



# àisthesis

Discovering art with all the senses

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# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>To each child, his own space in the world - Lega del Filo d'Oro .....</b>                              | <b>3</b>  |
| by Nicoletta Marconi  |           |
| <b>Touch, instructions for use .....</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| by Maria Manganaro  |           |
| <b>Cultural heritage: an experience of participation and inclusion<br/>in Friuli Venezia Giulia .....</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| by Morena Maresia   |           |
| <b>Beyond words: telling yourself through images .....</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| by Farnaz Farahi  |           |
| <b>My last respects to Paolo Annibali .....</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| by Aldo Grassini  |           |
| <b>A monument to nothingness .....</b>  | <b>13</b> |
| by Paolo Annibali   |           |
| <b>Credits .....</b>  | <b>15</b> |

# To each child, his own space in the world - Lega del Filo d'Oro

by Nicoletta Marconi

If you've never met a deafblind person or someone with multiple disabilities, perhaps you may have some unanswered questions: are deafblind people completely deaf and blind? How do they care for themselves? How do they spend their free time? How do they play? How do they communicate?

When talking about **deafblind people**, we must think about a wide range of characteristics. Deafblind people may be completely deaf and blind or have a residual trace of one of their two senses. They may have lost their sight and hearing after acquiring language, they may have received hearing aids at an early age and have therefore partially recovered their hearing. They may be able to see shapes, lights, and shadows, or have a residual ability to discriminate colors and images. Certainly, deafblindness must be considered **a single disability**, distinct from the simple sum of visual and hearing impairment, because dual disability has a different impact on the development of the personality and social relationships.

So, if sight and hearing are absent, or only partially present, and if cognitive or motor skills are also suboptimal, what **tools** does a child have at his disposal to find his place in the world?

First, they must learn how they can maximize the **remaining intact sensory channels**, primarily touch, but also smell and taste. Everything around them has a smell, a consistency, a texture, and so reality gradually becomes populated with objects, people, and materials that differentiate and become recognizable by the sensory aspects that characterize them.

A fundamental role is played by the **educator**, whose primary task must be to provide a safe haven, a warm place within the educational relationship, a starting point from which to depart and return to acquire knowledge, skills, independence, and self-determination. The entire educational relationship turns around the word "**trust**". The educational relationship is always a relationship of trust; the child

must learn to trust a person who, in most cases, is not a family member, whose manner of approach or smell is recognized only by the child, and the educator must have infinite faith in the child's abilities.

In fact, people with deafblindness and, above all, multiple psychosensory disabilities face seemingly insurmountable challenges every day, such as carrying out tasks **independently**, correctly perceiving and using their environment, learning new skills, and, above all, communicating.

Learning to express own needs, desires, and, above all, own disagreements, thus becomes the greatest of challenges, the primary aim of growth.

Children with multiple disabilities must invest a great amount of energy and commitment into learning to use that magical and extraordinary tool that is **communication**; any system, method, or language can be effective if it allows them to relate, understand, and be understood.

Each system has an own value only if it is "significant"; a spontaneous gesture, a real object, a miniature model, or, where a visual residue is present, an image. Any object, symbol, or behavior to which a meaning is associated becomes a signifier of a reality: an activity, an environment, a person, a food, a place, an emotion.

Then, communication takes on the magical power of bringing the deafblind or multiply disabled child out of isolation and silence, projecting him into **a shared reality**, in which he himself becomes the protagonist in the expression of his own choices, decisions, and desires.

For the deafblind person, as for everyone else, being able to communicate is a vital requirement to avoid feeling alone, isolated, self-absorbed, immersed in a world of silence, and delegating to others the power to speak on your behalf.

When people with deafblindness and multiple disabilities acquire communication skills, they become masters of their own lives. They gradually begin to express their needs and, above all, their will. Spontaneous gestures, where there are the necessary prerequisites, can be supplemented and replaced by a sign from Sign Language. Deafblind people, who for obvious reasons cannot perceive signs visually, learn to use **Tactile Sign Language**, where the sign, which deaf people

perceive visually, is replaced by a sign perceived by the hands of the deafblind interlocutor. The same sign that is seen and looked at by deaf people is then touched and explored by the hands of the deafblind person. The interpreter signs into the deafblind person's hands, positioned to receive it.

Deafblind people who have learned to read and write can also become skilled at communicating through the **Malossi system**, in which the listener's left hand becomes a keyboard, where each point of the fingers corresponds to a letter of the alphabet and on which entire dialogues can be typed.

