

INSIDE A BLINDING WORLD

di Marco Roberto Marelli

One of the basic concepts in art in the 1980s – before the Berlin Wall came down and the political strain moved from the East-West axis to the North-South one – was the so-called *genius loci*, that is, the influence placed upon artists by the cultural setting they had grown in. Nowadays the key word to describe the current trend is *glocal*. Introduced in sociology by Zygmunt Bauman, *glocalization* means that complex social phenomena should not be examined through an analysis of their general context, yet the local heritage, whether material or immaterial, of individuals and places in order to create a tightly-knit social fabric focusing on the communications of individuals in place and time, where local distinctive features may engender global wealth and well-being, and not hinder sharing.

Daniele Basso's AQUAMANTIO is one of the most outstanding works in his artistic production, as the term explained above is embodied in exciting living matter. The Piedmontese artist develops a typical feature of his homeland with this artwork, which then becomes a symbol that gets spread all over the world through the opportunities given by the globalization process. A key factor in the relationship with the local territory, water becomes the core matter of this major urban project, whereby a modern-looking landmark is created and given to the local inhabitants as a tool to reinforce their collective identity. The hand-polished steel molecules represented in the work have a contemporary feel and their shiny finish draws the attention of distracted passers-by who are then given pause for thought about such a common everyday element which is often considered as ordinary and taken for granted. **What may first appear an excessive use of mirrored surfaces is indeed a smart tool which tears people away from their boring everyday chores for a few minutes and gifts them with the emotion of deep thought. The art installation that we all can admire every day when walking through Curiel Square is not only a fascinating sculpture, but also a metaphor of an area rich in excellence and a tightly-knit community, based on hard work and great entrepreneurial skills.**

This project has many underlying meanings, including the reference to top-quality food production, but they all stem from a true feather in the cap of this magic Piedmont area, that is, artist Daniele Basso.

Born in Moncalieri in 1975 and now a Biella resident, he set off on his multicentered study path leading him to expound upon Business Science in Italy and the US, to finally get a Design&Communication degree in Milan. His worldwide-based knowledge contributed to his artistic career and, in a few years' time span, his works were exhibited in renowned art locations all over the world, from New York to Shanghai. Growing in modern times where the so-called "widespread creativity" is predominant, Basso reacted to easy-to-go art bulimia with his works, exploiting two concepts that were apparently conflicting: top-level design – which becomes conceptual art – and the urban landmark revival.

By founding GlocalDesign in 2006, a leading firm cooperating with major Italian design companies, the artist from Biella started on a path that led him to deeply develop the intention to stray away from the study of "functional practicality", required in designing products of everyday use, to find a "symbolic functional feature" in his works. Going along a path rich in exciting and demanding progress, the object that is created out of his design turns from a tool for action to a tool for thought, from a manufacturing product into an art piece. **The technological element, his painstaking research on materials and professional care in the implementation step – which typically characterize top-of-the-range consumer products – are still essential in Basso's work, but what really makes a difference in his works, that stand out in a wide range of well-made products, is the ability to stretch all these factors to express a deep-seated concept, conveyed**

with great communication skills. He knows all the tricks as a designer, but he moulds them with his artistic sensitivity and makes them powerful expression tools for a new goal, which is no longer commercial but entirely ethic.

By examining Daniele's whole artistic production, what impresses and deeply charms contemporary art connoisseurs is the predominantly public penchant of his sculptures. Unfortunately, with the end of great narrative works, our times witness the trivialization of landmarks, that used to be symbols of township pride and individuality and are now becoming non-places where locals go for a walk on a depressing Saturday afternoon.

Instead there are such works as AQUAMANTIO that place the focus back on major local events, those great milestone of the true history of a town where the square is back at the centre of urban life where major social events take place. Indeed civilization as we know it was born in the *agorà*.

This long-lasting symbol created by the artist for his hometown does not recall or imitate great past landmarks, yet is open to the most stringent innovation. On the one hand, the basement is a large stone block also meant as a seating area, made of the same material as the paving of the square where it is located, fully suited to its installation site; on the other hand, the polished mirror steel towering over the white Carrara marble blocks makes the sculpture a cross-generational instrument, a door that leads to the bright future we are already stepping into.

Moving on to a strictly phenomenological approach, it is worth noting that Basso's typical mirrored surfaces, that are found in nearly all his artwork, are his unique feature that prevent his art from becoming self-referencing, self-enclosed elements, and contribute to its opening out to the world, thus letting onlookers and the surrounding landscape get into and become part of it.

Recalling the artwork of another great Piedmontese artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Daniele uniquely develops the use of mirrored surfaces by expanding the power of the art piece to mirror the surroundings, thus turning it into a true environmental installation, conceptually close to the artwork of one of the most renowned contemporary artists, Anish Kapoor.

In order to completely understand Basso's artwork, we need to mention his deeply ethical view of work. In our blinding society, which is both exceptional and dazzling at the same time, getting up every day to go to work, whether in an office or a factory, is often regarded as a sacrifice, and companies are considered as soulless concrete boxes. However, such works as AQUAMANTIO convey a different approach to the manufacturing world, as steel plates require manual work to be polished by hand, so machinery does not overcome man and the finished art piece is the pride and joy of all those who participated in its creation, from the design step to the final installation.

Nowadays multinational companies swallow up small manufacturing firms, which were set up and developed with fondness and hard work, Daniele Basso's quiet wisdom communicates the will to go back to a view of life and work in a society that recalls bygone times, where fellow citizens are not just neighbours but fellows and going to work drives pride for the opportunity to process raw materials into top-quality products.

A small old world? Maybe it's just a better one.

Marco Roberto Marelli - July 2016