

**Echoes****Lorenzo Balbi****The *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, a Possible Model for a Museo Reale****Abstract**

Contemporary museology confronts us with a radical rethinking of the functions and responsibilities of the contemporary art museum which, from a place of conservation and enhancement of artistic heritage, becomes today a center of cultural production open to citizens. Looking at the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, the new project of MAMbo - Museum of Modern Art of Bologna which offered working spaces to local artists, the article traces the characteristics of a new proposition: the museum presents itself as a site of creative processes, and as a home for the artistic community and promoter of its growth.

The points through which the new contemporary art museum model is described are driven from what Cesare Pietroiusti defines as the *Museo Reale* (Museum of the Real). In his manifesto, presented in the form of a work / poster on the occasion of his retrospective *A certain number of things* at MAMbo, Pietroiusti assembles a number of reflections which are taken as fundamental principles for the construction of the museum of tomorrow.

**Keywords**

Museology, Contemporary Art, Museography, Relational Aesthetics, Cesare Pietroiusti, Artist's Studio, Future of the Museum

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Echoes

# The *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, a possible model for a Museo Reale

Lorenzo Balbi

*The museum has been the object of Institutional Critique, today it must find a way to become a subject of it as well.*  
Gianfranco Maraniello<sup>1</sup>

I have always thought that dedicating a space to artists' studios, or—more generally—making a space available to artists specifically for the purpose of facilitating their creation and access to tools and skills to produce new work, was a sound development and a fundamental addition to the museum's activities.

The global context of the pandemic has confronted us with the need and the possibility of thinking about alternative models for the museum, which is now required to take a clear position and take responsibility for the needs of the community it represents by sharing its resources and spaces.

From these prerogatives the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* was conceived, a possible new model of museum: no longer a home for works of art but a production space for artists, a forge for new works, an incubator for new projects through which to experiment with a more radical and direct museology. As represented in the logo of the project created by Aldo Giannotti, it was a *toolbox* available to everyone. The 2020 exhibition program has therefore been partially interrupted to put the Sala delle Ciminiere—the main exhibition space of the museum, dedicated to large temporary exhibitions—and surrounding spaces at the disposal of the artists of the territory, creatives and cultural associations—to restart together.

On October 3, 2019, during the opening of Cesare Pietroiusti's solo exhibition *Un certo numero di cose* at MAMbo,<sup>2</sup> the audience in attendance was surprised by a strange noise, akin to hammering or pickaxing coming from behind a wall of the exhibition space. The public soon moved inside the room from which the strange noise came, and it became more and more intense and closer, making the works exhibited on the walls and in the cases vibrate. After the first cracks and the fall of some rubble in the wall, a hole was created from which one could see the figure of

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<sup>1</sup>

Gianfranco Maraniello, "Il Museo all'opera", in Stefano Chiodi (ed.), *Le funzioni del museo: Arte, museo, pubblico nella contemporaneità* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), 199.

<sup>2</sup>

Cesare Pietroiusti, *Un certo numero di cose / A certain number of things*, exhibition curated by Lorenzo Balbi at MAMbo – Museo d'arte Moderna di Bologna (October 4, 2019 – January 6, 2020).

the artist who, armed with a hammer and chisel, had created a gap. I like to think that with that gesture, which physically connected the space of the exhibition with a technical room, an inside and an outside, a public place and an inaccessible place, my idea of the museum was realised—one that I had already tried to evoke by opening the windows between the Sala delle Ciminiere and the permanent collection, or the large window under the porticoes of Via Don Minzoni through which anyone passing by can see what is happening inside MAMbo<sup>3</sup>: an open place, without compartmentalisation, in constant dialogue with the outside, with the city, with its various publics.

