BAŞIBOŞLAR, GERGEDANLAR VE YANLIŞ ANLAMALAR HAKKINDA

OF STRAYS, RHINOS, AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

10.05.
— 15.08.
2025

GUIDO CASARETTO

YUNT

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OF STRAYS, RHINOS, AND
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This booklet accompanies the exhibition *Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings* by Guido Casaretto, held at YUNT from May 10, 2025, to August 15, 2025.

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MAY 10 — AUGUST 15, 2025


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Guido Casaretto:
Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings

Esra Aliçavuşoğlu[1]

The paradigm of art's existence shifts across styles, periods, forms, geographies, and functions. Shaped by cultural and social norms, art in every era reflects the spirit of its time. Although the history of art may appear as a sequence of returns, the notion of "repetition" reflects a contemporary perspective: one that becomes original through the artist's interpretation and act of appropriation. Thus, even when recurring themes or contexts are revisited, art undergoes profound transformations, sometimes in form, sometimes in language, and at times in meaning, ultimately taking on entirely new expressions. In this sense, it represents the ongoing evolution of meaning and context.

Many leading figures in contemporary art engage with the ever-shifting relational structure between their work and the broader field of art, navigating conceptual dualities such as sameness and difference, repetition and innovation, originality and commonality. Guido Casaretto constructs his own artistic language through these strategies of reactivation, employing borrowed visual forms, concepts, and historical references. Drawing from historical and cultural imagery and documents, he traces traditional metaphors and positions them within the trajectories of art history through contextual analysis. At times, he draws from collective memory; at others, from the personal. Central to his practice is the gesture of 'repetition' and its layers of meaning.

The intercultural dialogues present in Casaretto's broader body of work, his references to various texts and the act of reproducing them in collaboration with new contexts, form the conceptual basis of the installation *Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings*, currently exhibited at YUNT.

Following a recent trip, Casaretto encountered a collection of short studies and theses produced by *Centro Internazionale della Grafica di Venezia* (International Graphic Centre of Venice).[2] These works investigate the development of various models and textile patterns—products of the cultural diffusion resulting from Venice's extensive commercial networks. One particular study focuses on the restoration of a 16th century Venetian court manuscript, offering a detailed exploration of the origins, evolution, and mythological transformation of the unicorn (Italian: *Alicorno*).[3] Strikingly, it includes documentation of the Republic of Venice selling two unicorns to the Ottoman Empire. The manuscript presents not only official correspondence and financial records between the Venetian and Ottoman officials but also vivid details of the unicorns' journey to Venice. However, the conclusion of this exchange remains unclear, leaving the final fate of the unicorns open to interpretation.

Inspired by Casaretto's work in Venice, this research explores the symbolic, semiotic, and mythological origins of the unicorn, intriguingly intertwined with the history of collaboration between Turkish and Italian bronze workshops up until the 1980s. Drawing on this context, the artist brings to YUNT the molds of a pair of life-size bronze horses from 19th century, which still exist today.

Ernst Cassirer presents mythology as one of the fundamental cognitive and conscious forms of human experience. When we consider that myth, like language, is as ancient as human history itself, his assertion that "every thought and concept possesses a symbolic form within human beings" becomes even more compelling.[4] What was once perceived as vague and obscure takes on a defined shape and structure; what seemed passive becomes an active, dynamic process. In this way, myth—with all its elements—emerges as a vital cognitive and conscious expression of humanity.

This work, which Casaretto encountered by chance and which serves as a focal point for a reality that is both layered and deeply relevant to his artistic practice, evokes numerous references, associations, and allusions within the art historical context. It encompasses intercultural elements such as the unicorn, equestrian sculpture, and the mentality of monument making, each of which has been continually shaped throughout history, infused with symbols and icons. Elmer George Suhr notes that the unicorn is not a real creature, but rather an image born from human imagination, symbolizing its role as a powerful cultural icon in humanity's effort

1 Prof. Esra Aliçavuşoğlu, Marmara University Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Basic Education, Art Historian, Critic.

2 Manzonetto, Flora. *Storia di un Alicorno tra Venezia e Istanbul* [The Story of an Alicorn between Venice and Istanbul], Ad Orientem Thesis Series, International Center for Graphic Art San Marco, Venice, 1989.

3 Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 1: Language*. Transl. Ralph Manheim, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953, p. 71.

