

Beauty in the Word

The new Ambrosian Evangeliary
and ancient masterpieces *Milan –Royal Palace*
San Fedele Gallery, Church of San Raffaele
5 November – 11 December 2011

Room 101

By combining the priceless, inevitable heritage of tradition with the provocation of the present, a visit to the exhibition puts one of the “fundamentals” of faith squarely before our eyes, the one that Kierkegaard called the *unique situation* in which man finds himself with regard to Christ: *contemporaneusness*.

+ Cardinal Angelo Scola, Archbishop of Milan

In illo tempore.
Erat lux vera,
quae illuminat omnem hominem,
veniens in mundum.
In mundo erat,
et mundus per ipsum factus est,
et mundus eum non cognovit.
In propria venit,
et sui eum non receperunt.

Quotquot autem acceperunt eum,
dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri,
his, qui credunt in nomine eius,
qui non ex sanguinibus
neque ex voluntate carnis
neque ex voluntate viri,
sed ex Deo nati sunt.

Et Verbum caro factum est
et habitavit in nobis;
et vidimus gloriam eius,
gloriam quasi Unigeniti a Patre,
plenum gratiae et veritatis.

At that time.
The true light that enlightens every man
Was coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and the world was made through him,
yet the world knew him not.
He came to his own home,
and his own people received him not.

But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God;
who were born, not of blood
nor of the will of the flesh
nor of the will of man,
but of God.

And the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth;
we have beheld his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father.

(John 1,9-14)

Room 102

The four Gospels

The Gospel is the greatest of all the treasures of the Church. It contains the word of life, capable of touching our hearts, healing our hidden wounds and opening the way to hope in even the darkest situations.

THE FOUR GOSPELS

The Gospel is one and one alone, although the good news was bequeathed to us by the hands of four evangelists. Although it the work of four different authors, the true author of the Gospel is always Jesus himself: it is the story of his salvation, of the Son sent by God the Father to reveal the last, definitive word of love to mankind.

One of the iconic illustrations we find most often – on lectionaries, on lecterns or in the decorations that adorn ambos, pulpits and altars – is the reproduction of the four living beings that are the symbols of the four evangelists. This is the *holy quadriga*, the *merkavà*, the mysterious divine chariot that – in the prophet Ezekiel’s first vision later revived by the Book of the Apocalypse – is drawn by four living beings with the semblances of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle.

The Church Fathers soon applied Ezekiel’s semblances to the four evangelists, acknowledging the gospel as the new *throne of God*: Matthew was represented by the winged man, or angel, because his writings begin with the list of the ancestors of the Messiah Jesus; Mark by the lion, because his begin with John the Baptist’s ministry in the desert, a place inhabited by savage wild beasts; Luke by the ox, because he begins his gospel with Zechariah’s vision in the temple, where oxen and sheep were sacrificed; John was represented by the eagle, whose eye stares at the sun, because his gospel starts with the contemplation of the Word incarnate, which was with God from the beginning.

The four gospels were not the only ones written in the first two centuries. Partial attempts preceded the successful completion of the Gospel according to St. Mark, which today’s experts generally agree to be the first of the four canonical gospels to have been written, shortly before 70 AD, when Jerusalem was taken and destroyed by the Roman general Titus. In explanation of the similarities between the sections common to the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke that are not found in Mark, modern critics have theorised the existence of what is known as the “Q” source (from the German *Quelle*, meaning “source”), a first collection of quotations attributed to Jesus of Nazareth that is thought to have preceded the four gospels we know today.

Apart from this theory, we have this much on Luke’s own authority, as the solemn prologue to his own story recognises that he followed a long series of evangelists: *«Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the Word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realise the certainty of the teachings you have received»* (Luke 1,1-4).

The four gospels, the heart of the Christian Bible’s *New Testament*, were not generated by the interest of private authors, nor intended for private reading. They were written in the Church and destined to be read in Church. We can deduce that the authors were not private individuals from the fact that they have titles of their own, nor do they even bear their author’s names. The Greek preposition *katà* found in the traditional title and

followed by a name indicates that the writing belongs to the apostolic tradition guaranteed by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, rather than any precise identification of the author. Those who penned these works intended to disappear behind the testimony of the community to which they belonged and to adhere to the apostolic tradition that had gone before them. Recognised as *normative* by the great churches of Antioch in Syria, of Jerusalem, of Asia Minor and of Rome, they became the *canonical* writings, held to enjoy the same status as the Holy Scriptures inspired by God.

Gianantonio Borgonovo

The Gospel according to St. Matthew

The genealogy of Jesus Christ
son of David,
son of Abraham.

The Gospel according to St. Mark

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus,
Christ,
Son of God.

The Gospel according to St. Luke

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative
of the events that have been fulfilled among us,
just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning...

The Gospel according to St. John

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

Ambrogio Figino

ST. MATTHEW AND THE ANGEL

Giovanni Ambrogio Figino,

St. Matthew and the Angel, 1586

Oil on board, 220 x 130 cm,

Milan, Church of San Raffaele Arcangelo

“Let there be light, and there was light”. The “Light” seems to be obeying God’s primordial, creative command as it bursts suddenly from left to right, sculpting with plastic vigour the figures of St. Matthew and the Angel, freeing them from a gloom that had held them as though imprisoned in the void of its darkness until just a moment before. And “coming to the light” is

not a static, mannerist scene, but a dynamic action comprising looks and gestures, thoughts and words, strong emotions and a restless, yet equally creative, “happening”.

What is actually happening here is in fact the “Word” that “made flesh” now, by this same “Light”, is fixed, written in a book, so that every man can hear its echo of truth and of life as it rebounds uninterruptedly and unstoppably, always contemporary, as history unfolds.

This is how Giovanni Ambrogio Figino, a painter from the Milan area (1553? - 1608), set out in 1586 to apply his great technical skill, refined and precise drawing, vibrant sense of colour and a wealth of theological meaning and profundity to paint “the divine inspiration” that drove Matthew to “write” the Gospel for his community.

The “Book” is barely visible in the centre, yet the “Light” immediately focuses our attention on it, so drawn by its vivid illumination there on the Evangelist’s knee that it almost seems to pierce through the canvas. The nakedness of the leg, its position there in the foreground and its vibrant anatomical forcefulness are as many characteristics of the “Word”: it is light, it is truth, it gives solidity and security and needs steps of courage and of sobriety of attitude to be announced credibly.

From this focus, the “Light” spreads to show us a definitely human, vigorous Matthew, who bears the signs of a story that not only declares his advanced age, marking his expressive face, but also conveys all the experiences he had while following his Master. The “Light” inhabits him, playing with bright reflections and deep shadows in the rich, undulating folds of his luminous, almost gilded cloak and in the deep, intense blue of his robe. His eyes are in semi-shadow, once again stressing that he is merely the tool of the “vision” that he is writing in the book.

That he is an important tool we can perceive from the gesture of dipping his pen in the inkwell that a pleasantly spry little cherub holds for him, yet another metaphor of his personal experience as an apostle: it is into this that he is really dipping his pen to leave us a faithful testimony of Christ’s mission of salvation.

To the right is the Angel that has always accompanied and identified St. Matthew the evangelist in the iconography. Painted with comparable skill and precision, the angel – unlike the Apostle – comes across as light and delicate, a spiritual figure that states its nature as a “celestial spirit”. The Angel identifies with the same “Light”, which in his case take visible form, highlighting three essential points: his face, because the “vision” belongs to the “Light”; his hand, with index finger outstretched to inspire Matthew with the Word and show that It is “the Way, the Truth and Life”; and lastly his knee and foot, confirming that the steps taken by those who announce the Gospel are the steps of God Himself.

“Wonderful, say the scholars of the painting wrought by Ambrogio Figino for the church of San Raffaele in honour of St. Matthew the Evangelist; as here he showed how the painters of our century can still so easily achieve the force of the principles that flourished in the past”: thus wrote Borsieri in 1619. And it is true: this painting of Figino’s is “wonderful”, since it has all the explosive force and plastic vigour of Michelangelo, yet it also presages Caravaggio’s theatrical, engrossing painting of “light”, investigating everything with realism of form and truth of intents. During the time he spent in Milan as a young man, Caravaggio certainly had the opportunity to admire this masterpiece, so much as to draw on it for the first version of his own *St. Matthew and the Angel*, which he painted for the Contarelli Chapel in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. The painting’s aesthetic qualities certainly make it “wonderful”, but primarily Figino’s ability to give image, identity and beauty to the Mystery of God, the Beautiful Incarnate Word that still rings out to us from the Gospels to this day as the only Word of salvation.

Domenico Sguaitamatti

Room 103

The splendours of antiquity

THE EVANGELIARY IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND ART

The Evangeliary is the book containing the evangelical text that spread in the earliest centuries of Christendom, but gradually fell into disuse after the thirteenth century, as it was replaced by different kinds of liturgical texts.

Its structure was sometimes more narrative, with the sequence of the four canonical Gospels copied out in full: in this case, it was also known as a Tetragospel and often also includes the Tables of Canons or a sort of index known as a *comes*, to help in finding the various passages and the correspondence between the episodes related by the various Evangelists. On other occasions, it was organised to suit the needs of officiating priests, with the passages and pieces copied to follow the liturgical calendar: in this case, it is sometimes described as an Evangelistary.

These books had already started being made by the fifth century, but maybe as early as the fourth, in the form of the codex, which was bound like today's books, using sheets of parchment that in the most luxurious cases were dyed purple with a special technique, then inscribed with inks that sometimes contained gold or silver dust, to make them even more precious.

In the Middle Ages, these books were often richly illuminated with an array of subjects borrowed from the evangelical narrative or, more often, just with portraits of the Evangelists enthroned, sometimes set beneath an arched architectural frame, and with the image of the Saviour in glory.

On the outside, the codices were often protected with a special binding of plaques of gilded metal sheeting decorated in relief, with etchings, with enamel applied in cavities or set with gemstones, as well as other techniques of the goldsmith's art, usually depicting Christ in Majesty or the Cross, between the Evangelists or their symbols.

The Gospel's special meaning for mediaeval man and the desire to create works worthy of the value attributed to the texts contained in these codices led craftsmen to execute some veritable masterpieces of Christian art, the epitome of their contemporary technical skills and of the taste of both patrons and artists alike, some of the loftiest expressions of the culture of the mediaeval millennium.

The text, the illustrations and the symbolic images inside and outside such codices constitute a unique end product whose purpose was to glorify the Word of the Lord, but also to make Christ's presence manifest to the observer during the community's liturgical practice, so as to strengthen faith and embellish the ritual with greater attention and prestige.

The area of Lombardy in general and the Ambrosian diocese in particular have preserved several such mediaeval Evangeliaries and the covers of Evangeliaries that date to practically the entire series of centuries identifiable as the heyday of this kind of illuminated codex, lending themselves to illustrate how the output of these holy manuscripts also extended well beyond the region's cultural confines. The story of the evangelical book for liturgical use shows some of its most meaningful achievements here.

Valerio Ascani

The Book: a precious casket of treasure

THE SEALED BOOK

«Then I saw in the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a

loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”» (*Revelation* 5,1-5)

The *Book* of the four Gospels was carried with ceremony by the deacon into the solemn Mass celebrated in the Cathedral and in every church on the great feast-days of the liturgical calendar. The Evangeliary was held aloft, shown to the whole congregation, placed in a receptacle or bound in a particularly beautiful cover, embellished with Christ’s glorious Cross or the icon of the crucified Saviour raised from the dead.

The Evangeliary was introduced to the assembled congregation in procession as a *sealed* book. On the frontispiece is Christ who has died and been raised again and is now present. The sheer splendour of the bindings and covers on show in these rooms indicates, as though in a series of still shots, the force that radiated from the raised Saviour. The book is “closed” because it needs our hands to be opened and our voice to be declaimed. “Weep no more” is what Christ’s Cross seems to say as it passes through the congregation. The Church embellishes the icon of the Crucified Saviour raised from the dead, because the Word of the Gospel comes to console, to hearten and to announce life’s victory over death, that of love over separation, that of charity over desolation.

