



laboratorio d'arte  
palazzo delle esposizioni



Chiara Camoni | Photograph by Claudio Pascarelli

for activity  
for kids

# CHIARA CAMONI

was born in Piacenza in 1974 but she now lives and works in the hills of the Upper Versilia in Tuscany. Nature and the passage of time are invariably feature in her work. Leaves, branches, stones and clay meet her hands and thoughts to become sculptures, prints, drawings, videos and books through the medium of her artistic creativity.

*Kabira* is the product of a common intuition. The work is a collective installation\* in wood and clay created in 2019. Fifteen people from all over Italy held a number of meetings at the Museo Carlo Zauli in Faenza under Chiara Camoni's guiding hand. In the course of this workshop\* they alternated moments of theory with moments of practice. Their personal histories, their group interaction and their discussions on art led to a shared decision to depict a life-size horse. They even all agreed on the title, *Kabira*, the name of a horse of which Chiara Camoni had been especially fond. In the course of the meetings, they went walking and drew horses from life, read poems and exchanged tales sitting around a worktable, and modelled clay into small, free and reiterated shapes. Each participant produced several models. Before drying, the models were pierced in the centre with a wooden toothpick then fired in a terracotta oven and finally all joined together in long strings like the pearls on a giant necklace. This series of strings, arranged on the wooden shed-shaped structure, is what makes up *Kabira's* body. The wooden parts were also created during the group meetings, when it was decided that the sculpture should be touched and even inhabited like a cabin for people to



*Kabira*, 2019  
Courtesy SpazioA, Pistoia  
Photograph by Angela Grigolato

*Sometimes when I start a new cycle of works I don't know exactly where I'm going. I do things with determination, but the reasons why I do them come later. I follow a flow of associations, juxtapositions and intuitions.*

shelter in, a secret place for them to hide in. Kabira's neck and head were made of the same clay and modelled by several different artists' hands and minds like the rest of the work, using black Belgian clay from the cellars of the Museo Carlo Zauli. There is only one part of the head that is different, because it is enamelled: the horse's eyes. The colour of the enamel is the result of a concoction with a melting base with the addition of animal ashes obtained by burning the remains of horses' nails and hair.

It took a long time to put the work of art together. Each piece of clay first modelled then fired and assembled, and each wooden plank first shaped and then nailed in place both recorded and, at the same time, breathed new life into the time the artists spent together creating, telling stories and talking about themselves.



## \* glossary

**COLLECTIVE INSTALLATION** is a work of art created and assembled by several people, in which each person leaves a mark or a trace of their contribution.

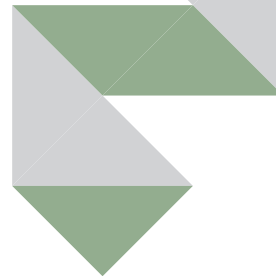
**WORKSHOP** is a kind of laboratory, but it is a term also used to describe a meeting or a course lasting a certain amount of time in the company of an expert. It can be on a given topic, on an expressive technique (art, the theatre, writing) or on a practical exercise.

**VEGETABLE PRINTING** is an ancient form of printing that has recently been revived because it is both environmentally friendly and sustainable. You print on natural fabrics such as silk, wool or cotton without using any harmful substances, just using the impression and the colour released by leaves and flowers during the boiling process in boiling water.

**ALCHEMIST** is a person who practised alchemy, a mysterious science whose purpose was to turn base metals into precious metals such as gold or silver. Today we tend to use the word to describe people who transform materials, in this instance through the practice of art.

A *Tent* is an installation created in 2019 consisting of a large cylindrical brass structure and six pieces of silk cloth, each with a vegetable print\*. Just like *Kabira*, so this installation too was designed to be touched, lived in and walked through in a cross between architecture and sculpture. A *Tent*'s main characters are the creatures on the cloth, made by printing on silk the spontaneous plants and wildflowers that Chiara Camoni picked in her garden or while going for walks near her house. Each cloth has a creature, a kind of woodland spirit, achieved by obtaining the impression of berries, petals, small branches and bark. They are lively creatures with faces, eyes that gaze at you, smiling mouths, hands, hair and moustaches. They look like our ancestors, the mysterious inhabitants of a natural world that we cannot always succeed in seeing.

