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**DESIGN VALUES  
IN THE  
MEDITERRANEAN**

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**MAKE**

# Mediterranean Design: Action-Research on Capodimonte Porcelain

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## Keywords

Mediterranean Marketing, Identity, Design, Craftsmanship, Porcelain.

## Abstract

The Moroccan poet Mohammed Bennis writes that the Mediterranean “[...] is no longer just a historical and geographical entity [...] it has turned into an idea, aspiring to reconcile its own peculiarities – that is, plurality, variety and diversity. [...] Mediterranean culture embodied tolerance, dialogue, and open-mindedness. It was a song of migration and a shared imagination. It would reconnect what politics and economy would divide”. This cultural idea of the Mediterranean, that joins plurality, variety and diversity, can help to ease tension between two cultural territories that often lie apart and need reconnection, that is design and craftsmanship. The Mediterranean man has become skilled at building bonds, connections, bridges. This inclination makes for a gentle, yet deep harmonisation of “different worlds”. There are no miraculous solutions, all we can do is patiently listen and understand those that appear as “islands”, kept apart by the sea.

The paper, in its final portion, will describe the educational activities carried out both during an Industrial Design Laboratory – in the context of a Bachelor’s Degree – and in a few graduation theses where students designed porcelain items to be manufactured in Capodimonte, which forms part of the local production excellence in Campania. Regardless of its outcome(which was, by the way, indeed interesting), such an experience falls within the framework of a mediterraneanization of design culture, enabling it to build connections where there are none, and where separation seems irreconcilable.

## 1. Introduction: Mediterranean Culture, Thinking beyond Identity

When the Italian semiologist Giampaolo Fabris wrote his last essay (2010), the world was in the middle of the worst global financial crisis since 1929: the fall of Lehman Brothers in 2008 triggered the most dramatic bankruptcy in the history of US finance. Fabris, while questioning the idea of “growth”, theorized what he named “post-growth” - as opposed to Latouche’s “happy degrowth” (2008): more of a prophecy than a theory, he proposed a more manageable approach, albeit requiring extensive changes in people’s lifestyle and consumption habits. The core of his theory, still very relevant nowadays, contradicts the misconception – deeply rooted in our society – that “more possessions” equals “more wellness”. The beginning of the current pandemic highlighted this concept: lockdown has forced us to give up on consuming many goods and services, leaving only grocery shopping as an anaesthetic for our consumerism, longing for the return to the freedom (to consume) we used to enjoy. The shallow, depressing and moralistic motto “Nothing will ever be the same” has been a recurring, albeit hypocritical, mantra accompanying all the critical moments during the first two decades of this century; however, it gets swept away by the rhetoric of re-opening every time governments relax their coronavirus restrictions, resulting in huge consumeristic fests. Nonetheless, everything will be the same. The unexpected and persistent restrictions – despite Covid-19’s heavy death toll – have not impacted people’s conscience, but rather their assets, trade and industry: the kind of economy that the contemporary man always prioritises over intangible – and *useless* – assets, such as art and culture.

It is worth noting that it is a marketing expert mentioning the Mediterranean, however paradoxical this may appear. Years after Fabris's book was published, it still provides unusual perspectives on this sea and its cultures. Fabris does understandably indulge in the typical repertoire of poetic imagery commonly associated with this world, mentioning its "boundless spaces" and the "briny smell" on a sailboat trip; such is the beauty of the Mediterranean Sea, imbued with myths, exerting a powerful fascination on educated, sensitive people. Fabris's depiction of the Mediterranean openly evokes Franco Cassano's *Southern Thought*, the one that arises "[...] when one discovers that the borderland is not a place where the world ends, but where those who are different come into contact, and the relationship game with the other becomes difficult and real. Indeed, Southern thought [...]", Cassano wrote, "was truly born in the Mediterranean, on the coasts of Greece, with the opening of Greek culture toward conflicting discourses, to the *dissoi logo*" (2003, p. 6).

In the final part of his book, Fabris mentions "Mediterranean marketing" – a term coined by Antonella Carù, from Bocconi University, and Bernard Cova, professor at Kedge Business School, in France – as "the dawning of a new civilization". This innovative marketing approach differs from traditional marketing since "it posits detachment from hyperconsumerism", as it suggests "shifting from excess to moderation", and a new era for design, "starting from the production stage, carried out with care and attention to detail, employing ancient skills", "rediscovering tradition and mediating with it" (2010, pp. 398–409).



