ROSONE NO. 2, PART OF A FIVE-PIECE SERIES. MAMMALS ARE MAGENTA, REPTILES ARE CYAN AND THE PLANT LAYER IS YELLOW.

FILTERED FRESCOS

CARNOVSKY's RGB collection proves wallpaper can be more than just a flat, static surface.

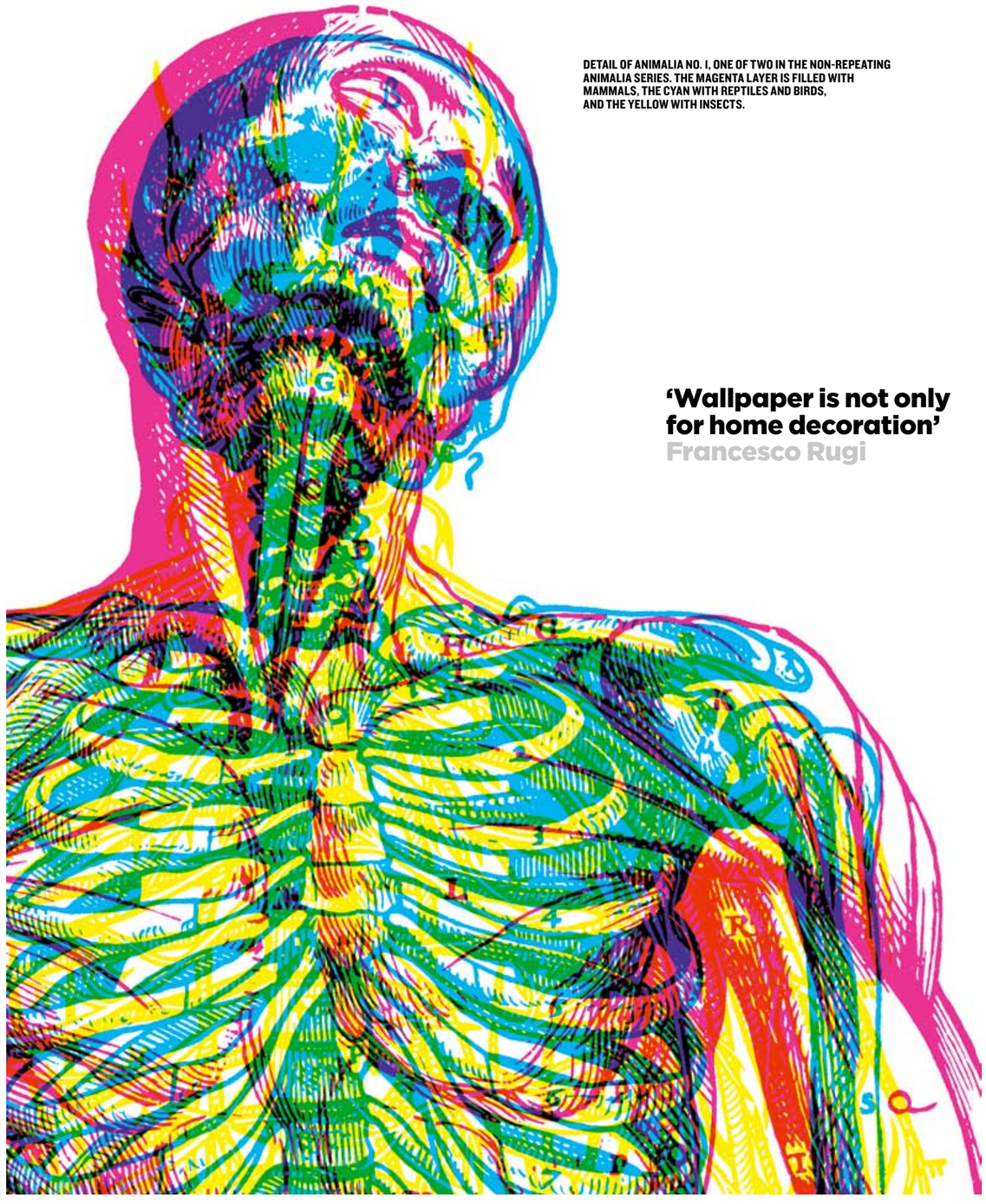
WORDS **SHONQUIS MORENO**
PHOTOS **COURTESY OF CARNOVSKY**

Among the spaceship wallpapers and chinoiserie in Janelli & Volpi's Milan showroom in April, four patterns stood out. The non-repeating motifs of the RGB wallpapers change, depending on the colour of the light – white, red, green or blue – to which they are exposed. Designed by Milanese studio Carnovsky, the RGB collection has four sequences, each of which consists of three layers of cyan, magenta and yellow illustrations. Vesalio, for example, features anatomical drawings of a human figure, posed hand to chin as if contemplating his own mortality. The skeleton is rendered in cyan, the musculature in magenta and the nervous system in yellow, and each layer is called forth by a different light. As the lights shift, however, the transitions momentarily reveal two layers at the same time and, under ordinary white light (a combination of red, green and blue), all three become visible in an alternately exuberant and Gothic confusion of overlaid hues and offset imagery.

