



Cristina Balbiano d'Aramengo

When printmaking, typography and bookbinding meet: the backstage of limited art editions

INTRODUCTION

Until a few years ago, in my professional life I had almost always dealt with unique pieces or runs limited to 5/10 pieces; but starting from 2013 more and more limited projects of a broader range, between 100 and 250 copies, have increasingly been presented. This often meant changing the layout of the spaces, albeit temporarily, but above all creating a team of collaborators and organizing the work differently. I can say that this was a great opportunity for professional growth, for me accustomed to an individual activity in which relations with third parties took place essentially only in the educational and training fields, the teaching having become over time my main activity.

Yet, it must also be said that probably without the experience gained in twenty years of work, not only in the production of bindings at my bench, but also in the teaching and management of the Associazione Professione Libro, I would not have been able to achieve in an organic way this type of work processes. Having been trained not only in the field of bookbinding, but also in hand printmaking, as well as the habit of coordinating and preparing materials and tools for dozens and dozens of courses and workshops developed over the years, allowed me to easily enter the process of making and in team work.

I chose to document for this conference three of the most representative projects of this new working method in my bookbinding studio, the first on an offset printed edition with very high quality levels, and the other two on art editions printed in monotype typography and with images printed with a chalcographic press.

Here I want to thank and pay tribute to the professionals with whom I have worked for years and who with their skills have made it possible to consolidate an effective professional network, through which we can proudly say that we can satisfy any need in the publishing field, from the limited edition of artist's books to standard editions in hundreds of copies, using tools and processes ranging from traditional hand printing to digital technologies.

Surely the most specific and fruitful collaboration is the one with Daniela Lorenzi - A14: as sometimes happens, from a beautiful friendship a professional relationship was born, in which our skills are perfectly integrated, and work flows in a sort of osmosis between our studios giving life to educational projects and editorial production of wide scope.

PLACES



Professione Libro (*Occupation: Book*) is an association whose aim is to promote the Art of the Book.

As well as promoting book-related events, workshops and research, it collaborates with printmakers, calligraphers, illustrators, designers and bookbinders on projects such as limited editions, children's books, graphic art, and art printing. New members, ideas and initiatives are welcome.

Professione Libro organizes courses and workshops to suit all levels of interest and skill, such as basic bookbinding, fine binding, design binding, book and paper repair and restoration, and is the place where I spend most of my time in the last 15 years.



Fontegrafica



The first project of a 100 copies Limited Edition I bound in 2013, was printed by **Fontegrafica**, a leading company in offset printing, which with over 50 years of experience, established itself nationally and internationally for the quality of its products.

Founded in 1951 by Salvatore Musmeci as a family-operated printing company, it soon passed under the guidance of his son, Giuseppe, who transformed the business from a small print shop to a real company. In addition to quantity, the company grew in terms of quality as well, and during the two decades from 1990 to 2010, it held a leadership position in the sector of quality

offset printing. Fontegrafica offers a 360 degrees service, from the product concept to its technical preview in pre-print area, from the making with professional multicolor equipment to the ennoblement of bookbinding and special processing.

In the other two projects I am documenting, the texts were printed in monotype typography at Tipografia Campi, while images were printed with a hand printing chalcografic press, using different kinds of matrices and inks, at A14.

CAMP
- 1898 -
TIPOGRAFIA IN MONOTYPE



Tipografia Campi Monotype 1898 was established 120 years ago in Milan's via Larga. Its name was then "Tipografia Cav. Umberto Allegretti", after its founder. In the 1930s, it was bought by Rodolfo Campi, who had been an employee of the company since the turn of the century. The Campi family still runs the business today. The unique nature of this printing and publishing business lies in the fact that it is the only one to still utilize the hot metal typesetting process and the Monotype

system. This was the first automated process of typesetting, which had remained basically unaltered from the time of Gutenberg's invention of the printing press until the second half of the nineteenth century. All in the service of a 3D-like effect: the impression of depth and maximum readability that – according to Mauro Chiabrando – comes from the pressing of the page against the lead typeface character. A process that releases the ink towards the inside of the sheet of paper, accentuating the edges of the character. An effect that cannot be duplicated with even the most sophisticated and refined cold printing method.

This means that Campi cannot be surpassed in the realization of the most refined and elegant publishing projects, from volumes produced by publishing houses known for their attention to printing quality to celebratory publications and limited editions.

A14



Daniela Lorenzi is the founding figure of Atelier 14, best known as **A14**. A14 was born in the mid 1990s out of several collaboration projects between artists from different disciplines, notably photography, graphic art, publishing and artistic print making. A14 has now a twenty-year experience in the execution and fulfilment of artists' projects in the

field of original print making with the production of limited print editions, artists' books, and research projects, which combine traditional original print making techniques with new digital technologies. Through an extensive network of artists A14 operates in Italy and abroad, in particular Brazil, where A14 maintains strong ties.

PROJECTS

Project 1 | MILAN - Discovering food, fashion and family in a private city | 2013

Standard edition: 2000

copies

Limited edition: 100 copies

Size: 240 x 280 x 40 mm

The creation of this book required considerable teamwork. In a way, the physical making of the book has only been the tip of the iceberg. The first input came by Emilio Roccioletti from ERD, an established graphic design & communications agency based in Carlton, Australia, who designed the book. Our role in this was to translate the emotional and stylistic concept into a physical object.