Looking to the Mediterranean through the lens of marketing might help tone down the debate on the Mediterranean itself. As the Moroccan poet Mohammed Bennis wrote

[...] it is no longer just a historical and geographical entity [but] it has turned into an idea, aspiring to reconcile its own peculiarities – that is, plurality, variety, and diversity. [...] Mediterranean culture embodied tolerance, dialogue, open-mindedness. It was the song of migrations and shared imagination. It would reconnect what politics and economy would divide [...] the Mediterranean, throughout its history [...] was constantly open to hospitality and sharing. These values made the Mediterranean resemble a house comprising multiple buildings. Walking from one building to another we end up gathering around the olive tree, emblem of sharing and hospitality, singing with both our own kind and the others, together. (2009, pp. 420-421)

Therefore, considering the Mediterranean as an idea, made of values and qualities, not just of its history, geography, events, images, colours, architecture, cities and landscapes, helps tone down excessive emphasis and enthusiasm within the debate about the Mediterranean and its culture. This idea also allows us to detach from the exoticism that often turns places and things into objects of desire. Viewing the Mediterranean as the lost paradise of a Western cosmogony results in mere folklore and provides solutions that are way too obvious. This eventually leads to a sort of new, somewhat mannerist - and hackneyed - form of eclecticism.

Nonetheless, this is a double-edged sword. Defining the Mediterranean as a culture inevitably highlights the contrast with

whatever is non-Mediterranean; this is the exact opposite of what the Mediterranean represents. The reason lies in the common association between the concept of culture and that of identity, which is responsible for sparking new forms of nationalism: celebrating identity, by pointing out how different it is from other identities, leads to a stale scenario where solid blocks turn into unrelated, disconnected islands.

In François Jullien's essay, aptly titled *There is no such thing as cultural identity*, the French philosopher addressed the issue and wrote “[...] we cannot speak of identity either - since the distinctive feature of culture lies in its ability to change and transform - but rather of fruitfulness [...]”, or of what he calls assets (2018, p. 2). Jullien thus chooses not to speak of differences between cultures - since that would imply praising their “essence” - but rather of gaps. “[...] difference [which is a classifying parameter] is about demarcation, while gap is about distance. This sparks a vibrant tension that results in constant, invigorating regeneration. Where there is a gap [...] the two separate parties face each other [...] The distance in between them keeps what is separated in tension” (p.32). Then, Jullien dwells on the concept of gap, which, in his words,

[...] does not originate understanding through categorization, but rather promotes meditation since it creates tension. Within the “in between” space it opens [...], a gap produces work since the two separate terms, which are kept facing each other by the gap itself, never stop questioning each other in the empty space between them (p.36). In a book published a few years ago, Giuseppe Lotti quotes what Enzo Bianchi, Barbara Spinelli and Umberto Galim-

berti wrote on the issue. Bianchi points out that civilization itself – whose cradle is the Mediterranean, at least for Western civilization – originates from a “let us move towards each other” rather than a “move towards me!”. Which means [...] let us make a deal and find a common ground, even a minor one. (p. 88)

Spinelli and Galimberti, in different words, explain how the relationship with the other, the stranger, promotes self-awareness and boosts a transformation process. Thus, what Julliens calls a distance creates the right conditions to build bridges. Cassano himself stated this by writing that the Mediterranean man is the one who, thanks to the “intersection of land and sea”, has developed the ability to establish connections, contacts, bridges (2003, p. 49). Such a disposition requests constant self-cultivation in order to develop into a full-fledged quality and paves the way for a gentle and thorough harmonization process between different worlds. There are no ultimate, thaumaturgic solutions, those that appear as *islands* only need to listen to each other patiently. Later stage, we will investigate what gaps, distance, and bridge building can lead to in the field of design.

## 2. A Possible Scenario for Mediterranean Design

In the research project *Me.design. Strategie, strumenti e operatività del disegno industriale per valorizzare e potenziare le risorse dell'area mediterranea tra locale e globale* (Me.Design. *Strategies, tools and effectiveness of industrial design in enhancing and increasing resources in the mediterranean area from local to global*), co-funded by MIUR (the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research) in 2002-2004 and

involving seven Italian universities all over the national territory, it has been clearly highlighted how Mediterranean design does not represent an entity in itself, but rather a cultural background “which [eventually] impacts the shape and life of objects” (Lotti, 2015).

