

## OUTDOOR ART: CATALOGUING THE PUBLIC CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURES IN FLORENCE

Emma CANTISANI<sup>1,\*</sup>, Cecilia Gaia Rachele TOGNON<sup>1</sup>,  
Samuele CACIAGLI<sup>2</sup>, Barbara SALVADORI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Istituto per la Conservazione e la Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali del CNR,  
via Madonna del piano, 10, 50019 Sesto Fiorentino (FI), Italy.

<sup>2</sup>Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, via della Canonica, 1, 50122, Firenze, Italy

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### *Abstract*

*This paper reports the results of a project aimed at documenting contemporary outdoor sculptures in the city of Florence (Italy). A total of 80 public outdoor sculptures dating from 1910 to 2010 and including works by Folon, Botero, Moore, and Pepe, located over an area of 102 Km<sup>2</sup> were catalogued in the various districts of the town. A comprehensive file was created for each sculpture with information on the location, artist, materials, historical and technical notes, state of conservation. Interviews with living artists (Onofrio Pepe, Piero Gensini, Roberto Coccoloni, Silvano Porcinai, Antonio di Tommaso, Roberto Barni, Giuliano Vangi, Marcello Guasti) were also carried out in order to glean information on the materials and techniques used, to better understand the “meanings” of their artworks and to obtain recommendations regarding the conservation procedures. The importance of information collected from artists together with the indications relating to the conservation of contemporary artworks are well known at an international level, aimed at a fruitful interaction between the arts and sciences as well as at planning appropriate maintenance procedures.*

**Keywords:** *Outdoor public contemporary sculpture; Catalogue; Materials; Interview*

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### **Introduction**

Florence has always been considered as a city of art, yet its contemporary art heritage, particularly the outdoor sculptures, has rarely been investigated. In the past arts of work located in public spaces were a celebrations or memory of the power of noble families, merchants or politicians. Today, they are a form of urban ornamentation [1].

Contemporary artworks in Florence struggle to find a fair and suitable location. In the past, the sculptures were located at the center of harmonious squares or under a *loggia* meant only for artworks, such as Cellini’s Perseus under the “Loggia dei Lanzi”. Instead, contemporary sculptures are frequently located and forgotten in poorly visible places, with low cultural potential, and suffer from a lack of maintenance, vandalism and vehicle emissions (Fig. 1).

In fact, modern artworks are exhibited at roundabouts, service stations, next to traffic lights areas or railway flyovers. They are not very visible, and are sometimes hidden by traffic or advertising signs (Fig. 2). The few sculptures located in squares or public gardens cannot be truly appreciated because of the uncontrolled growth of weeds and vegetation (Fig. 3). In

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\* Corresponding author: [e.cantisani@icvbc.cnr.it](mailto:e.cantisani@icvbc.cnr.it)

addition, citizens and institutions are not aware of this cultural heritage, thus contributing to its loss.



**Fig. 1.** Paloma (Fernando Botero, 1990) (a); Dietrofront (Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1981-1984) (b)



**Fig. 2.** Il caprone (Silvano Porcinai, 1988) (a); La Pluie (Folon, 2002) (b)



**Fig. 3.** San Giovanni Battista (Marcello Tommasi, 1983)

The main features of contemporary sculpture include a great variety of shapes, techniques and expressive materials. In the 20th century, artists began to be influenced by the innovations produced by industrial development [2], such as new materials and innovative application techniques. The percentage of outdoor contemporary sculptures that are not well conserved is significant. Their damaged state results from exposure to the aggressive urban atmosphere. Contemporary works of art need to be restored on a case by case basis not only preserving the materials, but also maintaining the work in its “physical and spiritual existence” [3]. Conservation therefore needs to consider what changes in materials and works are acceptable without distorting the artistic message and when and how the action should be performed [4].

The cataloguing of artworks should also be a priority for local public institutions by creating files containing detailed information such as materials, state of conservation, previous maintenance interventions. This is fundamental for appropriate preventive conservation, based on the monitoring of artworks and on periodic maintenance. However, in most cities in Italy there is no such cataloguing.

