

Cybernetic Labyrinths

Francesca Crozier-Fitzgerald (March 24, 2011)



The Italian Cultural Institute of New York and the publishing house Skira present a selection of recent artwork by legendary hosiery designer Emilio Cavallini

Walking down Wooster Street on March 22nd around 6:30 pm, one may have wandered into [Cappellini](#) [2] Showroom, intrigued and curious to know why so many handsomely dressed people were congregating inside. Once inside the gallery, it would not have taken long to discover what was being honored that night. Clues could have been found on the walls, on display tables, on shelves, and even decorating the wrists of many guests.

The stocking fabric by renowned designer, Emilio Cavallini wrapped each book on the table, ready to be autographed, and stretched across the walls of the gallery where his new artwork was being observed. Some guests, such as his daughter, showed their support in wearing the open-work stocking design on their wrist as a glove. For over forty-years, his signature stockings have wrapped the legs of models around the world. Tonight, Cavallini would show guests and fans how the end product of his first love, fashion, has become the starting tool for his next passion, art.



Despite his distinction in the fashion realm, the accomplished designer's presence in the gallery could have gone unnoticed. With his modest and informal disposition, Cavallini blended into the crowd of guests, and he was able to do what he enjoyed most—mingle amongst colleagues, new acquaintances, fans, inquisitive guests, and old friends. To i-Italy, he mentioned that the event was about introducing his new passion with art. This step in his career was not about selling, advertising, or critic approval; he is fascinated by this new niche he has discovered, so the other elements do not interest him.

At the event, organized by the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [3], Cavallini would sign the first page of [Rizzoli](#) [4]'s new book on his craft as a fashion designer and artist. Titled, "Emilio Cavallini," the book explores the designer's artistic medium, hosiery, and the artist's vision of the medium's potential. Cavallini has revolutionized the fashion industry with his innovative methods to decorate a model's most lethal weapon, the legs, and now, he has stretched it to new levels.

The book, with a thorough introduction by editor, Benedetta Barzini, gives a conclusive explanation of Cavallini's newest art; he is stretching, twisting, and weaving the hosiery into complex geometric frames.

The night's display, titled "Cybernetic Labyrinths," is appropriately named. Though made with the pliant hose fabric to create soft and aesthetically pleasing textures, the art allures and traps viewers unexpectedly. The hose overlap in alternating, intricate patterns, creating a spongy fabric web, but the spongy softness of the material can be deceiving. Like much of his work, Cavallini's art creates visual mind-teasers and viewers attempting to trace one individual string throughout the frame will be enveloped in an inescapable geometric maze.

To provide brief analyses of Cavallini's art were Anna Mecugni and Laura Cherubini. Speaking first, Anna Mecugni, currently working as a lecturer at [MOMA](#) [5], comments on the relationship between Cavallini as a fashion designer and artist. "Like the stocking traps the leg, the art is trapping your eye to follow each individual string deeper into the piece." Mecugni also notices that with art, Cavallini is not restricted by the boundaries that can exist in the fashion industry—and he is taking full advantage and pushing limits. While his stocking designs often obey some sense of order and symmetry, Cavallini's artwork flirts with the possibilities to denounce balance and equilibrium.

Laura Cherubini, curator, art critic, and professor of art history in Brera, Milan comments on the unique process of Cavallini's work. Cherubini inducted his art into the canon of complex weaving and labyrinths that have appeared throughout Greek history such as [Penelope](#) [6]'s tapestry, the myth of [Arachne](#) [7], and the thread of [Ariadne](#) [8]. The medium used, whether it be thread, spider silk, or hosiery, is conducive to creating this art form that produces complex structures and logical pattern successions. As Cherubini comments, it is clear from his newest work that Cavallini has always been interested in art, math, and logic—his works exude these passions.

A long-time friend and colleague, designer Pablo R. Rodriguez of Members-Only clothing mentioned that he is always curious to see what Cavallini will dominate next. "He has only just tapped into what he can do, and these works on display here don't even compare to some of the other things he's done," says Rodriguez. He imagines that once he discovers new boundaries in engineering and color alternation, his work will skyrocket.

At the end of the night, Cavallini sat at the table in the front to sign his guests' books and chat for a moment with each new acquaintance. The only obstacle of the night was trying to keep the line moving swiftly, as Cavallini's amicable nature spurred conversations and words of gratitude to each guest. It's clear that Rizzoli has chosen a worthy candidate to chronicle.

When asked about the next turn in which he plans take his career, Cavallini smiled and said, "Oh, do not worry, I am young. I have plenty of time!"

The show was organized by the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [9] and the publishing house [Skira](#) [10].

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