



## THE SKY OVER FRANKFURT

by Silvia Ostuzzi

Das Himmel über Frankfurt – The Sky over Frankfurt is brushed by the tips of the skyscrapers that stretch proudly and unexpectedly (in a certain sense) along the city's border and centre. Everything in Frankfurt evokes an idea of measure that has been tacitly challenged exactly by the excess of the skyscrapers that are vertically projected in such a dizzying manner that urban space comes into play with a kind of invisible city that is spreading ideally until it gets *inside the sky*.

And then there's the river. And with it, the charm that belongs to every city that has one. A charm that also offers majesty and peace, a sense of urbanized country living, with a symbolic passage represented by bridges stretching above the water, inevitably cutting the city in two.

The Main river crosses Frankfurt like a mobile boundary that is also a bit mysterious.

People spend a sunny afternoon sitting near that river, perceiving (perhaps) something like a presence, a living element in motion, in transformation.

In those mid-May days in Frankfurt, everything expressed change, a change in state, of creative superimpositions, directions, figures and viewpoints. All of this and much more that seemed to be already symbolically conveyed to the area that was to host the *Mutazioni \_ Passaggi di stato* exhibit organized by *arsprima* in Frankfurt.

A hall in a bank located in the central Kaiserstrasse, the heart of Frankfurt's economic and financial life presents itself as an elegant, neutral space developed on two levels that are connected thanks to a wide opening. The upper floor, that also features a terrace running along its entire perimeter, stretches above the ground floor, creating a sense of profound continuity of its vision.

The colours of this place are light grey, white, a muted green that is almost grey combined with the black of several pieces of furniture in contrast to the rest of the exhibit space. Materials used are stone, rough marble, very dark wood, wrought iron railings painted white and glass panels that intermittently allow for a surprising penetration of some beams of light.

Caught unawares by the sudden manifestation of those brief glimmers of light, everyone there – occupied with the initial phases of the exhibit layout – look at one another with an expression of astonishment on their faces – to then observe the hall once again: inundated with the sparkle of that explosive Teutonic Spring.

Frankfurt – the first day began with a shy exploration of the places that were gradually becoming more meticulous. The exhibit is revealed as it takes shape before our very eyes. In fact, it is as if these works of art were displaying themselves. By requesting a precise position, they were expressing in no uncertain terms the narrative merit that united them, becoming stages of a figurative, extremely inviting and variegated exposition.

It is in such a manner, for instance, that the work by Pietro Broggin slides towards the middle of the room and towards the exhibit's inaugural spot, finding its position right upon the first expositional surface. This first panel, the only one painted black, forcefully evokes the very *incipit* of the *Mutazioni* exhibit, re-creating the visual experience of the reader-guest in a tri-dimensional space, leading him or her (in a certain sense) through this ulterior declension of the experience of *the passage of a state*.

The rest of the exhibit space is pervaded with a white light that never ceases to filter through the wide glass panels. The two people responsible for the exhibit's layout worked relentlessly, creating spaces, corners, repainting panels and positioning canvases with a precision that accounted for every last millimeter. Someone, impressed by the skill of their work, whispers: "These are the true artists..."

The centre of the hall hosts a work by Mirko Baricchi (from the very first instant): it almost spreads in chorus with the offshoots painted on the canvas, defying space

to the point of condensing into the sculpted-woody moment represented by *Leveret*. The placement of a work by Silvia Argiolas is also immediate. She brings her own fascinating thesis to life through the use of tonality and atmosphere with a Baricchi canvas. It suggests an intense sensation of disorientation in a magic forest (that spreads ideally throughout the central hall) with the portrayal of a woman/mother in metaphoric relation with nature. The final segment of this sort of central triptych is the polyptych presented by Silvia Idili. Her therianthropic children, nest-children are positioned with a powerful line of profound intimacy with the other two pieces on display in the same room and, most of all, are condensed in the insistent recourse of the animal component.

On the same floor, but on the other side of the panel that offers a kind of small, separate *loggia*, the triptych by Tamara Ferioli is displayed. The candor of the work is intersected by fragile traces of pencil and vitalized by the disquieting organic element represented by hair placed on paper. It marks a perceptive disseverance with the central hall, characterized by darker, nocturnal nuances.

Stefano Abbiati arrives in Berlin by train with his canvas in tow. The artist assembles his work on the spot and it is placed on the exposition's upper floor. Its chromatically powerful form of expression and the human figures subjected to a sort of deformation enacted through the lens of sarcasm represent another moment of change, played upon with different codes when compared to the works displayed in the central hall.

On the same floor of the gallery, in a cozy corner, Barbara Giorgis' animation video is projected, completed by the expositions of drawings from which the animation film was generated. *kE-yO* leaves itself to be perceived in the exposition space like an actual *presence*. It moves on the panel, it looks at us. And we are hypnotized, we watch – projected, repeated and in permutation. The notes of the musical composition selected by the artist for her installation are circulating rhythmically, spreading like waves throughout the gallery.

The first day ends with a sense of anticipation for the imminent inauguration: a subtle, anxious curiosity hidden in the glances of the artists who have not yet seen the complete layout and the definitive position of each of their works.

It is now evening. Before retiring, we walk around the city, we eat pork shank (in all honesty, only the most shameless carnivores at the table can eat it), we try to drink a kind of divine nectar called cider (most of us soon give up, and the carafe, instead of emptying gradually fills up...). We climb up into the Frankfurt sky to drink a cocktail up there, accompanied by the notes of an unusual pianist.

