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**DESIGN VALUES
IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN**

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PROJECT

Photography Testimony of Artisanal Values

The Boat Project as a Historical Memory of the Mediterranean

Antonio de Feo

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Keywords

Photography as Memory, Know-How and Territory, Cultural Identity, Design, History of Material Culture.

Abstract

In a social and economic context that moves according to rapid patterns, in a contraction of time that paradoxically distances the past and brings with it an increasingly innovative future, photography can become a historical memory of ancient designs close to social and cultural values and traditions. The waves of the Mediterranean are ploughed by ships and small boats, projects that find their roots in the most ancient of human history and are still present today and continue to unite lands and men. It is the boat that merges the *sea between lands*. The *gozzo*, a small wooden boat, is an ancient project that was able to exploit knowledge from the past.

The contribution intends to investigate how photography has been and still is today an important tool for telling the story of the past and useful for handing down forgotten forms and views. The heirs of that specific knowledge, of that past which formed an entire society, are destined to disappear: the photography of construction sites, tools and craftsmen represents one of the privileged ways of keeping memory of this history.

Design, understood as a wide-ranging design process, can become the historical memory of society, and photography, which has always been a tool for sharing and a means of communication, can transform itself into an opportunity for historical and social investigation, always carrying with it the Barthesian axiom of *what has been*.

1. The Plato's Myth of the Cave

Susan Sontag, taking up Plato's myth of the cave, states that mankind continues to remain in the cave to delight, as a centuries-old habit, in simple images that seem to represent the truth (Sontag, 2004). However, being educated by photographs is not the same as being educated by older, more crafted images: today, more and more photographic images demand our attention. Since its invention in 1839, almost everything has been photographed, or so it seems. This insatiability of the photographic eye tends to modify the conditions of imprisonment that man feels in the cave that is our world, teaching us a new visual code. Photographs alter and expand our knowledge of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe and above all to remember. The greatest consequence of photography is that it gives us the feeling that we can be masters of the whole world, knowing and preserving its visual contents. In photographs, the image is also an object, easy to carry around, to accumulate or to preserve. Photographing means, in fact, appropriating what is photographed, what is written about a person or an event is clearly an interpretation, as are paintings. Photographs are not accounts of the world, but pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone could produce or acquire (Barthes, 2003). Photographs provide evidence. The photographic document can prove, being an indisputable demonstration, it can remember, being a visual representation of what has been. The photograph thus becomes a historical memory and a witness to past values. A photograph seems to have a purer, and therefore more precise, relationship with visible reality than other mimetic objects (Sontag, 2004), allowing it to become an archive

of society and a bearer of ancient values, as well as a tool for social, cultural and historical investigation. In particular, the contribution intends to investigate how amateur photography, preserved in small family archives, can have a high cultural importance, becoming a means of understanding, reading and enhancing craft knowledge belonging to small villages or workshops. It also becomes a means of confirming or denying a larger story.

The oldest relics of man's work are the tools of the Stone Age. There is no continuity from these tools to the things of today: it is one long series of objects, which has branched out several times and has often ended in dead branches. Entire sequences naturally disappeared when artisan lines became extinct or when a civilization collapsed. But the flow of things never came to a complete standstill: everything that exists today is either a replica or a variant of something that existed some time ago, and so on, without interruption, until the first dawn of human life (Kubler, 1972, p. 09).

2. The Mediterranean and the *gozzo*

The Mediterranean is not only physically a place of exchange or passage; it is a basin of social, political and cultural interaction. A fertile ground excellent for cultivating old and new traditions and projects. A testing ground for new discoveries and, finally, a connector for different peoples (Feniello, 2018). The waves of the Mediterranean bathe the cliffs of the Strait of Gibraltar and the warm sandy shores of the Middle East, flood the streets of Venice, the capital Alexandria and the small islands of Greece, protagonists of the most important moments

