



Rebuilding with art

curated by Francesca Pasini
Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti
Camogli (Genoa), 13-09-08 / 28-02-09

Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti is the result of the three decades of experience in contemporary art collecting of its founders, and of an approach of interaction with the territory.

The foundation's facilities are in the deconsecrated church of the former convent of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Garden (Gianelline) in Camogli, a few miles from Genoa, thanks to an agreement with the City of Camogli.

The Foundation will be the trustee of the important collection assembled by Pier Luigi and Natalina Remotti, whose first acquisitions date back to the mid-1970s. In that period the Remottis lived in Caserta and often visited the gallery of Lucio Amelio in Naples. Amelio was a figure of international stature, the first to show the work of Joseph Beuys in Italy. He also worked with other artists of national and international renown, including Andy Warhol.

For many years now Pier Luigi and Natalina Remotti have resided in Santa Margherita Ligure and Milan. Their adventure in art collecting continues today, with the same great intensity.

The facility

Built at the start of the 1900s, the Church of the Gianelline is not a structure of particular artistic value, but it does have the typical elegance of well-crafted architecture that has contributed to give the Italian landscape its unique charm.

The interiors have been completely restructured, while the exterior has been conserved intact: the back, painted with white and gray stripes, the yellow front with its decorative inserts of stucco and marble.

The project

In Italy, since the fall of the Roman Empire churches have been the favored location of artistic expression, and important artworks have contributed to the development of their architectural physiognomy. Continuing this noble tradition, Francesca Pasini, director of the Foundation, has decided to call on several contemporary artists to design certain zones of the building, those that traditionally featured the work of artists, creating an ideal bridge with history.

The wall of the altar has been assigned to **Alberto Garutti**; the internal balcony and the churchyard to **Gruppo A12**; the facade to **Michelangelo Pistoletto**; the trusses to **Tobias Rehberger**; and the floor of the ground level to **Gilberto Zorio**.

This curatorial choice develops an original dialogue with the architecture. The works are not simply "site-specific", but are also coherent interventions through which the building itself can embody the art-architecture relationship. A choice in tune with the reality of the site today, based on an existing collection, and ready to meet the need to establish a continuing dialogue with other works that will be added in the future. Every one of these structural works becomes a full-fledged inhabitant of the site, making an essential contribution to the definition of the spaces and the imaginative aspects determined by objects, thoughts, emotions, which are just as decisive as walls, windows, staircases.

A contemporary artspace today must take the particular dialogic system of art and architecture into account. This does not happen only in museums but also, as in a special kind of King Arthur's court, anywhere the two factors have a reason and a desire to join forces.

The fact that this former church incorporates art throughout its spaces, from the walls to the floor, the ceiling to the facade, does not respond only to an aesthetic requirement. It is the starting point for the construction of places and visions that constantly trigger new relationships, without overlooking the fact that processes of change proceed in close relation to those who create, those who observe, those who arrived at the beginning, and those who came later.

We will present other works, created from time to time, but we will also host encounters with different forms of cultural expression. Each of them will establish a relationship with the building that was once a church and therefore a place belonging to all, which now, thanks to the interventions of the artists, takes on a new, secular sacrality.

Exhibition spaces are usually designed to have aseptic walls, neutral floors, non-theatrical lighting. But neutrality is impossible. Architecture, no matter what, always has a character. And art can thrive by coming directly to terms with what has been constructed, because it is precisely the presence of art that can often make us see the same place in different ways.

Contemporary architecture does not always take into consideration the imaginative fluidity of its inhabitation by artworks and human beings, and thus fails to offer the pauses, the silences required for thoughtful self-awareness. This even happens in certain museums by the so-called "starchitects", where the theatrical-media force of the container seems to overlook the fact that contemporary constructs its own space and therefore requires places of relation to bring out the specific relationship with the present expressed by each work, whatever its date of birth. With respect to the proliferation of architectural and technological wonders, and the need to interact with contemporary languages, art continues to tell us that its specificity lies in the investigation of changes under the skin, of links to the past, the emotional impact of technical discoveries, rather than their mechanical application.

