

The Colors of Public Art in Pescara: 4 Keywords

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the latest result of a research – shared with a few scholars of the Department of Architecture of the University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti and Pescara – on how colors can shape the perception of contemporary urban space. In particular, we present here a research that investigates the complex relationships that colors and space of Public Art establish with the citizens, the city and the specific architectures of Pescara. Over the years, Abruzzo's city has been the setting for a series of interesting works of public art – both ephemeral and long-lasting – in which colors play a fundamental role in establishing paths of urban transformation but also as synesthetic acts and gestures of communication on different scales; artistic and socializing processes capable of releasing new aesthetic and participatory meanings to inhabit the collective and intimate space of urban spaces between art, architecture and design (and more). The works have been selected and divided using four keywords which highlight certain aesthetic characteristics of the colors that shape their perception. Ephemeral fluid red: *Huge Wine Glass* by Toyo Ito (in Piazza della Rinascita). Big Blue: *A Fountain* by Ettore Spalletti (placed in the square in front of the new Tribunal). Black & White: *Dream* by Millo (a mural painted on a blind facade of a building in the Fontanelle district) and *My safe place* (realized on a façade of a school). Habitable rainbow: *The enchanted garden and Piazza Caduti del Mare* by Franco Summa.

KEYWORDS Representation, Public Art, Color, Urban settings, Ephemeral Architecture, Pescara

RECEIVED 08/02/2021; **REVISED** 23/03/2021; **ACCEPTED** 07/04/2021

1. Introduction

This paper is the latest outcome of a study on how color can shape the perception of contemporary urban space (Caffio, Unali 2020). In particular, the aim of the presented research is the study of the representation project included in the complex spatial-temporal relations between city, architecture, art and color in the context of some examples realized within the Public Art in the city of Pescara. Over time, Abruzzo's city has been the scene of a series of interesting public artworks in which color has played a fundamental role in establishing artistic and social processes capable of releasing new aesthetic, "anthropological" and participatory meanings of the collective space. This research was shared by two professors from the Department of Architecture at the University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara (Caffio and Unali, 2020) who, after outlining the general aspects of the subject, identified four keywords, mainly related to the meaning of the use of color in representational projects – semantic models for deepening and interpreting iconic projects –, dividing their work as follows: Giovanni Caffio studied two keywords in depth, "Black & White (but not only)" (chap. 5) and "The Big Blue" (chap. 4); Maurizio Unali the other two, "Ephemeral Fluid Red" (chap. 3) and "Habitable Rainbow" (chap. 6).

2. Four keywords for a visual journey in color

The keywords used in this paper refer to a hypothetical visual path in color that unites the works of a few artists

who have contributed to transforming the face of the city of Pescara through their work, even when this is no longer present or because it disappeared or because it was ephemeral in its first conception. The lines of reading, which we propose in a deliberately provocative way, are intertwined in the space and history of the city, changing its image and use. Moreover, these are very different artists, coming from various experiences and disciplines, from art, architecture and street art, but who find themselves united by having left, also through the project of color, a deep imprint on the body of the city. From the "chalice" of Toyo Ito – a work that has remained in the collective imagination of Pescara mainly because of its unfortunate history, but that has affected and still acts as a unique case in which the absence of the work affects and generates more attention than its presence –, to the murals of Millo – interesting the work of this architect who, trained in the Faculty of Architecture of Pescara, gives a particular work of "architectural street art" to the city where he studied –, the urban sculptures of the artist Franco Summa – whose artistic career has made color its hallmark –, up to the refined and ethereal poetics of an international artist like Ettore Spalletti. In conclusion, we drew a conceptual map (published in Fig. 1 in the form of "emotional collage") in which to synthesize the idea that from the proposed path we can understand how color can compose kaleidoscopic living spaces; how it can act as catalyst of experiences of "Public Art" heterogeneous in means and purposes, but always generating new meanings in the relationship between citizens and urban environment (Perelli, 2006).



Fig. 1. G. Caffio, M. Unali, A visual path "in color" on Public Art in Pescara, conceptual map, 2020 (detail, cf. Fig. 23).

