

MARIA MORGANTI – DEVELOPMENT OF A PAINTING

(PROJECT FOR THE FONDAZIONE QUERINI STAMPALIA CAFÉ IN VENICE.)

THE COLOUR SETTLES INTO THE SPACE

*How wonderful when the whole room – silently –
barely moving its lips – suggests a verse! (1)*

Marina Tsvetaeva

CONDENSING THE COLOUR

The project originated from the *Quadro per la Sala dell'800* (Painting for the Nineteenth-Century Room), which I painted in 2008 during repeated visits to the museum's picture gallery.

The painting originated from the colours found in the paintings of the nineteenth-century room and in particular from the flower in the hair of the woman in a Milesi painting (*La Modella*, 1910), which I envisaged as the palette on which the artist had contemplated his colours. It was as if that flower had become the place where he ended up cleaning his brushes, the point of reflection, his thinking in colours instead of in words. During each visit, I collected a colour and took it back to the studio with me, materialising it in a layer of paint on the canvas. My painting is the result of the superimposition of these experiences.

DILATING THE COLOUR

In 2015 when Chiara Bertola asked me to come up with a project for Mario Botta's café I decided to go back to that painting.

The thing that had allowed me to realise the idea, the element I focused on in order to extract the colours *to steer the original idea into reality* (2), was the small diary of brushstrokes where I recorded all the colours while I was developing the painting.

I started from the "clump", from the flower, which took on symbolic value as the condensed point of the artist's thought, asking myself how to expand this intimate and dense gesture. How to extend it into the space? How to think of a broad gesture? How to express such a small gesture on a large and public scale? How to go from intimacy to exteriority? How to give shape to the small and concentrated colour formed on a daily basis in my studio?

I imagined the painting expanding, opening, that the colour was distributed in the space. I envisaged a dilatation of the painting in the architecture as if every single layer were peeling off three-dimensionally in the space. Through a prevalence of green and blues, and hefty dose of red, the painting multiplied into lots of separate paintings.

I perceived the architecture, I felt Mario Botta's space, as the place where my colour had the chance to establish itself, to settle and to take up its own space.

Every single colour is the expression of an uncontrolled emotiveness and needs to be kept, compressed, embraced and accommodated.

Between them, the two grey and horizontal levels – the ceiling and the floor – hold all the coloured surfaces. Between them are the colours painted on the vertical walls, divided, sectioned and separated from each other by lines, black iron frames which create the borders.

And so what happened was that the architect's voice superimposed the artist's: *Finite places. Building "finite" spaces to investigate and discover "infinite" conditions! This is the natural working condition in which the architect works. The idea of place (which is always a UNICUM) presupposes the existence of a limit which is created in a finished space... (3)*

FROM THE CANVAS AS SUPPORT TO THE CANVAS AS SUBSTANCE-COLOUR

Sometimes it is necessary to escape one's repetition and try to shatter one's rhythm by intersecting with the process of someone or something else. What sets the work in motion is when I feel in harmony; when I find similarities and equivalences rather than differences. Starting from contact points, junctures can arise from an adherence with another experience. When my internal system converges with an external system which has similarities with what I do, a short circuit is created and something is activated that becomes a common ground where subjects can recognise each other.

The meeting with the textile company Bonotto and seeing the Fondazione Querini's textile collection in 2016 were the two things I related to empathetically. Doretta Davanzo Poli writes in her publication about the Querini textiles: *Looking at the Querini soft furnishings, it is possible to discern (...) an important suggestion, which should be considered as one of the many contributions attempted to solve the (...) problem regarding the conservation or substitution of the soft furnishings in the historic abode. Of the solutions attempted thus far, the most common have been: the restoration of the fabric and its mummification on the walls in the state in which it was found (...) or the replacement of the fabric with a similar one (...). A brave solution (...) projected in the future for the interest capable of being aroused in whoever remains (...), could be that of continuing to do, at least in this context, that which was done for centuries, which is to substitute the old ruined fabrics with new ones. (...) In this way, as well as handing down textile examples of some interest to the history of textile art (...), the original Querini "collection" would endure in worthy fashion. (4)*

My response to the request was to add a new "layer" to the Querini collection and at the same time add a new "layer" to the Bonotto textile collection.

I imagined translating the pictorial gesture (spreading oil paint on a canvas) into Bonotto's practice (of creating fabric with weft and warp) and this is how I translated every single layer of colour on a coloured canvas: from the canvas as the support of the painting, to the canvas itself as the substance-colour.

Just as every single brushstroke of colour consists of numerous gradations, so the fabric I developed with Bonotto is composed of numerous different threads which together create a single colour. From afar they look like large monochrome canvases, but when we get closer we realise that the colour is made up of various nuances. This is an extension of the pictorial gesture, without mediation, without distance, which forces us to a closer and more direct relationship with the colour. We also perceive that each canvas has a back and a front. The back is always red. As in my paintings, the first layer is always red. I always start with red. Each colour is superimposed starting with red. Over time, it is possible that the fabric will show wear and tear in some parts and will then reveal this hidden part of the work.

Then if we take a step back from a close-up view of the material to have a broader vision, we notice that the maximum width of the pieces is about 160 cm. This is determined both by the specificity of the loom the fabric is woven on and also by the largest size of all my paintings. It is more or less the height of a human being and the maximum arm span.

The work also contains another element: at the centre of the space the café tables, covered with grey papers, become small horizontal surfaces. It is as though the colours on the walls have slithered and encountered one another, intersecting, mixing and kneading. It is almost like the formation of the “sludgy” substance, the deposit of all the colours found at the bottom of my brush pot and in the Venetian canal beds.

RECOMPOSING EVERYTHING WITH A GLANCE

In the end, we realise that the work is actually a diptych, composed of two parts: a painting in the museum and a work in the café. The work is complete when we go up to the second floor and return to the painting in the nineteenth-century room in the museum. The circle is closed, the project is actuated as soon as we recompose the backward process in time through our perception. The imagination returns to where things are born.

(Maria Morganti, Venice, December 2016)

1: Marina Cvetaeva, *Taccuini 1919 – 1921*, Voland, Rome 2014

2, 3: Mario Botta *Quasi un Diario. Frammenti intorno all'architettura*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2003 e Mario Botta *Quasi un diario. 2003-2013*, Le Lettere, Florence 2014.

4: Doretta Davanzo Poli *Tessuti inventario*, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, 1987