Quoting Pietroiusti's own words: "Historically, the museum represents an attempt to give a home to the works, that is, to define (and make publicly viable) the place of art. But it also represents an attempt to define an 'inside' in terms of the social and cultural legitimacy of art. In this sense, the museum of contemporary art, in its ambivalence of being both directed towards production and towards history, seems to represent the hinge, the junction, of the so-called art system".<sup>4</sup>

Video still from the video realised during the opening of Cesare Pietroiusti's exhibition *Un certo numero di cose / A certain number of things* in the context of the workshop *E molte altre cose*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, thanks to the support of Italian Council, 2018



The project of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* is based on three cornerstone-concepts, intended to unhinge the canonical framework of museum action and propose a trademark<sup>5</sup>—a model distinct from the canonical one—which revolves around more open exhibitions and collections, with artists and spaces at the centre of the creative process:

- 1) the production of art as an operational and research tool;
- 2) the construction of a community of reference;
- 3) self-training as a shared practice of growth and the provision of equipment and skills.

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These structural operations to open the spaces were carried out on the occasion of the exhibition *That's IT! Sull'ultima generazione di artisti in Italia e a un metro e ottanta dal confine*, exhibition curated by Lorenzo Balbi, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (June 22, 2018 - January 6, 2019).

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Cesare Pietroiusti, "Essere un po' fuori. L'artista e il museo", in Chiodi, *Le funzioni del museo*, 89-90.

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On this subject, read Daniel Buren's fundamental text *Function of Museum* (1971) which speaks of how "the museum leaves its 'mark' and imposes its 'framework' [...] on whatever it exhibits, in a profound and indelible way" and does so because "everything the museum displays is produced and evaluated according to the perspective that will be placed in it". See Daniel Buren, "Function of the Museum," in *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Upper Saddle River [NJ]: Prentice Hall, Inc: 1985), 189-190.

In the first instance, this model foresees a shift from the idea of the museum as an expositive institution to a productive one, an aspect that foresees a necessary re-engagement of the public in different ways, in line with the theories and experiments of various scholars and museums in recent decades. As Stefania Zuliani well summarises: “either the work is in its own space, the studio, and does not take place (for the public) or it is in a situation that is not its own, the museum, and only then does it take place (for the public)”.<sup>6</sup> This appears to be a paradoxical and inevitable condition which, however, finds a possible solution precisely in the transformation of the studio, that is, in its continuous regeneration through a rigorous on-site practice, a strategy which, as we know, the artist has been consistently pursuing for over forty years (and the site, and therefore the studio, can be as much a physical place, a square or a museum, as the ether or the web). A site-specific dimension that today has become a widespread practice and that has been fully absorbed by the museum as well, which has become not only a client of works created in its rooms but also a space of public residence and production for artists.

The second structural objective of the project is the direct creation of a community, of a comparison group that can grow and develop into a privileged and direct interlocutor of the museum. We often talk about this decisive role of the public museum, but it is always relegated to the proposal of contents through exhibitions and paths or to the activities of the educational department. In this model, instead, we start from the direct involvement of the artists, of their researches and different attitudes in a space (physical and mental) of confrontation. These skills and dispositions determine our own institutionalisation as members of the art field. They achieve what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*: the “social made body”, “the institution made mind”.<sup>7</sup>

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021).  
Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.



As Michael Asher argued, the art institution is not only institutionalised in organisations such as museums and objectified in exhibitions and collections. It is also internalised, incorporated, and represented by people. It is internalised in the skills, conceptual models, and perceptual patterns that allow us to produce art, understand it, write about it, or simply recognise it as such, whether we are artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors or museum visitors.<sup>8</sup>

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Stefania Zuliani, “Post studio? Produzione ed esposizione dell’opera nel global art world”, in Stefania Zuliani (ed.), *Atelier d’artista. Gli spazi di creazione dell’arte dall’età moderna al presente* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 182-189.

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Pierre Bourdieu, *Il dominio maschile* [1998] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014), 15.