A first attempt in this direction has been ongoing since 1989 with the American project SOS! (Save Outdoor Sculpture) [5], collaboration between the US National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The project includes listing and assessing the state of conservation of North American sculptures. This is carried out by volunteers from cultural and historical associations, non-profit associations, and university associations. The files are located in a database freely available on the web [6].

The American initiative is part of a political/national cultural program, but also constitutes a replicable model on a smaller scale. In Italy, the ICCD - OAC ministerial board for Contemporary Artworks has produced a catalogue which is now in its third version [7], and the one prepared by the Municipality of Florence for cataloging its contemporary cultural assets consists of a simple description regarding the state of conservation and analysis of previous restoration interventions.

There is clearly an urgent need to develop new comprehensive and up-to-date files, to gather information on the identification, characterization and state of conservation of the artworks, eventually exploiting the iconometric model, together with documentation of previous restorations.

### **The catalogue of sculptures**

This paper proposes a catalogue for sculptures created from 1910 to 2010 and located in the five districts of Florence (historic centre, Campo di Marte, Gavinana-Galluzzo, Isolotto-Legnaia, Rifredi). Each artwork is described in a file, starting with a visual investigation, historical research and, whenever possible, interviews with the artist. Onofrio Pepe, Piero Gensini, Roberto Coccoloni, Silvano Porcinai, Antonio Di Tommaso, Roberto Barni, Giuliano Vangi, and Marcello Guasti were interviewed. The conversations took place in the authors' atelier and were organized in a homogeneous scheme, following some Dutch reviewed models [8]. This enabled different problems to be characterized for each artist. Over the last few years, the conversations with the artists were encouraged on an international level: the artists' point of view is crucial, both in terms of gaining knowledge on the materials and for understanding the essence of the artwork [9, 10].

Each file for the sculptures (Fig. 4) was drawn up by the relevant district and gives the author, title, creation date, subject, location, technical information, and any inscriptions, along with a brief description of the sculpture, historic and artistic notes on the author, notes on the urban context, and a description of the state of conservation. The decay of stone materials is described in accordance with the UNI glossary [11]. The file also contains photos and a map indicating the location of the artwork.



Fig. 4. Simplified model of file: sculpture “La Fontana della maternità” by Sauro Cavallini, 1968-1971

Each file is organized as follows:

### 1. Description of The Artwork

- Title
- Creation date
- Author
- Subject
- Dimension
- Materials
- Location map
- Date of placement at current location
- Inscription (if any)
- Foundry/factory
- Customer
- Owner/supervisor

### 2. Information on the State of Conservation

- Structural conditions
- Surface appearance/iconometric model
- Presence of treatment/ conservation conditions
- Presence of water
- Vandalism

### 3. Additional Information

- Brief description of the artwork
- Historical and artistic notes on the artist
- Notes on urban context
- Previous restoration treatment
- Information provided by the artists (material, execution technique, meaning/idea behind the artwork).

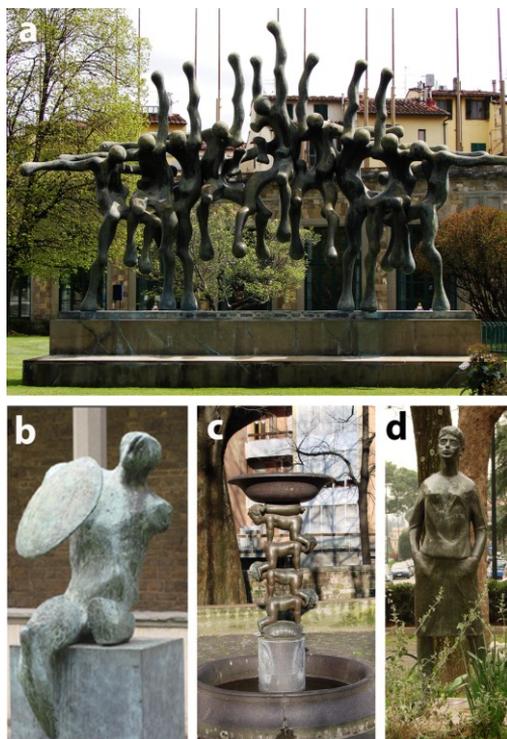
## The Materials and State of Conservation

Table 1 summarizes the materials used, including: the name of the sculpture, year of location in its public space and name of the author.

