

Pop-ups in the Langhe: From Barolo to Truffles. Between Painting and Craftsmanship, a Three-Dimensional Magic

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ABSTRACT

The text guides the reader through the author's artistic journey in the field of pop-up books, characterized by a handcrafted approach and a strong three-dimensional sensibility. Through the projects presented, the pop-up becomes a tool for narrating and enhancing the Langhe region, intertwining artistic and personal dimensions.

KEYWORDS

Piedmontese artist's pop-up books; Marchesi di Barolo pop-up; Tuber pop-up.

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I trained at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts in Turin and, over the course of my career, I have worked in various fields, always connected to imagery:* from comics, with “Corriere dei Piccoli”, to the illustration of classic fairy tales for Malipiero, and collaborations with the publishing houses De Agostini and Fabbri. At the same time, I worked as a visualizer for advertising agencies and as a decorator, creating *trompe-l’œil* and oil paintings for public and private spaces. I have also exhibited in solo shows in Turin and Milan. At a certain point in my life, I rediscovered a place – the homeland of my grandparents – where I decided to move and immerse myself, making it an integral part of my artistic path. It was precisely here, in the heart of the Langhe, that my two pop-up books were born: *Barolo. Alchimia di una storia d’amore / Alchemy of a Love Story*, created in 2015 on commission from the Marchesi di Barolo wineries in a limited edition of 2.000 copies (Fig. 1 a, b, c), and *Tuber Pop-up – Tuber Comics*, a project developed together with my brother Luigi Piccato, who passed away in 2023, and with other artists. This graphic work was commissioned by the Langhe Monferrato Roero Tourism Board to celebrate the famous white truffle, and was presented on the occasion of the inclusion of “Truffle Hunting and Extraction” in UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list, with a print run of 1.000 copies in Italian and English (Fig. 2 a, b, c).



Fig. 1 a, b, c. || *Barolo. Alchimia di una storia d’amore / Alchemy of a love story.*
Front cover and two pop-ups.

* The translation of this contribution, originally written in Italian, was carried out by the editorial team of “JIB” and was produced in order to provide wider dissemination of the content to an international audience. This testimony was developed – with the collaboration of Marta Peiretti – following the talk held at the Pop-App Museum in Turin on March 26, 2026, as part of the “Pop-Appuntamenti” series. The full recording of the event is available on the website of the International Centre on Interactive Books at the following address: <https://tinyurl.com/385k9yf8>.



Fig. 2 a, b, c. | Tuber. The graphic work consists of a box set (top left) containing the Tuber Pop-up book (top right) and the Tuber Comics (bottom right).



This 'three-dimensional' sensitivity of mine has always been a kind of magic. Since childhood, when I opened a pop-up book and saw the figures rise, I had the feeling that they came to life. It is precisely that sense of wonder, that original amazement, that I still try to convey through my work: inviting the viewer to enter a small world of imagination (Fig. 3). I feel I possess an innate ability to imagine in three dimensions: I can visualize each element in space almost instinctively, without relying on rigid measurements, but trusting my sensitivity. My work is born in this way, from a process that is very free yet at the same time rigorous, made up of trials, errors, and continuous adjustments. I work by hand, drawing on paper and developing the idea; then, through the folding of the paper, I create the die-cut, taking into account the possible printing techniques, thus moving from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional. This is a process I like to define as entirely artisanal, born from my experimentation and my love of drawing, and it shows how every modification is the result of continuous research – almost like a personal dialogue with the material.



Fig. 3. | Hand-made pop-up card, detail.

In the project dedicated to the Marchesi di Barolo, I sought to translate into three-dimensional form the identity of the Langhe, the history of wine, its architecture, and its landscape. I wanted each opening of the book to be a discovery, a visual experience capable of conveying not just an image but an atmosphere. This resulted in four double-page spreads plus a fifth (created later), which does not appear in the book (**Fig. 4**). The Abbona family, owners of the Marchesi di Barolo wineries, commissioned the work because they wanted to share the history of wine with a wider audience. They had already experimented with presenting it to visitors through a small theater (with a structure similar to a pop-up) set inside an old wardrobe. That was the initial idea: to offer wine enthusiasts – even internationally – a story to leaf through with surprise and wonder, entering into a tale of love and good works. The project was entirely produced in Italy and within the local area, including die-cutting and assembly (**Fig. 5 a, b, c, d**).



Fig. 4. || The fifth pop-up related to Barolo, not included in the book.



Fig. 5 a, b, c, d. || Barolo. *Alchimia di una storia d'amore / Alchemy of a love story*. Pop-up design plates.

With *Tuber Pop-up – Tuber Comics*, on the other hand, I engaged with the world of the truffle, with its hidden, almost secret nature. In this case as well, I worked to evoke rather than describe, allowing the paper to build small environments to be explored (**Fig. 6 a, b; Fig. 7 a, b, c**).



Fig. 6 a, b. || *Tuber Pop-up*. Design plates, details.



Fig. 7 a, b, c. || *Tuber Pop-up*. Design plates, details.

This project also held a deeply personal value for me, as it involved the collaboration of my brother, Luigi Piccato, a great comics artist with whom I shared sensibilities and imagination. His contribution enriched the work and today represents for me a living memory of our creative dialogue. In addition to the box set, I was asked to design a large-format, one-of-a-kind pop-up that would become a small theater – a three-dimensional silent book capable of telling an important story connected to our territory without words, even abroad (Fig. 8). The pop-up was taken around the world and used directly by the tourism assessor Mauro Carbone to explain what truffle hunting entails.

A very important moment in my journey was my encounter with MUSLI – the Museum of School and Children’s Books, and my participation in the 2021 exhibition *Italian Style*. Seeing my pop-ups included in such a prestigious context, alongside historical movable books, was a truly significant recognition for me. In that dialogue between past and present, I strongly perceived the value of my work: my contemporary pieces were engaging with older works, becoming part of a continuum. I also had the opportunity to share this experience during the “Pop-Appuntamenti” of the Pop-App Museum, an occasion to present my path and, at the same time, to remember my brother Luigi. Publicly retracing the work we did together on *Tuber Pop-up* was a particularly intense moment for me, in which artistic expression and personal memory became intertwined. My two pop-up books, born from an intimate and artisanal process, have come to engage with history, acquiring a dimension that goes beyond time. And this is perhaps one of the aspects of my work that I feel is most important.



Fig. 8. || The large-scale pop-up exhibited at the Pop-App Museum on the occasion of this event.