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THE WOMEN'S MAKING



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ABOUT CURRENT PRACTICES

Identity and Care in the Daily Life Project of in Changing Women

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Keywords

Social Design, Design of Daily Life, Participatory Art, Social Ar, Identity.

Abstract

Ezio Manzini defines the project as the human capacity that allows us to read the state of things, recognize problems and opportunities, to imagine how things could be and what new meanings could be created, but above to realize what we imagined.

The project, therefore, understood as transformative capacity of reality, necessarily implies to go out of the so-called comfort zone, to give, with a creative and unusual wave, a change.

In the *Things of Others* project, led by an interdisciplinary team of the Architecture Department of the University of Florence, “things” have become the pretext for 40 refugees, to tell a part of their history and their life in their countries of origin. In the *Odissee Fiorite* format, through the mutual meeting and photography of three everyday objects that express experiences of life and cultures, related to the past, present and future, the artist and visual anthropologist Tiziana Menegazzo highlights the ability of women to do home wherever they are and wherever they come, regardless of their personal odysseys. How they manage, starting from the objects of daily life, to transform their memory into a future project, to be carried out in the care of every day, nourished by hope and tenacity.

1. Introduction

Ezio Manzini introduces the concept of social project as “aspetto caratterizzante dell’innovazione di questi anni e quindi anche di una possibile transizione verso una società sostenibile” (Manzini, E. 2019, p. 7) and he defines the project as the human capacity that allows us to read the state of things, recognize problems and opportunities, to imagine how things could be and what new meanings could be created, but above to realize what we imagined.

The project, therefore, understood as transformative capacity of reality, necessarily implies to go out of the so-called comfort zone, to give, with a creative and unusual wave, a change.

This capacity of design and transformation, intrinsic to human beings, emerges even more strongly when external conditions are more pressing, when it becomes necessary to leave the comfort zone. The practices of social innovation bottom up are developed just when some needs (primary and not) do not find adequate answers neither from the market nor from the institutions. The absence of the welfare politics opens the way to the arise of society’s self-organization and new forms of social aggregation in order to try to improve the quality of life of the populations and to look for solutions more satisfying and responding to their values and needs. We think to the maker movement, to the spread of practices such as co-working or co-housing, to social cooperatives, to those experiences more generally attributable to models of social innovation that also respond to problems related to youth unemployment and the difficulties linked to the economic crisis of the last decade.

We are just finishing this paper in the days of quarantine in the COVID-19 emergency, we are used to design and always looking forward, somehow controlling the outputs through the design process. We are experiencing on ourselves the frustration due to the uncertainty, the total lack of knowledge of what awaits us. We develop mathematical models, we proceed by trial and error, trying to find a way out that probably will be very different from what we can see and we will certainly have to measure ourselves with new solutions that will arise, as Manzini (2015) says, from a widespread and pervasive design. It will be very important then, when everything ends, to understand how we will all be changed and how these changes will manifest themselves. Certainly as designers, artists, intellectuals, we shall have the social and civil obligation to interpret, facilitate and promote the new scenarios that will open up.

The two projects we are going to talk about arise from the need to understand how the so-called “ordinary people”, and in particular women, manage to plan their own lives even in conditions of extreme hardship, caused by the need to migrate or flee, often from survival itself. All the protagonists of the *Odissee Fiorite* (2017-2018) – participatory art project realised by Tiziana Menegazzo, a woman artist and visual anthropologist – and *Le Cose degli Altri* (2016) project, have made a change – in some cases disruptive – of their own lives: they are women escaping from war or terrible situations, refugees, migrant women for work but also for love or simply to pursue one’s own dream. From this “changing” condition, a project emerges which, starting from its backgrounds, be-

comes an affirmation of a transformative identity capable of including, with Edgar Morin (2016), the improbable, the unexpected, which however opens up to a better future, compared to a present still too charged with disturbing ambiguities and uncertainties.

