

NEVER GROUND CURATED BY LAURA LAMONEA

A deep cut in the Earth's crust, a breach that promises a direct, visceral encounter with matter: entering this subterranean world immediately reveals a surprise. The hypogean space is an unexplored dimension that offers the promise of discovery, even as its dense branching and constant metamorphosis make it a labyrinth whose map can never be considered complete, resisting to any attempt at total and definitive representation.

In myth and literature, caves have always symbolized thresholds: gateways for initiatory descents, places of transformation, and passages to hidden civilizations. Speleologists, like astronauts, describe an “ultra-awareness of the body” when referring to the descent into the Earth's crust and the experience of leaving the surface. During these transitions, the familiar world gives way to an alien dimension to which the body must adapt. The resulting wonder is not only aesthetic but also epistemological, connected to a concept of knowledge that blends scientific rigor with imaginative tension. The fifteenth edition marks a significant milestone for Video Sound Art in its efforts to produce and promote contemporary art. Since 2010, the festival has transformed schools, theaters, swimming pools, and unused spaces into venues for encounter and experimentation.

This year, it reaffirms its mission by selecting a new exhibition venue in the city— a space deeply connected to its theme. The title *Never Ground* is derived from a new work by Natália Trejbalová, produced by Video Sound Art and slated to join the Museion collection in Bolzano. Like a sounding board, the festival amplifies the work's theoretical and poetic implications, unfolding them through an exhibition that traverses languages, media, and perspectives.

The new video production *Never Ground* (2025) embodies the conceptual core of the entire edition, offering an exploration that not only examines the act of descent but also subverts it. The artist does not merely traverse the underground; she constructs and imagines it, layering reality and fiction, science and speculation. In her film, footage of real caves, volcanoes, and tunnels still pulsing with geological life merges with artificial sets and miniatures. Trejbalová reclaims science fiction in its original dimension: a tool for speculative inquiry, a language that, starting from scientific hypotheses, transcends, distorts, and at times anticipates them.

The hypogean journey is not separate from the cosmic one but mirrors it in a continuous dialogue. Terrestrial caves, due to their

extreme conditions for life, have become sites of scientific experimentation to test potential habitats on the Moon or Mars, thereby transforming speleology into a science of the future. Within this context, the artist's work assumes a political significance that requires no explicit statement to be understood—one that is simultaneously geological and technological, challenging the boundaries between the human and the non-human and proposing a unified “more-than-human” organism composed of flesh, minerals, and metals.

In dialogue with the film and sculptural interventions by Natália Trejbalová, the works of Adele Dipasquale, Nicoletta Grillo, and Andrea Mauti expand the reflection on the underground—not only as a geological or material space but also as a metaphor for buried voices, unheard and submerged by the flow of history and the superstructures of power.

Adele Dipasquale presents *Spirit Talks*, a new video production born from an investigation into mediumistic practices that the artist explores through the use of analog special effects and a layered process of writing and performance. Her research unfolds as a constellation of gestures that serve as instruments of evocation and listening, shaping a grammar of contact with the invisible.

