'Dove io debbo dipingere scrivo uno quadrangolo di retti angoli quanto grande io voglio, el quale reputo essere una finestra aperta per donde io miri quello che quivi sarà dipinto'[historia].

'I trace as large a quadrangle as I wish, with right angles, on the surface to be painted; in this place, it certainly functions for me as an open window through which the *historia* is observed.'[1]

Leon Battista Alberti, Della Pittura, 1436

Inter·face /ˈɪntəfeɪs/
noun 1. (*computing*) an electrical circuit, connection or program that joins one device or system to another

2. the point where two subjects, systems, etc. meet and affect each other

The literal meaning of the word 'interface' has to do with interaction: inter-, a Latin prefix meaning between, among, mutually, in the midst of. Inter-face, inter-action: to put a face between things, to mutually act. An interface in this sense functions like a point of connection rather than a barrier or boundary: when two elements meet and an interface is between them, they connect, rather than being separated. Interfaces produce opportunities of transformation.

By extension, interface is also how the systems through which we operate our numerous devices in our daily lives are called, and by further extension it can indicate the devices themselves. The envelope-looking icon on our smartphone is part of a graphic interface, through which we communicate with the machine. On our end, it is designed to be intuitively understood, and it then translates our actions into meaningful instructions for the system. The shift from textual interfaces, that required users to enter the instructions verbally following a set language, to graphic interfaces has determined a boom in the diffusion of technological devices on a mass level, with the results we see and experience every day: images are a much more shared kind of code.

What is curious about digital interfaces is that they technically put the user in contact with the machine itself, rather than with other individuals. True, the machine contains additional levels of interfaces that eventually reach other machines and their respective interfaces and users, too, so that the effect we get by using them is to be interacting with other people: interfaces have become invisible and completely insignificant. Still, they are there, layers of translating mechanisms, and their presence arguably affects the actual communication. This is one of the aspects explored by the INTERFACE exhibition.

The works that make up the exhibition deal in a great variety of ways with the multifaceted meanings associated with this word, both in its strict sense and in the more extended one. There are pieces which require or encourage the actual interaction of viewers, where the merging of two systems, the viewer and the viewed object, determines a transformation that involves both. Other pieces adopt technology and its interfaces as media, subjects, themes of reflection, and sometimes all of them simultaneously. Interfaces as subtle points of contact between the most varied aspects of the world are the subject of yet other pieces, which focus on the primary, literal meaning of the word. And, most of all, many of the artists have created combinations of these different interpretations, enriching immensely the possible points of view and offering stimuli for reflection.

Art will always be an interface between us and the world, as writer and artist Leon Battista Alberti had realised already in the 15th century: his conception of the painting as a window, an interface opening up on a different reality, has been highly influential since its expression, and although, as this exhibition manifests, today's artistic media have widened since his time, the relevance of his words is not at all lost. Art puts us in communication with some kind of otherness, expressing those inexpressible things and translating them for us to be received.

Sara Riccardi, art historian

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[1] Leon Battista Alberti: On painting. A new translation and critical edition, curated by Rocco Sinisgalli, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 39