It may therefore be said that we are well past that stage of industrial design where we could think of it – under the impetus of the Postmodernist counter-reform – as a new design, an alternative to Western industrial design, starting from Southern Italy and somehow redeeming such a poor (and poorly industrialized) land. At the same time, Northern Italy happily enjoyed its wealth, celebrated in conventions, articles and exhibitions such as the one Enrico Crispolti curated in 1985 at the Castello Svevo in Bari, aptly entitled *L'onda del Sud?*, with a meaningful question mark. What Crispolti wrote in his preface to the exhibition catalogue clearly suggests the atmosphere surrounding design culture in those years, marked by far-fetched pastiches of unbridled artisanal experimentalism and inaccurate references to art. Writing of the exhibition itself, Crispolti mentioned “[...]the widespread success of the mixed, playful, revivalistic Postmodernist taste, taking root in the South as well” (1985, p. 10) and the “creative ebullience of the new southern *design*” providing “multiple suggestions that it is possible and necessary to start rediscussing the new *design* all over again, before, within and beyond Postmodernism” (p. 12). Further into his foreword, Crispolti wisely overcomes some overly formalistic approaches and identifies a more substantial meaning in this phenomenon by claiming that “[the warm response from southern *design*] highlights

the necessity and possibility to look back at one's own motivational sources of behaviour and to one's own cultural and anthropological roots" (p. 13).

Andrea Branzi – who contributed to curating the exhibition, along with Dalisi and Mendini – tried to figure out what role the South had been playing in art culture since the 1960s, and highlighted the intricate relationship with the North:

[...] the South would stand as an alternative to the North, it would find its role and its purpose in this, representing a contrast, a *different* place. Such a purpose, though, could only be fulfilled by traveling into the opposing territory, the official North within which the South could only rely on its own manufacturing peculiarity and its own characteristic values, still seen as *alternatives*. Nowadays, instead [in the 1980s], we can suggest a different reading key of this territory and its culture, no longer based upon performance as a criterion, as in the 1960s, nor upon the idea of an alternative, as in the 1970s, but rather upon the complete autonomy of the South and its ability to stand as a paradigm in the modern world. (1985, p. 19)

Nonetheless, the title of Branzi's paper was *Il Sud come modello del mondo?* (*The South as a paradigm of the world?*), ending in a question mark. Branzi's statement marks an essential step in Southern culture - in the eyes of those who observe it and somehow posit its existence.

This type of design, in its mythical and theoretical notion, is what Dalisi would later label as *Neapolitan* and Branzi himself as *Latin*, as it spread well beyond Southern Italy and reached

other regions of the Mediterranean area, including emerging countries and economies much further to the south and to the east; it seemed to lose its close bond with the territory, loosened by the limitless expansion of its geographical borders. A *mythical* Mediterranean, like Maffessoli's East (2000), not placed in a defined area on the planet nor in a specific manufacturing context, thus opening up to a new cultural scenario, an inspiring and motivating one, beyond all the – still worthwhile – experiments carried out on its shores, mixing up languages and manufacturing techniques. The “mythical Mediterranean” draws power from places, imbued as it is with the colours, sounds, tastes, voices of its territories and their anthropology. Still, it somehow transcends them and turns into a flair, into art, into a hard-earned ability to interact with others and build bridges between those who are different. *Deterritorializing* Mediterranean design means not betraying its places, but internalizing them and protecting them from the exotic fascination they hold for designers, researchers and artisans operating within this context. This notion of Mediterranean design is inclusive; it is not about latitude, it is about a specific human ability, developed in certain places and times. It does not present itself as an alternative, and it does not claim to be better than other forms of design; it just wants to find its place in design culture, where it can thrive.

### 3. University Teaching and Enterprises: a Collaboration with the Caselli Factory in Capodimonte

In recent years, students in the *Industrial Design Laboratory 1 A* at Vanvitelli University have been requested to design an item of university merchandising as a final project for their exam.



**Figure 1.** Luigi Pasquale Barretta, Giovanna Bava, Filomena Nancy Picariello, *Sincrisis*, two-pronged vase, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020.





**Figure 2.** Luigi Pasquale Barretta, Giovanna Bava, Filomena Nancy Picariello, *Sincrisis*, two-pronged vase, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, technical 2D drawings.

It was not meant as a mere publicity stunt, carried out through globalised and tawdry objects, garments, and fashion accessories, but rather as a radical reworking, enabling products not just to carry a logo but to establish a bond with the territory - thus capturing and conveying its traits and features.

It is worth noting that museum shop merchandise design is a neglected field, yet interesting for designers and design itself as a discipline. Miniature replicas of displayed artworks are the most popular merchandise items: countless *Dancing Faun* figurines have been purchased from souvenir stands in Pompeii since the archeological site opened its doors to tourism. Replicas are a form of forgery, allowed by *major* arts - painting, sculpture, but also printmaking - but still imply a deceptive message, by *smuggling* a smaller, though perfect, repro-



duction in lieu of the original, unattainable work of art. They somehow fulfil the common longing for public property that sometimes results in theft. In addition to replicas, books and exhibition catalogues, more affordable merchandise items are sold: pencils, magnets, notepads, bookmarks, posters, mugs, tote bags, T-shirts, neckties, or more expensive items.

