



àisthesis

Discovering art with all the senses

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Giuliano Vangi passed away

by Aldo Grassini, President of the Omero State Tactile Museum



On **March 26th**, Giuliano Vangi passed away. How can we be surprised and shocked by the death of a man who just two weeks before turned 93? But, Vangi was one of those people you can't imagine losing despite his discretion and his desire to stay away from the spotlight!

Giuliano Vangi was a great artist and man and so we are surprised and shocked and we deny nature the right to take back that splendid gift given to all of us.

But I would like to remember this great artist above all as a **true friend**: a friendship not based on an assiduous acquaintance, but on a closeness of spirit and sensitivity. Yes, he was great, but his greatness acquired a human dimension due to his **gentle, affectionate, generous and kind manner**.

I remember the first time he came to visit us at the Omero Museum: after having taken a tour with my wife Daniela in our modern and contemporary art gallery, where he had found some works by important contemporaries sculptors, he said with simplicity, with the candor of a sincere soul: “But here, I’m the only one missing!”. He made amends immediately, promising to give us one of his works: then he gave us two. One, “Him and Her”, was created specifically for us, the other “The Woman in the Tube”, a 1967 plaster cast of extraordinary expressive effectiveness representing constraint, almost encapsulation, in an indifferent and ruthless society. A beautiful bronze sculpture was made from this plaster: today, that sculpture is in the Vangi museum in Mishima (Japan).

Vangi was a figurative artist and to find his way, in an era in which the word “**figurative**” sounded like an offense to an artist’s imagination, he combined classicism with a strident modernity. In 2004 for the first time, I noticed it in one of his exhibitions at the “**Rotonda della Besana**”: a huge number of big, important and beautiful sculptures in marble and bronze which denounced, with unprecedented violence (unpredictable in a man like Vangi), the infinite cruelty of the world we live.

In 2014 after a few years, I had the opportunity to visit another of his exhibitions at **MACRO**; in the first room, like a punch in the stomach, he proposed a violent and inhuman society but then, in the second room, he softened the expression with a more intimate and contained pain of female representations.

In this occasion, I must remember my visit to the **Vangi museum in Japan**: 100 sculptures set, as only the Japanese are able to do, in a wonderful garden that acts as a background or rather as a contextual reference to Vangi’s works. The continuous reference that I usually make to multisensoriality is perfectly realized and the sensorial perceptions, integrating and interpenetrating, are transformed into an **authentic aesthetic experience**.

In the meantime, I had the opportunity to deepen our friendship during not frequent meetings but rich in precious cultural and human stimuli. Giuliano taught to live with the wisdom and sensitivity that know how to look at the things of the world with distance and, at the same time, with the participation which, perhaps, only art can transform into an authentic life experience.

He was always magnificent and modest; in 2022, we found him at the **MART in Rovereto** in the splendor of some of his works of extraordinary magnificence and he moved himself among them with the simplicity of someone accustomed to considering them only as human things.

One of our last meetings, in the **Piazzetta Mosca** inside the heart of **Pesaro**, will be unforgettable for Daniela and me. We were in one of the most splendid sculptural and, let's say, also architectural complexes in which art and life merge together. It was the summer of 2022, Giuliano gave us an evening of pure reflection and authentic aesthetic enjoyment with his calm, stimulating, simple and very dense speech explaining to us the deepest meaning of his museological aesthetics: the art is life and finds the meaning of the gathered there artworks in the joy of experiencing them by ordinary people who stop on that bench, by the children who choose them as a space for their games, and by who more or less unconsciously become actors of a scene including both them and Vangi's artworks. And those conversations continued in a very enjoyable dinner with his wife Graziella and the rest of Vangi's family, perfectly liked with his **friendliness**, with his **simplicity** beyond the obvious and the banal. An affable conversation: Giuliano, always generous and elegant, gave up the only available dish of mussels in favor of Daniela and talked to us about his many projects, forgetting and making us forget that he was a man who has long since surpassed the barrier of ninety years.