3. Ephemeral Fluid Red

This visual journey in color begins with a work that turned ephemeral, *Huge Wine Glass* (Figs. 2-9). This is Toyo Ito's first work in Italy, a sort of urban "sculpture-fountain" consisting of a scenographic transparent parallelepiped with a square base (2 meters wide and 5 meters high) – inside which a sinuous red fluid is revealed, metaphor of a glass of wine with an empathic "made in Italy" taste – planted in a circle of water placed in one of the main public spaces of Pescara, Piazza della Rinascita (known as Piazza Salotto), on the axis of Corso Umberto I, which connects the railway station to the Adriatic Sea. But the unpredictable "poetics of the ephemeral" (Unali, 2010) reserved an unexpected fate to *Huge Wine Glass*: the

shining transparent monolith (made of an acrylic resin, polymethylmethacrylate), inaugurated on December 14, 2008 in the presence of the Japanese architect, "broke" in February 2009 and was removed in September 2013 (and never reinstated), thus living only in the memory of those who saw it, as a radical temporary event, a sort of urban art performance (De Simone, 2021).

In the memory of the viewer, the project thus becomes a metamorphic narrative: a kaleidoscopic visual fulcrum of the urban space for its mutation according to the lighting conditions of day and night; an original impalpable liquid presence accentuated by the fluid red coloring of acrylic material that changes as the point of observation varies.



Figs. 2-4 - Toyo Ito, *Huge Wineglass*, 1999. Photo by Giuseppe Marino 2009.

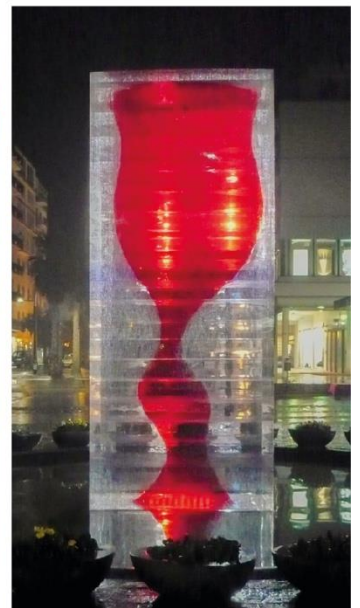
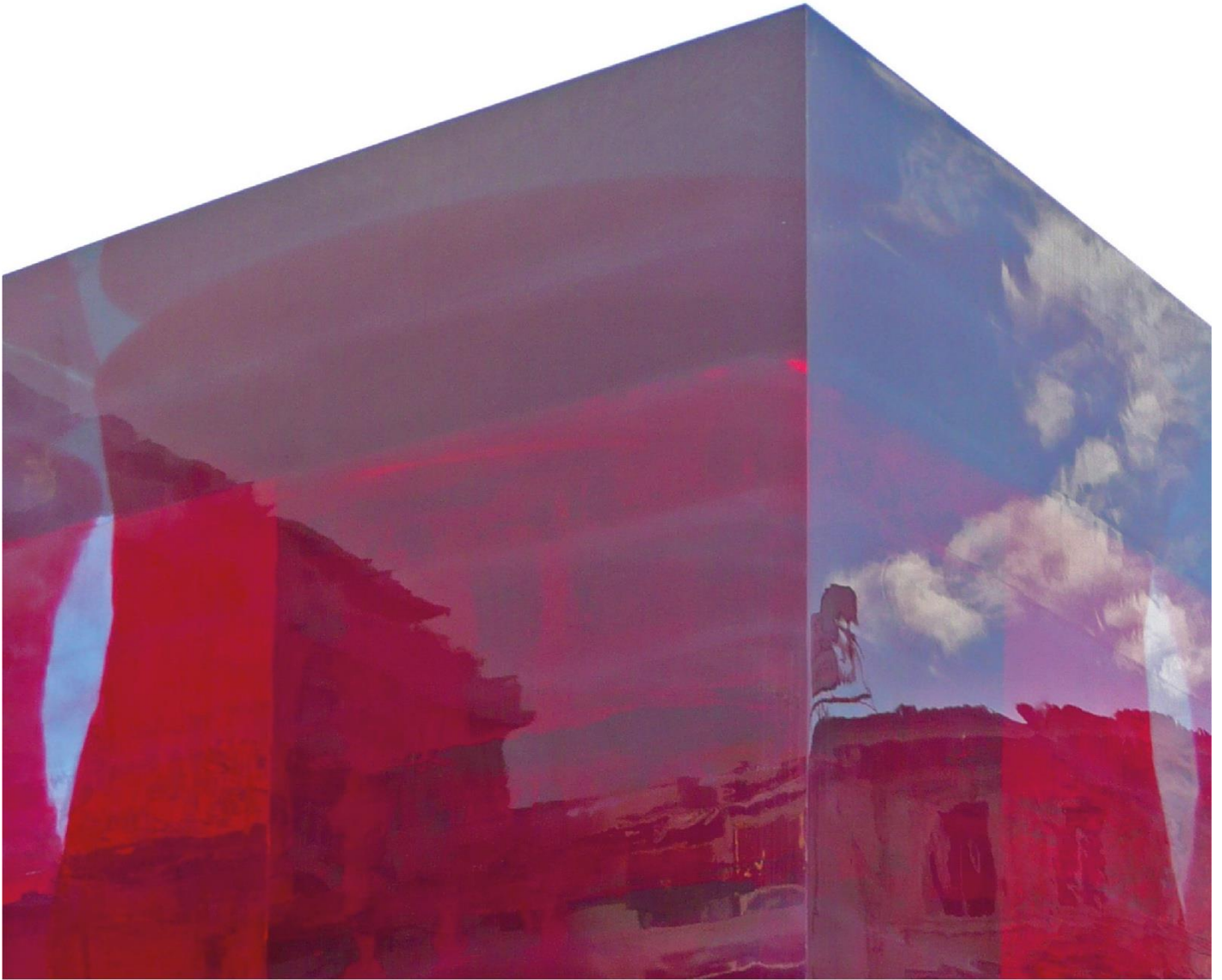


