

Bramante and his work of Painted Façades: Bergamo and Lombardy

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ABSTRACT

Bramante, a renowned architect of the High Renaissance, is not well known for the remarkable paintings that constitute his artistic beginning, education, and development in the wake of Piero della Francesca, of Melozzo and of Mantegna, as well as Paolo Uccello and others from the circle of Urbino. His painted architectural illusions, which create complex and articulated spaces, make him a fundamental figure in the fifteenth century in Lombardy. In fact, moving from Urbino to Milan, he brought there the renewal that was developed by the Urbino circle, which was a humanistic centre of primary importance since the mid-fifteenth century. Here “on the basis of the teachings of Piero della Francesca ... and not without some knowledge of Mantegna, a school of ‘perspective architects’ must have been formed” – with architects, architectural designers and painters working together. In any case, the culture of Urbino and the Paduan-Mantegnesque culture are at the basis of Donato’s education (Bruschi, 1985).

KEYWORDS Color, Painted Façades, Architecture, Urban Environment, Bramante

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1. Introduction

Within the decades-long field of study of painted façades of historical architecture, and of the relationship between painted façades and architecture, the specific theme of Bramante's activity as a painter of façades is here addressed. The aim is to spread this fundamental part of his work widely and to develop it as it deserves (Falzone, 2020). This part of his production, in fact, is not very well known, when compared with his great fame as an architect. Indeed, the theme of his several façade frescoes, mostly in Lombardy, is not much dealt with, nor diffused among non-experts: perhaps because this heritage is little preserved in situ, and only partially musealized.

In this paper, in particular, the chromatic values of his two most important and remarkable façades are analyzed:

1. the façade of *Palazzo del Podestà* in Bergamo, whose detached fresco portions are preserved in the *Museo delle Storie di Bergamo*, in *Palazzo della Ragione*. The theme is that of the "ancient philosophers", which are painted between the openings. Unfortunately, the preserved parts are very incomplete.

2. the frescoes on the walls of the hall of *Casa Panigarola* in Milan, in *Piazza dei Mercanti*, now detached and preserved in the *Pinacoteca di Brera*. These are particularly interesting and meaningful since in them all the figures, which represent men-at-arms, are preserved, two in their entirety and the others from the waist up.

In addition to these two most important examples, of which the chromatic characteristics are analyzed, the features of other bramantesque façades are cited and described:

3. *Casa Angelini* in Bergamo, with a polychrome fresco on its façade and painted stories in Venetian style.

4. *Casa Bottigella* in Pavia, whose façades on the court are frescoed with Renaissance grotesques.

5. The porticoed façades on the square of Vigevano, decorated with the repeated motif of the *candelabra*.

6. The façade of *Palazzo Fontana Silvestri* in Milan, *Corso Venezia*, painted with a double order decoration in Renaissance style.

Bramante's pictorial work emerges clearly in the main Renaissance treatises of the fifteenth centuries: those of L. B. Alberti (Alberti, 1436), Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Piero della Francesca and Antonio Averlino "Filarete". While, in the sixteenth century, it is visible in that of Sebastiano Serlio (Serlio, 1537), Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, Vincenzo Scamozzi,

Andrea Palladio and others, as well as Vasari's *Vite – Vita di D. Bramante* (Vasari, 1568).

In modern times, Andrea Bruschi is the Italian scholar of Bramante that explored the most his entire production, including his work on façades, through his several publications: (Bruschi, 1971), (Bruschi 1973) and (Bruschi, 1985).

Recently, in 2018, the conference "*Bramante a Bergamo e la città a colori*" was held in Bergamo. It was aimed at rediscovering the city, that was once all painted, and Bramante's façades in Bergamo (Ferrari, 1964). Here, instead, the overall typological, compositional, and chromatic analysis of his façades production in Lombardy is developed, through what has been preserved.