+ Franco Giulio Brambilla

(All the words, images and gestures narrated in *a contemporary Evangeliary* make Him present. They cannot obscure His presence, but must excite the emotion of the living, burning encounter with Christ. That is why the cover of the closed Book is decorated with the seal of Easter, His “glorious Cross”.)

The Evangeliary of Theodelinda

THE EVANGELIARY OF THEODELINDA

Monza, Museum of the Basilica of San Giovanni Battista

Two binding plaques, each one 34 x 26 cm

Both comprising sheets of gold fixed to wooden panels.

A cross stands out slightly against the background. Decorated with gemstones and glass pastes and with points that flare outwards, it partitions the surface into four rectangular fields, each one occupied by cameos in oval settings. All the cameos show faces in profile and are Roman, except for two that were replaced when the cover was restored in 1773. Two strips of gold are inserted between the cameos and the arms of the cross, bearing the dedication inscribed. The four fields are framed by beaded gold thread, while the entire binding is surrounded by a frame of red glass paste with cavities with compass motifs that form cloverleaves.

Pope Gregory (590 - 604), who has gone down in history as the Great, addressed barbarians with confidence. He sent St. Augustine to the Anglo-Saxons and had a fatherly relationship with the queen of the Lombards, the Catholic Theodelinda, daughter of the Duke of Bavaria, who married the Lombard king Authari and succeeded in converting him. The Lombards, who invaded Italy in 568, were mostly Arians (which means that they did not accept the consubstantiation of the Son with the Father) or even pagan and were originally savage and merciless. Pope Gregory managed to avoid their conquering Rome and started a long process that was to culminate in the Lombards becoming

Catholic and thoroughly Roman in culture and language. The Evangeliary whose two preserved covers are on show here was sent by the Pope to Queen Theodelinda to mark the birth of her son Adaloald in 603. Made of sheets of gold leaf attached to a wooden support and decorated with enamels and cameos, the binding is a superb example of Roman art on the threshold of the Middle Ages. The codex that deserved such a precious binding has, however, been lost.

Carlo Bertelli

The Chiavenna Evangeliary

THE ERRATIC EVANGELIARY, NOW IN CHIAVENNA

Goldsmith's work from the Ottonian period (in the Lombardy area?)
front binding plaque / cover of the receptacle for storing the Evangeliary
first quarter of the eleventh century

Technique/materials

board: walnut wood

decorations: gold leaf – smooth and embossed – and gold filigree, precious stones – mostly with a *cabochon* cut – and pearls, *cloisonné* enamel on a solid base (*Vollschmelz*)

Dimensions

height: 40.5 cm; width: 31 cm; thickness: 2.1 cm

Traceability

Treasury of the Collegiate Church of San Lorenzo in Chiavenna (Province of Sondrio), at least since 1485

Location

Museum of the Treasury of the Collegiate Church of San Lorenzo in Chiavenna (Province of Sondrio)

Description

In the centre of the board is a precious gem-studded cross– in accordance with the late antique iconographic tendency of an iconic representation of the *Divine Word* –resting on two filigreed ovals raised on minute arches, airy portals of a blinding *Celestial City*; the four *Evangelists* go forth from the *Logos* in the four directions of space, embossed on sheets of gold. The arms of the gem-studded cross give the entire composition its structure: a horizontal and a vertical axis extend from it until they touch the edge of the board, tracing a second, larger cross. Each arm of this second cross comprises a filigreed gold disc, with precious stones and pearls arrayed as a cross, and a large oval plaque decorated with *cloisonné* enamel: at the top is *Emmanuel* (*Christ descending from heaven to become flesh*), to the left the *Angel Gabriel*, to the right the *Virgin at the Annunciation* and below the *Visitation*, the first revelation of the Incarnation. Four square plaques of *cloisonné* enamel, with a pattern based on cruciform modules, complete the quadrants. The board is enclosed in a frame along which another twelve filigreed and gem-studded gold discs alternate with eight rectangular plaques of *cloisonné* enamel – smaller on the shorter sides – with delicate floral and/or geometric patterns.

Restoration

In the winter of 2011, extraordinary maintenance was conducted on this piece, so as to plan its conservation (checking for any stages of decay) and to complete the identification of its materials (extending the database of analytical information compiled by a non-destructive diagnosis and sampling of the organic materials for the purpose of

radiocarbon dating) in the framework of the project “The *Peace of Chiavenna* revealed. Multidisciplinary research into a masterpiece of mediaeval goldsmith’s work”, organised by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (of Milan) and co-ordinated by Chiara Maggioni. The opportunity was taken to clean the surfaces and remove traces of previous traumatic events and mishandlings. This work was undertaken by Giovanni Morigi (*Giovanni and Lorenzo Morigi Restorers*, Bologna), directed by Sandra Sicoli (SBSAE, Milan).

Chiara Maggioni

Room 104

The Evangeliary of Heribert

THE EVANGELIARY OF HERIBERT

Milan, Cathedral Treasury (c. 1018-1037), gold, gilded silver, enamels and gems. Gold plate: 42.6 x 33.9 cm, edge on the right 2.7 cm; gilded silver plate: 37.3 x 28.9 cm, with silver frame 42.6 x 37.3 cm, border width 2.8 cm, second border on the left 2.7 cm, binding spine.

The decorations on the gold plate generate a precise, detailed iconographic cycle supported by captions and dominated in the centre by the *Crucified Christ*. Above the cross the *Lux mundi* – Light of the World – offers the key for interpretation: *Christ* is the light of the world and the salvation of humanity. The scenes at the four ends of the cross illustrate the *Annunciation of the Resurrection to Mary Magdalene*, *Christ* descending into Limbo to free the souls of the just, accompanied by the Archangel Michael spearing the dragon, *Christ holding the hand of the Good Thief* and *Christ* represented as the *Pantocrator* ascending to the glory of the heavens, while the twelve *Apostles* contemplate him in adoration. The *Christ Pantocrator* is flanked by the anthropomorphic images of the Sun and the Moon. Beneath the two arms of the cross are the two soldiers bearing a lance and a pole with the sponge soaked in vinegar, *Mary* and *John*. Below are Saints *Ambrose* and *Satyrus*, while the four corners are occupied by the symbols of the *Evangelists*.

The rear plate bears a figure representing Heribert of Intimiano presented by *St. John the Baptist* and by the *Madonna*, as he offers the Evangeliary to *Christ*, who holds a scroll bearing Heribert’s motto of LEX ET PAX. In the lower section are the Milanese saints *Ambrose*, *Protasius* and *Gervasius*; the inscription on the frame reads: ERIBERTVS ARCHIEPISCOPVS SANCTA MEDIOLANENSIS ECCLESIAE; SCS IOH(ANNE)S SCS PROTHASIVS/ SCA MARIA SCS GERVASIVS

Paola Venturelli

The Vercelli Evangeliary

THE COVER OF THE *LIBER EVANGELIORUM*

Cod. C, Vercelli, Library of the Chapter House

Silver plate: front. Dimensions: 29.2 x 22.4 x 1.7/2 cm

Gold plate: rear. Dimensions: 29.3 x 22.4 x 1.8 cm (2.3 with the gemstones)

Area of Lombardy, middle or second half of the eleventh century

The two plates of this binding are recorded in the treasury in the Cathedral of Sant’Eusebio in Vercelli in an inventory dated 1426, as the cover of a richly illuminated Evangeliary dating from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. And this remained their function until the Codex C was restored in 2000. They are now conserved in the Vercelli Cathedral Museum.

Identical in size, the two binding plates comprise wooden supports lined on the inside with leather that was originally stained red and covered with plates of silver (on the front) and plates of gold (on the rear), gemstones and enamels, which were originally respectively the front and rear of the codex; the more precious plate was in fact the part intended for exposition when carried in processions.

The silver plate bears the figure of an archangel with a sceptre and an orb (already identified as St. Michael in the 1426 inventory) facing outwards and resting on a slight rise in the ground. The central field is smooth and framed by a smooth border and a surround of racemes.

The gold plate is sumptuously decorated with gold plates and filigree, protruding figures, enamels and gemstones. The centre is dominated by Christ on a cross of blue enamel trimmed with green, set on a smaller cruciform plate of gold surrounded by settings of precious stones; the figure is made on a gold plate, while only the head is in relief, maybe made as a cast, with the beard, hair and facial features finished with niello; the loincloth and the figure's rich halo were made of enamel, but this has decayed badly. The body's anatomical features, which are picked out by grooves etched into the gold foil, were originally filled with dark or reddish-violet enamels, of which only the slightest traces now remain. The reclining head induces Christ's gaze to rest on the figure of Mary in prayer, executed in enamel, while St. John stands on the other side of the cross. Above the figure of Christ is the cartouche and at the sides two roundels containing the figures of the Sun and the Moon, indicated by inscriptions. At each of the four corners, a roundel contains the symbol of one each of the Evangelists; the roundel with St. Mark has been lost: all that remains is a trace of the mastic used to bind it to the support. The composition is framed by a series of roundels containing twelve busts of angels, understood to be the choir that is singing the praises of the Lord. The background fields of foil are decorated with gold filigree and set with precious stones of several varieties (there were originally one hundred and twenty of these gemstones, of which eighty-seven now remain).

Along the edge of the gold plate runs an inscription that is now badly worn: only the part on the upper edge is legible, citing a hexameter taken, with variants, from the *Carmen Paschal* by Sedulius (III,195), which highlights the regal status attributed to Christ: *Cruce susspensus mundum regit undique [X(pistu)s]*.

By general consent, the binding plates are considered to be at least a century older than the codex they protected; this means that this is an adaptation of an older artefact. Some scholars have held that the golden plate was originally the cover of a liturgical codex, but the current state of knowledge does not enable this theory to be confirmed.

The characteristics of form, execution and technique apparent in this work are of various origins: on the one hand, some elements of a Byzantine flavour, albeit mostly indirectly, can be found primarily in the enamels of the mourners, while on the other there are elements traceable to the plastic and goldsmith traditions of the Ottonian age in Lombardy. The critics have been tireless in stressing the elements that link this work to other important artefacts made in or around Milan in the eleventh century, such as the cover of the Evangelary of Heribert for Milan Cathedral, or the comparable piece known as the "Peace" of Chiavenna (both on show in this exhibition), but they have sometimes also mentioned the work of goldsmiths known to come from Germany. The dating of the Vercelli cover has

oscillated in the various studies from the late twelfth back to the early eleventh century. The features that have aged most, which seem to indicate that the piece belongs in the wake of the well-established tradition of Ottonian goldsmiths' work, starting from north Italian models, provide grounds for believing that the piece was made in the area of Lombard influence, possibly in the environs of Milan, towards the middle of the eleventh century or a little later.

Saverio Lomartire

Room 105

THE OPENED BOOK

«The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body » (*Dei Verbum*, 21)

The deacon opens the Evangeliary to proclaim the Gospel of the festival that announces a moment in the life of Christ, of His time among us. The evangeliary is the quintessential *Book*, within the library (*tà Biblìa*) that constitutes the Holy Scripture. As we browse through the open *Evangeliary*, we find it populated by *narratives* and *images*. That is because the *Evangeliary* contains a narrative, actually a quadruple narrative. That narrative is illustrated with precious images, in the form of the capital letters or of figures in the text or in the margins that accompany the written story. The interplay between the narrative and the imagery reveals Christ, the present Word, the living Word. This combination of *narrative* and *image* is important for understanding the evangeliary's function. The Book is *opened*, to proclaim and hear a story with narratives and images: not just any story, but the story of salvation, in which God comes towards man and man meets God. The sealed book must be opened to be proclaimed, narrated and illustrated, so that the icon of the Cross in glory that we see on the frontispiece of the *Evangeliary* can unfold into the story told, into the narrative that calls us to answer and to act. It needs our voice so that it can be proclaimed and our ear so that it can be heard. Since the Gospel contains the words and the gestures of Jesus in the echo of the response and of the life of the early Christians. The *opened* Book needs our word and our gesture to be contemporary, to speak and to transform the world, to tell a story for today, one that is also made of narratives and images of life and of solidarity.