Fig. 5 - Toyo Ito, Huge Wineglass, 1999, detail. Photo by Giuseppe Marino 2009. Figs. 6-9 - Toyo Ito, Huge Wineglass, 1999. Photo by G. Caffio 2009.

4. The Big Blue

Ettore Spalletti (1940 - 2019), an artist internationally renowned (AA.VV, 2014), created two important works in Pescara: the first is the Fountain located in the square in front of the new Court of Pescara, the only public work designed and built by the artist in the Adriatic city (Fig. 10); the second one is a small chapel (Fig. 11) with the annexed Room of the Farewell, inside the private clinic "Villa Serena" in Città Sant'Angelo (Figs. 12-13). The fountain is a perfect ellipse of black marble, just a few centimeters high, within which, in an off-center position, there is a sort of hollowed-out blue pentagon and a small white circle that lights up at night as the water overflows from the edge and is collected by a recess hidden at the base. A metaphysical and ethereal work that plays with continuous references to earth, water and the celestial spheres of which it seems to be a sort of concrete map. As it rests on the ground, it seems to want to subtly reveal a hidden poetic meaning in the apparently random spaces of this Pescara suburb, a sort of "Zen koan" made of stone and water that invites observers to discover the secret relationships between the surrounding architecture. This absolute work, as absolute as its colors

are – deep black, reflecting white and blue – reveals once again Ettore Spalletti's ability to use his personal chromatic research to create an unexpected bond between observer, work and environment; an accurate and sophisticated project that through its simple materiality offers a different perception of the contingent reality. A different poetics informs the second work, a sort of "gesamtkunstwerk" – and therefore a theoretical manifesto to better understand the sense and use of color in Spalletti's fountain – in which architecture and art converge and integrate. The chapel, built in the '60s, was completely redesigned. The interior pushes the observer to search for his own position, which escapes the strong axiality of the Greek cross plan and is moved by a continuous tension of the space generated by minimal fluctuations and reverberations among the archetypal objects placed inside: cubes, parallelepipeds, folded planes, diaphanous statues and Venetian chandeliers are carefully organized to define the space of the sacred. As in the chapel, also in the Farewell Room, the colors of his personal palette – blues, grays, pinks and splashes of gold – seem to be arranged in veils that make the atmosphere vibrant, material and meditative.



Fig. 10 - Ettore Spalletti, Fountain, Palace of Justice 2004. Photo by Antonella Salucci 2015.



