

**Comitato per la
Promozione del Merletto**
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Lace and Design

Creative lace-making in Cantù from the twentieth century to today

6th April- 30th June 2019

Palazzo Morando/ Costume Fashion Image, Via Sant'Andrea, 6, Milano

This exhibition, organized by the Lace Promotion Committee, as testimony and tribute to a precious art cultivated over time with patience and passion, is to be held in the ancient Palazzo Morando.

Situated in the Fashion quadrilateral and belonging to Milan Municipal Council, it is a museum site with a nucleus of works dedicated to the history of the city to which, since 2010, have been added the civic collections of Fashion and Costume.

The exhibition is dedicated to an ancient handicraft speciality: lace, defined in Italy with as many as three equivalent terms: “merletto”, “pizzo” and “trina”, all of which indicate intertwining threads woven by hand with very simple tools, the main ones being bobbins and needles, and extant since the late fifteenth century.

The value of lace is determined by two factors which are closely linked: the novelty of the design, which only the creativity of the best designers can guarantee, and technical perfection which requires consolidated operational experience. The aim of this exhibition is to show how this synergy between design and craft skill has come about, considering the case of Cantù (Como), a centre of uninterrupted production from the seventeenth century until today. By means of a selection of prestigious exemplars, accompanied by their designs, it will be possible to follow not just the history of the production of this city, but also to reflect on the future of a high-quality Italian speciality which, since the second half of the twentieth century has met with varying fortunes in fashion as in furnishings.

With the aim of finding new areas for the application of this technique, renewing its dignity and use, while maintaining its high technical quality, the Lace Promotion Committee has organized in Cantù since 1993 the International Lace Biennial, seeking to keep the historical memory of this art alive, hand it on to the future and stimulate design research. For this reason, since the tenth Biennial in 2011 the Committee has promoted the initiative “Lace and Design”. Internationally famous artists, architects and designers - Alessandro Mendini, Andrea Branzi, Luca Scacchetti, Ugo La Pietra, Patricia Urquiola, Anna Gili, Angela Missoni, and Thessa Schoenholzer Nichols - have been invited to collaborate with lace-makers from various schools and associations of the Cantù area to produce the “designer multiples” which will be shown in the exhibition. For the forthcoming Biennial in Autumn 2019 new collaborations will be added: Michele De Lucchi, Terry Dwan, Martino Gamper, Lombardini22, and Nanda Vigo.

A significant synergy has developed between the designers, stimulated by the material and the patient work it involves, and the lace-makers, involved in experimenting with ever-new technical solutions to carry out the designs: the different competences have encountered each other and given life to innovative projects which enhance an ancient handicraft skill inserting it into contemporary design research.

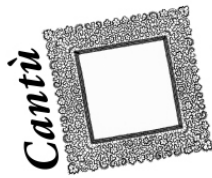
The cultural aims of the initiative have been well summarized by Luca Scacchetti (2015): *“The world of Cantù lace has allowed me to find an “extraordinary island of humanity” which has led to a collective project which is the “true value”, a value which becomes a kind of real resistance to contemporary fragmentation and standardisation; the resistance of tradition, place, the character of a territory, of an ancient form of socialisation and above all of a different relationship between design and handicraft. A resistance which tends to make a craft, an art, local knowledge re-emerge and re-signify, which precisely in its particular and specific qualities takes on universal meaning and value.”*



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The historical path proposed by the exhibition begins in the seventeenth century, when Cantù used to produce bobbin lace whose design was aligned with the Baroque taste which was internationally widespread in the decorative arts, this lace was sold in the Lombard territory and exported by Milan, a famous Italian centre for luxury production linked to textiles.

This lace was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a very expensive ornament and a prestigious symbol of wealth and social status in clothing, both male and female, in furnishings of the upper classes and in ecclesiastical contexts.

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the fortunes of Italian production, including Cantù, suffered due to the competition of Belgian and French manufacture, cheaper and stylistically innovative, and increasingly widespread machine work.

Only from the late nineteenth century onwards did Italian production revive, although with different characteristics to the past: no longer the search for homogeneity but that for a recognizable style for each centre of production. In Cantù the synergy between design and technical quality was ensured from 1888 onwards by the School of Art Applied to Industry and by the enterprising spirit of the new production. Thus a typical style was defined, characterised by complex eclectic designs and by some recurrent stiches (such as Venice, Mimosa, and Rosaline) with which borders and large furnishings, such as table mats, tablecloths, curtains and bedcovers were created.

In the nineteen-thirties Italian craft production found in the figure of the architect-designer the impulse towards modernisation. In harmony with the international Rationalist style, in Milan Giò Ponti proposed in the magazine "Domus" innovative simplified and geometrical motifs for the decorative arts.

In Cantù too, architects and designers such as Giorgio Wenter Marini, Fausto Melotti, Tomaso Buzzi and Giovanni Gariboldi contributed to the creation of "Art Lace" destined for the Milan Triennials and several of these designs and works are shown in the exhibition. Their desire to renew did not however meet with the favour of local manufacturers, who continued to be tied to the traditional taste shared by the international market.

In the early fifties, during the recovery in production which saw the birth of Italian fashion, we have the attempt of Gegia and Marisa Bronzini to apply artistic design not only to hand weaving but also to the creation of single items of female clothing as the two exemplars exhibited demonstrate.

In the same period, for the exhibitions organized at the Milan Triennial by ENAPI (National Board for Handicraft and Small Industry) Mario Giampieri and the painter Leonardo Spreafico, who taught at the school of Applied Art in Sforza castle in Milan, designed unique exemplars for some Cantù workshops.

In the nineties sporadic design collaborations developed, such as that of Emilio Tadini and Cooperativa Produzione Merletti (1993), in a panorama which had been declining since the seventies for various reasons, linked to social cultural and production changes. In the seventies enrolments in the lace courses at the local art Institute also tailed off.

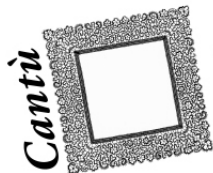
Despite this, hand-made lace has continued to flourish to this day, thanks to the passion of many lace-makers who, individually or working together in associations and schools continue to produce amateur handicraft of high technical quality.



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