

## Reviews

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Ilaria Trizio (a cura di)

### **Linguaggi Grafici. Decorazione.**

Publica

Alghero 2022

957 pp.

ISBN 978 88 995 86 29 4



The volume *Linguaggi Grafici. Decorazione*, edited by Enrico Cicalò, Francesca Savini and Ilaria Trizio, deals with a very current topic, especially in the declination that new technologies can offer. The work could not avoid dealing with the topic without considering another issue, which is that of ornament, highlighting the semantic similarity between the two terms and the differences dictated by the etymology of the names, as the editors point out: in the first case, in fact, "the ethical element is detected, indicating [...] an attribution of honor and dignity" [p. 24], in the second case the word is "synonymous with order, beauty, harmony and perfection" [p. 24]. But ornament cannot fail to call to mind—as they rightly observe—the well-known essay by Adolf Loos written in 1908 [Loos 1999, pp. 217-228], presented at various conferences of the period and first published in French in 1913 in the journal *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* under the title *Ornement et Crime*. Although the text was followed by a number of repentances, including *Ornament and Education* in 1924 [Loos 1999, pp. 325-332], there is no doubt that the weight of the very critical words in the first essay—think of the phrase "no ornament can any longer be invented today by those who live at our level of civilization" [Loos 1999, p. 226]—still affect our considerations today, leading us to think in terms of decoration/ornament especially about what was made before the 1930s, that is, including the *Art Nouveau*

season. From this point of view, the volume stands out for balancing in a fair way between traditional ornament—the one extolled in Loos's essay, to be clear—and new possible declinations, which, perhaps wrongly, would not have found consensus in the same.

This balance between the two types of ornamentation finds different space in the sections in which the editors have placed the 38 essays by the 57 authors: if tradition has been included mainly in the first sections—*Geometrie*, *Rilievi*, *Tassonomie* and *Tecniche*—the new experiments are largely gathered in the following sections, well expressed by the titles *Interpretazioni*, *Superfici* and *Rappresentazioni*. Since it is not possible to list all the essays in the volume, we will report on a few of them, most illustrative of the various sections.

Edoardo Dotto's essay, *La sfida delle restrizioni. La decorazione a matrice geometrica tra didattica e ricerca visuale* [pp. 48-69] deals with the theme of decoration drawing in late 19th century schools, with timely and interesting references that are framed within the specific framework of the history of our discipline; other contributions in the same section, dedicated to *Geometrie*, also address the theme of geometric analysis, albeit declined from real cases: consider the contribution by Ornella Zerlenga, Margherita Cicala and Rosina laderosa, entitled *Intrecci amalfitani. Decorazioni fra contaminazioni e geometrie* [pp. 120-147] dedicated to the

rich figurative repertoire of the Amalfi Coast, where the history of architecture has been interwoven with decorative systems that have constituted the very character of the geographical area; but also those of Daniele Colistra –*Geometria e figurazione nelle decorazioni murarie di Tozeur e Nefta (Tunisia)*, [pp. 148-165]–, Marinella Arena and Paola Raffa –*Scritture in codice. Decorazioni berbere nella regione maghrebina* [pp. 166-185]– and by Barbara Messina –*Geometria e ornamento come identità culturale. Valenze estetiche e formali della decorazione nell'architettura islamica* [pp. 186-211]– which shift the investigation to the Mediterranean area, from Morocco to Turkey, pointing to the geometric genesis of wall textures, wall coverings and more complex double-curved surfaces. The essay by Michela Rossi and Giorgio Buratti, entitled *Variazioni sul tema. Dai rosoni del duomo di Milano: forma, costruzione e proliferazione nei pattern chiusi* [pp. 92-119], while dealing with an accurate analysis of historical materials, such as the Milan cathedral's rosettes, succeeds in reformulating their genesis using algorithmic systems that can then be applied in areas other than the original ones, such as in the field of industrial design.

The section called *Rilievi* is all about the study of past forms, also aided by new 3D scanning technologies. This is already perceived in Luca Vespasiano and Stefano Brusaporci's essay, *In dialogo tra spazio e decorazione: la Fonte della Rivera all'Aquila* [pp. 214-235], which involved the acquisition and treatment of the fountain of the '99 spouts' at L'Aquila, with the re-presentation of three-dimensional models of the masks made with the tools offered by rapid prototyping for a heritage enhancement project. Similar is also the

case proposed by Michele Valentino, Andrea Sias and Marta Pileri –*Oltre la visualità delle superfici. Decorazioni parietali del Palau Carcassona ad Alghero* [pp. 292-309]– which, thanks to a photogrammetric survey, documented the restitution of the elevations of the work under study, identifying the figurative genesis of the wall decorations, traceable to the figure of the triangle and the square [p. 307]. A particularly unique case is the one addressed by Silvia Masserano and Veronica Riavis –*Geometria e natura: l'apparato decorativo del piano di facciata di Casa Bartoli a Trieste* [pp. 310-331]– who investigated the so-called *Casa Verde* in Trieste, designed by Max Fabiani in 1906. The site survey was flanked by historical documentation-archival drawings and photographs which enabled the comparison of design and construction status, allowing an accurate investigation also of the decoration with a plant subject, the geometric matrices of which were reconstructed.