+ Franco Giulio Brambilla

The Sarezzano Evangeliary

THE PURPLE EVANGELIARY OF SAREZZANO (5th-6th centuries)

Parchment Codex, 72 pp. - Tortona, Episcopal Administration

This codex, which comprises 72 sheets of purple parchment, much of which is worn and torn, can be classified in the category of composite manuscripts, which were made by joining separate sections together, in this case the remaining pages of two evangeliaries. In fact, the final verses of S. Luke's Gospel (Luke 24,41-43) and the first eleven chapters of the Gospel of St. John, contained in sheets 1-64, can be attributed to a first hand, while

a second is responsible for the three chapters of the same Gospel (John 18,36-20,15) transcribed in sheets 65-72. Although both scribes used uncial letters, their calligraphic approaches differed, as did the layout of their writings: the former copied in two columns, the latter in one across the whole page. Palaeographers disagree about the dating, tending in the case of sheets 1-64 to the fifth to sixth centuries and to the fifth for the remaining sheets. The evangelical text contained in the codex comes from an earlier version of the Gospels than St. Jerome's *Vulgate*. A good many readings are specific, while others are shared with manuscripts from the area of early northern Italy. A date of the seventh to eighth centuries has been attributed to the notes, which are placed in insular minuscule in the margins of the uncial script or between the columns, to facilitate liturgical proclamation, with indications of the end of the pericopes.

Held by the Bishopric of Tortona since 1979, the *Sarzanensis* comes from the village of Sarezzano (*Sarzanum*), which is located in the province of Alessandria and the diocese of Tortona, to whose parish it still belongs. The *Sarzanensis* is a liturgical document of inestimable value that was certainly composed in northern Italy, although its exact origins and the place where it was first in use are difficult to determine in any great detail. What is apparent, however, is the special treatment to which the sheepskin used to make it was subjected, probably by a parchment workshop related to the *scriptorium* that produced the evangeliary. The material was treated with a dye that is still clearly visible and which X-ray fluorescent analysis has confirmed to be Tyrian purple. It has also been established that gold was used, together with traces of silver, and there is evidence of copper, which is considered to have caused the perforation of the parchment corresponding with the lettering, brought about by the action of oxidation. Such a fine ornament was and remains in itself ample evidence of the veneration reserved for the Gospel, especially during the recitation of the liturgy.

The manuscript was found in a wooden box with an effigy of St. Rufinus, set into the wall in a niche in a burial chamber. The palaeography of the inscription that can be read above the saint's head (*Beatus / rufinus / servus de(i) / q(ui) infi(rm)/atos febre // sanat terza/na quartan/a et contin/ua et m(u)l(ta)/rum (in)fir(mi)/tatum est san(i)tas. Amen*) and the style of the depiction lead some scholars to date it to the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

In addition to the wooden casket in which the codex was found and the fragment of leather (15 x 22 cm) of its elegant binding (in which nine circular eyelets produced by the studs set in the form of a cross and another four in the corners are clearly visible), a significant selection of the sheets of the codex is also on show here. On number 17 rear (under glass), some verses from the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, the famous story of Christ's meeting with the Samaritan woman, are still clearly legible. An example of the pages subjected in the past to laminating is provided by sheets 11 rear and 14 front: the first bears a recognisable transcription of John 2,12, while the second has the famous passage from John 3,6: *Quod natum est de carne caro est, quia ex carne natum est et quod natum est de Spiritu Spiritu est* ("Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit"). Much like other codices of the *Vetus latina*, the *Sarzanensis*, compared to the *Vulgate*, features the addition of the expression *quia Deus Spiritus est*, ("because God is a Spirit"), which was familiar to St. Ambrose and was preserved in mediaeval Ambrosian liturgical books.

Norberto Valli

Room 106

The Ambrosian Library's A28

THE AMBROSIAN EVANGELISTARY WITH EPISTLES AND HAGIOGRAPHIC READINGS

Milan, Ambrosian Library, Codex A 28 inf.

The Milan Ambrosian Library's Manuscript A 28 inf. offers us a chance to take a close look at the sequence of gospels preached on Sundays and feast days in the Ambrosian liturgical calendar during the Carolingian age, as the book was reserved for the proclamation of the Gospel (as well as other readings under certain special circumstances), during the episcopal celebrations. Of the 225 sheets, in fact, those numbered from 1 front to 184 front constitute a veritable evangelistary, sheets 184 front to 194 rear contain a brief epistolary and sheets 194 rear to 206 rear the hagiographic readings for the feasts of St. Ambrose (Ordination and Deposition), of St. Stephen (cf. Acts 6,8-7,1; 7,51-8,4) and St. Lawrence. Lastly, sheets 206 rear to 222 rear contain the Passion according to St. John and the Passion according to St. Mark. The twenty-eight parchment quaternions that make up the codex, numbered by the copyist with a Roman numeral on the rear of the last sheet of each quaternion, are preceded by a pair of twin sheets of paper, added as a reinforcement, with the front of the first sheet glued to the binding. At the end is another twin sheet of paper as reinforcement, whose second sheet is again glued to the binding and has no number, reflecting the treatment reserved for the first at the beginning of the codex. Palaeographic studies date the codex to the ninth century, with M. Ferrari placing it firmly in the second half, while B. Bischoff prefers the last third of the ninth century. The writing used is "a good Milanese caroline with titles in rustic capitals sometimes mixed with uncial elements" (M. Ferrari). The hand of the ninth-century scribe is recognisable as far as sheet 221 rear. The two sheets 222 front – 223 rear are a later addition datable to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, completing the Passion according to St. Mark, which nevertheless remains mutilated. The corrections, additions in the margins and the addition of two sheets with a subsequent style of lettering demonstrate that the manuscript continued in use at least as long as the period to which the later lettering can be dated. The ink used is a brownish ochre in colour. The use of *litterae rubrae* (red letters) is always reserved for the title of the feast day, for any reference (*require in...*) and for the indication of the Evangelist's name, all text elements that are generally in capitals, with rare exceptions when they are minuscule. We can assume that the copyist intended to capitalise the first letter of an incipit, such as the *I* in *In illo tempore*, as a red letter, although in practice it is very often found in ordinary ink. We can imagine that the manuscript was penned in a *scriptorium* in the city of Milan, reflecting the usages of celebrations in the city's cathedral, as it is they that justify its structure. On the more important occasions, when the Archbishop celebrated, the Gospel would be read by the Archdeacon and the Deacon would proclaim the second reading. Since it also has the appendix of the epistles, this evangelistary enables us to reconstruct the calendar with which the Archbishop of Milan celebrated mass with the pontifical rite in the ninth century, so takes us back to a precise context, with which we are familiar primarily because of the descriptions left for posterity a few centuries later by Beroldo, who confirmed that the deacon was also responsible for the four hagiographic readings contained in the manuscript, which can be described in every respect as a "pure" liturgical book.

A comparison between the A 28 inf. and the Busto Codex is extraordinarily interesting, as it clearly illustrates how the Ambrosian liturgical calendar developed in the Carolingian age compared to the previous norm. Moreover, the fact that the pericopes *de Letaniis triduanis*, together with the indication of the city churches where they were proclaimed, are inserted between the Sunday after Ascension (sheet 89 front) and Whitsun Eve (sheet 125 rear) provides invaluable evidence about the places of worship in Carolingian Milan. Compared to the data furnished by the Busto Codex and other liturgical sources, as well as archaeological findings, this enables us to identify the churches that existed in the city at that time.

From an analysis of the codex, it appears to be possible to suggest that the manuscript originally also included a Passion according to St. Luke, as it probably contained a further complete quaternion that was lost at some stage during transmission, despite the

difficulties created by the anomaly of the sequence (John, Mark, Luke), which cannot be justified from a point of view of ritual, but whose purpose was probably to underscore the pericope of John, to be read by the Archbishop, by placing it in a position that was not functional to its use, but to the dignity of the minister.

The text of A 28 inf. has been published in N. Valli, *L'ordo evangeliorum a Milano in età altomedievale* (Monumenta Studia Instrumenta Liturgica 51), Vatican Publishing House, Vatican City 2008.

Norberto Valli

The Busto Evangeliary

THE AMBROSIAN CHAPTER AND EVANGELISTARY

Busto Arsizio (Varese), Chapter House Library, Codex M-I-14.

The manuscript M-I-14 from the Chapter House Library in Busto Arsizio (in the province of Varese) is articulated in three sections. The first (sheets 1-11 front) comprises the only certain record of an Ambrosian chapter; the second coincides with the actual Ambrosian evangeliary (sheets 11 rear – 191 front), including the complete text of the 162 passages listed in the chapter and another 22 passages for the Sundays and the days after Whitsun (sheets 176 rear – 190 rear); the third (sheets 191-197) is a collection of hagiographic readings for the *Ordination* and the *Deposition* of St. Ambrose, for St. Lawrence and for St. Stephen.

Neglected by scholars until at least the beginning of the twentieth century, the document caught the attention of Achille Ratti, prefect of the Ambrosian Library, who realised its enormous importance and salvaged it from oblivion. Dating back to the ninth century, this priceless manuscript constitutes an indispensable source for reconstructing the Ambrosian liturgy used in the pre-Carolingian age, for which the evidence we have is only fragmentary. It is impossible to state with any certainty exactly where the codex was first used. Documents held in the Busto Arsizio Chapter House Library lead us to suppose that the codex, together with other liturgical books, was acquired by the Busto Arsizio Chapter House Library from the parish of Olgiate at some time after 1611 (or maybe after 1621), as the responsibility of provost had been transferred from Olgiate to Busto in 1583 by order of St. Charles Borromeo. Nothing certain can be reconstructed, however, about its arrival in Olgiate and its story prior to that.

From a graphic and calligraphic standpoint, the entire codex is the work of one hand, in a single column on each page, with ample margins and written in Carolingian minuscule using brown ink. Although esteemed palaeographers have dated the codex to the end of the ninth century, a comparative analysis, in particular of the section relative to the Saints, with the one contained in the other contemporary evangeliary on show in the exhibition, the A 28 inf. from the Ambrosian Library, reveals that it contains a previous stage of liturgy, dating back to the eighth century and perhaps even earlier. This enables us to get a glimpse of the path trodden by the Ambrosian rite on its way to the structure of the liturgical year that was eventually to distinguish it for more than a thousand years and that the updated lectionary has set out to restore. The absence of gospels reserved for certain celebrations that were included in the Ambrosian rite in the ninth century (the mass on the night of Christmas, the Purification of Mary...) confirms that the Busto Codex – and above all the chapter – reflects an older phase, even if it was then transcribed during the Carolingian period. The anomalous location of certain pericopes for saints' feast days,

following St. Ambrose both in the chapter and in the evangelistary, gives us ground to suppose that an actual addendum had to be transcribed, not to make up for any omissions, but to introduce new feast days into the Ambrosian liturgy at the time when the codex was put together. Moreover, the transcription of the gospel for the Sunday after the execution of St. John the Baptist and of the pericope reserved for the Sunday *ante transmigrationem ecclesiae* indicates the beginning of the definition of a relevant component of the Ambrosian liturgical calendar: the cycle of Sundays following the feast of the Martyrdom of the Precursor and the ones around the Dedication of the Cathedral. By listing the evangelical passages intended for three-day Litanies, which may have been copied from a separate collection, with the titles of the churches visited by the solemn annual processions, the Busto Codex actually constitutes the first proof of the existence of certain places of worship in the city of Milan.

Norberto Valli

Room 107

The Plenary Lectionary of Bobbio

THE PLENARY LECTIONARY OF BOBBIO

The Plenary Lectionary of Bobbio is a priceless manuscript preserved in the Ambrosian Library, where it is identified by the catalogue number C 228 inf. The codex is a volume in a large format (258 mm wide and 323 high), comprising 183 sheets of parchment, all written in two columns, except the first, which is written as a full page. Coming from the famous monastery of Bobbio, founded by St. Columban in 613, the codex can be dated to the end of the ninth century, probably in the decade from 880 to 890, and was written by several copyists in a caroline script.