4 Cassirer, Ernst. *Language and Myth*. Transl. Susanne K. Langer, New York: Dover Publications, 1946, p. 39.

to understand nature and the universe. He argues that this symbolic and mythological animal's significance across different cultures reflects the human quest for spiritual and cosmic meaning.[5] According to Ernst Cassirer, a common thread runs through all cultural forms (symbolic forms): in each, signs (symbols) function as active and creative forces. Even in the earliest mythological expressions, we encounter not just a reflection of reality, but also a creative and original articulation of it.[6]

The equestrian statue, one of the most powerful points of convergence between historical imagery, ideology, art, and propaganda, represents the most concrete and monumental embodiment of glorified sovereignty, power, greatness, and immortality. With an imperialistic solemn expression and eyes fixed on the horizon from above, it becomes the earthly manifestation of demigodhood. This sculptural form, which has endured with various layers of meaning and significance from Ancient Rome to the present, continues to evolve, adopting different representations - sometimes aligned with religious dogma, and at other times with secular ideologies.

Today, the equestrian sculpture, once purely imperial in nature, has evolved into a more layered structure, serving not only political and pedagogical purposes but also reflecting a broader, allegorical significance. Stripped of its propaganda roots, it has been deconstructed and transformed within the boundaries of contemporary art, much like earlier examples that were melted down in the Middle Ages to create weapons and coins. In this sense, works ranging from the live horses Jannis Kounellis brought to the Galleria L'Attico in Rome in 1969, to Hans Haacke's *Gift Horse*, installed in Trafalgar Square at different times, and Elmgreen and Dragset's *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101*, all invite us to reconsider issues woven with symbols and metaphors - sometimes in serious, sometimes in ironic ways.

5 Suhr, Elmer G. "An Interpretation of the Unicorn." *Folklore*, vol. 75, no. 2 (1964): pp. 91–109. Accessed: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1258042

6 Ettinghausen, Richard. *The Unicorn*, Smithsonian Publications 3993, Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1950. The book explores the concept of the unicorn (commonly known in Islamic texts by its Persian name meaning 'rhinoceros'), examining the origins, interpretations and historical representations of this mythical creature. Through written sources and artistic representations from the 9th to the 17th centuries, it documents the transformation of the unicorn in regions such as Iran, Syria, and Andalusia. Ettinghausen highlights how this motif, bridging science, mythology, and religion, evolved into a hybrid symbol in Islamic art and intellectual tradition.

References to unicorns, equestrian sculpture, and monumental sculptures form the central theme of Guido Casaretto's project *Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings*, specially developed for YUNT, which is conceived as a space for interaction. In his work, the artist traces the journey of oral and written art canons, cultures, and concepts, while also engaging with contemporary reality through a diverse range of expressive forms. Casaretto is not only interested in reality itself but also in how it is perceived and interpreted. In some of his pieces, he explores the boundaries between reality and representation, and between relativity and the retinal, by employing *trompe-l'œil* techniques - one of the most fundamental existential concerns of art and painting.[7] In his exhibitions, he selects a cultural or historical phenomenon as a focal point and appropriates these phenomena, using the data he gathers to navigate the boundaries of an intellectual, layered structure dominated by visuality. Simultaneously, he excavates the displacements within culture.

This exhibition at YUNT navigates the quadrilateral of concept, history/document, space, and relationality, making visible a pragmatic approach that enables the viewer to locate meaning and engage with the messages. It invites us to consider the memory of concepts alongside the memory of space. The historical contexts brought into YUNT's interior are interwoven with the memory of the space itself, the content of the artist's practice, and the essential forms and structures of art history.

The artist juxtaposes a composition designed to reinforce power with the meanings attributed to the image, as well as with his own reality. What emerges is a monumental aesthetic that permeates the fundamental dynamics of the artist's production practices, filtered through the recent memory of the space. The concept of the monument, the creation of copies, the transfer of public sculpture into interior spaces, and the areas the artist questions, all prompt us to reflect on the historical memory of Istanbul, particularly the *Quadriga*.[8]

Casaretto's horses dismantle the imperialist atmosphere of imperial power, yet they do not completely avoid alluding to it. With a riderless, emperor-less, and anti-heroic horse sculpture, the artist focuses not only

7 *Trompe-l'œil* is a French term meaning 'deception of the eye,' referring to a painting technique that creates the illusion of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface. (Ed. note)

8 It is suggested by some sources that the four-horse statue at the entrance of St. Mark's Square in Venice was brought from the Island of Chios to the Hippodrome in Constantinople in the 5th century AD. These statues, moved to Venice during the Latin invasion of 1204, were once at