The concept of the book took years to define. Managing the technical aspects, which consisted in designing the page layout, finding the correct shelf mark sequence and choosing the right combination of papers/inks/subject, took an average of one week for each copy. To this we must add the actual production process (printing, finishing, special techniques and handmade binding) that required a full two weeks of work for each copy.

PRINTING TECHNIQUES

This book is a triumph of special and sometimes unique printing techniques, all of which have been combined together to achieve not only a luxury product, but a real piece of art. More in detail, Fontegrafica used in some pages of the limited edition, in addition to a high five, six or seven colour offset printing, the following techniques:

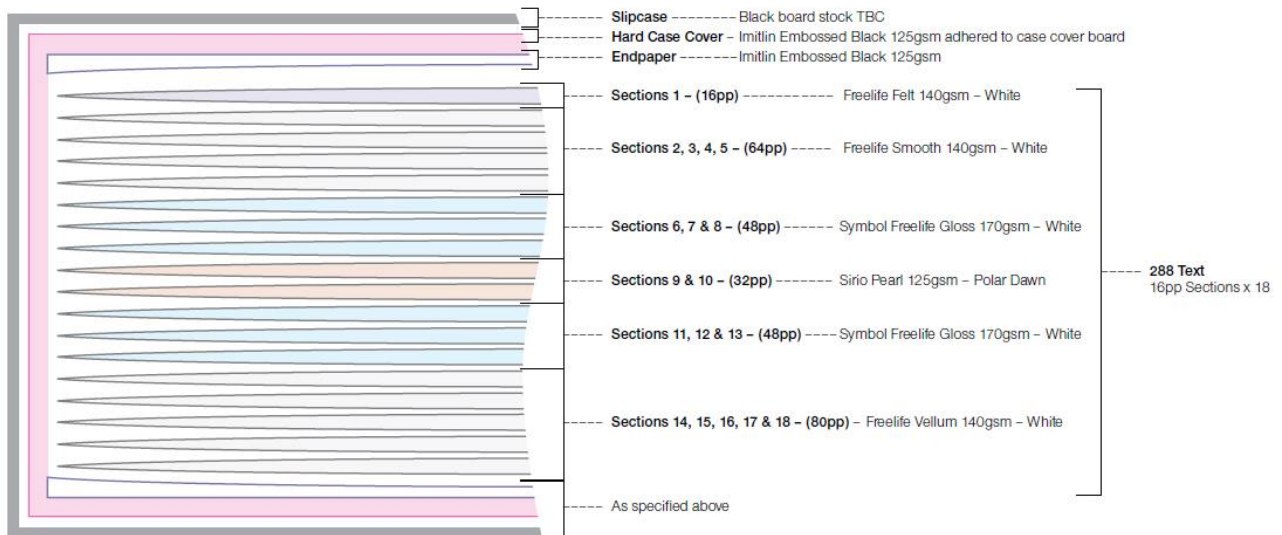


- micro laser cut
 - UV gloss
 - scratch and sniff almond varnish
 - gloss hot foil
 - embossing
 - typography types
 - gloss and silver laminations
 - matte and transparent silkscreen
 - thick silk screen to give the feeling of rough stone
- Besides, I added a real cotton thread glued with tiny dots of glue on one page, and I applied the reproduction of a poster on another page; also, a printed translucent sheet to enhance a picture of thin fabric has been inserted.



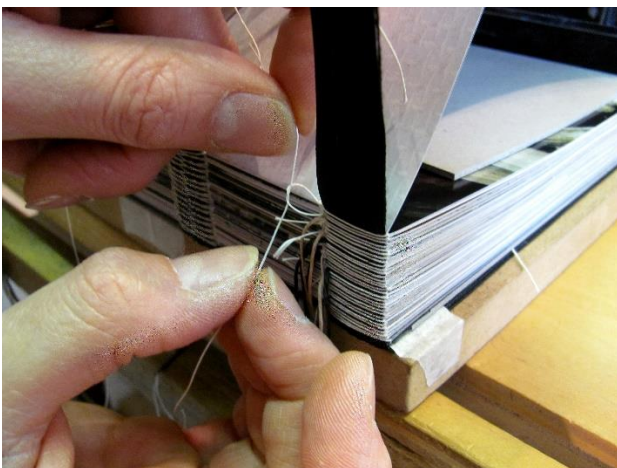
PAPER

All papers in the Milan Book are of incredible quality and have been provided by Spicers (Fedrigoni's Australian partner). Fontegrafica used many different papers, each time picking the one that they thought could best express the concept of that specific page. Just to mention some, they used Freelif Vellum, Symbol Freelif Gloss, Freelif Smooth and Freelif Felt, great papers which have contributed to the overall quality of the book.



BINDING

The meaning of my work was to reveal what's usually hidden inside a classical binding, as well as the book content reveals of Milan what's usually hidden to the first sight.



Hence, all the structural details, which allow the book to work well as an object to handle, are shown: the hand sewing on exposed double tapes with crossed stitch in linen thread; the structural headbands, which strengthen the head and tail of the spine; the lining of the back with a black gauze to protect the spine and secure the boards to the binding; the rounding of the spine to create the correct shape of the back and fore

edge of the book block, and to contain the thickness of the boards.

