

# Browse time, inhabit a story

By Elena Gervasoni

*Small paradoxical dictionary for (re)read and (re)name a gallery*

*Reading Room (and more)*

It is a room dedicated to reading: there are large windows that filter a warm autumn light, an armchair, a sofa to sit on, and a large shelf on which many books chase each other. These are the catalogues published during the twenty years of activity of the Artopia gallery, then renamed RITA URSO artopiagallery. Today's reading room has been the art gallery of the past two decades. Here today we read and reread, we "take stock" of what has been, what remains, what has gone, and what will come: for this reason, between the seats emerges the great bookmark of the Dutch artist Feiko Beckers, a sort of metal pedestal like an arm, that with its index lying on the floor signals the urgency of stopping, sitting and "recapitulating": in fact it supports, in a paradoxical metonymic reversal between containing and content, the catalog published for the twentieth anniversary of the gallery. It is an invitation to leaf through it and to re-think the past, so that its light reverberates in the present, illuminating the way toward new futures.

*"Make a nice (wide) breath"*

It is, in other words, an invitation to "take a break". Like the one that, with every breath, connects the inhale to exhale: a suspended moment in which the expansion of the lungs and chest magically gives way to theirs with con(ce)ntration. Filling and emptying...of air, ideas, projects, and visions. To let go of what has been consumed, to make room for what is truly new: to renew oneself. In the wake of this double metaphorical movement, the RITA URSO artopiagallery is preparing to inaugurate a new season of its activity: not by chance (while the former headquarters is transformed into a reading room), the courtyard storage space that will welcome the new "soul" - that is, the new vital breath - of the gallery, currently hosts a collective exhibition dedicated to the breath ("Wide-ranging" in fact), with works by Bea McMahon, Caterina Silva, and Vera Pravda. And, again, it seems not a mere coincidence that in the new space of the "gallery that will be" this exhibition has been anticipated, as a flash that breaks through the darkness for a moment before the thunder, from the performance with which Feiko Beckers himself presented to the public his gigantic bookmark: a bookmark indicated the course of future projects, and then withdraw nostalgic to the space of the origins, to the domestic roots of the reading room, the "old gallery that was". From the future, back to the past. Inside and out, back and forth: in space and time.

*Book, booklets and little books*

On the shelf - we said - not catalogues in the traditional sense, but small, nice booklets and booklets: at a glance, in an overall look, they reveal that free, playful and irreverent attitude to research on art and on the way to tell it experimentally, never too serious. But no less committed or profound. As a living body, the narration woven by the different publications has adapted from time to time to the intimate strings (*Cor, cordis*, "the beating heart") of individual projects, repeatedly changing the formats of the book, the binding, the quality and thickness of the cards, typefaces, colours, importance given to critical text or images.

Sliding the shelf from left to right, however, is the sense of a linear development in time that is returned, from the beginnings twenty years ago until today, or at least until yesterday. So three well-defined times emerge, which mark the years of work as if they were three acts of a single opera: the beginning in 2001 in "minor tone", with small pocket square booklets, white background and black title (Adrian Paci, Valentina Loi, Margherita Morgantini) or painted background covered with matte paper (Martina Della Valle, Giada Giulia Pucci).

These are the years of simplicity and formal cleanliness, which slowly give way to *divertissement* - as in the case of the *Luoghi che non esistono più* (Rebecca Agnes, 2010), with a cover graphic that winks at the yellows of Mondadori's Urania necklace.

Still, time to play a little with catalogs-postcards and catalogs-leaflets or folding the sheets as children do with origami; then: silence, break, the mourning of mother Mary.

End of the gallery overlooking the family home; the end of that emotional permeability between the domestic and the exhibition space. You need rules to deal with pain: the beginning of the second act. Catalogs all conform to the same dimensions. The covers are reduced to black and white, but do not renounce to an affectionate "matrix" (the imprint of the Mother) geometric graphic type: small open diamonds, inspired by the decorative motifs of the maternal diaries, are combined on the front and back of the booklets (including *Luce Coatta. Dischiusure; L'immagine del tempo. Anatomie dell'immateriale; Ophelia. Della muta eloquenza*).

Inside the books and the gallery, the languages are increasingly hybridizing: not only the "traditional" artistic genres, but also cinema, design, and artist's books... as far as the rule is concerned, art - like life - always moves for paradoxical surpluses. And precisely in them lies the saving potential of "healing". Soon, in fact, on the covers of the catalogs the color returns, and several typefaces alternate (for example, Elizabeth McAlpine. *Cinematic sediments*; Davide Allieri. *Duet*; Marianne Viero. *Figure Bold*).

2020-2021: end of the second act, the curtain falls, change of scenery. From the stately spaces on the first floor of the Porta Romana building, the public is invited to sit in the inner courtyard of the same building, where a former nineteenth-century workshop will host the third act: the latter, music and libretto (but read "exhibitions and catalogues") They're all still to be written.

In the meantime, these small books remain to be re-read, from the first to the last or from the last to the first. Or again, fishing at random in the pile. Like when a story told in a book you don't remember more than a few facts, and then you go back a few pages to read again, to have a clearer plot and understand where it is going to end: In this way, the past twenty years of the gallery captured in these booklets now you can browse it and hold in your hands everything together, playing to chase the past and to intertwine it with what will be.

"*Textum*": fabric, text, roof

The interweaving is the artisanal gesture referred to by the Latin word "*textum*", which brings with it a semantic universe with different nuances: "having woven threads", as did the hands of the parents of Rita and Remo, Giuseppe and Maria, professional tailors and then art gallery owners; but also "aver tessuto storie" - "trame" appunto -, cioè aver scritto/cucito "testi" (come i cataloghi delle mostre); e infine "aver tessuto una struttura", quindi aver costruito una casa, dalle fondamenta fino al "tetto" - che è il punto culminante di questa tessitura verso il cielo, when the wooden beams are intertwined to form the trusses (and here you are thinking back to the former workshop in the courtyard, the future gallery, with its beautiful exposed beams). In any case, "do with your hands, create, give life to something that was not there before", starting from a vision, from a project that you must have the courage to dream. *Textum*: from one generation to another of the Urso family, weaving a house with a gallery, and then with a warehouse.

"*Habitus*": habit, habitude, inhabited

"*Habitus*", from the Latin "habeo": owning, having in your hands, living, spending your time... Once the last gesture of weaving is made, the hand rests: something is there now, it exists, it can finally be handled. A "dress" to wear or a house to "live". In both cases, it is the custom repeated over time - what becomes "habit" - to make this family plot: like a dress worn for years, which slowly takes on the forms of our body, almost a second skin that you sew on to stay warm and feel protected. Or like those four walls that become home (or gallery), keepers of voices, memories and smells that echo the time spent, turning into history. It is the story that the former workshop in the courtyard waits for someone to weave for him: this wounded and bared body, with its scars embroidered on the walls, that asks for a dress to dress and invites to design new plots. And then again the hand will engage in the gesture and weave the space. Again, "stitch and piece".

*Bookmarks*

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**RITAURO**  
artopiagallery