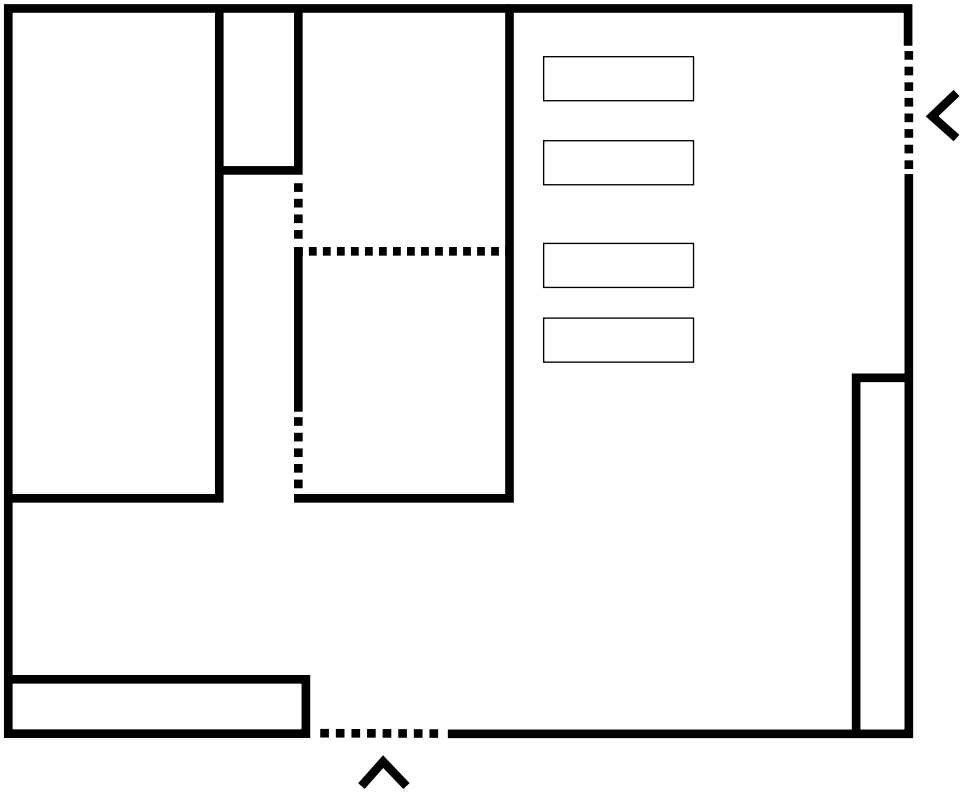
on appropriating knowledge but also on the memory of space, the traced form, and cultural transmissions. As in many of his projects, the artist selects cultural and/or factual elements, creating new processes of construction through the historical and symbolic contexts they carry. In this way, he establishes his own originality, authenticity, and validity. The exhibition at YUNT is not merely an empirical presence; it is part of a continuity and a connection to the artist's broader body of work. Casaretto creates a stage woven with interaction, processes, and images. In fact, by drawing connections to certain images and forms in art, he presents a form of resurrection: a personal interpretation of history and art history.

As you step into the space, you are met with a sudden and unsettling contrast. Is it a monument, a memorial, or simply a horse sculpture? While these questions linger, the fact that YUNT is housed within a newly constructed building atop a former abandoned stable deepens the sense of contradiction. This layering allows YUNT's approach—sustaining and remembering, building, looking back while pointing forward, recreating and reshaping—to be interpreted as a strategy for liberating time and space, borrowing both the memory and the promise of the past.

Material occupies a central axis in the artist's practice. The selected material either dilutes or intensifies the connection to the original concept or phenomenon. In Casaretto's work, the horses are removed from their functional contexts and endowed with new layers of meaning through their historical echoes, and through the images they evoke in the memory of the space and in our minds. In this process, the viewer becomes an active participant in the performative interplay between seeing and understanding.

The dominant representation of the idealised, along with the iconography of victory, gradually dissolves at the edges of the space's historical memory, stripped of the meanings once ascribed to it.

→ 8 risk of being melted down for ammunition, but were saved after the poet Petrarch mentioned that they were original works by Lysippus. In the 18th century, the statues were taken to Paris by Napoleon, and were returned to Venice in 1815. During World War I, they were once again displaced due to an Austrian bombing.