in the history of mankind. The sea, which links these lands, protagonists of the birth and history of mankind, has always been sailed by ships and small boats. They use the winds to cross the sea with slaves, wines, spices and oils to bring their cargo to different markets and cultures. The boat is the vehicle for these journeys. It has its roots in the oldest history of mankind, and even today it is the boat that unites lands and people more than any other means. It is the boat that unites the *sea between lands*. A project born of history, handed down from human to human. A project that has been able to exploit knowledge from the past, but also to be a test and reason for new discoveries. The project of the boat has been able to be adapted to different materials for different territories (Macao-vaz, 2013), able, therefore, to adapt to different peculiarities of the sea and to develop for different forms and specific functions to respond to needs specific to the territories and social traditions (Avilia, 2016). Boats are built with a higher keel, or a wider deck, a mast is built in the middle to lower the sails, or they show portholes for the oars, or are driven by propellers powered by hundreds of quintals of iron and fuel. But it is all the same space, a lost island in the middle of the sea, a place of despair but also a place of hope of finding a better world than the one you have just left. Large boats transported people in the Mediterranean, thousands of journeys, waves, shipwrecks and landings that traced the route of this sea. In particular, the contribution intends to investigate the great strength of a small boat, which is nevertheless capable of being a connector of distant peoples, cultures and craftsmanship. Going to sea not to fight, colonize or establish trade but to fish or simply for the pleasure of sailing.

The boat, the historical icon of fishermen, which embodies the most classic seafaring tradition, enduring to this day, defined as the mother of all Mediterranean boats, is the *gozzo*. The *gozzo* is a wooden boat of Levantine origin which, like the Latin sail, was introduced to the Mediterranean by the Arabs and later copied by the sailors of the Italian maritime republics who frequented the ports of the eastern Mediterranean. Each port subsequently redesigned the hull so that the boat could best meet its own needs in terms of fishing and working techniques. Today, the *gozzo* is universally classified as the mother of all Mediterranean boats and combines technological and performance characteristics that have been modified over many years of slow evolution, allowing this boat to remain evergreen. The *gozzo*, a small wooden boat, can display all the knowledge, craftsmanship and history of the small villages along the Mediterranean coast (Beltrame, 2012). It consists of a 5 or 6 metre wooden hull and is mainly used for daily fishing. The design of the *gozzo* follows ancient indications, but it is developed according to specific craftsmanship knowledge peculiar to each territory where it is born. The technical characteristics of the *gozzo*, common to all designs developed on the Mediterranean coast, are the unbridged hull with a wedge-shaped stern, a high freeboard and a large horse (Marzari, 1998). The *gozzo* is designed and built mainly for rowing propulsion, but often also has a lateen or Portuguese sail. The *gozzo* was born out of history and the search for a compromise between speed and safety, above all stable and capable of tackling even high waves. Hence the harmonious shapes that allow excellent maneuverability. Despite its limited waterline length, the *gozzo* is still capable of travelling long distances in search of fish.



Figure 1. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 2. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 3. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.

The production of wooden *gozzo* is traditionally linked to small shipwrights who, in their own boatyard, built one *gozzo* at a time with the help of one or two apprentices. The boat was then built by eye by the shipwright, who knew and carried with him all the secrets of construction (Marzari, 1998). He proceeded to build the boat without the aid of plans and drawings, let alone mathematical formulas for perfect buoyancy (Figs. 1, 2, 3).

The *gozzo* was built with the experience and practice of craftsmen carpenters. Once the craftsman had drawn the gauze - the life-size wooden model of the framework - of the main half-section, the rest of the hull was made according to rules that were not codified but applied considering the environment in which the boat would operate and the type of use envisaged (Gutelle, 1988). It is no coincidence that shipwrights passed on their knowledge from father to son. The choice of the construction materials was very careful and considered the type of use of each piece. The guardians of this ancient knowledge are the master carpenters who learned this craft from generation to generation. From popular knowledge it is known that the masters were very jealous of their secrets and apprentices had to, as a first step, observe them to learn. But their knowledge was also sometimes imprinted in photographs. These, with the aim of telling the story and becoming a memento, or helping the memory of the craftsman, today remain the only historical sources of ancient work no longer practiced. In fact, unlike large industries, which, with the advent of photography, recounted their production, they did not use photography to communicate their knowledge.

