



Milano 3000
13 x 34 feet (4 x 10.5 meters), 2017



Cities on Fire

The latest art quilts from DAMSS

by Sandra Sider

For two decades, the wife-and-husband team of Daniela Arnoldi and Marco Sarzi-Sartori, known as DAMSS, have created textile art as true collaborators. They both will tell you that three minds focus on their art quilts: the two of them individually and then both together. As the panels of one of their quilts progress via machine stitching and other techniques, Arnoldi and Sarzi-Sartori switch back and forth to build the surface, to the extent that upon completion they cannot distinguish who did what on each panel.



Detail of Milano 3000
photo by the author



Inferno 3000
13 x 39 feet (4 x 12 meters), 2021

In November of 2022, I was fortunate to be able to interview DAMSS in Milan's capacious Superstudio Maxi during a textile and fashion expo where their *Milano 3000* art quilt was on display. Illustrations of their gigantic pieces cannot possibly convey the overwhelming presence of a work like *Milano 3000*, which towers over and seems to absorb the viewer into its densely textured surface. In her article on DAMSS in the *SAQA Journal*, Cindy Grisdelo compares the art quilts by DAMSS to Impressionist paintings (2018, 28/3), an apt analogy since their large-scale compositions appear packed with abstract patterning up close, coalescing into dynamic scenes when viewed from a distance.

DAMSS use recycled fabric scraps from high-fashion ateliers in and near Milan. The sheer volume of fabric required for one of their city installations is impressive—approximately 175 pounds (80 kilograms). Their manipulation of textiles results in numerous three-dimensional effects in their quilts,

especially felted fibers in swirls and tendrils. For the backing of their panels, DAMSS sew on lengths of thin, waterproof fabric with a plastic texture. When they pass a hot steamer over the front of the panel, the backing shrinks slightly, creating intricately crinkled shapes across the surface, just one of their many subtle techniques.

In 2021, the 700th anniversary of the death of Italian poet Dante Alighieri, DAMSS premiered a monumental installation inspired by his *Inferno*. DAMSS are expanding their vision concerning the uncertain future of humanity during their millennial 3000 series, previously expressed in the textile masterpieces of their art quilts dedicated to the cities of Milan, Rome, and Venice. The *Inferno 3000* project took form very slowly, developing into a unique composition of nearly 180 square feet (50 square meters)—a powerful narrative that addresses recent human history, which Dante could never have imagined. Flowing across the visual expanse of



Roma 3000, 13 x 34 feet (4 x 10.5 meters), 2018



the installation, we can witness the most distressing chapters of the 21st century, with many references to the future. DAMSS tell us, "We would like for *Inferno 3000* to have significance for the past, for the present day, and for a distant future, portrayed through a dystopian vision of a turbulent inferno caused by the characteristics of contemporary society."

Viewers of this spectacular work of art are moved to reflect on the dangerous state of planet Earth, and to consider the succession of natural and biological phenomena that our planet is sacrificing because of our own selfish activities. This millennium is represented

by terrorist attacks, massive fires caused by arson, devastation of our forests, overpopulation especially in our huge cities, maddening industrial production, unregulated use of fossil fuels, and irresponsible nuclear testing.

Nature manifests itself through furious volcanic activity, catastrophic tornados, successive earthquakes, melting of large glaciers triggering severe climate change, with increasing drought and destruction of our major water reserves. We see asteroids crashing into Earth, acid rain, and awakening of an implacable millennial virus released upon the world

by uncontrollable melting of the permafrost. Incapable of confronting these subjects, with their inevitable consequences, humanity is abandoning the planet in *Inferno 3000*, looking for alternative solutions in outer space.

Another commemorative installation, in honor of the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci, positioned DAMSS's version of the *Last Supper of Christ* at an angle with their huge *Pop Supper* filling an entire wall. The installation took place in Milan, where Leonardo's famous painting of the same subject is exhibited in a church. Themes of human commu-

nication and connection dominate *Pop Supper*, as dozens of figures seem to interact with gusto, mirroring the more static dialogue of the *Last Supper*.

Convivio, their latest work, sweeps across a vast expanse, inspired by two enormous 16th-century paintings by the Venetian artist Veronese depicting convivial scenes of festivity. Unlike the dire warnings of the 3000 series, *Convivio* celebrates the post-pandemic possibilities of social interaction, where groups of people enjoy the company of friends and family. DAMSS imagines welcoming banquets that encourage participants to exchange ideas, discuss ideological stances, delve into philosophy, and share experiences—all through the shared rituals of dining within the spectacular expressiveness of monumentally narrative textile art.

Art critic Marta Lock in her Italian article on DAMSS for the online magazine *l'Opinionista* sums up the conceptual genius of their recent work, which "brings a new sense of moral values to the art of recycling" (Nov. 23, 2018). Many of their technical innovations are illustrated in their 2015 how-to book *Le basi della Fiberart (The Basics of Fiberart)* and are used in the master classes they teach.

[Ed. note: Parts of this essay are from Gabriello Anselmi's English text in the book *Cities of the Future* featuring the works of DAMSS, and translated by the author from the artists' website: <https://www.damss.com/>]

left:

Pop Supper

(partial view), 13 x 39 feet (4 x 12 meters), 2020, displayed with their *Ultima Cena* (Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci) in the background, 9 x 31.5 feet (2.5 x 8.8 meters), 2013

above:

Convivio (Banquet)

9 x 108 feet (2.5 x 30 meters), 2022