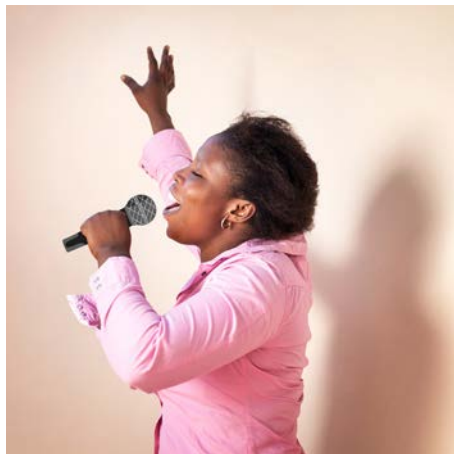
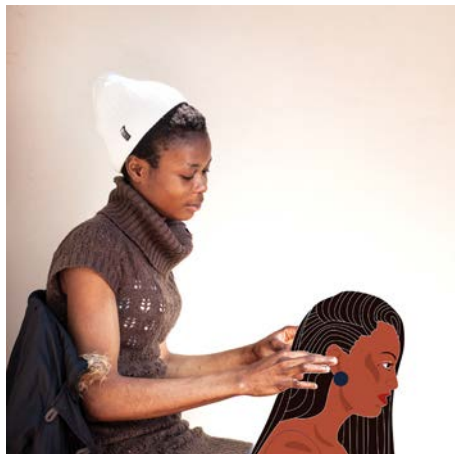
The investigative tool in both projects is represented by objects or rather things, since “The meaning of ‘thing’ is broader than that of ‘object’, since it also includes people or ideals and, more generally, everything that interests us and is close to our hearts” (Bodei, 2009, p.135).

The story of these projects finds its representation through objects, mediums, but also carriers and activators of values and therefore of potential transformations (Moretti, 2019). Things lost in the journey or only remembered, have become an opportunity to express, re-establish identity and make visible the protagonists of the project.

The methodologies applied are based on an interdisciplinary approach, with the significant contribution of social disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology, and highlight two visions that are design and art, which, as we shall see, end up converging. The convergence is firstly established in the participatory approach adopted in which subjects, and specifically women, become storytellers, co-authors of the artistic and creative process. Moreover, in the *Odissee Fiorite* project this aspect has been extended through the direct involvement of some of them in the crowdfunding implemented by the artist through the Eppela platform. In doing so, as well as participants, women became producers, active parties in the implementation of the project itself.



Figure 1. *Le Cose degli altri*. Photo ©Itaca Freelance.



Figures 2-5. *Le Cose degli altri*. Photo ©Itaca Freelance.

In this participatory creative process, the interaction between creative and co-creative subjects takes place through the relationship and the creation of an “intermediate” space in which, thanks to empathy, a “putting oneself in the place of” is implemented, but alternatively the elements remain distinct. It is in this space that the artistic and creative project takes place. And the designer, necessarily, interprets, or rather translates, in a continuous passage and dialogue from his own cultural dimension to that of the other and vice versa. Translation, in turn, is an activity of deep and bidirectional knowledge. In order to translate from one language to another it is necessary to know both deeply, so translation is not assimilation of the other to oneself, but appreciation of the distance between oneself and the other. (Kilani, 1997, pp. 22-23).

2. Migrant Identities between Memory and New Projects

The project *Le Cose degli altri* (Figures 1-5) is the result of an interdisciplinary team¹ of the Laboratory of Design for Sustainability (LDS) directed by Giuseppe Lotti, belonging to the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence in collaboration with Caritas of Florence and 3 reception centres for asylum seekers. In 2016 it was at the height of the migration crisis in Italy, but it seemed that once the boats arrived, the people on them disappeared, nobody knew anything about it anymore. The organization of the *Cos'è Festival* in its