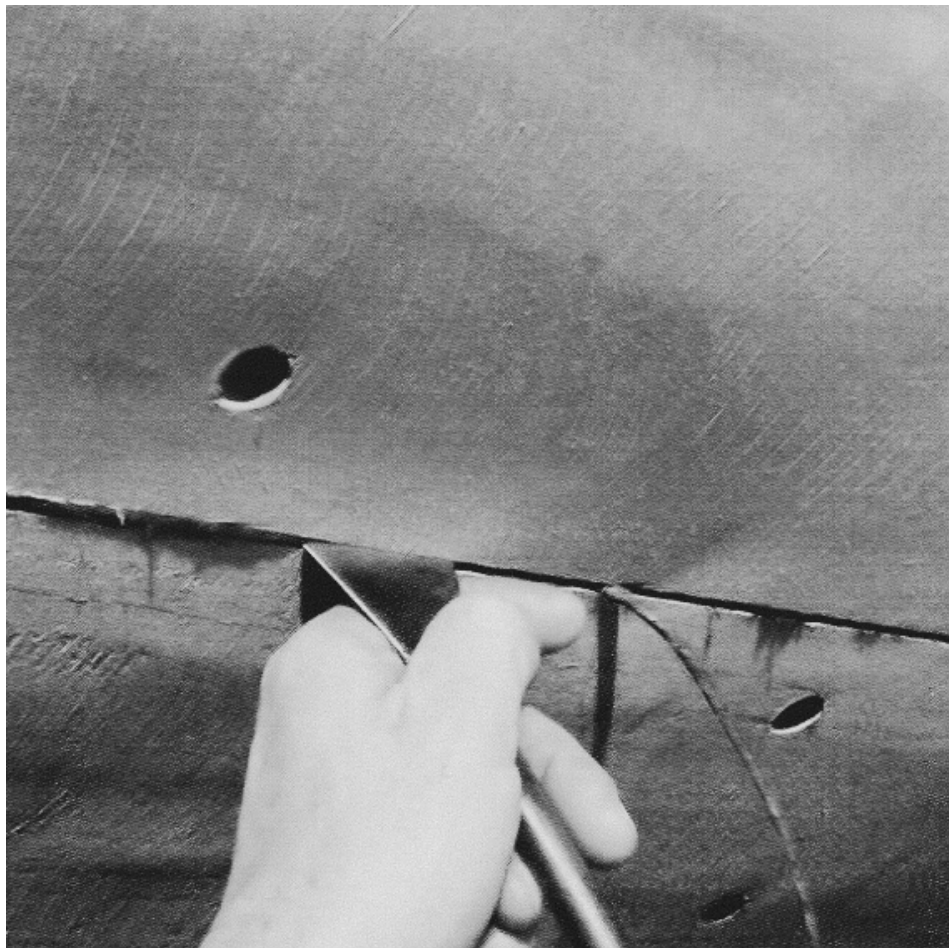


Figure 4. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 5. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.

Today, the photographic material that remains to us is part of family archives of little historical interest, but capable, in the same way, of weaving and telling the story of these small boats that were born from the hands of craftsmen (Figs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

We have been disciples of the animals in the most important arts: of the spider in weaving and mending, of the swallow in building houses, of the singing birds, the swan and the nightingale in singing, by imitation. (Ditadi, 1994, p. 90)

Imitation is the process that underlies the creation of every photograph, as it simply takes its cue from the world and reproduces it in an image, which is then used to communicate and disseminate values. Photography has always been a means of bearing witness and telling stories, and society has used it from the outset so that it can serve and be used for these purposes, to the point of becoming a visual historical memory, and not only that, of society (Figs. 9, 10).

3. Photography as Historical Memory

The proposal to make photography a source of historical and social studies is a recent one. At the end of the 19th century, the French poet Baudelaire wrote about photography so that it would be:

Handmaid of the sciences and the arts, but handmaid full of humility, like printing and shorthand, which have neither created nor replaced literature. (Baudelaire, 1996, p. 190)

