

## “I AM COLOR”. COLOR MAGNETISM IN THE WORK OF KIKKI GHEZZI

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Kikki Ghezzi recalls being profoundly moved in front of a painting by Soutine in which two figures walk hand in hand facing the elements of creation together. This remark speaks to Kikki’s romantic view in which nature and culture are intimately connected. Every aspect of her practice, be it writing, drawing or painting, immediately establishes a kind of creative symbiosis with the natural realm: a state of grace that grew from when she was a child playing under the branches of her grandparents’ apricot tree, unwittingly performing her first creative acts. It materialized the voices that nourished her interior world and manifested the invisible links between things: “When I work my aim is to let go completely, total abandonment.”

For Kikki, the path of painting is something thoroughly incorporated in her own being and her sense of communion with the kaleidoscopic wonder of the world—a practice at times without a plan or preparatory sketches, which rather resembles an action taken with her eyes closed. In her paintings, external reality and inner reality are one. Consider, for instance, her 2012 drawing *Dream*: in the foreground, in a strange environment with a long staircase that resembles a psychic interior, there is a double image of a supine female figure—an Ophelia almost—her eyes closed, whose physical body and astral body are transported by the current of a river. The proliferation of flowers that radiate from the vase in the background, like a small explosion that reaches the figures in the foreground, speaks the language of a strange reverie in which Redon, Matisse and Warhol seem to have arranged to meet. Consider too *Fluffy Purples* (2012), in which Gauguin’s feeling for color seems to be the main and perhaps unconscious reference: there is a field so vast and so red, red, red, which looks like an echo of Gauguin’s *Vision after the Sermon*; a fundamental painting that portrays dream and reality on an equal plane. “Mental things are alone real” (William Blake).<sup>1</sup>

Red is an essential color, and in Kikki Ghezzi’s work it often appears with diverse qualities: it flows, direct and free, transparent, thick or opaque—a magnet red; a red that assaults.

Let color be. It is simultaneously calm and mercurial. Effusive, it radiates, overflows and pulsates; it crosses a threshold; it suggests the sensation of infinity; it is alive, it flickers, airy, mobile, liquid; it has no boundaries and knows no areas of rest or control. It seems to escape from all sides, never stable, as when looking at the Sun. A true extension of the breath. The canvas, the supports, a sort of weaving of suffused noises, disappear and dematerialize at the explosion of a single color; they become the field of energy which, in its momentary configuration, appears as color—just as the night sky, albeit pregnant with vibrations, acts as an inert background for fireworks and stars.

The manifestations of color also have a touch of lightning, as if the uneven backgrounds were caused by vibrating electrical discharges that expand in the visual space; after all, the whole vital question concerns energy. The colors have the instant beauty of a supernova (Ghezzi herself speaks of “incandescence”), and at the same time they suggest the implosive movement of a black hole. Sharp and weighty resonances, the colors always emit particular tones. Systole and diastole.

Ghezzi believes that every painting is a mirror, more or less bright or more or less dark. Together, her works compose the pages of a diary of personal transformation, her stages along a spiritual path: “Everything is a creative process: in the studio, outside of the studio, everywhere I am. It is a deeply spiritual experience. There is no separation.” It is no wonder that even in her studies (particularly the one of 2009, in which she uses a pencil to draw the spiral and helical shapes of the interiors of sea shells) Kikki seems particularly attracted to themes and forms linked to the infinity of nature.

She is interested in primordial purity, as is clear from *My Hands* (2007), in which the gesture of imprinting her two hands in plaster resembles one of Alberto Giacometti’s stripped busts of his brother Diego, which seem to come from primeval time or even from beyond the grave.

The works in the series *Roots* are “portraits” of found roots, fleshless beings that function as a dizzying discharge of a collectively felt truth. Not only in the choice of subject matter and the close-up

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<sup>1</sup>. William Blake, *Vision of Last Judgment* (E 565).

viewpoint, but also in the minimalist titles, such as *Violet and Babel* (2014) and *Blue and Babel* (2014), the direct reference appears to be Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings of bone structures found in the desert.