Some decorative details have been added: the black dye on the spine lining, the long double sewing bands which extend the spine material on the cover, and the black and turtledove long linen threads sewn together with the headbands.





The endpapers have been lined with a thick card to stabilize the attachment of the boards, using PVA mixed with starch paste, then the tapes and gauzes of the backing have been fixed to the joint of the endpapers, and the cover boards have been covered with the printed "Imitlin" using pure starch paste.

The last step has been the mounting of the boards on the book block, putting it in the press for a while.

The front board has an additional layer in black calf leather, which has been laser cut and applied around the board joint, and which falls free over the subject, partially showing what's underneath; it invites the reader to open it, unveiling the front cover and starting enjoying the book.

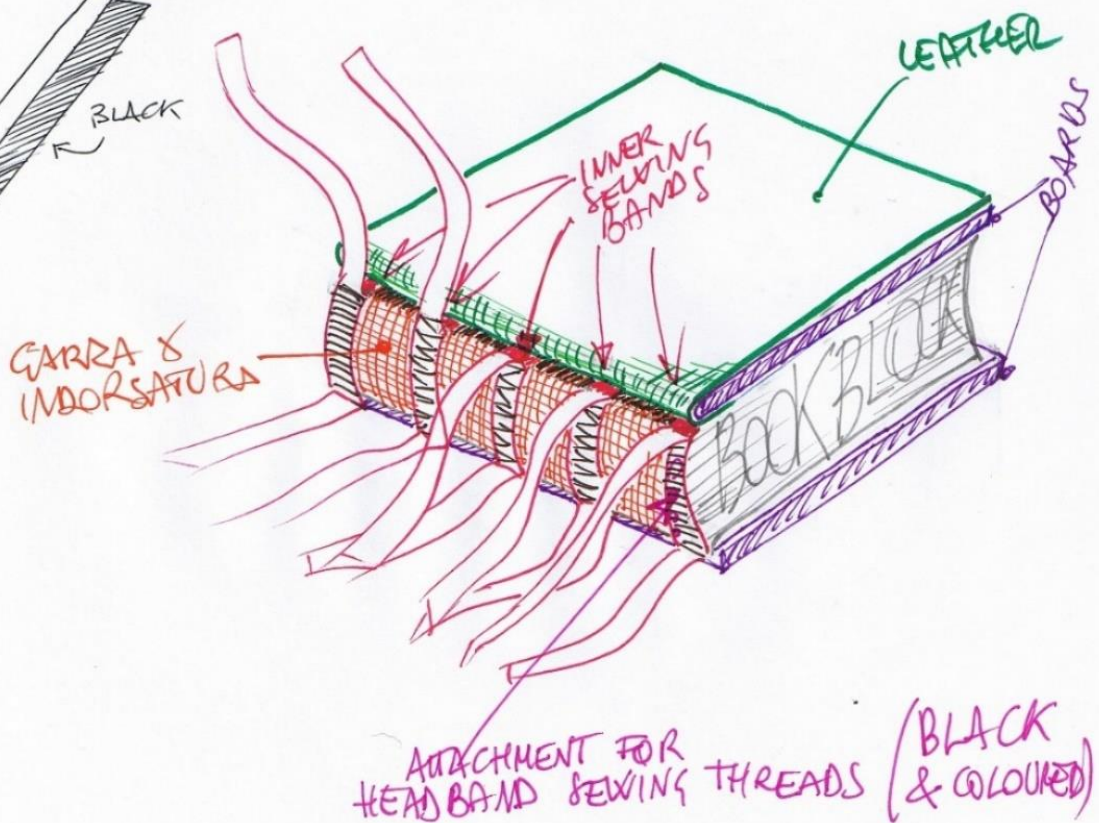
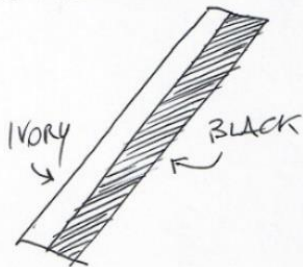
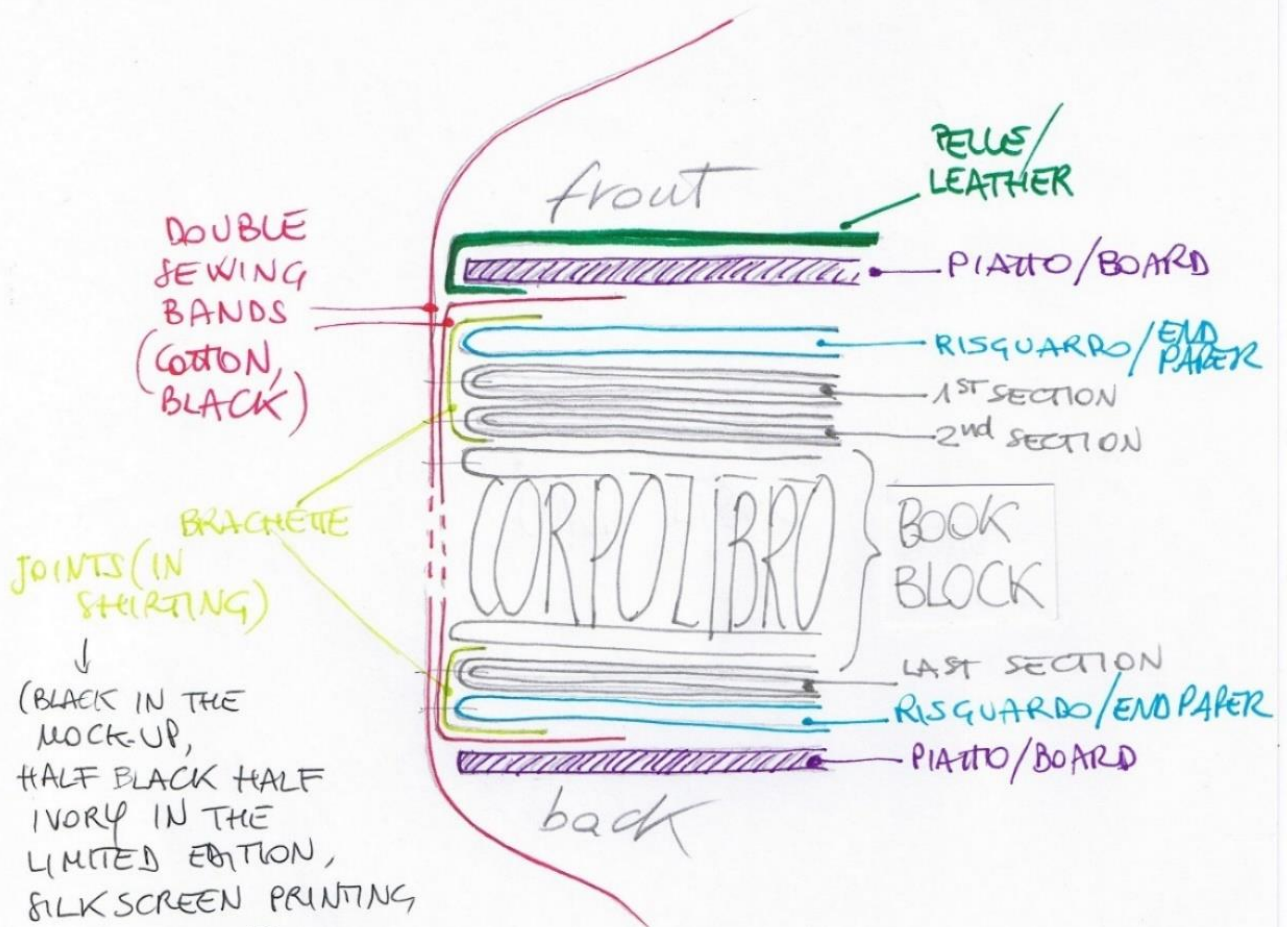