**Table 1.** Materials, year of location in its public space and name of the author for outdoor contemporary sculptures in the city of Florence

Material	Sculptures		
Bronze	Stele dell'amicizia, 1976, Galeazzo Auzzi	Il teodoforo, 1994, Roberto Bami	
	Sole per Galileo, 1997, Giò Pomodoro	Meteora, 1995, Giuliana Signorini	
	San Giovanni Battista, 2000, Giuliano Vangi	Il caprone, 1988, Silvano Porcinai	
	Incontri, 1994, Romano Costi	Apollo e Dafne, 1983, Marcello Tommasi	
	Fante all'attacco, 1927, Angiolo Vannetti	Pluie, 2003, Jean Michel Folon	
	Ercole e il leone, 1937, Romano Romanelli	Volo di gabbiani, 1969, Sauro Cavallini	
	Monumento alla pace, 1983, Sauro Cavallini	La fontana dei putti, 1953, Mario Moschi	
	L'uomo della pace, 2005, Jean Michel Folon	La piccola zebra, unknown, Zebri	
	Guerriero con scudo, 1987, Henry Moore	I due cerbiatti, unknown, Angiolo Vannetti	
	Fontana della maternità, 1996, Sauro Cavallini	Cavallino, unknown, unknown	
	Pescatore con cormorano, 2004, Kousei Tateno	Fontana della scimmia, 1956, Giulio Cipriani	
	Inquieto risveglio, 1980, Franco Mauro Franchi	Bagnante Olga, unknown, Mario Moschi	
	San Giovanni Battista, 1983, Marcello Tommasi	Bambino sul pesce, 1967, Mario Moschi	
	Tobiolo, 1960, Enzo Pasqualini	Don Facibeni, 1978, Antonio Berti	
	Ema, 1962, Mario Moschi	Obelisco, unknown, Giovanni Cilio	
	Uccelli in volo, 1990, unknown	Porta del mito, 2009, Onofrio Pepe	
	Polena, 1993, Romano Luacchini	Paloma, 1993, Fernando Botero	
	Forza della materia, 1980, Umberto Mastroianni	Monumento ai caduti, 1926, Augusto Miniati	
	Stone	La ragazza con il pullover, 1959, Zino Boldini Nisticò	
		Monumento ad Anatole France, 1955, Emile Antoine Bourdelle	
Fontana dei Capretti, 1953, Valmore Gemignani			
Gioco tra un putto e un capro, 1955, Valmore Gemignani			
Monumento a Giuseppe Mazzini, 1987, Antonio Berti			
Monumento ai caduti di Rifredi, 1927, Mario Moschi			
Monumento ai ragazzi del '99, 1969, Alberto Sparapani			
Monumento ai caduti di Peretola Petriolo, unknown, Italo Amerigo Passani			
Dietrofront, 1984, Michelangelo Pistoletto		Monumento al bersagliere, 1960, unknown	
I sette tulipani, 1994, Islah Jafar		Calciatori, 1979, Ugo Guidi	
Steel	Paesaggio lacerato, 1990, Francesco Cremoni	L'aiuto, 2002, Roberto Coccoloni	
	Guerriero e funzionario, 2009, unknown	L'Arno e la sua valle, 1935, Italo Griselli	
	Monumento all'Elettrice Palatina, 1995, Raffaello Arcangelo Salimbeni		
	Monumento ai martiri del Nazismo, 1963, Venturino Venturi		
Artificial stone	Verso lo spazio superiore, 1990, Piero Gensini		
	Il Pegaso, 2010, Enzo Pazzagli		
Concrete, iron, bronze	Uccello in gabbia, 1991, Corrado Cagli		
	Silenzi: ascoltate!, 2007, Mario Ceroli	Calciatore, 1958, Mario Moschi	
Reinforced concrete, bronze, pebbles, stone, iron	Senza titolo, 1993, Emilio Carvelli	Ballerina, unknown, Pilade Giorgetti	
	Targhe Ponte Amerigo Vespucci, varies, 1957		
Sandstone, bronze	Monumento all'ultima sede di radio CoRa, Unknown, Venturino Venturi		
	Terra, Aria, Acqua, fuoco, 1995, Marcello Guasti		
Reinforced concrete, steel, plexiglass, bronze	Monumento ai caduti della Grande Guerra, 1927, Attilio Fagioni		
	Monumento (ai caduti) del Pignone, 1950		
Cor-Ten steel, stainless steel, steel, concrete	Monumento ai caduti di Pian d'Albero, 1970, Marcello Guasti		
	Sintesi, 1991, Carlo Damerini		
Concrete, iron	Santa Maria dell'Accoglienza, 1990	Alunni ist. Porta Romana	
	Monumento ai caduti (di Ugnano), 1924		
Artificial stone, marble	Aggregazione '90, 1990, Gabriele Perugini		
	Arlecchini n° 2, 2008, Enzo Pazzagli		
Reinforced concrete, bronze	Polena, 1992, Romano Luacchini		
	Nuredduna, Aligi Sassu		
Bronzed steel, plexiglas	Grande colloquio, 1969, Kurt Laurenz Metzler		
	Monumento a Guglielmo Oberdan, 1919, Ugo Cipriani		
Marble, gilded bronze	Fontana drago, 1990, Marco Dezzi Bardeschi		
	Strutture in movimento, 1992, Giuseppe Carlo Balboni		
Plexiglass	Forze propulsive, 1990, Antonio di Tommaso		
Aluminum			
Bronze, stone			
Stone, glass, iron, terracotta			
Painted iron			
Cor-Ten steel			