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See Michael Asher’s reading of Andrea Fraser, “Dalla critica delle istituzioni a un’istituzione della critica”, in Chiodi, *Le funzioni del museo*, 83.

Self-education in this context becomes a shared tool for growth in which each actor can be educated and educator at the same time, proposing content for collective growth and using those spaces and skills of the institution that are difficult to approach from the outside.

After six months of activity and experimentation, of visits, meetings, collaborations, new works and public programmes, the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* has become a model that other institutions are also looking at and thanks to its ability to think about the future, I am aiming to establish it into a fixed activity of the museum—an additional department to which an exclusive location can be dedicated. This seems the possibility to develop what Pietroiusti has defined as the *Museo Reale* (Museum of the real).<sup>9</sup> This sort of museum is described by the artist through eight points that outline a possible museum model that, just as happens in all the artist's research, is open to a constant rethinking of itself, questioning the traditional characteristics on which it was built. Just as the artist and his or her work are reconsidered from a community and relational perspective, the museum can be reshaped starting from a fundamental openness to the *other*, becoming a space that can be inhabited and crossed by a multiplicity of experiences and stories. According to Pietroiusti, contemporary art museums, having been built as museum-objects with a great architectural identity and considerable economic weight, remain *structures* that do not become *real*. For the artist, the reality of a museum becomes the ability “to turn towards the inapparent: the hidden, the marginal, the invisible, the precarious; that which escapes the radar of the spectacle, the media and the market economy; that which we would tend to ignore”.<sup>10</sup>

I would now like to retrace the eight points that outline the characteristics of this museum, using the experience of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* and the institutional program of MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna as the sources of the sustained reflections, with the aim of showing the real possibility of realisation of the model proposed by the artist.

The first characteristic of Pietroiusti's Museo Reale concerns hospitality and the double meaning of the word *ospite* (guest) in Italian: (the one) who welcomes and (the one) who is welcomed:

*1. Hospitality. The real museum is hospitable. It welcomes both those who are already there, and who therefore open it up, and those who come from outside, and hence enter it. In order to be hospitable, this place will have to be inviting, and make both those who open it up, and those who enter it, feel at home, not as visiting strangers but as ospiti, which in Italian means both hosts and guests.*<sup>11</sup>

From this point of view, it is interesting to note that the first thirteen guest artists of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* project, despite this era of pandemic and its restricted possibilities of movement, came from the most disparate geographical contexts and only two had Bologna or its province as their place of birth. Selection followed the principles of hospitality and reciprocal exchange: while the chosen artists were all domiciled in Bologna they originated from Mongolia, Rwanda, the USA, Colombia and all regions of Italy. Perhaps this diversity of origin—so characteristic of the city in which the museum operates—has rewarded the sense of community of the occupants of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, in accordance with the second characteristic of the Museo Reale:

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On the characteristics of the Museo Reale, read, *Un certo numero di cose 1955-2019* (Roma: NERO, 2019), 223-224. A manifesto that, in the form of a work/poster, was set up on the exterior walls of MAMbo on the occasion of the artist's exhibition in 2019.

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Cesare Pietroiusti, *A Certain Number of Things 1955-2019* (Roma: NERO, 2019), 48-49.

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Ibid. Emphasis added by the author, here and in the following points.

2. *Residentiality. The real museum does not propose a model of separation, but of integration among people: living together is a concrete option, an opportunity for exchanging knowledge, experience and affectionate feelings.*<sup>12</sup>

I have already talked about the concept of self-education and how one of the fundamental criteria on which this experience is based is the fact that each artist is called upon to have a clear idea of what they can bring and what they want to take from the group. But now I'd like to focus on the architectural model and the division of spaces: if at first we thought of single spaces, divided by walls and compartments, then a model able to guarantee the integration among people won, with many united spaces, delimited only by yellow lines on the ground (for anti-Covid reasons) and a big central common area, on which all the spaces face, in which to meet, in which to dialogue, in which to host other people, rehearse performances or works.

