

FEDERAZIONE MONDIALE DEI CLUB E CENTRI UNESCO (WFUCA)

Consiglio Esecutivo e Convegno Internazionale

“Il Linguaggio Universale della Musica e dell’Arte per un’Etica Globale”

Lucca e Firenze, 8-13 marzo 2013

TOMMASO DE CARLO

Fondazione Firenze Artigianato Artistico

Ethical values in Minor Arts: craftsmanship

Ethics as a constitutive component of artistic and traditional craftsmanship

Florence, 11th March 2013

This contribution, focused on the actual relationship between ethics and craftsmanship, wishes to underline how ethics is crucial to develop artisan work relationship and environment which could be sound and marked by an optimal relationship between the artisan master and the apprentices as well as a supportive and mutual relationship between these all with the matter and the masterpiece.

This narrative buildup, which cannot live aside the story of a personal work experience, tells briefly about the career of the speaker, who has traveled the most exemplary steps related to the artisan job. Tommaso De Carlo, born in 1959, following his specific professional studies at the Istituto d’arte in Florence, started to collaborate with several Florentine traditional craftsmanship stores, where he concluded his training and got to the achievement of its professional maturity around the ’80s. Due to these precious human and working experiences De Carlo became able to manage his own structured business, within whose he was even able to receive and train new recruits, while developing advantageous networks with architects and interior designers.

The artisan store, as an example of microcosm, constitutes a perfect look-out to identify the variety of social and interpersonal aspects which are common to several work environments on one hand, and on the other hand it is an elective place where it's possible to observe the persistence of some peculiarities, unvaried since the Renaissance age to present time, making this a unique kind of job.

At the heart of this work environment the artisan Master rules, representing both the hinge for the apprentices, and the conjunction between the traditional knowledge and the interpretation of contemporaneity. In fact, the Master is the main case of all those heritages and best practices which could be inherited by apprentices solely through a prolonged vicinity with the Master added to their personal attitude and will, so realizing a transfer of the trade that could be successful.

The transmission of this knowledge between the Master and the apprentice in the craftsmanship store is characterized by a continuous, disciplined and sound dialogue with the teacher as well as by

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<http://www.centrounESCO.it/>

Via G.P. Orsini, 44 – 50126 Firenze tel. e fax +39 055 6810895 presidenza@centrounESCO.it

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an operational and dynamic relationship between the apprentice and the matter, that poses several problems in its treatment: a theory evolving in continuous practice.

To make this productive system humanly fruitful and financially sustainable, ethics should affect all relationships and be at the heart of the everyday working life in the artisan store as well as much more beyond its surroundings. The Master should represent for apprentices both a distinguished model of autonomy and professional skill to be matched and, preferably, exceeded, and an ally for the intellectual and social training. Actually the choice to continue an existing business, so connected to the territory and the traditional local values, represents itself an ethical choice not easy to be run.

In the artisan practice, it is the work itself to generate an ethical urgency, since the urgency is given by that continuous and dynamic relationship with the matter, by that thought becoming action, by those hands driven by the thinking. When this mechanism develops virtuously, maintaining a balanced ethical tension, it gets as a result the masterpiece shaped exactly as imagined by the thinking during its initial creative abstraction. Otherwise, when the creation process is affected by some formative naivety or prejudices, the masterpiece could rarely be consistent with the initial wish, getting in its final shape the frailty of its premises.

Indeed, it exists even an ethical approach that the craftsmanship expresses both spontaneously or as a result of the related educational process, not solely in the practice itself, but also in the essence of the matter which represents the main incentive to admire the Nature, major value, which includes and transmits the beauty.

It is indeed this acknowledgement of ethics as a constitutive element of beauty that in the craftsmanship sector stimulates a respectful approach to the matter, leading the craftsmanship to see the matter's limits even if inspired to challenge and overcome them through the ability felt to have.

Watching the beauty - better here to be defined as perfection - which is present and recognizable by the craftsman in the natural matter, drives his will to produce objects that could be in harmony with such a generative heritage, able to replay its aesthetic content. In fact, the usual vicinity to beautiful materials, causes to create objects capable of catching everyone's admiration and, in this sense, imitators of the same lucky aesthetic balance.

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Focusing specifically on my working experience as decorator I have been always trying to pursue the origin of the elements while recreating an harmony of shapes and decorations, through both a philological and a contemporary interpretation. Every environment is, indeed, called, for the observing professional, to be garnished with a specific color or treated specifically in its surfaces. The research for the balance should take into account both the desires of the customer and the historical suggestions crossing the places and calling for respect, to grant them to be read in harmony with everything; respecting the nature of place and its becoming is always ethical.

The acknowledgment of the beauty, in such a city like Florence, goes far beyond your working table and impacts the entire territory and the urban environment, that continuously stimulate the craftsman to improve professionally and culturally. Is it really possible to stay indifferent before the spectacular line of the hills surrounding the town, some country panoramas, or the balance power of its institutional and private architectures? How couldn't you get the desire to replay that wishful wisdom that inspired the shape of the Brunelleschi dome, in whose profile the entire city – nowadays – recognize itself as a well-organized and industrious community?

There's no doubt that everybody gets his suggestions from the relationship with the territory and that the quality of these incentives are better in those places where they are more concentrated in quantity and quality.

The ancient Conventino di Firenze, situated in via Giano della Bella, has always been a meeting place since the very beginning of the last century (about 1920s)– an incubator- adequate to develop the best artisan synergy, through the simultaneous presence of several Masters in various specializations, from the blacksmith to the gilder, from the decorator to the woodcarver, from the silversmith to the engraver, until getting to host the very first followers of the most modern and scientific restoration practices. In its spaces, that were cloister cells before becoming craftsmanship stores, the craftsmen have been able to keep their individualities together, preserving the Tuscan and Florentine tradition. The recent recovery and renewal promoted by the Comune di Firenze – starting in 2005 - has been able not to betray the principle of self-organization among peers, even replacing the dignity of a healthy working area to the artisan labour. Inside the Vecchio Conventino is hosted the Fondazione di Firenze per l’Artigianato Artistico, which promotes the artisan activities in the city.

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