

Ilaria Vinci (1991, Brindisi) lives and works in Zurich. Vinci’s practice spans sculpture, installation, drawing, and collaborative performance, exploring how fantasy shapes, reveals, and distorts reality through the languages of visual entertainment. Drawing on recurring cultural motifs such as Sci-fi tropes and fairytales, she investigates how narratives evolve across time while preserving their core metaphorical functions. By distilling visual themes into essential components of storytelling, Vinci positions viewers as co-authors in the process of meaning-making, framing fiction as a critical tool for interpreting and transforming contemporary realities.

Her work has been included in solo and group exhibitions at Kunsthaus Zurich (2024); Kunsthalle Zurich (2023); Museion, Bolzano (2023); Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich (2023); MACRO Museum, Rome (2022); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2021); Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen (2021), among others.

Istituto Svizzero acts as a transdisciplinary platform bringing together artistic and scientific research. From Rome, Milan or Palermo, it facilitates connections between Switzerland and Italy, as well as internationally. Istituto Svizzero offers residencies to emerging artists and researchers who wish to contribute to the future of art, science and innovation. Each year, the Institute presents a public programme aimed at promoting forward-thinking events and projects, experimental practices and excellence in research. Istituto Svizzero seeks to actively participate in the global discourse on arts and society, envisioning new paths and looking beyond the boundaries of disciplines.

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Galleria Alice Amati, London

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Opening hours
Monday – Friday: 11:00–17:00
Thursday: 11:00–20:00
Saturday: 14:00–18:00

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Istituto Svizzero presents the first institutional solo exhibition in Italy by Ilaria Vinci (Brindisi, 1991; lives in Zurich). Vinci’s work, which encompasses sculpture, installation, and drawing, uses the fantastical as a lens through which to engage with reality. Drawing on the legacy of fairy tales and fables, as well as contemporary fantasy and science fiction, her practice taps into the storytelling power inherent in the iconographies and cultural motifs that populate the collective imagination. Through these elements, Vinci articulates fictional universes that become speculative tools for negotiating the construction of the real.

Goodnight Morning at Istituto Svizzero in Milan presents a series of new sculptures that evoke the liminal passage from wakefulness into sleep, and back. The works seem to appropriate the oniric process by which the day’s information and traumatic events are transformed into objects, places, and scenarios that are familiar yet distorted by a language that transcends rationality. A wishing well—a popular motif devised to construct, manage, and quantify desire—rises from the shipping crate of a freshly delivered work. The felling of trees collides with the topos of the enchanted forest, while newspapers transfigure the day’s horrifying events into hybrid entities that are blown away. United by wood as both organic material and symbolic device, the works engage with cultural archetypes that have endured across the centuries as vehicles for different meanings and forms of power.

Just as in altered states of consciousness every thing, object, and place is formed of the same neural substance as the mind imagining it, in the exhibition space every element seems to have originated from the same tree trunk. Environments, objects, and figures of differing status coexist, much as they do in the hallucinated clarity of our first waking moments, as we grope our way to the bathroom. Unified by Vinci’s sculptural and poetic language, they seem to interrogate the transformative potential of the subconscious as the antechamber of reality.

Curated by Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti (Head Curator Istituto Svizzero)

Goodnight Morning Ilaria Vinci

18.09.2026
29.11.2026



Ilaria Vinci, *Knock just in case of good suggestions or real emergency*, 2021, Photo: Margot Montigny.

Milano

Istituto Svizzero

EN

List of works

ROOM 1

Handle with care, 2026
Wood, iron acetate, wood stain,
aluminium, spray colour
235 × 100 × 100 cm

Does language eclipse feeling?,
2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
100 × 89 × 90 cm

Almost Natural, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
25 × 88 × 79 cm

Interior design, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
70 × 94 × 78 cm

Interior design III, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
61 × 86 × 83 cm

Interview, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
47 × 74 × 62 cm

Shadows of the evening, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
41 x 72 × 61 cm

Shadows of the evening, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
47 × 62 × 73 cm

