

XNL Arte

02.03.24

30.06.24

Ways of Seeing – Act 3 /

Andrea Sala

In collaboration with the Office for Ecclesiastical  
Cultural Heritage of the Diocese of  
Piacenza-Bobbio



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*“This project is important because it required me to engage in something that is consistently part of my artistic work. My interest lies in engaging the audience in a mechanism that reinterprets specific cultural and linguistic structures – in this instance, rituals, symbols, and sacred objects – by mixing them with alternative forms, functions, and meanings.”*

Andrea Sala, Piacenza, February 2024

# Ways of Seeing – Act 3 /

## Roberto Reggi

Artists offer communities a unique lens through which to perceive reality and envision future possibilities.

This dynamic is evident in each instalment of the *Ways of Seeing* exhibition series, where emerging artists, informed by diverse perspectives and global experiences, engage in dialogue with the collections of Piacenza's museums.

Thanks to their efforts, our perspective is revitalized, allowing us to rediscover the potency, relevance, and boundless meaning embedded within paintings, sculptures, and artistic artefacts that may have faded from view due to familiarity or relegation to storage or peripheral spaces.

This interplay between contemporary and museum art, memory and innovation, and artistic heritage and new identities seeks to reclaim our history by illuminating it through the lens of the present. It aims to construct a cohesive and interconnected museum experience that bridges Piacenza's collections with contemporary art.

Following the first act - Grimaldi, who engaged in dialogue with works from the Ricci Oddi Gallery of Modern Art, the series continues with two new instalments. These chapters unfold concurrently, emerging from a fruitful collaboration forged with the museums of the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio and their director, Manuel Ferrari.

The focal point of Act 2 is a statue recently attributed to the renowned sculptor Giovanni Angelo Del Maino from Pavia.

It originates from the Church of St. Eufemia in Piacenza and depicts a figure of sorrow. On this regard, we express our gratitude to the Conservation and Restoration Centre of La Veneraria Reale for their collaboration on the project, specifically for their assessment of the restoration needs of the artwork. Concealed by layers of paint accumulated over the centuries, the statue showcased in the exhibition engages in a dialogue with impactful sculptures by contemporary artist Berlinde de Bruckere and a selection of precious engravings by Carol Rama. This interaction provides visitors with an evocative exploration of themes such as resilience in the face of pain, fragility, and the strength of the human spirit.

In Act 3, the focus is artist Andrea Sala, whose invaluable research within the diocesan museum's archives has paved the way for a captivating series of works. Sala's exploration involves engaging with objects traditionally used in religious ceremonies, offering profound insights into the significance of rituals within communities, the deep symbolism inherent in these practices, and the fundamental connection between sacred and domestic objects.

# Ways of Seeing – Act 3 /

## Manuel Ferrari

Without knowledge and the ability to interpret our history, there is no prospect of effectively navigating the future. If we accept this premise, little else needs to be added in reflection to the exhibition *Ways of Seeing Act 3 - Andrea Sala* presented by Fondazione of Piacenza and Vigevano at XNL. This conviction prompted the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, with a keen focus on the cultural assets housed within local museums and parishes, to participate in the project by contributing items from its archives. Many of these objects have long since ceased serving their original purpose but still carry layers of meaning, some more overt than others. The interpretation of these meanings depends on the observer's perspective and approach.

For a young person, comprehending the purpose of the numerous leather boxes on display may prove challenging, simply because they have likely never encountered such items before. However, they might find themselves intrigued or captivated by the juxtaposition of these boxes with the artist's works. In contrast, older visitors might recall childhood memories of exploring sacristies to uncover their functions but could struggle to comprehend their presence alongside gourds. For this reason, I'd like this exhibition to serve as an opportunity for intergenerational exchanges, bringing together individuals from diverse age groups to broaden understanding, forge connections, and refine perceptual abilities. This exchange allows the present era to thrive and innovate, all



while remaining grounded in the rich cultural heritage that defines our identity.