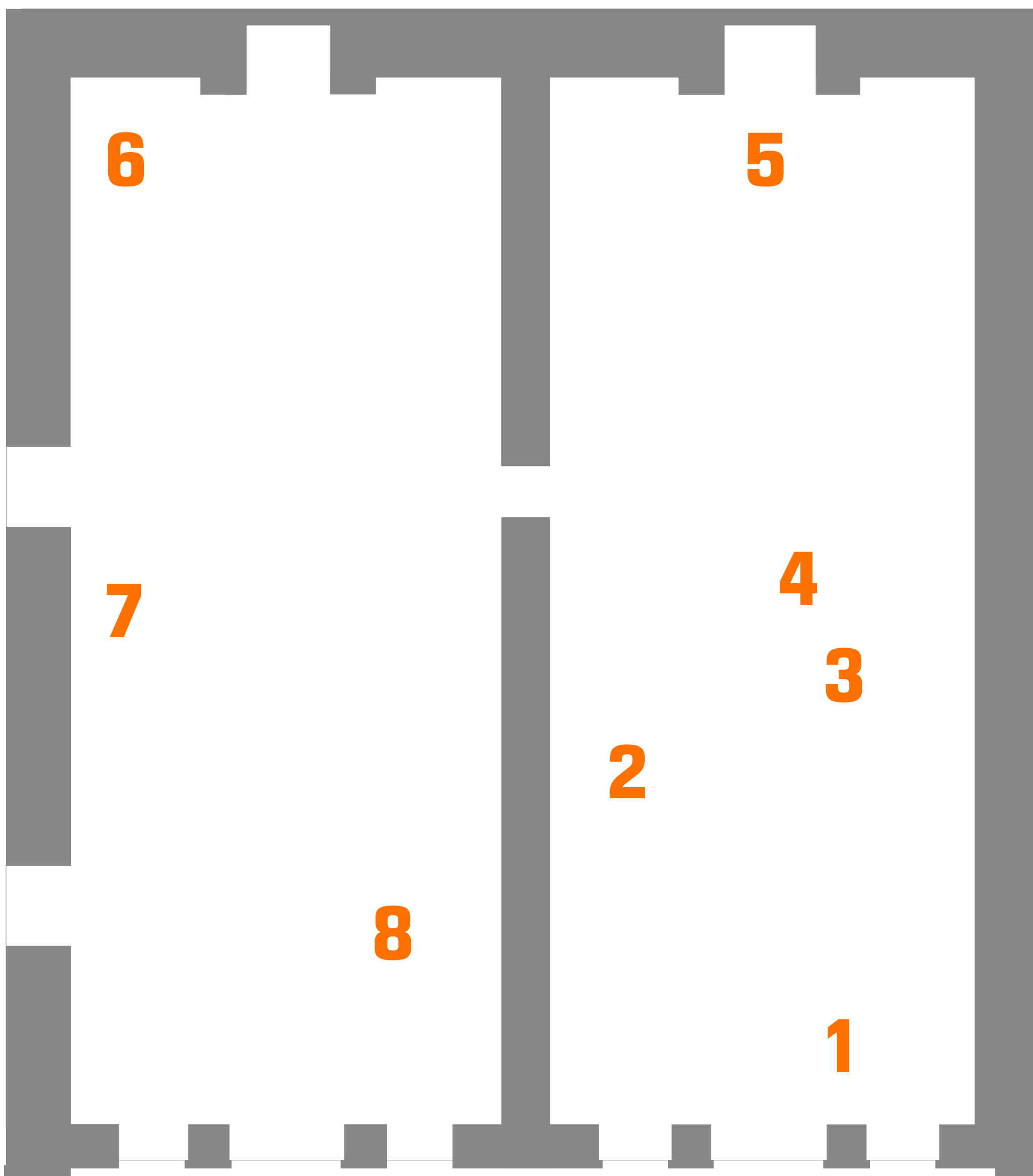
Through a series of sculptural interventions, Andrea Mauti explores the poetic and narrative potential of objects, liberating them from the political and social implications that typically define their function. *Esausta. (Voice Voice)* takes shape as a reflection on the enduring influence of the dead: language itself, and the very words through which we communicate, become relics—fragments of a transmission that moves across generations and bodies, an immaterial form of inheritance that continues to resonate.

Nicoletta Grillo presents an assemblage of images exploring the landscape of Tyrrhenian Calabria—a sculpted topography where the underground emerges to the surface and becomes visible.

On one hand, caves are places that protect what the surface corrupts and where time seems to stand still; on the other, they reveal themselves as extraction chambers. This duality is exemplified in Fellini's *Roma*, where workers digging a subway tunnel uncover an ancient tomb dating back two thousand years. In these cavities, industrial drills pierce the underground, paving the way for modernity while simultaneously revealing and dissolving the treasures of the past. The excavation sequence—where authentic footage and reconstructed sets intertwine—thus becomes a powerful metaphor for the dual nature of human intervention: preservation and destruction, revelation and loss.

To consider the planet as a dynamic system, intersected by fractures and extractions that challenge our notions of stability, governance¹, and civilization, is the task of both imagination and research. The journey to the center of the Earth inevitably becomes a confrontation with what is hidden not only within the planet itself. The text includes an excerpt from the author's introduction to *Never Ground*, an artist's book conceived by Natália Trejbalová in collaboration with researcher and art historian Stella Succi, published and distributed by Mousse Publishing.