Shadows of the evening, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
48 × 71 × 62 cm

Shadows of the evening, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
35 × 68 × 69 cm

ROOM 2

*Knock just in case of good
suggestions or real emergency*, 2021
Fibreglass and spray paint
70 × 120 × 75 cm

*Knock just in case of good
suggestions or real emergency*, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
108 × 65 × 50 cm

*Knock just in case of good
suggestions or real emergency*, 2026
Epoxy putty, acrylic and oil painting
97 × 43 × 64 cm

The plot thickens, 2026
Watercolour on cotton paper
47 × 57 cm

All works courtesy the artist
and Galleria Alice Amati, London

I. Once Upon a Time

One way to access Ilaria Vinci’s work is through an age-old practice: storytelling. The impulse to invent and share stories, often laced with extraordinary or fantastical elements, has been a constant for virtually all of human history. These narratives—from archaic oral myths to fairy tales and fantasy literature—have served multiple, overlapping functions: encoding knowledge to be passed down through generations; helping to form and reaffirm the identity of a given community; performing an educational, moralising or cathartic role for a particular social or religious group; and, increasingly, serving an entertainment function, which became their predominant domain over the course of the twentieth century. More recently, fictional narratives have come to be relegated largely to the realm of childhood and adolescence, its privileged audience.

At the same time, however, the structures and narrative functions of fiction, stripped of their magical trappings, have continued to infiltrate contemporary public discourse: the description of fictional realities, along with the strategic use of symbolic figures and tropes, characterises political propaganda and the media that disseminate it, as well as advertising language and the self-celebratory, sensationalist rhetoric that now dominates self-narration. The progressive infantilisation of fiction has run alongside the “fictionalisation” of adult reality, in which the construction and dissemination of myths often serve specific agendas and powers.

Vinci’s work sits within this landscape, narrowing the gap between the two worlds. Her practice builds fictional yet plausible universes, whose characters, objects, and settings draw on the repertoire of the fantastic to engage with the construction of the reality we inhabit. Motifs lifted from fantasy literature and film invade the space of realist narration, while popular iconographies of contemporary culture are destabilised and put to the test through their own mythologisation. Vinci extracts stories, subjects and cultural motifs from the collective imaginary, deforming, transforming them, and setting them to work in new configurations. In her hands they become speculative tools, reclaiming the creative power of storytelling and restoring imagination to a central place in critical thought.

This approach engages with two distinct and at times opposing traditions. Methodologically, it edges close to the critical and philosophical practice of “world-making”, which recognises in science fiction a form of political prefiguration. From this perspective, speculative fiction can help us imagine alternative social orders with emancipatory potential—as with feminist science fiction, Afrofuturism and

strands of queer literature. In terms of content, Vinci’s work often engages with the fantasy universe, an imaginary increasingly co-opted by reactionary forces, conservative milieus and, more recently, techno-libertarian circles. From the “Hobbit Camps” organised by the Youth Front (youth wing of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement) in Italy between 1977 and 1981 to Palantir Technologies—Peter Thiel’s data-analytics firm, named after the seeing-stones in *The Lord of the Rings*—fantasy has repeatedly provided a vehicle for nostalgic yearnings for rigid, hierarchical social orders and for violent forms of interaction grounded in anti-democratic principles.

Vinci draws freely on this reservoir of fantasy imagery—itself frequently rooted in the tropes of ancient myths and fairy tales—reclaiming its transformative, counter-hegemonic potential. In doing so, she contributes to the reactivation and resignification of motifs and symbols that have travelled across ages and geographies, gathering them up and ferrying them towards new horizons. More specifically, she does so through the processes of artistic production, using codified formal languages such as sculpture, installation and drawing, and within the specific context of contemporary art—itself an inherently hybrid space in the negotiation of its own regime of truth. The art object belongs to the symbolic

dimension of representation while simultaneously existing in the real world: it activates processes of physical and somatic experience, sets networks of economic valorisation in motion and asserts itself as an ontological certainty—albeit with the poetic licence of relative veracity. Freed from any expectation of adhering perfectly to reality, the space of art provides ideal conditions for experimenting with the power of fantastical speculation.