1. The project's team consists of three designers, Giuseppe Lotti, Debora Giorgi, Irene Fiesoli, two photographers, Stefano Visconti and Flavia Veronesi from Itaca Freelance, an illustrator, Alessandra Marinelli and a sociologist, Paolo Costa. The project was carried out thanks to the disciplinary contribution of Caritas operators, the director Alessandro Martini and the head of the asylum seekers area, Marzio Mori.

first edition in 2016, dedicated to investigate and make explicit some of the socio-cultural, design and production processes that underlie the complex relationship that we entertain with things, it seemed to us an opportunity to give visibility to the protagonists of the migratory crisis and break that situation of detachment from the rest of the population that made them invisible to the majority of people.

Through a work of focus groups and individual interviews, we undertook the construction of the story of some flashes of life of these people and we decided to do it through the “things”, which represented the medium and the pretext to make visible their past, their origins and their memories. About 40 men and women participated in the project, who arrived on the coasts of our country in the summer of 2015. When, a few months later, we met them, for many of them the memories of a long and often dramatic journey, were still alive: in many cases this had meant crossing a large part of Africa, by the most diverse means, even on foot². Then everyone had stopped in Libya and there, in prison, had suffered terrible violence and abuse, until they embarked on a “barcone” risking their lives again. Finally, when they arrived in Italy, they found themselves suspended, waiting for the recognition of refugee status (Lotti, Giorgi & Costa, 2017, p. 14). Among these, the women, concentrated in a centre dedicated to them, lived in an even stronger condition of invisibility,

2. See the project *The Stories Behind a Line* by Federica Fragapane with Alex Piacentini that tells the stories of six asylum seekers who arrived in Italy in 2016 through the data that shaped their personal travelling line (<http://www.storiesbehindaline.com/>).

because in addition to being waiting for the recognition of political status, they risked retaliation for having denounced the traffickers who had brought them clandestinely to Italy and had exploited and subjected them to violence.

The format envisaged identifying an object that represented for them “home”, their identity, but quickly the object became a symbolic aggregator of meanings and a starting point for a future project, focused on the self-recognition of individual identity.

If there are few things that migrants can take with them when they embark on their journey, in the case of refugees these objects are not there at all. During the meetings with them, to overcome linguistic difficulties, we used the drawing as a real translation tool. That is why we have imagined and drawn the things in their hands, trying to make their stories visible, but also to stimulate the viewer to imagine what is behind them, to try to identify with those on the other side.

There are the “objects of affection”, because the objects make “home”, they help us to recreate a space of our own, a way of recognizing ourselves, like the ring given to Mohamed by his mother before leaving but stolen from him during the long months spent in Libya, waiting to find a passage to Italy. Then there are the objects that you use and that sometimes represent something else. A way of doing things, of eating, of cooking, of dressing, all those daily actions that enclose our culture and identify us as eating at the table all together, from the same dish: eating means sharing and the awareness of being safe in a family.

Finally, doing things: doing them in one way or another expresses a way of being, habits, traditions, in a word one’s

own culture. It was interesting to note that it was precisely the women who spoke about this, focusing their story on what they had been and what they wanted to plan for their future: the make-up case of Jennet, cosmetician and make-up artist who was also an opportunity to talk about traditional weddings in Nigeria, Mildred's microphone with which she sings in church, hairdresser's instruments, traditional hairstyles... Objects that represent their craft, their traditions of which they speak with pride, with nostalgia but never with resignation. Common objects, without any economic value in most cases, but made precious by memories, feelings, emotions that they tell and above all that catalyse new projects.

3. Material Culture as a Vehicle of Meaning Linked to the Migration of Women and Their Ability to Make a Home Wherever They Are.

The project, *Odissee Fiorite*, was conceived and realized for Turin, as part of FoTo, International Festival of Photography, curated by Museo Ettore Fico and then expanded in Florence, thanks to the invitation of the Design Department of the University of Florence and the participation with the exposition *Odissee Fiorite - Photographic fragments of women's stories*, organized by DIDA of University of Florence in the framework of the Festival *L'eredità delle donne* curated by Serena Dandini.

