



artway of thinking ●

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY

Introduction to the Syllabus for "Art on Location: artway of thinking"
Winter Interim course at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2008

Twenty years ago, as artway of thinking we began our research on art-making in a social environment; we asked ourselves about the question of the role of the artist in society. Both of us started from a feeling of personal uneasiness; thinking the nature of the issues of separation, isolation, the limits of communication and the social uselessness of art. The codes of art expression learned at school (for us, the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice), limited the act of art-making and didn't suggest a professional role in art that was interconnected with society's future.

So, we imagined an artist who operates together with other professionals in the development of the contemporary society, a professional whose "value-added" dimension is in bringing creative thought to planning, who has the courage to imagine in non-conformist ways, and brings innovation to production. We felt in sympathy with Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto when he says:

"The artist must be everywhere, not only in galleries and museums; h/she e must participate in every possible activity. The artist must be the sponsor of thought in different human enterprises, on all levels, from execution to decision-making."

With this image of the artist, the question we have continually addressed in our research is: *How?...How can an artist bring creativity to processes of socially responsible transformation?*

Today, after more (lived) our experience with living, we can affirm that making art for us is, *in primis*, the natural way in which we create relationships in the world; and also where we build life experiences. Being an artist is to express one's soul: it takes form as a job and in daily life.

We believe that the responsibility of artists is to act with awareness in order to produce and inspire responsible changes in ourselves, in personal relationships and in society. Through experience, we have learned that we cannot bring to the world what we ourselves have not digested and metabolized.

We recognize, too, the value of operating as a group and creating together in an interdisciplinary way. We have made this value our principal way of acting: activating collective creative processes in social and public environments, with total attention towards revealing the unknown dynamics of process at work, and with the intention of to harmonizing and speeding up these processes of personal and collective change and growth.

We have a desire, to draw a net between school learning and the social/art professions; and believe the is a focal points today are:

- For art students, to locate a professional role (or typology) as an artist, operating inside the public, social, and cultural dimensions.
- To find how this practice can create possibilities for job and for creative expression - as an art practice.
- At the same time, to consider how in society (public administration systems, private institutions with public agendas, social services, as well as the world of production) a professional artist can be a constructive force, add value to the process, and contribute to the politics of transformation of this wider realm.

Throughout these twenty years of working together we have gained experience as artists operating in the public realm. We believe that in comparison to professionals in other public-oriented fields, artists have a distinct advantage because of the quality of innovation they bring to the task. Practicing with an open mind, they can depart from closed forms, easily imagine other landscapes, and bring beauty. By being visionaries and nonconformists, if directed toward collective ends, their positive and transformative energy offers enthusiasm and creates trust in the process.

The (opposite) paradigm - the artist disempowered from making a difference and unable to participate and shape decision-making in the public realm - is change when the artist makes these first steps, entering the world sure that they do, indeed, have something important to offer and to share.