



àisthesis

Discovering art with all the senses

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Going to the Museum to Perform the Artwork

by Marcello La Matina

When the ancient Greeks wanted to explain their artistic life, they used a mythological image: the **Muses**. These nine sisters, daughters of Mnemosyne, were the goddesses who governed the different artistic expressions: Calliope was the muse of epic and Terpsichore of dance, just as Euterpe was the goddess of lyric poetry and Melpomene that of tragedy. In actuality, the artistic field of the **Greeks** was broader than ours; for example, it included history and geometry that we place among the sciences. Despite the subject, geometric and historical knowledge were matter of song or the expression of a sovereign formal balance between magnitudes speaking of the beauty of the world, or what they called the **Kòsmos**. For the Greeks, art was never defined starting from the content, from the subject, as it is among moderns. Art was a constellation of phenomena linked to song, to voice, to beauty and harmony.

The Muses had taught men to **sing**. And there was no poet who did not begin to sing, giving thanks to the Muses – or more generally to the goddess – for having received both the song and the material of the song itself. In fact, the Muse sang through the voice of the poet or the dancer. We do not know when exactly humans learned to sing, but it certainly happened before writing taught how to fix the characteristics of sound and voice on durable materials. Before the invention of writing, poets passed down song and, with it, knowledge. Songs, especially epic ones, were their tribal encyclopedia. Homer's poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, do not solely tell the stories of Achilles and Odysseus, but they merge descriptions of objects and activities that archaic man learned from tradition rather than from experience. Even those knowledges learned by Greeks from other civilizations (such as geometry taken from the Egyptians) ended up being attributed to a Muse. Urania was the goddess of geometry and astronomy.

Therefore, **arts** were ways of **contemplating** and recreating the **beauty** perceived by the Greeks in the external world and that they absorbed like a precious divine drink capable of restoring and feeding their inner world.

We moderns divide arts into two classes: **arts of time and arts of space**. The arts of time are music, poetry, and dance; the arts of space are architecture, painting, and sculpture. A piece of music or a ballet have a duration, without it they cannot be constructed as artworks. On the contrary, a Gothic cathedral or a statue by Phidias seem to stand before us motionless and immutable, like things that time cannot modify in any way. However, as a scholar Etienne Souriau shown, this distinction is incorrect. For example, the Parthenon. It is certainly a body extended in space. And yet, to be considered as an artwork, a spectator must contemplate it, “circumnavigate” it, and frequent it for a certain period of time. The same thing could be said of a Gothic cathedral: to be recognized as an architectural work, its visitor must enter it, walk through it, and observe it for a certain period of time. No object in space is known in the blink of an eye and no object can be an artwork if it is not read, contemplated. The same thing happens to a painting or sculpture as to a piece of poetry or music: they must be executed in time, they require a certain amount of time to be enjoyed, listened to, enjoyed and judged.

Souriau considers the time of contemplation as a sort of “**time of execution**”. A cathedral, but also a park or a garden are not only an expression of an ‘art of space’, but rather artistic objects embedded in time, as music. So, in the “plastic arts”, artwork have different ways of giving their own time. However, this time is neither a merely physical time nor a psychological time, but an intrinsic time to the aesthetic constitution of the object or of the event.

Let’s take a sculpture of Greek art, for example the Nike of Samothrace. For Souriau, it has an **intrinsic rhythmic life**: “it is surrounded by the sea, by the wind, by the waves rhythmically broken by the wake of a boat”. With certainly imprecise words, we would say that it goes beyond the confines of the matter to suggest a dynamic that can be grasped by the observer only incorporating himself into the rhythmic movement of the object of his contemplation. The classical sculptor succeeded in impressing a power of evocation of the surrounding space and time on the block of marble.

Thus, **contemplating the object means starting a relationship with the rhythmic movement of its texture.** You cannot appreciate an artwork without participating in its time and you cannot participate in this time without executing the plastic work without that our psychological present become incorporated into the time evoked by the work itself. The plastic execution creates a relationship between the time of the subject and the time of the object. Art is this relationship that indeed needs space, but which is not exhausted in space.

Now, let's see what a museum can and must be. A **Museum** is primarily a space built to allow the transformation of this Subject/Object relationship. When the visitor enters the space of a museum artwork, he is present only in the space of the object but as soon as he begins to “circumnavigate” the artwork, he can be captured in its time breathing to the rhythm of the work itself. He will use all his sensorial strategies to “perform” the artwork. As a musician reads a score by converting the written signs into sound so our visitor will be able to translate into his sensorial grammar the features of the object he is “performing” like reading a score.