In this way, day after day, deafblind children become women and men capable of expressing their needs, emotions, and desires. With the support of family members, educators, and technology, life's challenges only seemingly become insurmountable, because no child is denied the opportunity to learn, regardless of their starting conditions. Disability, even when characterized by the need for intensive support, cannot represent a constraint, a point of arrival, or the absence of educational prospects, but rather must be understood as the premise, the starting point from which to embark on a long journey of continuous growth.

# Touch, instructions for use

by Maria Manganaro

During a recent training session on **accessibility**, with professionals of various kinds from all over Italy (as always), I thought that among the many open and suggested way by President Grassini, **podcasting** was missing. I thought it while listening (as a non-professional) to **Aldo Grassini** himself, a generous and magnetic speaker on that mysterious (for many) topic that **touch** represents in our culture and especially in our daily lives. The last of the five senses, in terms of importance. The first in terms of prohibition (don't touch!). Rare and therefore precious in terms of use (symbolically in Italian, "it needs touch" means "be kind").

Yet, when Grassini talks about **exploring reality** (in the broadest sense) through touch, he opens to fantastic worlds neglected for reasons I couldn't analyze (it's not my profession). I reflect on it. The sense of touch is underutilized by the able-bodied, sight is tamed. I'm certainly not the first to say that we look without seeing, for much of our time. And the opposite would be impossible. Our brains would suffer from an excess of images to catalog, like that "memorable" young man in Borges's story who, due to a tragic accident, is unable to forget absolutely anything that happens to him.

And however, the path of still and moving images is, in every field, well-trodden. Touch is largely neglected. Fortunately, Aldo Grassini, with his partner **Daniela Bottegoni**, has opened his museum to everyone, showcasing a side of inclusivity which is as necessary as fascinating. Thanks to an intuition that became stubborn conviction, for three decades we have been able to run our hands over the curves of nose and curls of hair of **Michelangelo's David**, over the body of the **Venus of Milo**, over the curves of **Arnaldo Pomodoro**, and through the folds of **Valeriano Trubbiani's** grotesque elegance.

But how did he select and then choose each of the artworks to reproduce? And where did the originals come from? What passionate desire drove Grassini to the freedom to have access to (along with everyone else) precisely those works? Which ones would he have wanted? And, above all, why?

During the training course, the president, pragmatic and idealistic, holds everything together. He provides answers and suggestions, raises doubts, and tackles taboos, captivating the attention of the large audience. No, he's neither an actor nor a rhetorician. He's "just" one of those **free minds** (educated and pertinent) who has found a hearing in public affairs by championing the cause of inclusivity, starting with the need for the visually impaired to use touch, and beyond. It's no coincidence that **Fabio De Chirico**, a member of the **Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity**, participated in the training course on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, with a remote presentation that Grassini described as revolutionary in its openness to concrete, inclusive approaches to artworks, which are recognized as having a specific social role.

Of course, Fabio De Chirico, identifying the "Omero" museum as a structure of excellence, speaks of cities like Turin fully committed to inclusiveness and accessibility, where **the people**, not artworks, are at the center. He speaks of overcoming economic and linguistic barriers to provide concrete responses to a multiethnic society, in a changing context where the museum can reclaim its function: "a challenge that the Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity is called upon to address, in its guiding role, with a multisensory approach that encompasses visual, olfactory, musical, and performative interactions. "Accessibility", Fabio De Chirico concluded, "is a vision, it is a question connected to citizenship and, as such, must open itself to new horizons and educational aspects".

It is precisely here that I reflect on how **experience** is a vehicle for learning, how the subjective version of events from a recognized expert enriches intellectual and emotional understanding of reality, how it satisfies unexpressed curiosity by triggering mechanisms of trust and anticipation. It would be wonderful—I find myself wishing—if Aldo Grassini's voice could accompany, through headphones, those visitors to the Omero museum who wanted to hear the verbal translation of the tactile experience of an artwork, the journey of an artwork to the Omero museum, or the piece that the music-loving president associates with a sculpture.

# Cultural heritage: an experience of participation and inclusion in Friuli Venezia Giulia

by Morena Maresia

Sometimes, it takes very little to be amazed, to marvel, to be surprised. Discovering beauties right next to us, rich in history and stories. Simply answering a simple question—“What is this?”— gave many groups, associations, and individuals the opportunity to get involved, seek information, visit libraries, and activate networks in their local area to learn about what has always been “right there in front of me” (as the title of the project) but which, before that day, they had never stopped to observe.

