

Chiara Nicolini visits a press that is making its name by creating unique collaborations with a wide variety of artists

Roberto Dossi is probably the youngest Italian owner of a fine press, but he has the skills of a man who has created books all his life. He has worked on around 120 volumes, although he is not yet 40. His experience with typesetting helped Luciano Ragozzino to launch his Il Ragazzo Innocuo press (Illustration 34) and he started producing his own books while sharing the vast ground floor of Ragozzino's villa in via Guinizzelli 14, Milan – a former 1940s ice cream factory (the colophons of the books by both printers say “Ex Gelateria di via Guinizzelli 14” (“Ex Ice Cream Factory, 14 Guinizzelli Street”). Although Dossi now prints in his workshop in Merate, near Milan, he has kept the “Ex Gelateria” colophon.

Dossi has been making books and writing poetry since childhood. In his early twenties he met the printer Alberto Casiraghi, whose Edizioni Pulcinoelefante press has issued nearly 9,000 booklets in the past 30 years (see Illustration 12). Casiraghi taught Dossi how to typeset and print with movable types. This apprenticeship enabled Dossi to operate Ragozzino's Fag press, which he used to print the first of his Quaderni di Orfeo (“the notebooks of Orpheus”) editions: Rainer Maria Rilke's *Requiem per un'amica* (Requiem for a friend) on 2 November 2003 (fig 1).

Rilke's work has been an endless source of inspiration for Dossi, as well as the initial *raison d'être* of the Quaderni di Orfeo, which was founded with the specific aim of printing Rilke's compositions. The name Quaderni di Orfeo is a combination of the titles of Rilke's novel *I quaderni di Malte Laurids Brigge* (“The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge”) and his collection of 55 sonnets *Sonetti a Orfeo*. The logo of Quaderni di Orfeo – a bird with a lyre-shaped tail that lays an egg which is the “O” of “Orfeo” (fig 2) – was invented and engraved by Ragozzino and appeared for the first time in book 3 of the Quaderni series.

Requiem per un'amica is a poem written by Rilke in 1908



1 and 3
Front cover and plate by Luciano Ragozzino for R M Rilke's *Requiem per un'amica*, the first book printed by Quaderni di Orfeo (November 2003)

2
The press's logo was engraved by Ragozzino and used from book 3 of the Quaderni series

4-5
Stefano Turrini's copper sculptures for *Doppiamente* (March 2006) and for the box of Roberto Dossi's *Opera in rosso* (May 2009)

on the premature death of his painter friend Paula Becker. It took a long time for Dossi and Ragozzino, who illustrated it with an aquatint (fig 3), to complete this edition, which was hand-printed in Garamond types on Hahnemühle paper. The 60 numbered copies were signed both by its translator Dario Borso and Ragozzino. These typefaces and paper are a recurring feature in the five Quaderni di Orfeo series: *Quaderni*, *Ottavo*, *Euridice*, *Assolo* and *Quadernetti*.

Quaderni and *Assolo* consist of previously unpublished texts hand-printed on different types of paper (mostly Hahnemühle, but also Graphia, Alcantara and Arches) and in varying typefaces (mostly Garamond, but also Bodoni, Normanno, Bastoni, Aster, Linea and Forma e Millerighe), in a number of formats. Their limitation varies from around 30 to a maximum of 101 copies. Both series are beautifully illustrated with a wide range of techniques.

Quadernetti and *Ottavo*, on the other hand, are not illustrated. They contain previously unpublished poems and are hand-printed on Hahnemühle paper. They have a fixed format and limitation of 99 and 150 copies respectively.

Euridice, which includes only three titles so far, contains previously unpublished translations of poems hand-printed on Hahnemühle paper, illustrated with one plate, and limited to 150 copies. Two of the three titles were translated by Marco Rota, curator of both the *Euridice* and *Ottavo* series. He met Dossi at a book fair and joined him in 2005. Dossi regards him as a valuable collaborator: Rota works on each project helping to choose new authors and updating the Quaderni di Orfeo website, which he set up.