The binding has been completed trimming the sewing bands and the headband threads in different lengths, and gluing their points with mixed glue to avoid the raveling of the fibers.

CASE

The book is contained in a protective case in soft alpaca fabric, cut in one piece with a template and sewn to measure, which softly wraps the volume with four overlapping layers, and is closed by a black grosgrain ribbon.





Project 2 | IL GIARDINO È APERTO | 2015

Limited edition: 130 copies
signed by the authors
Size: 410 x 265 x 15 mm

The artist's book "The garden is open", born from the encounter between the artist Alessandra Angelini with the writer and historian of the gardens Paolo Cottini, tells, through the perfect union of the original graphic works and the unpublished texts, the garden of Vico Morcote in the Canton Ticino (CH), which Sir Peter Smithers designed, built and cared for in the last twenty years of his long and lively existence.



Alessandra Angelini, following a careful analysis of the texts by Cottini - who had the opportunity to frequent Sir Peter Smithers - and of numerous visits to the Morcote garden at different times of the year, has created a series of graphic works, preparatory drawings with Indian ink, photographs and computer processing. The format of the book corresponds to the golden proportion and is a tribute to the ethical and aesthetic lesson that Sir Smithers transmitted: Harmony and Beauty, like plants and flowers, are able to transform everyday life into the open garden of our dreams.

PRINTING TECHNIQUES

For the creation of the original intaglio prints contained in the book, the artist has chosen the UV rays engraving of photopolymer plates, and blind embossing with xylographic matrices.



The UV engraving, thanks to its technological and at the same time profoundly creative aspects has made it possible to transform photographs and drawings made "en plain air" into a graphic sign, sometimes combining photographic image and drawing in a process of hybridization of expressive modes, extremely involving.

