

# Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare

**Emilio Prini – Typewriter Drawings. Bologna / München / Roma – 1970/1971**

Text by Curator Timotea Prini

In 1967, Emilio Prini was already realising urban surveys using photographs depicting portions of the city centre of Genoa. Casts, in which he showed himself from the back, in profile, from three-quarters or from the front.

He photographed, tore down and took home advertising or election posters, ads, maps. He enacted and filled voids. He improvised banquets where he offered passers-by slices of corks to fill the gap between the table leg and the floor.

He analysed space, the behaviour of bodies in relation to it, magnetism and the concept of 'standard'.

**I built a portion of an uphill road in the same materials as the support. The asphalt object is 9 metres long, 1.38 metres wide, the slope is 6 per cent (5 urban surveys per environment: uphill road granite curved wall, granite ellipse pavement, marble step, straight brick wall, large asphalt plate 66/67**

When he presented the *Perimetro d'aria* (Air perimeter) project to Germano Celant, Prini was immediately invited to participate in the *Arte Povera - Im Spazio* group exhibition at Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa, the first display to formalise the Arte Povera movement.

*5 sistemi percettivi per ambiente o Perimetro d'aria* (5 Perceptual Systems for the Environment or Air Perimeter) consists of five neon elements and five sound-activated relays automatically switching on every three seconds, placed at the corners and in the centre of a small room in the gallery. The main light is switched on, all the other objects are allowed inside.

**This project does not develop the idea of the environment; here, rather a definitive (passive) imprint of the room ('the perimeter of a space of air') obtained with an acoustic optical support of immediate expressive disappearance (the idea of the cast as**

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# Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare

a dimension of the unrepresented). Concentrated action on memory (on its organising itself into data) obtained with the lowering of the same minimal levels of prearranged information (geometric scheme of consciousness): the rapid-comic succession of a single light-sound working in sequence in the room (the room is a centre plus four corners); up to the sum of the five necessary pieces of information (the level of knowledge of the white drawing sheet).

The central light (the light of the container room) constantly switched on again as part of the 'heap of signs dissociating perception', i.e. a continuous means of plastic or expressive distancing of the arranged light-sound systems. The accepted presence of other objects (as disturbance of the light elements) is the guiding thread towards an exclusive and assumed acoustic and therefore totally mnemonic use of the perimeter space.

Outside, *Perimeter (misura a studio stanza)* (Perimeter. Room Studio Measurement), a lead spool wrapped in a white neon tube measuring the total perimeter of the room floor.

In metrology, the distance corresponding to a leg span in walking is a unit of length and hence a constant distance, in a proper and figurative sense, between two successive elements in any sequence. The *Sei Passi da un metro* (Six One-Metre Steps) that Prini presented for *Collage 1* at the University of Genoa are made of grey-painted wood and have a curved base. In addition to being a dimensional representation of the hollow - or void - that forms between the lower limbs when taking a step, they indicate that rhythmic, alternating movement of the body translating forwards or backwards.

Several are the works dating to 1967, most of them never officially exhibited but rather tested in galleries or studios.

Tested and photographed at La Bertesca is *Standard 1967*, a 6.50 m standard-size pole made of profiled aluminium that behaves differently according to the variability of the space.

*Punti. Ipotesi sullo spazio totale, 150 cilindri anodizzati neri + 150 contenitori di carta* (Dots. Hypothesis on Total Space, 150 Black Anodised Cylinders + 150 Paper Containers), was tested at La Bertesca in 1967, photographed there alone and later exhibited in 1968 at the Galleria De Foscherari in Bologna for the *Arte Povera* exhibition. In a conversation with Germano Celant, Emilio spoke of dots of support being indirectly tested, attested and checked through the consequences of an unverifiable hypothesis, and in some notes

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# Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare

in the archive he referred to the dots being placed in correspondence with the furniture in his room.

*The world is a room. State of sympathy with my room. Side of life, biological key.*

1968 is the year of his first solo exhibition.

We consider *Pesi spinte e azioni* (Weights Thrusts and Actions) the result of a series of actions and relations that lead to a behavioural transformation of his own life.

