

Research title: *Living Worlds - methods of tracing (emotional) connections*

Miriam Del Seppia, 2024
Report for Stichting Gerbrandy Cultuurfonds

Introduction to the project

My project involved a residency at Lottozero, a centre for textile art and design based in the historic textile district of Prato (Tuscany). This residency was possible thanks to the support of Stichting Gerbrandy Cultuurfonds. At Lottozero I conducted material research on plant-based colours, worked with screen printing techniques and experimented with developing visual material reflecting questions of relationality towards a specific natural living world, the Apuan Alps, a mountain range in Northern Tuscany. The foundation of this work also relies on a preceding research period I spent at the Botanical Garden of the Apuan Alps “Pellegrini-Ansaldi”, located in Massa (Tuscany), where I studied the Apuan ecosystem and their native plants in dialogue with the staff taking care of this peculiar garden. This mobility and the collaboration with the Botanical Garden were funded by the European Union, through the Culture Moves Europe program.



Residency at Lottozero, Prato

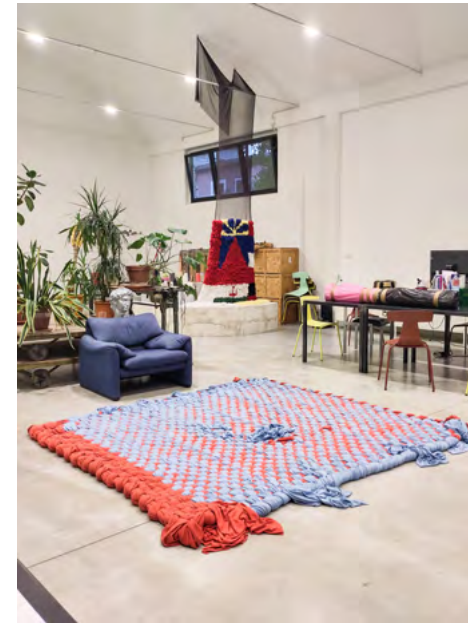
On the day of my arrival at Lottozero, I was welcomed by Federica Valli, the Lab Manager, in the beautiful open space of the laboratory, where the Lottozero team and the artists-in-residence do coworking. Federica introduced me to the library, the kunsthalle and the facilities of the lab: the looms, the embroidery, knitting and sewing machines, the spinning wheels, the dye kitchen and the printing area, the materials available for use, and the Lottozero Material Library, containing samples of textiles and techniques. This archive has been of particular inspiration to me during the first days, allowing me to glimpse how other artists and designers have worked with screen printing and have experimented with natural dyes on different fabrics, being a guide for planning my first experiments at the beginning of the residency.

In the following days, Federica taught me how to prepare the silk screen frames with the photo-sensitive emulsion, to expose it and assisted me during the first printing procedures.

The entire first week was dedicated to material research, making multiple tests and sourcing materials and ingredients I needed for work. I tested various kinds of fabric in natural fibres that were part of the material collection available in the laboratory, both in cotton and silk. I also visited some local fabric stockists, immersing myself in huge storages of textile material.

Since I was curious to try block printing as a possibility to be included in my work, I spent my first afternoon in the lab testing this technique. I used some already existing blocks with a floral motive and printed the image with a mordant paste (a thickened paste containing a metal salt that helps the dye attach to the fibre: by immersing the fabric in a dye bath of weld, I obtained a rich yellow in the areas where the mordant had been applied through the block and a pale faded yellow in the other un-mordanted parts).

I then focused on screen printing as originally planned and started the next few days working on the images that I would print while also preparing the inks. I wanted to make concentrated pastes out of plant-based material and had to test the thickness and the concentration of plant extract for the pastes