The next two sections, *Tassonomie* and *Tecniche*, also collected contributions that studied works prior to the early twentieth century. These range from the Art Nouveau of some architecture in the city of Bari, studied by Valentina Castagnolo, Antonia Valeria Dilauro and Anna Christiana Maiorano, in the essay *New Liberty. Composizione e rappresentazione di un pattern* [pp. 334-361], to the mosaic floors of the Roman period, as treated in Sabrina Acquaviva's contribution, entitled *Il linguaggio decorativo in ambito romano: lettura e analisi del disegno dei pavimenti musivi* [pp. 416-441]. A possible contemporary implication of the decorative tradition is described by Valeria Menchetelli in the essay *La decorazione ceramica nell'architettura. L'esperienza umbra fra tradizione storica e innovazione contemporanea* [pp. 522-

553], in which the use of terra cotta relief decoration in architecture is documented, also indicating the craftsmanship that is conducted today to produce ornamental ceramic tiles.

Francesca Fatta and Andrea Marraffa's contribution, entitled *Il Monetiere del Museo dei Brettii e degli Enotri di Cosenza: dalla decorazione analogica alla narrazione digitale* [pp. 556-583], starts from a careful analysis of a series of coins from the Greek and Roman periods that have been subjected to careful investigation. An initial phase of acquisition was followed by further investigation with the reconstruction of the three-dimensional figurative apparatus present on them. In this way, the scene described on became a narrative plot that made it possible to tell in animated form, with the logic of storytelling, what was present on the coin, as if it were a frame of the sequence.

Associated with these case studies of historical decorative apparatuses are other figurative modes that are not usual. One thinks of the historical use of lace and its revival, in its different regional declinations, as indicated by Sara Conte and Valentina Marchetti in the contribution *Decorazione strutturale e struttura decorativa: il rinnovato valore della tecnica del merletto* [pp. 584-605]; of light as a decorative apparatus, as proposed by Nicolò Sardo in *Disegni di luce. L'illuminazione artificiale come decorazione dell'architettura* [pp. 624-653]; to the use of tattooing as a decorative form that combines tradition and contemporaneity, as treated by Massimiliano Ciammaichella and Laura Farroni in *Pelli disegnate e indelebili decori del corpo* [pp. 684-709]; to the use of decoration in the art of weaving in Stefano Chiarrenza's contribution, entitled *Linguaggio grafico e struttura decorativa nella produzione tessile modernista di Anni Albers*

[pp. 730-751]; to the fine use of decorative art in Alfons Mucha's graphic designs, as described in the two essays by Marcello Scalzo –*Comunicazione ed estetizzazione nei poster di Alfons Mucha: alcune note sul rapporto tra arte e pubblicità nella Parigi di fine Ottocento* [pp. 878-893]– and by Vincenzo Cirillo and Riccardo Miele –*Elementi di grammatica e sintassi decorativo-ornamentale di Alfons Mucha* [pp. 894-925]– which in different ways emphasize, on the one hand, the historical framework and, on the other, the geometric genesis of the figurative matrices.

Finally, we point out that, about the opening Loosian essay, it would also be useful to remember an important historical document, not mentioned in the volume: this is the film of the same title *Ornamento e delitto* by Aldo Rossi, Gianni Braghieri and Franco Raggi, which was presented at the XV Milan Triennale in 1973. Borrowing Loos's invective against ornament, the three authors –of whom the figure of Rossi is certainly central, given his role as head of the International Section of that event– proceed to a montage of film sequences by Luchino Visconti, Mauro Bolognini and Federi-

co Fellini, supplementing them with video footage of the Milanese suburbs and punctuating the film with readings, some of them from texts by Adolf Loos, Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx and Hans Schmidt [2]. The video will be accompanied by the volume *Architettura razionale* [Bonfanti et al. 1973], which, although it does not quote the Loosian essay, conveys the principle of rationality and essentiality that –perhaps beginning with that 1908 text– will have such a wide echo in the Italian architectural scene.

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#### Notes

[1] *Ornamento e delitto*, a film by Aldo Rossi, Gianni Braghieri and Franco Raggi, edited by Elver Degan Bianchet, directed by Luigi Durissi, Contemporafilm production, 1973, 42 minutes.

[2] The transcript of the texts can be found on pages 55-61 of the volume [Braghieri et al., 2010]. In the same book see also the contribution by Alberto Bocchini and Giulia Giacipoli on pages 61-65.

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