

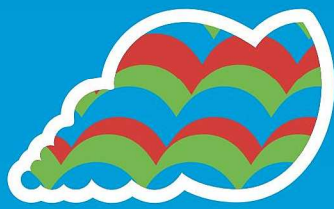


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José Luis Caivano and Mabel Amanda López
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The colour of food: Last layer on the palimpsest of St. Caterina market in Barcelona

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand in depth the colour composition of a contemporary building, the St. Caterina Market (Barcelona 2004) by architect Benedetta Tagliabue, who develops a poetic reinterpretation of the colours of a food stall. The physical reality of the colour, the design process and intentions expressed by the architect are studied. The result is a market as a kind of palimpsest, which allows the reading of the different layers of history and represents virtually chromatic experiences that are developed in the inner space. A kind of transparency, as a tele-reality, which is consistent with the contemporary perception, and blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction.



Figure 1. Overall photograph of St. Caterina Market in Barcelona, by EMBT architects.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, food has been an outstanding artistic inspiration source for many artistic disciplines, used as an argument to train with colour. The presence of food as a decorative element in architecture goes beyond a simple functional relationship with the use of space and is a helpful tool for organizing colour composition. Examples include coloured cornucopias of

classical architecture, Biblical food in medieval fresco paintings (grape, bread, fish, etc.), painted still life in illustrated housing, glazed ceramics in modernist markets, etc.

Benedetta Tagliabue recovers and reinterprets this tradition of representing food at market buildings. She takes up again both the decorative motifs and the tiles, but abstracted and manipulated in a transversal proposal, which in one hand is strongly contemporary, and at the same time restores aspects of the past. This building links different historical levels, and it reverbs the echoes from previous architectures, in a plot that previously was a convent, square and market (Figure 1).

2. DESCRIPTION OF CHROMATIC FEATURES

The roof of the market is an undulated wooden structure with a glazed ceramic tile at the top. The colour treatment covers the entire surface of the market and projects onto the street shaping a small pergola. Therefore, the cover is a continuous surface, independent of other parts of the building. The chromatic layout is not claimed to integrate the building in the surroundings but to make it different, to recognize it. The colour ranges are the consequence of a distant referent: the market activity, instead of its immediate architectural landscape.

Hexagonal spot coloured pieces are used to make up a large-scale drawing; a mosaic consisted of little coloured tiles (Figures 2, 3). Red and orange shades dominated over a large pool of green ranges, resorting to the simultaneous contrasts of complementary colours to give intensity to the whole. Blue hues are practically nonexistent, although purple shades are arranged in the darker parts. Everything finished on a gloss surface that slightly reflects sunlight.



Figure 2. Small samples of colored glass tiles, showing the 64 shades selected.

Figure 3. Detail of one of them.

3. DESIGNING PROCESS

As Benedetta herself insures, the main plastic strategy is “trying to give the same importance to the trace of the monastery than the trace of a time when everything was destroyed, or the moment of a road that went through the middle [of the plot] as if everything could be such an important question” (Miralles and Tagliabue 2000). In this way, the trace that fits with nowadays is this kind of virtual image of the vegetables available underneath, in previous layers.

The colour composition on the roof has been reached starting with the photograph of a food stall (Figure 4). This first picture is touched up with specific software in order to reduce its amount of chromatic information. This abstraction process reduces the color ranges to just 64, and makes it possible the tiles supply and its industrial production (Figure 5). It was necessary a work with ceramist Toni Cumella, to adapt the computer colours to appropriate pigments for ceramic tiles. In opposition to ancient mosaics, built with small tile pieces or *tesela*, Tagliabue's mosaic incorporates new technology to help in the color decision process, the module size fitting and the industrial production of material.

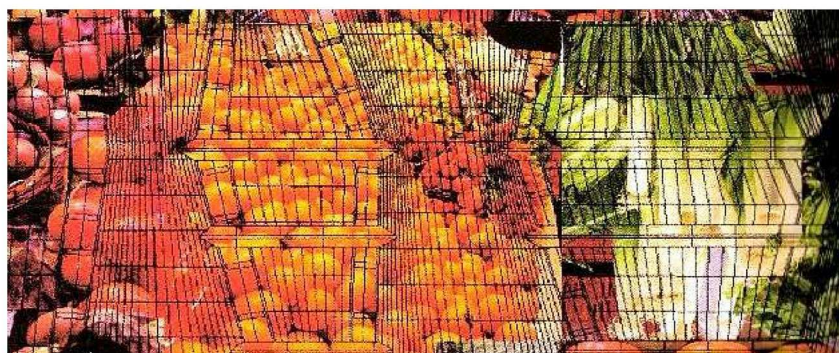


Figure 4. Starting photograph of a food stall (Tagliabue 2010).



Figure 5. Final color composition, showing the distribution of everyone of the small hexagonal tiles all over the roof.

4. INTENTIONS

This roof can be interpreted as a large awning that protects from sun and rain, and under which the activity market is developed. Like a big patterned fabric, generates the necessary protection enable to trade outdoor, as has been done during the times.

This is, doubtless, another layer which has been putted on top on this plot, where was the convent, plaza, market, etc. The project of EMBT, as if it were a palimpsest, can be search for the lines of the different historical moments and the colourful cover is a stratum more that does not respond formally to the logic of what is below but what it represents, its use as the market recovered. As the author says:

There would be another reading of this basic project, which would be the ability of producing documents that make explicit the superimposition of different moments of a place, building on the ruins of it. Surely, in this work have influenced public spaces and watch how essential is the coexistence between architecture, design and the need to destroy society. (...) You need to have some kind of document in which the time on this site is condensed. But not to consider your project as a step further, not that if it had a linear idea behind, but almost as if time -I like to think in this way - instead of having it back, you had it before you ... (Miralles and Tagliabue 2000).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The result is a building understood as a palimpsest, which shows the accumulation of the various historical facts as strata. The substrate corresponding to the contemporaneity is the roof, which plays virtually the chromatic experiences that take place underneath, and stages the lower level. The colour of a market that is transparent, thanks to technology, to express a final image, as a tele-reality. An interesting thought about contemporary perception that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction.

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