1 Reference to Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, 2008



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Natália Trejbalová, *a deep crack, the fall through and the descent into the abyss*, 2024

2

Natália Trejbalová, *Fantastic Voyage pt.1-3*, 2025

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Natália Trejbalová, *Travelling without moving*, 2024

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Natália Trejbalová, *accelerando*, 2022–2025

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Natália Trejbalová, *Never Ground*, 2025

6

Nicoletta Grillo, *Orizzonte*, 2025

7

Andrea Mauti, *Esausta (Voices Voices)*, 2025

8

Adele Dipasquale, *Spirits Talks*, 2022 – 2025

ADELE DIPASQUALE

Adele Dipasquale, *Spirit Talks*, 2022–2025

multichannel installation, Super 16mm film scanned in 2K, 5' loop with Cristina Lavosi, Angelica Venturini, and Adriana Marineo. Sound: Marco Segato. Editing: Benedetta Marchiori. Assistants: Cristina Lavosi, Marco Quadri, and Adriana Marineo. Film stock: Kodak. Film processing: Filmwerkplaats Rotterdam, Onno Petersen, Color DeJonghe. Supported by the Mondriaan Fonds Voucher in 2024.

What does it mean to be a channel for someone else's voice, to embody that voice as in a séance? If mediumship is a matter of tuning in, then I would say it can be a privileged mode of knowledge—a way of relating to and communicating with the world. I approached evocation as a form of invocation, a way of feeling indebted to the voices of the past—those whose memories have been forgotten, silenced, or suppressed.

Adele Dipasquale

Spirit Talks is a multichannel installation derived from a series of short 16mm black-and-white films. The work is based on extensive research into nineteenth-century mediums—women who were often marginalized and who, through their mediumistic practices, found forms of economic and symbolic self-determination. In the late 1800s, alongside the rise of photography, there was a surge of interest in spiritualism. During this period, many mediums attracted the attention of the positivist scientific community, which sought to use photography as a tool to prove or disprove supernatural apparitions. Scientists focused on invisible phenomena—such as electricity, the unconscious, or spirits—in an effort to classify and name what exists. *Spirit Talks* reclaims early analog special effects techniques, such as double exposure and optical découpage, to create spectral presences on screen and highlight the historical tension between positivist science and magical thought. The sound component, developed in collaboration with a sound artist and the performer, explores the “improper” use of the voice, evoking a dimension where what has been silenced can once again be heard.

ANDREA MAUTI

Esausta (Voices Voices), 2025

Site-specific installation, copper, ashes collected from the firing of clay objects, plaster, iron oxide, soil from the Caffarella Park (Rome), charcoal, fennel essence produced by the artist, steam

The Etruscan rite of haruspicy involved reading the entrails of animals—usually sheep—by extracting the intestines and liver to establish a physical connection with the world of the afterlife. *Esausta (Voices Voices)* awakens collective memories in which death is both condemnation and repression, as well as a silent presence that continues to inhabit spaces. *Esausta* evokes a death-stricken body that breathes, consumed by pain, hollow like the tubes through which the gaseous specter of fennel essence permeates the space. The memory of the dead is evoked through smell—an invisible medium capable of triggering and recalling traumatic events. In Michela Zucca's text *Donne delinquenti*, the word “finocchio” (fennel), in Italy now misused as a slur related to sexual orientation, is traced back to the hanging practices inflicted upon women accused of witchcraft. Meanwhile, the bodies of homosexual men were used to fuel the fires that burned the condemned women. After the hangings, the corpses were sprinkled with fennel seeds to mask the smell of decay and burning. The work appears as an intestinal, robotic creature whose materials absorb the diffused essence, creating a collective ritual moment in remembrance of bodies, identities, and species that no longer exist yet continue to haunt and remain alive in their corporeal absence.

NATÁLIA TREJBALOVÁ

Natália Trejbalová, *Never Ground*, 2025

Full HD video, color, sound, 17'

Directors of photography: Matteo Pasin, Andrea Pocorobba. Editing: Natália Trejbalová, Valeria Corà. Music, mix, and mastering: Giuseppe Ielasi. Vocal improvisations: Adele Altro. Producers: Laura Lamonea, Alma Malara, Federica Torgano. Colorist: Matteo Finazzi. Lighting assistant: Stefano Trombetta. CGI background images: Diego Zuelli. Title design: Gloria Favaro. Courtesy of the artist. Produced with the support of the Italian Council program (2024).

Natália Trejbalová, *a deep crack, the fall through and the descent into the abyss*, 2024

Polystyrene, acrylic ink, sand, clay, various materials, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist. Produced with the support of the Italian Council program (2024).