The term “plenary lectionary” is used to describe a liturgical book that conveys the sequence of readings for the entire liturgical year, with complete forms for every day: first the epistle of St. Paul, or – in certain cases – a reading taken from the Old Testament, then the passage from the gospel. Detailed comparative studies have demonstrated that this sequence of readings reflects the one in the Roman liturgical tradition, while the type of text used, especially with reference to the evangelical passages, appears to demonstrate close ties between the monastery of Bobbio and the celebrated monastery of St. Gallen, another centre of monasticism with an enormous liturgical and cultural impact at European level.

But the importance of the plenary lectionary of Bobbio also derives from the fact that it has preserved several decorations: rather few, to tell the truth, but they are of great significance for the history of illuminations.

There is no doubt that the most sumptuous page in the entire lectionary is sheet 4 front, with the text of the epistle and of the gospel for the Christmas mass. The whole first column, on the left of the sheet, has been transformed into a table framed by an edge with three ribbons (the two outer ones are red, the central one silver); the background of this table is treated with purple, against which a large, richly decorated letter “F” (the initial of the epistle’s first word, “Fratres”) stands out, occupying three quarters of the height available. The first verses of the reading are transcribed in gold on a purple background, achieving an effect of great, evocative elegance. The text of the epistle continues in the right-hand column and is then followed by the passage from the gospel, introduced by a sequence in red («*Sequentia sancti evangelii secundum Matthaëum*» – Sequence of the Holy Gospels according to St Matthew).

It is important to stress that this lectionary is evidence of the durability, or the revival, albeit on a reduced scale, of a profoundly symbolic practice: that of using purple, gold and silver to produce precious books destined to contain the texts of the Holy Scripture.

This refers to the priceless purple codices that enjoyed an extraordinary blossoming in the fifth and sixth centuries, one celebrated example being the breathtaking *Evangeliario purpureo* of Rossano Calabro. What these artefacts offer us is evidence of their creators' intention to find some way of "clothing" the Word of God with the symbols of royalty: purple for the parchment and gold and silver instead of ink. The resulting book thus acquired an extremely elevated symbolic value, especially when it was destined for liturgical use, becoming an expression of faith and of veneration of the holy book and above all of what the book contains and conveys.

Purple and gold obviously also continued to be used for making codices after the period of late antiquity, although in the Middle Ages they were sometimes reduced to no more than the capital letter or to the decorations: such is the case of this codex, in which it almost appears to be by force of inertia that this symbolic use is found once again, albeit to a limited extent.

Marco Navoni

The Casola Evangeliary

The Evangeliary of Pietro Casola

This Evangeliary is a precious artefact both for its own sake, as an illuminated manuscript dating back to the first years of the sixteenth century, and because of the person who decided to produce it and donate it to Metropolitan Chapter House: the canon Pietro Casola, an interesting personality, who made such a mark in his day as to be remembered by Enrico Cattaneo as «our best fifteenth-century liturgist»; which he truly was, especially for the tradition of the Metropolitan Chapter House, which he preserved and passed on with certainty and accuracy. His work "was already known to and studied by the scholars of the seventeenth century, such as du Verdier, Possevin and Puricelli"; so much as to be considered – as Marco Navoni points out when citing Argelati – "*vir in ecclesiasticis ceremoniis eruditissimus*" (a man of great erudition in ecclesiastical ceremonies). The parchment *Evangeliary*, whose scale is interesting (42 x 35 cm), comprises 25 sheets whose texts are written on 14 lines, with variations due to the presence of illuminations and musical notation.

Frames with floral motifs and Casola's own coat of arms accompany the evangelical text, while at the beginning of the pericope a small square, set inside the field of writing in a narrow golden frame, illustrates its content: so here we have a narrative, in words and images, of the visit of the Magi, the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the Annunciation, the Resurrection, a Christ crowned with thorns, another Christ in radiance, the descent of the Holy Spirit to Mary and the Apostles, Saints Gervasius and Protasius, Peter and Paul, the Birth of the Virgin, the dedication of a church, the presentation of Jesus at the Temple and Saints Simon and Anne.

Lastly, the manuscript is accompanied by several indications hand-written by Francesco Castelli, "tireless collector of ecclesiastical and secular memorials" in the sixteenth century: they contain the *Rubrica Evangeliorum* and the *Norms* for singing the Gospel, indicating the text from which the individual passages to be read were taken.

In brief, the manuscript 'speaks' about all this: about the profound renewal that took place at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth; about the

work of liturgical systemising undertaken by Casola; about his eventful life and his personality, and about the sequence of numerous, complex institutional figures in the church in Milan. Throughout this dense web of human stories, there is always the presence of the annunciation of the Gospel, silent, yet capable of inspiring prayer.

Stefano Malaspina

Ambrosian Evangelary

LIBRARY OF THE MILAN METROPOLITAN CHAPTER HOUSE

ms. II-E-01-020 (*olim* D-2-37)

parchment, 42 x 35 cm, cc. I, 24.

Bound in red leather on card.

Room 113

The “Book” transmitted

THE BOOK TRANSMITTED

«For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: “For the word of God is living and active” (Heb. 4:12) and “it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13)» (*Dei Verbum*, 21)

The Evangelary becomes the Book *transmitted*: it enables us to hear the word of the meeting, disturbing those who hear the Word, who allow themselves to be drawn in by the exhibition’s itinerary. The Book is transmitted to heal our wounds and produce new recoveries of both body and soul. The Gospel gives to both the church and society a Word that nourishes thoughts and actions of hope and fraternity. This is all contained in the Book. And that is why the Church holds the Gospel in the highest regard. Even today, it dedicates imagination, intelligence and resources to make the sovereign beauty of the Book of life shine. The presence of the Book that announces the living Word stands with the same honour next to the presence of the Eucharist. Because man lives by a Bread that is a word and by a Word that is made flesh. Man lives by Bread and by the Word: the daily bread that finds the flavour of sharing and of sacrifice in the “body of the Eucharist”; the Word with which God “enters into conversation” with our spirit and gives it new meanings for living. The extraordinary beauty of the ancient evangelaries and the creativity expressed by the artists in the *New Ambrosian Evangelary* tell us the story of the Word that is made art and of Art that is made bread to nourish mankind’s spirit. Because the soul, too, is hungry for the beauty of the Word, to receive life in abundance.

+ Franco Giulio Brambilla

The Evangelary of Pope Paul VI.

This volume was printed by the Officina Bodoni of Verona, in a limited edition of 300 copies in 1965. It contains the readings and the Gospels according to the 1962 *Missale Romanum*, translated into Italian. Known to the faithful and to the whole world because it was placed on Pope Paul VI’s unadorned light wood coffin on 12

August 1978, during his funeral, which for the first time in centuries was held with a simple, touching ceremony, it was later used again for the funerals of both John Paul I and John Paul II. Paul VI made a gift of this volume to the Italian bishops who on 23 June 1966 took part in the first assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference after the Vatican Council: an act that joined many other similar ones on the part of the “Pope of gestures”, one that aimed to call the attention of all the Italian dioceses to the enhancement of the value of the Word of God in the celebration of the Eucharistic, as reshaped by the Vatican II Ecumenical Council. The Evangeliary – in other words the liturgical book that contains the passages from the Gospels that are read during Christian celebrations – reminds us that Pope Paul VI Montini was both the Pope of evangelisation and the Pope of liturgy. We remember his apostolic journeys to the five continents, which inaugurated a new era in pontifical pastoral care, and the promulgation of such fundamental documents as the exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in 1975. It was here that Paul VI declared that the great objectives of the Second Vatican Council “are definitively summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century”. This Evangeliary is dedicated to Cardinal Giulio Bevilacqua, Pope Paul’s great friend and master, who gave him his impassioned love for liturgy. The most pregnant characteristics of Pope Paul’s liturgical conscience – the profound sense of the Easter mystery, of the tradition and the need to adapt it to modern culture, his constant efforts (as an educator of young university students in the twenties and thirties and then as the Archbishop of Milan and Pope) to give a true liturgical education to the Christian people, his extreme sensitivity to the beauty of the rituals – were transfused into the liturgical reform give to us by the Council. This is how Paul VI summarised the Gospel’s liturgical and missionary meaning on 7 March 1965, in his homily during the first mass celebrated in accordance with the new ritual, in the Roman church of Ognissanti (All Saints): “It is evident that we want to acquire the word of the Lord[...], introduce it through the ears to the heart, listen to it internally, fix it within ourselves, make of it a store of energies for the intellect and the heart, observe it always in practice and live by it”.

Giselda Adornato

Quotation from the Holy Father

“In the liturgy we find that *the Bible is the book of a people for a people*; an inheritance, a testimony delivered up to its readers, so that they can achieve the story of salvation to which the scripture testifies in their own lives... This reciprocal sense of belonging, between people and the Holy Scripture, is celebrated in every liturgical assembly, which, thanks to the Holy Spirit, listens to Christ, because He it is who speaks when the Scriptures are read in the Church and the alliance that God renews with His people is received. So it is that the Scriptures and the liturgy converge for the sole purpose of building a dialogue between the people and the Lord and of obeying the will of the Lord”.

Benedict XVI, Homily at the closure of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 26 October 2008

Room 114

The new Ambrosian Evangeliary

The one and only great wish of my life is to give the Gospel. Because the Gospel is life, it is salvation, it is the annunciation and achievement of joy. I wish to deliver the Gospel as the most precious of treasures: a book to be read with the heart, to venerate with affection, because it is Christ himself, the Word of God.

The making of the new Ambrosian Evangeliary

We have Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi to thank for the fact that the process of completing the revision of the Ambrosian Rite according to the indications of the Second Vatican Council was taken up afresh with a strong impulse. The ripest fruit is the renewed Ambrosian Lectionary, which, together with the adoption of the new Italian Episcopal Conference translation of the Holy Scripture, with effect from Advent 2008 introduced a sequence of readings that revives the ancient tradition intrinsic to the Church of Milan, opening the treasure of the Holy Scriptures more abundantly to the prayer of the Church. The publication of the volumes of the Ambrosian Lectionary is inspired with care by the iconographic treasures linked to the lands where the Rite is applied, drawing amply on the art forms of the various ages. Nevertheless, the contingencies of production times did not allow for contemporary works to be commissioned of a kind specifically devised and desired for a liturgical book.

In the autumn of 2009, Cardinal Tettamanzi decided to launch the concept stage for the project for a new Evangeliary in a dialogue with contemporary art, choosing to monitor progress directly through his personal secretariat. The completion of the new Ambrosian Evangeliary has coincided with the end of the mandate held by Cardinal Tettamanzi, who wanted to leave a book of the Gospels “prepared and adorned with the greatest of care” as a significant gift to every Ambrosian parish and rectory. To this intention was associated the aim of re-launching “a strong idea of patronage”, calling attention to the forms of production that earn the greatest recognition and esteem on the art scene today. This is how Cardinal Tettamanzi expressed it himself: “The Church is going back to being a patron, with courage, awareness and respect, just as it was in the past. And every commission presumes an open dialogue with everyone concerned, a quest to understand the others’ reasons, languages and gifts for the purpose of achieving a common goal. The Church intends to play its part in this enterprise with its own identity, its own face and the tradition and history it represents, in a word with the Gospel whose transparent witness it aims to be; but it also intends to recognise the full entitlement of art with its subjectivity and its language, with the substance of humanity that it manages to express today and that escapes every other form of representation” (Milan, 23 September 2010).

The Committee appointed by the Archbishop to complete the task he set brought individuals with biblical and liturgical skills together with others who are experts in the arts and graphics. The fact that it was co-ordinated by the Archbishop’s own secretary clearly illustrates the prelate’s personal interest in monitoring the various phases of the project directly. The first meeting took place in the Archbishop’s Palace on 19 March 2010. The discussion in the Committee immediately highlighted the need for ample reflection, which would have to go beyond the borders of the Diocese, to compare

experiences in the sector at least at European level. This led to the decision to organise a study symposium on the following 23 and 24 September in the Milan Diocesan Museum and Villa Panza in Varese, involving the Liturgical Office and the Cultural Heritage Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference and with the support of the secular institutions. As a result of the presence of international experts, the symposium achieved its aim of investigating tradition, so as to make an intelligent use of its priceless heritage, without neglecting to compare with certain contemporary works of art and with such decisive aspects as graphics and design.