This is why his passing away took us by surprise, disbelieving his energy and vitality could leave us. And instead, Giuliano passed away, but fortunately for us he leaved us his thoughts and his works.

This is the happy privilege of every great artist!

The importance of Accessibility in Rai Public Radio and Television Service: accessible audiovisual models and languages

by Maria Chiara Andriello, Accessibility Manager – Rai Public Utilities

Rai is a broadcaster - a Public Service Concessionaire - and for this reason it must respond, in terms of accessibility, to specific obligations established from time to time by the Service Contract - signed between RAI and MIMIT (formerly MISE) -.

The fact that Rai is required to comply with specific obligations in this regard is an indication of how the importance of Accessibility is recognized at institutional level and always at institutional level how its role as a “public service” is recognized.

Accessibility must increasingly be considered a “**service**” to be guaranteed to citizens, because it is only through Accessibility that we can achieve full sharing of any “good” among everyone.

But what type of accessibility must a public broadcaster satisfy?

The accessibility that Rai as public broadcaster has to achieve is the Accessibility of **communication**: this is an Accessibility aimed at allowing anyone to **understand** the content of an **image** and/or a **sound**.

In summary, the services offered by Rai - specifically by the Public Utilities Directorate with its Accessibility Structure - are those services allowing deaf people to “decode” everything that is sound - through subtitles and translation into the sign language - and blind or visually impaired people to understand what the images represent and depict - through the audio description technique -.

The evolution of institutionally imposed compellings, and the notable increase in accessible products created by Rai in recent years - well beyond the minimum limits set by the mentioned Service Contract - clearly demonstrate how we are increasingly understanding that:

- an accessible product has an increased communication capacity
- there can be no true inclusion without Accessibility
- Accessibility is not a service for a few, but a common good useful to all.

When you create an accessible product, i.e. a product in which audio and video are accompanied by a subtitle and a description of the images, you effectively create a product that everyone can perceive activating the available senses in a given moment.

The communicative capacity of the “Accessible” product is increased because it is able to reach everyone: in this way, both a deaf person and a blind person can be able to understand the contents of sounds and images and the sensations that sounds and images arouse.

We must acquire the awareness that without **widespread accessibility**, there can never be **true inclusion**.

If we continue to keep part of users out of informative, cultural, customs communications and social phenomena because they cannot hear that information or cannot see those images, true inclusion will never be achieved.

It is no coincidence that in recent years there was a notable increase of RAI accessible products through translation into Italian Sign Language (LIS), both because LIS had official recognition in 2021 but also, and above all, because over the years, the requests gradually increased from the Associations of deaf, asking for the use of LIS as an additional communication method.

Therefore, starting from the traditional LIS news programs - which Rai has been producing for over 20 years – the **accessibility in LIS** has been extended to the most important institutional communications, to electoral stands in the event of political elections and/or referendums, to musical shows and to cultural contents.

Rai, as a public broadcaster, is also the largest **cultural enterprise** in Italy and precisely by virtue of this important and delicate role, Rai can provide a fundamental contribution in starting and consolidating an awareness and promotion campaign of the cultural value of Accessibility.

About this, the statement reported by the online newspaper Huffingtonpost.it regarding “accessible Sanremo” goes precisely in this direction: “The operation that RAI is carrying on as a Public Service has great cultural and social relevance”.

Talking about Accessibility of Communication, another fundamental consideration is the indispensability of the human factor and its high professionalism: this consideration is supported by the experience of those who daily create Accessibility services.

Obviously, **technology** is fundamental. Both to support creation processes and to spread it - let's think of the web and all the devices that reach an infinite audience of users and also allow to the personalization of accessibility services - but all this must remain under human control, because communication is something that happens between human beings and cannot be left to the automatism of technology, even if it is continually evolving and progressing.

With the previously stated objective of considering Accessibility as the primary driver of cultural diffusion, as Rai Pubblica Utilità, we also began to deal with **museum Accessibility**: the techniques for creating Accessibility in museums are the same techniques used to create the accessibility of an audiovisual, i.e.: subtitles, LIS and audio description.

