



# Urbino's Graffiti From the Wall to the Exhibition

Manuele Marraccini

Independent Scholar (<manumarra90@gmail.com>)

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## Abstract

The article traces a journey which started with my MA thesis and has become a tangible reality in the pathway through the exhibition *La pietra racconta. Un palazzo da leggere* (Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche 29 marzo-21 maggio 2017). The cooperation of many specialists (historians, information technology specialists, photographers, graphic designers and communicators) has made it possible to realize this project. A hidden story has been revealed thanks to different media in order to offer the public a multimedia visit, an innovative and pioneering learning experience.

Keywords: *Database, Engravings, Light, Photography, 3D*

## 1. Introduction

The idea for my thesis arose during my first visit to Urbino's Palazzo Ducale, when my attention was drawn not only to the works of art, but also to the architecture of the Palace itself. While walking through the doors, looking at their frames and architraves, I noticed some engraved writings and, as a visitor, I realized that, in fact, writings and drawings covered the whole building (figure 1). These engravings, evidence left by different authors and dating from different times (between the sixteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries) instantly caught my attention, and so the idea of devoting my thesis to the study of such drawings and writings was born. After reading Raffaella Sarti's texts, I devoted attention to many of the actual graffiti and, on 1st April 2015, I discussed an MA thesis in Cultural Heritage Photography entitled *Un Palazzo da Leggere* (Marraccini 2015).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All photographs are by the author.





Figure 1 – Graffiti on one of the walls in the main entrance to the Palace

## 2. The Project *'La pietra racconta. Un palazzo da leggere'* ('Stone with a Story. Reading the Palace')

My thesis was based on advanced photographic techniques that allowed me to closely analyse the graffiti. Although in my dissertation I examined only the graffiti of a few rooms (the first in the guided tour of the Palace), through pictures and digital design my project was the starting point of a bigger project focused on many aspects of this phenomenon which paid particular attention to the educational aspect: the project *'La pietra racconta. Un palazzo da leggere'* ('Stone with a Story. Reading the Palace'). The outcome was an interactive exhibition that employed a multimedia platform and QR codes as links to the cataloguing of engravings (figure 2).



Figure 2 – The thesis (left) and the exhibition catalogue (right)

The first step of this project was a photographic overview of the whole building (including parts that are normally closed to the public). These first pictures were subsequently sorted and arranged thematically.

About a hundred of the most meaningful engravings were selected to properly describe the phenomenon and a database of positions and categories was created. The classification used for the database is the same that appears in sections of the exhibition, of the exhibition catalogue and of the website (Sarti *et al.* 2017).<sup>2</sup>

In terms of photographic techniques, the work was challenging as it required the use of advanced techniques, macro lenses and appropriate lighting, in order to capture all the details. One of the techniques employed was that of radiating light (direct light shone on the surface). This procedure is used in artistic diagnostics to study surface decay in works of art, but in this particular case, the 'damage' itself was the object of our analysis. As the best way to study the engravings proved to be using direct lighting from the bottom up, a supporting structure was created to speed up the operations (figure 3).



Figure 3 – A high-resolution image (left), all the files making up such an image (top right), the magnification of a detail (bottom right)

Since the graffiti are quite small, it was necessary to take images using a macro lens. Despite the advantages of this technique, a single macro image can show only a small section of the item photographed, so multiple pictures of each item had to be joined together using specific software (Autopano). Through this technique, it has been possible to achieve high-quality images showing both the whole item and its smallest details (figure 4).

<sup>2</sup> *La pietra racconta. Un palazzo da leggere* (Palazzo Ducale, Urbino, 29 March-21 May 2017), <<http://www.isiurbino.net/palazzodaleggere/>>, accessed 10 January 2020.



The use of these techniques made it possible to obtain 2D images, but the project included an even deeper study thanks to high-precision 3D scanning using GOM technology.<sup>4</sup> GOM scanner technology is one of the most precise techniques available: it allow us to analyze every single point of the surface observed. All the different parts are then merged together thanks to a specific capability of software and a single image is thus created. Measure 3D<sup>5</sup> (a company specializing in 3D scanning) made an extremely important contribution to the project by working in detail on all the data. These images were available both at the exhibition (through touch screens) and on the website. Océ<sup>6</sup> (a company specializing in 3D printing) created 3D prototypes of these images (either in their original size or on a larger scale) adding a further level of experience for the visitors. Thanks to this, in fact, even visually-impaired visitors were able to access and enjoy the exhibition (figure 6).



Figure 6 – The GOM system during data acquisition

### *3. An Innovative Exhibition*

The exhibition was organized in record time, thanks to the cooperation of many specialists (historians, information technology specialists, photographers, graphic designers and communicators), who created an organic product illustrating five hundred years of untold history (figure 7). The show allowed the public to interact with the Palace through different media specifically created for all kind of visitors (from the least to the most expert).

The exhibition was open to the public from 29 March to 21 May 2017, but has had a lasting impact on the Palace, thanks to the guided tour created with QR codes, which allowed visitors

<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.gom.com/it/sistemi-di-metrologia/atos.html>>, accessed 10 January 2020.

<sup>5</sup> <<http://www.measure3d.it/>>, accessed 10 January 2020.

<sup>6</sup> <<https://www.oce.com/the-genius-of-the-great-masters-at-your-fingertips>>, accessed 10 January 2020.

to discover the history of the engravings by simply using their smartphones.<sup>7</sup> In this way, not only could people visit the Palace and its works of art but they could also follow a path through the rooms, thus giving new life and value to engravings which would otherwise be difficult to notice and delving even more deeply into the Palace history. Furthermore, the virtual tour is still available on the internet.<sup>8</sup> In conclusion, this exhibition was, to my knowledge, the first to cover this topic in Italy (if we exclude prehistoric and contemporary graffiti). It is hoped it will be a starting point for a deeper study of and more careful attention to these signs, not only in order to preserve them, but also to develop a new area of study that could give a new view of the past, a new way to see history, as the sum of many small pieces of evidence left by its protagonists.



Figure 7 – The poster of the exhibition

<sup>7</sup> See figure 3, Rachiele in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> *La pietra racconta. Un palazzo da leggere*, <<http://www.isiurbino.net/palazzodaleggere/>>, accessed 10 January 2020.

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