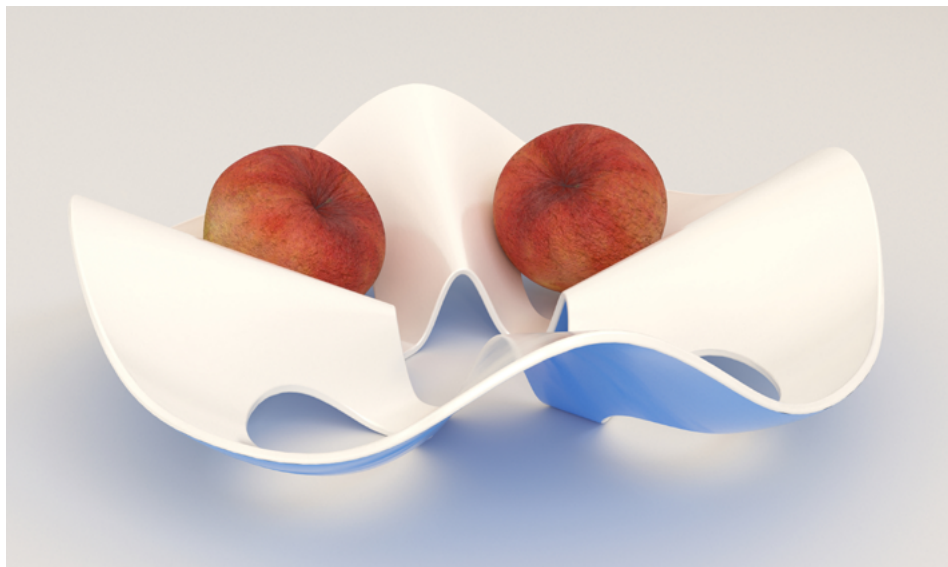
Items of merchandise, or at least some of them, may also be thought of and designed as tangible extensions of the museum itself - seen as a place of constant learning - therefore acting as catalysts for the development of an experience within the museum, an encounter with art. This is not (just) about figurines but rather about everyday objects with strong suggestive power. Thus, designers face a way more challenging task, which requires them to live an extraordinary experience first-hand inside the museum before they can inject such a *second soul* into their designs: objects then become *things*, in the words of Remo Bodei, demanding to be more than just used; they turn into a bridge between designer and user, a hub for both the designer's and the visitor's relationship with art, they «are nodes in the tightly woven network of coordinates with which we structure the world», as Bodei wrote in his *The life of things, the love of things* (2010, p. 40). Further on in the same book, he pointed out - referring to Georg Simmel, Ernst Bloch, and Martin Heidegger - that “all three philosophers considered ordinary objects such as a bowl, a vase or a jug as a crossroads of relationships that do not reduce an object to its necessary material substance, not to the basic conceptual framework that defines it” (p. 43). From this perspective, the process of designing such products belongs to the sphere of art since it is en-

riched of yet another dimension, not a merely practical one nor that of a simple beauty to be served for the audience to taste, in the words of Umberto Curi, but rather a symbolic one. Visitors who agree to a more demanding task than just purchasing an item of museum merchandise, possibly a designer one, somehow escape from a passive state. Once again, it might be useful to cite a passage of Bodei's book, referring to the difference between things and objects, which seems to well suit the idea of a new merchandising strategy for museums.

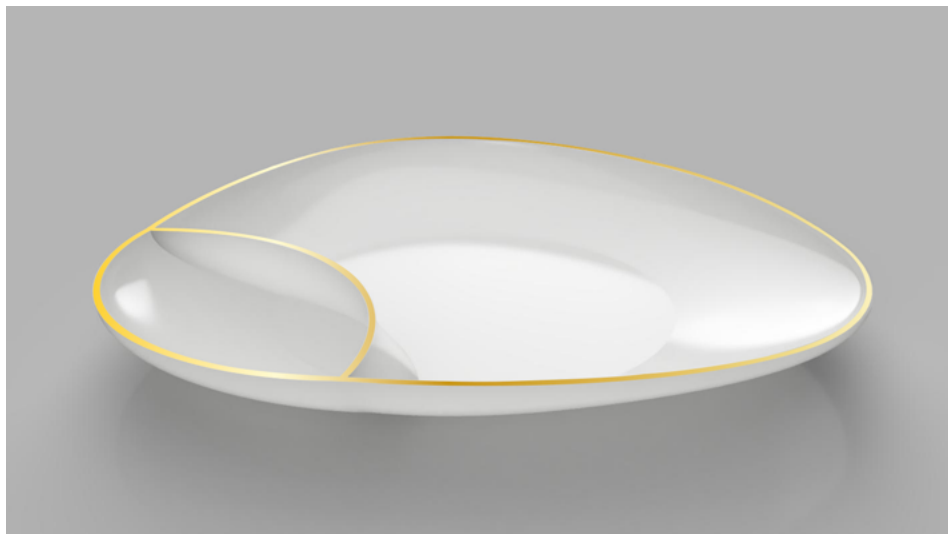
Things lead us, agonistically, to rise above the inconsistency and mediocrity into which we would fall if we did not invest in them – tacitly reciprocated – thoughts, fantasies, and emotions. They are things because we think about them; because we know them and we love them in their singularity; because, in contrast to objects, we do not claim that we use them only as instruments or to cancel out their otherness; and because, as happens in art, we remove them from their precarious condition in space and time, transforming them into “miniatures of eternity” that contain the complete fullness of existence. (p. 116)

