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towards Habitat III a gender perspective

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**towards Habitat III
a gender perspective**

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Events, conferences,
exhibitions



Angelica, Bradamante... and the others: a convention at the Triennale Exhibition in Milan to discover women's thought in contemporary creativity

Francesca PIROZZI

The charming, sentimental Angelica and the fearless warrior Bradamante are, like every woman, beyond easy stereotypes, eclectic characters, with a psychological and experience universe of their own easily revealing itself in its complexity to an attentive reader as a mirror of the women's personalities emerging in the daily life. It is not by chance that Raimonda Riccini, President of the AIS/Design, chose to dedicate to the heroines by Ariosto the 3rd National Convention of the Italian Association of Design Historians *A/B/D/Angelica and Bradamante: Women of Design*, held on June 17th and 18th, 2016 at the Triennale Exhibition in Milan and dedicated to the relationship between women and design. A relationship still unexplored, as women are almost absent from the history of design and art and in its historical and critical research there is still a male approach based on negationism, in spite of the multiple expressions of women's creative talent which is constantly spreading nowadays, as witnessed by the exhibition *W. Women in Italian Design* as well, organised by Silvana Annicchiarico and currently displayed at the Triennale Design Museum, showing the "river" – this is the metaphor adopted by the exhibition path – of women's projects implemented in the art

and customary objects which populated the spaces of our life from the 20th century up to now. The will to shed light on the *other half* of design – just to quote an expression used by Lea Vergine – comes from this "unjustified absence" of women in its history; a half that, in spite of its primary contribution to the renewal of culture and project practices given to our country, has often acted "softly", even without the awareness of its right to take part, "on the same level", to the professional contexts in which male colleagues have easily found an appropriate historical position and award. Therefore, the ambitious goal of the convention was to reflect on the role of women in society, professional work and culture, thus restoring and focussing the attention on the several authors and designers who dedicated their life to creative thought, exploiting their intelligence in order to bring

Fig. 1 – Conference, round table



art to a daily and collective dimension but, at the same time, to build the basis not to repeat those perverted mechanisms which suffocated women's creativity in the 20th century from society and culture. Beside the historical recognition – which can already rely on important contributions, such as the innovative research and evaluation of the project carried out by Anty Pansera, president of *DcomeDesign*, an association active on women's side in the historical and critical research and in designing for social purposes – the convention wanted to focus its attention on the limitations and possibilities of today's professional activity for women as far as design in the training, professional and scientific field is concerned on the one hand; on the other hand the image as a mother in contemporary history and in the contemporary world and its effects on cultural and social models as well.

During the convention, several and interesting women profiles came to surface thanks to the net put into the sea of creativity of the 20th century. Unfortunately, the convention did not give the expected results as a precious and concrete restoring occasion of their contributions, even including their works in the contemporary art exhibition organised on this theme and with similar goals at the Triennale Exhibition. Among the several women who gave their contribution in the artistic and craft field there are – thanks to the research carried out by Maria Chiara Salvaneli, myself and Serena Carbone – mostly unknown characters, often with multi-faceted talents, that are often difficult to define: Bianca Tuninetto and Lidia Lanfranconi, “female quotas” of the Studio Del Campo, a Turin-based workshop producing fire-enamelled objects active in the second half of the last century (1956-97) and characterized by a perfect role balance within the working group, apart from the quality and the expressive variety of its creations; the pottery-worker Clara Garesio, whose existence, characterized by a hard-working artistic and training activity, was like a travel through pottery from Turin through Faenza and Isernia to Naples, which she lived until the beginning of the new millennium “behind the scene” of the official artistic scenario and was recongnized in her mature years, when she experienced a bright season of freedom and creative liveliness; Lucrezia Gangemi from Calabria, journalist, actress, fashion designer, who lived in New York in the post-avantgarde era, in a context rich in opprtunities but, at the same time, in conflicts and contradictions, interpreted through a small craft production of artifacts made of wool and leather. The presence of women is also greatly varied in the field