Most of the catalogued sculptures are made of bronze (Fig. 5) or stone [12] i.e. marble, trachytes, sandstones, serpentinite (Fig. 6). Plastic materials and steel are rarely used in Florence.



**Fig. 5.** Some artworks realized with bronze:  
 a. *Monumento alla pace* (Sauro Cavallini, 1976);  
 b. *Guerriero con scudo* (Moore Henry, 1987);  
 c. *La Fontana dei Putti* (Mauro Moschi, 1953);  
 d. *La ragazza con il pullover* (Boldini Nisticò Zino, 1959)



**Fig. 6.** Some sculptures realized with stone materials:  
 a. *Calciatori* (Ugo Guidi, 1979); b. *Monumento all'Elettrice Palatina* (Raffaello Arcangelo Salimbeni, 1995); c. *I sette Tulipani* (Islah Jafar, 1989); d. *L'aiuto* (Roberto Coccoloni, 2002)

Roberto Barni and Giuliano Vangi also created an artificial patina in order to simulate the appearance of naturally-aged bronze. For the sculpture *Il Teodoro*, Barni created an artificial green patina using ammonium and sulphate salts in order to create a similar surface to that of bronze exposed to acid rain. Giuliano Vangi also used different acids in order to impart different colors to the surfaces. The artists used various techniques for casting. In addition to the traditional lost wax casting, the “*a staffa*” (stirrup) technique was also used, for example, by Marcello Guasti. Gensini reported that he preferred iron materials and steel, using a laser. In the steel work, *Verso lo spazio superiore*, the surfaces are finished differently (some portions were polished, others engraved). Cor-Ten steel is a durable material for artists, which was used by Antonio di Tommaso for *Forze Propulsive*. Local stone has also been used, such as Pietra Serena sandstone, used by Roberto Coccoloni in *L' Aiuto*, or Apuan marble, used for example in *L'Arno e la sua valle* by Italo Griselli. Concrete and reinforced concrete are frequently used for the bases of sculptures, especially for those created in bronze.