Bramante was born in Monte Asdrualdo, near Urbino, in 1444. He earned his education in the artistic environment of Urbino, at the Montefeltro Court, but he carried out his production mostly in Milan and Rome. In fact, Bramante moved from Urbino to Milan, at the court of Ludovico il Moro, between 1477-1479, where he worked from about 1479 to 1499 (Malaguzzi Valeri, 1915), (Beltrami, 1901), and then moved to Rome, where he worked from 1499 to 1514 (Longhi, 1955).

Piero della Francesca and Melozzo da Forlì's influences, as well as the acquaintance of Mantegna, emerge from the frescoes that are preserved in *Palazzo del Podestà* in Bergamo, and even more from the frescoes of *Casa Panigarola* at Milan. Here, Melozzo and Mantegna's suggestions are recognized in the layout used for the monumental figures. These are painted using a view from below, with a conception of spatial illusion that is new to the fifteenth century. The recurring chromatic values are few but intense, and show "his particular sensitivity for coloristic and atmospheric values" (Bruschi, 1985). Moreover, according to Bruschi, Bramante is also sensitive to what was already being made in Lombardy by Filarete, Michelozzo, Foppa (*Cappella Portinari* in *Sant'Eustorgio*), and Amadeo (*Cappella Colleoni*).

This pictorial heritage stands out for its distinct architectural component. In fact, the frescoes - façades and building interiors - always show the strong architectural-perspective suggestions derived from his education in Urbino.

2. The main fresco façades in Bergamo

In 1477, on behalf of *Podestà* Badoer, Bramante worked on frescoing the façade of *palazzo del Podestà*, in Bergamo. Here, he painted "melozzesque" and monumental figures of "ancient philosophers" (Bruschi, 1985). This theme was recommended by Filarete in his

1460 Treatise (Averlino, 1460), as described by Michiel in 1525: “*Li phylosophi coloriti nella fazzada sopra la piazza et li altri phylosophi de chiaro et de scuro verdi nella sala furono de man de Donato Bramante...*” (i.e. “the colorful philosophers in the façade above the square and the others philosophers painted with a green *chiaroscuro* in the hall were created by Donato Bramante”) (Michiel, 1525). He uses both polychromy, in the exterior, and monochromy, in green, in the interior hall. Green, within an overall analysis, is one of the colors he uses most

frequently, and it refers to one of the masters of Early Renaissance, Paolo Uccello. The latter in fact, a perspective virtuoso, frescoed the equestrian monument to Giovanni Acuto in Florence Cathedral in green monochrome; the large lunette with “flood and Stories of Noah” in the *Chiostro Verde* at *Santa Maria Novella* in 1448; the “Stories of saint monks” in the Cloister of *San Miniato al Monte* using vibrant colors, with figures in green monochrome and scenes framed by pillars (Fig.1).



Fig. 1.- The frescoes by Paolo Uccello in the upper loggia of the Cloister of San Miniato al Monte. Vasari wrote: “He painted in San Miniato, in a cloister, in green umber and partly colored, the life of the Holy fathers, in which he did not observe very much the solution of using a single color, as stories should be painted, since he colored in blue the backgrounds, in red the cities, and the edifices in more colors, according to his will...”. Photographs by the author.

On the façade of *Palazzo del Podestà*, in Bergamo, Bramante celebrated Venice’s supremacy painting an architectural apparatus that illusionistically unifies the smooth surface, consisting of two pre-existing medieval elements, in a single front, which becomes the background of the square (Figs. 2 and 3). In this apparatus he inserted monumental figures that evoke moral, philosophical, and cultural messages. The *architectura picta*, starting from the top, consists of a painted *loggia* bounded by a balustrade; below, between the front openings, in the architectural *sfondato*, it shows square-based niches bounded by pillars, with the gigantic

figures of the Seven Sages of Greek antiquity: Solon, Epimenides, Pittacus, Periander and Chilon are the ones identified to date (Figs. 3 and 4). The thirteen fragments of the preserved gigantic decoration, discovered on the façade in 1927 and then *strappati* (i.e. detached), are nowadays placed in the *Sala delle Capriate* of *Palazzo della Ragione*, *Museo delle Storie* (located in the same square, *Piazza Vecchia*, as *Palazzo del Podestà*). Here, the great perspective scenography was rebuilt (Fig. 2), according to the concept of “eloquence of architecture”, “considering the edifice as an entity that expresses concepts, that speaks, that communicates” (Argan 1984).