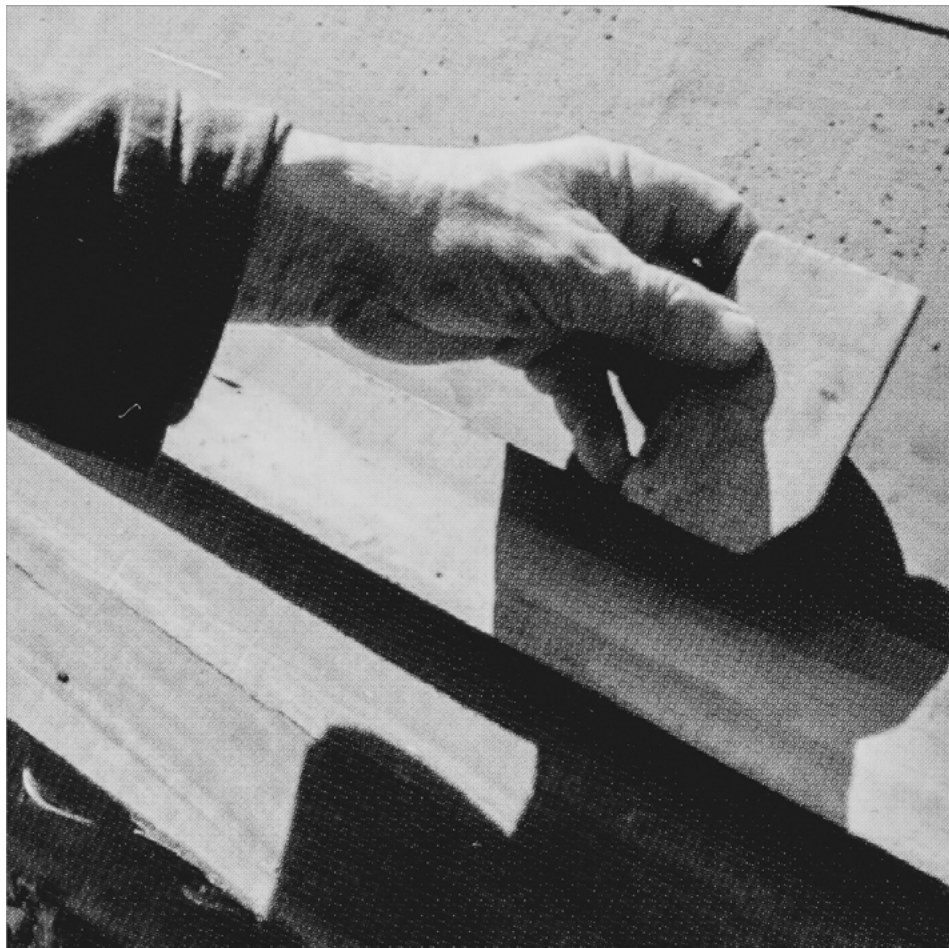


Figure 6. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 7. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 8. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.

Photography is hardly associated with a historical document, as evidence and representation of a past, it has been understood for decades as an artistic object with an important expressive value, proper to a culture based on painting. Baudelaire hoped for a very different role for photography: to be a historical document without aesthetic superstructures. Subsequent developments in the photographic medium, and thus the great season of the historical avant-gardes, together with the languages of the second post-war period and the impetuous advent of the new avant-gardes from the end of the 1950s, would however have definitively disproved the poet's ominous predictions. While a slow and silent change in interpretative codes was taking place, perhaps we were witnessing a rediscovery of photography by historians. The idea that photographs can be read and studied, and therefore understood and interpreted, as historical documents or on a par with written texts is becoming ever closer. Photographic art as a testimony of the past has finally taken center stage in contemporary photography theory. This means that photography should be read not through an aesthetic analysis, which has a history in the older arts and thus forms a standard of judgement, but through the set of documentary subtexts that the photographic image carries.