Guido Casaretto
Life-Size Roman Horse Pair
2025
Various discarded materials, resin
Construction
235 × 220 × 80 cm | 4 pieces

Emotional Archaeology

Agata Polizzi

Guido Casaretto's creative impulse is shaped by a deep inspiration fuelled by a fantastic creature, *the unicorn*, whose mystery has remained unchanged over the centuries.

According to the legend, in 1531, Suleiman the Magnificent, one of the most important figures of the 16th century, requested one of these mythical beings as a gift from the Doge of Venice who owned three unicorns. From this point, the imaginary narrative set in motion numerous legends about the purity of this mythical being, and at the same time, a kind of alchemical fantasy in which magic and nature were intertwined. It resembles a symbolic meeting between East and West at a time when the Ottoman Empire was at its peak, expanding to Europe in the west and to the borders of the Persian Empire in the east.

This powerful narrative connects two centres of civilisation and culture, Venice and Istanbul, two unique economic and political capitals that are not so far from each other. Today, as in the past, these two cities are at the centre of geopolitical balances with international resonances.

Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings, Casaretto designs a pair of Roman horses made from a matrix of late 19th-century bronze moulds, probably from Naples and produced in an Italian foundry based in Istanbul. This work emerges from a dense fusion of identities, a sum of personal and collective stories. In this quest, the artist focuses on different cultural and geographical processes of transmission and repositions them in the context of space and time.

YUNT, on the other hand, with its architecture based on the existence of an old stable, acts as an apparatus that hosts the exhibition and offers the sculptures the opportunity to be placed with absolute conceptual and spatial coherence.

The materials used in the production of the artworks consist of waste materials from unusual contexts. In this particular case, Casaretto incorporates materials from YUNT's adjoining construction sites into the body of the sculptures, a very interesting layering practice that incorporates not only matter but also memory.

Matter and memory are concepts that the artist sees as two fundamental elements that complement each other; while shaping matter, he revives realities from the distant past that resonate in the present. In this process, he focuses on the transformation phases of objects, revealing the collective and emotional experiences hidden beneath them. The endeavour to preserve this link between the past and the present is often shaped by family stories, sometimes intersecting with official history.

Casaretto conducts in-depth research and carries out a series of analyses of the commercial relations between Venice and Istanbul during the Ottoman period. He discovers documents such as graphic charts of orders for works of art and economic treaties. In the process, he uncovers details that point to a lively and fascinating dialogue between the doge and the sultan, highlighted by the legend of the 'Unicorn.'

This source of inspiration is fuelled by the artist's interest in the origins of his identity. Coming from a Levantine family that has been living in Turkey for generations, the artist carries the traces of the migrations between East and West in his identity.

Guido Casaretto's creative process, fuelled by constant references to his Genoese origins and the transformations that have taken place in the communities to which he belongs over time, is an archaeology of emotions and events. The artist conveys his interest in these places, which he has been observing and analysing for a long time, by focusing on social and anthropological processes, visible or hidden relationships. He transforms the fine lines of existence into a narrative through special stories, objects and images. The resulting narrative is an artefactual reflection of the complex contents filtered through the lightness of the artist's gaze.

If it is necessary to establish a common line of thought, it is possible to say that Casaretto connects Venice and Istanbul with a definite reference: The artist's horse figures, reflecting the Roman sculptural tradition, directly refer to the famous Horses of San Marco, brought to Venice by Doge Enrico Dandolo after the sack of Constantinople in 1204 and installed on the façade of the Basilica of San Marco.

This powerful image forms the basis for a profound reflection on time and the processes that govern it, on social and interpersonal relations, on the possibilities offered by circumstances, and how these are softened by a reassuring iconography of acquired truth.

What the image evokes in fact triggers a deep questioning of history, politics and society. As we dig into the past, the reasons for the 'now', which devours those small and important parts of existence very quickly, sometimes without really realising their value, come to the surface. It is precisely these details that Casaretto is attentive to; he breaks them into pieces like a mosaic and reassembles them in his works, which are 'heaps of existences' in both form and substance.

There is always a material and emotional intensity in his work that underpins his way of seeing the world, as if everything that makes up his *oeuvre* is irreversibly generated from the signifier itself.

This brings to mind a series of literary references in which the East is exoticised and relations with the 'foreign' are the source of epochal transformations. As a matter of fact, Shakespeare, in his *Othello*, has brought to the stage the most sublime representation of a structure with a whole of layered and variable relations in a complex spiral of events in which social roles, emotions and habits are intertwined, paving the way for the birth of new models and ways of seeing.