In summary, the artwork is not a ready-made object, it is not something made once and for all. Rather, it is an event that we are called to recreate each time and each time it can be given in new forms, stimulating new knowledge and enriching itself with the experience that the visitor manages in his sensorial journey of reading and performing. And this journey does not necessarily need to be visual. The artwork reveals itself if it transmits a bit of its formal organization through a **multisensory grid**. The senses of the artwork speak to the senses of the visitor and the languages of one are translated into the languages of the other. Art is a continuous transposition where the senses are a function of the meaning and its expressive organization. The **museum** is an **immense vocabulary** full of pages and they are filled and rewritten at each visit. And each of us is like a performer called **to participate** in the continuous **creation** of the world generated by the art of the Muses.

Nova Gorica European Capital of Culture 2025

Where “Art for Everybody” Wins

1. David Kožuh
2. Aldo Grassini
3. Loretta Secchi

Art beyond the invisible

by David Kožuh

In modern society, there is an increasing need to overcome obstacles for people with disabilities. Therefore, Museums are committed to ensuring equal access for all vulnerable people. In Slovenia, museums are actively working on accessibility for blind and visually impaired people, including the Goriška Museum (Goriški muzej) which is about to complete the project “Art beyond the visible”. The project, launched in June 2023, connects museums, artists and various institutions. The exhibition, which will open on March 21, will be divided into two sections: “**The Existing World**” will present examples of good practices from Slovenia and Italy, while “**The Nascent World**” will showcase experimental collaboration between artists and blind people on adapting artworks.

The existing world

In the first part of the exhibition, copies of adapted to be touched artworks will be exhibited, they will allow us to learn about the history of art from ancient Greece to the present day. Almost half of the copies and bas-reliefs were borrowed by two Italian museums, the **Omero Museum in Ancona** and the **Anteros Museum in Bologna**. Visiting and collaborating with these museums helped us to understand the best practices in the field of tactile exhibitions. The **Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana** and **two Italian high schools** also joined the project. An important role will be played by projects where students and pupils, helped by experts, will create copies of famous artworks.

The Nascent World

The second part of the exhibition will focus on an experiment that has involved Slovenian and Italian artists and a Croatian one since autumn 2023. In total **17 artists**, from different artistic disciplines. Most of them are sculptors, some are painters, others are conceptual artists, and among them there is also a graphic artist. The materials used by the artists are very different from each other: travertine, pine, cedar, iron, bronze, aluminum, ceramics and other materials that give this part of the exhibition a unique tactility. For making all this, the artists adapted their creative process to obtain artworks suitable for touch. Before starting, they participated in workshops on blindness and low vision and allowed blind people to touch their artworks. The process was also documented by the Academy of Arts of the University of Nova Gorica which will produce an accessible **video** of the exhibition using subtitles and sign language in three languages. For blind people, **subtitles, audio description of the video will be available in three languages.**

Politeness and accessibility

We believe also politeness should play an important role in the success of this project. In collaboration with international partners such as the University of San Jose in the USA and the **Faculty of Pedagogy in Maribor**, we are planning to develop an inclusive pedagogical program. On the other hand, thanks to the collaboration with the **Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Primorska in Koper**, we will receive audio descriptions of the shown artworks in three languages.

The project “**Art beyond the visible**” aims to be an example of how collaboration between institutions, artists and communities can overcome the limits of traditional exhibitions and contribute to a better understanding and accessibility of art. Through education and collaboration, sustainable solutions will be created allowing equal access and enjoyment of cultural heritage for all the visitors.

Ancona and Nova Gorica together in the valorisation of tactility

by Aldo Grassini

In 2025, the European Capital of Culture is Nova Gorica a small city settled in Slovenia that is a small country. But this is an event of great value; we must welcome it with true enthusiasm. It is the recognition of quality, regardless of size, and of the value of diversity that puts everyone on the same level giving all the power to assert their being and their qualities.

And accessibility to cultural heritage is a concept parallel to the previous one and it fights for the same values. In terms of numbers, there are smaller realities but holders of the same rights; they claim equal dignity and fair opportunities for presence and participation.

This is the essence of **democracy** in the relationship between peoples and cultures, but also between the different components of the society.

These premises clearly explain the Omero Museum presence in the Slovenian event and its convinced acceptance of the invitation to offer its own contribution to the organization of a tactile exhibition in the “Goriski Muzej” in Nova Gorica. The discovery of both the cognitive and aesthetic value of tactility, where the Omero Museum is recognized among the protagonists, is the cultural reference for this collaboration, we hope that it represents only a first step. The ability to use touch breaks down a barrier that excludes the visually impaired people from enjoying art and from a social integration which would be unthinkable without authentic cultural integration.