In this series the color is paste-like, both rich and sensual. There are at least two versions of *Pink, Blue and Root* (2014), one brighter and one darker, as if they were painted in different light conditions—one under a clear, sunny sky, the other during a storm. *Gray and Root*, with its wavy, atmospheric background, boasts a preparatory study, as does *Blues and Root* (2013). Note the title: “*Blues*” (not simply “blue”), with all its musical connotations underlining the color’s close connection to melancholy. *Blue, Orange, and Root; Blue, Green, Orange, and Root*. From the titles it is clear that the absolute protagonist is color and that the object is a satellite, a pretext, even though each holds unknown and fascinating stories. Indeed, it seems that color is something more concrete and primary than any singular object, and that chief among these is Blue, the color of the spleen and of spirituality, which dominates unchallenged in Ghezzi’s mental images. In her public introduction to this project (which was not a conventional biography but rather a poetic declaration), Kikki speaks to this dominance: “In my process I become a cosmic channel of divinity able to tap into the beautiful colors of the cosmic palette of the Universe. Source, who oversees the magnificent beauty of all creation, is perpetually dancing and rejoicing – and what wondrous, colorful movement there is in that! ...When I work I am in a different space, where everything is connected, and I sense Lord Krishna’s blue footprints dancing freely across the canvas.”

Another indication of the centrality of blue is found in Ghezzi’s description of a series of works: “There is a group of paintings I call *Bird-Roots* where I reflect on the feminine and masculine qualities of color. They started as red paintings, yet they are not red anymore. The colors got mixed together and evolved – in the end, blue won.” Red, the earthly color, is undermined by blue, the astral color. Blue in all its shades is the ever-recurring color in Ghezzi’s work: “Yesterday I painted with a specific title in mind: . . . *And the Sky is Blue*.”

In a similar vein, Kandinsky wrote that “Vermillion attracts and stimulates like the flame eternally craved for by all men.”<sup>2</sup> Red is blood and earth while blue is air and infinite sky, so much so that in Christian iconographic tradition, Mary’s dress and cloak are in these two colors to indicate her dual nature, her role as a divine middle ground

As is also true in her relation to other colors, for Kikki there is a powerful early memory at the root of red. At the age of seven she spent a few months in India with her parents: “In New Delhi I was fascinated by the Red Fort. Enchanted by that vast space, I ‘forgot’ myself.”

Returning to *Roots*, Kikki writes: “The roots I paint and draw symbolize my process of transformation.” Already apparent in the found roots, which represent the most primitive part of the plant, is the existential and metamorphic value of each form. It is as though they were living beings undergoing change by freeing themselves from their physical nature in order to express their own essence, like creatures from a mythological tale. Hades and Persephone.

For Ghezzi, painting roots is also a symptom of a personal urgency “to have green roots everywhere” not only in every location (Italy, or the United States, or the rest of the world) but also in every action. To become energy in the purest possible way, instant Karma, using color as the main vehicle for this event of the Spirit.

Kikki Ghezzi might say, together with Yves Klein, that the artwork is the ashes of her art.

Another childhood memory that helped shape Ghezzi’s psychic and poetic milieu is a film she particularly loved, Disney’s *The Sword in the Stone*, which contains at least two important suggestions. The first concerns predestination—not strength, but purity. The second introduces the theme of metamorphosis through the surprising transformations of Merlin and Wart.

Due not only to the centrality of color but also to the messianic tone of Kikki’s writings, it is helpful to refer to Kandinsky’s book *The Spiritual in Art*, which is indispensable precisely for its content relating to “inner necessity”. That text focuses on the germinal power of color—its vitality, its inner sound, its energy and synesthetic effect—while underlining the artist’s function as the messenger of states of

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<sup>2</sup>. Vasilji Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, First complete English translation, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, for the Museum of non-objective painting (New York City, Hilla Rebay, 1946), p.40

consciousness and feeling. Before addressing the intrinsic values of each color, the Russian painter wrote that “consciously or unconsciously, artists obey the Socratic motto: ‘Know yourself!’”.