For Dossi, every new book is a unique undertaking. His books are exquisite not just because they are the work of great authors and artists and are hand-made with the finest materials. They stand out because their conception, development and the final result are flawless. Dossi aims to make books that nobody else could make. This applies to many works in the Quaderni cycle, which includes 65 titles so far. Stefano Turrini's



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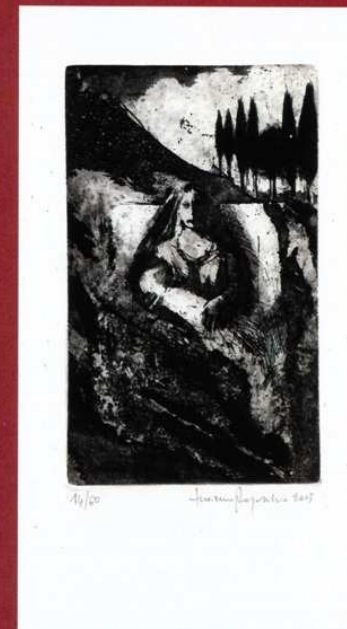
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6
Dossi's *In tre Atti* (April 2010) is printed in black, red and yellow and illustrated with three matching sculptures by Turrini

7
Dolores Previtali's terracotta sculpture for Rino Bertini's *La Terra Verticale* (March 2009)



3



9 Linocut on the cover of Sergio Borriani's *Forte Vibrar di Motori* (April 2007)

10 One of four original pencil drawings by Borriani in all copies of *Forte Vibrar di Motori*

11 The frontispiece of *Forte Vibrar di Motori*

Doppiamente ("Doubly", March 2006, 50 copies) was the first "book object" in the series: it contains three coloured copper sculptures by its Florentine author (fig 4), who later made similar contributions for a number of texts written by Dossi, including *Opera in Rosso* ("Work in red", May 2009, 33 copies) (fig 5) and *In tre Atti* ("In three acts", April 2010, 35 copies). The latter is printed in black, red and yellow on Alcantara paper and illustrated with three matching sculptures by Turrini (fig 6).

Other impressive Quaderni di Orfeo publications that contain sculptures are Rino Bertini's *La Terra Verticale* ("Vertical land", March 2009, 40 copies) and Gabriele Geminiani's *Stanze del Caos* ("Chambers of chaos", October 2009, 33 copies). These are both preserved in wooden boxes built by Dossi, who oversees most phases of each project. *La Terra Verticale* encloses a terracotta sculpture by Dolores Previtali (fig 7), while on the cover of the box of *Stanze del Caos* there is a group of objects Geminiani found on the beach (fig 8). Of course this means that each copy has a different cover.

Unique copies within the same edition is typical of a number of other Quaderni titles illustrated with original drawings. Sergio Borriani's *Forte Vibrar di Motori* ("Loud vibrations of motors", April 2007, 50 copies) contains four original pencil drawings (figs 9 and 10) that decorate in a simple but powerful way Charles A. Lindenberg's sentence "Sono stato nell'eternità e sono tornato" ("I have been into eternity and I have come back"). This is not the shortest in the series – some of the Quaderni di Orfeo books contain a single word. Dossi likes to play with words, metaphorically and literally: their arrangement on the pages is always inventive and a beautiful example of this is *Forte Vibrar di Motori*'s title page (fig 11).

The first of these books with single-word texts was *Ascolto* ("Listening", June 2004, 40 copies), which was illustrated with original artwork by Paola Fonticoli, an artist who also contributed original artwork to Dossi's *Ombre Luci* ("Shadow lights", September 2009, 40 copies) and to Philippe Jacottet's *Nuvole* ("Clouds", March 2010, 60 copies) (figs 12 and 13).