Photography lends itself to careful and expert reading, just like any other historical document, whether on paper or not. Like any historical research, it must be cross-referenced with other testimonies, a source among sources, to avoid fallacious or not entirely correct readings. Photography, therefore, should not be seen as a unicum from which to take the

absolute truth, since it is a vehicle for a specific point of view, that of the photographer or the client, but as a support and confirmation of other documents (D'autilia, 2001). It can therefore be deduced that photography can be an excellent tool for writing the social and cultural history of a country that is constantly changing. About twenty years ago Duccio Bigazzi, director of *Archivi e imprese*, the name adopted by the first two series of *Imprese e storia*, attempted to trace an initial furrow towards this idea of photography as a historical document and to indicate possible lines of development with respect to what had already happened in past years (Bigazzi, 1993). The historian focused on the authorial value of the photographs in the archives, therefore on the presence of known or lesser known photographers within these, to the collaborations between freelance photographers and the industry, thus continuing to submit to the formal canons that he tried to overcome. Photography was treated in that writing for its possibilities and capacities to narrate the corporate image and spread identity values. There is a lack of real understanding of what the photographic object is, how it is born and how it is formed. Historians often underestimate photographic documents, reading them only as formal and artistic information and using them as a visual accompaniment to written text. They do not understand, let alone in most cases intend to understand, the photographic techniques that led to the determination of a specific image. It is necessary, however, to know that photography is not a neutral object, the result of a miraculous action of light on photosensitive products, it is the product of precise technical choices, made in accordance with the most disparate practical contingencies.

Only by knowing and decoding the visual elements of the photograph can we deduce all the conditions that led the author of the image to make certain choices that gave life to that specific photograph. Historians and archivists, therefore, not only need to have an excellent knowledge of the technical aspect of the language of photography, but they also need to know the subjects and commissions of each work. Industrial photography, unlike the photography of artisanal products, is a technical photography, carefully studied, since an inanimate object is photographed, or a production methodology, and not tools to which the photographer must try to give a soul and a point of view that is, in the communicative sphere, also captivating, but above all true (Calvenzi, 2008).

The images of artisan products very often arise from requirements other than those linked to corporate communication. They are the result of amateur photographers who, out of personal interest, have decided to photographically illustrate the workings of craft workshops. Today they remain unique testimonies of knowledge linked to ancient *know-how* that has become extinct with technological progress. The memory of small shipyards, where *gozzo* were designed and built, derives solely from amateur photographs in private archives. And it is precisely the rediscovery and careful reading of these archives that today allows society to study and understand ancient design knowledge and production processes that died out with the craftsman, the only one who knew such knowledge. In companies, many photographs were destined for customers and had, therefore, to show the object in a technical and scientific way, for an internal archive useful for inventories. These photographs had to be technical to show the

object in its entirety and best represent the entire production process that led to it having certain shapes and technical characteristics. It can be deduced, therefore, that the photograph of the handicraft product was born, not to be directly commissioned by the craftsman and, in this sense, does not show itself as a document since it was not produced for demonstrative purposes within the workshop itself. Understanding what use the photograph had is necessary to be able to read it and attribute to it the merits regarding its purpose.

History and memory meet in the archive, which opens up possibilities for knowledge and integration between disciplines. In this context, photography is taken in its specificity, but at the same time it is analysed and returned as one of the many components of the reconstruction of memory, together with sketches, catalogues, working drawings, final products, all *objets trouvés* capable of recomposing, by fragments, countless potential narrations (Cresci, 1979). In this way, the researcher can carry out philological work and reconstruct the choices that craftsmen made.

The advent of digital technology, which is increasingly powerful, has led to a simplification of the ways in which it can be consulted, but one of the most significant problems has been the slow disappearance of physical material and the concealment of the original supports, which has led to a promiscuity even in terms of terminology. Photography becomes the bearer of complex meanings and, more than any other document, can be the constructor of a new meaning. Particularly in these years in which photography has lent itself to being

viewed almost exclusively in digital format, it has lost all the materiality and historical documentation of the photosensitive medium. It is even easy and immediate to manipulate a photograph, making it lose its documentary importance and becoming an object and medium for lies (Smargiassi, 2009).

Photography should be understood as a cultural and social asset, which is the bearer of historical information necessary to trace the lines of a history close to us. For this reason, business and family archives should not only be shown to selected and appreciated scholars, but it would rather be necessary, also for a social interest, that they become public and available to the whole community.