The project started from a reflection on a participatory art work I realized in 2014 in Morocco, where I stayed for an artistic residence at the Swiss-Moroccan foundation Dar Bel-larj in Marrakech, then merged into the exhibition *Féminin Pluriel*.



Figure 6. Féminin Pluriel, workshop with the Medina Women of Dar Bellarj Foundation in Marrakech. Photo ©Aniko Boehler



Figure 7. Féminin Pluriel, work for the exposition *Oui c'est moi* at Dar Bellarj Foundation in Marrakech. Photo ©Aniko Boehler.



Figure 8. Féminin Pluriel, the exposition *Oui c'est moi* at Dar Bellarj Foundation in Marrakech. Photo ©Aniko Boehler.

*L'éspace physique et mental des femmes*³ where I realized *Oui, c'est moi*. It is the story of 15 Muslim women of the Medina, told through 5 objects for each one, then photographed and assembled as identification totems. Fragments of history and stories have been embodied making it possible to decipher and represent themselves. A secret and social self at the same time, as can be seen from the type of objects chosen, where the visible, making visible, opens up to the possibility of the founding act of being there, here and now, claiming its inalienable right. The sentimental poignancy of the objects that each woman has chosen to represent herself underlines the poetics of the affections and lives that underlie them. *Odissee Fiorite* was the consequence and the natural deepening of this reflection, in a continuum of studies and personal interests that see at the center of my work an anthropoietic attitude directed towards a *weltanschauung* oriented to women, in the way of perceiving and making world and worlds. In particular, differently from what was done in Marrakech, where the intention was to investigate the mystery, to understand what identity was hidden behind the veil of the women of the Medina, with *Odissee Fiorite*, I wanted to highlight the ability of women to make a home wherever they are and from wherever they come, regardless of their personal odysseys; how they manage, starting from the objects of everyday life, to transform nostalgia into a desire for the future, to be realized in everyday care, nourished by hope and tenacity.

3. Féminin Pluriel is an artistic collective created & animated by Aniko Boehler and Debora Giorgi, art curators, in collaboration with a team of women: Brigitte Perkins/Tadert Titbirine, Florence Robert-Vissy/graphic design department ESAV Marrakech, Maha Elmadi/Fondation Dar Bellarj, Nathalie Locatelli/Galerie 127. Féminin Pluriel organizes artist residencies, workshops, conferences, in the field of visual arts with a special focus on women artists.

A real and metaphorical home at the same time, capable of transforming one's own personal experience, from an odyssey to a blossoming, interwoven with sharing and a propensity, specifically of gender, towards dialogue. Where the talk of children, of nostalgia for what one has left behind, of the dream of a different future ... highlights how female thought is naturally led towards a future of peace and integration. The intent has been to demonstrate, through photographed objects and the transcription of the narrative, how women have a greater porosity than men and how the sense of the future, inherent in biology, allows to create human and affective relationships starting from the territory where they are, without forgetting their roots.

The idea of working with objects has allowed me to have access to real cultural universes, varied and extremely significant, making it clear that the object is never something inert (Bodei, 2016) but, on the contrary, condenses a trail of affective, sociological and anthropological meanings, capable of testifying to the complexity of existences, in this case, feminine.

The object thus becomes a vehicle of immateriality (Miller, 2014), whispering and whispering of intimacy, where gender study and ethnographic turning point allowed breaches in the unspoken.

It is from here that I thought of using the same strategy as the object and direct storytelling, without interpreters, to give voice to women who have left their country, for whatever reason, and have started again elsewhere. I was interested in highlighting this feminine ability to rise up and create a future.