The production process is articulate. The exhibition has more than one opening between March and April. Objects land on the rebound or disappear, partially or entirely, each time altering the gallery space.

Beer cans, a dropped ice cream, waste paper, a goldfish brought as a gift by Marisa Merz, become part of the set design and are later replaced with something else.

In *oggetto di peso* (Weighty Object), the weight of his bodily parts, those of his partner Grazia, of his friends and their families, as well as those of the cat Ubu, is reproduced by means of rolled or cut sheets of lead scattered across the gallery.

Lead is also slammed or thrown from above, the concept of chance, cause, necessity, explored both ontologically and in the philosophy of science, thought of and related to art through the formula of *Cosa - Caso - Causa* (What - Case - Cause), which was applied already in *Standard '67, Punti - Ipotesi sullo spazio totale* (Standard '67, Dots - Hypothesis on Total Space), and essentially in all subsequent work.

Photographs depicting him in the act of sleeping, waking up and weighing himself become the manifesto for the exhibition.

*Scritte che restano scritte* (Writings that stay written) 44 punch-engraved lead plates, corresponding to as many actions performed in the course of time, are resting on the ground and on a small wall next to the stairs.

*5 sensi per un ambiente* (5 Senses for an Environment) is composed of 25 sheets obtained by cutting out malleable lead sheets on which the description of the *Perimetro d'Aria* is silkscreened in orange or white.

Visitors and friends are free to open the packs, unroll the lead sheets, sit on the casts, participate.

A room in the gallery is filled with other people's objects and works.

**I coloured a room in the gallery by randomly gathering things from the warehouse.**

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Some photographic enlargements of streets and stairways are laid on the floor with the corresponding lead weight as a support.

The *Fermacarte* (Paperweights), mounted in a sequence and consisting of three blocks of large photographs stacked and secured by crude pieces of lead. The total weight of the lead corresponds to the artist's body in the act of running, jumping, somersaulting or to the thrust required to perform these actions. The *Fermacarte* are placed on the floor, coinciding with the angle formed between the wall and the floor, suggesting a search for perspective based on the theory of Euclidean optics.

**I prepared a self-portrait of conditional weight and size. The weight of my naked body built in lead up to the weight of my 80 cm tall body.**

While setting up the exhibition *Pesi Spinte Azioni*, various photographs were taken, which related to the study and production of the works, often accompanied by descriptive comments. The existence of the artist himself, every action performed, every person or thing encountered is captured in an assiduous documentation that acquires a theoretical value in the production of an artwork.

In 1969 for *Op Losse Schroeven* in Amsterdam, the participation of and relationship to friends and family groups was still very present. In *Magnete. Introduzione alla velocità* (Magnet. Introduction to the Speed Tent), Prini chose to use the sand field outside the Stedelijk Museum and, together with Icaro, Calzolari, Kounellis, the Merz family and others, he built tents by setting up an electromagnetic field, in which the participants were vectors.

On the catalogue sequenced information:

**'sympathy supports'**

**'affirm the self not one's own reflection'**

**'love the depressed structure of the self (rest)'**

**'not action but biological extension of self'**

**'anti-topological condition'**

**'identical (to self) alien (to world) exchanged (to friend)'**

**'utopian space' Emilio Prini "intentions" INTENTIONS (...) Natural dimensions**

Prini's interest in magnetism and the possibilities of its implementation also focused on the apparatus he used. Thus, by means of Karl Marx's theory of use-value, he

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quantified the value of machine-made (art) commodity, calculating the labour required to produce it and the value acquired at the end of the operational cycle, gauging the increase in relation to the initial use.

Together on the floor, magneto-phone, camera, film camera and typewriter are the paradigm of which he would later take several photographs.

In October 1969, the exhibition *Konzeption-Conception* opened at the Staatliches Museum in Leverkusen and Prini sent a letter to the museum director.