Fig. 2 – The façade of Palazzo del Podestà on Piazza Vecchia, in Bergamo. Photography by Jennifer Coffani.



Fig. 3 - Conference "Bramante a Bergamo e la città a colori" (2018). Reconstruction and video mapping of Bramante's fresco strappi on the current façade of the palace. Photography of the projection by Alessandro Bettonagli.



Fig. 4 – Starting from the top: Fragments of the Loggia Balaustrade, from which a lively polychromy can be noticed. Next to it, fragment of an architecture and of the sfondato between the openings, with the bright blue of the sky. Next to it, a fragment with an inscription. Below, the philosophers Chilon and Epimenides and, on the right, the fragment of another philosopher. Again below: fragment of a figure and fragment of an architecture. Cornice with a frieze. Fragments. Photographs by Alessandro Bettonagli.

A vivid color range, made up by few recurring colors, emerges clearly from these fragments, which are unfortunately incomplete (Fig. 4). As a first reference for the analysis, we chose the comparison with the colors of the *Norma Italiana (1991) Colorimetria. Denominazione dei colori. UNI 9810*, which defines a chromatic wheel with 24 hues, 5 levels of saturation and 7 levels of brightness.

The architectural fictions, with a strong *chiaroscuro* that emphasizes depth and the *sfondati*, are in the colors: “*Giallo aranciato brunastro*” and “*Bruno giallo aranciato*” (Hue 2 p. 5 – *GIALLO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey yellow).

The *loggia balaustrade* alternates small columns in a marble color, in “*Grigio giallo aranciato*” shade (Hue 2. p. 5) and, one every two, in “*Rosso forte chiaro*” shade (Hue 7 p. 10 – *ROSSO*, i.e. red), perhaps in reference to the pink marble of Verona. The green handrail, in “*Giallo verdastro forte medio*” shade (Hue 24 p. 27 - *GIALLO VERDASTRO*, i.e. greenish yellow), is in stark contrast with them.

The two preserved monumental figures of Philosophers show robes with rich draperies in bright green, even if in different hues.

In the first figure, the green robe in “*Verde forte chiaro*” shade, (Hue 22 p. 25 – *VERDE*, i.e. green), is accompanied by a red mantle in “*Aranciato rossastro forte chiaro*” shade (Hue 5 p. 8 - *ARANCIONE ROSSASTRO*, i.e. reddish orange) with bright yellow edges in “*Giallo aranciato forte chiarissimo*” shade (Hue 2 p. 5 - *GIALLO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey yellow).

In the second figure, the large green mantle in the shade “*Verde ciano moderato scuro*” (Hue 21 p. 24 - *VERDE CIANO*, i.e. cyan green) opens onto the tunic colored in “*Arancione forte molto chiaro*” (Hue 4 p. 7 – *ARANCIONE*, i.e. orange). The lining of the mantle is purple, in the shade “*Violetto purpureo moderato medio*” (Hue 13 p. 16 - *VIOLETTO PURPUREO*, i.e. crimson purple). The latter color is present also in the other large fragment of a figure, while blue is found in the fragment with green and red.

Therefore, we find once again green and red, complementary colors, while green is found almost in all fragments, even if in a small part. The bright blue of the sky that breaks through the wall between the openings is a “*Ciano bluastro moderato molto chiaro*” (Hue 18 p. 21 - *CIANO BLUASTRO*, i.e. bluish cyan).

