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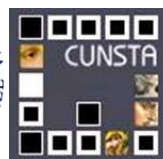
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Saggi

# Contemporary Art in Italian Universities: a History of Art and Society

Gaia Salvatori\*

## *Abstract*

European universities traditionally had two main tasks: teaching and research. Recently, another task (the so called 'third mission') is being considered to reflect the involvement of university with society. This paper analyzes how contemporary art can contribute to this third mission by means of museological projects and art historical research and practices. Here the particular case of Italian universities is considered with their collections of contemporary art and their participation in public art experiences. By considering the initiatives that have been developed in Italy in the past decades, the present attempts to employ contemporary art for the 'Third Mission' can be better ascertained.

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I compiti principali delle università europee tradizionalmente si sono concentrati su insegnamento e ricerca. Recentemente un altro se ne è aggiunto (la cosiddetta 'terza missione') in relazione all'impegno dell'università per la società d'appartenenza. Il testo analizza il ruolo che l'arte contemporanea può avere in tal senso attraverso progetti di natura museologica, ricerca storico-artistica e iniziative concrete considerando, in particolare, le collezioni d'arte contemporanea nelle università italiane e la partecipazione di queste ultime a pratiche di arte pubblica. In particolare, far luce sulle iniziative sviluppatesi in Italia negli ultimi decenni e quelle più recenti può essere utile per sottoporre a verifica le potenzialità e gli sviluppi del rapporto fra arte contemporanea e 'terza missione' universitaria.

### 1. *Introduction*

The exhibition of contemporary art in university sites represents an aspect of the intricate issue of its position beyond the traditional museum circuit. It is a topic that should be tackled not only in the context of contemporary art history, but also in that of social science. Both points of view constitute the methodological framework of this essay, which scrutinizes how the stimuli of contemporary arts and their actors in university life contributed in the past to disseminating knowledge, reaching a broad and diversified audience, and how this can be employed in the present.

The role of the university as a stakeholder in community development, which dates back to its origins in early nineteenth century Germany<sup>1</sup>, has gained new momentum in Western Europe from the Lisbon strategy<sup>2</sup> (2000), focusing on innovation, sustainability, and on social and environmental renewal. Over the 1980s and early 1990s the relevance of knowledge of the development trends of Western society was widely recognized<sup>3</sup>. Hereafter the Lisbon strategy aimed at integrating the university and its role in knowledge production in a transformative process, strengthening its capacity to actively support and disseminate scientific and technology research results<sup>4</sup>. Hence the recent tendency of stimulating universities to assume a mediating and promoting role in the circulation of knowledge as well as in the local economic development. Actually, this is what has been labeled the 'Third University Mission', which has been defined as

<sup>1</sup> Geuna 1996.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion, see the publications by Loet Leydesdorff and Henry Etzkowitz; for example, Leydesdorff, Etzkowitz 2001 and Etzkowitz 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Geuna 1996, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Mazza *et al.* 2008, cited in Capogna 2012, p. 34.

the promotion of interventions that are capable to promote and disseminate research results; so that they contribute to the socio-economic development of territories in a local and national key<sup>5</sup>.

The 'Third Mission' thus can be a label or notion useful to understand whether and how the enhancement of economic and social outcomes of scientific and technological research is possible. It must be seen in relation to the socio-economical and institutional changes during the last decades of the twentieth century when universities faced significant internal changes that contributed to deepen the crisis of the traditional teaching-learning structure<sup>6</sup>.

As sociological studies pointed out, twentieth-century technological developments challenged the strict separation between science, technology and society, and a new sensibility to the social dimension of science has been established. The intersection of three immaterial factors (informational, networked and global) of the information society contributes to new knowledge and competitiveness in the context of global relations. And although social and humanistic sciences have had a subordinate role compared to the natural sciences,

a new change of perspective takes place within a new cultural climate that recognizes complexity as the dominant feature of life that unfolds around us, requiring new interpretive, research and organization strategies. In the wake of these changes [...] new management models are gaining ground [...] to enhance cooperation, creativity and interdisciplinarity [...]. The University and its role in knowledge production has also been affected by this transformative process<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, the third mission of the university is based on the principle of 'science for development'<sup>8</sup>.