**Dear Mr. Wederer/this is the project for the catalogue and the exhibition. It must fit on the first three pages according to the progression indicated on the sheets. The other two pages can receive a few photos where I stand/you/wished/or remain blank/For the exhibition open the catalogue on the project pages put it on a transparent glass base at reading height and in the size of the catalogue/let it be browsed all the way through**

**Thanks and regards Emilio Prini**

Three pages for the *Magnet* project, whose content, in English, concerns a recording traced in writing, photography, sound and moving image, leading to a complete exhaustion of the instruments used, i.e. a Lagomarsino typewriter, an OOZZ sound recorder with microphone, an Exakta camera and a movie camera.

Two distinct formulas; the first showing the method of consumption behaviour, the second bringing the realisation to a close. What can be inferred is the cancellation or rather, the deletion of the data taken, also through the rewinding and/or superimposition of sounds, images and writing. But also the unity of a person's sensory time, of the active energy that forms matter, and the definition of fullness or emptiness taken to its maximum focus and thus destined for deletion.

**“Free movement and variation of relations between bodies now. Free sounds and sound variations between fixed telepathic impulses now\*.**

**\*DOCUMENTATION / FILM DOSSIER / RECORDED TAPE / BIOLOGICAL DURATION.**

**IA) the sensorial time unit of the lens for the active energy time in the matter registers image / Films the anything**

**IA) A used cinematographic machine using used films perpetually disgravitig - eight in anything\***

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2A) The sensorial time unit of the tape for the active energy time in the matter condenses in sound / register anything.

1A) A used recorder using used tape records perpetually disgravitng/eight in anything\*

3A) The sensorial time unit of man for active energy time the matter forms perception/perceives the anything

1A) A man using the sense unity perceives perpetually disgravitng/eight in anything ((1)\*Duration / according to film resistance - Setting / undefined - Filming camera whit image overlap film converter - Operation / film continuously rewound and reimpressioned.

2)\*Duration/according to tape resistance - Setting/undefined - Operation / continuos reversing on the two faces and re-registration of the tape))”

Cancel references on map

Cancel references in the universe

Cancel references to the universe

Be seen around”

At the Michetti Foundation in Francavilla a Mare, Prini developed an initial numerical formula that would later be widely researched.

The photographs in the catalogue show a formula written in pencil on a gallery wall. A series of numbers intersect to obtain a result or deduction: ‘Margin for error on 8’; a tape recorder with a microphone attached is on the floor and the catalogue in the archive bears a handwritten note: ‘Any initial arrangement of numbers always leads to harmonic development’.

This calculation is the principle of the even more intricate *ST/NS formula* completed at the end of the 1970s, which enclosed, through an analysis of topological sets, what could be defined as standard (ST) and non-standard (NS), until the proportion of  $2/7$  is obtained, widely studied and described in the drawings made with the Olivetti lettera 22 typewriter, carried out from the early 1970s.

The same proportion he used to place elements in the exhibition space.

In 1970, work on *Magnet* and *standard* continued with a large production of photographs, photocopies, recordings, overdubs and typed notes.

Everything continued to be analysed and measured to its own becoming and was shared with those in his life: family, friends, critics and curators, institutions, users. The same public places and the city with its streets, the used, trampled on and worn out squares

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# Fondazione Antonio Dalle Nogare

and subways. The movement and the relative consumption of the means of communication. Public transportation such as trams, buses, trains and ferries.

*Racconto che si fa da solo* (A Self-Made Tale) is a series of 90 black and white photographs of Genoa's buildings and skyscrapers. State institutions such as the Confindustria skyscraper, the Bank of Italy, municipal buildings and offices are shot with a fixed lens and exposure time with a variable aperture, the camera body is mounted on a tripod, whose head traces precise inclinations.

In a film-like unfolding, the resulting work is an account of the activity and consequent process of demagnetisation of the camera and its accessories, a study of the case and cause for obtaining an art object through the means and the energy used, put in relation with the transfer of money employed for labour, power consumption, public communication and the mechanics of socio-economic global advertising. The image of the neon sign *servizio di cassa continua* (Continuous Cash Register Service) on the back cover of the catalogue of the exhibition *Arte Povera, Land Art, Conceptual Art* held at the GAM in Turin in 1970, is part of the same film roll and, besides its interesting aesthetic impact, it captures the above in a single shot.

