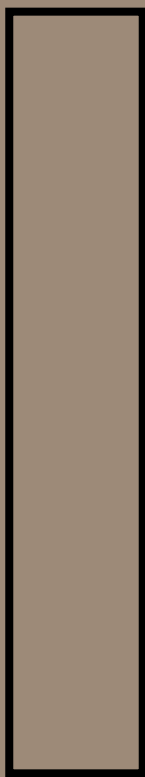


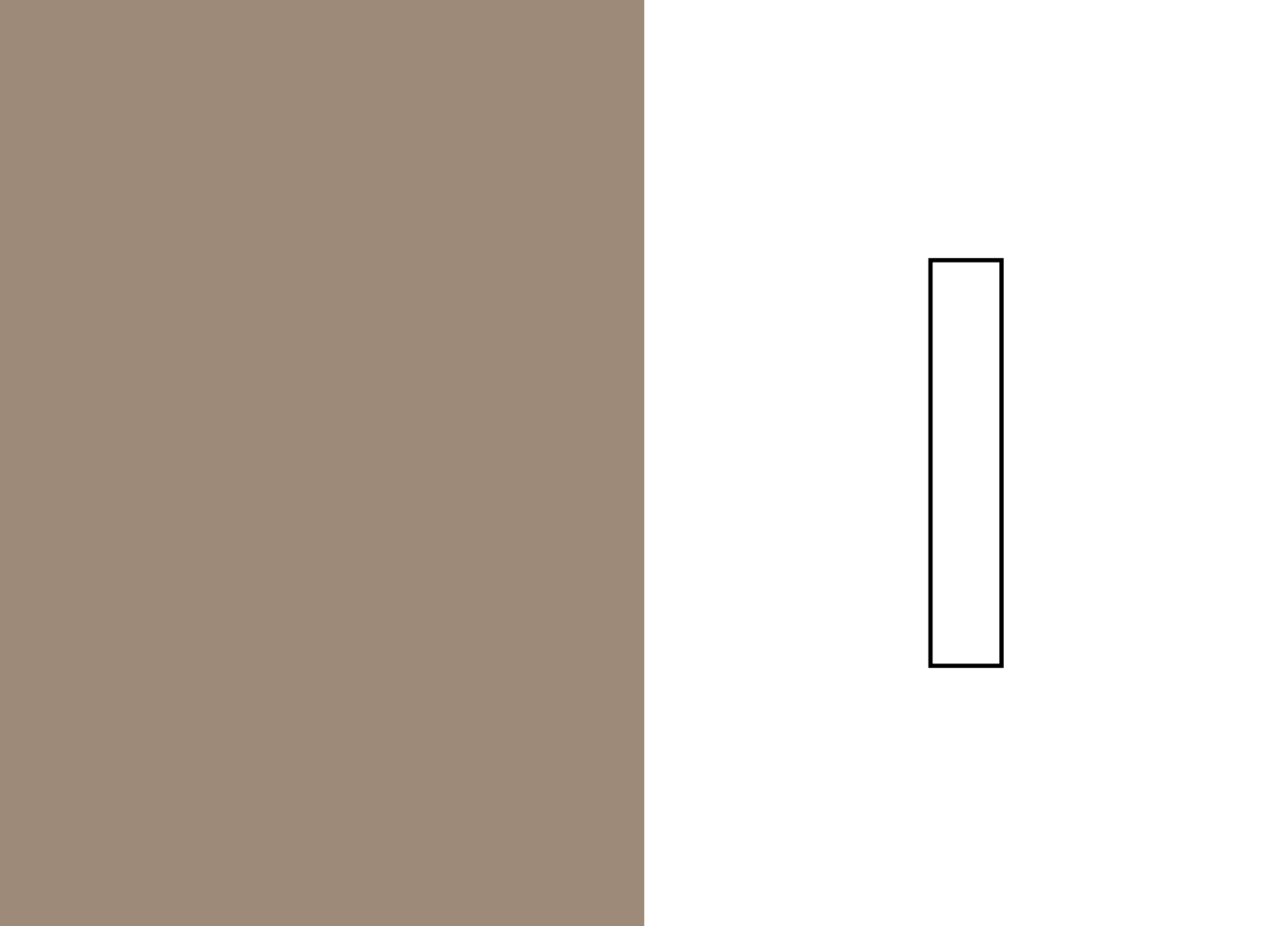
Luca Vitone



MOUSSE PUBLISHING
MILANO

FONDAZIONE BRODBECK
CATANIA

MUSEION
BOZEN/BOLZANO



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Indice – Inhalt – Table of Contents