Plastic materials were used for the *Nuredduna* by Aligi Sassu. This sculpture was the focus of a multi-analytical approach used to understand the constituent materials, build-up technique and state of conservation, and to produce guidelines for its maintenance [13].

The number of outdoor sculptures that are not well conserved is very high, which is surprising given that they were created and installed throughout the last century and the majority in very recent years. The deterioration of the sculptures and the chemical and physical changes are due to the environmental exposure, especially in polluted atmospheres. The particulate deposits favor the attack by air pollutants and microorganisms which penetrate into

the porous structures of the stone materials or attack the surfaces of the metals. The degradation is manifested by the discoloration of surfaces, loss of materials and lack of legibility.

For bronze sculptures, the most frequent decay phenomena are corrosion and streaks (Fig. 7), while patinas and biological attacks are very frequent in stone sculptures (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 7.** Decay phenomena on bronze sculpture: *Monumento ai caduti di Peretola-Petriolo*, Italo Amerigo Passani, 1927



**Fig. 8.** Decay phenomena on stone sculpture: *Monumento ai martiri del Nazismo*, Venturino Venturi, 1963

The sculptures made with concrete have been subject to considerable decay, for example the *Ballerina* by P. Giorgetti (Fig. 9) where there are cracks and failings in the iron reinforcing.



**Fig. 9.** Details of physico mechanical decay of the sculpture *Ballerina* (Pilade Giorgetti, 1970)

This occurs when the pH of the artificial stone material decreases due to the reaction of carbon dioxide with the constituents of the alkaline material, in the presence of moisture [14]. Rusty iron has a higher volume than the sound metal, which causes traction in the concrete that leads to cracking and collapse. In addition, poor restoration can compromise the appearance or durability of the sculpture.

Not only are these artworks damaged by natural phenomena, such as atmospheric agents, or human acts such as vandalism, but the negligence of local authorities also contributes to their decay.

### **The interviews**

The artist is the person who best understands the symbiosis between artwork and the public space. Artists create a sculpture for a specific place and identify the most suitable place for it to be located.

The following summarized phrases have been extracted from complete interviews [15] carried out with the artist according to this structure:

- a. Starting from the artwork recorded, the artist is invited to express his/her opinion on the: materials/techniques/creative process/topics covered and their meaning within the artistic experience/installation and placement;
- b. Questions relating to ageing of artwork/conservation and restoration

From interviews it emerges that artists not only confer an aesthetic significance to their artworks but also ethical values, thus contributing to the regeneration of the urban pattern in Florence.

Besides the function of ornamentation, the sculptures assume a social dimension and help to enhance anonymous public spaces.

A wide preference for bronze emerged. Onofrio Pepe declared *“I like the texture of this material, which is incandescent. I also like the idea of the fire that forges it. I like how the sculpture appears on the dark outer surface, with these veins that remind me of lava”*.

The artists admit to being personally involved and they generally oversee various phases carrying out the work. The success of the work also depends on the foundry where the workers need both skills and patience in performing difficult castings, in order to achieve perfect results even in presence of elaborate shapes.

According to Vangi *“Artists must know how to work with 'all materials' at least technically, otherwise they limit their expressiveness. In addition, to achieve artistic results, and rise to "great poetry", they must have 'artistic sensibility'.* He has learned how to work with all materials: *"metals, marble, granite, wood, terracotta and even plastics"*. He likes working with marble, because it is a long process and allows the artist to *"rethink work, reflect, to review mistakes, to vary the approach, all very calmly"*. The choice of marble or granite *"depends on the subject"*.

The choice of a suitable marble is also crucial for Antonio Di Tommaso: *"If the stone is very veined, I discard it"*. He prefers a compact material, because otherwise it could create problems in shape and sculpture levels. *"To work with marble and the stone I need suitable spacious environments"*. Di Tommaso worked with these two materials directly on site.

Piero Gensini said that, *“After the final processing, the materials may all seem similar, however they all have a different soul. This diversity binds the working technique, especially in the final part, because depending on the texture of the material, the sculptor can reach high levels of sensitivity....”*.

