

*DIVING INTO THE RIVER:
IN CONVERSTION WITH MARIA
MORGANTI*



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Disclaimer:

- Due to the limit of pages, the artistic practice of Maria Morganti is not introduced and analysed in general. This choice is sustained by the fact that the artistic production of Maria Morganti has already been studied by the reader/examiner of this paper
- All the quotation between "" comes from the transcription of the recorded conversation with Maria Morganti

"Nel mio studio la materia-pittura formata si stratifica, si accumula e si organizza in contenitori, come se io fossi uno strumento di registrazione del tempo"¹

¹ From <http://www.mariamorganti.it> , "In sintesi" introductive part

THE STARTING POINT: A GENTLE "EPIPHANY"

I have always thought that artists are special people with a different (and higher) way of thinking, a different way of being and gifted of a disconcerting sensitiveness. The few times I have been lucky enough to approach and have a conversation with one of them, at the beginning I was always in awe. However, this has never happened from the very first time I bumped into Maria Morganti's artistic practice, thanks to her acute ease and frankness in speaking about her work.

Within the Art Management and Market course, we have had the Milanese artist as guest speaker. I did not know the artist until she was mentioned by the professor during a class. The evening before, I tried to dive into Maria Morganti's practice: it is possible (and I suggest the reader to absolutely do it) thanks to an unconventional website. It is personally conceived and continuously modified by the artist, who states that it is a personal space where she can reflect.

After this brief initial approach, I started thinking about and elaborating the artist's practice, and I glimpsed the space for a reflection on a possible link between her way of doing art and History. Thanks to the extreme kindness of Maria Morganti, I have been lucky enough to have the possibility to present my (naïve) insight and discuss it with her in person, in front of a plate of pasta on the side of Naviglio Pavese. In addition to a unique experience, what came out was a conversation on temporality.

RESEARCH QUESTION: AN ARTISTIC HISTORY

There is no doubt that the artistic production of Maria Morganti is strongly linked to and permeated by temporality. It can be stated even reading only the title of her website: *Un archivio del tempo (An archive of time)*. The relevance and the bulk that time has in the work of the artist brought to my mind some possible touch-points between her practice and History. I felt like in some moments of her practice, in the production and interpretation of specific type of work, the terms time and space were interchangeable.

What emerged from my reflection has been a personal gaze on Maria Morganti's production, an insight that allowed History to permeate and mix with it.

The starting point has been the following: everyday the artist produces a new colour, but is this colour in some way influenced by the personal and the social/global history?

Assuming that this may happen, every specific production of Maria Morganti can be seen as a tool for the interpretation of the history, both micro history (personal) and macro one (global history seen through her eyes and life). *Diari* are diaries, in the sense that this narrative form is strongly spread in historiography: every colour is in some way the transfiguration of how everyday history has impacted on her life. *Sedimentazioni* can be seen as a history book: not all the colours (and so the history) are represented, but only some of these, as in those particular days something important is happened. *Quadro Infinito* can be considered as embodiment of the true essence of history: day by day a colour (bundle of historical events) erases the previous one, but under the surface, the whole historical flux is maintained and can be analysed. This was, in few words, my simple and humble vision: I was aware that it was in some ways a stretch. But on the other hand, I would have liked to know what Maria Morganti thought about it and if someone else had advanced this kind of interpretation before.

CONVERSATION ON HISTORY

After a brief introduction on myself and the path that brought me to my reasoning, I have introduced my insight on history. The answer was the following: "If you want you can interpret it in that way, it does not bother me. But I do not find words to answer at question like that. They bring me in a symbolic sphere". Well, my conversation could have ended there, with a quite negative and direct answer. But this is not the approach of Maria Morganti: she does not neglect an opinion, she is always open to explanation and discussion as a source of reciprocal enrichment. This was the starting point of our conversation.

The way in which the artist talks about her work depicts it as way to understand the flux of things, a vital excursus, that has to be left flow freely and not interpreted by the artist. For her it is about creating the conditions, defining banks (as in a river) where this flux of events can manifest itself and happen without an *a priori* interpretation. It is not possible to attribute a meaning and a symbol to a colour ("today I am happy so I paint with light blue"), because it does not allow the event to happen. It is like "deciding that from one day to another, you become an artist" she says. For her instead, it is about embracing what life brings in front of your eyes. This does not exclude an analysis of her practice: as a matter of fact, she talks a lot about it and her website is there for this purpose. However, the discourse on her practice is always on

a general level, on a broad structure that contains things. She does not penetrate directly the sense of things because the meaning has to be constructed by colour and painting themselves (an approach that immediately brings to my mind the reading *Against Interpretation* by Susan Sontag). Thereafter, the viewer can relate to the images, to this form that Maria Morganti creates: in the building of the visual impression, he/she can grasp from personal experiences and history/life, conferring more meaning. "This is an enhancement for me, a sort of gift" she says. In that way the interpretation is possible but left to the viewers.