But the tactile approach is not solely a substitute for the visual one. It has its own specificity: it is a different way of knowing and aesthetically appreciating things and art. Using touch to experience the emotion of a different approach to beauty and rediscover what nature offers to everyone and what society makes us forget means, even for those who can see, breaking down a cultural barrier: the same barrier that excludes the visually impaired people from enjoying art.

In addition to returning to the blind a right belonging to everyone, a tactile museum becomes a great opportunity of recomposing the unity of a public that can include both the blind and the sighted people promoting that deep integration that only culture can develop.

Since several decades, the Omero Museum has been following this path, and it is wonderful that the Goriski Muzej also wants to deepen a research capable of starting a huge reform of museology. For several centuries, thinking that art represents an exclusively visual phenomenon has dominated the world of culture. Now however, it is being discovered that in front of an artwork what really matters is an experience that can totally involve the subject and bring together all his resources and all his senses, including touch, removing definitely the ostracism it is victim of.

Taxonomy and Humanities for a Functional Aesthetic Education

by **Loretta Secchi**

In Nova Gorica, European Capital of Culture 2025, the temporary exhibition marks an important and innovative milestone about initiatives focused on the accessibility to artistic heritage aimed at people with visual or more extensively sensorial impairments. The event represents a decisive, and not obvious, milestone for Italian and European museology. It is focused on the themes of inclusion, testifying to the need of creating tools for approaching the arts and aesthetic education, attentive to the educational methodologies underlying typhology and typhlo-didactic tools.

The value of an original artwork, but also of a copy, reproduction, transposition or translation of a masterpiece, is not presumed, it is substantial for blind and partially sighted people. These people, otherwise excluded from the real knowledge of cultural and artistic heritage, must be allowed learning art and history with a function that is not only cognitive, but rather based on the

interdisciplinarity that every humanistic knowledge imposes. It is therefore needed to set up a taxonomic aesthetic education aimed at **categorizing its multiform expressions** throughout the centuries, in consideration of a history of style that is the history of ideas, often metaphor and history of the spirit.

The criteria of proportion, the systems of measurement and representation of space and time, the compositional logics in search of balance and harmony, just to mention some aspirations specific to the universe of the arts, are inserted in this cosmos. The aim and function of art is to vivify, in the individual, the projective force of the human intellect associating it with the development of sensitivity, in feeling and understanding the meaning of the representations with aesthetic value.

And therefore, for the need to represent and project one's imagination, and reify it, the human being finds reason and sharing of aesthetic and ethical models. The comparison with the principles of verisimilitude and abstraction, naturalism and stylization, realism and idealism, iconism and aniconism, develops the awareness of a **grammar of forms** to be approached with never mechanistic critical study and practice of the languages of art.

For this reason, in Nova Gorica, the temporary exhibition constitutes a unique opportunity never conceived before: the possibility of highlighting a deliberately structured cognitive and learning path, through an exhibition of images of art and methodologies of historical-artistic research which also has the merit of combining two key institutions of functional aesthetic education: the Omero State Tactile Museum of Ancona and the Anteros Tactile Museum of the Francesco Cavazza Institute for the Blind of Bologna: institutions of educational practice that are fundamental for blind people and for this reason unavoidable for everyone.

The Diary of a Rose

by Silvana Sperati

In the 90s, I was experimenting with the Munari Method in a nursery school. At that time, I had a great “consultant”, a special friend. I met him once a month or every two months, showing the experiments carried out with the children. This was **Bruno Munari**. I believe this memory can help us to understand what the extraordinary person he was and above all his willingness to welcome young people, stimulating them in their projects.

Following one of those projects, we organized an exhibition of fancy animals made by children using only recycled paper. The title was chosen by Munari himself: “**Paper Fantasies**”. In the first half of the 90s, at the art gallery “Il Vicolo in Voghera”, the exhibition was set up spending only 25,000 liras for an ingenious installation made of cardboard on which the works were hung by pins.

On that occasion, I gave Bruno a reproduction of one of the children’s works made by an artisan using fragments of coloured glass. The whole thing was suspended with a metal string. Shortly afterward, I went to visit him in Milan. He did not receive me in his studio, but in his house on the top floor of the building.

We went to his beautiful terrace where his special “bonsai garden” was set up; he had been taking care of it for years. In a sort of “little house” built in this roof garden, there was a small table and all the gardening tools. Here with pleasure, I saw again the children’s work hung by the string; hit by sun, it sent out coloured shadows. That was a special place for Bruno: there, he spent a lot of time taking care of the plants and during the winter it became the perfect place to shelter them from bad weather.