*The Industrial Design Laboratory 1 A*, within the bachelor's degree course in Design and Communication at Vanvitelli University, boasts a long-running relationship with manufacturing companies for educational purposes, which has proven extremely useful for the training of young designers and, occasionally, for job placement. First-year students, coming from all different types of high schools, start by facing a first methodological-designing stage requiring them to try their hand at crafting paper or clay maquettes, from the very first

classes. By shaping, folding, bending the material, they get to know it and experiment with its resistance. Such an approach to design, starting from manually moulding the material, falls within that overall “ontological reappraisal of perception started by Merleau-Ponty [...]” (De Leo, 2018, p. 1), and, arguably, within the reappraisal of designers’ *craftsmanship*; designers cannot help employing materials they know, and not only by learning about their chemical, physical, mechanical, and technological properties. Concepts are not to be treated as renderings, as if they could adjust to any choice of material, since concepts are born with their ideal material. Each academic year bears new adventures, new materials, new manufacturing processes, new relationships between people. Over the years, the Laboratory partnered with Be Different (a Tuscany-based firm manufacturing Polymass furniture and homeware), Arco Arredo (a DuPont Corian® certified company), Caracol-AM Advanced Large-Scale Additive Manufacturing (a service provider employing a proprietary robotic system to print objects and components within ComoNExT, a digital innovation hub in Lombardy) and, in the current academic year, with Vaia (a startup based in Trentino, employing local timber from trees felled by a storm in 2018). In the academic year 2019-2020 students were requested to design porcelain items, intended for sale in museum shops across Campania and meant to be manufactured in the porcelain factory hosted inside Istituto di Istruzione Superiore a indirizzo raro Caselli-De Sanctis e Real Fabbrica - a vocational school in Capodimonte which inherited and patented the Bourbon fleur-de-lis, once the logo of the original Capodimonte porcelain manufactory.



**Figure 3.** Filippo Caliendo, Nicola Esposito, Sarah Alfinito, *Casatiello* fruit bowl, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, rendering.



**Figure 4.** Filippo Caliendo, Nicola Esposito, Sarah Alfinito, clam-shaped seafood pasta bowl, complete with compartment for empty shells, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, rendering.

That was indeed an intricate task for first-year students facing their very first design challenge, one involving a twofold issue: on the one hand, tackling the delicate and demanding relationship between design and such a prestigious manufacturing excellence as Capodimonte porcelain; on the other hand, dealing with the equally delicate balance between design and territory, specifically Naples. Although the first example of European porcelain was manufactured in Meissen, Saxony (1707-1712) – whose paste closely resembled the original Chinese formulation – “If we closely follow the timeline, we will find that the first manifestation of applied arts, or design before the term was even invented, happened in Capodimonte” (De Fusco & Rusciano, 2015, p. 13). The Bourbonic manufactory was established in 1743 after three years of chemical experimentation, and in 1744 the addition of white clay from Fuscaldo allowed switching to soft-paste porcelain in lieu of the typical hard paste made in Meissen, employing quartz instead of frit.

Capodimonte porcelain owes its particular charm to the consistency of its paste: its suppleness makes for fine, delicate detailing; during firing, the highly absorbing paste would perfectly blend with the glaze, the vitreous layer coating the biscuit, smoothing out any roughness or porosity [enhancing the illuminated decoration]. It is worth pointing out that the Capodimonte trademark is used exclusively to identify porcelain manufactured in the Real Fabbrica from 1743 and 1759 [...] a short period defining a uniform range of products and their outstanding quality. (Rinaldi, 2004, pp. 110-111)

Then Charles de Bourbon sailed for Spain, and he “had the whole manufactory taken aboard, including its artisans and