*Standard 1969* (*L'U.S.A. USA*) (Standard 1969. The U.S.A USES), is itself analogous. Produced in a series of letterpress prints of then standard newspaper size, it contains a descriptive formula on the use of a recorder until exhaustion:

**“The recorder records at the consumption of the mechanism. A recorder that uses used equipment records at mechanism consumption”**

*Valore-Usa-Lavoro* (Value-Use-Labour), in this way Prini compared the art system and the value of the work that the artist produces with standardised social behaviour, the labour theory of value enunciated by classical economists and later developed by K. Marx, for whom the value of a commodity is the sum of the value of the means of production employed, the value of labour power and the surplus value created during the production process.

Thus a commodity, which in this case is the work of art, has the capacity to satisfy a need and the relative exchange value, i.e. the property of acquiring other goods, through its relative price.

In Bologna, for *Gennaio 70* (January 70), Prini's demonstration focused on the 8 operational hours of two TV screens.

By means of a red/white/black chessboard calculation in which red is a time unit, white time and black the third undifferentiated time unit (the transmission apparatus) and

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isolating each step in the series of 3 ( $1+1=3$ ) as in the logarithmic spiral based on the Fibonacci sequence, a relatively precise on/off sequence is obtained.

*Magnete/proiezioni TV Programmazione di elementi a proiezione miniaturizzata con cancellazione alterna nel quadro* (Magnet/TV Projection Programming of Miniature Projection Elements with Alternating Deletion in the Picture) is made via a closed circuit camera. The fixed camera, connected to a monitor, points to an office interior with a TV set in the foreground that alternates between on and off. Outside the room, the monitor also adopts the same behaviour, thus alternating the working behaviour of the two devices. The room is filled with a recording of typing to signify the human work implemented by the machinery used.

From this demonstration emerged *Film TV. 5 min.*, a series of 11.000 photographs, expanded to about 37.000 with the addition of a large portion of off-set prints, to define the different production methods and the consequent difference in value and production time. At the same time, he elaborated on the process through typewriter drawings, in which alternating keystrokes follow the described rhythms, and, using the same logic, marker drawings on squared sheets. Once again finalising the logic of circular consumption in which everything, through use, repetition and over-inscription is brought to exhaustion and thus to annihilation.

The 'portrait' of the Exakta camera featured on four pages of the catalogue *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* was also eventually off-set printed in an edition of around 10.000 copies. Also shot in the negative as an additional cast, the sheets have a grey and/or black background and the footnote describes the intention fittingly:

**Emilio Prini/magnet/photographic series/series of 2000 sheets relating to September 1968/(4 phases)/a normal camera photographs continuously until the mechanism wears out/expected time of use of the camera/20.000 shots/expected time of work/10 years/yearly series of 2000 elements/technique/black and white photography/ferrania sheets/3 M/K 203/ 3/ each 30x40 cm/ constant shutter speed/fixed tilt stand/1969/ used camera maintains its original value and adds to the art market/**

The last pages of the catalogue contain the text that collects the telegraphic communications between Prini and Jean Christophe Ammann for the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne, Kynaston McShine for the MoMa in NY and Tucci for the Sperone Gallery. The information relates to the functions and addresses of participants, the locations of the post offices from which the telegrams were sent, the word count, the money spent and the day it was sent.

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The same text was published shortly afterwards in Studio International under the title *Part of a Comedy Script for 4 actors*.

Prini's response to requests for information on what he intended to exhibit would be the same: 'I confirm participation exhibition'.

The substantial production of typewritten sheets, always with an Olivetti letter 22, entitled *Attention. Modern Art* included formulas, poems and working hypotheses, in which the progress done with *Magnet* can be traced in the information issued by public information agencies.

A few months later, the two telegrams confirming participation in the exhibition followed by the material for the edition appeared in the catalogue of *Concept - Theorie* at the Daniel Templon Gallery in Paris.

In August 1970, with the collaboration of the Piero Barboni photographic studio in Genoa, he compiled 100 photocopies of a document, the matrix of which would be cancelled.

