

by Pietro Rivasi

Trasluce & Oltreforma (*Trasluce & Beyond Form*) is the title of the work designed by **Giorgio Bartocci** in close collaboration with **56 fili** by **Arturo Amitrano** for SPAZIOC21 in Reggio Emilia.

A large, complex installation comprising nine independent pieces, it was conceived to engage in a continuous dialogue and create a unified whole with the space for which it was created: the magnificent courtyard of Palazzo Brama.

This unusual exhibition could be defined as a *four-handed solo show*. It is the outcome of a multi-year collaboration between an artist and a master craftsman who has assumed the role of an alchemist: part of the works were produced using screen-printing techniques bent, for the occasion, from Amitrano's expertise to Bartocci's visual suggestions, through *ad hoc* heating processes similar to those implemented in a recent public art project commissioned by Zanichelli Editore for the City of Bologna.

The Marche-born artist (Jesi, 1984) has distilled 20 years of research into a single, cohesive entity (*unicum*) that offers viewers the current arrival point of his poetics. In this work, painting, sculpture, installation, form, and color hold equal importance, acquiring depth through the fundamental role of light, the perspectives created between the various components, transparencies, and the transience of the elements. Indeed, the four works created on the shopfront windows used by SPAZIOC21 for its exhibitions are meant to be destroyed once the show closes—a symbolic tribute to the origins of the artist, a former *enfant prodige* of graffiti writing, an inherently ephemeral practice.

The subject of *Trasluce & Oltreforma* consists of *liquid figures* that the artist has over time synthesized into fully abstract compositions. These convey all the tension to which the precarious nature of the contemporary era condemns us: we live in a historical moment in which we are subjected to an ever-faster flow of inputs impossible to digest and distill, placing us under constant psychological pressure.

It would be difficult, if not entirely incorrect, to look for a single protagonist at the center of this work, as a dominant role is played by the shapes, transparencies, perspectives, and overlaps that form among the nine pieces. Bartocci consciously plays with these relationships, exploiting the spatial qualities of both the courtyard and the gallery, bringing them into resonance with the manipulated material that gives life to the large sculpture set in the middle of the courtyard.

Essential to the balance of the work are the transparencies of the interventions on glass—a support the artist learned to blend into his practice many years ago. From abandoned factories in the post-industrial Milanese hinterland to recent commissioned interventions, by way of more seminal executions carried out on train windows, Bartocci's work finds in this transparent and translucent medium the perfect solution to add depth and nuance to his ongoing research.

The works created on glass possess a unique quality that no other support could bestow upon them: they vibrate with light and activate colors. Transparency is a feature we take for granted in daily life when standing before a shopfront or a window, yet it enables a profound interaction between colors and light—ever-changing according to the time of day or season, or constant, warm, or cool when artificial.

Perspective and transparency allow for overlaps that go beyond mere color layering—with which the artist has always experimented using techniques ranging from collage to painting—extending to a spatial stratification between works and people. Once again, Bartocci draws inspiration from his experience in the world of graffiti writing, where his works coexisted with commuters looking at the surrounding world through the painted windows of train cars, or from his recent *Bodymuralism* project, in which statuesque models conceptually replaced subway cars by wearing his works among crowds, pushing the themes of overlap, movement, and the interaction between space, artwork, and public to the extreme.

The enamelled steel sculpture dominating the cloister serves as an ideal perspective center and characterizes the entire installation, catching the eye of passersby from Via Emilia before they even enter the gallery's exhibition perimeter.

This three-dimensional *form*—created *site-specifically* in collaboration with artisan workshops that placed their expertise at the service of the artist's project—becomes the fulcrum around which the empty space of the courtyard and the filled spaces of the window displays are arranged, interrupted only by the passage of viewers. Overall, the presence of the sculptural volume constitutes the center of an ideal stage where every element is brought into relation through perspective, light, and color.

Thus, the installation created by Bartocci goes beyond form: it is alive, interacts with the viewer, renews itself as light and perspective shift, and activates imaginations of volumes and colors.

In a word, it astonishes.

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THE TECHNIQUE

The creation of *Translucide & Oltreforma* benefited from the decisive contribution of **Arturo Amitrano**, the soul of the Rome-based screen printing studio **56 fili**, who for thirteen years has been a key master craftsman for a generation of artists and creatives. His partnership with Bartocci dates back to 2017, when their paths crossed on the occasion of the exhibition *Routine Fabrique*. It has since matured through numerous collaborations that led Amitrano to research, experiment with, and develop the applications best suited to the artist's poetics.

Screen printing (serigraphy) is a stencil-based printing technique (*permeography*), perfected at the beginning of the last century, which today lends itself to almost endless variations. The term derives from the Latin *sericum* ("silk") and the Greek "γράφειν" (*gràphein*, "to write"), as the first fabrics used as printing mesh were made of silk.

Arturo Amitrano is a Master of screen printing—not only because he teaches the craft at the Fine Arts Academy of Frosinone, but because he has accumulated deep expertise working in close contact with dozens of major artists who, thanks to his technical know-how, have enriched their approach to work and multiplied their possibilities of expression.

In Reggio Emilia, Amitrano's contribution had little to do with the simple screen-printed reproduction of an image, no matter how complex. Instead, it was about stimulating and accompanying the artist in bringing his vision to life: to execute the oversized interventions conceived by Bartocci—the largest measuring an impressive 185 x 140 cm—it was necessary to design and build custom vertical frames reinforced with wooden guides, something completely unique in the field of screen printing.

The technique was thus devised and perfected by one in service of the other's aesthetic vision. Here too, as in most of their collaborations, innovation serves to "paint" and create unique works—part of an ongoing flow of research and experimentation that generates unusual solutions and results, pushing the artist to approach his practice in entirely new ways.

Screen printing is a slow process, requiring multiple sessions to become familiar with. It has a major impact on the final outcome because it demands a shift in mindset, establishing a strong bond between artist and printer.

The technique used at SPAZIOC21 to develop the works for *Translucide & Oltreforma* forced Bartocci to work in reverse (in negative), applying color only to the unmasked areas. This is a very complex exercise for someone accustomed to traditional painting, as they are forced to recalibrate how they plan the stages of creating a work—especially when dealing with large formats where the areas to manage are vast.

The compositional outcome, however, is powerful. The variety of color tones brings the liquid forms to life, overlaying dozens of tactile inserts—strips of rough-cut, torn paper (*maltagliata*) soaked in color that Bartocci first uses for masking and then reinserts into the works, converting them into *collages*.

The resulting synergy is summarized in Amitrano's own key words:

"With every artist, I try to create intimacy and rapport to see if we can work well together. In doing so, I come to know them deeply and can even allow myself to step into the creative process—that's how the full potential of my contribution comes through. This time, our challenge was the large format: we did a warm-up in my studio in Rome using five frames. Giorgio prepared rough-cut paper masks (*maltagliata*) to shield certain areas of the sheet, which we then printed using highly transparent colors. Every time I printed a color, I would go back and layer additional masks between the frame and the paper: in this way, we created areas with varying color intensities, layering ink over ink until we achieved the desired tones in the exposed areas."