

Realismo critico and Passaggi invisibili: storytelling with video projection

An eloquent example of how the storytelling of two art exhibitions can be significantly enhanced by adding video-projected content to the artworks exhibited at the venue. A case study from the Castello Visconteo in Voghera, Italy, involving eight Vivitek Qumi 3 Plus projectors.

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In brief

- Title of exhibition: **Realismo critico (painting), Passaggi invisibili (photography)**
- Venue: **Castello Visconteo, Voghera, Italy**
- Dates: **from 20 May to 2 July 2017**
- Conception and design: **Arnaldo Calanca, Graziano Bertelegni, Renzo Basora**
- Exhibition curator: **Virginio Giacomo Bono**
- Organization: **Associazione Spazio 53**
- Video projectors: **Vivitek Qumi 3 Plus**

► Voghera's Castello Visconteo (Visconti castle), one of the most important Visconti town castles in Italy's Po valley, was built between 1335 and 1372 by Azzone Visconti and Galeazzo II Visconti, two 14th-century lords of Milan.

On the main floor or piano nobile, which has been completely restored, are **frescoes attributed to Bartolomeo Suardi, best known as Bramantino**. Over the entire piano nobile of this castle, Associazione Spazio 53 and Oltre magazine, together with the Department of Culture of the municipality of Voghera which approved the project and set the ball rolling, offering support and guidelines for showcasing the content, organized two exhibitions which ran simultaneously from 20 May to 2 July 2017: Realismo Critico (Critical Realism) and Passaggi Invisibili (Invisible Transitions).

One of the things that made this event different was the provision of complementary content, provided by projection, in addition to the exhibited artworks (over 80 paintings and 70 photographs) which were illuminated with carefully-calibrated light. Experiential environments were created, in which narrating voices, sounds, music tracks and sound effects interweave with videos and documentary footage to augment the visual

experience for visitors. **What makes this case history even more interesting is the budget allocated for video projection:** it was low because it was implemented with 'pocket' Vivitek Qumi Q3 Plus projectors, which have a luminance of 500 ANSI lumen.

Two connected exhibitions: one is the natural extension of the other

«The idea of juxtaposing images of places symbolic of societal decay, and also of Voghera's post-war recovery, with the works of local painters in the Critical Realism movement, which were the natural extension of those images, was met with interest and success», comments

“Video projection offers possibilities for raising the bar in storytelling: for comprehending things not just because you see them, you know them, or you learn by reading them, but also through direct testimony” (Graziano Bertelegni)

Arnaldo Calanca, the creator of the Invisible Transitions project and President of Associazione Spazio 53. «What came out of that idea was an exhibition, two-thirds given over to paintings and one-third to photography, documenting the most well-known places in Voghera, now abandoned. **The two exhibitions were successful because they were linked to each other: the exhibition was developed around seven elements, dedicated to painting part and to the photographic part.**»

Associazione Spazio 53 is a small gallery that embraces all the figurative arts, including painting and sculpture;

on average, it holds one exhibition a month. The objective was to bring important artists, who are frequently exhibited, to Voghera; public success is important, as is the presence of contemporary artists, the best-known being Giorgio de Chirico. «The activity of our association», continues Arnaldo Calanca, «enabled us to build good relations with the Voghera municipal council although, unfortunately, we did not get any financial support because the council budgets are always hard pressed. We did, however, get permission to use the Castello Visconteo, which is a very prestigious location. **The video projection of interesting and relevant content was a groundbreaking idea and was greeted with enthusiasm:** Vivitek's Qumi projectors are very small and flexible, and with a USB flash drive you can store the content without using an external PC. Generally in exhibitions PC monitors are used, but even the biggest ones are never big enough, and with the Qumi projectors we were able to project images that were immersive».



Graziano Bertelegni
Realismo critico



Renzo Basora
Passaggi invisibili



Arnaldo Calanca
Spazio 53

The painters of Critical Realism: exhibition of their artworks and video testimony

In 1975 an exhibition at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara celebrated the work of five artists belonging to the Critical Realism movement, which was found

ded in Milan in the 1950s and 60s by a group of young painters who had studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in that city. More than forty years on from the Ferrara exhibition, renewed interest in that artistic period has created an opportunity for direct testimony of some of its protagonists. The idea for the Critical Realism exhibition



A room of the exhibition containing the components of the setup: the general supporting structure, the lights, the video projectors and the audio system

came from a proposal to reconstruct the same exhibition hosted at the Palazzo dei Diamanti, i.e. to search for and obtain those very paintings by those very artists: Pietro Bisio, Giansisto Gasparini, Piero Leddi, Michele Mainoli and Dimitri Plescan.

By contrast, Invisible Transitions is a photographic exhibition that documents “abandoned places” as an ideal bridge with Critical Realism, from the viewpoint of people who live dissociated from their environment; **these places represent the present-day break between the life of the city and its places that have fallen into disuse.** The Manicomio Provinciale (provincial insane asylum), the Caserma di Cavalleria (cavalry barracks), the Carcere Circondariale (city prison) and the Teatro Sociale (social theater) are the symbolic places in Voghera which were chosen for the photography exhibition. It is a highly original narrative and, like the Critical Realism exhibition, it is supported by multimedia content.

Realismo critico: 80 artworks to reconstruct the movement with the works of the artists

«My contribution,» explains Graziano Berteleghi, who curated the conception and design of the Critical Realism exhibition, «was concentrated especially in provi-

ding the projected content. The idea came from the desire to recount the history of an artist's colony which, breaking away from the Milanese “Existential Realism”, had started to express itself in the 1950s and 60s with its own figurative language. “Critical Realism” was the name given at that time by Virginio Giacomo Bono, curator of the exhibition, to that new movement. The exhibition included paintings taken from their contemporary output, supported by sound and vision content generated by the video projectors. This solution meant we could open up the exhibition to include the direct testimony of the two surviving artists, who were interviewed for the project. Overall the exhibition was made up of around eighty

“The exhibition was seen by over two thousand people. It was a visual and perceptual story of images and technology” (Renzo Basora)

paintings. In particular, we were interested in reliving the event that the exhibition in Ferrara had been, by seeking to reconstruct the historical period, and the addition of video projections with interviews with the artists, filmed content from that time, and testimony from writers, poets and intellectuals, all went in that direction».



Realismo Critico (The Critical Realism) exhibition **included around eighty artworks**



Passaggi invisibili (*Invisible Transitions*). The city spaces shown were: Manicomio Provinciale (provincial insane asylum), the Caserma di Cavalleria (cavalry barracks), the Carcere Circondariale (city prison) and the Teatro Sociale (social theater)

The evolution of storytelling: direct testimony in video projection

«Technology» continues Graziano Berteleghi, «gave us an important boost: this exhibition was held in a provincial area, where the financial prospects are rather different from exhibitions in big cities like Milan. **Our goal was to get the best result with the means available** and the idea was to replace the classic PC-stuck-in-a-corner with video projection and background music. We searched for tracks that would create the perfect mood for the exhibition. Technology only makes sense when there's content, which of course is king. We produced important content: the artists involved made technical contributions to the editing of the films, and in some cases they made comparisons and parallels with artists of other periods. **Video projection offers possibilities for raising the bar in storytelling**: for comprehending things not just because you see them, you know them, or you learn by reading them, but also through direct testimony».

Invisible Transitions, to bear witness to the decay of a city

«Invisible Transitions,» explains Renzo Basora, critic and creator, «is a photographic exhibition created by A. Calanca, G. Colla and F. Draghi and tailored to the size of a room of the piano nobile of the Castello Visconteo, where a series of images was exhibited that bear witness to the deterioration of the city of Voghera. Video projection was also used to help explain the exhibition, with unconventional images, with footage, some of it taken with drones, and with voices reciting texts taken

from the catalog which described the places that were photographed. So, the photographs gave an idea of the inside and the outside of those places, and the projected images and the narrating voice gave unusual perspectives. The display and the image quality impressed me, and the technology was very easy to handle; the Qumi mini-projectors were naturally placed inside the exhibition structures, and the path through the exhibition wasn't interrupted; on the contrary, the integration of the technology was absolutely perfect. **The exhibition was seen by over two thousand people. It was a visual and perceptual story of images and technology. And everything was put together really well».**

«The technology,» continues Renzo Basora, «did this for us: it brought the voice of these artists into the exhibition. The audio commentary was complementary and it elicited an emotional response. So it was a functional integration, not just on the educational and captioning level but also it gave a more structured and attentive viewing, different from viewing the photograph on its own, where the relationship is static. For the more expert visitors the images taken with a drone are interesting in their own right; and they attract the attention of the less expert visitors too because they create a less traditional path through the exhibition. The exhibits could be read on different levels: the specialist examined the image from a professional viewpoint, while the merely curious regarded it as an artefact. The sound and vision commentary of the projectors supplemented the simple viewing of the exhibition: while the visitor looked at the images they could also hear the commentary from the catalog. This also gave extra information, and not just educational, for people who approached the exhibition by chance.»



Passaggi Invisibili (Invisible Transitions). A room of photographs bearing witness to the deterioration of the city of Voghera

TWO-MINUTE FULL-HD VIDEO FILES, MPEG-4 CODEC, BITRATE 2 MBPS

Pierpaolo Cigagna is the videographer who recorded and edited the content.

«It was an interesting experience to make those videos when we did the interviews, together with Graziano Bertelegni and Pier Luigi Feltri. We also went to the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, to talk to the painter Pietro Bisio, who as a young man had studied at the Academy. The documentaries projected during the exhibition were produced by editing about one hour's footage, which we shot over a couple of days, plus archival images selected by Graziano Bertelegni. We produced MPEG-4 files around two minutes long at a bitrate of 2 Mbps in Full HD, in 16:9 format. Each projector had its own USB flash drive containing its movie; the playback software onboard the Qumi never faltered and we were stunned by the projectors' performance, not least because they were so small [176x103x28 mm, 460 grams – Editor's note]; everything worked as it should, with no problems, for the entire duration of the exhibition. Even when the room was lit they worked just fine, and the quality of the projection on the unfinished wall astonished us».

Note that the Qumi range from Vivitek includes 4 models with luminance from 500 to 1000 ANSI Lumen.

Critical Realism and Invisible Transitions, with the aid of 8 Vivitek Qumi 3 Plus projectors

Claudio Carra set up the exhibition and installed the Vivitek Qumi video projectors and the lights.

«Each room,» explains Carra, «had its own projector and a Denon audio system. **The installation was made easier by the very small size of the Qumi projectors, which can be placed anywhere.** They're also really light, so they don't require their own plinth, and all we had to do was attach a Manfrotto support bracket to the frames that held the paintings and the photographs, so that we could quickly orient them and lock them in position. In the various rooms the lighting had been well designed, the spotlights were oriented to point towards the artworks; **there was ambient light of course, but despite that the light from the projectors was enough to project high-quality images.** We projected images over two yards wide onto the unfinished walls. This was also the first time we used a structure made up of contoured extruded aluminum tubes, which we put together like scaffolding; aesthetically it's more elegant since it's made of anodized aluminum, with chrome- and nickel-plated connectors instead of black ones. **The resulting structure was elegant but muted, designed not to steal the show from the paintings and the photographs».**



Voghera's Castello Visconteo, partially restored, dates from medieval times

«This exhibition,» comments Marina Azzaretti, Cultural Officer in the Municipality of Voghera, «has given us a taste of the potential offered by technology, which I'm certainly in favor of, not just for aiding knowledge and learning but also to attract interest. **'Millennials', who are accustomed to using technology, are an increasingly key target.** For sure, the new tools offered by technology can have their downsides and risks, but also and especially they offer opportunities for learning that are different, more involving, and far-reaching; images that strike you stay with you. This exhibition is an example of how we can use municipal property to harness our artistic heritage and to promote culture. The Castello Visconteo dates from medieval times; it's one of the most important monuments in Voghera, together with the Teatro Sociale and the cathedral. When our administration took office, we reopened it to the public. Towards the end of the twentieth century it was partially restored, and frescoes were found in the Hall of the Muses which were attributed to Bramantino: they were hidden by the false ceiling that was installed

when the castle was converted for use as a courthouse».

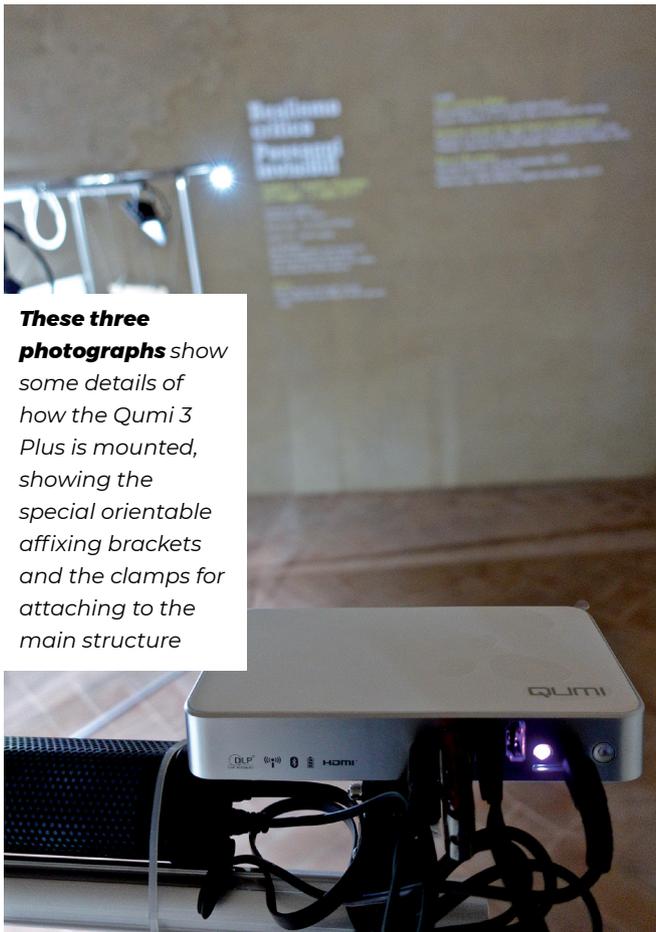
«Right from the start of my mandate, in 2010,» adds Marina Azzaretti, «I wanted to adapt Voghera's Castello Visconteo to make it exhibition-friendly. The

castle belongs to the public: it is used for the period necessary, weather permitting. We can't afford to heat it in winter, so we use it from May to October».

«The collaboration with Associazione Spazio 53,» continues Marina Azzaretti, «got off to a very good start and it's become well-established over the years. Together we've created really positive synergies that have given excellent results, and this extends to setting up events.

This exhibition, proposed by Renzo Basora, Graziano Bertelegni, Arnaldo Calanca and Guido Colla, has met with a great response because it raised awareness, not just of our castle used as an exhibition space, but also of the artists in our area who left an indelible

mark in a period of history and art that gave birth to the Critical Realism movement. In Voghera we also have a small, nineteenth-century Teatro Sociale, which closed in 1986: we're restoring it with private funding, donated by the Esselunga supermarket chain and the Fondazione CARIPL0 to make it a reality. Our administration believes it's essential to salvage disused monuments: the Teatro Sociale is going to reopen in 2020».



These three photographs show some details of how the Qumi 3 Plus is mounted, showing the special orientable affixing brackets and the clamps for attaching to the main structure