The first experience on museum accessibility was carried out during the Covid19 pandemic, when each of us experienced the condition of “isolation” and when the use of the web was often the only way to interact with others and with the world.

Precisely in that period, the **Uffizi Gallery** created a virtual exhibition dedicated to Dante with 92 paintings by Federico Zuccari: but blind and visually impaired people were excluded from enjoying it. Therefore, we activated a collaboration with the museum of Florence and created the audio descriptions of these 92 works allowing blind people to be able to access and appreciate their beauty. The result was the creation of an artwork within an artwork: historical and literary references were added to the objective description of each individual panel, reproducing a fascinating and engaging “Dantesque atmosphere”, such that even sighted people preferred enjoy the exhibition also through the descriptions.

Accessibility improves enjoyment for everyone.

The creation of Museum Accessibility also continued through a collaboration with the **Capitolini Museums**, which led to the creation of audio and video in LIS with subtitles, to guarantee the usability for blind and deaf people of the Helmut Newton Legacy photography exhibition - hosted in Ara Pacis Museum – from October 2023 until March 2024.

In creating museum accessibility, it is obviously necessary to take into consideration the needs of blind people; therefore, we must narrate what cannot be seen, also with reference to materials and spatial indications; the narrative must be constructed considering the historical and cultural location of the artist and artwork; the audio must therefore be accompanied by a video project which will be subtitled and translated into LIS. In this way, we can obtain an audio-video guide enjoyable through a **QR code** (perhaps in Braille) which can also be activated from a smartphone, or through uploading the videos onto tablets available to users, or - for audio files only - through the **audio pens**.

I want to end with the hope that we can realize a true cultural revolution where everyone understands that in a society considered truly civilized it is necessary to create products that are accessible from the beginning and therefore to move from the concept of ACCESSIBILITY as an accessory SERVICE of a product, to the concept of ACCESSIBILITY as the **FOUNDATION** and **ESSENCE** of the product itself.

Curiosity as a method, experimentation as a project. Bruno Munari's silent revolution

by Silvana Sperati, writer, researcher, president of the Bruno Munari Association

Every time, I write about Bruno Munari, and more precisely when I pick up the ideas to do it, my personal shared experience, the artist and everything I studied and experienced become just one thing. This contamination stimulates a permanent reflection, which evolves and enriches itself adding new thoughts: above all, the experiences and considerations deriving from this reflection are contextualized with respect to the time we are going through. This is a typical Munari process: in fact, with his extraordinary **ability to simplify and go to the essence of the processes** he always offered, and continues to do, suggestions and stimuli of a universal nature, crossing time, separating what is historical and circumstantial from which is universal and forever valid.

Also for this reason today, we turn with even greater curiosity and interest to the artistic and human process of this **Master of art and thought** who was able to cross the entire 20th century showing a constant and articulated interest in different artistic and expressive languages: in fact, he was painter, graphic designer, sculptor, writer, philosopher, poet and finally teacher, as he liked defining himself.

We are evidently dealing with a personality with Leonardesque traits without hyperactivity or fragmentation of actions, but rather with an always harmonious and conscious flow, oriented towards his interest and curiosity.

Speaking about Bruno, we must pay attention not to force the priorities between the concrete action of doing and the considered more intellectual action of thinking; because in him these two aspects constantly interact, so much so that one could say that **Munari “thinks by doing”**, in a dimension of personal and constant “presence in being” which involves all aspects of the person and, consequently, of the project he expresses.

Regarding the need to pursue a global approach to different problems, we can find clear indications in the text *Fantasia* (Universale Laterza) where, speaking of design, he invited us to use creativity, imagination, and inventiveness in a global way, considering all the aspects of a single problem: from the economic to the social aspect, from the psychological to the image-related one, and so on.