Presente Materiale	11
Fondazione Brodbeck	53
Dieses Material	71
Muscion	119
Present Material	137
Elenco dei lavori – Werkliste – List of Works	179

Present Material

Preface – <i>Letizia Ragaglia</i>	139
From Sicily with Love – <i>Giovanni Iovane</i>	141
Anachronic Geographies – <i>Stefano Chiodi</i>	145
Luca Vitone, Acting Places – <i>Emanuela De Cecco</i>	151
Pulvis Musica Est – <i>Gianni Garrera</i>	159
Vitone Monochrome – <i>Elio Grazioli</i>	165
Being a Bridge – <i>Luca Trevisani</i>	171
Authors' biographies	176

Preface

“We run [the risk of losing] a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page, and in fact of *thinking* in terms of images”, Calvino wrote in the *Six Memos*¹; “We have to relearn to think about space”, writes Augé in *Non-Places*².

Turn-of-millennium considerations from two intellectuals whose thought has not only influenced, respectively, literature and anthropology, but has also been grasped and applied, in terms of proposals, in other disciplines, from architecture to economics.

Reaching a new awareness and knowledge of places through unusual tools of investigation that get away from normal paths to implement a contamination of disciplines through engagement of persons from different spheres is a fundamental aspect of the poetics of Luca Vitone.

As Roberto Pinto writes in *At Home Everywhere*: “Vitone encourages us, in fact, to use our reality in a free, creative way, without necessarily succumbing to the habits, the routines of crossing and using the city without observing it any longer”³.

The exhibition *Monocromo Variationen* at Museion has multiple reasons for being: not just the presence of the artist in the collection and the desire of the museum to pay homage to his important career, but also, fundamentally, his particular sensibility in coming to grips with places.

The monochrome becomes almost a “pretext” to establish a specific relationship with the place, to reflect on its identity, getting away – in a subtle but clear way – from the idea of monochromatic painting with a universal value.

Luca Vitone’s monochromes are the opposite of pure visibilism or metaphysical painting: several of the works of the nucleus *L’invisibile informa il visibile* (1988-90), installed over the heads of visitors to the show, are composed of geographical maps hung on the ceiling and turned over, turning their backs on the viewer, so to speak. At first glance they look like monochromes, but when you approach you can see the pattern of the represented territory that is printed on the other side: “(...) the metaphor of what an approach of interpretation should do with respect to culture and, by extension, to its host territory: not to stop at the surface, but to go beyond it”⁴.

Le ceneri di Milano (2007), made of ashes from waste-to-power plants, placed on aluminium, or *Io, Roma* (2005) and *Ich, Rosa Luxemburg Platz* (2008), are self-portraits of the places in which they were created, according to Luca Vitone: produced by the atmospheric agents at the various sites, these works represent

.1
Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Vintage, 1993.

.2
Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 1995.

.3
Roberto Pinto, “Luca Vitone: pratiche di spazio”, in *Luca Vitone, Ovunque a casa propria. Überall zu Hause. At Home Everywhere*, Folio, Wien 2006, p. 23.

.4
Stefano Chiodi, *Una sensibile differenza. Conversazioni con artisti italiani di oggi*, Fazi, Rome 2006, p. 349.

an invitation to those sites to make their own self-portrait. The same is true of *Finestre* (2004) – watercolors on paper, painted with dust – or of the works made with food substances like saffron or wine, elements that inevitably trigger associations and imply links to a social context. Ash and dust share a high degree of impalpability and, at the same time, have strong connotative power: ash and dust speak of the atmospheric impact of a place, of those who are absent, of the dead. Saffron and wine are highly perishable and strongly linked to a specific place, a territory that makes them recognizable and particular. All the elements used by Luca Vitone, beyond their apparently volatile nature, are intrinsically “expressive” and give the monochrome a character that is radically opposed to the idea of painting as pure object.