The drawings of architectures in perspective for the frescoes of *Casa Angelini* façade (Fig. 5), still in Bergamo, were attributed to Bramante, too, and dated between 1480-85 (Bruschi, 1985). Besides these, also the drawings for the interiors, which depict complex architectural perspectives with a typically mantegnesque character, were attributed to him (Fig. 5). On the outside, the colors appear in a rich polychromy and more reminiscent of an extremely decorative late-gothic taste, even if within classical references. Here too, we find the bright light-blue of *sfondati* and the relevant presence of very bright red and green colors.



Fig. 5 – *Casa Angelini* interiors, where the projects are preserved. In the basement, the complex painted Renaissance architectures with figures. On the right, design for the façade in a lively polychromy, architectural *sfondati* with figures and wide landscapes. Image taken from: brochure of the Conference.

3. The main fresco façades in Milan

His main activity took place in Milan, at the court of Ludovico il Moro. Here, he still was “*ingegnerius et pinctor*” (Bruschi, 1985) and continued his activity as a painter and perspective expert. His name is mentioned for the first time in a 1481 act about a drawing for the Milanese engraver Bernardo Prevedari. The drawing depicts a temple in ruins, populated with figures. This is considered a real architectural piece, the first that is clearly influenced by his education in Urbino and by Alberti. In it, the figures show the closeness to Ferrarese painting and especially to Mantegna (Bruschi, 1971). Lomazzo attributed to him the figure of the poet Ausonius and “other colored figures” in a façade in *Piazza dei Mercanti* (Lomazzo, 1584). The frescoed decoration of a hall in *Casa Panigarola* in Milan, located in the rear part of *Piazza dei Mercanti*, is attributed to him, and dated to 1480-85 (Fig. 6). It constitutes a monumental work, fortunately largely preserved at the *Pinacoteca di Brera*.

The theme is “Men-at-arms”, painted within niches, which articulate the hall in an illusionistic way. This was defined as a “fundamental work of spatial modeling, obtained through the perspectival system that breaks through the walls with semicircular niches, marked by *lesenes*, in which heroic figures of men-at-arms are inserted, along with the figures of the philosophers Heraclitus and Democritus, in the entrance overdoors” (Bruschi, 1985). These materials in particular allow us to carry out a wider and more significant chromatic and perceptive analysis, thanks to almost completely preserved *strappi* (i.e. detachments), compared to the fragments of Palazzo del Podesta in Bergamo. As far as colors are concerned, here too there is a recurring range of few fundamental colors, often complementary, declined in different hues, with a good color saturation and a strong chiaroscuro. The colors are green, yellow, red; red is often combined with green, yellow with green and red, alternated in their prevalence.



Fig. 6 – From the top: Man with a mace; Man with a broadsword; Heraclitus and Democritus; Man at arms; Man with a halberd; Man at arms; A cantor. Following, details of the previous subjects with the recurrence of colors. Photographs by the author.

In detail, in the first standing figure we can find three colors: a green mantle "*Verde giallastro debole chiaro*" (Tinta 23 p. 26 - *VERDE GIALLASTRO*, i.e. yellowish green) accompanied by dark-yellow breeches and bodice in "*Giallo aranciato brunastro forte chiaro*" (Tinta 2 p. 5 - *GIALLO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey yellow) and a red robe in "*rosso purpureo moderato chiaro*" shade (Tinta 8 p. 11 - *ROSSO PURPUREO*, i.e. crimson red). The second standing figure presents only two colors: the faux bronze dark yellow of the partial armor, and the red of the mantle in "*Rosso aranciato forte molto chiaro*" shade (Tinta 6 p. 9 - *ROSSO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey red).

On the other hand, the two philosophers, who are talking to each other, show mantles and draperies in the same hues.

