

Convivio delle Eccellenze. A One-Day Celebration of Milanese Culture

Marina Melchionda (July 14, 2010)



On July 12 the Commissioner for Culture of the City of Milan, Massimiliano Finazzer Flory, presented a one-day festival dedicated to the excellencies of Milan in the cultural, artistic, and culinary fields. During the first part of the event, hosted at the Italian Cultural Institute, a selected audience was invited to explore and discover the philosophical relationship between food and design. In the evening, the Lincoln Center hosted a lecture of Alessandro Manzoni's "I Promessi Sposi" (The Betrothed) given by Mr. Flory himself

On July 12 New York hosted a delegation from the city of Milan for a one-day festival dedicated to its excellencies in the cultural, artistic, and culinary fields.

"Art is nourishment to the soul" was the motto of the "Convivio delle Eccellenze milanesi" an



initiative that the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs of the City of Milan, [Massimiliano Finazzer Flory](#) [2], presented before a strictly selected public of about 50 guests in the conference room of the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [3], where the first part of the event was hosted.

Organized and created for **Thinx Events** and Francesca Parvyziar, sponsored by the Municipality of Milan and [Expo Milano 2015](#) [4] in collaboration with [ED Contract - Doimo Group](#) [5], [Alessi](#) [6], [Poderi San Pietro](#) [7], **Thinx**, [La Myse Service](#) [8], and [Cerasarda](#) [9], the convivial was divided into several different phases embracing every field of art and culture, from music to literature, from cuisine to design.

Upon their arrival, Consul Laura Anghillare, Deputy Consul Maurizio Antonini, Italian journalists, critics and art lovers were welcomed into the conference room where an illuminated table made of Plexiglas and LED material manufactured by ED Contract – Doimo Group was displayed at the center of the room to symbolize the typical Italian custom of strengthening human relationships by sitting around a table. A designer object, it was divided into four different parts, each one representing important monuments and pieces of art in the city of Milan: Leonardo' da Vinci's "Ultima Cena", [La Scala Theatre](#) [10], the Navigli, and the [Arcimboldi Theatre](#) [11].

"The purpose of this event is to celebrate the union between food and design, a "couple" that has a philosophical and aesthetic value. Design has in fact the merit of transforming food into metaphysical objects, giving an inner soul to inanimate objects. This is why the table shown here represents only the beginning of a long- term project aimed at founding a number of "Caffè Milano" in different Italian Cultural Institutes throughout the world, where guests will be invited to taste excellent food while discovering the newest trends in cinema, theatre, and literature", proudly stated Riccardo Viale, the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute.

Commissioner Flory defined the event as a further occasion to strengthen the relationships between Milan and New York, two cities that although geographically distant, have in common the role of being global cultural poles: "This initiative is a continuation of the recent visit of Mayor Letizia Moratti, who presented our "Museo del Novecento" (XX Century Museum) at the MoMA this past May. It intends to further promote the numerous attraction that the city of Milan has to offer, a city that soon will become the world's culture capital when it hosts the Universal Expo in 2015", he told the audience. When he read the greetings sent by Mayor Moratti he grabbed the occasion to highlight the universal reach of the Convivial: "Design and food are universal languages that have the power to bring peace, dialogue, and integration among peoples and different identities. A multi-ethnic city, Milan needs to be guided by a single ethic, the one of creativity. Transforming culture into creativity means evolving from multi-ethnicity to universality and confronting the challenges of our times".

As a symbol of communion among diversities, the lunch prepared for us by Chef Pietro Leeman in collaboration with the [St. Ambroeus restaurant](#) [12] in New York, was centered on the element of bread, a simple food that has a key role in Mediterranean cuisine that is in itself the fruit of the encounter between different national culinary identities.

Chef Leeman, owner of the [Joia Resturant](#) [13] in Milan, delighted us with dishes inspired by the Lombard tradition and prepared with natural products all coming from that area. The food he cooked and elegantly garnished was served in Alessi pottery and paired with DOC, DOOP, and DOCG wines offered by the Poderi San Pietro vineyards. It accompanied the rest of our afternoon together, that also featured two screenings: the first was the last interview with the internationally known Milanese poetess [Alda Merini](#) [14], conducted by journalist Paolo Ortaggi for TV 2000; and the second was the documentary "Reato di Vita" (Life Offence) , dedicated to the initiative "Milano per le nuove generazioni" (Milan for the new generations), directed by Elena Maggioni, and interpreted by the young students of the [Scuola Civica del Cinema di Milano](#) [15] and actress [Carla Chiarelli](#) [16].

As this first part of the festival was about to come to its conclusion, we were entertained by pianist and violinist Caterina Demetz who performed a number of Chopin pieces.

A handmade linen handkerchief dedicated to the theme of bread enclosed in an elegant box evoking the Cathedral of Milan was the gift Commissioner Flory presented to the guests while inviting all of



us to attend his lecture on the Milanese author Alessandro Manzoni's "Promessi Sposi" (The Betrothed) at the Lincoln Center.

"It is commonly known as a love story, but it is actually everything but one", he stated while stepping onto the stage of the [Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse](#). [17] In his introduction to the novel he portrayed author Manzoni as a tormented man, torn between the necessity to follow his era's literary currents which were more inclined to romanticism than to history and philosophy and the need to tell the past and present torments and issues of his Lombard community. This sense of responsibility leads him to write the one and only romanzo ottocentesco italiano, the first attempt at building a national culture in a country that was still not unified.

Commissioner Flory took us on a journey through the pages of this novel set in the XVII century, and introduced us to its main protagonists by reading a half dozen passages. The various alterations in his tones of voice demonstrated a rare and passionate empathy towards the characters who showed vices and virtues that can still be found in the people of our times, giving the novel a character of temporal and geographical universality.

Some of the passages he selected moved many of us because of the evident feeling with which he recited them. Human stories and historical events closely interconnect in "The Betrothed", as episodes such as the sack of the bakeries of Milan and the plague that hit the area in 1629-1631 affected the story of the betrothed Renzo and Lucia and postponed their final reunion. Each passage was accompanied by works by Bach, Beethoven, Prokofiev, and Schubert performed by Pianist Caterina Demetz.

At the end of his performance, after having saluted an enthusiastic public, Mr. Flory told us that this representation is only the first of many that he intends to organize in the near future. "French and English novels are well-known worldwide and it is just not fair that a story of the beauty and complexity like "The Betrothed" is still mostly unknown. I feel it is my duty as Commissioner of Culture of the City of Milan to give correct this situation and present it to the widest audience possible".

This said, he announced an upcoming world tour. We hope that it will bring him to New York again soon, maybe for the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy. After all, "I Promessi Sposi" is the novel which has been acknowledged as the first work of national breath in the history of Italy

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