If we are convinced the way of accessing knowledge, and the consequent ability to use information in the context of new functional relationships to projects, is one of the aspects that best characterizes this iconic artist, we evidently recognize the relationship between the artwork and the creative and artistic process that generated it. Let me to say that the artwork is a sort of staging of the creative process, first imagined and then created. Perhaps, we could suggest visitors of a Munari exhibition to use this observation strategy: grasp the process, research and careful experimentation that precede the creation of each artwork. A sort of curious game aimed at discovering “what is behind the artwork”. It would allow us to understand better this artist and to reconstruct, retrospectively the generative processes that underlie his designing. Above all, young people could learn from it: given the results achieved by this Master, who was able to inspire so much, they would acquire a lot in terms of discovery and growing.

But what are the most salient characteristics of Munarian research?

By analyzing the multiplicity of his production, which always produces amazement for his astonishing and abundant artistic creation, scholars and biographers highlight various aspects.

I personally place the emphasis on the characteristic and most intimate trait of the artist and the man revealed with words and actions in a coherent reference between art sphere and private one without any ostentation. Indeed, spontaneity and discretion were always his natural feature.

In short, I didn't know a private Munari and a public Munari. Bruno had a behaviour and a way of acting and expressing himself with disarming naturalness in his daily life, dealing with any topic and in his public moments. Munari's style was unique and for this reason it was easily recognizable.

An atmosphere of anticipation and joyful interest was created around him stirring empathy. He transferred this identical approach in his books, in his many activities or in conferences and lessons, always driven by the desire to share the results achieved and provide precise keys to access the artistic fact to as many people as possible.

Munari managed to be clear about every topic but he was able of “unsettling” the interlocutor allowing to glimpse aspects and possibilities unnoticed by most. Never presumptuous in his own considerations, always driven by the desire to make himself understood and helping others to understand.

His simplicity was never banal, but dense and essential, and therefore so effective.

I believe the driving force behind his moving towards things, the power of involving himself and being interested in such different phenomena and facts came from afar: perhaps from that game-laboratory that entertained him so much as a child in Badia Polesine. He often spoke and wrote about it. We can imagine him enchanted observing the fall of the maple seeds and trying to replicate what he saw throwing handfuls of seeds. But why do they fall like that? I’m sure he would have wondered it, just I’m sure he would have wondered if it could be replicated. Later become adult, he developed precise researches on different types and sizes of paper, discovering that a “little rectangle of paper of about five millimeters by five centimeters, slightly curved, in the air, it begins to spin and makes a shape illusory like candy... and it doesn’t fall immediately, but sometimes it flies over the person who threw it, allowing you to see the currents of hot air or the wind that otherwise wouldn’t be seen...” (Munari, *Giochi e grafica*, published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Castello di Soncino, 1990).

In him, the **curiosity** wasn’t static. Munari **touched, tested, observed, tried again, created new relationships between objects and materials**. He became curious about the sound produced by a drop falling from a broken tap finding the sound non-monotonous. He was ready to discover and describe the possible variables of the phenomenon, placing a crumpled sheet of paper under the drop or an overturned pan or an empty jam jar. What will happen? Will the sound remain the same or change? In every discovery, the action supports a game that becomes real experimentation.

The artist Munari did not consider these his first researches as a simple legacy of the past or a useless childish game, but in them, he was able to recognize the **propulsive force of the “spirit of childhood”**, so much so that he advises all of us to preserve this spirit throughout life: the curiosity to know, the pleasure of understanding, the desire to communicate is expressed through it.

The extraordinary fact is Bruno kept this attitude throughout his life: perhaps this was the elixir which permitted him to enter his time but also to achieve it, reaching the deepest and purest tension of man: knowing and expressing oneself through the arts.

Today, I believe this is precisely Munari’s lesson: acquiring an **attitude of curious openness towards every phenomenon**, every element coming to our attention; becoming capable of questioning it without taking anything for granted.

How many are the types of clouds in the sky? According to what rule do the tree branch? What does the internal organization of an orange look like? A toothbrush, dipped in paint, what kind of marks can leave on a sheet of paper? What is the form of an “illegible writing” of an unknown people? These things and much more constitute the wonderful world of Bruno: a lively, interesting, sometimes astonishing world, a world made of **continuous discoveries and the joy of sharing them**. A democratic world without the need to excel one over the other, where we understand the importance of collaborating for a common project.