In our initial discussions with Andrea Sala, we grappled with the question of which objects to include, considering various constraints such as administrative regulations and the need to uphold their sacredness while prioritizing their capacity to evoke an emotional response. Our selection process often shifted from focusing solely on the objects to considering their containers, creating an interplay of references that enhance the viewer's sense of wonder and search for meaning. The artist's selection is not a curated collection of prestigious artworks sourced from diocesan repositories. Instead, it also comprises humble objects, such as boxes, candle holders, and vestments, which serve as the foundation of narratives rooted in emotion. The theme of the container resonates with notions of protection, custody, and care, aspects that the artist's work adeptly deciphers. For instance, when observing the meticulous craftsmanship of a monstrance box, one is reminded of the profound significance of its contents: the precious vessels used to display the Eucharist, which symbolize the beginning and end of the Mystery in Christian tradition. The juxtaposition of sacred items and seemingly incongruous objects, such as carved gourds, has a striking effect and prompts various semantic associations. This interplay of meanings, where one signifier leads to another, underscores the dialogue between mystical reverence and earthly nature that the artist orchestrates through his works. Each piece is a result of deliberate creative acts imbued with a sense of sacredness, offering viewers a continuous stream of interpretative keys that evoke familiar connotations while also suggesting novel insights.

# Andrea Sala

In his artistic practice, Andrea Sala (born in Como, 1976, currently living and working in Milan) merges his passion for design culture with an exploration of the processes stemming from the allure of delicate materials, such as terracotta and ceramics. The artist draws inspiration from both traditional aesthetics and the avant-garde movements of the 19th century, especially focusing on the realms of design, architecture, and visual arts. His vocabulary is rooted in the history of plastic arts, often enhancing both its formal and expressive results.

Following his graduation from the Brera Art Academy in Milan, Sala cultivated a significant connection with the masters of Italian design. The piece "Notizie dall'Interno," (News from Within) curated by Mirko Zardini for the 9th Architecture Biennale (Venice, 2004), was dedicated to Castiglioni.

Similarly, the solo exhibition "Cicognino" at the Optica Centre for Contemporary Art (Montréal, 2009), following his relocation to Canada, was dedicated to Franco Albini, another significant figure in modern design, and featured an installation where the designer's table took the centre stage. Two other important exhibitions are "mSm" at the Fondation Guido Molinari (Montréal, 2011), and the Musée D'art de Joliette (Joliette, 2012).

During this same period, Sala also had the opportunity to devise the design concept for the exhibition "Actions: What You Can Do With The City" at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). Other residencies include Civitella Ranieri (Perugia, 2013); Fondation Guido Molinari (Montréal, 2011);



Studio view © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi

“Prototipi 02”, Fondazione Adriano Olivetti (Rome, 2003). Special projects include: “Lucido, ancora più lucido” (based on an idea by Alessandro Rabottini), a dialogue between the works of Andrea Sala and the designer Alessandro Mendini (Milan, 2020).

Recently, alongside exhibitions in galleries, Sala has been working on a series of site-specific projects for private collections. Since 2015, he’s teaching Sculpture at the New Academy of Fine Arts (NABA) in Milan.

The artist’s research journey has evolved over the years, focusing on the simplicity of forms and the application of traditional techniques to industrial materials. Indeed, Sala’s artistic work is heavily influenced by his choice of materials, which evolve during the production steps. Examined closely and explored in its phases, the production process resembles a narrative composed of different pieces, simultaneously enigmatic and evident, mirroring the history of our material culture. This approach allows for transcending the original source’s completeness, creating space for works increasingly influenced by diverse factors. Sala delves into the realm of industrial goods, where the objects’ functionality gradually diminishes due to the decontextualizing effect of the artistic process. With meticulous care and obsessive scrupulousness, he dissects the world of objects, transforming them into a personal alphabet that underpins a creative process always in search of its own rationale.

# The Exhibition / Paola Nicolin

The first solo exhibition dedicated to Andrea Sala by an Italian institution, *Ways of Seeing, Act 3*, showcases a collection of new sculptural pieces crafted from ceramic, glass, and terracotta. The artworks are displayed within a cohesive narrative framework, conceived as both a work of art and a display, providing a setting that embraces and liberates the objects within the space.

The exhibition is the third chapter of the *Ways of Seeing* series, inspired by John Berger's TV series of the same name from 1971 on the BBC. This series is dedicated to reinterpreting the artistic heritage of the city of Piacenza and its surrounding territory, exploring the interplay between tradition and innovation, as well as between temporary exhibitions and permanent collections. The project has already engaged several contemporary artists (and will continue to do so until September 2024) inviting them to engage in dialogue with lesser-known works from various local museums. The goal of the initiative is to enrich historical narratives by connecting them with contemporary themes and issues, thereby creating a comprehensive and interconnected disseminated museum.