Odissee Fiorite was a work on the encounter between me and the foreign women present in Turin and Florence, where the

word foreigners understand both the tragedy of the refugees, and those who have been living in Turin or Florence for years for personal choices, and those who have just arrived there to study, not only from distant countries, but also from other Italian regions. I was interested to see what kind of cultural koinè is determined by the meeting of different cultures and humanity to prove how much, the difference is only wealth and opportunity. Through the mutual encounter and photography, I wanted to highlight the ability, all feminine, to transform the wound of separation into a flowery garden, where melancholy is intrigued, however, of the future.

The other aspect underlined by *Odissee Fiorite* is the concept of plastic identity, starting from that “I am another” of Rimbaudian memory (Rimbaud, 2004), to reach the position of Francesco Remotti, clearly contrary to any definition of static and rigid identity (Remotti, 2005). Considering it as a plastic process, in continuous evolution, capable of producing new wefts and warps, the result of meetings and relationships, identity becomes an opportunity to reflect on the feminine porosity, able to absorb stimuli and information from the outside, constantly integrating them, without forgetting their cultural origins. Identity understood as a dialectic between the ego, already plural as we know from psychoanalysis, and an exterior whose meaning is also constantly changing.

Odissee Fiorite has been a testimony to this.

Starting from a call, for 3/5 days I met, in various places, public and private, all the foreign women/girls of the two cities who wanted to tell about themselves through 3 personal objects (the past, the present and the future). The objects were then photographed and I transcribed their narration.

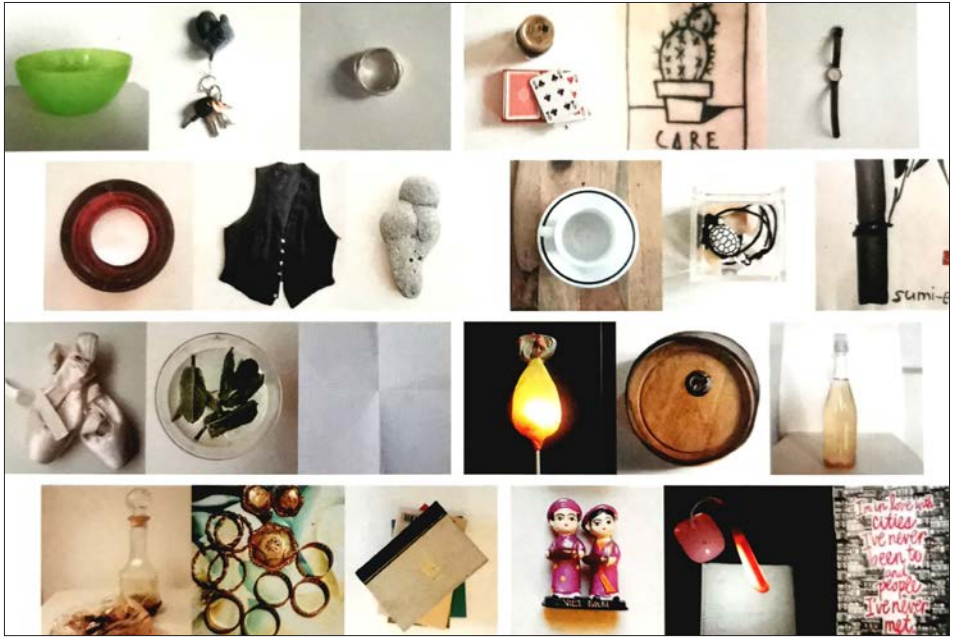


Figure 9. *Odissee Fiorite*. Photo by Tiziana Menegazzo.

I asked all participants to answer these 3 questions:

What did you leave and what do you miss?

How did you integrate your origins with your current life?

What do you dream of for your future?

The use of photography is anthropological and the project is part of a social and participatory vision of art: it was not just about exhibiting photographs, but the visible and verbal consequence of a meeting.

The participation was, both in Turin and Florence, extremely varied: migrants, asylum seekers, students, former students and those who found themselves in a place by chance and then stayed, crossing love and starting a family.

