

Rolando Giovannini, *Mirco Denicolò: a ceramic poet*, in “Ceramics Art and Perception”, issue 89, 2012.

In order to properly present Mirco Denicolò, Italian artist in his prime both artistically and professionally, two aspects must be explored. The first refers to his presence in the 54th *Venice Biennale, Italian Pavilion Emilia Romagna Region*, when in July 2011, he was invited by the art critic Vittorio Sgarbi to exhibit his piece at the Cloisters of Saint Peter in the city of Reggio Emilia. The second is to note a very consistent artistic journey rich with both graphic and painterly sensibility. His expressive experience has been profound, not at all accidental, and is definable as specialized in the field of drawing. Such gifts are the privileges of some artists and, in this case, the creator is also particularly technically inclined and respectful of methodologies. Another of his particularities has been the progressive goals he has set for himself and his consistent determination along the way.

He spent his formative artistic years in the “Art of Ceramics” department at the “*Mengaroni*” Institute of Pesaro, well-known thanks to the likes of Franco Bucci, Nanni Valentini, and even earlier- for painting on ceramics by Bruno Baratti, Vincenzo Molaroni and Ferruccio Mengaroni himself. He then completed his studies in the two year training program “Art of Majolica” at the State Art Institute “Gaetano Ballardini”, learning wheel throwing from Professor Manlio Tassinari, as well as multiple aspects of design, the alchemy of formulas and the art of technology, of which are main features of this school in Faenza, Italy. Speaking of himself, he maintains that “for over thirty years I have been living every day surrounded by ceramics. I am not bored, and am still able to be moved by a piece in an exhibition window or interested in laboratory tests or by reading technical articles”.

The artists in our discipline are sometimes distinguished or characterized by the dimensions of their work; for example there are some who produce monumentally, while others the opposite.

Denicolò has established his own dimension, often made up of works belonging to the realm of objects, of comprehensible things, utilitarian.

For example towards the end of the 90s he created a series of 60 vases identical in dimension, extraordinarily refined, each one boasting a different iconographically inspired representation (objects from the world of nature; animals, shells, stylized fossils). The handcrafting remained functional, staying true to his original mission, while the aspect of communication evolved. The idea of the “series”, of “sequence”, typical of Denicolò, is due to his demanding and effective experience within the ceramics industry, where for almost thirty years he ran the “Research and Development Workshop” at the *Maestri Maiolicari* factory in the city of Campogalliano. It was a job based on a typical Italian creative model, where technical knowledge were fused with manual labor. Only this type of synthesis can bring one to such a high esthetic level, being made largely possible by working in a production plant in the industrial zone of the Sassuolo district, an area of worldwide fame for its wall and floor tiles in the construction and architectural sectors. In fact, the artists was also impressed by other serial expressions connected to the world of design. This refers to *100% make up* conceptualized by Alessandro Mendini, who only in 1992 for the famous Italian Alessi trademark, designed a limited edition collection of vases. This signified one hundred pieces of the same ceramic form entrusted to as many as one hundred artists and designers using their own distinct expressions, interpretations and styles.

The concept of series, of repetition and of the development of a sequence is the foundation of Mirco Denicolò’s poetry.

During the course of his research, he has carefully and sequentially explored iconographical themes, that is to say that at each stage in his artistic endeavors he has built upon the theme of the preceding work, taking it in new directions. For example, he is passionate about designing sets for theatre, side by side with directors -like Tiziana Asirelli- and theatre companies. This type of show is supported and substantiated by the representative context of the backdrops, by the succession and alternation behind the scenes, by the colors and treatments used in order to create the context.

Denicolò tends to create ceramic backdrops, stories and narrations either through the sgraffito technique or with brushwork to create a similar effect.

In order to complete this picture and to highlight this way of expression, the "A picture a day" project should be mentioned- where 400 unedited drawings were published on the web, one a day starting on 6th October 2008 and finishing on 8th November 2009.

The fascination with/of design, which is fundamental both in the production and in the interpretation of his work, is due to his formative years, when his drawing teacher, Piergiorgio Spallacci, pushed and encouraged him to synthesize his vision. Even today he punctuates each subject by choosing its most important formal value, this outcome is the quality of light, the task of volumes, as well as the value of the graphic mark making.

When speaking about ceramics, there are some parameters which reveal the artist's personality and his way of approaching the material. Among these, the setup and treatment of the studio space indicates a way of measuring the methods the artist uses in his approach to the creative process; for example, Mirco has this to say about the subject "my studio is dusty, with low light, with a lot of useless objects, set up for painting on ceramics: it is a bachelor's studio, a den. The most important elements are the brushes, the scale and the mortar, the base materials for making glazes and pigments, all the jars to conserve them, the wood and cardboard used to make boxes and crates for transport".

In fact, visiting his atelier requires having a global vision of the tools and materials. Color samples, containers with raw materials he measures out depending on his personal formulas, chromatic glaze test trials of wide ranges of colors, several small tools for engraving and painting catch the eye. His studio is spacious, deep, extremely tidy and divided into work stations. He adores explaining his work in terms of processes, detailing the numerous firing phases, doting on the various themes confronted.

Sometimes he reveals some little secret resulting from his experimentation and research. For example, to reach the desired depth of color, typical of his deep blacks, he layers multiple colors and fires them several times. In some cases up to eight firings at 1040 ° C.

While being inspired in his youth by the works of Paul Klee, from whom he has still retained the influence in his geometrically structured background paintings, more contemporarily his influence has been that of Katsushika Hokusai's elegance and use of negative space within the composition. With respect to the dynamics of other artists working around him, he particularly appreciates, dialogues and feels in synthesis with his colleagues Danilo Melandri and Nedo Merendi, painters and ceramists from Faenza.

He says in his own poetic definition "I have two aptitudes, one for storytelling and the other for composition. When I compose an image I can use anything, the goal is the harmony of the finished piece, the journey I use to get there is not so important".

There are two aspects which best characterize his recent artistic journey relevant to his creative approach with mixed competencies- ceramics and communication. In the work "Fuoco sul palco!" "Fire on the Stage!", Mirco Denicolò wrote an animated narrative, which resulted in a four minute video. It is a story created by digitally combining his own ceramic pieces and ceramic pieces from the collection at the International Ceramics Museum (MIC) in Faenza. It was a collaborative effort;

Andrea Pedna curated the animation, while the soundtrack was created and performed by Paolo Geminiani and Donato D'antonio.

The video was broadcast in spring 2011 on You Tube at the International Museum of Ceramics- MIC.

Then, on October 4th of 2011, the same MIC of Faenza entered in the UNESCO program "Monuments expressing a culture of peace in the world." To celebrate this recognition, a piece by Mirco Denicolò was commissioned, which resulted in a ceramic tile measuring 25x25x6 cm depicting a dove in flight.

You can tell at a glance that the artist feels the need to capture, to represent and to uncover the beauty that captures his spirit. His method is the narration of perceived reality, told through engraved surface design.

His ceramics involves the viewer, as it evokes mental images of all the possible processes that lead to the finished piece.

In his way of working, he tries to eliminate any unnecessary phases. This mental clarity in the realm of manual production helps to amplify its poetry, which some viewers are able to understand, even when it isn't so apparent at times.

His role as Ceramics professor, both at ISIA (The Institute of Industrial Arts, Faenza) and at the prestigious and renowned School of Drawing "Tommaso Minardi," are the privileged settings where he is able to express and transmit these feelings and goals.