As for Kikki’s titles, it is evident from them that color also has a nominalistic magic: *Blues and Root . . . And the Sky is Blue; Pink; Blue and Root*. If repeated one after the other, the titles of this series form a litany or mantra.

Returning for a moment to blue, cobalt blue evokes the depths of the sea and sky, and is the color of infinity. Yet for Kikki it also bears the sentimental imprint of the seats in her father’s car—a Citroën from which, as a child, she experienced the joy of discovering new places and new worlds. Blue runs throughout all of Kikki’s production and psyche in a profound way: “I loved laying inside my parents’ car, on those gorgeous blue velvet interiors, daydreaming while listening to Brazilian music, my head on my favorite orange pillow. My dad’s Citroën Shark was like a giant spaceship.”

Surprise is part of the game of life, and Kikki focuses on it while also working without pre-conceiving, so that the art can grow from the relationship between materials and thoughts. She is seeking something she neither knows nor wants to understand with her intellect, as painting is for her an astral journey.

Blue has a further resonance for Kikki, which is, if possible, even more personal and autobiographical: she was born with the umbilical cord around her neck, thus making her a “blue baby”. Prenatal sensations and neonatal memories inhabit us in an unconscious but palpable way. Memories are known to be constantly affected and transfigured by the imagination. Consequently, more than any other color, blue for Kikki is linked to childbirth.

But what is the source of this intense sensitivity toward color? Once again, the artist herself can provide an autobiographical trace. When she was seven and spent a period of time with her parents in India, she was captivated by the painted elephants and the terrifying statues of Kali. In Kathmandu, however, it was the intense blue of the sky that profoundly affected her. Perhaps it was the time she spent years later with Larry Poons—her teacher at the Art Student League in New York—that nourished her acute sense of color, even if the luminosity of her hues seems more reflective of the brightness of Arthur Dove’s palette. Nevertheless, I’ll leave such a discussion of hypothetical influences to others, and return instead to the subject of color.

*Yellow and Heart* (2013) has a yellow background against which a root stands out, now definitively transformed into something else. “The bright yellow of a lemon hurts the eye after a while, as a shrill trumpet note may disturb the ear. The eye becomes restless, is unable to fix its gaze for any length of time and seeks distraction and rest in blue or green.”<sup>3</sup>

Kikki Ghezzi became particularly aware of blue’s vocation for infinity when on August 30, 2015, she wrote about *Chi* (“house” in the Cornish language): “The process of enveloping an abandoned house on the cliff, once used by tin miners to store explosives, allowed me to reflect upon the perpetual principles of impermanence, repair and renewal. I felt like a *mother-bird* patiently weaving and tenderly repairing her fragile nest. Memories came to me of my mother and grandmother: clever, patient, soothing, indispensable. I rose when the tide went down, often encountering on the stony beach a fisherman who lived according to the same ancient clock. As I wrapped stone in vivid blue fishing net and rope, the sea with her unforgiving liquid hands rose up and undid large parts of my work. Once she had finished pulling apart the man-made rope, nothing but the essence survived, and I could begin again on a fresh canvas”. From these lines it is clear that what interests Kikki is not so much the aesthetic result, which in the end is almost completely dematerialized, but the significance inherent in the process—that is to say, what is strictly intrinsic to living and intimately connected to Kikki Ghezzi’s here and now. As Sara Fontana points out, in this case she has acted “in symbiosis with the tide chart.”<sup>4</sup> Among all her works, this is the one that undoubtedly surrenders the most to the elements and fades into the Whole.

The blue fishing line Kikki used already contains in itself the idea of languor and a feeling of distance and loss. “It is the color of love, a color that allows you to breathe.” The action of wrapping an

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3. Vasilji Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 40.