It is only a moment: the time to take the glass elevator and see the city descend under our feet, the time to sigh inaudibly and in unison, pushed upwards by a sense of ineffable shared vertigo.

Frankfurt – the second day might have shown traces of that dizziness that carries the artists away a little bit as they roam about shortly before the inauguration, or during the final moments of agitated organizing that precede the imminent official opening of the exhibit. Once again, it's just a matter of moments –

imperceptible –, and then the halls gradually start to fill with visitors.

Small groups of people gather around the works and urged along by a sincere interest, they ask questions and express the sensations that the paintings on display are stirring up, trying to start a dialogue with the artists. The atmosphere is filled with a low, but lively buzzing of voices commenting on the paintings, an atmosphere pervaded with smiles, glances and moments that are skillfully captured by Alessandro Brasile's lens and Uber Carravetta's movie camera that move about the exposition like seekers of precious moments to discover and immortalize.

The buzzing fuses inextricably with the music accompanying the projection of *kE-yO*, with the clinking of crystal glasses, snapping of photographs, the sound of the pages of a catalogue being leafed through slowly, the rhythm of the guests' steps on the stairs.

Raffaele Lino, the event's organizer, and Cristina Gilda Artese are in the middle of the hall and make a brief inaugural speech. Seen from the white railing that borders the upper level of the exhibit, this frame remains impressed like a symbolic moment: today, Frankfurt – second day, the exhibit is officially open and the event is being created right in this moment, under our eyes.

From the private and (in a certain sense) secret condition that surrounded it until a few seconds before, now here is *Mutazioni* literally changing into an *exposition*; displayed to the attentive gaze of its guests, telling them the same story that fascinated us while we observed it come to life. It is now telling that same story to others: an identical tale and yet it sounds different every time, altered and multi-formed depending upon who is looking at the canvases, the intensity of the light coming in from the glass panels. It depends upon how much each one of us is willing to let themselves be provoked, willing to let themselves be interrogated by the symbolic strength enclosed in each of these seven works.

It is always with a certain lightness that the passage of state takes place and the gallery slowly empties. A few untidy fragments remain: glasses have been gathered up and set on the buffet, the darkness of the evening that has descended onto the hall (we barely noticed), the appearance of three red dots on Tamara Ferioli's triptych.

We walk once again through the streets of Frankfurt. These same streets now seem to be inhabited by a slight sense of fatigue, a silence that is still holding all the sounds present until a short while ago inside – exactly like ourselves. We walk, motivated by a feeling of satisfaction that has become vibrant and bright by the idea of that which is in store.

Frankfurt – the third day is the last day we will be attending the exhibit. The day unfolds with a certain tranquility under this warm and generous May sun. Everything is heralding the evening, the gala dinner during which the concept of *Mutazioni* will be brought into view even further and studied in more depth. The dinner will take place on the upper floor of the gallery: the same place of the exposition, right in the middle of the exhibit itself. Now it has become the stage for an authentic happening.

The heart of the entire day is represented by the intense pause that occurs during

dinner. It is like a kind of break in which everyone there abandons silverware and glasses to let themselves be led - as if under a spell - to the most confidential heart of the *Mutazioni* project. Cristina Gilda Artese, creator and curator of the exhibit as well as the president of the *arsprima* association, leads the guests into this kind of "voyage into the exhibit".

Retracing the works on display one by one and taking a pause for reflection on the deeper and "concealed below ground level" meaning of each one, Cristina Artese conveys to everyone present the *raison d'être* of every single piece: the reason why that painting and that artist were chosen for the exhibit and what is it about the work that is intrinsically inspired by and linked to the image of change? Telling about all of this, she highlights the coherency of the exhibit and the creative turning point portrayed by the canvases, valorizing the distinctive features of such a pictorial pursuit undertaken by each artist.

The visit of the exhibit that Cristina Artese offers guests at the gala dinner is a moment of rare intensity: the dynamic beauty of the canvases are made even more incisive by the curator's words, that are able to convey to all of us the intermittences of the mysterious essence that dwells in these works of art.

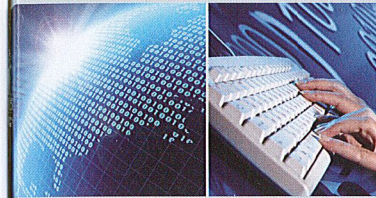
It is no accident that the entire presentation is wrapped in a spellbound, bewitched and suspended silence that involves everyone there. They seem to be enthralled by the same works that even though they had been viewed at the inauguration, it is as if they are being seen for the first time. Time is slower and rarified. It's passing more slowly. These are moments that are imbued with a special density. All the visitors, gathered into a group follow one work after another with the help of a thread woven by Cristina Artese and - perhaps for an instant - someone chooses to lose him or herself one more time inside the maze of those images of change.

Everything that happened afterwards was interesting, but the days in Frankfurt of *Mutazioni* end symbolically with the end of Cristina Artese's presentation.

What is left then, as a final image, is the rustle of an extremely elegant aqua green silk gown. Shiny shoes covered in many miniscule silver fragments can be seen beneath the folds of the gown, moving stealthily through the gallery.

Those shoes remind me a little of the magic ruby slippers Dorothy wore in "The Wizard of Oz". In the story, all she had to do was click her heels three times in order to find her way home from wherever she was. That was how she changed places, a passage of state.

And it is exactly in the observation of the luminous reflection of those shoes during the *Mutazioni - Passaggi di stato* exhibit gala dinner that I realize that the time has come for us to go home as well.



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