The initiative began in September 2023 with an exhibition by Massimo Grimaldi engaging in a dialogue with works from the Ricci Oddi Gallery of Modern Art and focusing on the theme of image research. This third phase marks the commencement of a partnership between XNL Arte and the Office for Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage of the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, led by Manuel Ferrari. This has triggered an

engaging conversation among the collections, the artistic heritage of the Diocese, and the artwork of Andrea Sala. Sala's sculptures reflect his interest in design culture and his exploration of the processing stemming out of the fascination with fragile and contaminated matter.

With a keen sensitivity to the poetics of materials and presentation, Sala engages with the artefacts from the Episcopal palace in Piacenza. Objects such as cases, sacred vestments, containers, goblets, and candle holders have been hand-picked by the artist and reorganized in a novel framework, altering their perspective. These items are accompanied by a selection of Sala's new ceramic sculptures crafted from ceramic, glass, and enamel-coated copper.

The exhibition originates from the artist's regular visits to the storerooms of the Piacenza museum, providing him with repeated opportunities to engage with this hidden part of the museum's heritage, which consists of simple objects holding a significant narrative value. One of the objectives of the project was to facilitate the residency of a contemporary artist in the city. This allowed for the selection of objects to become a personal and subjective choice, revealing not just a story but also an emotional response to materials, forms, and the potential for contemporary reinterpretation of ritual objects.

Sacred furnishings, designed to shroud and enclose mystery, safeguarding it during public display (the term "ostensoiry," derived from the Latin "*ostendere*", specifically means "to show"), now rest on the ground, inviting close examination and revealing their simple yet powerful beauty through form and



Studio view © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi

material. The theme of the exhibition also conveys a desire for the object, contemplating both the shell and what it contains, whether it be a garment, a box, a blanket, or a body.

Sala's consistent research approach focuses on the shapes of everyday objects and their intricate details. The artist reflects on shapes, materials, and colours to evoke a poetics of objects. Devoid of religious connotation, this exploration offers an opportunity to reflect on the container to better understand the content. This perfection, balanced between abstractionism and anthropomorphism, serves as a "vessel of the sacred" while also narrating stories of journeys, rituals, solitude, and intimacy, but also of multitudes in procession, peace and wars, conversions and submissions, pomp and poverty, life, and death.

"This approach", the artist explains "enables me to transcend the primary source of inspiration and create pieces that are 'tainted' by a plethora of influences. I persist in exploring the realm of industrial products, where the functionality of objects gradually diminishes as a result of the detached nature of the artistic process. But I am also intrigued by humanity's approach to living spaces and its relationship with objects. Throughout the years, my meticulous and thorough examination of the world of objects has enabled me to develop a personal lexicon of shapes that progressively diverge from their original references, and yet remain somewhat recognizable, albeit in a distorted manner." In this project, Sala's research refines the artist's ability to analyse the shape of objects keen eye, Sala observes and dissects ob-



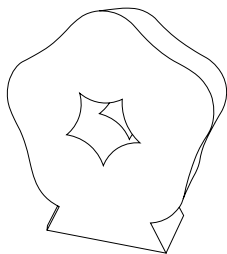
jects, adjusting their proportions, and rearranging them within the domestic spaces where we typically encounter them. And in doing so, he reveals the narrative structures and hidden meanings conveyed through form, directing attention towards the processes and the genesis of a shape as a conceptual and investigative effort, rather than on its final, perfected state.

Sala's artistic work is heavily influenced by his choice of materials, which depends on their inherent qualities, which evolve throughout the manufacturing process. The sculptures on display are the result of an in-depth study of the materials being combined into a cohesive structure, and of a quest to find the most skilled artisans to bring the concept to life. Enamelled ceramics from Apulia, terracotta from Tuscany, glass and wood from Lombardy, dried gourds: Sala's works narrate the various stages involved in their making, their production geography, and the connection that the artist forges with the community he is addressing.

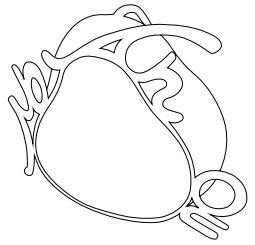
# Works by Andrea Sala

## Pierced ceramics

2024, (n. 20)



This is a core collection of 20 works created specifically in response to the invitation to engage in dialogue with pieces from the repositories of the Diocesan collections. In response to the encounter with the collection, the artist opted for raw ceramic as their material of choice. The ceramics in this first group of works feature sinuous and soft shapes, with perforations creating a see-through effect. Some pieces are double-sided: one side displays a plain terracotta surface, while the other side is adorned with clouds and skies made in plaster. The interplay of light and the effects generated by the contrast between rough and smooth surfaces are among the elements explored by the artist to give voice to the form and establish a physical connection with it, where objects are viewed as pre-logical linguistic structures. This approach echoes the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century and the studies of radical pedagogy. It explores how we perceive objects and their conceptualization in sculpture.



