

'Drappellone: the prized asset', Frantoi, 13 December 2017



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## Drappellone: the prized asset

People are often surprised when they find out that the only prize awarded in the Palio di Siena is the Drappellone – a vertical drape. Given the passion and intensity of this extraordinary horse race, one would expect hefty prize money after a race, but in Siena all you get is the Palio (the actual name of the drape).

Made of silk, the Drappellone carries enormous symbolism and is wrapped in tradition and regulation. A new Drappellone is commissioned for each of the 2 Palio races every year – one dedicated to the Madonna of Provenzano (2 July) and one dedicated to the Assumption of Mary (16 August). Each Drappellone is commissioned to an artist, but must include many elements that represent the Palio, the contrade running the race, the town and more. We were lucky to be present at the unveiling of the last Drappellone, painted by Anglo-Balinese artists Sintia Tantra, who brought modernity and her unique style to this old tradition. She was kind enough to share a few words with the Cold Press about Siena, Italian food, her art, the Drappellone and more.

**You are a British Artist, of Balinese descent and born in New York. Are your strongest influences from your past or your present?**

I'm inspired by both the past and present... and although I live and work in London and may appear Western in many ways, I would say I'm probably more Balinese in spirit. In Bali, much of the Hindu religion is based on Buddhism – they believe in the importance of recognising both good and evil, past and present, creating harmony and balance.

We are based in Italy, a country that perpetually looks to its past for reassurance. You were recently commissioned to create the Palio, the flag that is awarded to the winning Contrada of the famous horse race in Siena. How was it working on a contemporary commission for such a traditional event?

It's a challenge for any contemporary artist responding to this brief. There are so many complex elements to include such as the ten contradae, the Terzi, Madonna of the Assumption, the symbol of the Mayor. Many of these rules seem so alien for a contemporary artist – especially for a non-Italian one such as myself.

However, I kept in mind something the Mayor told me after my first meeting. He expressed how I should really take ownership of the work and to make the drappellone mine – for it to be recognised as a 'Sinta Tantra', even from far away. So although the framework remains traditional, whilst designing it I focused more on inserting my own identity into the flag.

What were the main challenges on working on the drappellone?

For an abstract geometric artist, the biggest challenge was having to include figurative elements.

For the Madonna of the Assumption, I represented the figure as a linear drawing based on an early Renaissance painting I found by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. The sculpture of Sappho by Giovanni Dupré on the other hand, was based on drawing illustrations by Andy Warhol from the 1950's – I wanted to add a layer of 'pop art' and 50's nostalgia into the work.

On your trips over here in the past year, what have you enjoyed most about Tuscany?

The food, the wine, the Tuscan hospitality. In many of the Tuscan towns, I love how the architecture and buildings not only visually frames what you see, but it also gives a sense of theatre to daily life – the city as a stage.

Are there any contemporary Italian artists you particularly admire and why?

Although originally French, I admire the work of Nathalie Du Pastier, an artist based in Milan and co-founder of the Italian collective 'Memphis Group'. I like her work a lot – colourful and bold, it crosses over so many disciplines such as art, architecture, painting and design.

If you had to describe Italian people in a few words, what would you say?

Passionate, sexy, a zest for living – family comes first – it's not about *what* you know, it's about *who* you know.

I'm sure you've had the chance to explore some of Tuscany's best restaurants on your recent visits. Is there a dish that you've enjoyed more than others?

Tuscan white beans with olive oil, garlic and rosemary. I ate this dish in a restaurant called Trattoria la Tellina in Siena. It's one of those recipes that is so simple, so modest, but yet so delicious and utterly memorable.

As well travelled as you are, what do you have on your dream destination list for 2018?

On the dream list is 'Raja Ampat' – a series of more than 1500 island chains in Indonesia. It's regarded as one of the world's last wild places – remote with its beautiful white beaches and exceptional marine life.

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Tantra's bold interventions use colour abstractions that wrap themselves around architectural environments, transforming them in the process. The works are a hybridity of pop and formalism, a bricolage of colour and rhythm, an exploration of identity and aesthetics. Tantra challenges our understanding of geography whilst playing on notions of globalization / localization and deconstructing the modern obsession with brand. Themes within the work include the slippage between pictorial and physical space, of turning something 'inside out' and how we as bodies become submerged in surface and structure.