Drawing on the contributions thus gathered, the Committee then embarked on defining a tangible objective. With the aim of restricting the commission to a limited number of people, so as to achieve greater homogeneity than in other recent experiences and to be able to monitor the phases of the process directly, the Committee identified a selection of artists belonging to different generations from the area of those whose artistic medium is primarily painting, as it wished to provide a range of styles that would make allowance for a certain variety of interpretations. A photographer was included among their number, reflecting the wish to open up to criteria of illustration that are adopted by many artists these days. For various reasons, the choice of the artists to whom the visual commentary of the evangelical texts was to be entrusted fell, from all the numerous ones first taken into consideration, on Mimmo Paladino and Nicola De Maria, two painters who first achieved renown in the seventies in the framework of the movement known as the “Transavantgarde”, and who then proceeded to manifest an outspoken and different personality in their interpretations of the strength of the sign of figural ascendance and the quality of their colours, which vibrates with intense timbre; on Ettore Spalletti, an artist who bases his investigation of form on painterly elaborations of environments, in which the delicacy and the uniqueness of the pigments are the decisive factor in creating a light-space, and on Nicola Samorì and Nicola Villa, artists who belong to a younger generation and have made their mark, among other things, as interpreters of subjects with a sacred theme. The team of artists involved in the project was completed by Giovanni Chiamonte, who has been recognised for many years as one of the most original and competent of Italian photographers: he was entrusted with the task of creating works to introduce the sections into which the Evangeliary is divided, following the typically Ambrosian pace that articulates the liturgical year into the Mysteries of Incarnation, of Easter and of Whitsun, adding the Missal. In order to help the artists, the liturgist and a group of Biblicists were called in from outside the Committee to draw up brief summaries for each pericope to be translated into image, providing essential information about how each one is used in the framework of celebrations, together with an accurate critical interpretation and some suggestions for applicative readings.

The individual passages were entrusted to each of the artists, on the understanding that they would generate individually completed works, expressing their own specific qualities and the characteristics of the passage and of the verses on which special attention was to be focused. This approach gave due consideration to the characteristics of form and style used by the artists in their previous works and to theological and liturgical guidelines provided by those responsible. Once the commission had been issued, a constant dialogue was established and maintained with each of the artists, including paying visits to their studios and offering them advice to assist them in completing their works, both from a technical standpoint and in terms of the symbolic elements to stress.

The project is to be completed when the originals on show here are bound and then donated to Milan Cathedral by Cardinal Tettamanzi, and when the printed version is then also donated to all the Parishes and the more important pastoral locations in the Archdioceses of Milan and of the Ambrosian Rite. On the night of Christmas this year, the Evangeliary will start being used in the celebrations of the divine mysteries for the first time in the Cathedral and in all the churches of the Diocese and the Rite.

Committee for the new Ambrosian Evangeliary

The covers

Gospels of the Resurrection and Vigil Readings

Room 115

The Mystery of the Lord's Incarnation

Verbum caro factum est / The Word is made flesh

The Church and contemporary art

After many years on the margins, the Church now seems to have discovered a new interest in imagery. Ever since its very beginnings, the Church has set out to announce the Gospel not only by word of mouth, but also by using images, which could become vehicles for testifying to faith and so for evangelising. This quest has led to the creation of some of our civilisation's most important works of art. And although they are now considered to be "works of art", as Kant's aesthetic suggests, at the time when they were produced they were the expressions of faith of a community of believers.

After centuries of diversions and splits, the attention paid to the art world has been increasing apace since the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI was speaking from the heart in 1964, when he held his famous meeting with the artists in the Sistine Chapel, declaring: "We need you". The same concern can be found in the letter addressed to artists by John Paul II in 1999, when he defined art as the bridge towards the mystery. Although this attention has also been reiterated on several occasions by Benedict XVI, too often the relationship has fizzled out in no more than lip service and fleeting attempts. What has often been lacking is a sense of continuity of relations. While on the one hand the twentieth century certainly brought some sincere openings and generous efforts, on the other there was no shortage of timorousness and caution.

In a world growing increasingly secular, where the bond between artistic experience and religious practice seems to be fragile and uncertain, how is it possible to develop images that speak to today's faithful? This is one of the most frequent and searching questions asked of those who aspire to a new dawn, one that speaks of a new relationship between art and faith. The urge to fall back on the models of centuries past is very often very strong indeed, yet the allure of such an archaeological revival probably conceals the difficulty encountered by the Church in finding a language capable of interpreting today's world. A sense of nostalgia for a lost past is always at our door. While on the one hand this attitude illustrates a loss of confidence in the Gospel and its ability to penetrate into today's cultural processes, so as to fertilise them and enliven them from within, on the other we have to take this objection seriously. The risk of creating images that may be beautiful, but are far away from the perspective of faith is real indeed. We

often find ourselves experiencing a sense of stagnation, of observing attitudes of circumspection and fear. Prudence can easily become immobility, stasis and the inability to open up to others.

To counter such dangers, the decision to tread the path of contemporary art corresponds coherently to the Church's desire to identify fully with the culture of its day, to use imagery, too, to bear witness to the mystery of God in its fullness and wealth of meaning, translating it into the expressive forms of today, without betraying the spirit of a tradition that carries us like dwarves on the shoulders of giants.

This commitment to keep faith with the spirit of our times has led to the creation of the new Ambrosian Evangelary. For this purpose, each artist was given a very difficult task: to use the medium of image to convey the mystery of the God of life, so as to help believers open up to the transcendent. In this sense, before starting their work and developing their various images, the artists engaged in a process of being accompanied in a Biblical and theological grounding. Each was asked to adopt an attitude of profound humility, the readiness to enter into the ambit of meaning outside which he could only be a narrator of stories, of interesting tales, but without really speaking about the subject he was commissioned to depict. In this respect, the artists all proved to be quite prepared to delve into the depth of the Biblical text. The fact is that contemporary art is all too often found to be empty, artificial and bereft of content, while in this case each artist accepted the challenge to use form and colours to incarnate the principal evangelical episodes, not so much for the purpose of illustrating them, as to help today's mankind to penetrate the mystery of new life that they enshrine and the reality of the living Christ, whose mysteries continue to take place as history unfolds.

Andrea Dall'Asta

Room 116

The Mystery of the Lord's Easter

Resurrexit sicut dixit / He has arisen as He said

GIOVANNI CHIARAMONTE

"I am a photographer, so I am a man whose identity is to use a machine to write with light; a man whose task is to represent the world and how man inhabits the world, through an image imprinted like the Shroud by the primeval energy of nature itself, that centuries of developments and evolutions in science, technology and industry now enable me to use with complete creative freedom". This is the "photograph" that Giovanni Chiaramonte takes of himself.

There is something demanding and highly ambitious in the technical research of imagery conducted by Giovanni Chiaramonte. It is not done for its own sake, presumptuously showing itself to be objectively perfect before then making do with falling back on a purely aesthetic, seductive beauty that would end up masking a void, so misleading the observer, but it sets out to lead us to the threshold and, indeed, right inside the heart of the mystery of mankind, of life and, more profoundly, of God Himself.

That is how "writing with light" has become the artist's own identity, his way of revealing himself, of getting known and involving others in a relationship that is more than merely aesthetic, as it becomes a dialogue, an interrogative, a comparison, a

conflict and a consensus. This is the only way in which light can “write” or rather “imprint”, taking a language that becomes a voice for the world, for mankind, for the universe, and making it indelible. And it achieves this imprinting “like the Shroud”, as the result of a primeval energy that certainly belongs to nature, but also and above all by virtue of an equally “originating” energy that dwells in man’s soul and is the true source of his creativity and his freedom. Giovanni Chiaramonte photographs “places”, but his gaze penetrates “beyond the place”, to unearth its identity, listen to its voice and investigate its “presences”.

Almost as though he is setting out to broaden not only what we see with our eyes, but above all what we perceive with our soul, Chiaramonte often does not trust his work to just one image, however individually significant it may be, but to a sequence, a diptych or triptych of shots whose very distinctness generates a great unity of meaning, with a profound narrative impact and an intense ability to communicate and involve. The artist’s favourite square format, which comes from a 6 x 6 negative and which he often uses, also has a significance: it celebrates the fundamental and irreplaceable relationship between heaven and earth, between man and God. In iconographic tradition, the square is the metaphor of the time of mankind: in Chiaramonte’s image, the same form also becomes a “place” and a “story” within which the quest for the dimension “beyond” the visible in the photograph, the desire to transcend the object that has been caught in time technically, results in the very “Invisible God “becoming manifest and coming towards mankind.

Chiaramonte’s images are places “for the Incarnation and of the Incarnation”. His silent landscapes celebrate the expectation and the wish for this meeting; his objects suggest fragments of life that bear witness to a perceived, sought-after “Presence”: man becomes the protagonist of a story filled with events that relate him to others and open him up to the “Other”.

This ability on the part of Chiaramonte’s images to be “prophetic”, inner spaces where the “Word” that has always sought out mankind and saved him, has an extraordinarily intense, full echo here, by virtue of the fact that, for the first time, the language of artistic photography accompanies that same “Word” and is fully entitled to enter the quintessential liturgical book that is the Evangeliary.

In actual fact, in the project for the new Evangeliary for the Ambrosian Church, Chiaramonte’s photography plays a unique, important role. Just as the great doors to venerable old cathedrals, richly adorned with images and symbols, open up to introduce the faithful to the “Mystery of Christ”, showing them the way that leads straight up to the altar where mass is celebrated, the place of meeting, so the “evocative suggestions” of Chiaramonte’s camera lens catches the very “Word” that announces the “Mystery”, lending rhythm to its liturgical tempo and celebrating it.

In the double pages entrusted to him, the artist plays with skilled graphic balance, achieving a close, significant union between image and Word: the latter, written, has the same function as the camera’s lens, opening our gaze up to contemplate its completion in the action of God evoked and in the image itself.

Domenico Sguaitamatti

GIOVANNI CHIARAMONTE

Giovanni Chiaramonte was born in Varese in 1948 to Sicilian parents and now lives in Milan. He started photographing at the end of the sixties, gaining renown as a

photographer of architecture and of landscapes. Chiaramonte concentrates on how contexts relate to human beings, investigating them with the curious eye of an explorer for whom every detail – be it of architecture, landscape, a face or an object – conceals a meaning, an enigma.

In particular, architecture has become the key for him to capture the transformations taking place in our cities, as in his project “Italian Atlas 003: Portrait of a Changing Italy”, in which he investigates two regions, Calabria and Sicily, and the exhibition “The Other_ In Faces In Places”, in which he describes Milan and Palermo, focusing on the neighbourhoods with established immigrant communities.

For Chiaramonte, every work bears witness to the passing of time. He sees the buildings erected by man not as shapes raised in the three dimensions of space, but as endless enigmas thrust into the passage of time, as he stated on the occasion of the “Cantiere d'autore” event in 2006, when he joined other leading photographers to shoot the progress of construction work on the MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, designed by Zaha Hadid and inaugurated in 2010. Similarly, in the exhibition “In Berlin” held in the Milan Triennale in 2009, he unveiled and revealed the origins of Berlin, a city he started getting to know in 1983 and to which he then devoted years of his work, recording the symbolic architecture of its history. Shown in the most important galleries of Europe and America, including the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Caracas, the Milan Triennale and the Venice Biennale, his images of Berlin have truly travelled the world.