Today, contemporary art, too, is caught in the glare of the media spotlight, and excess spectacle can at times weaken its message: this is another reason why the space of Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti has been rebuilt through interventions of great individuality, while leaving room for other works to eventually enter the context as well.

The interventions

The facades of churches have often hosted artworks of great impact: the basilica in Modena, decorated by Wiligelmo, or that of St. Mark in Venice, are just two of the most famous examples. **Michelangelo Pistoletto** has worked on the facade, with the sculpture "Necklace of the Third Paradise": sixty-six ceramic spheres produced at Albissola and decorated by design students from the School of Architecture of Genoa, and by the ceramists themselves.

The spheres are arranged in three loops that flow together in a diagonal that crosses the entire facade. The design is an extension of the mathematical symbol for infinity, tripled at the center with a larger circle.

The dichotomy of natural and artificial paradise has marked the development of human knowledge and the birth of the rational logos. "In the last century – Pistoletto says – there has been problematic development that has had negative impact on nature: basic needs have been transformed into artificial necessities, dominated by technique, with serious consequences of pollution. The central ring in my work, which I have added to the mathematical infinity symbol, is larger because it is the symbol of the conception of a Third Paradise in which to create a new balance between Natural Paradise and Artificial Paradise. We have to try to get out of this conflict through other systems of sharing and participation. In my mirror paintings I erased the subjective symbol of the artist, replacing it with the phenomenological reflection of what exists, which constantly changed in the mirror. Here too the need was created for a third place where the artist and the viewer could meet through the work. The mathematical infinity sign is public, it does not express my personal emotion; I have expanded an existing symbol that is based on a scientific convention. This non-individualistic operation calls into play persons, with their differences and multiplicity: the students and collaborators who have made the decorations, and the Ligurian territory, through the ceramists of Albissola. This symbol intertwines in the passage between the place of religion and that of art; they meet, in fact, creating a third sphere where the spirituality is born and grows from art can emerge.

The necklace is an object with primitive origins. It exists in all cultures, developing from a belt from which to hang tools necessary for life to a ritual, aesthetic object that holds amulets. This is the creative sense of the image. But the necklace is also a spiritual symbol for the flow of time, the reiterated cadence of time and prayer, through Christianity and all the religions, so it is a reminder of a very ancient symbolism I have renewed by altering it, through this third circumference that increases the complexity of the sentiment of the infinite.

The third circle takes on the physical symbolism of a great womb, born of the encounter/clash of two opposites: nature/artifice, male/female. The idea of the infinite loses its abstract sense in favor of a concept of pregnant infinity, to generate a new civilization".

Decoration is an essential element in the history of the architecture of Italian churches, which from the outset absorbed the great lesson of floor mosaics from the Roman world. This tradition has been particularly evident in Liguria, where for centuries all the floors, from the most complex to the most simple, have been decorated with geometric or floral motifs made by combining multicolored fragments of marble, or with the classic checked combination of slate and white marble.

Gilberto Zorio has set a star slightly rotated on its axis into the floor, extending toward the back wall. Rays emerge from its five points, crossing the floor in a single vision, while making the rotation more perceptible. The points and rays of the "Star of Camogli" are made with shiny copper, while the central pentagon is in black resin with a phosphorus insert. The entire design is bordered by lines of black resin, while drops of transparent resin raise the surface of the copper, and the phosphorus trail inside the central pentagon lights up in the darkness, conveying the impression of a sky.

This enigmatic alternation of tangible matter and immaterial light is combined with a sound mechanism, which every 40 minutes produces a hiss that is an ideal reference to the sound of the cosmos. It is a strong, calm image that seems to have fallen into the man-made architecture from remote space. As Zorio puts it: "The star is a global-cosmic image, one that suggests more widespread, significant images... The floor of the former church of the Gianelline in Camogli contains the star, whose rays extend to the walls. The copper of the triangular points and the rays conducts the energy of memory. The central pentagon is the womb-wineskin that awaits the liquid night. The hiss is a long breath... The floor becomes a horizon projected toward the center of the earth. It is an attempt to transform the temple of worship into a temple of art".