The first mantle is red in "*rosso purpureo moderato chiaro*" shade (Hue 8 p. 11 - *ROSSO PURPUREO*, i.e. crimson red) and the yellow robe is a "*giallo debole chiaro*" (Hue 1 p. 4 - *GIALLO*, i.e. yellow). The other figure's drapery is in bright yellow "*Giallo aranciato moderato chiarissimo*" (Hue 2 p. 5 - *GIALLO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey yellow), and white robe.

The four partial figures, preserved up to their bust, present the following colors: the first one shows the combination of the bright yellow of the mantle in "*Giallo aranciato moderato chiarissimo*" shade (Hue 2 p. 5 - *GIALLO ARANCIATO*, i.e. orangey yellow), which is the prevailing color, with the light green of the robe, in the same color "*Verde giallastro debole chiaro*" (Hue 23 p. 26 - *VERDE GIALLASTRO*, i.e. yellowish green) of the first standing figure.

The second figure shows the same combination of a golden-yellow mantle in the shade "*Giallo aranciato moderato chiarissimo*" (Hue 2 p. 5 - *GIALLO*

ARANCIATO, i.e. orangey yellow), which is the prevailing color, with the light-green color "*Verde giallastro debole chiaro*" (Hue 23 p. 26 - *VERDE GIALLASTRO*, i.e. yellowish green) of the lapels, while the sleeves are in the same red color "*rosso purpureo moderato chiaro*" (Hue 8 p. 11 - *ROSSO PURPUREO*, i.e. crimson red) of the first standing figure.

The third one still presents the same combination, but with a prevalence of green of the wide bodice in "*Verde giallastro debole chiaro*" (Hue 23 p. 26 - *VERDE GIALLASTRO*, i.e. yellowish green) with a pinkish-red decoration in "*rosso purpureo moderato chiaro*" shade (Hue 8 p. 11 - *ROSSO PURPUREO*, i.e. crimson red), and parts of the armor in a faux bronze dark yellow color.

Lastly, in the figure of the cantor we still find the same combination of colors, with a prevalence of the green color of the mantle, and then yellow and dark red.

All the niches are in monochrome with the architectural order in faux marble color and a light brown background, with the motif of the continuous circle running above the capitals of the pilasters.

The painted façade of *Casa Fontana*, now *Silvestri*, in Milan in *Corso Venezia* 10 (Fig.7), is probably from this same period, if created by Bramante (Rosa and Reggiori, 1962), (Bruschi, 1971), (Lomazzo, 1590). This façade is painted in monochrome, in very light umber, using *chiaroscuro*. It preserves only partially the architectural structure, colored in faux marble, formed by two vertical orders, with semi-columns on the ground floor and lesenes on the upper floor, where are painted the gigantic figures standing in front of the *lesenes*, or between the *specchiature* (i.e. wall panels), and classical friezes with tritons, *putti* and *clipei*.



Fig. 7 - The façade of *Casa Fontana Silvestri* in Milan, *Corso Venezia*. Details of the preserved frescoed part. Photographs by the author.

In Pavia, the drawing for *Palazzo Carminali, Bottigella* (at least the ground floor) in *Via Cavour*, is attributed to him. Here, the elevations on the courtyard present a lively and classical pictorial decoration, with figures in false niches in the walls and grotesque friezes.

In Vigevano, between 1492 and 1494, Bramante works with Leonardo for the great design of the square, where he still uses the fresco decoration for the exteriors of the adjacent edifices of this great urban space. Perhaps, the urban plan of the square (realized between 1492 and 1494) could be attributed to him, along with a scheme used for the painted decoration (1494) on the façades bounding it. The decoration shows the insertion of false triumphal arches, placed, as Alberti suggests, where the roads give access to the “*forum*” (Bruschi, 1971). On the three sides, the porticoed façades are punctuated by the scanning of the great monochrome painted *candelabra*, on the sides of the openings of the *piano nobile* (i.e. the main floor), that give life to a scenic continuous background, that amplifies the space of the small square through repeated motives. These *candelabra* can also be found in Milan, in the church of *Santa Maria delle Grazie*

in the tribune he built, and in the pilasters of the Renaissance portal.