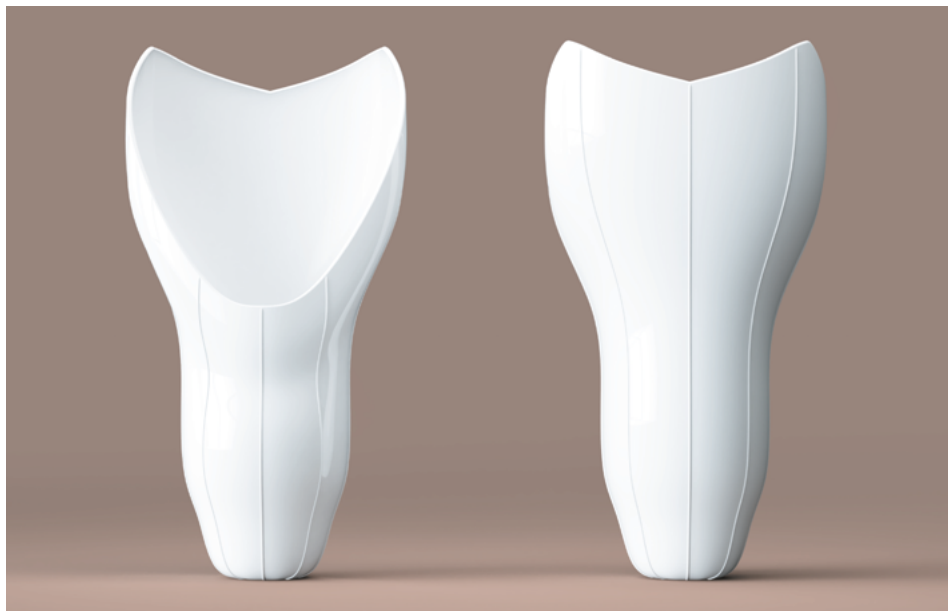
five tonnes of paste, and commanded that whatever could not be carried on board should be destroyed [...]”; Capodimonte thus entered a period of decline (Rinaldi, 2004, p.111). Ferdinand I established a new factory (1771), located inside the Royal Palace, initially in Portici and later in Naples; it was a very different factory than the one his father Charles had founded, since the original chemical formulation of its soft-paste porcelain remained unknown. From 1780 to 1799, nonetheless, King Ferdinand’s Royal Manufactory experienced a period of splendour and established itself as a leader in Europe, thanks to its manager Domenico Venuti who contributed “[...] to the spread of the sophisticated archaeological style, blended with the elegant neoclassical taste that had by then become dominant in all the main courts across the old continent” (Rinaldi, 2004, p. 111). Venuti gave the factory a modern organization and also incorporated an art school into its premises. Under his guidance (the factory experienced changing fortunes over the following years, until it eventually closed its doors in 1821) Capodimonte manufactured its best tableware sets, crockery and ornaments, whose shapes, types, enamelling and decorations provided reference models for students’ designs in the *Industrial Design Laboratory 1 A*.

The project also aimed to design *narrating* objects -that could act as *educated* souvenirs, recalling Naples and its territory. How could students achieve such a goal, that would prove challenging even for the most experienced designers, especially when studying Parthenope’s city, with all its clichés? It might be helpful to explain how difficult it was for Design and Fashion students at Vanvitelli University to tackle the task of

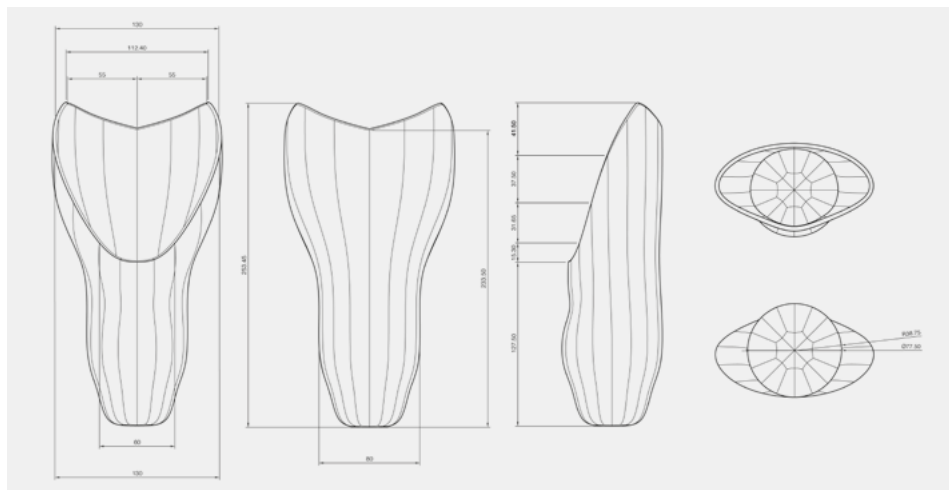
designing everyday objects and fashion accessories as items of university merchandise, drawing inspiration from Campania and Naples, its regional capital. Students were requested to fill in a moodboard, into which they would randomly insert the main tropes revolving around the city of Naples: Pulcinella, Totò, horn-shaped amulets, Maradona, Saint Januarius, Eduardo De Filippo, spaghetti, Mount Vesuvius. However, it was impossible to employ such images without wondering “what does this mean to me?”, “what does this call to my mind?”. Another cliché students drew from Neapolitan folklore, namely the communal washing lines in the narrow alleyways of the old town, could instead be seen as what it actually is: two neighbours sharing a facility, a relationship between people who are not bound to each other, neither by blood ties nor by friendship, therefore a fine example of solidarity, openness and mutual trust. The second step, not any easier than the first, involves incorporating this peculiarity into the design, allowing it to take shape and shine through the object.