Nine pages, the first of which bearing the photographic studio's header, contains the declaration signed by the collaborators that they are the legitimate authors of the photocopy itself, which was made at the artist's request and executed for him against payment, as per market quotation, and the day on which the document was made.

The following pages are typewritten sheets containing information on some of the works presented, the theory of *Cosa-Caso-Causa* (1967), the investigation of propositional (telegraphic) language, ignition, consumption, time of use and magnetic fusion, universal energy as act-fact, communication, the original matrix and value of art through the passage of time, institution and politics, standardisation.

But also notes and quotations from books, machine drawings, focal points of interest and the concept of confirmation participation exhibition.

In Berne for *Arte Povera. 13 Italienische Künstler* (Arte Povera. 13 Italian Artists) in 1971, Prini was present for a demonstration, similar in concept to the one in *Gennaio 70*.

With the help of a technician, he demonstrated the exhaustion of a television set through a succession of operations. What Prini was also interested in is the information output of the television set, in this case German, as well as the minimum and maximum light and sound energy pushes of the device.

In some notes, the type theory proposed by B. Russell, but also standardisation in the broadest of senses. An analysis of the quantity of information and of information quality of the public broadcaster.

The TV advertising system can be considered an integral tautological system.

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Just as generally the public information body, so interconnected international bodies are the tautological foundation, the unified and adjacent language is tautological.

**TV disassembly: type theory.**

**'No more exhibiting grammar and syntax'.**

**Synthesis can be said to be about analysis, form and usage.**

Among the many photographs taken by Claudio Abate, one in particular stayed with Emilio Prini. Among the spectators huddled around the table where the demonstration took place, one is smoking, his fingers are slightly detached from the cigarette he is taking a puff on, and in the black and white of the photograph a star appears, coincidentally.

The photo would be called Monaco '71. (Caso Fotografico) (*Munich '71 Photographic Case*) and would appear on various occasions and editions.

With this exhibition, Germano Celant declared the end of the Arte Povera.

During the setting up of the *Septième Biennale de Paris* curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, Prini occupied the space with a tractor used by the workers of the Parc Floral, displaying it on the day of the inauguration with a politically charged sign next to it in support of the workers: 'En representance des ouvriers du Parc Floral'.

The solo exhibition *Merce Tipo Standard* (Standard Type Merchandise) at the Attico was not conceptually distant from the disassembly/assembly of the TV set in Munich, nor from the choice to exhibit the tractor in Paris.

Emilio Prini called the exhibition a demonstration.

What is analysed is the practical-economic urbanism and function of the (art) commodity, the theory and practice with which it is realised, and the complete integration of the interdependent relationships between all sectors of human activity (standard).

The distribution and classification of formal and functional structures takes place through the printing of different postal invitation cards for the exhibition, to which the addresses are entrusted. An inscription on the bottom of the postal invitations differs by 'merchandise', 'type' or 'standard', each accompanied by a different date of issue, in a kind of information asymmetry.

The occupation of the territory (gallery) is implemented through the placement of a van from the Roman company Video International S.P.A., which supplies the equipment of the closed circuit TV system (merchandise), subsequently installed in pre-established spots.

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The gallery becomes the space in which artist, gallery owner and users act. The place that Prini defines as functional urbanism conceived as the integration of the ensuing cycle of that which is necessary to live to the random needs of the moment.

TV C. C.

ENDOWMENT/THE INSTITUTION ENDOWS THE GALLERY WITH THE NECESSARY AMOUNT OF MERCHANDISE (ATTIC 3 TV SPACE CONTROL)

At the X Quadriennale in Rome in 1973, he exhibited an eternit board of standard dimensions.

**The 'standard', by deforming mechanically, adapts to different environmental situations (the gallery) and signals the changes that have taken place over time in the ways of conceiving the gallery space in relation to the changes that have occurred in the context of art.**

The table, lying on the wall, is neither supported nor docked, it is completely intact and its placement stems from a very careful study of logic, mathematics, physics and Wittgensteinian theory.