Natália Trejbalová, *Travelling without moving*, 2024

Paraffin, acrylic ink and various materials, iron basin, 90 × 50 cm

Natália Trejbalová, *accelerando*, 2022–2025

Paraffin, beeswax, acrylic ink, salt crystallizations, LED light and various materials, iron stand, 110 × 140 cm

Natália Trejbalová, *Fantastic Voyage pt. 1–3*, 2025

Paraffin, beeswax, acrylic ink and various materials, iron stand, 35 × 140 cm

Never Ground is a video work inspired by science fiction stories about subterranean worlds and recent scientific discoveries connecting speleological exploration with space exploration. The video is presented as an uninterrupted loop depicting a descent and ascent through the interior of a celestial body, tracing a potential space-time journey between Earth and the underground passages of another planet. In *Never Ground*, real ecosystems merge with studio-constructed scenes inspired by pre-digital sci-fi special effects techniques that relied on miniature sets and props. Trejbalová's research into moving images is closely connected to her sculptural practice, which plays a central role in constructing the cinematic imaginary. The sculptures created by the artist become the film's sets, bearing witness to a process in which matter is transformed into image.

The video explores the structure of Jules Verne's novel *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), in which the protagonists traverse the planet's interior by entering through an Icelandic volcano and emerging from Stromboli. This nineteenth-century tale conceptually anticipates what future technologies would enable: connecting two extremely distant points on Earth. In recent years, subterranean systems—particularly lava tubes found on the Moon and Mars—have attracted significant scientific interest, as they may be among the first environments suitable for future human settlements. Simultaneously, newly discovered terrestrial cave systems harbor organisms that have evolved under such unique conditions that they provide valuable insights into possible forms of life in extraterrestrial environments. Addressing the theme of the underground involves confronting a series of critical contemporary issues: the ground beneath our feet harbors the majority of the planet's fauna and, simultaneously, the remnants of vanished human civilizations. Excavation grants us access to a distant, even deep, past—much like the extraction of minerals and hydrocarbons, which underpin the survival of the capitalist system. Yet, as human beings, we are accustomed to perceiving only the visible surface of our planet, almost as if we inhabit an infinite plane.

NICOLETTA GRILLO

Nicoletta Grillo, *Orizzonte*, 2025

Site-specific installation, inkjet print on plexiglass, marker on plexiglass, 24 × 1296 cm

Orizzonte is a verbo-photographic installation depicting locations in the Tyrrhenian Calabria characterized by the movement of matter and people between the mainland and the sea. The work consists of thirty-six photographs arranged in a continuous sequence, resembling a single film of light, in dialogue with the architecture of the exhibition space. Each image is overlaid with handwritten text in marker, transcribing a passage from Giuseppe Berto's novel *Il male oscuro*. The Venetian writer lived for years in Capo Vaticano—a panoramic point from which some of the photographs for the installation were taken. Berto reflects on the fear of crossing the sea in a way that seems to allude to surpassing one's limits, ultimately concluding by observing the lights on the other side of the coast, toward Sicily. The photographs portray various carved topographies where the subterranean becomes visible: a sand quarry later recognized as a geosite of marine fossils; a church carved into rock by a group of sailors as an ex-voto for surviving a shipwreck; rock caves that once served as grain storage along transport routes and later as stone dwellings. There are also emergent topographies from which matter rises to the surface, such as the two volcanoes, Stromboli and Etna, whose movements have shaped the territory, and the port of Gioia Tauro, a hub of goods along the coastline. Born from visual research for the video project *Oltremare* (2025), the installation becomes a topographical fable connecting the different layers of a transforming territory, where image becomes text and text becomes landscape.

OPEN CALL CURATED BY FRANCESCA COLASANTE

Dialogues from the Underground is the title of the Open Call launched by Video Sound Art on the occasion of the festival's fifteenth edition, curated by Francesca Colasante—art historian—in collaboration with Pollinaria and TAB | Take Away Bibliographies. In line with the festival's themes, the call invited artists, creatives, and researchers to participate in a residency dedicated to the exploration of the underground, understood as both a symbolic and real space.

The winning project is *TUNING FOR RELATIONSHIPS. Practices of Somatic Speleology* by Sofia Salvatori, who explored the perceptive potential of the body in relation to hypogean environments through exercises of listening and attuning to the depths of the soil.

The residency took place at Pollinaria, an organic farm and research center active since 2007 in Abruzzo, which promotes projects capable of integrating art, agriculture, and the environment. A fundamental part of the project was the research by TAB | Take Away Bibliographies, which, through the production of zines, collects and shares bibliographies as a collective practice of building non-linear and non-productive knowledge, including textual and multimedia sources, preferably open access.