For Casaretto, rethinking and redefining objects through layers is indispensable. The artist looks at the present with the consciousness of being the vigilant guardian of an aesthetic that is not only formal but primarily intellectual; he deepens his research by constantly asking questions, questions himself, and at the same time glorifies the potential of art as a force that, even if cyclical, always harbours doubt and can renew itself and its perception of reality.

The exhibition *Of Strays, Rhinos, and Misunderstandings*, specially designed for YUNT, is the embodiment of this endeavour. True to his poetics of shaping thought and his own artistic identity, Casaretto resurrects the iconographies of the past with the vibrant and compelling energy of the present. Thus, while creating a sense of time that is at times theatrical and undefined, he opens up a space for the viewer to experience the spirit of the present in a balance that skilfully eludes the ambiguity of the process of becoming full of 'strays, rhinos, and misunderstandings'.

Esra Aliçavuşoğlu

Prof. Esra Aliçavuşoğlu (b. 1973) is a faculty member at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Marmara University. She completed her undergraduate studies in the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Literature at Istanbul University, where she also obtained her master's and doctorate degrees. In 2000, she attended courses in "Curatorial Studies" at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. In 2016, she conducted research on contemporary art museums in New York with the support of a TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) grant. In 2022, also with a TÜBİTAK grant, she was invited to the Department of History of Art and Design at the Pratt Institute in New York as a visiting researcher, where she conducted further academic work. A member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), Aliçavuşoğlu has published numerous articles, critical essays and monographs on artists in national and international academic platforms. Together with Ayşe Köksal, Aliçavuşoğlu co-edits the *History of Art in Turkey* series, published by Can Publication's imprint Tellekt. The first book in the series, *Museum*, was published in 2023. She also co-edited the book *Bauhaus: The Design of Modernisation* (2009) with Ali Artun.

Agata Polizzi

Agata Polizzi (b. 1976) lives and works in Palermo. An art historian and independent curator with a PhD in the History of Architecture and the Conservation of Architectural Heritage, she has worked as a freelance journalist and correspondent for specialist art magazines since 2011. From 2004 to 2006, she taught Cultural Anthropology as an adjunct professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo. She has curated exhibitions and publications for both public and private museum institutions. Polizzi collaborates on contemporary art research and projects with artists, cultural organisations, and foundations at both national and international levels. Since 2019, she has served as the editorial director of *My Art Guide, Italy*. That same year, she was appointed adjunct curator of BAM: Biennale Arcipelago Mediterraneo (Biennial Archipelago Mediterranean). She is also guest curator at the Francesco Pantaleone Gallery of Contemporary Art in Palermo and Milan. Since 2017, she has curated the visual arts section of the Migrant Literature Festival. olizzi is a consultant for the Swiss Institute in Rome. She has worked with the Fondazione Mario Merz in Turin since 2014. She also served as curatorial coordinator for ZACentrale in Palermo.

Guido Casaretto

Guido Casaretto (b. 1981, Istanbul) lives and works in Istanbul. He is one of the founding members of Sanatorium, an independent art space based in Istanbul. Casaretto has held several solo exhibitions, including *The Pope and Galileo Had a Minor Disagreement* (Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, 2017), *Synesthesia* (Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, 2015), *Extrasystemic Correlations* (Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, 2012), and *Default* (Sanatorium, Istanbul, 2011). His work has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions, such as *Restless Monuments* (Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, 2018), *Urban Justice* (CerModern, Ankara, 2015), *the Italian Pavilion* at the Venice Biennale (Venice, 2011), and at Teatro Comunale (Italy, 2000). Casaretto's works are included in prestigious collections such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków (MOCAK), Poland, and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia, as well as numerous significant private collections across Europe and the Middle East.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Ziyaret günleri | Visiting days
Çarşamba – Pazar
Wednesday – Sunday
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YUNT HAKKINDA

Located in Sultanbeyli, YUNT is a non-profit art and interaction space. It aims to increase the society's opportunities to encounter artistic activities. In addition to its exhibitions and events, it enables those it comes into contact with to establish new sensory relationships with the world through its educational program and supported publications. It aims to help increase the potential for social change through the experience and interaction opportunities offered by the place.

YUNT supports art production and intellectual thought with its event program and incentive policy.

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