

Exploring The Alluring Installations Of

BRUNO BILLIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAGDALENA M

Bruno Billio is a Toronto based multidisciplinary artist, working with small and large-scale installations. At once an installation artist, a sculptor, and a designer, Billio creates challenging works informed by his command of each of these practices. Currently living and working in Toronto, Billio has been the resident artist at the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto for the past decade. Bruno Billio has exhibited internationally in Milan, London, Miami, New York and Los Angeles.

How do you define your style of work, and what motivates you to pursue these particular mediums?

BB: I would describe the style of my work being contemporary, with an ode to a classicism of culture. What motivates me, is that to me everything is my medium; it could be light, it could be air, colour, pressure, weight, conversation, so anything that I can respond to with my senses, becomes a melange of mediums I use for my work.

What do you love most about working with large-scale installation pieces?

BB: One of my favourite things, and maybe the thing I love so much about large scale, is just how it can envelop the viewer. When the viewer sees something of scale, it reacts with all those mediums I previously mentioned on a much bigger capacity, in a more profound way of receiving that sense of weight, perception, gravity; all those things become multiplied and the scale gives it a real clear conversation to the experience or feeling.

Do you build everything yourself or do you hire contractors to execute any part of the installation process?

BB: I conceive of everything myself in my super studio, but because of the scale and depending on the engineering factors, the kind of materials and mediums I'm using, I hire highly skilled crafts people to execute the projects. For example; the Gold Books Tower series, I work with master metal makers, producers, polishers, platers and book binders. The reason why I do that, is I don't have the expertise of 40 years of experience, so I seek out master crafts people that can execute things I cannot on a very high scale. This allows my pieces to achieve extremely high quality, because I'm working with the best. For the installation, I work with professional installers, I do my own calculations, and I work with engineers to confirm that my ideas will work and last, and be safe as well.

What type of challenges do you encounter while installing artwork within a space?

BB: I wouldn't say challenges, I would say opportunities. I am quite intrigued and excited about a space, and what the space is, and what it offers me becomes part of the story in some way. I wouldn't say there is ever a challenge to it, rather than a reaction to what is happening. That always reveals itself in the most beautiful way, reveals something I didn't think of that allows the mediums I'm working with to do what they do naturally, without conflict, without fighting against what is naturally happening. Its a better flow, a more organic way of seeing it, and all the things that are activated do what they do on their own without maintenance, without being persuaded or twisted around or challenged all the time.

How much planning goes into a piece such as the silver suitcases installation at the Hazelton Hotel in Toronto?

BB: I do have the capacity to have the concept idea very quickly, so when I conceived the nickel plated suitcases at the Hazelton, I knew what type of super structure I would need to create the illusion of them stacked already, but then I work with engineers to confirm the design, which enables me to tweak and make minor changes that are visually irrelevant to the final piece. The final could take up to a couple months to execute from concept.



For the Golden Books towers at the Four Seasons, how are those sculptures fabricated? What materials were used to create this pieces and how long did it take?

BB: Those are all custom made and fabricated individually. The covers themselves are made of steel, and then they're polished and plated in brass to give a gold look. I have proposed 18k gold, but it was going to be out of the budget. I wanted to give the option, but I have achieved the same kind of effect with brass, when the viewer looks at it and the light hits it. The actual inserts, the book part, are custom made books which were fused together and gilded to look like gold. The book covers don't open, but I wanted it to represent the real look of a book, I wanted the symbolism of the book to be very clear, without being so literal with a title or words.

What is your favourite installation to date and why?

BB: Its a tough question, because I love all my children very much. They are very different, looking at the suitcase piece to the book piece, those would be my favourite. The suitcases I love, because they are instantly recognizable as suitcases and travel. The nickel plating gives it a sense of luxury. They reflect the room and as you walk towards it, the reflections make the room appear & disappear, but when you get up close you see yourself. Its quite magical and becomes quite personal as well.

The Four Seasons Gold Books sculptures, one of my favourite parts about that piece that not everyone knows about, is if you look in between

the cracks of the books, you can actually see inside the sculpture. Inside is all brass, gold & paper, but its the inverted version of itself, which is a magical surprise. Thats what I love about both pieces, because they reveal so much magic, even though the trick is completely told.

Any future exhibitions you are working on?

BB: I am working on a sculpture for IKEA, which is a public piece, and

is my fourth project with IKEA. Its a large-scale project which lights up and is about recycling plastic. I am also working on a version of TRON for the Powerball at the Powerplant in Toronto, where people can experience the concept 100 times bigger. In addition, I am working with two hotels which I cant disclose just yet, one in the US and one in Toronto, that I will be installing large-scale public sculptures as well.

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