

The revolution of Eco Art

In these weeks, ending on 20th December, Reggio Calabria is hosting “Exhibition of recycled materials and eco-design”, the first Eco Art event ever realised in southern Italy. Promoted by the Department of Environmental Policies of the province of Reggio Calabria, in collaboration with MATREC, and coordinated by architect Antonia Rita Castagnella, the exhibition aims at disseminating the awareness of sustainable art, along with its various potential uses.

Conceived by architect Marco Capellini, MATREC was established in 2002 as an online portal (www.matrec.it), in collaboration with the National Recycling Consortia. MATREC has realized an expository route that allows viewers to immerse themselves in a new reality still to be discovered, through products and recycled materials.

The exhibition is fascinating. Outlandish and formally harmonious is the sitting “Polly” realised by Scatolificio Mangoni Silvio – Kubedesign with corrugated and stratified cardboard, woven in nylon and painted gray aluminium metal structure; same company and same material for “Traffic”, a twofold object: door cd/dvd and bookcase; originality is the feature of the clothes-hanger “Tree”. These examples unveil the many possible applications of materials that only little time ago were defined “scrap”.

The exhibition shows how many materials could be part of our residence or could be used to create our day-by-day clothing. But these are only examples that allow viewers to get in touch with a new artistic reality; in fact, there are numerous foreign artists who have already used this innovative technique: eco-friendly designers, such as David Edgar, who crafts coloured fish with recycled plastic, Cindy Kroth with her collection of vintage watches, bracelets and earrings made by reusing the keys of old and neglected typewriters, the sculptor Mark Orr, who manufactures decorations using the most varied recycled materials.

It's time for “eco-design”, integrating environmental constraints and profiles in the whole life of products, from the choice of materials to final treatments: it draws attention to both economy and ecology. Remarkable efforts in such a direction have been made by the European Union, through its four main regulations: IPP (Integrated Product Policy), EuP (Eco-Design of Energy using Products Directive), WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive) and RoHS (Restriction of the use of certain Hazardous Substances Directive).

These directives provide all the manufacturing companies with precise guidelines about the optimisation of the entire product life-cycle, the environmental effects of life-cycle stages, the management of end-life for the electronic products and last, but certainly not least, the limits to the use of specific dangerous substances (such as lead, mercury, cadmium, chromium IV, PBB and PBDE).

Within such a framework the eco-design is based upon a good amount of creativity and innovation in productive cycles. The architect, the company, the designers concentrate solely on the design phase, in a completely innovative way and with the possibility to use recycled materials. This growing artistic movement focuses upon love for nature and respect for our environment, raising awareness towards a more advanced concept of quality encompassing a reduced environmental impact.

Refusals take literally life through the imaginative minds of designers, and this is not only limited to clothes or furniture, but expands to many electronic tools we use daily, such as computers, printers or mobile phones. Many major brands are betting on green products, also co-ordinating their production methods with low environmental impact: in such way, they manage to obtain easier products and to sell them at cheaper prices.

The examples are various: HP, a leader company in the electronic market, announced that on the end of 2011, most of its products will be manufactured out of recycled plastic; Adidas has already produced “NBA Revolution 30” shoes, devoted to the leading thirty teams in NBA league, made with 60% recycled

materials; NOKIA has created a product with 60% recycled paper, fully recyclable at the end of its life; Philips has been awarded the 2010-2011 "European Green TV" label for its innovative 42-inch television set with low energy consumption and a remote solar power battery.

In the Italian experience, some interest to recycled art appears quite late, compared to other European Countries, but in the last years it has been diffused among both small and large companies, which consider eco-sustainable design an effective driver for enhanced competitiveness and success. An important step in such a direction was made by the European Union, with the introduction of important directives and thanks to the promotion of funding programs aimed at waste reduction and prevention through recycling and reuse to obtain new products. This not only contributes the reduction of waste products, but also it gives energy savings, resulting in decreased production of CO₂.

This new environmental awareness is strictly connected with creativity and innovation. In such a respect, the growing attention of consumers for green products leads the market to a more reasonable process of price-setting, in which consumer views prevail. For sure, according to such mechanism, in order to be fully operational, consumers must be properly informed about the nature and features of green products, and to appreciate the short-term (cheaper price) and long-term (environmental impact) advantages implied.

However, the road is still very long in a country like Italy, where is recorded the further weakness of heavy regional differentials. In such a respect, individual and group awareness and preference for green products must be supported by appropriate local regulations, providing communities with powerful incentives to shift to green behaviours and choices.

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