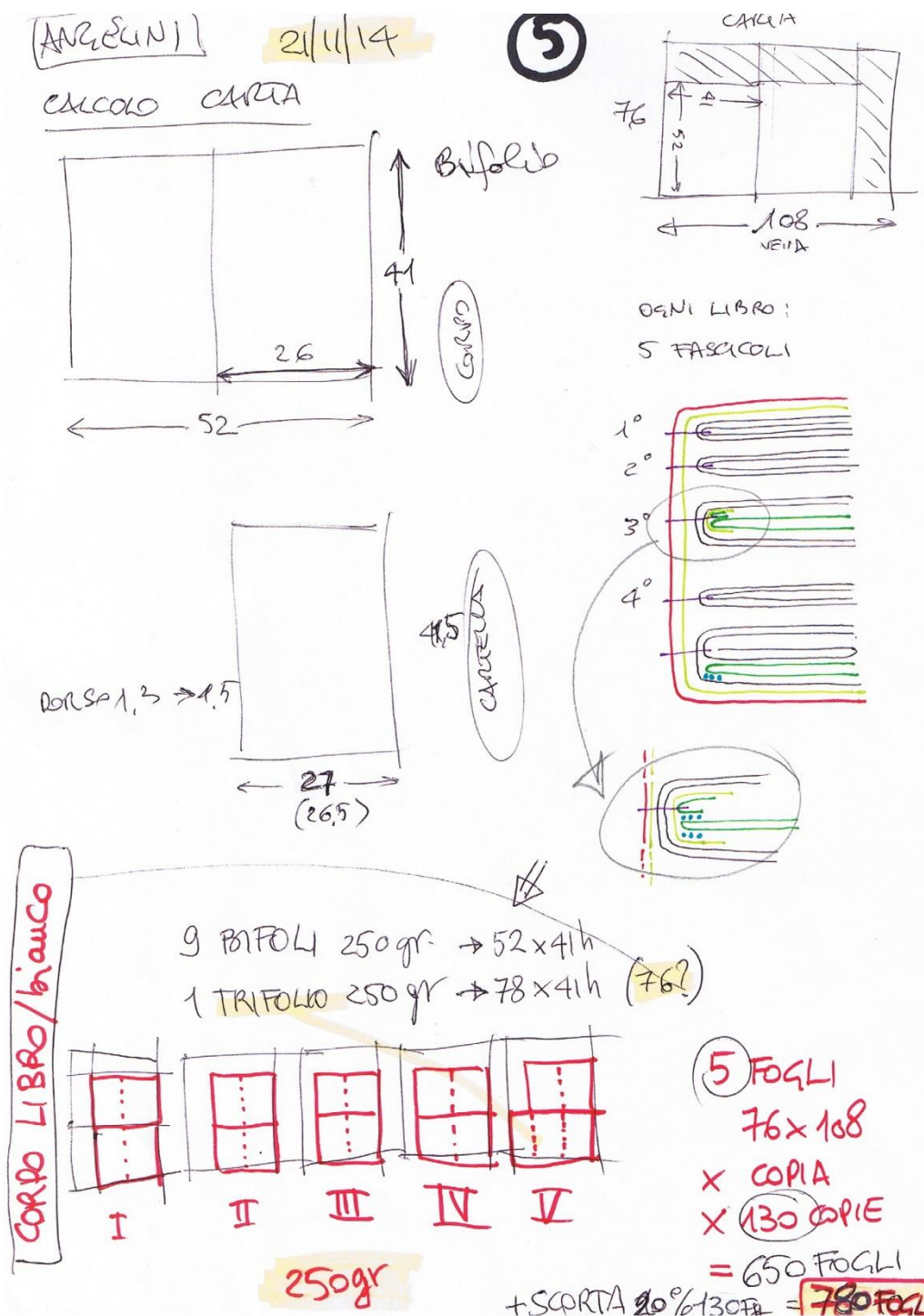
Blind embossing with woodcut matrices, conceived as a memory of the natural textures, accompany all the pages of the book, giving rhythm to the images and writings. The color, white and green of the pages and texts, lights up with sometimes slightly iridescent passages thanks to the Iridodin effect 300 Icy White ink.

The texts are composed in monotype using Baskerville 14 pt for the texts and 18pt for the titles, printed with green ink.

PAPER

One of the first things to do when designing a new art edition is to choose paper and calculate cuts and folds based on the size of the sheet and the desired size for the volume, as we try to preserve the deckle edges as much as possible, and respect the grain direction of the paper: in fact the chalcographic printing is carried out with wet paper, and therefore the lengthening of the fibers interferes hugely in the process, both for the printing register of the images and for the mechanical behavior of the pages.

This book has been printed in 130 copies, on pure cotton paper with raw edges, Zerkall Bütten 720, 250 gsm (pages) and 600 gsm (cover), Hahnemühle Bugra 130 gsm, dark green (central and final bifolios) and light green (endnotes). Cases made of Cordenons Wild Green 300 gsm.



BINDING

The binding is a long stitch sewing on slotted spine. Each book has 5 sections and two additional double sheets



in green watermarked paper. Each section has been scored and folded by hand, but not pressed too hard, to avoid losing the embossed blind print made on every page. The central plate, which is a full-page woodcut print, has been guarded pasting it to a double green strip shaped as a leaf, echoing the plants.

The inside of the spine has been lined in shirting, and the endpapers glued on top of the spine lining, so that the slots cut in the spine itself were strong enough to support the sewing threads.

Since the prints are inked “à la poupée” (ie in more colors placed by the printer directly on the plate), in many shades of green, blue, purple, the artist asked to dye the thread in different colors that recalled the shades of prints; this meant dyeing 650 meters of thread with iridescent colors in 5 tones, using alcohol-based felt pens and waxing the thread to ensure greater stability. In this way, each copy is really unique, since the arrangement of the thread and the color strokes is different for each sewing and therefore each spine has a different appearance.