4. Sara Fontana, “*Roots, prima e dopo*”, in Kikki Ghezzi, *Roots* (Milan: Skira, 2014). Thus far, this book is the most complete of those written on the work of Kikki Ghezzi.

abandoned house in an embrace distantly recalls *Legarsi alla montagna* [Binding to the Mountain], a “performance” undertaken in 1981 by Maria Lai in Ulassai, a village in the Sardinian hinterland, in which the whole community collaborated.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, Kikki is alone in challenging the elements, the sea, the darkness they swallow. . . guided once again by a dreamy creative impulse.

One aspect that Kikki’s work has in common with Maria Lai is the creation of textile books. “Once back [from Cornwall], in the studio, I cut into pieces old linen pillowcases, handed down by my grandmother to my mother and ultimately to me. Working with local embroiderers, I sewed the linen squares together, and then stitched my Cornish night paintings onto the fragments. They fold and unfold like bed sheets, slowly revealing within them traces left behind by three generations of women.”

Numerology, deeply connected to the ancestral roots of being, can also be useful for reflecting on Kikki Ghezzi’s work. For example, the number twelve is a recurring theme in many of her pieces, such as in the artist’s book *Luce* [Light] (2016). Twelve is a number that is particularly charged with symbolic meaning (twelve months, the zodiac signs, the gods of Mount Olympus, the Labors of Hercules, the Tribes of Israel, the Apostles, the Paladins of Charlemagne, the Knights of the Round Table . . .) and is one that seems to have a special weight: of The Major Arcanum, the Hanged Man (or number XII of the Tarot tradition) is obscurely connected to absolute idealism and a troubled rebirth.

In Western culture twelve is considered the holiest of numbers, along with three, which is its equivalent reduction ( $12 = 1 + 2 = 3$ ). Twelve indicates the recomposition of the original totality, the descent to earth of a cosmic model of wholeness and harmony. In fact, twelve signifies the conclusion of a completed cycle. It is the symbol of the initiation that allows a human to pass from the ordinary to a higher, sacred plane. Therefore, twelve has a very special esoteric meaning associated with the physical and mystical tests that initiates must perform. After passing the ritual, transformation occurs. In fact, in many cultures, initiation rites are performed at the age of twelve.

Returning to *Luce*, one can see a book in which the rays of divine light are condensed into different color attributes whose combined vibrations “constitute the fabric of our entire Universe.” This book was the product of a year-and-a-half-long meditation on color. Each meditation was followed by an immersion in a specific color, which spawned the different variations—on paper and on canvas—of Kikki’s phenomenal being. The book’s gestation was long, taking its cue from the ancient Bibles, whereas its function was broad, given that Kikki sometimes shared it with others as a support for meditation. “The seventh Ray is the divine Violet Flame, alchemical, sacred fire, which transmutes all negativities and karma of present and past lives.”

The double page poetic index of *Luce* is of particular interest because it fully catalogs Kikki’s desire to express the spiritual value of every color. It presents a sampling of tones and qualities alongside indications of the specific rich and complex sentimental areas that they involve. Gold is the only color with only one corresponding value: unconditional love.

WB Yeats wrote: “When I think of any great poetical writer of the past . . . I comprehend, if I know the lineaments of his life, that the work is the man’s flight from his entire horoscope, his blind struggle in the network of the stars.”

Even astrology and the ancient science of alchemy have a place of honor in Kikki’s world. *L’Orologio Cosmico* [The Cosmic Clock] (2021) is firmly based on astrology: “Your birth chart is the blueprint of your soul,” she writes in “Letter to Self,” published in the appendix.

Coincidentally, Kikki has her Moon in Pisces, the twelfth sign of the zodiac. Her emotional side is therefore governed by a sign of water, which represents the infinite ocean, emotional wisdom, and a fluid succession of illusions and illuminations—a path that can be sometimes cloudy and sometimes clear, a gap between winter and spring. Her personality is connected to a multitude of forms and colors that intertwine to form the characteristics of the “opposite” and rebirth.