While developing their designs, students were supervised remotely by Valter Luca De Bartolomeis, architect and headmaster of Istituto Caselli. The ongoing pandemic could only postpone the prototyping of some of their designs: we will be mounting an exhibition over the next months, displaying drawings and objects. We selected five pieces for this article.

*Coffee Flower* – an homage to flowers, a recurrent motif in Capodimonte porcelain – is a coffee cup that recalls two different coloured petals joined together, one with a glossy finish, and the other with a matte finish (Fig. 10).



**Figure 5.** Antonio Cicala, Antonio Chianese, Daniele de Lucia, Pasquale Altruda, *Partenope* vase, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, rendering.

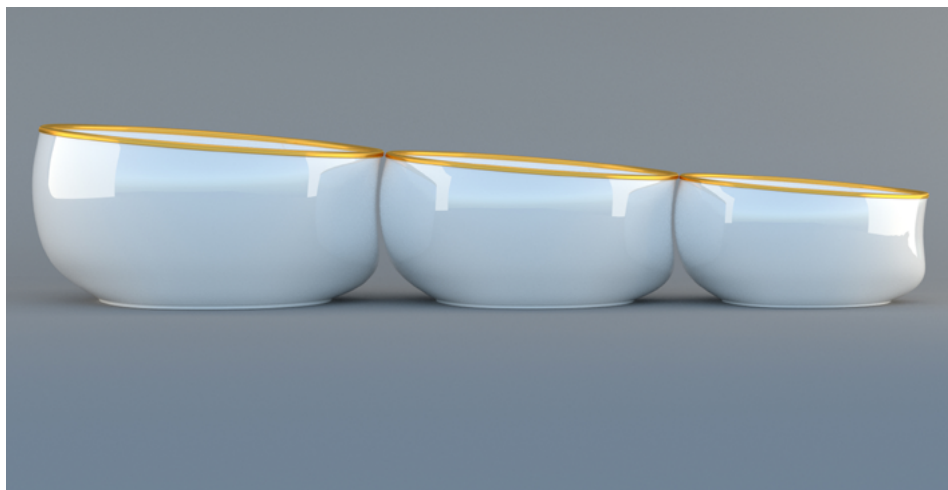


**Figure 6.** Antonio Cicala, Antonio Chianese, Daniele de Lucia, Pasquale Altruda, *Partenope* vase, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, technical 2D drawings.

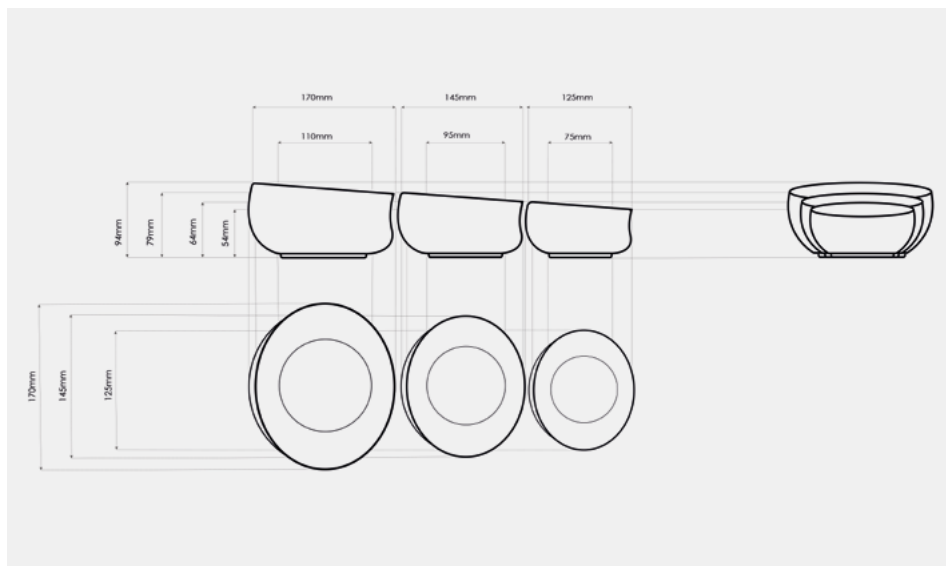




**Figure 7.** Vittoria Carrara, Francesca Cosimo, Maria Gargiulo, *Le isole* bowl set, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, top view rendering.