Chiaramonte is the author of numerous books: *Giardini e paesaggi* (1983), *Terra del ritorno* (1989), *Penisola delle figure* (1993), *Westwards* (1996), *Ai confini del mare* (1999), *Milano. Cerchi della città di mezzo*, (2000), *Pellegrinaggi occidentali* (2000), *Frammenti dalla Rocca-Cefalù* (2002), *Dolce la luce*, (2003), *Abitare il mondo: Europe* (2004), *Berlin. Figure* (2004), *Attraverso la pianura* (2005), *Senza foce* (2005), *Come un enigma_Venezia* (2006) and *Nascosto in prospettiva* (2007). He has founded and managed series of photographic books for Jaca Book, Federico Motta Editore, Società Editrice Internazionale ed Edizioni della Meridiana and Ulteya-Itaca. From 1984 to 1998, he taught History of Photography and History of Optic Vision, respectively at the Civic School of Photography and the Civic School of Cinema in Milan, and he has also held important posts in academia: in 1998, he held the course in Photographing the City at the Darmstadt University Faculty of Architecture; from 2000 to 2003, he lectured in Drama of the Image in the Sicilian Faculty of Theology and since 2004 he has been lecturing in the Masters in Photography course at Forma in Milan; following on the Universities of Palermo and Parma, he now lectures in the History and Theory of Photography at the IULM in Milan. From 1994 to 1997, he was the official photographer of the exhibitions at the XIX Milan Triennale. In 1996, he had a photographic section about Italian identity in Italo Rota's section of the XIX International Expo, while in 2000 he showed with an exhibition design by Pierluigi Nicolini. His one-man show *Milano. Cerchi della città di mezzo* featured architectural elements by Enzo Mari. In 2002, he curated the photography section of the exhibition *Le città in/visibili*. On 25 October 2005, he was awarded an Honorary Degree in Architecture by the University of Palermo. In 2006, he won the First Friuli-Venezia Giulia award for Photography and in 2007 the Benevento Oscar of Photography.

Nicola De Maria

Nicola De Maria is an artist from Campania who was chosen by Achille Bonito Oliva for the Transavantgarde group in 1978, together with [Sandro Chia](#), [Francesco Clemente](#), [Enzo Cucchi](#) and [Mimmo Paladino](#). His work can be distinguished from that of other artists for its great expressive strength and evocative power, which emerge from a skilled, original use of colour.

With his brilliant, lively chromatism, his garish, vivid colours generate a sun-kissed world, full of dream-like evocativeness. Nicola de Maria paints a fantastic universe, populated by images of playful imaginativeness. In this sense, the artist has revived a line of twentieth-century painting that stretches from Paul Klee's visionary world to that of Osvaldo Licini, elaborating on various suggestions within a thoroughly personal visual articulation. The artist brings out his lyrical vein through apparitions that might almost be the dreams of children, mixed with nostalgic reminiscences, transfigured memories and sensations that surface from the subconscious. His works are like a song from the *Magnificat*, a joyful hymn to life that never ceases stopping and renewing its fertility. His is a colourful, sunny joy. And yet there is nothing superficial about his lyricism: the expressive strength of his work seems to have passed across the contradictory experiences of life. His work takes the form of the sun that shines with light, yet it still seems to bear the trace of its nocturnal journey, of its path through the darkness of the night. It is as though Nicola De Maria were showing us a joy that has passed across life's suffering, but all the while transforming it and loving it. In this respect, his is a joy that descends into the depths, to re-emerge in coloured surfaces. The colours in his palette take on a symbolic value.

De Maria's canvases are not descriptive in nature, but evocative: they suggest and allude. They show the observer a way for him to recompose signs and colours in the spaces of his own conscience. The artist's painting does not seem to be geared to express concepts or demonstrations. Rather, the artist seems to stimulate free feelings in which goodness can triumph, bringing us back to a poetic, fantastic, visionary world that modifies even the saddest of situations into sublime works, into a feast of colours. We have the feeling that we are looking at pure abstraction, at poetry. In this respect, De Maria's interpretations of the Biblical text cannot be traced back to traditional iconographies. While the Gospel often uses metaphors, De Maria almost seems to blanket them in colours, cover them with meditated brushstrokes whose traces make an enormous expressive impact. In practice, these works are not so much descriptions or illustrations of the Biblical text as media that reveal their content of meaning, transfigured by the artist's religious experience. His art is not merely didactic, but reveals an inner world.

For this artist, art is a vital impulse, energy that is unleashed from his colour, whose "spiritual" strength can reimburse mankind for the horrors and lacerations of the world. While reality is shot through with violence and pain, in a spiral that man justifies with a system of ideologies, the experience of art counters this by pointing to a way through the night and its silence, so that we can be consoled, reconciled and loved. Art guarantees that there is the hope of this possible joy, the embrace of a radiant dawn. And for De Maria, all this is the gift of God.

Thus is his canvas transformed into a prayer, whose depth opens up to a revelation that takes shape by virtue of the fullness of a harmony of colours that delicately "touch" the chords of the human soul, make them as it were resonate

in sweetness, creating in each of us a sense of peace and of reconciliation, bringing the breath of a light that transfigures the world in which we live. Because artistic creation is a spiritual experience that speaks of the very origins of life, as it opens up to the absolute. It is an experience that can be reached by letting ourselves go, by allowing ourselves to be struck by the breath of the spirit. This is the profoundest meaning of Beauty: letting ourselves go to the embrace of the Father..

De Maria's palette includes the fundamental colours, blue, red and yellow, then expands into notes of orange, green and light blue. From the deep blue of clear night skies, his colours convert into the warm, golden luminousness of the day, passing through all intermediate tones. These are chromatic modulations, in which the artist lets himself go, as though he were plunging recklessly into an intimate, inner, personal world. And the visual impression we have of his works is rather like coloured mediaeval enamels, priceless testimonies of a past that lives again in the feast of his colour.

Andrea Dall'Asta

Nicola De Maria

Nicola De Maria was born in Foglianise, in the province of Benevento, on 6 December 1954, moving while still a boy to Turin, where he still lives and works today. Enrolling in the Faculty of Medicine, he pursued his studies with a specialisation in Neurology, a profession he was never to practise, as he devoted his attention to his art. After a brief dalliance with photography, in 1975 he started his prolific output of drawings on pages of notebooks, first in pencil, then in pastels, oil and water colours.

De Maria played a crucial role in all the numerous group exhibitions organised by Achille Bonito Oliva about the Transavantgarde. Nevertheless, although the painter was originally included in this context, he soon distanced himself to develop a purely abstract language that, over the years, has come to draw increasingly on a spiritual dimension, so that every work becomes a sort of personal prayer dedicated to "a God who is delicacy and cannot be downtrodden". The principal expressive tool of De Maria's poetic is his use of colour, which is always vivid and intense. The artist investigates its emotional and sensory effects, painting on surfaces that can vary from an entire room, in which case he revives the venerable techniques used by the ancient maestros of fresco, to the smallest of supports.

It is his colour that defines the space of his painting, whether great or small in format, as though it were a piebald or multi-coloured universe made of signs, elements of figure and, sometimes, written words. Flowers, moons and stars emerge from often monochrome abstract backgrounds, piecing wonderful scenarios together that welcome the observer and embrace him in an atmosphere that is intimate and serene, both contemplative and at the same time poetic. His experience of painting becomes the only means for expressing this, as he actually defines himself "One who writes poetry with hands full of colour".

In 1977, he did his first mural painting in Milan, which was followed by another for the Paris Biennale in the same year. In the eighties, the artist painted several exhibition spaces. In the late eighties and early nineties, he gained an international reputation and took part in important exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (in 1980, 1988 and 1990), Documenta 7 in Kassel

(1982), the XVI São Paulo Biennial (1980), the Sydney Biennial (1986) and the Rome Quadriennale (2003-2005). Retrospectives of his work have been held in the Haus Lange Museum in Krefeld (1983), in the Basel Kunsthalle (1983), in the Zurich Kunsthaus (1985) and in the Seibu Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo (1988). In 1991, the Museum of Fine Arts in Nîmes organised the major retrospective “Nicola De Maria. Orphic Head”. He also took part in the retrospective of the Italian Transavantgarde in the Castle of Rivoli in 2003. In the following year, he held an important exhibition at the MACRO (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Rome, entitled “Nicola De Maria. Cosmic Elegy”, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva.

Mimmo Paladino

Mimmo Paladino has demonstrated the ability to move on all fronts where art creates image, discovering harmony with vocabularies of form from other eras and with their survival in the present day, a dialogue that never stops, but that demonstrates the continuity of sign beyond the expressive borders and cultural surrounds of any specific era. This reliance on different patterns, on figures that surface from diverse motifs and worlds, on styles that are woven with one another in a making that brings them back together, has enabled Paladino to acquire an approach that is unequivocally his own, one that is not eclectic, but knows how to relate to the manners and memories of the episodes of the art of the past that are available to the artist of the present. In this process, which is open to suggestions, memories and reflections conducted by directly applying the artistic operation to the invention of “figures”, in which masks and faces, fragments of bodies and of figurative imprints are joined by allusions to objects, whose nature may be everyday or symbolic, even historical or archaeological, in which objectivity combines with apparition, Paladino has often allowed a potential sacred, religious or spiritual quality of his images and their situations to surface, in accordance with the innate conditions in which human beings manifest their desire to break through the narrow confines set by the nature of matter.

This opportunity to collaborate undoubtedly provided further working hypotheses, which Paladino has received and elaborated, offering a range of interventions that may well appear to be mutually quite diverse, though they are united by the need to approach the individual evangelical text and allow it somehow to speak to him once again, so that it can be summarised, in keeping with its original discovery and the new discoveries that can be made of it on every occasion. The figurative – but also technical – solutions he proposes stress how the wealth of the Word never ceases to introduce potential links that cut across the board of history, in this case in particular of art history, as well as being vertically applicable for their immediate manifestations of the qualities and depth of their symbolic signs.

In each of his works, the tangible, essential image he proposes never misses the chance to use symbolic motifs – though sometimes only hinting at them – that interpret some aspect of the Scripture, without ever being merely didactic or explicitly narrative, as is best demonstrated by the synthesis he elaborated in the design for the Evangelary’s cover, in which the figurative presences associate naturally with the sense of colour so typical of his approach to painting.

Francesco Tedeschi

MIMMO PALADINO

Born in Paduli, in the province of Benevento, on 18 December 1948, Domenico Paladino, who goes by the name of Mimmo, debuted in 1968 with his first exhibition in the Carolina Gallery in Portici, near Naples, presented by Achille Bonito Oliva, who later – in the late seventies and early eighties – included him in the Transavantgarde movement. Together with such other artists as Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Francesco Clemente and Nicola De Maria, Paladino contributed

to re-launching a “neo-Expressionist” figurative language, updating it with a personal research of form.

In 1977, Paladino moved to Milan, where he started also devoting his energies to drawing. From this, he later moved to etching and sculpture in the eighties and nineties, the same period when he made several trips to Brazil, which enabled him get to know and understand the country’s local culture, on which he drew for new inspirations that took the material form of a ceaseless flow of new symbols, objects and colours, because “art is not a superficial matter, nor a sociological matter, nor is it a poetic tempest: art is slow proceeding about the language of signs”. His creative imagery draws its inspiration from archaic forms of ancient civilisations and on his native region’s heritage of art and history. He is an eclectic artist and an experimenter with different expressive media, from photography and painting to sculpture and installations. In Paladino, the signs of the abstract tradition and figurative elements come together without clashing, taking part in the contemporary universe developed by the artist and creating actual symbols.

From the seventies to the present day, Mimmo Paladino has taken part in numerous exhibitions, the most prestigious among them including the travelling exhibition that visited Basel, Essen and Amsterdam and his personal show at the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, both in 1980; in 1983, an exhibition at the Fundació Joan Mirò in Barcelona that was also attended by other members of the Transavantgarde and one in the Tate Gallery in London; in 1988, he took part in the XLIII Venice Biennale. In the nineties, he was the first Italian contemporary artist to show in the National Gallery of Fine Arts in Beijing. In 2002, the Centre for Contemporary Art in Prato dedicated to him the most complete retrospective of his work ever organised by an Italian museum, curated by Bruno Corà. In 2003, he took part in “Transavanguardia 1979-1985”, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in the Castle of Rivoli, near Turin; in the same year, he was chosen to represent Italian art during the Italian Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers in Brussels, where his equestrian sculpture *Zenith* was installed in the square in front of the European Parliament.