In this work by Zorio the alternation of materials and colors conveys a magmatic yet very definite physical sensation. The astral symbolism and the questioning on the universe extend the idea of the sacred to human creations, revealing the secular sentiment of art, where reason and spirituality join forces in pursuit of figures capable of representing the whole to which each of us belongs.

To subdivide the space a large balcony has been created on the second floor to underscore the ascending thrust of light, a quality of the architectural structure of the apses of churches. **Alberto Garutti** has suggested – with a simple yet very forceful gesture – bringing the wall of the altar forward to create an element that deeply marks the space, while functioning to conceal the staircase and elevator. This wall extends for almost the entire height of the space and has the lightness of a suspended veil. The lightness is increased by the fact that it does not touch the ceiling, but remains hanging, aligned with the entrance.

A marble slab inserted in the pavement of the churchyard indicates the presence of the work by Alberto Garutti, "Storms", which is visible only when the heavens see fit: "inside this building, which was the church of the Gianelline, the lights will vibrate when lightning strikes during storms".

The entire church thus becomes the center of the intervention, involving work on the electrical system. In collaboration with CESI (Centro Elettrotecnico Sperimentale Italiano), Garutti has specified a vast zone, with a radius of 20 kilometers, with the Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti at its center. This area will be monitored by the sensors of CESI, connected to the Foundation, to reveal lightning during thunderstorms. The signals will alter the normal functioning of the electrical system, making the light vary in intensity and tremble whenever a lightning bolt strikes anywhere in the area.

As in other projects in which his work establishes a relationship with the territory, for Garutti it is important to address the sensibilities of the inhabitants of places; for this reason, a brochure will be distributed in the town to inform people that the church of the former convent of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Garden, a historic and spiritual place, is now a contemporary art foundation, underlining its new relationship with the territory and the sky.

As Garutti writes in the brochure, "the work is dedicated to the inhabitants of this town and to all those who will be able to see or just imagine the vibrating light, a sign of sensitivity to the continuous, unknown transformations of the sky".

The viewer will no longer see the former church simply as a building once set aside for worship, but as a "sensitive" place where art establishes a dialogue with nature, the sea and the big sky above.

Garutti has already stated, in the past, that "art contains the mystical sense of nature and, vice versa, nature contains the mystical sense of art", and the work "Storms" is a reminder of this attitude.

The work contains many reminders of the romantic traditions of landscape: the tempest seems to emerge above all things, the sign of the enigma of a danger that is not only physical and immediate, but also metaphysical, individual, intimate, with which the human race feels a need to have a relationship, to decode and grant meaning to its own experience and its own presence in the emotional, intellectual and cosmic environment of everyday existence.

At the same time, the constant reference made by nature not only to the aesthetic beauty of the landscape but also to its implicit danger is a condition of any artwork, where aesthetic quality triggers a change and therefore a risk, which in order to be sensed must find a perceptible figure with which others can identify.

Thus "Storms" extends its dual belonging to the place of art and that of the world: the imagination allows us to "see" this work from any place, even from distant points outside the radius of 20 kilometers, far from the city of Camogli and the Foundation.

The vaults of church ceilings have always been a place for art, as if the zenithal view could convey the divine message in a more direct correspondence to the heavens of the cosmos and of religion. One universal example is the Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo.

Tobias Rehberger, one of the most important German artists of the new generation, has intervened on the trusses of the Foundation, placing his work in direct contact with the architectural structures and the technical systems of lighting and climate control. As the title indicates, he creates an "infection" ("Infection IFR9"). While the presence of art on the vaults of churches is very frequent in the tradition, it is rarely connected with the technical equipment of the building. Rehberger, with great decisiveness and lightness, uses the virus of art to generate an infection that radically modifies the environment. The image is that of a very long white cloud, crossed here and there by color, as if a sky in motion had been forced into the zone under the trusses.