**Figure 8.** Vittoria Carrara, Francesca Cosimo, Maria Gargiulo, *Le isole* bowl set, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, front view rendering.



**Figure 9.** Vittoria Carrara, Francesca Cosimo, Maria Gargiulo, *Le isole* bowl set, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, technical 2D drawings .

When lifted to sip on the coffee, the cup reveals the brightly hued (or, in some variants, ornate) centre of the matching saucer. The *Casatiello* fruit bowl's shape, and its very name, are meant to pay tribute to the traditional Neapolitan Easter bread, which typically features hard-boiled eggs emerging from its surface; in lieu of eggs, the authors carved four hollows to accommodate pieces of fruit (Fig. 3). The same team also designed a bowl for serving seafood pasta, another staple of Neapolitan cuisine. Its shape resembles a clamshell, and the design features a specific compartment for empty shells (Fig. 4). The authors of the curvy, feminine *Partenope* vase drew inspiration from the ancient myth of the mermaid who founded Naples: indeed, the shape of its neck resembles that of a tail fin (Figs. 5, 6).

Only the set of three bowls, called *Le isole*, pays homage to the Campanian landscape: the pieces come in the same shape-but different sizes, and their gold piping trickles down to the bottom of each bowl in the shape of Ischia, Capri and Procida (Figs. 7, 8, 9). *Sincrasì* is the only piece in this round-up that is a nod to superstition, another cliché concerning the heathen piety of Neapolitans. A horseshoe – whose apotropaic function is recorded in many different folk cultures, not only in the Neapolitan one – provides the starting shape that gets re-processed from a conceptual point of view and eventually morphs into a small two-pronged vase (Figs 1, 2).

#### 4. Conclusions

*Deterritorializing* Mediterranean design eradicates the rhetorical celebration of the alleged cultural identities of a certain part of the world rather than those of a different one, thus respecting that peculiar ability to build bridges and connect the alien, that the Mediterranean man has developed over time.



**Figure 10.** Rossella D'Ambrosio, Alessia Borriello, Pia Carcatella, *Coffee flower* coffee cup with matching saucer, glazed porcelain, Industrial Design Laboratory 1A, Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Vanvitelli University, academic year 2019-2020, rendering.

Being able and willing to interact with others, to somehow understand their *language*, is a skill that applies to all kinds of circumstances, not necessarily involving someone from another Southern country. You can still meet the *other* here, perhaps an artisan, with their skills, their know-how employing local crafting techniques, materials, decorations, and shapes. We must not pursue the much vaunted contamination of styles - only capable of superficial hybridization - but rather seek dialogue, which generates flows of energy and exchanges, shuffles the cards, challenges us with the unpredictable nature of encounters that help us grow. Hermann Hesse's Narcissus and Goldmund well represent the encounter between different poles.

[...] We are not meant to come together, not any more than the sun and moon were meant to come together, or sea and land. We are sun and moon, dear friend; we are sea and land. It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is: each the other's opposite and complement. (1977, p.99)

It is about reaching out towards each other, yet never merging completely, it is like leaven for the dough of growth, with clearly defined roles, with equal dignity, different *duties*, and *responsibilities*. Through the relationship between design and handicraft - the one we experimented with in our university course, revolving around items of museum merchandise to be crafted in Capodimonte porcelain - a new, non-mixed Mediterranean design culture assimilates the territory not only as a geographical and anthropological entity, but as a *spiritual* opportunity, as a place inhabited by the Other.

This opens up new strategic and political prospects of enhancing territories themselves, within the framework of a global network. On the subject of design, Eleonora Fiorani wrote:

The challenge is to combine product culture and local culture, which is even more important in a field that is directly related to the quality of life, tightly interweaving the spheres of collective and individual, of everyday and holiday, of public and private, places of the self and places of encounter, work, interaction, entertainment. Where product culture and local culture meet, innovation, technology, science, design combine with the poetry of materials, shapes, colours, lights as the overarching, archetypical value of every emotion, ratifying the birth and rise of contemporary culture, a call to action for dwellers, manufacturers and designers. (n.d., §2)

Merging into “the patterns of interrelation between local and global which connect territories and their communities” (Fiorani, 2010) paves the way for what Ezio Manzini called “cosmopolitan localism”, regarding places not as isolated entities, but as nodes in short-range and long-range networks, generating and regenerating the local socioeconomic fabric. This takes us back to considering the Mediterranean as a place of communication, a network of relationships, a “[...] social and cultural space in the first place, but also fertile ground for the development of new forms of interrelationship” (Zuccolo, 2015, p.1).

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