## Written gourds

2024, (n.15)

Whether seeking inspiration or a setting for their narratives, the protagonists of art and architecture have consistently turned to the forms of nature, making it a central aspect of their creative process. Andrea Sala's fascination with the culture of materials evolved alongside the development of organic forms, which might originate from elements of domestic architecture (such as a shelf, a chair, or a blanket). These forms are then transformed beyond recognition by the artist's gesture, transmuting them into abstract shapes. In this second group of works, the generous and inviting shape of the gourd, traditionally used as a container over the centuries, serves as a muse for the artist. Among the myriad objects and jewellery in the Diocesan collections, the artist was drawn to items designed to hold something precious and symbolic in order to protect, preserve, and pass it down to future generations, forming an unbreakable connection with the history of humanity.

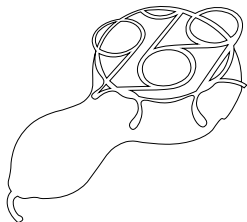
The words "mineral", "natural" and "siliceous" rendered in enamel on metal evoke the three materials — stone, papyrus, and silicon — that form the foundation of the evolution of writing techniques and have shaped humanity's analytical, associative and abstraction abilities from ancient times to the present day. However, creativity and imagination simultane-

ously guide individuals towards both the rational and the irrational aspects connected with humanity's endeavour to comprehend its existence, life, and death that form the core of its fundamental requirement for sacred attribution.

*"The ancient art of enamelling belongs the tradition of religious and non-religious goldsmithing, and it captivates me for its primary aim, whether to adorn them or convey a narrative of infusing vivid colours into metal, whether for adornment or to convey a message. Here, the gourd is both enhanced and dignified by the enamelled metal, yet it also serves as the justification for its presence as a pure form devoid of content."*  
Andrea Sala

## Stained-glass gourds

2024, (n.15)

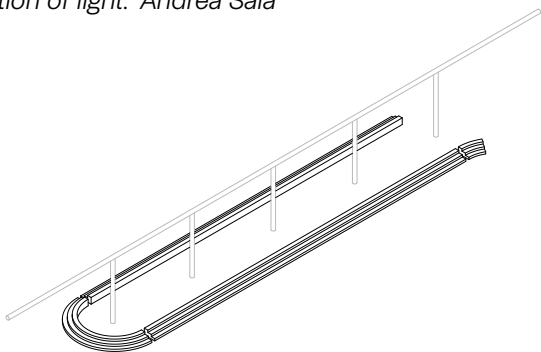


The final group of works revisits the form of this fruit while also incorporating glass as an additional element of the narrative. When describing these sculptures adorned with coloured glass shapes, the artist emphasizes the metaphor of the window, particularly the stained-glass window as an architectural feature explored by artists throughout history, as they struggled with the dimension of light that passes through,

uplifting the spirit, occasionally blinding, and always altering the perception of space and time. Andrea Sala's Stained-glass gourds resemble miniature kaleidoscopes, where the golden hues evoke the preciousness of the object, enhancing its opulence and reflections.

*"I find the stained-glass technique very intriguing because it has the ability to narrate a story, that of the gourd in my case, and symbolically participate in the creative process through the manipulation of light." Andrea Sala*

## Platform 2024



The artist uses the spaces of XNL as a backdrop for his reinterpretation of specific liturgical objects and furnishings exploring the dimension of ritual, the rhythmic movement of bodies in public spaces, and the intertwined act of listening to voices and choirs.