II. Goodnight Morning

Entering *Goodnight Morning*, we find ourselves faced with a felled forest: only stumps remain, gripping the ground with their roots. The installation invites us to imagine the bodies and canopies of the trees that must once have stretched towards the high ceiling of the hall at Istituto Svizzero—a small

enchanted wood of which only remnants survive. Historically cast as a liminal space where ordinary social structures are suspended, the forest is the site of the rite of passage, a threshold between one state and another. In the literary topos, one enters the forest alone, often to undergo a passage of existential disorientation involving a psychic encounter with otherworldly realities, before returning transformed to one’s community.

Vinci’s forest seems to translate into sculpture the possibility of accessing a transitional state of consciousness—similar to the state we enter every day just before falling asleep or immediately after waking, when the mind accepts without reserve a hybrid narrative combining the real and the imagined. The dream process by which the day’s information is transformed into familiar places and scenarios, objects, by a language that

transcends rationality, becomes a methodological principle for approaching the works on view. An axe lodged in one of the stumps tells us how the trees were felled, perhaps to create the other presences in the room: a magic well, a figure

fishing and small nuts on one of the trunks. Just as

every object and place in the subconscious is made of the same neural matter as the mind that imagines it, so in the exhibition space every element seems to have been carved from the same trunk.

The gesture of hewing the trees coexists with that of carving—sculpting by subtraction to coax form from material—as in the baroque bas-reliefs carved with a knife into some of the trunks. The imagery of wanton deforestation coexists with that of wood brought to life through human creativity, as in a contemporary Pinocchio, heightening the ambiguity of human intervention in the organic world.

A wooden figure resembling the artist sits fishing in mid-air with a long rod,

recalling the etymology of “trolling”—a term borrowed from fishing and now used to describe the act of intervening in an online community for no other purpose than to disrupt ordinary interactions between users. The work revives the figure of the troll, a demonic, long-nosed gnome said to inhabit the woods. The blindfold covering her eyes evokes the seer who loses ordinary sight in order to gain the ability to see into the otherworld, upending the old Italian saying that ‘sleepers don’t catch fish’ (in English, ‘the early bird gets the worm’).

The trunk she sits on, like all the others, is heart-shaped: an ancient symbol now recognised globally as a sign of approval of someone or something, as well as a form of interaction designed to require the least possible effort while generating engagement on social platforms. Hacked by the axe and pierced by the knife, Vinci’s hearts seem to recall the religious iconography of the *Mater Dolorosa* or the imagery of pirates’ tattoos, in which the dagger-pierced heart offered a symbolic materialisation of otherwise invisible psychic pain.

Amidst the forest stands a wooden shipping crate of the kind normally used to transport works of art. It has been transformed into a well—an engineered mechanism for bringing to the surface what circulates invisibly underground. This new hybrid device recalls the popular motif of the wishing well, linking the gesture of throwing in coins in the hope of healing or having one’s wishes granted to the mechanisms of circulation and valorisation within the art system and the economic fragility that characterises them.

The second room of the exhibition opens unexpectedly onto a domestic space: a bathroom whose fixtures are carved from walnut shells. The setting might be the refuge of a forest-dweller or simply an ordinary bathroom, transfigured by the hallucinations of whoever passes through it. Vinci ennobles the bathroom, typically the first room we inhabit in the morning and the last we visit at night, casting it as a privileged threshold between sleep and waking. The felled forest and the walnut-shell bathroom act as foils to one another: eccentric spaces—natural and artificial respectively—of transition into one’s own subconscious.

A gust of wind has blown scattered newspaper pages against the trunks. The daily paper—a medium typically associated with a guarantee of reality and the verified account of events—becomes another product of the subconscious. The unmooring of information from factual reality is taken to its furthest extreme, leaving us uncertain as to whether Vinci’s newspapers describe the universe she has created within the exhibition or serve as a reminder that there is, after all, not so much distance between an imagined story and a fake one.

