

ART + CULTURE

Antonio Signorini's Attraverso show marks the opening of Oblong Contemporary Gallery in Florence

Contemporary Florence takes flight in piazza del Carmine, piazza San Firenze + piazza del Grano.

BY **Marisa Garreffa**

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The message is clear: **contemporary art is gaining further ground in Florence**. Not only do we have a **new gallery to celebrate** (more about that in a minute), but the city is putting its money where its mouth is with innovative partnerships to install more freely accessible **public art interventions**. The squares of Florence are currently dancing with the elegant figures of **warriors, dancers and horses**, carrying with them hope, lightness and the energy of life. *Attraverso* is the work of **Antonio Signorini**, a Tuscany-born artist who has returned home to showcase seven monumental sculptures in the streets of **Florence**, with a collection of smaller pieces in the new Florence seat of global contemporary art gallery, **OBLONG**.



Antonio Signorini's Attraverso exhibition. Ph. Andrea Paoletti

There is a risk with public art that it can be swallowed up by the square or stick out like a crude *cough*, especially in a city like Florence where the architecture and history are so commanding. Over the years, we could say that Florence has survived as many public art interventions as it has celebrated. **But the works of Signorini are an immediate success**. They soar with full presence, their elegant lines and mythological themes conversing perfectly with the ancient materiality of the city, a contrast in style and form that is still beautifully complimentary.

We must not be surprised. **Signorini is Tuscany-born**, and has been developing and showing his works in **Dubai** and **Forte dei Marmi** across the decades, bringing his inner sensibility of home and history into conversation with new spaces: from the intensity of Dubai's futuristic cities to the power of the seaside, where the forces of nature challenge artists to live up to the power of their evocative landscapes. To then bring these works to the heart of Florence is proof that this cross-temporal and cross-cultural artistic discussion can find its place and inspire around the world, including the challenging backdrop of the Renaissance city itself.

“Attraverso, an adverb and preposition that in the Italian language introduces a nomadic, deliberately unstable image, and returns to the sense of the journey that is one of the most important ideal-types in Mediterranean culture and beyond. It seemed the best word to unite warriors, dancers and horses.”

Luca Beatrice, curator



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In **piazza San Firenze**, **piazza del Carmine** and **piazza del Grano**, horses take flight, dancers leap and long slender figures stretch their way seemingly beyond the very limits of the city's iconic architecture, streaming with a lightness that casts the eyes upwards as our own bodies seem to stretch taller in response to the grand images. But these are images of contrast; to create flight, the sculptures must be balanced by the solid pressure of a counterweight, yet somehow the bases remain almost invisible, so completely is the eye drawn by the lithe and powerful dancing figures above.

Signorini tells me that his figures show how we must “move through the difficulties, perhaps with worries, but we try to fly. **Everything is equilibrium**, everything is against gravity, and that's quite hard to do, especially with the big pieces that you see out in the square. They are quite unusual because, historically, horses are shown on their back legs since they have more strength to balance the sculpture. But these ones are flying downwards. Each has the name of a star and they are coming down from the universe. They bring us life. In different cultures all over the world there are horses that fly: Pegasus, the Greeks, the Romans, there is a specific Indian culture as well. To me, they are coming from the universe, and bringing that message of life. **This is a second Renaissance, and I'm glad that Florence can accept this art!**”



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Power cedes to a more intimate beauty, as we move inside the doors of new gallery, **OBLONG**, which has taken over the old Cavalli supper club in piazza del Carmine and transformed the space into a modern luxury gallery experience. For the opening night, all three spaces of the gallery are heaving, bodies brushing against the slender bronze cast forms of Signorini, which gently sway but never move. This is how monumental art must be. It must dance with the movement of bodies and retain its magic even as the crowd moves near and far, in mass or in single curious figures.

The works of Signorini are in fine company. OBLONG represents an exceptional selection of contemporary artists from across the globe. Pop-coloured sculptures of playful girls by South Korean artist **Youn Kyoung Cho** giggle and cheek beside the weight of marble angles and curves in abstract sculptures by Colombian artist **Gustavo Vélez**. Almost the entire top floor is dedicated to the philosophical miniature universes of **Stefano Bombardieri** as tiny figures haul the weight of elephants, rhinoceroses and whales. In photographs by Israeli artist **Yinon Gal-on**, richly coloured beauty is captured when famous fashion models plunge beneath the surface of water, experiencing in that moment the relief of silence and peace from the chaos of their worlds.



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Venetian artist **Gianfranco Meggiato** is there for the opening and describes how his curving sculptures of dark and gold are created purely from instinct, an exploration of the void and the space between, which leads us to the gold core in the centre from which all is reflected, a constantly changing image of our interior senses. “The essence is that even in the most difficult moments, on the contrary, *especially* in the most difficult moments, they are the times that can serve you the most to change. The message is to live life anyway in a positive way, even if you have intricate and difficult experiences, because maybe in that moment no one understands, it is exactly the breakthrough in your life.”

There are more artists in the collection, but I advise you to visit for yourself and discover them all. Walking the Oblong collection, you will feel the balance of depth and whimsy, playfulness and viscerally experience the collective thirst for new visions and life that can bring us together in a refreshed and inspired conversation through the public space. **There is an overwhelming sense of hope, light and beauty**. As fine arts public relations expert **Rosi Fontana** reminds me, “Remember, **all art was once contemporary!** All of the great Renaissance artists were once the contemporary artists of the time, so we must thank the past while serving the artists of now. We are bringing the contemporary into Florence. The next step is for Florence to begin to commission new contemporary work.”

I, for one, totally agree.

Attraverso. **Antonio Signorini** is sponsored by the City of Florence and Oblong Contemporary Art Gallery in Dubai, Forte dei Marmi and FlorencePiazza del Carmine, piazza San Firenze + piazza del Grano

Until January 31, 2023

OBLONG Gallery: piazza del Carmine 8/R



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