In Greek mythology the sign of Pisces is linked to Eros and Aphrodite, who threw themselves into the sea to escape their persecutor Typhon. When the two lovers were saved by a pair of dolphins sent by

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<sup>5</sup> . It is no mere coincidence that the photographic “fragments” of Ghezzi’s work *Chi*, were exhibited in the project room of Milan’s Nuova Galleria Morone, whose owner Diego Viapiana, brought heightened visibility and international attention to the work of Maria Lai. For a more detailed description of Ghezzi’s installation there, see note 11 of Sara Fontana’s essay in this book.

Poseidon, Jupiter lifted them up into the sky and made them stars in the constellation of Pisces. In the Babylonian world, there was the myth of Oannes, a fish that came out of the water every day to bring wisdom to men (I'm reminded here of Abel Ferrara's wonderful film *Siberia*). In short, the sign of Pisces represents both the beginning and the end, reality and vision, spirit and matter, an opposition which is united and indissoluble: there is not one without the other, just as there is no light without shadow.

The sign of Pisces is also ruled by Neptune, the eighth and furthest planet in the solar system. Its symbol is a stylized version of the trident (♆), which refers to the commanding power of the Roman god of the sea who lived in the abyss and dominated sea monsters and storms. Neptune is a planet that has traces of methane present in the outer layers of its atmosphere, and this gas contributes to characteristic blue color. We are in the blue, again and again.

To confirm the importance Kikki gives to the sphere of astrological knowledge, I will confess that in addition to her friendship, one of the gifts I received from her is my astrological chart, which I have not yet found a way to decode in its entirety and complexity.

Kikki speaks of the universal mind, and the cosmic vocation of her work is revealed in all its clarity in these (and other) words: "We are all bright stars full of inner light." To corroborate the power of this intuition, which was shared by philosophers such as Saint Augustine and belongs to anyone who is able connect with the Cosmos, I would like to share a story from the very early childhood of my daughter Marta Maria. One night at a country house in Orvieto, as I stood under the celestial vault with Marta Maria in my arms, she was looking up at the sky and said: "Ah, mamma, how beautiful the stars are, they are exactly like us . . ." One cannot fail to recognize in that feeling something common to us all.

Recurring words in Kikki Ghezzi's writings, such as light, mirror, map, journey, film, energy, synchronicity, serendipity, magic, dream, and ancient language, map out a spiritual territory that has more to do with initiation and intuition than with rational thought. Ever since she was a child Kikki has perceived the sacred value of imagination. Under the tree in her grandparents' garden in Brianza, she felt nature breathing. Many years later, as an adult, she would celebrate this recollection in *The Magical Cherry Tree*. In her childhood setting Kikki could observe life condensing into moments of serendipity: a bird suddenly fell into her cup of milk. Here the marvelous erupts, surprising, and the exceptional nature of this event led the young Kikki to perceive the anima mundi intensely. In this way she was suddenly aware that each of us is connected to the animals, plants, seasons, Sun, Moon and stars—all of us a part of the circle of life. Her artistic practice today follows the impetus of the Universe, the cyclical movement of which we are a part, and abandons itself to the flow of the process: to impermanence, change, and discontinuity.

Dreams and childhood are realms to turn to in order to stay connected to Source. "I dreamt I was in the garden of my grandparents' home, under the apricot tree, the sun shining. I want to be there today while I paint." Childhood is the place of the eternal present.

"The creation of a painting is like the experience of childbirth [. . .] Painting is a rhythmic cycle", similar to breathing. Kikki also talks about the joy of reconnecting with everything by following the universal rhythm of life. Painting is therefore in all respects a conscious practice, a way of accessing secrets, a discipline like prayer or a martial art.