CASE

The volume cover, in embossing-printed 600 gsm paper, is extremely delicate, so it was decided to make a soft case in 300gsm green paper, with two leaf-shaped panels designed by the artist, which wrap around the volume leaving a small part exposed; in addition, a wrapper band on the foot bears the title printed in typography.



Project 3 | TEMA E VARIAZIONI – Series 1-100 | 2016



Edition limited to 100 numbered copies of the first 100 illustrations from the Tema e Variazioni series by Piero Fornasetti, signed by Barnaba Fornasetti

Size: 410 x 360 x 70 mm

Introduction by Barnaba Fornasetti with texts by Gio Ponti, Alberto Manguel and Glenn O'Brien
Designed by Pomo.

In 1952 Piero Fornasetti began working on what would later become his most famous, iconic series: Tema e Variazioni (Theme and Variations). Starting out from a female portrait, he transforms it searching for different frames of mind. By 1966 the series includes already 299 variations.

That timeless face is the portrait of Lina Cavalieri, an opera singer who lived between the 19th and 20th centuries and who was considered “the most beautiful woman in the world”. A true archetype: resembling a Greek statue, she was the quintessential image of classical beauty, as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa and perfectly suited to Piero's creativity. What inspired him was not so much the singer's fame as the formal, artistic magnetism of her face. This portrait became Fornasetti's fundamental and most enduring motif.

His son Barnaba is perpetuating the tradition by continuing to produce and revive his father's work. Today the variations on the theme are almost 400.

With this book, that brings together the first 100 variations on the theme, he wanted to pay homage to the series and also to introduce a renewed excursion by Fornasetti into the world of the printed volume. Printing and publishing are actually part of Fornasetti's heart since the beginning.

Starting out as a printer, Piero worked on numerous books in a variety of forms, some as an artistic exercise, others printed with his friend, the publisher Vanni Scheiwiller, with whom in 1964 he created what might be considered the forerunner of this volume, in miniature.

For this particularly ambitious edition, the skills of many professional figures have been brought into synergy.

An extremely interesting path that best expressed the skills of each operator, with a team of more than twenty people involved in complex coordination work, with a huge amount of steps: study of materials, tests, mock-ups, technical checks on the behavior of the different papers, matrices tests with different techniques. The starting images were the files of the screen printing frames used to print the very famous ceramic dishes: it was necessary to find the correct way to transport them on brass plates, hence to go from the digital to the analog, however respecting dimensions, sharpness of the lines, depth of blacks...



In addition to the technical skills, it was fundamental to implement strategies for the optimization and calculation of the dimensions of the final work in relation to the initial material (for example, in order to preserve the deckle edge of the cotton paper used for the pages...), in addition to the organization of work spaces, the correct order of the processing steps to be followed, in order for the material to flow continuously from one workshop to another, starting from the first supplies of materials to the final steps of finishing the clamshell cases.

PRINTING TECHNIQUES

The original brass matrices are prepared with UV coating, engraved using the vintage technique of etching, and printed by hand with a chalcographic press by Daniela Lorenzi / Atelier A14.

The classic etching process was “corrupted” and rewritten through a combination of manual and digital processing. The brass plates were masked before engraving in order to restore the full graphic detail and depth of black lines that distinguish Fornasetti. The chalcographic printing technique is as described in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, using presses and methods that have remained unchanged ever since.

The texts are composed in monotype using Garamond 10 pt, 14 pt and 36 pt and printed in letterpress by Tipografia Rodolfo Campi.

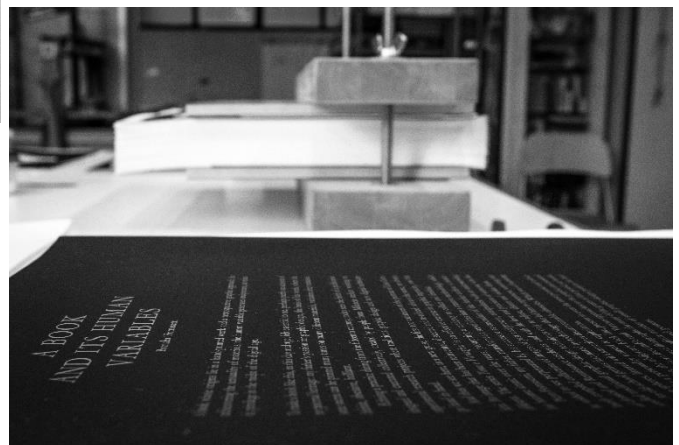


PAPER

The images are printed in black on white 100% cotton Hahnemühle 300 gsm paper, with deckle fore and tail edge and head edge trimmed in the guillotine, while the texts are printed in silver (to avoid the splash of white ink) on black Arjowiggins Curious Skin 135 gsm paper.



To mark a pause between the text and the images, a sheet of white Fedrigoni Pergamenata Stucco 140 gsm paper is guarded around the first white gathering.



The inner limp cover that acts as a support structure for the sewing, has almost the appearance of an architecture, with a very strong graphic value that interacts with the book. On the front it has the title printed in typography in gloss black ink.