Participation in this project, which required the production of short videos and films describing **local cultural heritage**, triggered virtuous processes of generative welfare involving the participation of citizens with difficulties of accessing and enjoying to cultural heritage (sensory, motor, or cognitive disabilities, deficits related to functional abilities, neurodevelopmental differences, rare diseases, linguistic or socio-cultural marginalization, etc.): people who currently live, work, study, or temporarily reside in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The aim was to overturn the paradigm whereby people with disabilities are considered mere passive users of cultural heritage, and to offer an experience in which they can truly participate and be **protagonists**, engaging and demonstrating their potential as “**generators**” of culture. Their perspective and sensitivity were a precious gift for everyone. A lot of organizations joined the initiative: **day** and residential **centers** in the health and social sectors, **social cooperatives**, and **volunteer associations** that welcome and assist people with cognitive and mental difficulties, limitations in independence, and people with disabilities. Public administrations and entire schools undertook **multidisciplinary projects** to listen, give voice, and put „themselves in their shoes“. Foreigners, migrants, and reception centers for unaccompanied minors shared their **desire to integrate**, learn about, and understand the history and cultural heritage of the region where



they now live. They told us about small churches enclosing precious and ancient frescoes, small museums, rivers and streams, and mills that, out of curiosity, they managed to open revealing their ancient contents and profound meanings.

They described a human landscape, made unique by their sensitive and attentive gaze, with creative imagination, enthusiasm, and contagious joy. Cultural heritage revealed its potential in the social sphere. We attempted to experiment with a way to recognize how the squares and buildings that are part of our lives, the streets we walk every day, the places where we lived and that shaped us as we are can actualize their meanings, serve as a framework and pretext for concrete reasoning, and enable experiences of participation, inclusion, and connection. It's important to feel that those journeys belong to us, to feel they're ours, to connect our personal and relational memories to them. The result is an **"amazing epiphany"** accessible to everyone: to imagine cultural heritage, the choice to share it, the emotion of doing together. All this gave us the opportunity to reflect, pause, look around, and not underestimate the beauty and richness of what we have near us and, above all, of "who" we have right there, near us.

"All the produced videos are available, accompanied by a descriptive sheet, on the website of the Superintendency of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape of Friuli Venezia Giulia".

# Beyond words: telling yourself through images

by Farnaz Farahi

When I arrived in Italy, I was nineteen, but I felt myself like a newborn. I didn't understand the language, I didn't know anyone, I did lose **my identity**. I had only two small black-and-white photographs with me: the faces of my mother and father torn out from old driver's licenses. Those images were my refuge and my roots, my nourishment during those days of disorientation. Then, one day, my wallet was stolen. I had no money, but I lost those **photos**. It was an **internal rip**. In that moment, I understood that an image can be more powerful: it contains memory, affection, hope.

**Images** help us to remember, reminisce, communicate, imagine. They offer continuity when everything seems fragmented. Arranging photographs — of the past, the present, and the future I aspired to — restored order. The images spoke for me, when I searched for words I didn't possess yet.

Today, I use them in educational and training contexts. Photographs can open dialogues, evoke emotions, construct meanings. They are bridges between cultures, languages, and experiences. They not only represent, but generate: new ideas, new relationships, new visions. "Seeing is body," I told myself, and the body can feel what the eyes cannot see.

**Photography**, as an artistic expression, has a power that goes beyond representation. Its primary **function** is **psychological-existential**, because it allows us to appropriate it, to bring it to ourselves and within ourselves. It has a **cognitive** function, because it deepens knowledge and observation; a **technical** function, as skill; a **social** function, in its ability to reflect, to criticize, denounce, and transform society. It has a **historical and cultural** function, because each photograph loads different meanings depending on time and context. And finally, it possesses a **utopian** function: it opens up to imagined, desired worlds that

do not exist yet. Photography does not simply document, but announces new possibilities of experience.

I had the opportunity to deepen the relationship between photography and pedagogy, and their connection to aesthetics. The power of beauty, already recognized by authors such as Schiller, Dewey, Proust, Bloch, Heidegger, Marcuse, Gadamer, and Adorno, reminds us that **art** can be a form of **salvation**.

Through aesthetic education, we can take care of ourselves. Receiving an artwork activates an internal dialogue, refines our experiences, and directs our gaze on the world. Art educates because it transforms us. In the silence between us and the image, a space of intimacy, freedom, and awareness is born.