*Il Ciliegio Magico/The Magical Cherry Tree* (a process documented in a catalog with a white cover engraved in relief, white on white, almost forming an embroidery on a bedsheet from an ancient wedding trousseau) connects roots to roots and sky to sky with an emotional thread. "Using the old traditions of embroidery, oil painting, natural dyeing and printmaking, I have explored the theme of Nature and place in an ideal dialogue between two ancient cherry trees, whose roots symbolically touch despite being thousands of miles apart: *il Ciliegio Magico*, a national monument rooted in my beloved native Italy, and the majestic Magical Cherry tree in Villa Firenze's garden, the residence in Washington of the Italian Ambassador to the U.S." Inside the book is a fragment of silk dyed in a delicate, pearly pink (the same pink as in the Peach Orchard scene in Kurosawa's film *Dreams*), which is reminiscent of the sheets/veils Ghezzi suspended in the spaces of the Italian Embassy in Washington. Light and luminous, almost intangible halos—gusts of pigment—the silk sheets moved like living membranes at the slightest stirrings of air. Their shades of pink combined the sweet pinks of Tiepolo and Spalletti with the tender,

mottled, iridescent pinks of Monet's water lilies, mixed with the impalpable and airy pink of dawn. This range of color can only indicate a prelude, a new beginning.

As far as the colors of *Femme Valise* (2016) are concerned, the cherry pinks deserve mention. Inside a box resembling a briefcase with a velvet-covered handle are two lengths of silk in a pale and luminous soft pink, contained like an oyster's pearl. The inside is lined with the same pale, luminous pink, and the outside is covered with a long-haired velvet of a darker, more intense and accentuated color. The silk inside has the pearly nuances of Monet's *Water Lilies*, described by Bachelard as "this sudden permanent flower," and further: "The nymphaea is an instant of the world. It is a morning of the eyes. It is the flower of surprise in a summer's dawn . . . It is as lovely as a breast. Its whiteness has taken on the faintest tinge of pink, the palest flush of temptation without which the white would be unaware of its whiteness."<sup>6</sup> Given that, according to Kandinsky, white is the color of the true beginning of everything—the source of inexhaustible possibility—consider how much white there is in these pinks, how much light!

Part of the series of *Il Ciliegio Magico/The Magical Cherry Tree* is also an artist's book of a refined taste that reminds one of the Japanese style.

Here a brief explanation of Kikki's coloring procedures and color baths is helpful. As in medieval shops, in the laboratory of an alchemist, or in witches' houses at the edge of the woods, Kikki follows ancient methods by heating numerous pots to obtain different dyes from natural pigments via immersion, such as in her extraction from cochineal which was used for the *Magical Cherry Tree*. The hanging silks that float in space, making color a sort of light and impalpable breath of wind, were soaked in infusions of various kinds, including flower petals. Depending on the desired colors and the nature of the supports, Kikki uses different procedures. Linens are often left to soak for days. The result is partially predictable but not directly controllable, since these are practices for which other natural forces are called upon, such as chance.

Continuing our discussion of color, we can now turn our attention to Kikki's artist's books in unique copies and in fabric, whose production increased during the pandemic. *In Aula Ingenti Memoriae Meae* (2020), we see an expansive color diary that contrasts with some of the artist's other books, which are often devoted to single colors (such as *Moon*, a book about white). Another of Kikki's artist's books is *Cosmos*, whose first pages seem to show a shred of cloud in a gaseous state that is ever-changing, as if the book were documenting its ongoing transformation.

Also worth mentioning are Kikki's notebooks/diaries, in which her life and work are intertwined in a web of theories, thoughts, images and feelings.