I have been contacted in both cities, by non-profit organizations operating in the social field: *Articolo10* in Turin and *Cospe* in Florence. This allowed me to meet refugee women, some just arrived from boats, all with devastating experiences in Libya, others with war and torture in their eyes. But all with the ability to transform an adverse fate into new possibilities, starting from the present. There are those who have started studying again, those who have set up a small cleaning company, those who have exploited their skills by inventing a job, those who, more simply, have learned to be autonomous. Through the objects brought by the women it has emerged that the objects/things are not inert material, but on the contrary they are able to trace maps of origin, preserve the native culture and create interrelationships with the territory in which they currently live, kneading another culture *in itinere*. Capable, that is, of making life (Dei & Meloni, 2017). A life that looks ahead, but does not forget its origins. It integrates and creates new plots. I have heard tales of war of those who, running away, lost their shoes, of those who risked ending up in the prostitution trade, of those who remember their grandmother's remedies against melancholy, of those who lost everything to the economic crisis of their country...

I met 47 women, listened to their story, laughed and cried with them, received various gifts (an amber-scented hair treatment, *bruschi* tomatoes, coffee, small embroidery, hugs, smiles, a bottle of wine), sometimes it was very difficult, sometimes cheerful. From all of them I received the courage to go on regardless of what happened yesterday. Blooms from odyssey, precisely.

Ages and places of origin extremely varied: Italy (from various regions), China, Congo, Chad, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Brazil, Senegal, Great Britain, Finland, Gambia, Egypt, Slovakia, Siberia, Iran, Spain, Vietnam, Mauritius, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Romania; the youngest is an Italian student away from home who felt lost and the oldest is an English dancer, now a teacher in a nursery school.

In addition to cooking and, of course, language, which was then taught to the children, the past was represented by mothers' objects, Federica's green salad bowl, Raphaele's (Ivory Coast) or grandmothers' bone comb, like the amber bottle with which Amina (Chad) perfumed my hair, the crocheted doily with which Jana fights nostalgia the precious kajal box from Saeedeh (Iran) or the marabou from Kunkung (Gambia), to find a husband and protect her from all evils.

The relational circle never breaks and the memory is jealously guarded. It is not forgotten but transformed. A nomadic inner house that flows into the house, understood as a place where one lives and where care reigns.

If the present is often aimed at the hope of finding a job, it is the future that marks the difference and makes us understand how women look ahead with obstinate vision. Genilda (Brazil) has brought a miniature house, Ruth (Spain) a seed in a jewelry box, Ellise (USA), a new notebook with all-white sheets and Saffie (Gambia), a volleyball ball. Because volleyball is a team game where unity is the strength and without trust in each other you get nowhere. Perfect metaphor for what I wanted to demonstrate with this project: women look forward, aware that together you are stronger, looking for new connections, but they do not forget. They transform pain and suffering into planning.



RAPHAELLE

Costa D'Avorio – 32 anni

a Firenze da un anno

È arrivata in Italia circa un anno fa con la barca, i barconi che approdano a Crotona, dopo l'inferno della Libia.

Nel suo paese lavorava come agente di viaggio, le piaceva molto, ma il padre non voleva. Prima o poi vorrebbe trovare un impiego nell'ambito del turismo. Per ricordare il suo passato e tenere in vita il suo desiderio ha scelto un aereo, un modellino di aereo di linea, come quelli dove prenotava i biglietti quando era nel suo paese. Quando la nostalgia è feroce cucina l'attieke un piatto tipico del suo paese a base di farina di manioca.

Va a scuola, per ora è alle medie, poi si vedrà. Il presente lo associa a delle scarpe da ginnastica nere: ha iniziato il viaggio con quelle, ma durante la fuga le ha perse. Non vuole scappare più.

