**Sul filo della lana/On the thread of wool**

curated by Philippe Daverio

Territory Museum, Cloister of Saint Sebastian - Pria Factory - "Factory of the Wheel", Biella

24 July 2005 - 11 September 2005

A journey about the thin and very resistant thread of wool which started from ancient archeological artifacts and arrives at contemporary art, through old and modern art, is the first exhibition ever made fully dedicated to wool and its culture. This is the journey of the exhibition "Sul Filo della Lana/On the thread of wool", open until 11 September 2005 and divided into three great venues in Biella: the Territory Museum, the no longer used Pria Factory and the "Factory of the Wheel".

The impressive event, curated by Philippe Daverio, has the advantage of a very capable scientific committee, whose members are Antonio Paolucci, Claudio Strinati and Nicola Spinosa, superintendents respectively of Florence, Rome and Naples. This great artistic event, strongly advocated by the mayor of Biella, Vittorio Barazzotto, and the president of the Biellese Territory Museum Foundation, Luciano Donatelli, has been made thanks to the contribution of the Piedmont Region, the 'Biella The Art of Excellence' Foundation, and the support of the Province of Biella.

The exhibition holds about 200 works, mostly from important national and international museums, and covers a time span that goes from the pre-historical era to the present. The main focus is on the inspirational role that this adaptable material had for excellent artists in history. There are many surprises for the visitor: from 25,000 yr old terracotta fragments which preserve the impressions of wooden fabrics of the same period - exhibited in a world preview as the oldest testimonial of the existence of this material - to Pollaiolo, Tintoretto, the well-known wool yarn by Andy Warhol, to the felt of Joseph Beuys, and the works created especially for the exhibition such as the evocative video-installations by Studio Azzurro. The themes approached are many: archeological artifacts, ancient books, costumes, decor, objects, historical instruments, paintings and sculptures, photographs, multimedia creations, settings, installations. It is an important exhibition which holds millennial history displayed without a division in ages, but ideally included in the present. The curator Philippe Daverio says: "contemporaneity is like a wardrobe where there is gathered all that men and civilizations before us have produced and whose tracks arrived to us. It contains objects and ideas that we interpret through the filter of our time, to which we can access in order to weave new textures, new ideas, which tell of the past and ourselves". The exhibition journey is born from three main intertwined lines of thought: Myth, Imagination, Factory life.

Territory Museum (Cloister of Saint Sebastian) - Biella

In the venue of the Territory Museum located in the sixteenth-century Cloister of Saint Sebastian, the works on display investigate the culture of wool, from the archeological exhibits to contemporary art, through sculptures and valuable paintings, as well as ancient objects of great historical value. The visitor is welcomed by works which are time-wise far away from each other, but are close in regards to the concept: from the famous marble sculpture from the Medici Collection representing the well-known Ariadne, to the golden sheepskins made by the Cracking Art Group. On the upper floor they juxtaposed works from different centuries which took inspiration from the mythical tale of the girl who allowed Theseus to find his way inside the Minotaur's labyrinth in the palace of Knossos: from the figure by Giorgio De Chirico to the red woollen thread in the images of Theseus on an Attican vase or in the hands of a Russian Madonna of the 19th century. In the works by Luca Giordano, Odillon Redon and Tintoretto we can instead find legends which tell of links among wool, history, myth and costume. The myths of the Golden Fleece and the Order of the Golden Fleece respectively portrayed in the drawings by Thiry Leonard from the Museum of Leiden, and in the portrait of Philippe III the Good by Roger van der Weyden. The theme of spinning is present in numerous works by artists from different ages, among which there are Andrea del Sarto, Pietro Longhi, Mario Sironi and Massimo Campigli.

The archeological and paleontological aspects, curated with Lanfredo Castelletti, director of the Museum of Como, allows the public to view very ancient artifacts, such as the wool bootlegs from the Iron Age, and extraordinary masterpieces such as the bronze ram from the first half of the 3rd century B.C., donated by Vittorio Emanuele II to the Archeological Museum of Palermo, the only survivor of a pair from the Hellenic period, which used to be at the sides of the door of Maniace Castle in Syracuse.

The ram is symbolically announced by the sheep depicted in the painting by Santini, next to which there are the works by Brueghel with scenes of shearing. Important old manuscripts constitute the documentary aspect of the section: in its illuminated pages the code G301 of the Ambrosian Library of Milan shows the work of the friars who were selling wool.

