

*Seven steps to complete an artwork.
At the eighth, continue your walk.*

***The Eighth Step** chronicles the
journey: tribute and legacy of the
Italian-American artist Linda Salerno.*



The Eighth Step tells of an encounter and friendship, exploring memories as well as the pain and weight of loss — yet is recounted with the childlike joy of a little girl looking into the closet of the adult woman, to find again the real sense of a life and also the imprint of an absence, through play and disguise.

Seven brief stories tell the encounter with art; beginning from paintings, clothes, shoes and unfinished canvases, left behind and found again in the studio of the Italian-American artist Linda Salerno, in Lugano, Switzerland, who passed away in 2011 and who inspired this film.

The art that we contemplate delivers us to the limit of the flight and the heritage that is the eighth step: to be accomplished with confidence the love of the beauty in art.

To make it flourish.

Director's notes

Leonardo Da Vinci said it is instructive to observe in the stains on a wall "extraordinary inventions" (mirabilissime invenzioni) and so in **The Eighth Step**, we enter into the work and wear the dress until it fits like a glove. This is an always interlocking game, continuously animating inanimate objects, adapting the body for each form we meet and seeing precisely, in that form, a new landscape. Each step proceeds by conceptual association but also, and above all, it turns into an aesthetic and photographic instance: to reveal the space where a new movement and new, unexpected, landscapes can be generated. To this end, the film associates the ability of action within the work and also the possibility to simultaneously prepare the movement from outside, setting up in every detail the scenographies, the costumes and the photographic possibilities. That ability is trained from the exercise of the gaze as the only possible engine that replaces, in this film, the word.

Linda Salerno was born on October 20, 1950 in York, Pennsylvania. From 1972 to 2002 live and works in her loft in SoHo, New York. For health reasons she moved 2002 to Someo/Canton Ticino in Switzerland. She passed away on July 17, 2011 in Lugano. Her last solo exhibitions was "Who Are You ? - Works from the Black Mirror Series" at Officinaarte, Magliaso/Lugano, at Camera Club New York, curated by Allen Frame, as well as at the Centro Luigi di Sarro, Rome, curated by Roberto Mutti. The exhibitions were accompanied by a book published by CHARTA Art Books and edited by Martin Kunz, with contributions by Klaus Honnef, Elisabeth Longari, and Roberto Mutti as well as an interview with the artist by Claudia Steinberg.



Elena Morando is a writer and interdisciplinary artist whose work span research topics related, writing, video and the performing arts. Her first poetry book *Mai più la parola cielo* (published by Aisara) was shortlisted for the Mario Luzi Prize 2011. Her story *Vicino al cuore* won the Claudia Sbarigia – Solinas Award 2009; *L'evidente Armonia delle cose* won the Avisia 20 prize and —produced by the ISRE, Sardinia, in 2010 — was her first medium-length film.



by

Photo: Alessandro Viganò



The seven steps — defined by Linda Salerno with a perfect poetic synthesis — gave the title to each work of a series called "The Seven Steps", painted and drawn on 7 large, multi-layered transparent sheets, each consisting of 4-5 layered, free hanging vellum pages. Made between 2007 and 2008, they were titled: Approach, Reveal, Gaze, Balance, Release, Surrender and Flourish, individually defining each work. The works always represent the same subject: a woman dressed in black in the action of taking a step. The woman disappears and reappears from the transparent layers of the tissue of the vellum tissues, in a game of appearance and disappearance, to signify the art game, where everything, when compounded, could have different meanings and readings, depending on the flow of feelings. The seven steps also can be understood as the seven steps necessary to the artist in the creative process and they are recounted in the video from suggestions related to the work of Linda Salerno. The seven stories proceed by visual and auditory associations, leading up to a "flowering" of the work, and finally deliver, to those who watch, the designated final seventh step. Words are excluded; instead there is the music speaking and the actress-dancer's actions that relate to the works and travel within the metaphorical space between the work and its contemplation — in the limited and strict space that art renders us. The video explores the three-dimensional quality of art work, with the walking, dressing and undressing as trace and inheritance, as imprint of a body: the relationship between music and gesture in a precise musical dramaturgy built on rhythmic associations, takes into account the themes developed by the musicians themselves.



Step 1 Approach

Approach to the work means wearing other people's shoes and clothes, undressing their own, remaining naked and a bit helpless, waiting to be dressed with new colors and new shapes.

But in *Approach* we see also the simple telling of the story of a common passion: that passion for special, very personal clothes and how to wear them. Clothes belonging to others, found clothes, clothes put together for a taste formed through time and with lots of feelings and never in step with fashion. So the clothes become words that still talk and communicate, seduce, love.

Step 2 Reveal

The circular dance reveals the meditated passage toward knowledge. Everything continues to be — it doesn't have an end if one experiences the movement of the circle.

Reveal is a dance that starts from the ground. Laying on the floor she strips, crawling in rotating moves, almost as if swimming, to rise to the vertical. That is how the artist finds liquid matter and then creates the painting that is developed vertically; through concentric circles, making matter move, composing a magnificent dance, that, as with the dervish dancers, becomes a prayer.



Step 3 Gaze

The order of art turns to disorder in presumed normality: the game to try on all the shoes to recompose the footsteps. But the artist always has mismatched shoes.

Gaze is the game of a little girl with too large shoes. Our look is fixed on them. In infancy we all have experienced that ancient and simple game: to wear and to remove the shoes of grown ups, to measure ourselves with other's steps. To find a new balance, in the imbalance of the bigger shoes.

Step 4 Balance

Each artist should be crowned with flowers when his work overcomes the fatigue and materiality of artisan work: everything becomes then perfectly balanced, thanks to this humility of spirit.

Balance overlaps glossy and transparent papers; photographs and small drawings — found in the studio of the artist — which are being moved to overlap, transformed from one constellation to the next, playing with the repertoire of the artist's vocabulary of ancient signs and her own images. It speaks of a princess crowned with flowers, dressed in a black suit, crossing beaches, bathing in the sea, of salt on blue small boats, and then ends with a butterfly, fluttering in front of a waterfall.



Step 5 Release

Release the energy of the gesture to create the sign: so the painting becomes sound.

Release simply tells the painting's dance: the sound contained in the gesture that crosses the canvas but also brings home the three-dimensionality of the form that belongs to the imagination of every painter.



Step 6 Surrender

Clothes are our footprints, on them rests the sacredness of the body. Clothes are also magnificent architectures, suspended, abandoned.

Try to wear dresses as if they were architecture, where one can pass through: gently and gracefully touch the shape. *Surrender* tells this but also attempts to draw a new landscape, very human and imaginatively plain, but with its own, particular perspective.



Step 7 Flourish

Confused spectators are fused together with the work: the story of oblivion and awakenings document extreme beauty.

Each flowering happens after the seeding, just as Vincent Van Gogh told his brother Theo in his letters, that he doesn't want to get tired going on to sow and sow, year after year, by painting and painting. As any good farmer, so the artist waits for the right time: he does not reap, but waits

for others to arrive and contemplate the finished work. Flourish delivers to the world this blooming, which will become the eighth step.



Some excerpts from **The Eighth Step** were shown as part of the Exhibiton *Sconfinamenti # 3* with an installation of Linda Salerno's *7 Steps* and other works, at the 58th International Festival of 2Mondi, Spoleto, Italy in 2015.