4. Conclusion

As a first reference for the analysis, we chose the comparison with the colors of the *Norma Italiana (1991) Colorimetria. Denominazione dei colori. UNI 9810*, which defines a chromatic wheel with 24 hues, 5 levels of saturation and 7 levels of brightness. It should be noted, however, that in the future it is planned to carry out the survey also through the comparison with the Munsell System and the Munsell Book of Color, as well as other color charts, for a wider dissemination of data at an international level (Falzone, 2014).

From the examination of the frescoes of *Palazzo del Podestà* in Bergamo, and especially of *Casa Panigarola* in Milan, the identification of the chromatic range confirms the small number of colors, which are recurring, very vivid, and almost always complementary.

In Bergamo, in the two preserved figures, GREEN and RED prevail. The range of colors, according to the color wheel, is represented in Table 1.

Hue	Shades
Hue 2 p. 5, GIALLO ARANCIATO (orangey yellow)	'Giallo aranciato brunastro'; 'Bruno giallo aranciato'; 'Giallo aranciato forte chiarissimo'; 'Grigio giallo aranciato'
Hue 4 p.7, ARANCIONE (orange)	'Arancione forte molto chiaro'.
Hue 5 p. 8, ARANCIONE ROSSASTRO (reddish orange)	'Arancione rossastro forte chiaro'.
Hue 7 p. 10, ROSSO (red)	'Rosso forte chiaro'.
Hue 12 p. 15, VIOLETTO PURPUREO (crimson purple)	'Violetto purpureo moderato medio'.
Hue 18 p. 12, CIANO BLUASTRO (bluish cyan)	'Ciano bluastro moderato molto chiaro'
Hue 21 p. 24, VERDE CIANO (green cyan)	'Verde ciano moderato scuro'
Hue 22 p. 25, VERDE (green)	'Verde forte chiaro'
Hue 24 p. 27, GIALLO VERDASTRO (greenish yellow)	'Giallo verdastro forte medio'

Table 1.

In Milan too the figures show a prevalence of GREEN, YELLOW and RED. The niches are in monochrome, with the architectural order in faux marble color and the background in light brown. The range of colors according to the color wheel is shown in Table 2.

Therefore, in all the figures the prevailing colors are:

1. GREEN, in its different hues and tints (tints from 19 to 23 in the color wheel).
2. YELLOW (tints from 1 to 2)
3. ORANGE (tints from 3 to 5),
4. RED (tints from 6 to 8).

Hue	Shades
Hue 1 p. 4, GIALLO (yellow)	'Giallo debole chiaro'
Hue 2 p.5, GIALLO ARANCIATO (orange yellow)	'Giallo aranciato moderato chiarissimo' (repeated three times); 'Giallo aranciato brunastro forte chiaro' .
Hue 6 p. 9, ROSSO ARANCIATO (orange red)	'Rosso aranciato forte molto chiaro'
Hue 8 p. 11, ROSSO PURPUREO (crimson red)	'Rosso purpureo moderato chiaro' (repeated four times)
Hue 23 p. 26, VERDE GIALLASTRO (yellowish green)	'Verde giallastro debole chiaro' (repeated four times).

Table 2.

Followed by PURPLE (tints from 11 to 13), LIGHTBLUE (tints 18 and 19), and BLUE (tints 16 and 17).

The similarities with the color range of works by coeval or immediately previous authors are emphasized: Paolo Uccello especially for the dark greens and reds, Melozzo for the bright greens and light-blues and the dark crimson-red that we also find in Piero della Francesca. Mantegna for the “*rosso aranciato moderato molto chiaro*” (i.e. “very light moderate orange red”), the golden yellow, and green. All are authors who show a wide use of complementary colors.

5. Conflict of interests

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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