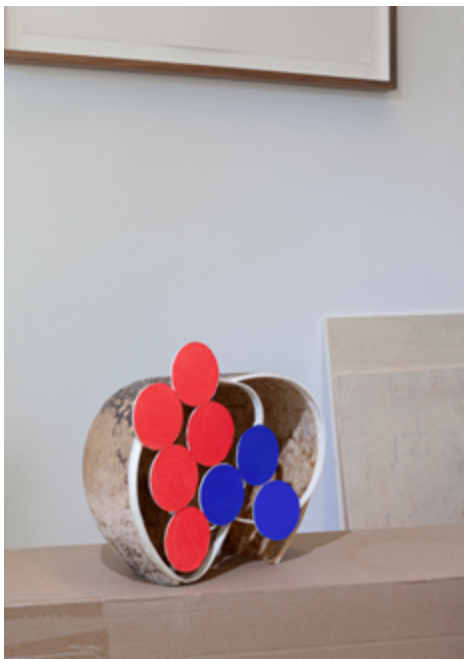
These objects, and the narratives they represent, are positioned within a semi-circular structure, a wooden platform made from simple, humble materials and painted white. The artist conceived this platform as the central element of the ex-

hibition: a ribbon that extends and accentuates the contours of the Space. It serves as both a support for the symbolic objects and a means to bring them closer to the earth, engaging with the gaze and physical presence of the viewer. This object presents itself with sinuous geometries that create an intimate connection between the displayed object and the persons moving nearby. It enhances the tactile experience of these shapes and colours, prompting a desire to further explore and engage with these objects.

The viewer is encouraged to embrace these narrative elements and make them their own, transcending the confines of the liturgical dimension to reach a universal awareness of the visual language that envelops us. Sala encourages viewers to contemplate the desire instilled by the artist, to ponder the reasons behind our desires, the significance of symbols, and the necessity of objects in the execution of every ritual that permeates our daily lives.



Dried gourds, 2024, (n.15). © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi



Written gourds, 2024, (n.15). © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi





Dried gourds, 2024, (n.15). © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi



Stained-glass gourds, 2024, (n.15). © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi



Pierced ceramics, 2024, (n.20). © Photo by Daniele Signaroldi

# From the collections of the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio

The collection includes two sets of candle holders from the parish of Fossadello, as well as other objects sourced from numerous churches in the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio. Throughout history, candle holders have adorned altars as symbols of devotion, a practice still observed today. Silver-plated examples were employed for daily use, while black-painted ones were reserved for funeral ceremonies. The four portable tabernacles were designed to remain open during temporary celebrations, whether held outdoors or in locations where a permanent altar was unavailable. The showcased cases were specifically designed to safeguard various liturgical furnishings. Those featuring wide, predominantly circular tops housed monstrances and reliquaries, while cylindrical cases were tailored to accommodate chalices with patens.



Candle holders, 18th-20th cent., Piacenza, Episcopal palace, repositories.  
© Photo by Daniele Signaroldi



Cases, 18th-20th cent., Piacenza, Episcopal palace, repositories.

© Photo by Daniele Signaroldi



Candle holders, 18th-20th cent., Piacenza,  
Episcopal palace, repositories.  
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Cases, 18th-20th cent., Piacenza, Episcopal palace, repositories.  
© Photo by Daniele Signaroldi





Liturgical vestments, 20th cent., Piacenza, Episcopal palace, repositories.  
© Photo by Daniele Signaroldi

# Public program

*Ways of Seeing, Act 3. Andrea Sala* is complemented by a public program consisting of a series of performances and sound actions curated by **Nicola Ratti**, musician and sound designer, whose experimental exploration intertwines with the spatial-performative dimension of the exhibition. The exhibition itself, envisioned as a vast enclosure for the showcased works, will feature, even during its opening, a series of interventions that relate to the displayed objects, enhancing their narrative impact in a contemporary context. Specifically, Nicola Ratti has been commissioned to develop, in collaboration with other artists, a sequence of three interventions in the space titled **sybol/voice/body**, which punctuate the duration of the exhibition.

## **sybol/voice/body** curated by Nicola Ratti

The container that holds and encompasses, along with the theme of the sacred in its symbolic significance and material representation, serve as inspirations and criteria for selecting three performative actions to be included into the exhibition *Ways of Seeing. Act 3 Andrea Sala*, on the ground floor of XNL in Piacenza. The works by **Miranda Secondari**, **Alessandro Busetti** and **Enrico Malatesta** incorporate a contemplation on the transference of symbols into varied contexts, the shift in meaning of the voice as a detached element from the body, extending to the body itself as a vessel a covering enveloping silence.

The presented works occupy the exhibition space in a manner that is both assertive and mimetic, yet they do not overburden or assert themselves too strongly. And this is not just about showing respect to the works being exhibited, but also about ensuring that visitors and viewers have a unified and integrated experience of both the physical space of the exhibition and its artistic contents. The performances are presented by *LL*, a cultural production and design platform founded by Nicola Ratti, Roberta Pagani, and Marco Paltrinieri.

