

Photo Pietro Giliberti

Peter Halley
Francesco Vezzoli
Hypermaremma

L'arte sotto casa / Art on our doorstep

Con la pandemia e i vari *lockdown* è cresciuto il desiderio collettivo di disporre dell'opera d'arte in una dimensione pubblica e partecipata

The pandemic and lockdowns have driven a collective desire to place artworks in a shared public dimension

Testo / Text Caroline Corbetta

■ There's nothing particularly new about art stepping out of the formal precincts of museums and galleries to burst into public spaces and people's everyday lives. One unrivalled historical model is the Festival du Nouveau Réalisme, which in 1970 saw, among others, Christo wrapping up the monuments of Leonardo da Vinci and Vittorio Emanuele II, and Tinguely installing a gigantic phallic and pyrotechnic sculpture in front of the Duomo in Milan. This joyous experience with democratic intentions left the general public indifferent, perplexed and even scandalised.

Today, as we near the end of a second year of pandemic, it is the people who frequent museums, as well as cinemas and theatres, who are calling out for artistic idioms to punctuate and enrich their daily lives. Will art "on our doorsteps" come to be considered a sought-after service in the manner of a post office or metro station? Without doubt, a yearning for "cultural proximity" was already in the air before the pandemic, and that desire was intensified by lockdowns that shuttered the places appointed to satiate our cultural appetites.

As soon as we were denied it, we became aware of our need for artistic imagination, for something that had seemed superfluous but instead emerged as an essential means to define us intrinsically as humans, precisely when the markers that socially identify us were suspended.

The flood of virtual exhibitions and performances – mediated via monitors and ultimately all seeming roughly the same – did not suffice to bridge the gap between art and audience. Indeed, in some cases they turned the gap into a chasm. And so the theatre started coming to the courtyards of apartment buildings, itinerant inflatable film screens appeared in backyards, and exhibitions began to fill empty shop windows... Public art experiences as diverse as their organisers are now becoming increasingly common and widespread.

See for example the seasoned gallery owner Massimo Minini and the Bellearti association over which he presides. With the aim of taking art out of institutional venues, he has turned the garage of the Generali offices in Brescia into a drive-in picture gallery. Thomas Braid, Ozmo, Antonio Riello and Stefano Arienti are among the 20 or so artists who since last June have conceived site-specific and permanent works for a collection that can be admired by chance or by appointment. The collection was recently boosted by the intervention of American neo-conceptual artist Peter Halley (who, in partnership with Alessandro Mendini, had already revamped Minini's gallery in 2008). Just over a kilometre away, in front of the Capitolium in the Parco Archeologico – where the architect Juan Navarro Baldeweg recently designed the space for the return to Brescia of the splendid *Winged Victory* of Roman times – stands the *Nike*

Metafisica by Francesco Vezzoli, born in Brescia but international by reputation. Attracting the attention of even the most inattentive passers-by, his sculpture invites viewers to interpret the ancient through a contemporary lens that makes ancient masterpieces closer and more accessible, as well as casting a light on today's art. This piece in Brescia is not Vezzoli's only public work in Italy. In Florence's Piazza della Signoria (now as crowded as it was in pre-Covid times), the artist installed a *Pietà* sculpture commissioned by Cristiana Perrella (the former director of Centro Pecci in Prato) and Sergio Risaliti (director of the city's Museo Novecento).

The portrayal of a 20th-century lion rampant gripping a Roman-era head in its jaws immediately became the perfect backdrop for the original selfies of thousands of tourists. This kind of reaction should be taken into account when art enters the public dimension, as it gives an indication of the level of popular appreciation that springs from a genuine feeling of amazement and curiosity before an unexpected encounter with art. The same applies to Patrick Tuttofuoco's neon sculpture for the Vetra Building in Milan, which risks becoming the eye-catching focus of a new "selfie-location" in the city, embellished with shops, green spaces and, indeed, by art that is a mix of decoration and urban regeneration.