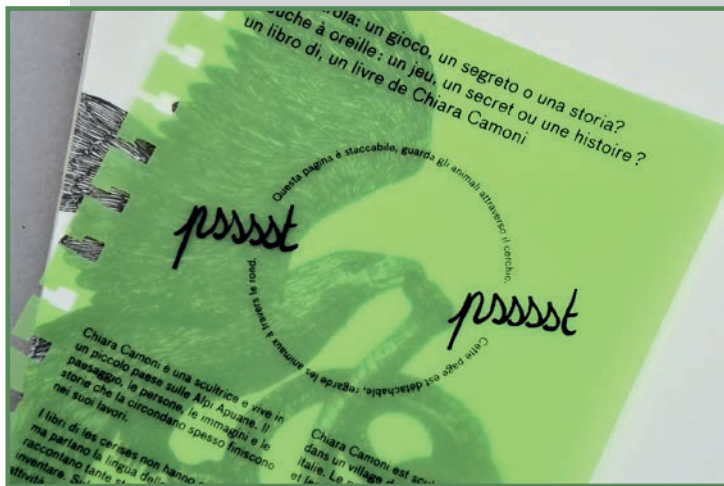
Like an alchemist\* Chiara Camoni tinkers on her kitchen table and in her garden with liquid concoctions of copper, iron, vinegar and bicarbonate to spray on flowers and leaves which then release coloured impressions while in close contact with the silk during the boiling process.



*Vegetable printing uses flowers and leaves with colouring properties to print on the fabric with the substances they contain. It is a lengthy process consisting of several phases and is largely unpredictable. The result is always a surprise. This makes the figures real ghosts, for me too. I used flowers and plants from my garden and from the woods outside my house. They are the spirits of the nature that lies all around me and they represent the changing seasons.*

## fun fact

In 2016 Chiara Camoni published a silent book for children with the publisher Les Cerises entitled *PsssstPsssst* alluding to the wireless telephone game, in which she urges readers to engage in active and collective participation. The book has heavy cardboard pages that are spiral-bound and thus endless. Each page recounts a mysterious conversation between two animals portrayed with almost scientific accuracy: a cat and a fish, a snake and a frog, or a rabbit and a hen in a word-of-mouth game that conceals secrets and opportunities. It is up to the reader to come up with original answers and solutions.



To try experimenting with a kind of vegetable print that is easy to do at home without having to go through the boiling process, first of all plan a walk in your neighbourhood. Pick wild flowers and look for the most interesting leaves and berries you come across on your walk. When you get home, take time to observe them closely, using a magnifying glass if you wish. If you happen to have an illustrated *herbarium*, you can even find out their names. Get hold of: a sheet of paper used for watercolour painting or some rough card; a bowl into which you can pour white vinegar and a bit of water; and a sponge to wet the sheet, dabbing it on both sides. Fold the sheet into two equal parts and place your finds from nature on one side only. Arrange the flowers, leaves and berries however you like, remembering that printing is going to produce mirror-images of their shapes on the other, currently empty, half of the sheet. Close the sheet and wrap it in clingfilm so that it is tight and fully sealed. Take a rolling pin and go over it several times, pressing down hard. Leave it overnight. When you open the sheet, you will see that the plants have made unexpected coloured impressions. Look at the result. What do you think? What title would you give your composition? Now try another print, wetting the sheet a little more or a little less, or using sodium bicarbonate instead of vinegar.

E-mail us a photograph  
of your work to  
[laboratoriodarte@palaexpo.it](mailto:laboratoriodarte@palaexpo.it)  
and we'll publish it on the *Give Us*  
*a Sign* page on our website:  
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## now you try!