The visitor can dive into the fascinating world of costumes through the documents and objects selected by Franca Sozzani. From Vogue collections are many photographs, some of which never seen before, displayed in a proper photo gallery. The costumes are of great interest, from the precious Barège dress of 1844, made in wool so thin to match silk, to the "improbable" wardrobe with Gorbachev's coat, Garibaldi's poncho, the Andean ponchos, the Scottish Tartans and the Aran sweaters with colours and textures which constitutes an indigenous language.

There are numerous artifacts coming from all over the world, such as an exquisite wall carpet of the 16th century and Orient carpets with extraordinary designs: from the rare Anatolian Ushak of the 16th century - of which a very similar specimen can be found in a painting of the early 1600s credited to Marcus Gheeraerts - to the Chinese carpet of the 17th century shaped like a tiger skin, up to the Afghan carpet of the "Russian-Afghan war" in 1980, a unique specimen in the world for its size and technique. In history wool has also been used to created dwellings, so in the section curated by Davide Domenici, from the University of Bologna, and Luca Emilio Brancati we find an ancient Libyan house and a Berber tent.

Pria Factory - outskirts of Biella

It's about how wool inspires creativity in contemporary art: paintings, photographs, installations, videos. The multisensory journey comprehensively allows the visitor to take part in the exhibition through his/her sight, hearing, touch and sense of smell. The installation by the scenographer Gianmaurizio Fercioni allows us to touch giant wool yarns and smell their scent after they have been soaked in dye, and in the abstract introduces the video-installation by Fabrizio Plessi who underlines the role of water in wool dying. The abandoned area hosting this section comes back to life, as if it were still in use: the life of the factory is revived thanks to the video-installation by the famous Studio Azzurro, which with virtual images, sounds and voices involves the spectator carrying him/her in the atmosphere of the wool production process, suggested by the extraordinary images in motion which recompose this environment unfamiliar to us; an environment which however enjoyed a great fortune as some evocative photo shots of industrial archeology by Gabriele Basilico prove.

Curated by Dominique Stella and Umberto Zampini, this section presents works inspired by wool made by great artists such as Beuys, Boetti, Lalanne and Man Ray, who really make this very ancient material contemporary.

Wool is the inspirational tool and material used by many prominent contemporary artists, whose works were made especially for this exhibition: e.g. Marcello Jori, Luigi Serafini with four sculptures that make up the "Famiglia Gomitaly/Gomitaly Family" and the Cracking Art Group which offers the public an installation made up of sixty blue plastic penguins, provided with red woollen scarves, suspended on a fake bridge on the stream that laps against the factory. In addition there is Braco Dimitrijevic with an installation focused on a photo gallery of famous portraits, among which there are Samuel Beckett, Amedeo Modigliani, Kazimir Malevic, and Jannis Kounellis with the "Grata lana e capelli/Mesh wool and hair".

"Factory of the Wheel" - Pray Biellese

Within the former Factory, Studio Azzurro created again the atmosphere of when they were processing raw wool, which was then transformed into a fabric through the work of men and the contribution of electricity provided by the water that moved the large wheel. The video-installations symbolically make the textile machineries move, tell stories through the voices of men and women who, from the birth of the middle class to the labourers' struggles, contributed to the increase of the textile industry. The former woollen mill of the 19th century, a splendid example of industrial archeology, restored and turned into a museum, as well as a venue for the documentary centre of the textile industry, is about thirty kilometres away from Biella. The exhibition in this venue has been curated by Giovanni Vachino, president of the Documentary Centre of Biella.

The event is accompanied by a catalogue published by Skira, curated by Philippe Daverio, with texts by Philippe Daverio, Claudio Strinati, Benedetta Barzini, Lucia Portoghesi, Nicola Spinosa, Alessandro Greggio, Elena Agudio, Alessandro Giovanardi, Antonio Paolucci, Umberto Zampini, Luca Emilio Brancati, Laura Laurencich Minelli, Davide Domenici, Lanfredo Castelletti, Filippo Maria Gambari, Giovanni Vachino, Marco Neiretti, Marco Trisciuoglio and Studio Azzurro.

The setting at the Territory Museum has been made with natural materials by Studio Cerri & Associati.

The three venues are connected by a specific service of thirty ecological FIAT cars decorated with a golden ram, the symbol of the exhibition.

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