Honestly speaking, I was displaced by her initial answer. The main point of my insight, history, was disappeared from the discussion. But when all seemed lost, the acute sensitiveness of Maria Morganti arose. She stopped one minute, she started reflecting (while she ate the plate of pasta that was arrived in the meanwhile) and then she made a new beginning. "I have never entered in narrative detail of every single fact and event, but history has permeated and shaped my artistic production as I go along with it". Very curious is the fact that Maria Morganti is married with an historian that, as she herself admits, has profoundly influenced her vision. For example, the artist's obsession to the actions of preservation and transmission seems what is closest to historian's practice.

Her vision of history is clear and contemporary: she is not interested in the history of big and important events, but rather in a consequentiality of little and personal events in the history of life of every single individual. The focus is on the so called Microhistory. In the construction of this interpretation, she has been not only influenced, but rather educated by an experience of the husband. He has been involved in a very peculiar project: The *Italian National Archive of Diaries* located near Arezzo, Tuscany. As its noun declaims, it is an archive that safeguard personal diaries of common people. This interesting institution allows to preserve the memories and the histories of common people, those individuals that are invisible to the mainstream history. In that way, historians can reconstruct all the parallel histories that flow next to the mainstream one that we all study on books. The synthesis of this thought is readable in a project that Maria Morganti has done for *Fondazione Spinola Banna* in collaboration with *GAM of Turin*. For one year, she has been the tutor for 5 young artists on a theme chosen by her that was called *Diari tra Diari*. The idea was to let everyone bring the proper individuality and put it side by side with others. In this sort of political act where individualities live together, the message was that we must not homologate to a universal history, the same for everyone, but accept and inhabit an history of

singularities that are co-present, live together and create a common ground every time they touch each other. It is important to be aware of ourselves (of who we are) and find our way to relate to things: in this way we are really free and not inserted in structures pre-established by others.

CONVERSATION ON TEMPORALITY

"Per anni ho agito seguendo una certa consequenzialità del tempo. Le cose si sono sviluppate in un andamento lineare, ininterrotto e uniforme.

Poi ad un certo punto qualcosa è cambiato. L'ordine si è invertito, sovrapposto, amalgamato, accelerato, ripreso a più sequenze."²

The quote above perfectly embodies the conception of time for Maria Morganti. And it was exactly the vision of the time the main flaw of my insight. In fact, all the touch-points that I have identified between history and the artist's practice took for granted a linear and step-by-step flow of the time: *Diaries*, *Sedimentations* as a history book, *Infinity Painting* as "container" for all the steps of the time...

Time for Maria Morganti is not only a flux, but rather an energy, a material entity that can be subjected to modifications of its natural course. This kind of approach can be better understood analysing her various productions under the time perspective.

First of all, let us focus on *Sedimentations*. They always start with a first red coat: it implies that the bowl, through its daily transformation, has to complete a cycle that starts and ends always with red. The idea of time in this case is comparable to the cycle of seasons, and it is embodied in the action that Maria Morganti calls *Ritornare*. The concept of time is inherent in *Quadro Infinito* since the title and the conceptualization of the work. The action that the painter associates with it is *Dimenticare*: covering everyday the coat before, the time allows something (figuratively other time) to disappear. However, the oblivion generated is a physical one; it solidifies and acquires a proper thickness. A small trace remains under the passage of the time and this condition opens a new window to manipulate it. The action related is called *Andare a ritroso*: starting by a section of 3 cm of the *Infinite Painting* and analysing it at the microscope, the artist has obtained a 3-meter-long print.

² From <http://www.mariamorganti.it/narrazione/12-impastare-il-tempo/12-01-introduzione>

Time not always flows at the same intensity: it can be subjected to acceleration. In this conditions, that are not so frequent, Maria Morganti starts and ends a work in a day. The technique is different and the painting has no thickness. In this case, we talk about *Accelerare*. This particular production has started when she had built the *Diarioteca*, the house of her diaries where the entire time of her life is stored in 1 squared meter.

Time can be also touched concretely in the practice of Maria Morganti: she makes a sort of Sedimentation with coloured modelling clay; when the material dimension (aka amount of time) accumulated is enough, the artist takes the work with her hands, kneads it and then she puts it back on its support. This action is called *Impastare*. However, time is not only a passive actor in the artist's practice: it can physically touch and shape a work. In fact, the unconventional way of painting of Maria Morganti can provoke detachments. This condition must not be forced, and it is for this reason that the linked action is defined *Lasciare accadere*.

CONCLUSIONS

I have always thought that artists are special people with a different (and higher) way of thinking, a different way of being and gifted of a disconcerting sensitiveness. I have always had demonstration of this the few times I have been lucky enough to approach and have a conversation with one of them. Despite the fleeting encounter, Maria Morganti was able to extemporize a lecture on time talking to me about her practice with ease and an openness typical of a cordial conversation. What I grasp from this experience is a different way of perceiving time. In trying to understand and analyse time from the bank we are inclined to adopt the scheme that we have learned during our life and that we take for granted. In my case, it was the linear conception of time. Maria Morganti helped me understand that if we really want to understand in depth, be transported by and live time and history, we have to leave the bank and dive into the river. Her paintings are the witness of this kind of approach: "let the flow of life pour and things happen", live with freedom and open mind the encounter with these manifestations because "the sense has to be given by colour and painting themselves.

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