3. *Usability. The real museum is an organisation that welcomes the projects of those who work there, and makes its tools available to them. It adapts to their planning needs and avoids restricting the artist's intervention to the logic of the site-specific work. The artist does not adapt to the museum, but uses the museum.*<sup>13</sup>

When we speak of *tools* made available to the museum, especially in relation to the experience of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, we must not only think of the technical equipment. Obviously, the spaces of MAMbo, the technical office with all the instruments, the warehouses and all the empty spaces have been made available to the artists for their purposes, but also—and above all—the professional structure of the museum, with the various colleagues who have made available their specific skills, their knowledge, their experience in the field. In addition to this, the network of relationships and connections with professionals, other institutions, artisans and workers, the museum that becomes a *facilitator* for processes of new relationships. By hosting productive dynamics, the museum loses its value as a white cube or as a space that, as a receiving place, tends to modify the form of the work, transforming itself into a laboratory of tools for the artist, from the material to the intellectual.

4. *Productivity. Just as in the library of Alexandria books were not only collected and read, but also conceived and written, in a museum, works and actions are not only collected, preserved and looked at, but conceived, made, transformed, and discussed.*<sup>14</sup>

This characteristic lies in the very idea of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, the transformation of the museum space from an exhibition centre into an art production centre. It was interesting to observe how the public, between one lockdown and the next, perceived this change by observing the artists at work through the large windows that from the second floor—that of the permanent collection—give onto the great Sala delle Ciminiere. A museum that puts itself on the line, that tries to redefine its role in a context of global crisis, becomes a productive museum: not only for works but for ideas, for new relationships and possibilities.

5. *Poly-sensoriality. Freedom from the predominance of sight. This might sound obvious, but we are still very far from experiments and practices that really enhance the other senses, including kinaesthesia, as much as possible, and thus allow us to explore a place with the same olfactory sharpness of, say, a dog.*<sup>15</sup>

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Ibid. 12  
Ibid. 13  
Ibid. 14  
Ibid. 15  
Ibid., 49.

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021).  
Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.



View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021).  
Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.



The large number of applications received (219 for 12 places available—a remarkable number if you think that the call was reserved only to artists living in the metropolitan area of Bologna) allowed us to create an amalgamated group during the selection phase, in which each artistic practice had its own uniqueness and complementarity with the others. A group in which sensitivities—and sensoriality—could mix to emerge but also, and above all, to refine, enrich and find new expressions.

From another point of view, the theme of poly-sensoriality, if updated to our narrower contemporaneity marked by crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, is also linked to the need to create an alternative response to the growing spread of online content that, while expanding the audience thanks to digital platforms, increasingly reinforces the primacy of sight, impoverishing the viewer's experience. Rather than adapting the museum to the new habits of fruition and involving it in the incessant climb towards *viewing* that includes everyone from individual users to large corporations, the Museo Reale promotes a sensory reconstruction, based on the sharing of real relationships, in which digital tools are used to disseminate artistic activities through a creative narration. It offers an opportunity to expand the social sphere of each of us, proposing an active habitation of the museum space that is not limited to the visit, but involves us in programmes of education and spontaneous aggregation.

6. *Permeability. A real museum cannot but involve, by definition, the people and stories who inhabited, and most importantly, still inhabit that particular place. For instance, it could work on the places next to it and consider the buildings (offices, businesses...) around the museum as possible exhibition venues.*<sup>16</sup>

As previously mentioned, one of the first actions that I carried out as artistic director of MAMbo was to open the large window that from the Sala delle Ciminiere allows one to see the external portico and vice versa. A simple gesture but, in my opinion, full of meaning. As a public space, the museum *opens up* to the outside world: it eliminates partitions and becomes permeable. Following this same principle, large windows were soon restored from the second floor to provide visual communication between the permanent collections and the temporary exhibition's area. The exhibitions and the works began to *invade* the *other* spaces such as the cafeteria, the bookshop, the reception and the immediate environs of the museum. All of this was done in order to pursue the idea of the permeability of spaces, the absence of physical partitioning, of the institution that thinks and works as an entity in direct connection with the city and the outside world. In this sense, the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* has marked another significant step with artists from the local scene who form a community within the museum and then leave it to become an active connection and privileged interlocutor.