Fig. 2 - Clara Garesio

Fig. 3 - Lora Lamm





Fig. 4 - Liisi Beckmann

Monetta Moretti Mateldi, Giulia Veronesi and Umberta Barni are the designers of printing materials which emerged from the research of Franco Dradi, starting from the Thirties, from the magazines belonging to Monetta Ferrante, Ornella Linke Bossi, Claudia Morgagni are the significant Italian graphics operating between the economic boom and the experience of the changes characterising the passage from the authorial dimension until the separation between graphics and advertising, a contribution to the communication of industrial products, as Francesco Carlini. In the same field the Italian experiences of Anita Klinz and Lora Carlini, introduced by Anty Pansera and Valeria Bucchetti: the first started in 1948 with *La vispa Teresa*, and followed a complex professional path, becoming one of the protagonists of the history of the graphic project, first director at Mondadori and dedicating to advertising, design and architecture, and then developed for the shopping group La Rinascente a series of projects focussing on women's character, interpreted with originality, such a way to build a positive reference model in representing the female physique, above all in the contemporary context, characterised by widespread genre stereotypes – which also comes out from the research of the University Research Centre for Genre Cultures. For the shopping group La Rinascente (Studio Sviluppo) also the Finnish artist and designer Liisi Beckmann worked at the beginning of her career, then becoming designer for Gabbianelli, Vetreria Vistosi, Vittorio Bonacina, Driade and author, in the Sixties and the Seventies, of *cult* projects such as the tray Nido (Valenti) exposed at the MoMA in New York, the armchair Karelia and the table Arcimboldo, produced by Zanotta. Connected with the famous trademarks of author design and with the golden era of the Italian design as well is the story told by Elena Brigi whose protagonist is the entrepreneur Maria Simoncelli and her adventure with Dino Gavina: Maria supports his choices and makes his ideas concrete, managing all aspects of his business with great intelligence, passion and abilities, so that the creativity of this designer from Bologna becomes a customary object and a cultural good. Piera Peroni's path traced by Mauro Sanmicheli goes from advertising to publishing: in 1961 she founded the magazine *Abitare*, managed in cooperation with an editorial staff almost entirely made of women, addressing to a wide professional and non-professional public, adopting a rigorous but elegant language through which she proposes contents aiming at aesthetic quality as well as civil and social values. Journalism and engagement in the publishing field also mark the profile of Giuliana Gramigna introduced by Cinzia Pagni, whose interior design projects are characterised by the interdisciplinary dialogue between architecture and design. In the field of gastronomy journalism the characters of *Petronilla e le altre* told about by Fiorella Bulegato are worth mentioning, author of an important modernization work of the women condition in a historical period full of political and social changes. Protagonists of the city of Milan in the Fifties through the Seventies are the several women workers told about by Rossana di Fazio in *La Signorina Kores* – icon of a typist in Piazza del Duomo – representing

those women coming to the city in the period of the economic boom looking for a job and playing a fundamental role in the social and cultural changes in that moment of our national history. The example of the professional paths of the designers Raffaella Crespi and Lica Steiner, analysed by Luciana Gunetti, develops starting from the idea in order to come to the construction of the memory of the project, because they systematically record their work and organised cultural places as well, such as the archives and the libraries today belonging to the Historical Archive of the Politecnico in Milan, aiming at the scientific research. The research of the identity of a design discipline compared to local contexts is the core of the activity carried out by Anna Maria Fundarò told about by Marinella Ferrara: founder of the Institute of Industrial Design at the University of Palermo and author of several articles, with its intellectual work Fundarò promotes an idea of “design for development” which aims at affecting the design, economic and social politics of the territory. At the end Letizia Bollini talked about women, communication and technologies, while Elena Dellapiana showed the first results of the European project MoWoWo (Modern Movement Women), which started more than one year ago, whose development offers an interesting occasion to reflect on the methodological problems and on the possibilities of intervention and revision of the historical contexts pre-established by a “genre” research approach applied to the history of design and architecture.

In conclusion, as Raimonda Riccini commented: «the quality of the interventions, the interest in the stories and the importance of the problems we discussed about showed that the theme of design from the point of view of women is important both for the history of design and for contemporary culture. Reading and reading again about those women, who are the (forgotten) protagonists of the history of design not only means restoring a historical truth, but it also has a political, cultural and disciplinary value. In the first case, study and research can become active elements of a fight which has just begun: reducing and completely removing the genre gap that still today represents one of the factors making our country backward (and not only that). In the second case, the history of design from the point of view of women can make us rethink about the way of making the history and renewing the methods of the discipline. Abandoning an individual point of view, the role of women in the culture of design – both as designers and as protagonists in publishing, entrepreneurship, university – makes us think about the story of design as a complex and unanimous phenomenon».