BINDING

Known as “long stitch binding”, with white (for the white sections) and red (for the black sections) linen satin laid Campbell’s thread, it is derived from the classic long stitch method used since Middle Age to bind archive documents and volumes with paper or parchment covers. Traditionally done with just two sets of stitches on the spine, it was slightly altered on this occasion, cutting slots in the spine and creating also a sort of “structural” headband, also adding a red leather string at the head and tail of the book to support the spine material. The knots of the threads have been deliberately left visible inside the sections: the structure is on display, transforming it into a graphic feature that flaunts technique and manual dexterity.



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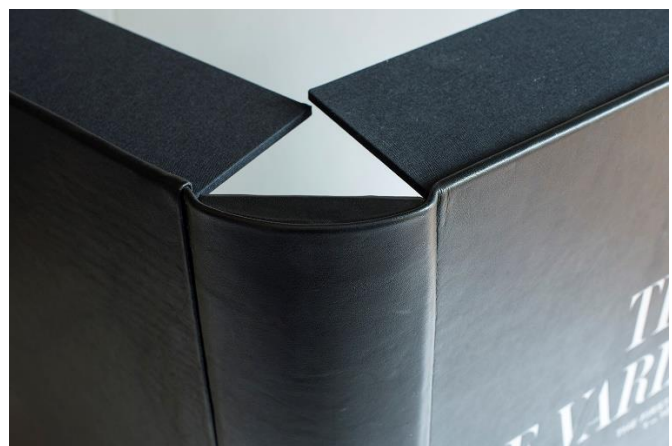
The book spine, that supports the sewing, forms a single body with the flexible cover, made in black Arjowiggins Curious Skin 380 gsm; it is lined inside with two layers. The first is in black shirting, extended over the joint in a portion of the back cover, then hidden underneath an additional sheet of 380 gsm card, to strengthen the spine, as the book block is quite heavy; the second layer is in white Hahnemühle 300 gsm paper, so that opening the book there are not black lines visible between the sections.

Then, the whole flexible back cover is glued inside of a handmade book hard cover in black canvas, produced by Legatoria De Stefanis, which has one of the matrices embedded in the front board: the matrices become a component of the cover, giving each book a different appearance. The number of each copy corresponds to the number of the illustration etched on the matrix.



CASE

The volume is encased in a handmade clamshell in leather and velvet produced by L.O.C.E., with silver hot stamping of the titles.



FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL AND BACK

In the last years, in various countries digital techniques applied to analog printing have started to be used; although analog tools and techniques remain irreplaceable for many reasons in the field of original printmaking, they can obviously benefit greatly from the so-called contamination between the various traditional techniques and the new digital instruments that today are developing quickly and visibly.

For over twenty years A14 has been devoted to the production and promotion of original print projects and contemporary art publishing. Together with A14 we produce limited edition publications, artist books, and research projects with artists for institutions, museums, galleries or private customers in Italy and abroad. A14's trademark consists in the alliance, used as a creative instrument, between the traditional, technical heritage of manual printing press analog methods and the full potential of new digital technologies with numeric control machines.

Daniela Lorenzi has selected for us some examples.