This is indeed the peaking period for his machine drawings, expressed almost completely through forms, formulas, architectural poetry, aesthetics and paradigm, which he was to produce until 1975, containing Prini's entire concept.

Inside the exhibition catalogue is a typewritten A4 sheet, on *Perimetro d'aria* and two juxtaposed photographs: *Standard 1967* and *1973*, proposed identically a few pages later, next to an igloo by Merz entitled *Lo spazio è curvo o diritto?* (Is Space Curved or Straight?) Clearly conversing with each other, the photographs seem similar and the two rods, one curved and one straight, placed on top of each other, seem to answer the question: 'I am straight, you are round'.

In the catalogue of the 1973 *Contemporanea* exhibition, the description refers to the measurements, material, support, and placement of four Eternit slabs titled *Standard, 1967/73*.

At the bottom, it reads: "Emilio Prini Genoa 1967 Rome – Contemporanea – Villa Borghese Parking Lot 1973."

For the group exhibition of De Dominicis, Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Pisani, and Prini at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome in 1974, a standard-size coloured sheet of

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Formica determined something important: the integrity or lack thereof of the sheet itself. Emilio Prini positioned the particularly flexible standard leaning against a wall and supported by a hook fixed to the wall in such a way that it did not alter the entirety of the object, not even imperceptibly, such as with a small nail hole. In front of it, a single sheet of paper was divided by red lines into seven parts. The formula  $2/7$ , based on the study of simple sets, allowed Prini to revise the Fibonacci sequence on a plane and establish the standard (integral) and the non-standard (partial).

In 1975, during the event *Arte a Tempo Pieno 24 ore su 24* (24h Full-Time Art) at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome, Prini presented himself with a notebook filled with graph paper, on which he had repeatedly typed two overlapping characters, an "O" and the symbol for the pound (£), creating a tiny portrait that closely resembled Napoleon Bonaparte. Throughout the evening, he conducted a practical demonstration in the gallery's rooms.

Between 1970 and 1975, Prini compiled around 200 drawings using the Olivetti 22 typewriter. These were often produced in numbered groups on sheets primarily in American letter format, which was the standard until 1975, but also in A4 format. The early drawings can be traced back to behavioural studies of the tools used for spatial study, where the sheet itself represented the given perimeter. Some photographs containing architectural details rich in vertical and horizontal lines are meticulously reproduced, while others were recreated from memory or simply imagined. His study of analytic geometry, logic, set theory, probability and statistics, and particularly quantum physics, led him to produce highly complex and impactful works. His pursuit of emptiness by way of negation never ceased.

In 1972, Prini visited the Olivetti plant in Sassuolo, where he took several photographs with his characteristic, unique, elegant, and objective perspective. During the same years, he visited IBM and various technological production offices.

By the late 1960s, advancements in machine tools, the changing technological characteristics of many products (standardisation and modularity), and the development of mass markets and production increased pressure within the European industrial world to modify factory organisation. In the 1960s, Olivetti began exploring the possibility of adopting different models for organising work. Task rotation, assigning factory workers more operations, as Philips chose to do, or more qualified functions, as IBM did, group work, and the adoption of mini-assembly lines for smaller parts of the product. In the early 1970s, the company decided to address the reorganisation of work more thoroughly and systematically to move beyond the traditional assembly line model. By gathering information, analysing it, and creating

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study groups involving all relevant levels (workers, supervisors, technicians, managers, analysts), the paths for change were defined, and a vast training and workforce retraining plan was launched. This new organisation led to the creation of Integrated Assembly Units (UMI). Each worker was assigned a meaningful task that allowed them to have a clear vision of the final result, giving them greater responsibility. Within certain limits, they were no longer tied to the pre-established rhythms of the assembly line and had some discretion in self-organising their work. By 1976, the implementation of tasks and workers' rotation led to the desired improvement in productivity and quality, compensating for the higher wage costs required. Thus, it is impossible to separate practical use from Prini's interest in a company like Olivetti, which was implementing a futuristic process.

The coming years would not differ in terms of method and research. Although Prini's projects became more sporadic over time, he continued to work consistently until 2016.

So long then.

Timotea Prini