Luca Vitone is also the creator of the *Carte atopiche*, produced in the late 1980s and early 1990s: maps from which all the place names have been removed. The *Carte atopiche* are not in this exhibition, but they represent another of the “ideal” motivations behind the invitation of this artist: the erasure of the place names makes a territory illegible, meaning that it must be re-identified through personal, individual or collective experience. Museion, in the heart of a land that has a long history of haggling over place names, plays host to the world of Luca Vitone, composed of intimate, personal paths, of requalifications of individual places.

The monochromes of Luca Vitone also thus become an invitation to pay constant attention to nuances, prompting us to reconsider the elements that construct the identity of a place.

The latest monochrome, made specially for the exhibition in Bolzano, is volatile, once again, but it goes beyond the fluid, gestural dimension, at times merely hinted at. Emanuela De Cecco, in her essay for this publication, has correctly underlined the performative aspects of the work of Luca Vitone. The basis of many of the works is a gesture, an action: an erasure, a walk, the exposure of canvases and banners in outdoor space. In this case, the fire-red 16mm film shot inside the waste-to-power plant of Bolzano becomes a monochrome that is completely in motion, continuously changing its state. Undoubtedly connected to the work *Le ceneri di Milano*, part of the collection of Museion, *Rogo* (2012) moves forward with the physical and expressive investigation of the monochrome on the part of the artist, in a wider sense of the term: once again, the monochrome becomes a new, unprecedented pretext to offer a city the possibility of making its own self-portrait, in this case with a process of continuous metamorphosis.

Letizia Ragaglia

From Sicily with Love

*I've travelled the world to learn,
I must return from Russia with love.*

*I've seen places, faces and smiled for a moment,
But oh, you haunted me so.*

(From the original soundtrack of the film
From Russia with Love, 1963)

In the 1930s the famous novelist André Gide recommended, even to the Surrealist manipulators, a knowledge of geography prior to any artistic activity.

Since the second half of the 1980s, the artistic experience of Luca Vitone has focused essentially on the idea, together with the practice, of place. In this case *place* takes on a dual meaning: that of the historical-cultural geographical image and that of identification of a concrete space.

Over the years, then, Luca Vitone has embraced this modernist attitude, combining the romantic figure of the explorer with conceptual irony and analysis.

His work, which is original not only on the Italian art scene but also on an international level, thus explores the way that places are *subjectivized* through cultural production: art, cartography, music, food, architecture, political associations and ethnic minorities.

The artist, in his ongoing rethinking of geography, reconstructs (produces) a *subject* – a territory or a landscape – even re-discovering forgotten paths and memories, offering a measurable, visible space to autonomous and individual subjects produced by the creative imagination.

Alongside (in spatial and metonymic terms) this personal geographical research, Luca Vitone has begun an equally original and different reflection, for about ten years now, on the nature of the monochrome (emblem but also target of the avant-garde art of the 1900s).

For his solo show at the Fondazione Brodbeck in Catania (June-September 2012), Vitone presented six quasi-monochrome monuments, “self-portraits” of six Sicilian places: *Io, Moak a Pozzallo*; *Io, Zafferana*; *Io, Fondazione Brodbeck*; *Io, XI Strada a Catania*; *Io, C.o.C.A. a Modica* and finally *Io, Fattorie Romeo del Castello a Randazzo*.

The captions underline both the “quasi” of the monochrome and the nature of the self-portrait: atmospheric agents on canvas.

As a matter of fact, the agency of the painting is not channeled through the romantic and heroic hand of the artist, nor into the symmetrical and opposite “anonymity”, or the *other*, or that of

others, that has never faded from the conceptual or post-conceptual scene.

The secret and invisible agent ("The invisible informs the visible", as in the fine title of an aerial plasticized map by Vitone in 1988) that frames the place is directly, without interference, nature, the nature of the place.