## Caveja

08.03.2024, h 18.30

*Enrico Malatesta's Caveja* is a sound performance entered around an instrument from the peasant tradition of Romagna, known as the *caveja*, which has transcended its practical purpose and is now associated with deeper cultural and spiritual meanings in the context of rituals and ceremonies.

The *caveja*, along with other sound objects, forms the instrumentation that Malatesta uses to craft a disseminated landscape of events throughout the room. The aim of the performance is to draw the visitors' attention to the small changes and fluctuations in the sound scape (the combination of sounds in the environment) that surrounds them.

## Plane/Talea

21.04.2024, h 18:30 (TBC - info: [xn|piacenza.it](http://xn|piacenza.it))

*Alessandro Bosetti's Plane/Talea* is a sound performance that uses the human voice as its sole compositional material. This voice is stripped of its personal identity and physical

presence, becoming a disembodied entity devoid of its usual vessel. It represents the culmination of years of archival work. The performance inhabits the exhibition space, but it deviates from the conventional presentation format by spreading out both the audience and the sources of sound across a larger area, breaking away from the usual centralized set-up.

## L'Assente

28.06.2024, h 18.30 (TBC - info: [xnlpiacenza.it](http://xnlpiacenza.it))

**The Absent** by *Miranda Secondari* is a solo dance piece that explores the concept of absence as a moment of pause, depicted through deliberate and carefully timed movements. Throughout the performance, unexpected imagery, subtle ambiguities between movement and sculpture, as well as moments of silence and sound events, are revealed. Miranda Secondari presents **The Absent** following a brief preparatory residency in the exhibition spaces.

## Nicola Ratti

Nicola Ratti is an Italian musician and sound designer known for his experimental electronic compositions. His sound production involves the creation of systems characterized by repetition and expansion, with a particular emphasis on constructing environments that interact with the spaces and architecture we inhabit. These environments challenge our emotional and perceptual orientations, pushing us beyond familiar boundaries.

As a composer and sound designer, he engages with various domains including theatre, cinema, performing arts, radio productions, and sound art, participating in international festivals and biennials focused on art and architecture. Member and co-founder of Standards, a cultural centre that operated in Milan from 2015 to 2022, he collaborates on events exploring the relationship between sound, space, and the body.

Born in Milan in 1978, he has performed in Europe, North America, Russia, and Japan. Since 2006, his albums have been released by several international labels. Noteworthy collaborative projects include *Bellows*, *NR/MA*, and *What We Do When in Silence*.



# Workshops / Pre-School and Primary School

Aligned with the ethos of XNL Arte as a museum-school deeply committed to knowledge dissemination, Andrea Sala contributed to the development, organization, or implementation of a program or artist workshops that are part of the PCTO (Curricular Path of Transversal Skills and Orientation) program designed for high schools and secondary schools in Piacenza. Additionally, the educational aspect of the exhibition is further enriched by the workshops curated by Enrica Carini, catering to both primary and secondary school students.

## One Thing Leads to Another

From 7.03 to 30.06; approx. 2 hrs

Inspired by Enzo Mari's "Il gioco delle favole" (The Fairy Tale Game), this experience encourages the observation of objects to understand their function or invent new ones.

## The Homes of Things

From 7.03 to 30.06; approx. 2 hrs

An exciting adventure centred around the concepts of secrecy and disclosure, confinement, and release, safeguarding and exhibiting.

## Info and bookings

[edu@xnlpiacenza.it](mailto:edu@xnlpiacenza.it)

# Voci su / Voices on

The digital series “Voci su / Voices on” featuring Andrea Sala. Conceived as a dive into the artist’s journey, this editorial project tailored for XNL Arte’s social platforms, focuses on the artists featured in the exhibition and the communities connected to them.

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Our diverse schedule of exclusive openings and interactive programs has something for everyone. From cultural mediation with XNL Mondo to guided tours for high school students and hands-on workshops for families.

Info and bookings

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# Ways of Seeing – Act 3 /

## Andrea Sala

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Sara Bonomini  
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Lara Facco, Milano

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Daniele Signaroldi

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RARA Comunicazione

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Libreria Fahrenheit 451  
di Sonia Galli

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# XNL Piacenza

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Hub for contemporary  
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Paola Nicolin

XNL Cinema e Teatro  
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