On that occasion, Bruno showed me all his crops and explained some of the procedures he followed to take care of the saplings. One of these was an oleander. It had been given to him as a wedding present by his father-in-law.

In that space, I understood he was the absolute protagonist. A **corner of green** among the roofs of Milan. A space where he had the possibility to continue the curious observations that had so involved him as a child. His attention and ability to grasp every element, every variable, without limits. For this reason, for him, **nature** had become the privileged place for studying changes.

He did not only observe what could happen in a particular moment, but his attention was focused on understanding the processes. Why did that element have that shape? What had generated it? How would it have transformed? For this reason, day after day, Munari invites us to observe all the changes nature prepares next to us. To do this, it can be useful to get used to taking notes in a scrapbook, making sketches. Continuum learning stimulate by the curiosity to know.

From this, the “**diary of a rose**” was born. It is an activity that I propose both to adults and children. When you can reside for a few days in the countryside, you can decide which flower, among all those present in the propitious season, you like the most. After that, with a previously established frequency, you leave every activity that involves you to go and observe the changes the flower manifests day after day.

Changes in shape, colour, tone, and structure itself. Up to the transformations deriving from the influence of the external environment: the light at different times of the day, rain rather than night. It is a very enriching experience. Once, during a training course for adults, I asked a colleague to ring a bell a few times, by surprise, to remind the students of that observation. However, the colleague rang too often or forgot it. Even that fact became a game.

The “Disappearance of Colors” by Luigi Manconi: what is lost and what is gained

The release of a book is always an important event, but this book written by Luigi Manconi is special. He tells his last 15 years in an acute way, describing all the phases that led him to accept a new situation: complete blindness which has changed him irreversibly. Don't miss this almost “autobiography” of rare subtlety, because it talks about problems of every age: identity, limits imposed by destiny, relationships with others. The intelligent and poetic style shares a vibration like a musical theme resonating for a long time. If he had not already written dozens of books, one could say a great writer was born at 76. Published last September by Garzanti, “The Disappearance of Colors” is a real novel, not an essay on blindness.

Going blind is a dramatic experience. It means wearing out relationships with the world, with its sizes and colors, with its promises and surprises. And it means tiring out relationships with others and with things: caresses don't hit the mark and glasses fall, the impossibility of writing a dedication or recognizing a face. Over more than fifteen years, Luigi Manconi - sociologist and political activist - has been going from severe myopia to low vision, to partial blindness and finally to total blindness. Therefore, this is the story of a loss and a slow descent into a darkness that is not, however, “an inkwell of compact gloom”, because “blindness is not black. It is milky and sometimes hazy”. This book is the testimony of a journey of consciousness and knowledge and it's the story of a new world full of echoes: the sounds of a basketball game, the notes of a song, the voice dictating a text or giving a command to a voice assistant or that one of an actor reading an audiobook. And the tactile sensations: the heat of the sun on the skin, hands that brush the walls orienting themselves, uncertain grips on objects, shins hitting the edges. And above all memories, because the loss of sight is accompanied by the vicissitudes of memory: the premonitions of adolescence and the faces that remain the same as thirty years ago.

And again: what can see who isn't able to see? In Manconi's narration, there is both the flattery of desperation ("should I throw myself out the window or not?") and a constant vein of humor, irony and self-irony. There is acceptance of the limits imposed by fate and praise of the struggle: the antidote to blindness, "which is first of all immobility". The struggle is "the movement that gathers and mobilizes energy, that produces knowledge, that pursues goals, that exercises intelligence". Today, no one, not knowing, notices Manconi can't see. He does not wear glasses, or a stick and does not keep his eyelids closed. Certainly, he is mostly accompanied, but it seems that it is leading the other lightly touching his elbow. Is he still himself, the same as before? Is he still the intellectual, writer, journalist, defender of rights (memorable the battles for jailbirds' ones with Pannella)? Certainly yes! Even physicality, for a good part yes! Still very handsome, elegant and sober, nice (when he decides to be) and above all self-deprecating. He is more than a jab for the so-called able-bodied, including that set of behaviors that are triggered towards every disabled person: pity, embarrassment, ignorance, excessive care. Since the limit of asking "who brings Luigi here? Where do we put him?". Finally, Manconi gives us a political lesson against that legal paternalism that continues to preclude, in our country, legislative choices that respect the self-determination of the patient, whose autonomy is denied «obviously, "for his own good"».

Credits

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