Placing yourself as the subject of an image is a powerful act: we express who we are, the places we inhabit, the people and actions we love. It's a way to know ourselves and to be known, to clarify who we are and to share our perspective on the world with others.

As Jerome Bruner states: "The self is constructed becoming its own interpreter, the narrator of its own experience." In this way, visual storytelling is a form of mutual understanding creating authentic bridges between people and cultures.

# My last respects to Paolo Annibali

by Aldo Grassini

Even though he has had to deal with illness for his whole life, we are shocked and surprised by the news; or rather, perhaps we are surprised precisely for this reason, because so many times, his passion and his **desire to live** have made him the winner of the challenge.

Annibali was an **authentic artist**, a faithful interpreter of **human fragility**, but he had the **dignity** of those who know how to live it, he had the seriousness and decorum of those who never surrender.

With a style focused to the **charm of the ancient**, he expressed the anxieties and contradictions of modern man, with classic composure and hatred for any form of exhibitionism.

His honesty and stylistic rigor make him a true artist who will remain among us with his much-loved and little-publicized artworks.

But Paolo was also a **dear friend** to my wife and me: a friendship born when we were able to share in mind and heart the creative period of the **exhibition “Dirà l’argilla”** (the clay will say), one of the finest presented by the Omero Museum.

His passion for the work of thought and hand, his kindness and gentlemanliness, his culture, never flaunted but offered with humble generosity, and his sincere affection were the foundation of a bond that will remain a precious memory for the future.

My wife and I, with all the staff of the Omero Museum, thank him and pay our heartfelt respects.

# A monument to nothingness

by Paolo Annibali

The days seem increasingly shorter at the end of summer as well as this last period of my life is marked by a sense of **elusive acceleration**. Being always late, useless days: these are the constants of my emotional perception of time and the rational list of my accomplishments can only minimally mitigate it.

My days are guided by the **severity of sculpture**, which, as a tame discipline, dictates the rhythms of creation. Improvisation is impossible; the material demands knowledge of procedures, calculation...; I feel myself a **builder** more than a sculptor. Clay, so seemingly docile to the caress of the fingers, requires a profound understanding of thicknesses, shrinkages..., otherwise the outcome will be catastrophic.

**Clay** isn't solely the art of **placing**, but also of **pressing**; construction also comes from within. Terracotta sculptures seem to come to life from within.

Honestly, I don't know why; although **the fragility of my hands** marked by time, perhaps for a challenge? I seek an anachronistically solemn dimension in my sculpture. My works always emerge quietly: initially they stay in **the palm of a hand**, then they gradually take on the concreteness of highly **articulated forms**. I deeply miss the shared feeling that marked my formative years; I deeply miss the sense of belonging to and sharing those ideas that allowed me to glimpse a different world.

Adulthood is marked by a multitude of problems caused by the complexity of the contemporary world, problems for which I often feel myself inadequate. I have never shown a melancholic interest in the classical world, not even in the fascinating galaxy of Greek gods and heroes; what strikes me most is the **feeling of the end** of that world that aspired to perfection.

Where did those gods go leaving, in disappearing, behind themselves such grandiose vestiges? Their followers became orphans: which sanctuaries would they have offered their gifts to? It must have been a gradual abandonment, the

temples slowly neglected, emptied of presence and meaning. Replaced by more advanced places and religions, they no longer offered a sacred precinct, a place of collective identity.

I tried to create a series of sculptures evoking the decorative apparatus of the past: the pedimental sculptures, the metopes, the acroteria. **Sculptures Without a Temple**, without the architecture that would have housed them. From the postures, from the stories of the little theaters (more than metopes, they seem like nativity scenes), you can understand a tale without myths or heroes, in which the absence of place, in the uncertainty of gestures and the futility of glances becomes the absence of a possible destiny.

The use of **terracotta**, more than Greek sculpture, recalls the **fragility** of Etruscan sculpture, where the vulnerability of existence was governed by an obscure sense of fate. It's useless. Despite the desire to consciously dominate the artwork, it always chooses its own path, like an oracle offering different answers to expectations.

Despite the sense of provisionality I wanted to tell with all the characters, the five sculptures on the **pediment** have taken on the fixity and solemnity of an absolute form of **crystallized existence**.

A monument to nothingness.

*From the Exhibition Catalog "Dirà l'Argilla" (the clay will say)*

# Credits

## Aisthesis

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