4. Conclusion

Photography becomes a historical memory of knowledge that is now extinct and a useful document for society to understand territorial and cultural values that were close to oblivion. But it is precisely all this knowledge and know-how that has made the Mediterranean a basin for the exchange of different cultures, becoming a breeding ground for discoveries and innovations. All this has been possible in recent years thanks to the ability of the photographic medium to capture details that the human eye would not be able to reach without the technique of the photographic instrument. The influence of Moholy Nagy is present in this way of conceiving photography, in fact he writes in one of his essays:

The camera has provided us with astonishing possibilities, the exploitation of which has only just begun. Already today's lens,

in widening the field of vision, is no longer bound by the narrow limits of our eye; no manual means (pencil, brush, etc.) can fix glimpses of the world seen in this way; likewise, it is impossible to fix movement in its essence with manual means of representation. Even the possibilities of distortion of the lens, seen from below, from above, in foreshortening, are by no means to be evaluated only in a negative way, but instead provide an unprejudiced optical vision, something that our eyes, bound by associative laws, cannot do. (Moholy-Nagy, 2010, pp. 56-57)

Photography is asked to do nothing other than stand as a privileged representative of reality, without, however, a fake and artificial reconstruction of it (Quintavalle, 1981). The photographer is therefore asked to recount the present, and therefore to have an excellent ability to use the photographic medium and above all to transfigure the subject, making it new and easy to read (Cresci, 1997). All the photographer's efforts must aim to show how an ordinary object, or aspect of everyday life, can instead be photogenic, even if represented "in its bare essential value" (Moholy-Nagy, 2010). The power of a photograph is in preserving, for investigation, moments that the normal flow of time immediately replaces (Sontag, 2004). Today, many ports of call and historic shipyards are abandoned or have been replaced by new industrial realities. The only heirs of that knowledge and past that formed an entire society and defined the Mediterranean as the cradle of past and contemporary society are destined to disappear. It will be photography, and the reading of private archives, that will shed new light on craft processes that have disappeared with the construction sites.

The photography of tools and workmanships represents one of the privileged ways to maintain the memory of this history and redefine current production processes by rethinking ancient design practices and specific workmanships that tend to disappear (Carullo & Labalestra, 2018).