Since the summer of 2019, veritable artistic-landscape manifestations have been awaiting people visiting the already marvellous, and seemingly untouchable, area of lower Maremma around the Tuscan town of Ansedonia. This place is dear to the sui generis gallery owners Carlo Pratis and Giorgio Galotti (the latter also conceived the DAMA project that takes galleries into the historic mansions of Turin in conjunction with Artissima). In 2018, the two friends started devising Hypermaremma as an opportunity for artists to tackle more ambitious projects that are, essentially, public art: from site-specific land art interventions to permanent monuments. An example is Massimo Uberti's large neon words *Spazio Amato* ("Loved Space") in the WWF nature reserve in Burano, which, after initially being temporary, has now become an integral and permanent part of the Maremma landscape. At night, it appears like a mirage to passengers on the trains whizzing past nearby, and, more importantly, to the teenagers out and about locally in summer. "Young people shift the work's timer to see it late at night when it should be switched off," says Pratis.

"This might seem like vandalism, but to our eyes it conveys a crazy desire to see the work always, even when it ought to be turned off." It is an anecdote that perfectly conveys the idea of a collective desire to avail of artworks in a public and shared dimension. With no walls or monitors acting as a filter. ④



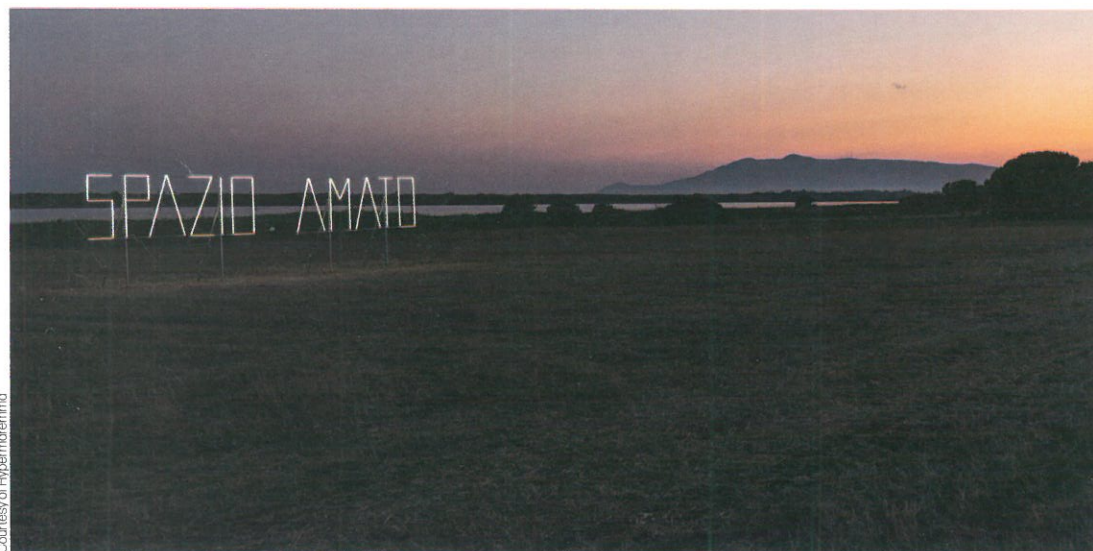
Photo Giorgio Benini. Courtesy of Hypermaremma



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■ This page. Top: *Il Mito dell'Eroe*, a performance by Gaia De Megni in the Abbey of San Bruzio, in Magliano in Toscana (2021). Above: *10000 Seahorse Power*, site-specific work by Marco Emmanuele, in the Stalle di Sant'Irma, Capalbio (2021). Left: *Spazio Amato*, a permanent installation by Massimo Uberti in Terre di Sacra, Oasi WWF, Burano, Lake, Capalbio (2020). Opposite page: *Totem*, a site-specific work by Moira Ricci in the hills of Fonteblanda (2021)



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