Two Domus graduates, Colombian Silvia Quintanilla and Italian Francesco Rugi, initiated the RGB project in 2008, a year after establishing Carnovsky. The use of coloured light as a filter to expose or obscure an image visible under ordinary light isn't new, but has typically involved only two images and a single filter. One example is Stefan Sagmeister's 2007 monograph, *Made You Look*, which reveals a secondary image when removed from its transparent red slipcover. Carnovsky decided to use three filters and then set out to update the fresco, transforming the prehistoric wall painting into wallpaper. 'For us, wallpaper is not only for home decoration,' Rugi explains. 'It should also contain a narrative.'

Under the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Max Ernst's 1934 serial graphic novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* – a collage of Victorian imagery – Quintanilla and Rugi began a two-year investigation into natural histories published between the 16th and 19th centuries. The pair collected illustrations by Dutch naturalist Maarten Houttuyn, plates from an encyclopaedia edited by Abbé Pierre Bonnaterre and, for Vesalio, human figures appearing in a volume from 1543, *On the Workings of the Human Body*, by Andreas Vesalius. 'It was amazing to discover how a single image of an exotic animal that the original artist had surely never seen in the flesh could be passed down from century to century and change only slightly,' Rugi says, referring to the fact that, for centuries, Europeans had access to only a few images of the rhinoceros. >>>

THE INSTALLATION AT JANELLI & VOLPI'S MILAN SHOWROOM DURING THE SALONE DEL MOBILE.



DETAIL OF ANIMALIA NO. I, ONE OF TWO IN THE NON-REPEATING ANIMALIA SERIES. THE MAGENTA LAYER IS FILLED WITH MAMMALS, THE CYAN WITH REPTILES AND BIRDS, AND THE YELLOW WITH INSECTS.

‘Wallpaper is not only for home decoration’

Francesco Rugi

CHANGES IN RED, GREEN AND BLUE LIGHTING REVEAL THE DIFFERENT WALLPAPER LAYERS. LEDS ARE USED WITH A DMX CONTROLLER TO MANIPULATE THE COLOURS, TRANSITION AND TIMING OF THE ILLUMINATION. WITH PAOLA JANNELLI AND THE LIGHTING TEAM, CARNOVSKY CHOSE A QUICK SHIFT BETWEEN COLOURS TO COINCIDE WITH THE FAST PACE OF DESIGN WEEK.

CARNOVSKY’S WORKSPACE FILLED WITH SKETCHES, TRIALS AND FILTERS.

In a painterly fashion, from an archive of 1000 animal and plant images, Carnovsky composed patterns that conjure up both the factual and the fantastic and resemble medieval bestiaries . The designers calibrated the colour of the resulting digital prints to that of the filters (filters can be lights, a transparent material like Plexiglas or even clear-plastic furniture). The mammal layer in Animalia, printed in magenta, materializes under a green filter; red light draws forth the cyan of the reptiles and birds; and the yellow insects crawl out from under a blue light. Blue has the narrowest visible range (red has the widest), so Quintanilla and Rugi printed the ‘scary or disgusting’ images – insects or the nervous system – in yellow, which shows up under blue but recedes under white. ‘It’s a compromise between what works perfectly in theory and what you get in reality,’ admits Rugi.

‘Wallpaper gives us the opportunity to bring metamorphosis to an architectural scale, as if we really are painting frescos,’ he continues. ‘You could say that with RGB we are trying to explore the depth of surfaces.’ The phrase *‘La profonditá della superficie’* was used by Alessandro Mendini in 1981 to describe his vision of drawings and objects that are capable of changing, as opposed to remaining eternally static, and that are indefinite rather than rigidly circumscribed. ‘The idea is that there are many different levels of meanings in things,’ says Rugi. ‘What you see at first may hide alternate meanings, other worlds. And perhaps what we assume to be flat is actually not.’ ■

carnovsky.com

SILVIA QUINTANILLA, ONE HALF OF CARNOVSKY.