Friday, November 28

h 7:00 PM Presentation of the project *TUNING FOR RELATIONSHIPS*
On the occasion of the festival opening, Sofia Salvatori will present the outcomes of *TUNING FOR RELATIONSHIPS. Practices of Somatic Speleology*, in dialogue with Francesca Colasante—curator of the Open Call, Rita Duina—who will present the new fanzine by TAB | Take Away Bibliographies, and Letizia Scarpello—artist and Program Manager at Pollinaria. The publication, conceived as an open narrative, weaves together images, notes, and theoretical references, becoming both an extension and a trace of the collective research process.

Saturday, November 29 and Sunday, November 30

h 10:00 – 11:00 AM Workshop *Tuning for Relationships* with Sofia Salvatori. The workshop offers practices of internal listening, sensory activation, and spatial exploration, focusing on perception in the dark. Sofia Salvatori's voice will guide participants through a process of re-organizing the senses, in which sight is temporarily excluded.

PUBLIC PROGRAM CURATED BY STELLA SUCCI

The Public Program, titled *Sottosopra* and curated by Stella Succi—art historian and independent researcher—offers a series of talks, presentations, and encounters spanning art, philosophy, and science to expand and share the research processes behind the exhibited projects. *Sottosopra* approaches the underground as a perceptive, poetic, and political possibility of the present. Subterranean cavities have sometimes been interpreted as cognitive technologies: penumbra, echo, and the loss of reference points destabilize the senses until they overflow. In suspension and vulnerability, perception reconfigures itself and becomes hyper-receptive. One feels sottosopra (upside down). *Sottosopra* settles in the tunnels beneath the railway tracks: an underground that, like many urban infrastructures, erodes the idea of the surface as a stable boundary. Cavities, conduits, and junctions—high and low do not exist in opposition but as a permeable grid of exchanges. The work that gives the festival its title, *Never Ground* by Natália Trejbalová, takes this notion further, drawing on the nineteenth-century fantasy of a hollow Earth—a hypothesis in which the sky above our heads could be a land beneath other feet, and the ground under our feet another sky: *Sottosopra* ascends and descends a system of internal worlds, interlocked and mutually possible. The underground is also the real one upon which our digital infrastructures depend: a deep geological history inhabits our machines. *Sottosopra*, this text, and the videos on view exist thanks to resources extracted from undergrounds around the world under conditions of violence. *Sottosopra* considers the underground as the cultural trajectory of the subsoil, inviting dialogue between practices and languages that grow at the margins of dominant flows, coexist with the surface, and influence it. Stella Succi

Saturday, November 29
2:30 – 3:30 PM: SOTTOTESTO

A conversation between writer, curator, and Mousse Editor-in-Chief Barbara Casavecchia, philosopher and writer Paolo Pecere, and artist Luca Trevisani on the relationship between the arts and the underground over time, from prehistoric forms of expression to contemporary practices and imaginaries.

4:30 – 5:30 PM: SOTTOSPECIE

Based on scientific research and the artistic and editorial project *Never Ground* by Natália Trejbalová and Stella Succi, published by Mousse Publishing and produced by VSA, microbiology researcher and lecturer Martina Cappelletti, speleologist Francesco Sauro, and artist Natália Trejbalová discuss the underground as a crossroads between the terrestrial and extraterrestrial, between deep time and the future.

6:30 – 8:30 PM: SOTTOFONDO

Readings from the Underground of Milan with Altalena – interdisciplinary research collective, Annamaria Ajmone – dancer and choreographer, Sandra Cane – independent author and researcher, Ivan Carozzi – writer and author, Attila Faravelli – sound artist, Frankenstein Magazine, Medusa – literature and ecology newsletter, and Murrur – contemporary poetry collective.

Video Sound Art

Video Sound Art is a production center and festival for contemporary art and expressive languages. Since its founding in 2010, Video Sound Art, in collaboration with international artists and institutions, has focused its research on the language of complex installations, particularly video, creating exhibition paths in dialogue with selected venues. The festival takes place each year in spaces inhabited by local communities, aiming to test the adaptability of art within society. Video Sound Art curates exhibitions and produces new works for foundations, museums, and international biennials.

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GRAPHIC IDENTITY

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PRESS OFFICE

Sara Zolla

OPEN CALL CURATED BY

Francesca Colasante

PUBLIC PROGRAM CURATED BY

Stella Succi

CULTURAL MEDIATION

Cultural mediation is available every hour. Starting point: entrance.

Video Sound Art Festival – 15th Edition

Never Ground

November 28–30, 2025

Friday: 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Saturday: 11:00 AM – 12:00 AM

Sunday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM

Magazzini Raccordati, via G.B. Sammartini 38, Milan