Atmospheric agents, nevertheless, are not recorded only by the history and chronicle of natural events, but also, and in a preponderant way, by the history of art. As a noble example, we can mention the *St. John the Baptist* of Leonardo, 1508-1513, held at the Louvre. In this splendid painting we see the saint, depicted with the features of Salaì, pointing to the sky with a very thinly tapered index finger (probably the archetype of the "index fingers" of Marcel Duchamp). One of the most important aspects, though, is that the background against which the figure stands out in a spiral rotation with the index finger pointing upward is a dark monochrome. How much intent there is here, in this quasi-monochrome (a monochrome that is not flat but slightly rippled, like the hair of the saint), is revealed, as counter evidence, by the same subject, this time painted by Salaì, who depicts himself in the guise of St. John the Baptist. In this painting, which obviously came after that of Leonardo, instead of the monochrome backdrop we see a stereotypical natural landscape (Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan).

Leonardo's masterpiece is also based on what modern art criticism calls "atmospheric veiling", namely brushstrokes that seem to capture and reproduce the consistency of air. The fact that this is not just a matter of labels is borne out by the works of Leonardo themselves, as well as by his technical-theoretical writings.

In short, the atmosphere, with its movements and even its deposits and stains, rightfully belongs to the iconographic repertoire of great Renaissance art.

With respect to the model instituted and *established* in art history – which called for a work of observation, if not of espionage, of the operation of atmospheric agents (then translated into almost monochromatic painting) – in the case of the "self-portraits" of cities or places by Vitone the agents themselves do all the work on the canvas. Different historical contexts and above all different technological innovations that have impacted modernity and that apparent synonym we call Modernism come into play in this "loss" of painting.

As an example of the modern, just consider photography and its various times of exposure and framing. While where Modernism, late Modernism is concerned, think about the uncertain nature, not subjugated to the composition, in the colors of the works of Ellsworth Kelly (*Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951), and then of Gerhard Richter (*Colour Charts*, starting in 1966) and, finally, the recent computerized and technological advanced infinite color samplings of Olafur Eliasson.

In short, the monochrome – which starts in the early 1900s

as the emblem and *screen* of art, as an absolutely autonomous space (as opposed to the ambiguous and romantic episteme of art as a "window on the world") – returns to being a sort of "screen memory"¹, the agent of something that belongs to reality, both in natural and industrial form; a transitional object that crosses an entire century.

In this relatively recent history, what has been defined as the "post-pictorial industrialization of Minimal Art (Benjamin H.D. Buchloh) and, later, the increasingly technological postmodern colors, play a fundamental and predominant role. The natural – and obviously not naturalistic – route has belonged to what we might define as "organic abstraction" or the conscious acceptance, on the part of certain artists, of the way an artwork can be completed (also in the form of an unavoidable surplus) even by dust, as in the *Large Glass* of Marcel Duchamp.

The natural monochrome of Luca Vitone, drawn by atmospheric agents, belongs to this latter category. In this case there is also a redemption of painting, not in its age-old fate of continuous loss and agony, but as a possible and intentional *object* of desire.

Vitone's works are not an automatic transfer of the *labor* of atmospheric agents on the canvas. That labor is organized and arranged according to procedures and images that are paradigms of the old pictorial body of occidental art: composition, surface (canvas), pictorial material, craftsmanship, patina and, finally, also the aesthetic idea (in the sense that it arises with aesthetics) that the work is a "window on the world".

With respect to this aesthetic *place* of the "window", Vitone demonstrated true conceptual awareness when, in 2004, he made a work entitled *Windows*, composed of seven large watercolors on paper, "painted" with dust gathered at the Stecca degli Artigiani in Milan, a former factory owned by the city.

The six Sicilian canvases, large in size and resting on the ground thanks to Ytong blocks, are simultaneously invitations and promises to rethink painting in the era of disenchantment and anti-aesthetics, as something still "living"... a precious term that even Albrecht Dürer sometimes felt the need to write at the bottom of some of his etchings, like the portrait of Melanchthon, for example (1526).²

Giovanni Iovane

.1

The German term used by Freud is *Deckerinnerung*. Nevertheless, this is a very rare case in which the translation improves, in terms of image, the original. In English, in fact, the translation is *screen-memory*, as in French, *souvenir-écran*. In short the screen, with its two-dimensional nature, seems like the ideal space to contain a memory that covers something else.

.2

The supplement of image of the word "vivente" was granted, in the work of the great German artist, by the famous stratagem of the reflection of a small window painted or drawn in the eye of the subject of the portrait.





