Fig. 11 - Ettore Spalletti, Chapel, "Villa Serena" private nursing home, Città Sant'Angelo, Pescara, 2017. Photo by Giuseppe Marino.



Figs. 12-13 - Ettore Spalletti, Sala del Commiato, "Villa Serena" private nursing home, Città Sant'Angelo, Pescara, 2017. Photo by Giuseppe Marino.

5. Black & White (but not only)

The architect-artist Francesco Camillo Giorgino, known by the pseudonym Millo, created two works in Pescara, the city where his now twenty-year artistic and professional career began (Caffio, 2015a and 2015b). The first, titled *Dream*, was painted in October 2017 on a blind facade of a building in the Fontanelle neighborhood (Fig. 14); the second, evocatively titled *My Safe Place*, was drawn on one facade of the Borgomarino elementary school (Fig. 15).

In his murals the artist always creates a distance, a separation made of contrasts of scale and color, between the urban environment, monochrome, aseptic, repetitive as an anonymous pattern in an infinite isometric space, and its childlike protagonists in color and out of scale. A metaphorical contrast made visible in a clear and brutal way, as much as naive, that pushes the observers to reflect on the estrangement between the collectively acted urban space and the individual and intimate life. Thus, in what has become the artist-architect's consolidated stylistic style, against

a black and white background in isometric axonometry (a legacy, perhaps, of his architectural training) of a generic and cartoonish city, protagonists appear as giants that seem to come out of Jonathan Swift's pen.

In front of an indifferent background where airplanes and driverless cars circulate, these little heroes perform simple and personal gestures, almost as if they wanted to overturn the contemporary condition in which the city, with its rhythms and its economic drives, crushes and reduces its inhabitants to insignificant little insects.

In his drawings Millo tells the feelings and personal stories through a sort of archetypal and utopian man-woman binomial, the new Adam and Eve, who stand out and emerge as the real protagonists of urban life. This contraposition, this working for opposites (big-small, human-urban, feelings-rationality, micro-macro) finds its precise echo in the colors: pure black and white lines for the urban background while the only colors belong to the human figures present in the compositions.

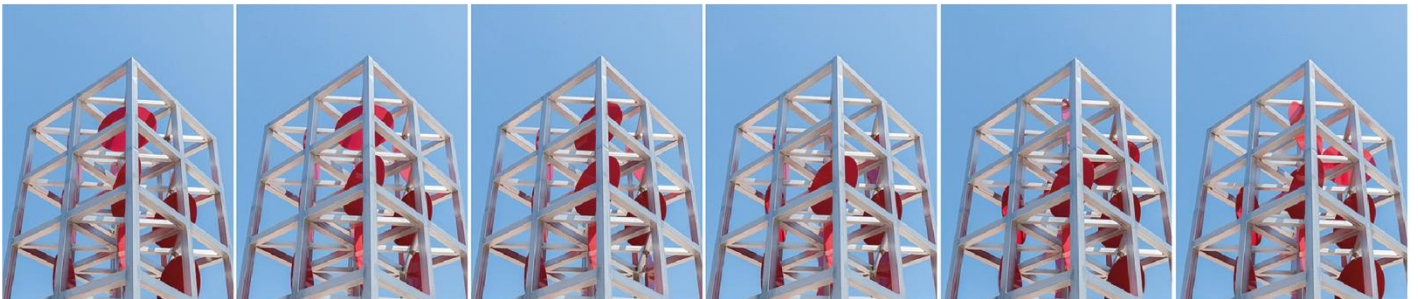


Fig 14 - Millo, *Dream*, 2017. Fig 15 - Millo, *My safe place*, 2018. Photo by Giuseppe Marino 2019.