Aspetta un bambino che nascerà tra 4 mesi e, mentre si accarezza la pancia, dice che è preoccupata, perché non vuole che il/la suo/a bambino/a prenda freddo. È il suo futuro e vuole proteggerlo. Immagina la protezione come un cappottino e sorride.



SAFFIE

Gambia – 21 anni

a Firenze da due anni

In Italia dal 2016. Prima è arrivato il marito poi lei, passando dalla Libia dove è stata tre mesi che vorrebbe dimenticare.

Ha un bambino irresistibile e sorride spesso.

Le sue radici africane sono un pettine di legno che le aveva dato la madre parrucchiera e che non ha potuto portare con sé perché è scappata in fretta e furia. Ne ho cercato uno io per lei: è africano, è in legno.....spero che vada bene.

Anche lei se ne intende di capelli e fa le trecchine a Kunkung che è sua cugina. Vorrebbe trovare lavoro come parrucchiera, ma il suo presente è scandito da lavori domestici, tra cui stirare, che le piace molto perché ama avere tutto in ordine e la cura del suo bambino. Nel futuro vorrebbe leggerezza e gioia: ha scelto un pallone da pallavolo, un gioco di squadra dove l'unione fa la forza e senza fiducia nell'altro non si arriva da nessuna parte.

Guarda avanti e cerca connessioni.

The objects, never fetishes, have been the means, material witnesses of immateriality, of existences. Each one precious and unrepeatable, that every woman who has participated in the project has generously made available to all. Existences from which we can see a common thread represented by the obstinacy towards a better tomorrow where we can share, together, the difference as an opportunity to make humanity (Remotti, 2017).

4. Conclusions

The theme of migration has aroused a lot of interest from designers and artists, we think at the digital project *The Stories Behind a Line* by Federica Fracapane or Matteo Moretti who in his book (Moretti, 2019) and especially in the platform *Design for Migration* (<http://designformigration.com/>) collects in a repository some of the most interesting experiences in the field of design. Other art projects such as the interesting exhibition *When Home Won't Let You Stay: Migration through Contemporary Art* held in 2019 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, testify the interest of contemporary art in the subject.

In becoming interpreters of the complexity and challenges of the contemporary world, art and design are charged with ethical components and must always develop new tools of expression that allow them to accept contaminations and stimuli that come from different disciplinary fields.

In the projects described in this article we wanted to bring attention on the one hand to the theme of plural identities of women who move from one place to another for different reasons, and on the other hand to the capacity typical of women

of resilience and of planning in circumstances of change and discontinuity. In fact, the women of the medina of Marrakech are also women in change, since, thanks to the Dar Bellarj foundation, they have come out of the comfort of the home to reveal their *identité cachée* for a long time subjected to the strict rules of a patriarchal society. They did so with the strength of their creativity and solidarity, finding the capacity to reinvent and to propose themselves. So the women of *Le Cose degli Altri*, projected towards the future, however unknown, in symbolizing an object that represented them, rather than indulging in nostalgia, used the project to tell about themselves and their skills. Obviously the women of *Odissee Fiorite*, who in retracing their more or less dramatic stories, have chosen to create a house that “will let you stay”.

Design and artistic project find a convergence in giving voice to these stories, extracting their values and bringing these pieces of personal memory back into a collective memory space. Storytelling makes it possible to build a bridge between the microcosms of individual identities and the wider space of the female community, revealing the common traits of care, welcome and the ability to transform pain into new life. The plural narratives of the female through the visual and artistic medium thus become a choral project in which every identity is not simply destined to get lost, but rather finds strength in the community and participatory dimension. Artist and designer thus become the agents of catalysis that, thanks to the interdisciplinary contribution, make visible the meaning and value of these stories through a continuous dialogue that, in an effort to understand and accept differenc-

es, opens up to the vision of what is possible, expanding the boundaries of individual identities. In this space of the possible, whose boundaries widen to embrace what is different, the creative process takes place. Seeing differences burns visionary capacity and imagination.

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Aknowledgement

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