Photographer Simona Uberto has also collaborated with Dossi. Her book, *Dove?* ("Where?", February 2012, 30 copies) consists of loose Graphia paper leaves on to which Dossi has printed in Bastoni the short text "Dove stiamo andando? Sempre verso casa" ("Where are we going? Always towards home"). The illustrations are silhouettes partly printed, partly

pasted on to the pages. A further silhouette was cut out from the front of the white Plexiglas slipcase and pasted on a wide sheet of orange paper inserted into the book (fig 14).

Dossi has also made books with famous artists including Emilio Isgrò, Azuma Kenjiro and the sculptor Mauro Staccioli. Isgrò is famous for his "deletions" (see *Illustration 34*). He created with Dossi a couple of books, one of which is *Ho Cancellato l'Incancellabile* ("I have deleted what was undeletable", September 2007, 65 copies), which comprises two complementary volumes, the first with "deletions" pasted on to the printed text, the second without deletions (fig 15). Both are preserved in a cloth box.

Azuma Kenjiro's *La Forma del Vuoto* ("The shape of emptiness", July 2008, 55 copies, fig 16) deals with the idea of "emptiness", a fundamental element in the art of this Japanese sculptor who has lived in Italy since 1956. The book was printed with wooden typefaces, illustrated with a hand-coloured cardboard sculpture and original pencil drawings by Azuma, and placed in a wooden box made by Dossi. Both Isgrò's and Azuma's editions were conceived by Rota.

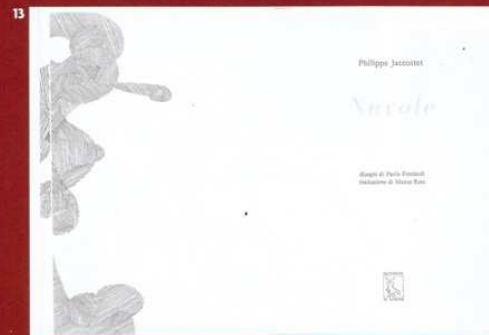
Mauro Staccioli is known for creating enormous circular or pointed sculptures placed in specific urban or rural landscapes. He often works with the concept of equilibrium. Dossi loves Staccioli's art and studied it for many years. When Dossi asked the artist to make a book, Staccioli wrote a short text and drew series of sketches. Dossi arranged these to create *Intervento* ("Intervention", July 2012, 37 copies), a book illustrated with pointy coloured shapes pasted on to Hahnemühle leaves (fig 17), and also including a painted metal sculpture.

The progress of the Quaderni di Orfeo since the production of *Requiem per un'amica* is extraordinary. Dossi ascribes this to the fact that each book is a collaborative artwork and that each collaborator has made a unique contribution to the growth of his little press. He is now working on his first photographic book, Raffaele Bonuomo's *Neve* ("Snow"), which will be limited to 35 copies containing a short poem by Isabelle Levesque and illustrated with 10 photographs by Bonuomo printed on bromide paper.

Dossi is happiest creating books in his small workshop, which is crammed with beautiful things. He has, however, taken part into a number of important exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The most recent was held in March and April in Lugano.



8 The box cover of Gabriele Geminiani's *Stanze del Caos* holds a group of objects found by Geminiani on the beach. Every box is different



12 Roberto Dossi's *Ombre Luci* (September 2009) with original artwork by Paola Fonticoli



13 Original ink artwork by Paola Fonticoli on the cover of Philippe Jacottet's *Nuvole* (March 2010)



14

14 Plexiglas slipcase, colophon, and the orange leaf containing a cut-out silhouette in Simona Uberto's *Dove?* (February 2012)



15

15 Two leaves from Emilio Isgrò's *Ho Cancellato l'incancellabile* (September 2007): on the left is the volume with 'deletions', on the right is the same sentence without deletions the bees were engraved by Ragozzino



16 Azuma Kenjiro's *La Forma del Vuoto* (July 2008). The drop is a recurring theme in Azuma's art

17 Three double-page leaves from Mauro Staccioli's *Intervento* (July 2012)

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