6. Habitable Rainbow

The idea of urban space as a shared civic place composed by infinite relationships (between people, memories, ruins, objects, nature, etc.) finds in the artistic research elaborated by Franco Summa (1938 - 2020), multiple design hypotheses (Summa, 2016). Among these, we choose two works by the "rainbow artist" for his city, Pescara, generous and passionate acts of joy to share with his fellow citizens. The first work is *The Enchanted Garden* (Figs. 16-17) created in 2018 in front of the residential complex designed by Mario Botta near the Tribunal. Sixteen six-meter-high

"menhirs" rise on a square plan, drawing a space made labyrinthine by the multifaceted use of color and the different conformations that the shadows generate as the weather and the hours of the day change. The second work is *Piazza Caduti del mare* (Figs. 18-22), inaugurated in 2020 after the artist's death. In the context of an urban requalification program, Franco Summa's vibrant square synthesizes a project shared with the inhabitants of the neighborhood, thus triggering new public spaces always under the banner of the idea of color as a catalyst of urban sociality and hope. A color that draws living forms, therefore.



Figs. 16-17 - Franco Summa, *The enchanted garden*, 2018. Figs. 18-22 - Franco Summa, *Piazza Caduti del Mare*, 2020. Photo by Giuseppe Marino.

7. Pescara Colors: a final visual synthesis

At the end of this visual journey we felt the need to elaborate a conceptual map (Fig. 1 - Fig. 23) that represents a sort of synthesis "in color" of Public Art in Pescara, obviously referring only to the four key words identified; an empathic perceptive experience in which color is the medium of the project, both for what concerns the conformed space and for what concerns the ephemeral representation, that is the movement, the daily use, the "indifferent looking", the careful seeing, the participation: active sensors of living the contemporary urban experience. With similar objectives, finally, we represented some ideas of Public Art in Pescara through the elaborative form of the "semantic model" (Unali, 2019). These works are representation models, between research and didactics, that trigger thematic elaborative processes under the banner of "cultural hybridization" and "aesthetic recycling"; visual experiments to know, create, transmit, and elaborate ideas and forms (Fig. 24).

Fig. 24 (right). Semantic model (detail) elaborated within the didactics of the teaching of "Drawing of Architecture", prof. M. Unali, student Luigi Gasbarri. Degree Course in Architecture, Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio", Chieti-Pescara.

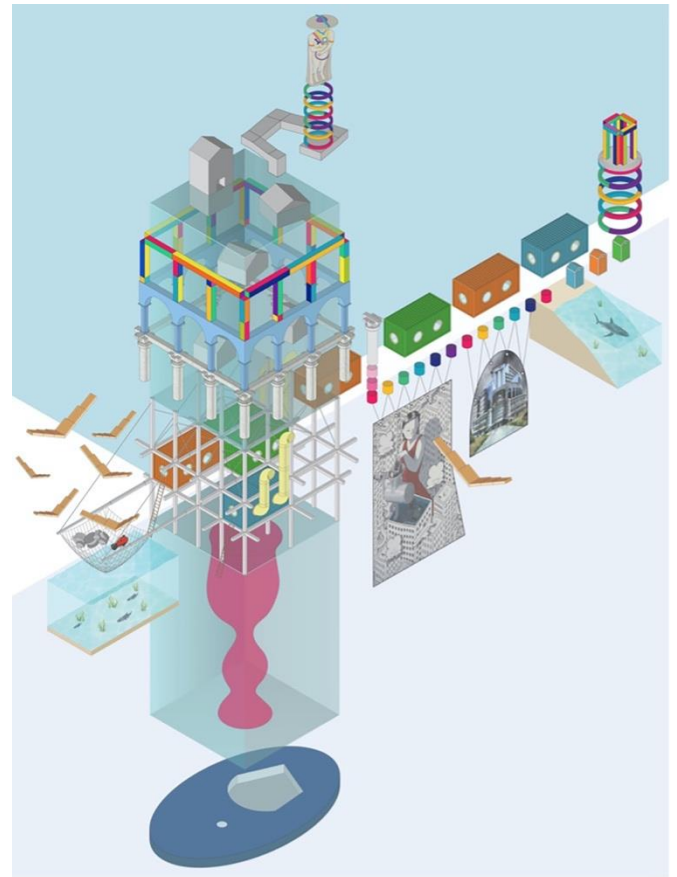


Fig. 23 - G. Caffio, M. Unali, A visual path "in color" on Public Art in Pescara, conceptual map, 2020 (detail, cf. Fig. 1).

8. Conflict of interest declaration

The authors state that no financial/personal interests have affected their objectivity and therefore no potential conflicts exist.

9. Funding source declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

10. Short biography of the authors

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