Since 2003, Paladino has shown his work at the Royal Palace in Caserta, in the Rupertinum Museum in Salzburg, in the Madre Museum in Naples, in the Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery in Paris, in the Civic Gallery in Modena, in the Pelaires Gallery at the Contemporary Cultural Centre in Palma de Mallorca, in the Ca' Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art in Venice, in the Ara Pacis in Rome and in Villa Pisani at Stra. At the end of 2005, he installed the major exhibition of paintings, sculptures and drawings dedicated to Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* in the Capodimonte Museum, in Naples, for which he then produced the short film *Quijote* in the following year. In the course of his long career, he has also designed stage sets for theatrical performances, including Schiller’s *The Bride of Messina* in Gibellina in 1990, *Oedipus at Colonus*, which won him the 2004 UBU Award for the best theatre sets, *Oedipus Rex* and *Cavalier Rusticana* for the Royal Theatre in Turin in 2007. Recently, on 6 April 2011, the City of Milan dedicated a major retrospective to the artist from Campania entitled “Paladino Palazzo Reale”, as it was held in the Royal Palace. Curated by Flavio Arensi, the exhibition included the artist’s celebrated *Salt Mountain*, which was placed in Piazza Duomo, in front of the Palace.

Nicola Samorì

Nicola Samorì is a young artists from the Romagna region who has gone against an often provocative and sensationalist vein on the Italian art scene that uses expressive approaches whose somewhat tired roots can be traced to Duchamp’s genius: he, on the contrary, stands for a return to painting, to the quality of

painting and to research of form. There are no spectacular special effects in his work, no driving urge to sign up to fleeting artistic fads. Since the very beginning of his artistic career, masterfully interpreting certain masterpieces of the past, especially from the Baroque age, he has always shown considerable technical skill and at the same time considerable sensitivity when creating existential metaphors, using images whose outstanding formal perfection he then has no hesitation about “deforming”, “lacerating” and “wounding”, in a continuous dialectic between creation and de-creation.

The artist uses mixed techniques: tempera, oil and water colours. He often also uses etching, which he then subjects to a variety of expressive techniques, sometimes tearing, dismantling and reassembling photographs, adding or overlapping things, gluing or burning them, subjecting them to chemical reactions and defying the times it takes glues to dry, or ink on acetate or copper... Attacks and abrasions reveal a layering and a sedimentation of his painted canvas that, far from making a statement of uncertainty of form, enable a complexity of elaboration to emerge that corresponds to a profound quest for meaning, in a seamless passage from ancient to contemporary benchmarks.

As the illustrations in the Evangeliary demonstrate, the representation of the scenes is achieved by lacerating the image, as though the act of passing through an intimate, inner pain were to disfigure the figure. Mankind's story cannot be depicted with ideal forms, whose tones are reassuring and consoling, as it used to be depicted in antiquity, all complying with the principles of harmony, eurhythmics and proportion. The harmony we know from the classics does not stand up to the test of the atrocities of history. From its very beginnings, the path trodden by mankind is one beset by violence. After Auschwitz, the concept of classical beauty has to be questioned. Samorì reflects on the concept of beauty, not to erase it, but to change it, to transform it from within. Classical form needs to be reconceived. In this respect, the concept of formlessness acquires fundamental importance for this young artist. For him, in fact, the image is not the place where beauty of the “beautiful form” stands revealed. Actually, it is as though Samorì were to set out from this “beautiful form” to destroy it, rape it, deform it. To disfigure it. By passing thus to formlessness, the image passes across the skin of reality, erases the “verist” factor and becomes enigma, deferring to the individual and collective fantasies that we generally remove from our conscience, to visions of the subconscious that emerge forcefully, even though we often erase and remove them. Samorì places us squarely in front of a paradox: while on the one hand the artist illustrates his ability, freedom and certainty, his great capacity to represent the figure in all its perfection of form, on the other he immediately seems to deny it, so as to make way for a sensation of imperfection, of impermanence and of transience. It is as though his bodies were about to mutate, to reconfigure their forms. From the perfection of the image, the artist takes us to its exorable dissolution, as though the image were constructed, configured as a “form” and disappeared, all at the same time, making it impossible for us to possess it, grasp it or handle it, as it is dynamic, caught in a continuous, ceaseless mutability.

Going against the grain of a contemporary art that stands out for its slovenly, insignificant character, a great quest and extraordinary technical finesse are at the root of Samorì's expressive force. His is a challenge to the art of the past, as

though he were to be plunging into an antique world, but so as to reconceive it and bring it up to date. So if his works draw their origins from quotation, the purpose is not to pander to it, but to enliven it from within, so that it speaks to the present. While contemporary references to Tapies, Burri and Kiefer can be recognised, the artist is never copying, imitating or aping their expressive gestures, but assimilating and integrating the new aspects that modernity has to convey to us.

In this way, Samorì accompanies us into a visionary world, one where the observer is expected to question the meaning of the image, so as to recompose its form and at the same time understand the reasons for its formal dissolution, the way it goes out of focus as we look at it. As though within the beauty of form there were a sort of pain, of drama that tears at it from inside, but emerges inexorably on the surface.

Adrea Dall'Asta

Nicola Samorì

Nicola Samorì was born in Forlì in 1977 and now lives and works in Bagnocavallo, in the province of Ravenna. Since taking his diploma in painting from the Bologna Academy of Fine Arts, he has developed an intense work of painting and sculpture that has induced him to refine all sorts of different techniques of expression, including fresco, etching and woodcarving.

Samorì's research of form started from considerations about the cultural and symbolic value of the body, before concentrating on the topic of loss of identity and the sense of extraneousness: his portraits became anti-portraits, through layers of tears, scratches, blotches and smudges that made them lose every trace of narrative and description; they then emerged from dark backgrounds as bodies with indistinct, altered shapes, like the faces taken from ancient and modern art, for example, in particular the portraiture traditions of the seventeenth century, disfigured and rendered unrecognisable, erasing or transfiguring their appearance.

Samorì has adopted the same reflective, intimate approach in his dealings with the sacred theme that has accompanied him throughout his creative career. In 2010, he took part in the 14th edition of the Sacred Art Biennial at Isola del Gran Sasso d'Italia, in the province of Teramo, and in the exhibition "Attraverso le Tenebre" (Through the Darkness) in the Lercaro Collection Gallery of Modern Art in Bologna, for which he created a *Via Crucis*, later also shown in the San Fedele Gallery in Milan, which demonstrates his considerable technical skill in using his materials to render bodies. In 2010, he showed some seventy illustrative works for the Sermon on the Mount, from St. Matthew's Gospel, for the exhibition "Imago Christi" at the same institution, while he is now one of the leading names, together with such other artists as Mimmo Paladino and Nicola De Maria, of the group exhibition entitled "Alla luce della Croce. Arte Antica e contemporanea a confronto" (In the Light of the Cross. Ancient and Contemporary Art Compared), devoted to the topic of the Cross and lasting until 30 October 2011.

Samorì is considered to be one of Italy's most interesting contemporary artists. His numerous exhibitions in Italy and abroad include "Dei Miti Memorie", at the Central TAFE Gallery in Perth (2003); "Classicism Betrayed", at the Erdmann Contemporary

Gallery in Cape Town (2004); “TAC - Un paesaggio chiamato uomo”, at L’Ariete Contemporary Art in Bologna (2005); “Lapsus”, at the Strino Fort in Vermiglio (2006); “Not so private. With my tongue in my cheek”, at Villa delle Rose in Bologna (2008); “Sine die”, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Gibellina (2007); and “Arte Italiana 1968-2007. Pittura”, in the Royal Palace in Milan. In 2008, he took part in the 9th Cairo Award in the Palazzo della Permanente in Milan, then in the next year presented his project “The Depopulator” at the Museum of Riva del Garda and at the Fort of Nago, followed by an extensive monograph at the Salt Stores (Magazzini del Sale) in Cervia and in the interiors of the Old Monastery of San Francesco in Bagnocavallo. In 2010, he held a one-man show entitled “La dialettica del mostro” at the Artecontemporanea in Milan and was invited to the art section, curated by Vittorio Sgarbi, of the Festival of the Two Worlds in Spoleto. He recently showed in the LARMgalleri in Copenhagen, the Christian Ehrentraut Gallery in Berlin and the Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie in Dessau. Since 2007, he has also been working with installations that, like his paintings, are based on the manipulation of celebrated masterpieces.

Ettore Spalletti

Ettore Spalletti’s work has an implicitly “spiritual” qualification, as it tends naturally towards a form of transcendence, compared to the materials that it nevertheless uses and thrives on, be they the light of nature or the pigments of colour, which end up occupying or creating the space where they become manifest. He has tested this in many works that project from the wall to open up into space, where they then find a unitary connotation, in which their colour assimilates the light and modifies the substance of the place.

The tendency on the part of this artist towards an immateriality that starts from the impalpability of colour becomes explicit in the way he represents things’ immobility, ending up incarnating a sense of time in suspension, an allusion to the infinite.

Because of the intrinsic character of his work, the readings that have been commissioned from Spalletti on this occasion include several markedly metaphysical passages, in addition to the *Frontispiece*, which he has interpreted as an opportunity to introduce the Book, but also as an aperture towards the outside, a point where Word meets spirit.

Reflecting the approach he adopted in works on a larger scale, Spalletti has succeeded here in transfusing the specific load of an art that melds space and colour into the particular condition of every passage he has interpreted, managing to transform the page that we see before our eyes into a form of environment. At the same time, every minimal form that comes into a dialogue with the priority of his colour immediately achieves the nature of a symbol, of a bond that urges the material form to represent the meaning of a reality that goes further than what we can see as matter. Thus it is that all Spalletti’s conceptions generate the need to read the essence of colour and of sign in a way that exceeds the confines of the sheet, the material quality of the paper, to touch on an intimacy with the transcendent dimension of the Word, reflecting, in aesthetic terms, the visible and tactile character of every one of his creations.

This is a dual transformation that has something prodigious about it and that transports us, time after time, into a different dimension.

Francesco Tedeschi

ETTORE SPALLETTI

Ettore Spalletti was born on 26 January 1940 in Cappelle sul Tavo, in the province of Pescara, where he still lives and works today. A painter and sculptor, he showed his work for the first time in 1975 in Plinio de Martiis' La Tartaruga Gallery in Rome, where he held the one-man exhibition "Rosso bianco verde bianco giallo" (Red white green white yellow), a title that says much about the artist's interest in the use of colour. Colour, form and light, in fact, are the essential components of Spalletti's art: he uses them to establish relationships between his works and the space. This artist conceives of surfaces as volumes to be shaped: painting, sculpture and architecture dialogue continuously, to the extent that the term "three-dimensional painting" has been coined to render the idea of the tangibility of the spatial dimension underlying every one of his creations.

Of all colours, he is particularly fond of white, the colour of light, of light blue, the colour of the sky and symbol of infinity, and of pink and grey, rather less of orange and yellow, while his favourite materials are wood, canvas, marble and the surfaces of walls.

Although the research conducted by Spalletti in recent years concentrates on volumes and surfaces of quite large dimensions, generating environmental installations like the *Source* shown in the La Marra environmental art park in Montemarcello, near La Spezia, in 2006, his creative career has generally been continuous, with no substantial changes in direction: "It is hard to draw a distinction between my works from the seventies and the ones I do know", he said in a recent interview, "because I take great care to preserve them all; for me, it's as though I had never finished them. Our works live much longer than we do. I believe that light is a fundamental element, it gives me the feeling that I can approach different works. Every morning, when I go into my studio, I am met by a sense of wonder when I look at them. I find them to be different every time from how they were the day before. That, in brief, is the story of all my work". (*Flash Art*, N° 281, March 2010).

In the course of his career, Spalletti has shown all over the world, always met by success both with the specialised public and the critics and with the public at large. His numerous exhibitions held in Italy and abroad include the group shows "Arte e critica" in 1981 at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, several editions of the Venice Biennale (in 1982, 1993, 1995 and 1997) and of the Documenta in Kassel (in 1982 and 1992) and a one-man show held in 1992 in the Massimo Minini Gallery in Brescia. The prestigious institutions that have held personal exhibitions of his work include the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Capodimonte Museum in Naples, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Strasbourg, the Smak in Ghent, the Muhka in Antwerp, the South London Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the Kunstverein in Munich, the Folkwang Museum in Essen and Villa Medici in Rome. His personal exhibition at the Henry Moore Foundation in Leeds was named by the American magazine *Artforum* as one of the best of 2005.