7. *Lightness. The real museum should be physically light, given that a bulky structure limits the number of possibilities, instead of increasing them; it should be organisationally light, since a rigid or redundant structure generates obstacles and inhibits its so-called human resources, instead of empowering them; and it should be light from the point of view of politics and mass media, because too much attention tends to annihilate the development of meanings and research.*<sup>17</sup>

The method of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* was simple: there's a worldwide pandemic, we have no way to open to the public, and we have no resources. We start from the only certainty we have left: space. Without partitions or superstructures: we put the (public) space of the museum at the disposal of the artists in order to start over together. From the point of view of communication, we have instead decided to establish—as the main method of dissemination of our content—a radio inside the museum, a method of communication apparently less visible in an era where the image is predominant, but that can recover meanings and attention to the word too often segregated to a secondary role.

8. *Multidisciplinarity. A return to the place of the Muses: regardless of their number and field of specialisation (there are several different versions and hypotheses on this), the Muses embody multiplicity, the idea that knowledge is a totality, and that the variety of its many facets is inherent in it, as well as inevitable. As the house of such multiplicity, a real museum can embrace different disciplines, languages, methods and approaches, and find precisely in diversity, and not in specialisation, its essence as a museum.*<sup>18</sup>

Diversity of knowledge and a sense of community were the driving forces behind this project, which ushered in a new way of engaging museum audiences and rethinking itself as an institution. In the words of Anne Pasternak, director of the Brooklyn Museum, in response to András Szántó's question, "What do museums need to unlearn to be successful in engaging deeply with their communities?" she says, "They need to let go of this obnoxious idea that they are the authority on all

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ibid. 16  
ibid. 17  
ibid. 18



View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021).  
Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.



things, and start to listen more. They need to let go of their arrogance. Museums also need to look and feel different. You and I grew up in a world where, no matter where you went, all museum installations looked the same, featured the same artists, told the same fake version of history. There must be a radical rethinking of how we tell stories and what it feels like to go to a museum”.<sup>19</sup> Pasternak’s position is exemplary for reflecting on a museum vision that continues to question itself, abandoning conventional narratives and opening up to new approaches of investigation. This propulsion comes primarily from an active confrontation with the artists who live in the museum, in order to transform them into activators for future reflections. Today, it is important to recognise a particular method in artistic research which is characterised by a disciplinary freedom that creates continuous connections without ever arriving at unitary and linear visions, offering instead imaginings and constellations of meaning. From this indisciplinary—beyond disciplinary, operating freely between disciplines—today’s museum takes its cue.

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Anne Pasternack, “We Should Aim to Be The Pillars of Society”, in ed. András Szántó, *The Future of the Museum. 28 Dialogues* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2020), 69-70.

### Author’s Biography

Lorenzo Balbi is a curator, art critic, and teacher. Since 2017 Balbi is Head of the Modern and Contemporary Art Area of Bologna Musei (Italy), and he is in charge of the artistic direction of MAMbo - Museum of Modern Art of Bologna, Villa delle Rose, Museo Morandi, Casa Morandi, Museum for the Memory of Ustica and the Sandra Natali artist’s residence. Previously, he held the position of curator at the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation in Turin,

where he was also responsible for the Residence for Young Foreign Curators program and lecturer at Campo (Course in studies and curatorial practices). His texts have been published in numerous journals in Italy and abroad. Since 2018 he is the artistic director of ART CITY Bologna. He teaches at the University of Bologna, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, and at IED (Istituto Europeo di Design) in Florence.

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