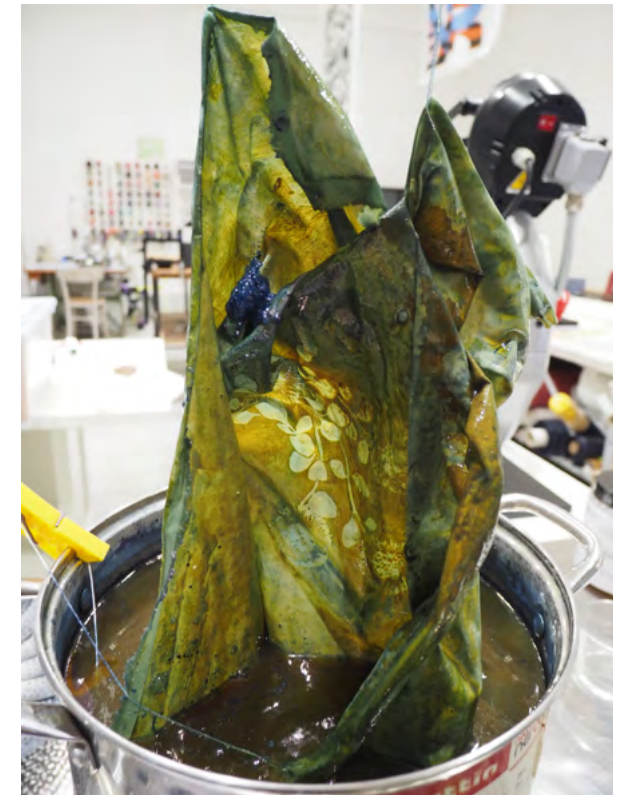


to work well with the screen and the fabrics. I tested different ways of applying the dye on fabric and a resist paste made of clay that allowed me to work with indigo. By the end of the first week I had prepared multiple inks. One was made of wild chestnut leaves I collected locally, while for the others I used extracts sourced from “Officina del Colore Naturale”, which is a company founded by Valentina Ferrarini, who cultivates plants and dyes fabrics in Mantova (Italy).

During the residency, I have worked with the drawings and pictures I made as part of the situated research at the Botanical Garden of the Apuan Alps “Pellegrini-Ansaldi”, where I have been learning about the complex Apuan ecosystem. This research has been a foundation for my work at Lottozero. I used both drawings and collages of pictures to create my own images of each endemic plant I observed, working toward the production of a kind of herbarium. Throughout the residency, I had some studio visits with Alessandra Tempesti, the curator at Lottozero. We discussed my plan, concept and ideas and how I could picture my project growing in the future. I started imagining my work as a herbarium in progress, an archive of plants with the capacity to expand throughout time, made of a multitude of textile pieces.

I spent the second week creating and printing images of three plants that are endemic to the area of the Apuan Alps. I first depicted the *Buphtalmum Salicifolium subs. flexile*, a plant with beautiful yellow-orange flowers. I worked then with my drawings of *Globularia Incanescens*, a plant with round-shaped leaves and light-lilla spherical flower heads, that is also the symbol of the Botanical Garden of the Apuan Alps “Pellegrini-Ansaldi”. In the last few days, I prepared some images of *Cerastium Apuanum*, a plant with white flowers whose petals remember heart shapes. I had a fruitful residency where I developed visual materials that constitute the start of a process that I will continue in the following months.

The ample variety of options for working with fibres that the laboratory allows nurtured my desire to spend more time there in the future for weaving, utilising the embroidery machines and spinning self-made yarns. Though being immersed in the process of testing and experimenting with my project, I was lucky to follow a workshop given by Sara Diaz from HiloTex-



tiles, about hand spinning with the open-source Hilo digital spinning machine. This was a precious experience since spinning is an important part of my practice. The workshop gave me new perspectives on creating yarns and allowed me to see possibilities for developing ideas for future work.

Outcomes

I travelled back to Rotterdam with a consistent bundle of fabrics, tests, some finished images and some which still needed to be steamed to fix the dye. Some of my samples were left to Lottozero, to be added to the Material Library. In my studio in Rotterdam, I patiently steamed, fixed and ironed the fabrics and started observing these partial results, from which I am thinking about images I will print next, how to assemble the pieces and how I will further develop the work.

On the 7th of July, I gave a workshop in Amsterdam where I shared my research and the techniques I worked with. The workshop was held at *I can change the world with my two hands*, a community garden in Amsterdam, in the contest of *Textile Initiative*, an event series of workshops, performances, and readings inviting people to engage with textile crafts, organized by Darsha Golova and Bronwen Jones. The event was structured as a collaboration between artist and ethnographer Masha Maroz and myself. Masha brought traditional Belarusian textiles embroidered with flower motifs. She illustrated her research into Belarusian culture while I shared the recently printed fabrics and introduced my practice and the process of botanical dyes. Each participant created a stencil out of paper, inspired by the suggestions given by Masha and me. We then printed the images on fabric using concentrated mordants and dyes of Weld, Coreopsis and Dyer's chamomile.



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