For outdoor sculptures, in Gensini's opinion, *“due to their durability, ferrous materials are particularly good, such as steel, which are worked with laser tools. Stainless steel absorbs and reflects light, which is very important for works located outdoors: it is fascinating as light varies the sculpture according to the moment and atmospheric cycle”*.

Antonio Di Tommaso chose Cor-Ten for his sculpture, *Forze Propulsive*, because it "absorbs the light without reflecting it. As a result, it is easier to appreciate the sculpture: with no shadows, the public can get a sense of the overall work without losing details".

Roberto Coccoloni believes that the material plays a key role in the creative process: *...the sculpture that I create is created partly, by me and partly by matter...".*

Coccoloni does not buy the stone for his artworks, but he tries to re-use what he comes across in quarries and landfills "I worked a lot by recycling things that are thrown away, even tires and glass. I vary my materials as much as possible".

The artists maintain that a constant focus on artworks located in public space is necessary. In fact, outdoor sculptures undergo not only changes due to the passage of the time, but also changes due to exposure. To transmit ethical and aesthetic values, the sculptures need to retain their 'legibility' and essence during the passage of the time. According to the artists, regular maintenance is of utmost importance, including the removal of dust and particulate, monitoring and periodic re-coating with protective products. Some artists, such as Marcello Tommasi, Piero Gensini, Roberto Coccoloni, Giuliano Vangi, carried out their own conservation, such as cleaning the surfaces. Constant maintenance is required in the case of some sculptures with mechanical devices such as *Terra, Aria, Acqua, Fuoco*, by M. Guasti (which is equipped with a water pump).

All the artists highlighted the need for the owner, in this case the municipality of Florence, to assume its responsibilities for the maintenance of outdoor sculptures.

However, not only maintenance and conservation were mentioned by the artists. In the case of the restoration and reintegration of missing portions of sculptures, the artists have different ideas. Roberto Barni and Onofrio Pepe said that it was not their task to preserve the works. And for some it is better to "leave everything as it is", without restoring damaged or lost portions.

A different approach was proposed by Marcello Guasti, Piero Gensini and Silvano Porcinai. They agreed on the reintegration of missing parts, being careful not to create fakes and that the restoration works must be performed by specialized people.

"And it is essential to consider the opinion of those who made it" says Roberto Coccoloni. "However, it must always be the artists who approve the restoration and replacement of damaged parts".

The artists did not believe in protecting their outdoor sculptures with barriers to prevent people from getting very close to them. They think that people should be able to touch the artworks. "...people do not care much about art; barriers would cause further estrangement. It is also nice to perceive the sculpture with senses" (Vangi). "The sculpture must encourage tactility" (Porcinai).

"...So it must be appreciated also through touch (Coccoloni, Di Tommaso). "In sculpture the material is felt before being seen. If you take away the light, sculpture senses it; the blind perceive it, but we also perceive it. In an atelier without light, if you touch a sculpture, you cannot define it precisely, however you can understand the form. By removing the visual factor, the tactile sensitivity increases: then more profound messages arrive from the hands to the soul than those transmitted by them eye alone"(Gensini).

"In Brâncuși's opinion, sculptures must be touched. A sculpture is an object that makes you want to touch it, otherwise if it is poorly communicated, it becomes a symbol. Sculpture is not only a mental act, but it is also a physical work" (Guasti).

## Conclusions

Compiling files for sculptures is essential in terms of knowledge, diffusion, and scientific information. The database of the sculptures located in Florence represents the basis for their ideal conservation, i.e. through continuous maintenance.

To ensure the best conservation of outdoor contemporary artworks, it is crucial to create a file when the sculpture is installed in the public space. For a better inventory, it is also necessary to include some information on the materials and technique, taken either directly from the artist or from the foundry or the company that assembles the sculpture. For living artists, their opinions on the maintenance interventions should be obtained and reported through interviews. The file can contain information on the decay using the iconometric model, and should be updated with detailed notes on the modality of the periodic maintenance or restoration works.

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