NICOLA VILLA

"What I expect of my painting and as a consequence also of my figures is to try to talk about people, about their reciprocal relationships and about how they relate to the space in which they are situated", says Nicola Villa, as he talks about himself and neatly summarises not merely the main – and not the only – subject of his painting, i.e. "people", but also the profound poetic of his creative quest, as it investigates relations

between people themselves and how they interact with space, so as to be able to define it and inhabit it, filling it with meaning or with a bitterness that marks its void.

The first important space for understanding Nicola Villa is his own studio, a place to be experienced, not just visited: the young artist can be seen here in all his desire and courage to get involved; it is here that he waits for you, so that he can open up the world of his art for you to see, which is actually his whole world. "One of the things I like best about my painting is getting my hands dirty, the smell of oil, the fact that I can feel a bit like a craftsman, the feeling that, at the end of a working day, I have lost what I have been working on since the morning, but can then find it again with one more gesture; the ability to make my own colours and choose them not with my eyes, but with my guts; so ultimately the contact with materials, the sort of battle that I win one day, though more often they are the winners".

This tells us that Nicola Villa's works should not be tackled head-on, with a sort of critical intellectualism, but, as he says himself, "with the guts", by which he means with a healthy dose of immediate and maybe unrestrained passion, of the kind that draws you in and involves you, at least in the beginning, more emotionally and intuitively, "striking while the iron is hot", rather than on a rigidly and coldly rational level.

What you grasp without any difficulty is that the space in Nicola's studio goes much further than its measurable physical dimensions: it also becomes internal, the horizon of a soul, the mirror that reflects a quest for a meaning about himself, about the artist and about contemporary man, the unquestioned protagonist of his painting.

Villa's work contains the naked, unadorned reality that is guaranteed by a camera lens that captures the "actual fact", without running the risk of changing it in any way. That fact then remains at the root of every one of his gestures as a painter, "the unaltered vision of a fleeting moment" that remains the source that gives rise to his entire poetic.

And yet Nicola Villa's approach is a vigorously creative gesture, since it is not restricted to registering what the camera reveals with such technological perfection, then proposes by manipulating everything with the quality of an academic painting often suffering from pure aestheticism; on the contrary, it is as though he were "breathing" into those images captured at the moment they were photographed, so as to use a decisive, concise hand, often with a strong impact, to paint a "dynamism", but not so much for the purpose of making a story out of it, a narrative that develops in time, as of unveiling the movements of the soul.

The timorousness and indeed the tremors with which Nicola Villa tackled this commission to paint the Gospels come from this: from this thoroughly personal poetic of his, which looks so straightforward to a superficial glance, if you go no further than the misleading level of the narrative, but which actually turns out to be much more profound and absorbing if you have the patience and the courage to discover what lies beyond and explore its paths.

Not that Nicola casts poetic out of his painting: in the case of this Word, he has set out to investigate the ancient spaces where it has echoed in history and the new spaces where it is now proclaimed no less effectively. Not different spaces for the past, the present and the future, but spaces that are eternally valid, because they are spaces of man and for man, because "in here", this Word "is made flesh".

No longer are these anonymous outskirts peppered with rickety, threatening, mute skyscrapers of stone, however: they are luminous spaces that you understand intuitively to be as profound as infinity, inhabited by a light that, as it were concentrated in

geometric shapes or dispersed like a shower of light dust, becomes from time to time “Presence, Sign, Way, Voice and – why not? – the seductive reflection of Grace”.

Neither does Nicola cast out the originality of his uncluttered yet effective and precise graphic sign, which forces the observer’s eye to refuse to be satisfied with a superficial visual experience, but to look closer, to seek out a personal re-composition of the same image that vibrates, as it moves and mutates continuously, under eyes capable of achieving contemplation.

By reflecting on these images that accompany the Word, Nicola is not inventing a different path that would end up being constrained, not belonging to him, but keeps faith with his poetic, for which the photographic image is his starting point.

This gives these images an even greater strength, tearing them away from the risk of appearing to be a mere, commonplace illustration for its own sake, to fill them with a meaning outside and beyond time. These works by Nicola Villa open contemporary art to the heading of this “Word”, as ancient as it is eternally new.

Domenico Sguaitamatti

NICOLA VILLA

Nicola Villa was born in Lecco on 19 December 1976 and now lives and works in Genoa. He started painting in 2000, deciding to devote himself full-time to his painting after graduating in architecture from Milan Polytechnic in 2004, as well as experimenting with etching.

Attention for the urban context and the human beings who inhabit it is a constant in Villa’s art, which is studded with cityscapes, the outskirts of large metropolises and portraits of people whom he first captures with a camera and then portrays on canvas, using pencils, water colours and ink in black and various other colours. With a scientific approach on the borderline between the narrative and the documentary, these images become a testimony of real objects, things and people located in equally real settings. The process of elaborating his subject’s face is one of the most expressive hallmarks of his work, in particular in his recent exhibition “Urban/Mediterranean. Stories and faces of a maritime city”, which went on show first in the Mimmo Scognamiglio Contemporary Art Gallery in Naples (2010) and then in the village of Monteggiori, in the province of Lucca (14-30 July 2011). The project was created to measure for the interiors of the gallery in Naples and devoted to describing everyday life, complete with real situations and unexpected events. In 2010, he already took part in the art and spirituality event dedicated to the Apocalypse entitled “Apocalipsis”. In “Revelation for Time”, curated by the Pastoral Centre at the Catholic University of Milan, he showed the painting *The Beast that Comes from the Sea*, interpreting the apocalyptic symbol as a pyramid-shaped group of dark shapes, immobile against a white background.

Villa held his first personal exhibition in 2001 in the Mosaico Gallery in Chiasso, Switzerland. Since 2005, he has been working with the Montrasio Arte Gallery in Monza, where he held a personal entitled “From the glance to the impossible face” in 2006, simultaneously with the Bellinzona Gallery in Lecco. He has taken part in several group exhibitions, including “Giovanni Testori, A Portrait”, in Palazzo Leone da Perego in Legnano, near Varese, in 2003, and the Morlotti Award in Imbersago, near Lecco, in 2005, where he won the under-30 section. 2007 was particularly eventful, as he took part in the Salon de l’Estampe in Paris with the Bellinzona Gallery and the Floriano Bodini Civic Museum in Gemonio, near Varese. He then spent three months in New York, where he took part in the *Harlem Studio Fellowship project organised by Montrasio Arte and curated by Raffaele Bedarida*. With the group exhibition “*The*

Pioneers”, he took part in the International G.B. Salvi Exhibition in Sassoferrato and in the SerrONE. He has won several awards, including the *Monza Youth Biennale at the Royal Palace (2007)* and the painting section of the Italian edition of the *Celeste Award (2008)*. In 2009, a folder of his etchings was bought by the BDIC –Contemporary International Documentation Library-Museum of Contemporary History in Paris. His most recent exhibitions include “*Walking on the City*” at Moretti Fine Art in London (2008), “*Entrée Reservée*” at the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio (2009) and “*New Italian Figuring*” at the Beckel Odille Boicos Gallery in Paris (2011).

Room 117

The Mystery of Whitsun

Effundam de Spiritu meo / I shall bestow my Spirit

The most beautiful beauty is not spoken,
it is perceived from the peace of the soul
under the splendour of the divine light.
That is why Jesus was extraordinarily beautiful
and His beauty was reflected on the face
of those who were prepared to follow Him.
That is why the Gospel, too, is so beautiful,
and artists have tried,
each in his own way,
to interpret that beauty.
We hope that all those who listen
will also be able to perceive this beauty.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, Archbishop Emeritus of
Milan

Missal

Et exaltavit humiles

From the Word to life

Jusepe de Ribera, known as Lo Spagnoletto
Balthazar's Vision, 1635
Valencia 1591 – Naples 1652
Oil on canvas 52x64 cm.
Monti Collection, Archiepiscopal Paintings, Milan

A hand is suspended between vision and reality, stretched between heaven and earth, seeming to appear suddenly from a dense mass of clouds that has just been dissipated by a strong, oblique light; now it is proceeding to write “mysterious words” with its index finger on a solid, compact and apparently hard wall that looks as though it will brook no scratching.

It is a real hand, whose real and plastic form is further strengthened by the clear-cut, marked shadow that it projects onto the same wall.

It is a hand that goes “beyond” its simple act of meaning in the gesture of writing, to evocate a “Presence” that is invisible, yet perfectly and clearly perceptible, almost palpable. The Presence of He who is writing, to whom the word belongs.

Using a language that was still influenced by Caravaggio’s plastic realism, but that was already making way for a pictorialism of impact that was to be a prelude to Baroque, Jusepe de Ribera, known as Lo Spagnoletto (Valencia 1591 – Naples 1652), translated a passage from the prophet Daniel into an image in 1635: “In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote opposite the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.” (Dn. 5,5).

Hence the title *Balthazar’s Vision* that accompanies the painting, interpreting the unusual, rare iconography like the sentence that God wrote on the wall of the palace against the King of Babylon, announcing the end of his kingdom because of his sacrilegious act: that of using the gold and silver chalices stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem in a banquet.

Yet we are entitled to leave the historical fact narrated here to one side, the harshness of a word that becomes a condemnation, so as to go “beyond” and find harmony with this evoked “Presence”, with its gesture of “Writing” and with its “Word that is etched” on that hard surface.

The arrangement of composition of this work, which is bereft of all context that would necessarily imprison it in a single event in the past, permits this; the meaning of the exhibition whose visit is closed by this image, generating an ideal link to *St. Matthew and the Angel* at the beginning, almost makes it obligatory.

Two moments of one and the same “Writing”, are the “Incarnation” of the “Word” and the “Voice” of the “Presence”.

It is God’s powerful, creative gesture that applies the impact of the “Word” to give life, voice, form and beauty to an anonymous, mute material that is apparently inadequate, when it is not actually hostile. With much less plastic impetuosity, but with the same decisiveness and certainty of action, this image is reminiscent of the detail of the hands of God the Creator and of the man in Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam*, in the Sistine Chapel. In that fresco, God shapes man, giving “Life” and “Form” to an inert mass of clay and generating a masterpiece “made in his own image”; here, in Lo Spagnoletto’s painting, God tears out man’s “heart of stone” to offer him a “heart of flesh”, in harmony and dialogue with the heart of the Father, docile at the mention of the “Word” that is “Life”, under His delicate, paternal “Writing”.

Thus does the word cease to be “mysterious”, actually becoming a well-illuminated path for every man who is courageous enough and happy to let himself be shaped and etched by it.

This, as Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, has written, is a Word that is “ancient and yet forever new, written for centuries on scrolls and in books covered with beauty”.

This is the Word that brings the “news of good and eternal life that all those who have seen and met the risen Christ have transmitted from generation to generation”.

It is the “ineffable Word that God Himself pronounces in every man’s intimacy, causes to echo in the Church and throughout the world and writes in the life of those who listen ‘not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts’ (cf. 2 Cor, 3,3)”.

We too are called to be “Evangelaries” of Beauty: visible, open and a faithful, credible echo of the “Word” of the God who loves us.

Domenico Sguaitamatti

There is a Word that is ancient and yet forever new, written for centuries on scrolls and in books covered with beauty: the Evangelaries contained in these rooms are luminous evidence of this.

There are news of good and eternal life that all those who have seen and met the risen Christ have transmitted from generation to generation: the Gospel is the priceless testimony of this that passes through time to reach to the ends of the Earth.

There is a unique, ineffable Word that God Himself pronounces in every man’s intimacy, causes to echo in the Church and throughout the world and writes in the life of those who listen “not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (cf. 2 Cor, 3,3). As St. Bernard commented: “the book of Life is Jesus... Blessed are those to whom it is given to read this book”, for they shall know great joy and peace!

+ Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi