

ZENATO ACADEMY

Wine. Beyond the portrait

by Luca Panaro

Artworks

Nicola Biagetti, Mescere (Pour)

In this work, the artist concentrates his attention on the Zenato winery's employees and makes them blend into the surrounding space where they do their daily work. Their tools seem to be part of them as if the instruments were extensions of their senses. The figures are still. They have neutral expressions. The viewer can see their pride on their faces: They are the stars and stewards of the work they perform. But you can also sense a note of irony as Biagetti plays with their bodies and their positioning with respect to the objects around them. It's as if the man surrounded by tubes were being transformed into a Marvel character. The reference is to Doctor Octopus whose mechanical tentacles extend from his body. The woman wrapped in a lavish ribbon has a regal air about her. And the labels for the wine bottles make her seem like an empress of her domain. With a dash of creativity, the other images are capable of making us dream as they transform the persons into characters. The viewer will recognize a young Icarus in the man who tries to levitate himself from the ground with bottles between his arms and legs. Similarly, the figure surrounded by electrical cables and another blending into the crates of grapes stimulate the viewer's shared collective memory.

Greta Grasso, Vinalia rustica (*Vinalia rustica*)

The vinalia rustica was an ancient Roman custom that celebrated the grape harvest. For this festival, all work was put on hold so that the people could partake in the ritual. Greta Grasso reinterprets this tradition by directly involving the Zenato winery employees. They leave their respective offices to attend a banquet with the King of the festival, the one who had the authority to decide how many glasses of wine each is to drink. The scene balances the past and present and this polyptych is the perfect setting for the many juxtaposed elements. In one of the images, the viewer will note a modern Narcissus who is taking a selfie. Next to him, there is a Sibyl, the legendary prophetess who was capable of predicting and answering questions about the future. In another image, she enjoys the Dance of the Vines with the other guests. The colors of the photographs are intentionally saturated. The people, dressed in traditional garb, move around the area of the winery designated for packing and shipping. This makes it seem as if they are traveling through time, especially when the viewer notes the sunglasses. It's an extraneous element that seems to be a reference to Paolo Sorrentino's "The Young Pope" or to Giorgio De Chirico's portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire.

Paolo Munari Mandelli, Alveare (Beehive)

In this work, the artist changes the function of an object known as the "Alveare" ("Beehive"). It's a cardboard insert that was discovered during a site inspection of the Zenato winery. And it's used every day to package the wine (it resembles a honeycomb, hence the nickname). Paolo Munari Mandelli sees a mask in this cardboard. As if an attempt to give a face to the wine, it's a metaphysical presence that suddenly appears inside the winery's Santa Cristina estate. The choice to print the photographs in black and white makes the face easier to recognize against the dark setting of the winery. It's an affable presence. The viewer can clearly see its eyes, mouth, and ears as if they had been drawn by a child. It appears to smile at us as we watch it from a distance or when it rests on the spigot of a wood cask. It blends into the spiral staircase that rises over the steel tanks used for vinification. Its silhouette peeks out during bottling. It seems surprised when we notice it on those special wooden racks with holes known as pupitres. This artist's approach to portraiture doesn't rely on people. Instead, he uses photography to make the invisible

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believable. He generates a presence despite the absence of an actual character. A simple box is transformed into a real human whose job is to protect the bottles of wine when it is shipped.

Orecchie d'Asino, A volte i volti (Sometimes Some Faces)

The artistic duo comprised of Ornella De Carlo and Federica Porro uses a series of photographic images as a synthesis of an audiovisual work where the characters are Zenato employees. Orecchie D'Asino (Donkey Ears) do not want to talk about the persons in the images or the tasks that the men and women carry out each at the winery. They show up in the video as if they had appeared in a dream that they were trying to wake up from. The artists start with references to ancient and modern texts that are recited by the characters and by an off-camera voice. In each short chapter, everyday reality is trumped by a fictional story that constantly feeds this work. Sometimes some faces are those of the artists themselves: Dressed as Bacchus with a broken glass in their hand or a woman who walks over the oak casks before doing the *bâtonnage*, the act of stirring the wine inside the barrel. The video offers the viewer the possibility to meet the other characters. And some of these faces also appear in the photographic images, as if they were totems depicting the stories and memories of a community. The objects and persons who appear in the video have been freed from the chains of the narrative structure. They appear in the photographs like aboriginal sculptures. A screen bearing their face towers over them.

Bartolomeo Rossi, Come Acini (Like Berries)

This series of images was inspired by the Zenato family's wineries. He populates those spaces with the winery's employees in absurd and often playful positions and situations. The workers and the spaces are decontextualized and their usual roles are abandoned as they become the players in a game. But there is also something suspended in the photographs. The bodies are frozen in position and rarely are their faces totally visible. Sometimes they are covered or they are shot from behind. It is as if Bartolomeo Rossi were telling us that in life, you should never take yourself too seriously. Sarcasm and humor can help us to see things in a different way. We could compare his photographs to the work "One Minute Sculptures" by Erwin Wurm. In this series, the artist arranges his models in unexpected interactions with everyday objects. And in doing so, he encourages the viewer to question the very definition of sculpture. The settings created by Rossi are fleeting and extemporaneous. Here, the artist has decided to use photography to ensure that the settings will persist in our minds. Five men standing inside a crate like the berries of a grape bunch; an anonymous figure lying face down in a stack of boxes; studies in balance; a body suspended; long yellow strips blowing in the wind.

Authors

Luca Panaro

Born in Florence in 1975, Luca Panaro is an art critic and curator. He received his degree in contemporary art from the Drama, Arts, Music Studies (DAMS) program at the University of Bologna. Currently, he teaches photography criticism at the Brera Fine Arts Academy in Milan and the history of photography at the Fine Arts Academy in Bologna. He has worked with the Laboratorio di Architettura e Arte, creating public art installations on the Piacenza campus of the Polytechnic University of Milan where he has also taught photographic iconography. He has written books on photography, video art, and new media including *L'occultamento dell'autore*, *Tre strade per la fotografia*, *Casualità e controllo*, *Un'apparizione di superfici*, and *La fotografia oltre la ripetizione*. His essay on "Reality and Fiction in Contemporary Art" appears in the Treccani 21st Century Encyclopedia. He has worked as a curator of exhibitions and site-specific art installations with museums and cultural institutions in Italy and around the world. He is the artistic director of the Centrale Festival in Fano and he is the founder of the educational project Chippendale Studio in Milan.

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Nicola Biagetti (born in Bologna, 1995) graduated from the Università di Bologna with a degree in industrial design. From 2018 to 2020, he studied in the contemporary visual studies graduate program at FMAV - Scuola di Alta Formazione. The experience gave him the opportunity to interact with artists like Adelita Husni-Bey, Nicolò Degiorgis, Niklas Goldbach, Gianni Ferrero Merlino, and Mario Cresci. In 2019, he took part in the “Petro Subjectivity and Social Ecology” summer program at Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto. His work is focused on the relationship between contemporary humankind and natural, artificial, and virtual spaces.

Greta Grasso (Genova, 1995) worked in the Canary Islands before she developed in photography in the city of her birth where she mounted her first shows in independent galleries. She later enrolled in the graduation program in contemporary visual studies at FMAV - Scuola di Alta Formazione where she had the opportunity to hone the expressive urgency that shapes her work. In the course of her schooling, she has developed an introspective approach to her photographs through her rigorous study of place and her interest in architecture.

Paolo Munari Mandelli (Bologna, 1983) has been working as a professional photographer since 2010. He began his studies at the John Kaverdash Academy of Photography in Milan where he specialized in reportage and visual communication. During that same period, he worked for photojournalism agencies covering current events. In the years that would follow, he continued his studies on trips through Greece, Turkey, and Serbia where he reported on the immigration crisis. In 2019, he turned to the world of contemporary art when enrolled in the graduate program in contemporary visual studies at FMAV - Scuola di Alta Formazione.

Orecchie d’Asino is an artistic duo comprised of Ornella De Carlo (Taranto, 1991), who earned a university degree in visual arts, and Federica Porro (Como, 1994), who received her degree in humanities with a focus on the arts in the 20th century. Since 2019, they have shown their work in festivals and they have participated in various residence projects in the visual arts. In 2021, they received an honorable mention for photography from the organizers of the Premio Francesco Fabbri (Pieve di Soligo). They were also finalists in photography for the Premio Combat (Livorno). They have shown their work at BACO - Base Arte Contemporanea Odiera (Bergamo) where they were included in the triennial project “Metafotografia.”

Bartolomeo Rossi (Udine, 1993) obtained a degree in multi-media sciences and technologies before working as a freelance photographer. He later enrolled in the contemporary visual studies graduate program at FMAV - Scuola di Alta Formazione where he continues to develop his work with analog images. His focus is the intimate perception of landscape with an emphasis on the relationships between human beings and their places of origin.