Traditional copper plate



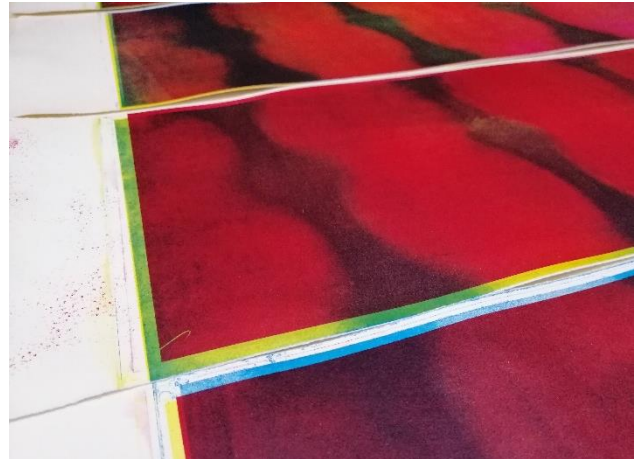
Traditional etching prints



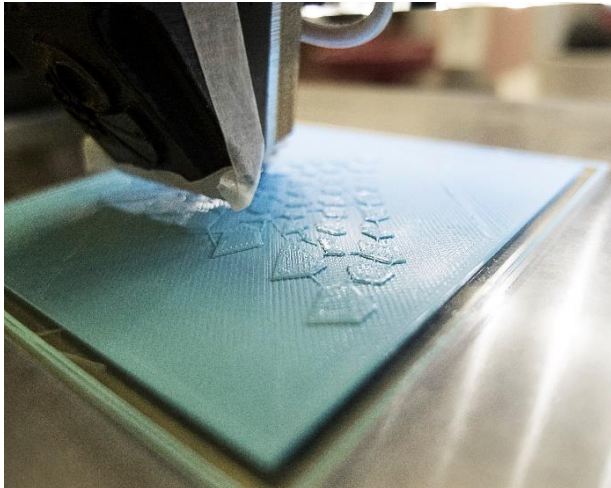
Pronto plate lithography in the making



Pronto plate lithography prints, four colours



3D plate making



3D plate and prints



Lasercut on wood and print



Lasercut directly on paper



Lasercut on plexi and fine art mix prints



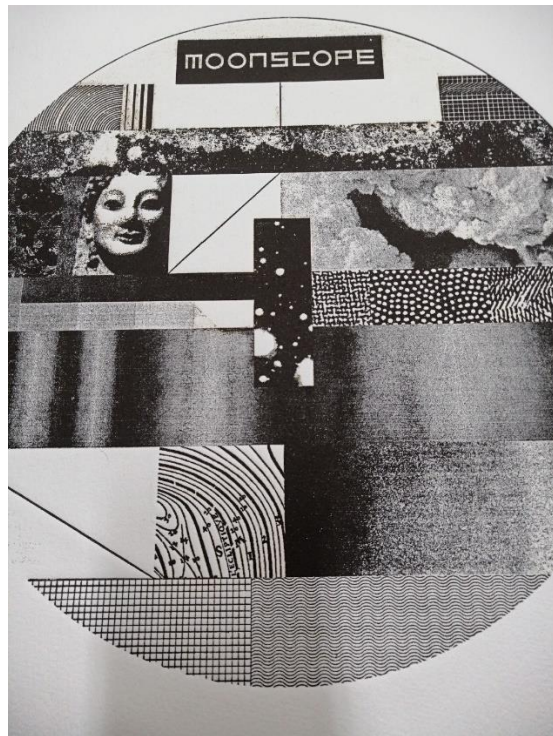
Fine art prints



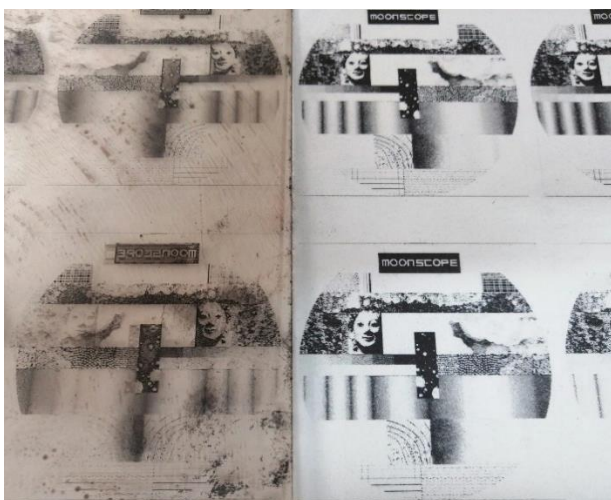
Linoleum lasercut print



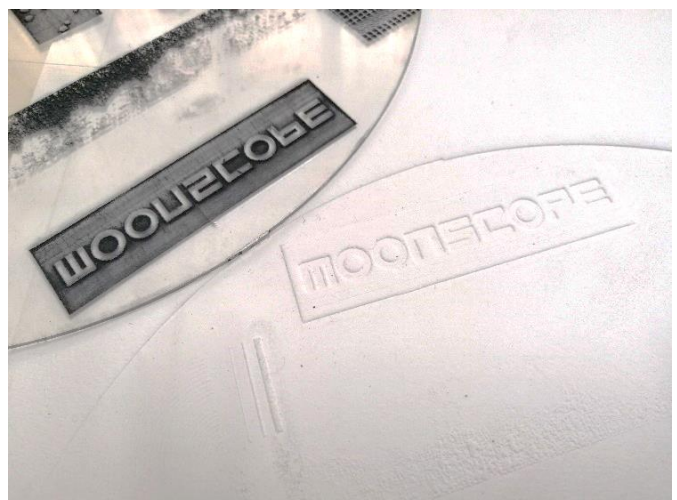
Wood lasercut print



Plexiglas lasercut plate and print



Plexiglas lasercut plate and blind embossing



Fine art and brass matrix engraved with etching



Lasercut on brass plate print



Photopolymer plates and prints



Acrylic lasercut plates



Special thanks

A heartfelt thanks to all those who helped me to collect photos and documentation of the projects, in particular to Daniela Lorenzi (A14), Gianluca Craca and Giancarlo Migliavacca (Fontegrafica), Valeria Manzi and Chiara Zanesi (Fornasetti), Rodolfo Campi (Tipografia Campi Monotype), as well as Bindy Wollen and Alan Hall for their patience in the organizational steps.

Thanks also to Giulia Gatti (Fedrigoni Italia) for assisting me in finding the papers needed to prepare the samples you received, and to my friend Cristina Negrisola for her valuable help in preparing the aforementioned samples. Without all of them, this lecture would not have succeeded.

Videos

You can find and share the video of the Tema e Variazioni book with Barnaba Fornasetti at the following links:

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/-p95KAOZhNA>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/162350507>

And the detailed video of the book:

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/vBvL4o2A8sw>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/206080468>

The video about Tipografia Campi Monotype can be found on Vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/261335844>

Sitography

<https://www.cristinabalbianodaramengo.net>

<https://www.professionelibro.it>

<http://www.a14.br.com>

<https://www.tipografiacampi.it>

<http://www.fontegrafica.it>

<http://www.fornasetti.com/en/thebook>

Handout assembled only for delegates attending the Educational & Training Conference 2019 organized by the Society of Bookbinders in Bath, UK, August 29th / September 1st, 2019.

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