Before we conclude, it is also important to mention a color that is a lively and essential hue for Kikki's palette: green. *Bindu* (a point, drop or particle) is the title of a painting with a pulsating patch of vibrant green in the center of a Belgian linen support, bold and bright like a meadow in spring. This dot is a planet of cosmic energy located in an interior—an explosion of the smell of new grass in the air. Green conveys the impetus of spring. Once again, a childhood memory helps to deepen the resonance of this color: "In Katmandu, the main square still crowded with hippies (I speak of the '70s), the giant Boudha Stupa, a strong smell of spices mixed in with OM vibrations and the thangka of the Green Tara that my mother received from a Buddhist Monk." Another example of green's importance can be found in Kikki's letter to self, published in the appendix: "And the light turns green [ . . . ] Your practice is to recognize the light". It is evident that Kikki Ghezzi paints the invisible forces of nature and the spirit. She sees herself as a medium, and when form arises on the canvas, it shows that something is emerging from the depths of herself in order to become embodied in a colorful organism. "Do not paint the picture, allow it to manifest." Visions that manifest themselves without the need to understand.

"My soul in process," wrote Kikki about *Bindu*, a painting that once again represents the way out of darkness, the festival of rebirth.

Her paintings and her books can be declared psychic objects. Real objects, on the other hand, are silent witnesses to our existence. Over the course of time, gestures and looks are deposited on them, and most of them survive our mortal remains. In *Court of Memory* (2015), the centerpiece is a briefcase; a small space conventionally designed to contain what is required for a single day. However, in this instance it has to store the past; the selected traces of a very dense and even painful one. Emblematic of

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<sup>6</sup>. Gaston Bachelard, *The Right to Dream*, trans. JA Underwood (New York: Grossman, 1971).

the importance of color research in relation to moods are the photogravures contained in the first two cases: twelve in the first and nine in the second. The latter contains silkscreen prints of the wallpaper from Ghezzi's childhood home, colored in different shades so as to recreate the sense of temporal distance and to maintain the typical dreamlike nature of remembered images.

The briefcases contain not only traces of private and personal "things", but also the Moon and stars—the infinite in the finite. The first series is composed of three elements in which the concept of the inner cosmic mirror is cemented with great cohesion: "I'm focusing on a project that explores the 'traces' of my parents; the memories and objects stored by my parents in a certain way makes them present and brings them back to life."

Whether tools of exorcism or supports befitting the practice of detachment and the process of mourning, these three briefcases contain the echoes of a past that will not return. Assembling them helped Kikki take a fundamental step: to leave her grandparents' home where she was born and under whose apricot tree she daydreamed. "When I think of how the work started [...] I don't have a sense of past, present and future [. . .] I feel as if everything were in the now and I don't remember the initial spark [. . .] Past history, past and present coalesce into a point [...] like the growth rings of a tree. This project opens wounds, like the cracks in the walls of my parents' home."

Kikki Ghezzi seems to have acted in this case according to Rumi's precept: "Don't turn away. Keep looking at the wound. It's from there that the light enters into you."

As Joseph Cornell taught, briefcases are an ideal habitat for storing relics of people: the remains of houses and things, scraps of wallpaper, or lining paper for drawers (although Kikki references Louise Bourgeois as the tutelary deity for this activity). Whatever the case, the sense of collecting with a child's attitude of discovery and classification—a sincerity in the task—is as pertinent to Cornell and Bourgeois as it is to Ghezzi.

To conclude, color is central to Kikki's work. Color is living energy, cosmic vibration at different frequencies, each reflecting its own particular deep harmony with the Universe.

"I think of myself as a weaver of colors. I am color. My oils are a thousand color threads woven together: me/we." This image sees painting as a practice that metaphorically unites what is separate, the different personalities of color—the I that becomes we. "Connecting with the immense colors of the Universe" is the purpose of Kikki Ghezzi's work: to enter into intimate and profound resonance with everything. A form of prayer, a mystical practice, a religion. On the last page of *Roots* (Skira, Milan, 2014), there is a photo of the artist that functions as a farewell to the reader: her body and head are set back and out of focus while her outstretched arms culminate in the hands she holds out, proffering a form (*Portrait with My Hands*). For anyone who has been educated in the Christian tradition, this form can be easily identified as the sacred heart of Jesus; a metaphor for the fact that for Kikki, art represents the offer of all of herself.