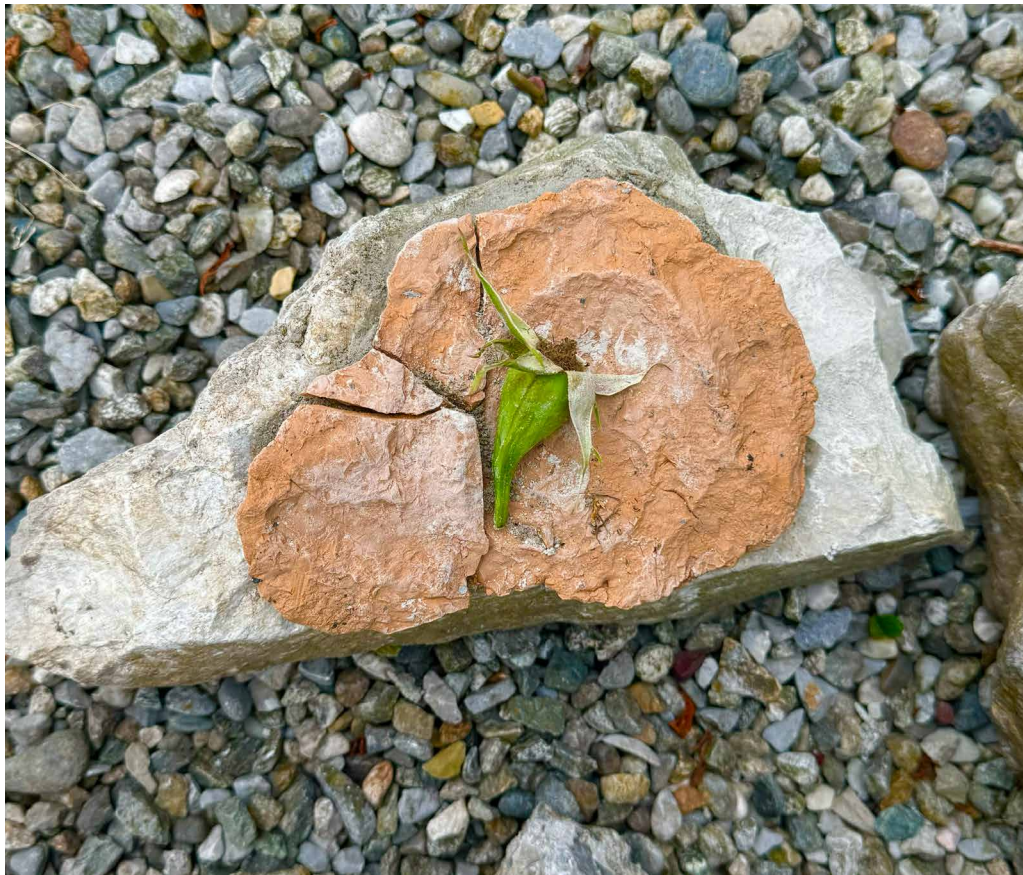
Fossil Experiments

Cement, Clay, and the Touch of Formation

I began experimenting with cement — not just as a structural material, but as a way to capture and preserve gesture.

I pressed my carved clay molds into it, like fossils, recording a tactile moment as it hardened.

I also began combining cement with found bricks and local stones. Some of these were carved bricks I discovered nearby, their reliefs blending with the marks I had made.