Of course, with this singular and disenchanting approach, he could rediscover, at various moments of his artistic career, the path that would take him back to the childhood, to the precious generative memories of his childhood. This journey was never a simple journey backwards, a reminiscence of a happy era; on the contrary, it was always supported by a clear awareness of the value of action and experimentation within a context of pleasant play, that same playful, carefree mode that we all experience in our early years and which can become, in some, a habit of inspired and planning action at all ages of life.

For Bruno, the match between childhood and experimentation occurred through the planning of a collection of books known today as “**books of 45**”. He made them for his son Alberto when he was five years old because Munari couldn’t find

anything suitable for his child. It was a project that completely overturned the approach to children's books, showing a path that later many followed.

The attention to growing children continued with a partnership offering new tools for a renewed school, in a fruitful collaboration with the educational director Giovanni Belgrano; they created a series of "game boxes", the best known is probably the one called "Più e meno" (Plus and Minus). The box presents a series of transparent tiles, each with a small design: blades of grass, a little man passing by on a bicycle, yellowed leaves, a small bare trunk, a flight of little birds.... Overlapping the tiles one over the others, or subtracting them, these tiles give life to ever-changing images and stories.

But in **1977**, with the experience of the "Giocare con l'arte" workshop hosted at the **Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan**, the founding elements of his main educational project could be outlined, stimulating children towards a first knowledge and using different artistic techniques. Munari suggested a method starting from the direct experience of the child and from the experimentation of main artistic techniques in various eras and in different cultures. The children were not invited to copy the artworks because this would not have allowed them to learn anything beyond the frustration resulting from the inability to replicate the masterpieces. Instead, the children had the opportunity to experiment, in absolute freedom, with the same techniques chosen by each artist. Signs, colors, shapes, frottage, divisionism, chromatic perspectives, materials, transformation of natural forms and much more. The experience was a great success not only in Italy: it showed a **new way of promoting art education** to children. From that moment, in all the workshops, the teaching is about how children can do and not about what they can do.

I believe I will not be contradicted saying that even today Munari's proposal is a source of inspiration for the educational sections of many museums. That project, born from a request of the Pinacoteca di Brera, made Munari even more aware of the need to educate future generations about art and the promotion of **creative thinking**, educating individuals capable of **solving the problems** of life without remaining simple "code repeaters". In short, creativity for everyone, growing up as free individuals.

In 1996 interviewed by Luciano Maruzzi, the artist expressed this thought: “The famous psychologist Piaget said that you cannot change the mind of an adult. I held several meetings and conferences in universities, in middle schools, in elementary schools and now, finally, I reached nursery schools. That’s where we need to work, otherwise children are already conditioned to distorted and closed thinking; they are stifled in their creative and fantastical possibilities. Therefore, if we want to change society, that is precisely where we must do for hoping for a better world in a few generations.” It is a reflection that puts us in contact with Munari’s wishes (is wish the correct word?) and with Munari’s own cultural heritage, i.e. the workshop. Personally, as I expressed several times, for an artist who considered continuous experimentation as an essential trait of his artistic work, the **workshop** is precisely the place that best expresses this value in the utmost concreteness: for this reason, we can consider workshop as an artwork. A dynamic artwork, constantly evolving, capable of welcoming new materials, new techniques, new needs to offer always interesting and generative responses, capable of promoting important contents and skills useful for the growth of children.

In recent years, in Munari’s words and actions we can feel how the artist was able to find a permanent breeding ground of wonder, creativity and generative processes in his laboratory. He always recognized curiosity and experimentation as the essential values of doing and creating art, for him, the achievement of this awareness became a new epiphany, capable of cheering him up because he was immediately aware of the power of his message. A message offered, first of all, to children - never considered as vases to be filled but as people who can have an extraordinary access to knowledge. For adults, he told us, it is too difficult because they have too many preconceptions.

In one of my last interviews, when I asked “Munari for whom?” he replied “Well, for everyone”. These words profoundly inspired my life and my profession, stimulating a constant effort aimed at disseminating the principles of this extraordinary artist.

Credits

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