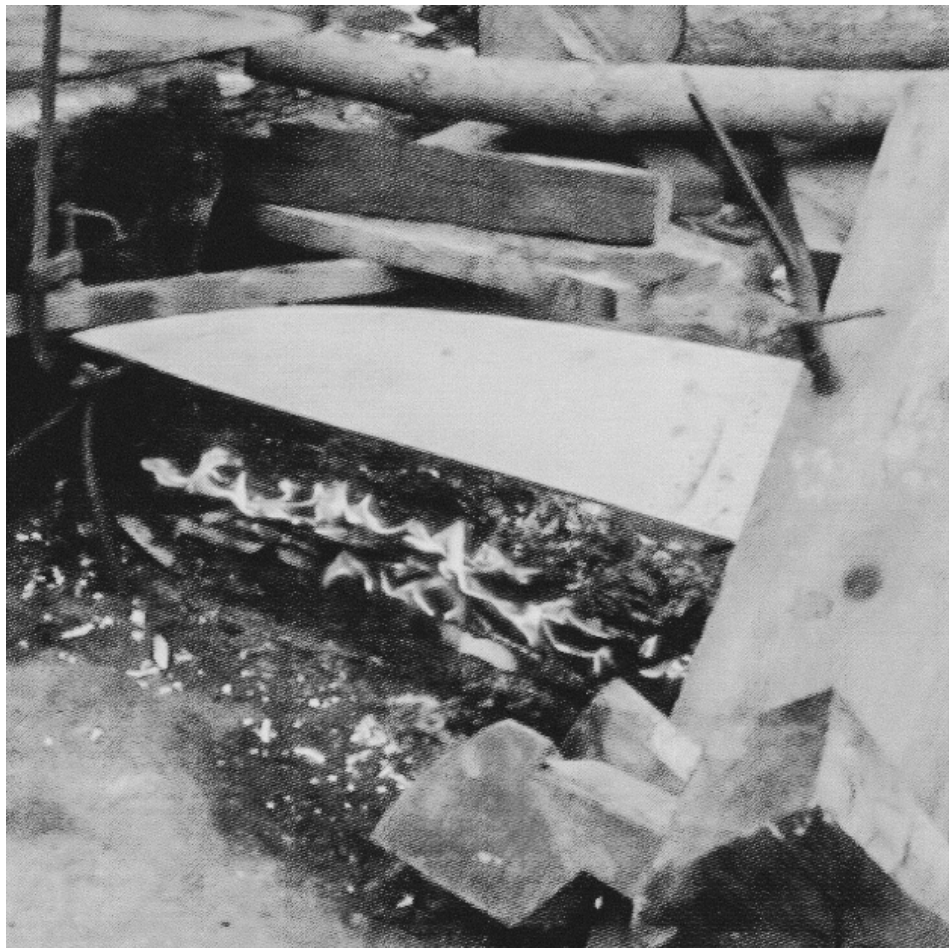


Figure 9. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.



Figure 10. Unknown author, craftsman at work in a small shipyard, about 1990/2000. Photograph from popular archives.

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Using participatory action research she aims to explore the ways in which tacit knowledge can emerge, be understood and leveraged to better design relational services for sustainable futures. This exploration will pivot on the ways of knowing that emerge from the process of design, craft and co-creation as well as on the indigenous practices at the local level. Her research aims to enable the emergence of a new design epistemology, based on concepts like post-humanism as well as on feminist and indigenous theoretical frameworks. This will be accomplished with small groups of people, within which co-creation will occur, following processes of participatory design.

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In his research he intends to analyze representational and transformative technologies as tools to communicate and market a product or a service. In addition, he studies to understand how photography could become a means of analysis and study for design, becoming historical memory of ancient craft values and material knowledge.

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The work is carried out in close connection to the regional manufacturing sectors as part of a complex system of relationships which aims to disseminate innovation, develop new technological paradigms and new, more sustainable production scenarios. Scientific Director of MATto, innovative materials archive open to Piedmont SMEs, since 2018 she is Vice Rector for Quality, Welfare and Equal Opportunities at the Politecnico di Torino.

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She wrote articles both in international conferences and journals, such as "Strategic Design Research Journal", "Design and Culture", "Journal of Design History", "MD Journal", "DIID. Disegno Industriale Industrial Design", "The Design Journal".

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One of his main lines of research concerns the valorization of that design dialoguing with craftsmanship, strongly anchored to territories of the country, and capable of supporting the Made in Italy development, that is what he names "Handmade in Italy." About this, he is the national coordinator of the ADI Thematic Commission "Handmade in Italy," which he founded in 2017. Since 2020 he is Scientific Committee member of SYMBOLA Foundation for Italian Qualities.

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From 2007 to 2017 lecturer fellow and then post-doc researcher at DIDA Department of University of Florence, where he led several joint research labs in between Academia and advanced craftsmanship SMES. Professor in Fashion Design and Product Design at undergraduate program in Design of University of Florence. PhD in Industrial design, Environment and History, his professional profile is focusing on relationships between design strategies and advanced manufacturing processes. Academic coordinator at Fashion Design department of IED-Istituto Europeo di Design in Florence from 2014 to 2018. From March 2018 to December 2019, Associate Researcher at Nanjing University/School of Art.

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Since 2006 she founded and coordinates the Hybrid Design Lab (www.hybriddesignlab.org), the design laboratory dedicated to mutual relations between design and science with particular attention to the experimentation of biomimicry in design and the integration of designers in the development processes of new materials to which the specific Designer in lab project is dedicated.

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Main focus of his line of research are parametric design, medical design, and advanced manufacturing – knowledge acquired during his academic path. The Ph.D. course with industrial characterization has allowed him to carry out and consolidate his research activity, as well as at his university, also at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería y Diseño Industrial (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain) and a company from Campania, based in Grignano di Aversa, to design a system of innovative orthopaedic devices through parametric design.

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He is occupied with street art and mainly with large-scale murals. He's worked individually and with his team, Really? Team, in various parts of Greece.

He also works as a designer, illustrator, street artist and musician. His interests include photography, production and direction of audiovisual works, writing and acting. His research interests revolve around Design, Art and Creation, focusing on the design processes that precede, are subject to and follow the creation of works of Street Art, and how they are qualitatively and quantitatively related to Design, in terms of productivity, quality, performance and user experience.

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