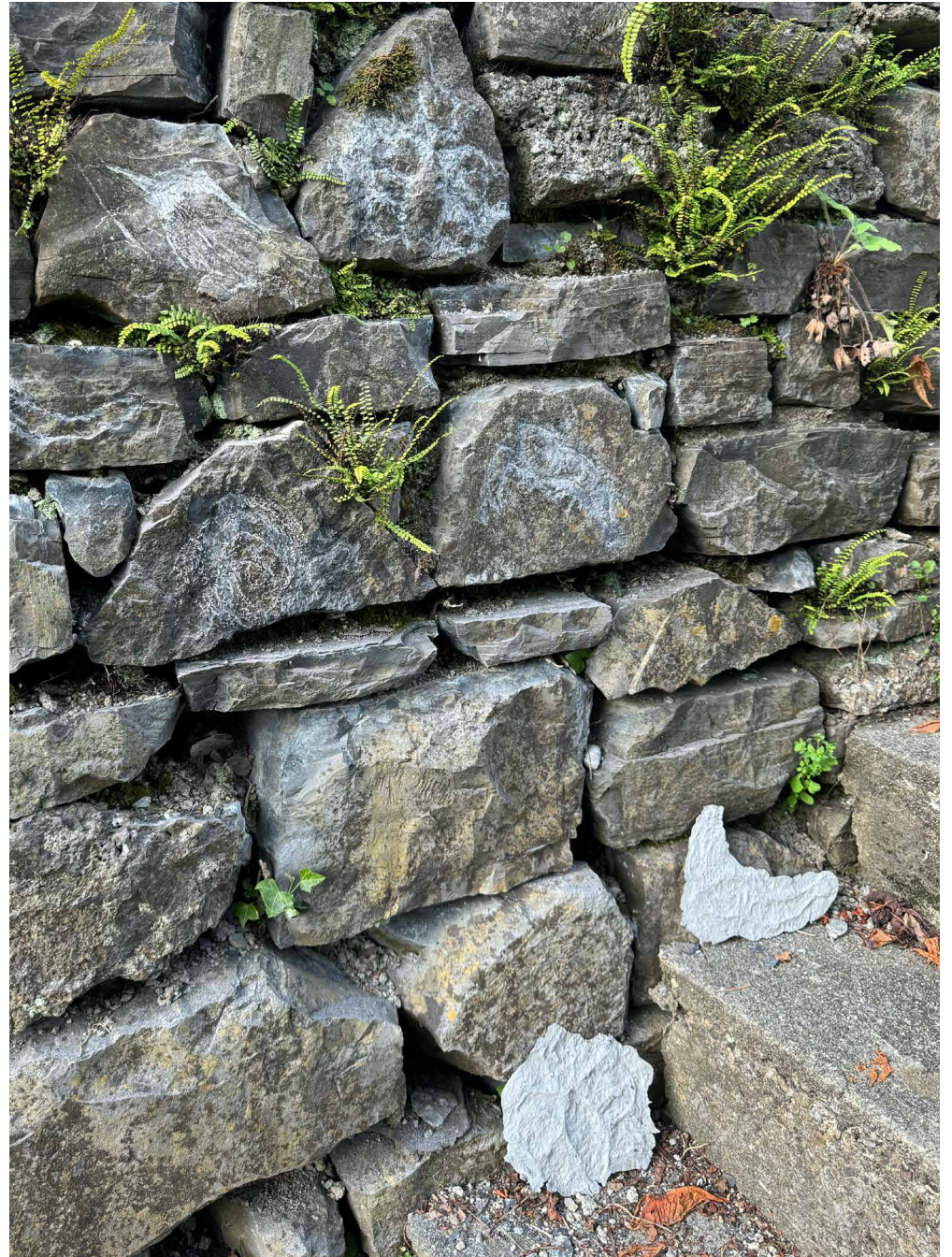


This phase was about layering time:

- the imprint of hand into clay,
- the clay into cement,
- the cement into new form.

Through these gestures, I started to build a language of fragments, connecting natural sediment with human shaping.

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A Flowing Altar

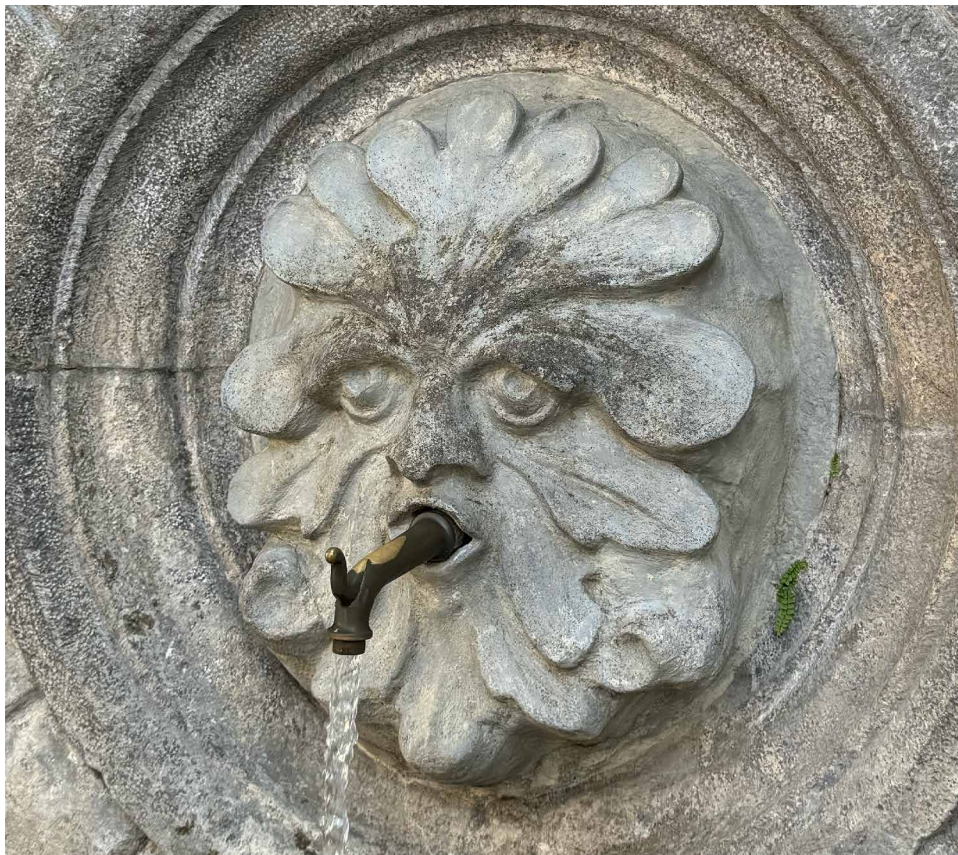
Fountain, Memory, and Gesture

The final piece takes shape as an altar-like sculpture assembled around the residency garden fountain.

Fragments from the carved stone wall, cast cement forms, discarded bricks, and rusted metal come together in a layered composition.

Water flows gently across its surface — activating the textures, carrying touch into motion.

It is a quiet convergence of sediment and story, geology and gesture.



Visitors are invited to participate in this unfolding through:
touching the carved textures,
taking rubbings from the original walls,
observing water flowing across layered materials.

Like milk becoming rind or sediment turning to stone, this is a space where transformation happens slowly — through contact, erosion, and time.

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A Tabletop Altar

Human Offerings to an Unknowable Nature

Alongside the main fountain sculpture, I created a second altar on the stone table in the residency garden — smaller, more intimate, like a collection of relics.

This altar is not a symbol of mastery, but of attempt, a quiet effort to speak to something beyond understanding.



It reflects the human impulse to make sense of materials we cannot fully comprehend, to create forms that might answer back, even if the response is silence. In the presence of nature's vastness, this becomes not a display of knowledge, but a humble ritual of not-knowing.

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Homage





With Deep Gratitude

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