

Lightness, Fragility, and Musicality - An Interview with Renato Miracco on “I Viaggi di Fausto Melotti”

Ilaria Costa (May 18, 2008)

Last Tuesday night the exhibit “I Viaggi di Fausto Melotti” (The Travels of Fausto Melotti) opened at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York. The exhibit is open to the public and runs until May 28

“Art is a journey,” wrote the artist, and this exhibit shows that art is a journey made up of small moments described through images and words where the soul of the poet Fausto merges with the artist Melotti.

The exhibit at the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [1] runs concurrently as the first American retrospective dedicated to Fausto Melotti at the Acquavella Galleries and presents a small group of high quality work: 13 drawings (the visual counterpoint of 13 poems on display), 3 sculptures, and 14 photographs by Ugo Mulas. Mulas, Melotti’s close friend, captures the artist in intimate moments in his studio or at important public events such as the Venice Biennale in 1966.

The elegant catalog which accompanies the exhibit inaugurates the series I Quaderni dell’Istituto di Cultura Italiano. Published by [Charta Art Books](#). [2] I Quaderni are curated by Director Renato Miracco with the intention of leaving a lasting impression of the many initiatives undertaken by the Institute.

In front of an attentive audience, the Director opened the evening and introduced the screening of the documentary produced by the Melotti Archives to reveal the sculptor-poet to the American public.

The guests at the event included Signora Castellaneta, wife of Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta, Consul General of New York Francesco Maria Talò, and the late artist’s daughters, Cristina and Marta.

We interviewed Renato Miracco with much curiosity and interest about his double role as art critic and profound admirer of Melotti’s work, as well as Director of the Institute.

How did the series I Quaderni dell’Istituto Italiano di Cultura come about?

“At first, from my position as the Director of the IIC, I wanted to maintain continuity with the Institute’s initiatives. I wanted to leave a tangible record of the various exhibits that we curated and hosted in our gallery.

In the process of restoring the building, we discovered archival material of considerable historical interest. We found, for example, interviews with famous luminaries of Italian literature such as Eco, Ungaretti, and Bassani. Some were recorded, others were transcribed. I Quaderni are divided into



two sections: Quaderni Letteratura and Quaderni Arte. The first is dedicated to literature, accompanied by illustrations and a CD where interviews with the greats of literature are recorded.

Quaderni Arte accompany our internal exhibits currently on display, such as the retrospective on Melotti which is concurrently showing at the Acquavella Galleries."

The synergy between Italian and American institutions seems like a winning strategy in the politics of promoting Italian culture on American soil. How is the IIC responding in this sense?

"We have organized many events and we are always promoting events and exhibits currently on display at both Italian and American galleries, museums, and art institutions. This exhibit on Melotti is a direct result of our collaboration with Archivio Melotti and the Acquavella Galleries.

Another example of this synergy between institutions is represented by the second issue of the Quaderni Arte which will be entirely dedicated to Morandi. In fact on September 15 the Metropolitan Museum of Art will launch an important retrospective on this artist, and at the same time we will exhibit Morandi's sketches and watercolors at the Institute, while Casa Italiana will show several of his etchings.

In this way, we want to become part of the American scene through a two-fold approach; we not only direct our initiatives toward the Italian community in a self-reflective way, but towards the American public on the whole. For example, architecture from the Venice Biennale will be presented at the Whitney Museum with related events organized at the IIC.

My stance is to partner with those who go beyond Italy. For this reason, all of our events are held in English. In this way, we expose ourselves to criticism because we are not using our native language for the presentations. For me it is a necessary choice, one that reflects the market. I am convinced that my role as Director is to broaden the audience for our events!"

Melotti's work is included in prestigious collections and museums throughout Europe. How is the artist's work received on the American market?

"The story of Melotti's critical acclaim and the market for his work is incredible... and unpredictable at the same time.

He is very well known in Spain, France, Italy, and I would say in all of Europe. Europeans are passionate admirers of his sculptures, but unfortunately Americans have not had the opportunity to appreciate his extraordinary talent. He is an artist who has contributed to great innovations in mid-century modern art in Italy, with an artistic language that is both universal and highly personal at the same time.

Thanks to the generosity of the Archivio Melotti, we are finally able to share the importance of this marvelous artist's work with the American public.

More than 20 prestigious European museums do in fact have works by Melotti in their collections, but in America they are only at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

His work is gradually entering into other relevant American collections. There is so much to discover... especially after this retrospective and the subsequent article that was published in the New York Times, which has finally recognized Melotti's greatness, giving him the visibility that he deserves."



What are the aspects of Fausto Melotti's work that immediately stand out for you?

"I am moved by lightness with which Melotti expresses himself. The lightness, the fragility, the musicality with which the artist depicts emotions strikes me... in a word, the poetic nature of his work hits me. It is as if the artist is excited by immediate perceptions, and he renders them in the pure lines of his sculpture. I am fascinated by his inclination towards the irrational, the poetic, the fantastic.... They are frequently mediated by geometric and architectural figures where color and light play a fundamental role."

The show at the Institute includes snapshots by Mulas, a close friend of Melotti, and with a few simple details Melotti the artist as well as the man is revealed...

"Yes, it is a magical yet silent dialogue between two great representatives of art...every snapshot becomes a personal conversation between the two men. With a delicate sensibility, Mulas shows the man before the artist and captures the creative intention... precisely before it is expressed and translated into sculpture. In this conversation of 'silent gazes' there prevails a sincere feeling of humanity, a sense of respect and mutual admiration."

"Art is a kind of breath of the soul," is a passage from your essay in the Quaderno on Melotti.

"Melotti's art is a form of inspiration. It provokes in us the viewers, as it does in the artist himself, a sort of 'creative bewilderment.' This is also true of all of contemporary art. As a viewer in front of a work that you don't seem to understand at first...it is because the work does not speak to you on a rational level... comprehension does not go through rational channels but the emotion of the work nevertheless arrives at you...but it arrives from another direction... it strikes you in the navel. The intellectual approach is only one level, while a work of art speaks to the heart. There are other levels of understanding that are respected and nurtured."

As an art critic, what is your method of writing and your approach to works of art?

"It is not aesthetic writing, it is not theoretical, and it is not even a type of social criticism of art.... I don't have a real method. In the process of writing I close my eyes and try to capture the proto-rational, that which precedes comprehension. I write with my eyes closed, I do not pause at each word, but I put myself in direct contact with the work, and I then verbalize and translate it into words."

Today most people read very little, but it is still necessary to deliver the message... it is necessary 'to enchant' people. In my role as an art critic I have to be a little bit like the 'pied piper.'"

What do you hope that a visitor would say as he or she is leaving an exhibit that you curated?

"I would be pleased if a visitor leaving the show would say: 'I have uncovered a part of myself that I did not know existed; I dreamt with my eyes open; I will look at reality through a new set of eyes that I did not have before. I left the show with a spring breeze in my heart.'"

(Translated by Giulia Prestia)

Italian version published in "Oggi 7" (05/18/2008)



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