This large sculpture is made by weaving different types of Velcro tape to create a transparent, irregular tangle that crosses the whole ceiling. In its midst fluorescent tubes with cold light create irregular blades of light that contribute to suggest the movement and transparency of the sky amidst clouds.

This work is a site-specific extension of the Velcro-tape lamp series that began in 2002, and it is the first time the single lamps have been installed as a single, large surface. The Velcro-tape lamps project started as a production of prototypes made by different assistants and then altered by the artist. This too is a metaphorical infection that underlines the dialogical relationship between the artist's project and the various collaborators in the project. A metaphor that is expanded to fit this particular space, where Rehberger's work will come into contact with the works of other artists who will have to interact with the sky and the clouds he has created. This is another way of making a symbolic link to the frescoes, mosaics and architectural decorations of the traditional ceilings of churches.

The connection between the churchyard and the church building has always been fundamental to establish connection with the urban territory and the social life of its inhabitants.

Gruppo A12, a studio of artists and architects based in Genoa, has designed the enclosure of the balcony and the zone of the churchyard. The classic elements of road construction sites, transformed into parapets that also function as seating, connect the idea of the exterior, the work in progress and a fragmentary character, a central node in artistic creation. The title of the work is "NJs08/gianellina", including an acronym that reflects the materials used. It indicates the link with everyday objects, their technical production and the tendency of art to transfigure them.

As the members of the group explain, "the design of the NJs08/gianellina seating system starts with the implications of a common object that belongs to the everyday life of all the streets in our cities, a barrier in New Jersey plastic, used to fence off roadwork sites. An object with an aesthetic quality determined by an essential form based on study of the functional requirements of its use, on modular, rational elements, and the alternation of white and red modules. This project comes from the desire (bordering on vandalism?) to take possession of this object "abandoned" in public space, to convert it for private use, while at the same time suggesting the possibility of transforming it and increasing its range of functions. So an object typical of public space in continuous, disorderly transformation, like that of Italian cities, is brought into an exhibition space as an element that alludes to its collective use and undermines the courtly aloofness of museum space, introducing a feature of the everyday world."

The intentions

Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti will produce two or three events each year, inviting one or more artists to create a project for this very special space. Each time, alongside the works created for the occasion, a selection of works from the Remotti collection will create a dialogue between the present and the recent past, between different generations and languages.

In parallel with the exhibitions and special projects, the program will also include presentations of books, conferences and discussions on art, musical events and screenings of films on art or from the world of filmmaking, with a particular focus on films that have won acclaim at festivals but have been unable to find distribution on commercial circuits.

The opening of the Foundation on 13 September 2008 will include the presentation of the space with the structural works by **Alberto Garutti**, **Gruppo A12**, **Michelangelo Pistoletto**, **Tobias Rehberger**, **Gilberto Zorio**, ideally paired with works selected from the Remotti collection with which each of the artists senses a particular affinity: **Garutti - Joseph Kosuth**; **Gruppo A12 - Paul McCarthy**; **Pistoletto - Yves Klein**; **Rehberger - Man Ray**; **Zorio - Grazia Toderi**. Works from the collection have also been selected by the director of the Foundation Francesca Pasini (Keith Haring), and by its founders (Nam June Paik, Barbara Kruger, Ugo Rondinone, Matthew Barney).

Fondazione Pierluigi e Natalina Remotti

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PRESS PREVIEW

13-09-08 | From 16.00

OPENING

13-09-08 | From 18.30-21.00

SHOW

14-09-08 | 28-02-09

OPENING HOURS

From Thursday to Sunday from 16.00 to 19.00
and by appointment
Free Entrance



Provincia di Genova



CITTÀ DI CAMOGLI

CESI



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