But how have the humanities, and more specifically, art exhibitions, art events and art practices contributed to these strategies in the recent past? The role and input of the arts, in particular contemporary art, within universities is relatively unexplored, notwithstanding the fact that contemporary art had, and still has, an important role in this context. This can be deduced, for example, from the North-American cultural policy concerning contemporary arts in academia which has been discussed in fairly recent studies<sup>9</sup>. Even the so called 'Mexican model' has a long tradition during the 20th century in the effort to

<sup>5</sup> Capogna 2012, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 33: «The assertion of a university of mass, the proliferation of degree courses, the gradual reduction of resources allocated to research, the development of scientific and technological research requires to outline new strategies of governance in the university.» For a 'European' view of the topic, see Laredo 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Capogna 2012, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi. On this topic, see Miglietta, Boero 2016 and Santagati 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Palermo 2014; see also previous studies about this topic, such as Dober (1963) and Venabel Turner (1984) quoted in Palermo 2014, p. 206.

join and foster national art production and social education in Mexico City<sup>10</sup>. Thus, considering the 'campus' as a typical American planning tradition, has unveiled the significant role of the university as a 'special' place for hosting contemporary art in order to involve and develop new audiences, in particular as from the 1970s. And some of these are significant in order to understand the early discussions regarding this topic outside Europe. Several reports published during the 1990s argued that college and university institutions should constantly strive to be an educational, open, disciplined, caring and celebrative community<sup>11</sup>. Universities should be «sites of citizenship [...] contributing to community social and economic infrastructure, the building of social capital, contributing to the solution of local issues, supporting equity and diversity and education for democratic citizenship»<sup>12</sup>.

In this context, art played a role of importance and certainly contemporary public art as defined by Susanne Lacy in 1995: 'new genre public art', indeed, is based on engagement<sup>13</sup>.

The discussion continued during the last decade.

Kenneth Robinson, director of the program of public art in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, on the occasion of a conference held in 2001, argued that the future of higher education should move towards new forms of creativity and innovation, obtainable exclusively through educational policies based on artistic practices<sup>14</sup>. Indeed «[...] universities are much less sensitive to the demands of the market, they will be better able to foster innovation and creativity»<sup>15</sup>.

And yet, public art at the University can respond to this purpose. «Public art is a mirror that reflects the educational, cultural, and artistic values of the academic institution [...] It is more than just art installed anywhere around the campus»<sup>16</sup>.

In the European context, the 2012 Green Paper stated the historical connections between the academic world and the society, imploring governments and university boards «to recognize anew an old social contact between universities and their host societies; learn to foster and promote it in partnership and collaboration [...]»<sup>17</sup>. To which extend the involving of contemporary art

<sup>10</sup> De La Torre 2008, Reiman Cordero 2008 and del Pilar Ortega Gonzalez 2014. For the 'Mexican model', see Auteri 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Boyer 1990, pp. 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Jongbloed *et al.* 2008, p. 313.

<sup>13</sup> See Lacy 1995, p. 46 and pp. 19-20. The approach of the "new genre public art" was defined by Suzanne Lacy in 1995, as a «redefinition that may well challenge the nature of art as we know it, art not primarily as a product but as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, an ethical action, and an aspect of a larger sociocultural agenda»; «not specifically painting, sculpture, or films, for example, new genre art might include combinations of different media. Installations, performances, conceptual art, and mixed-media art[...]».

<sup>14</sup> *Supporting the base (...)* 2002, pp. 3-9.

<sup>15</sup> McCarthy, Brooks *et al.* 2001, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Arts Across Campus, quoted in Palermo 2014, p. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Green Paper 2012, p. 3.

practices into the University could play a role for this aim? And what about specifically Italian universities in the same period? How then did contemporary art function in Italian universities?

In particular I will focus on two issues: (1) the historical and institutional position (reception, storage, tolerance) of contemporary art in universities, and (2) the specific role and contribution of contemporary art into the «kinds of beneficial impact universities can have on their host societies, and the circumstances that influence the ability of universities to deliver those impacts»<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. *Contemporary Art at Italian Universities from 1900 to 1960.*

From the early twentieth century onwards (and in particular from the 1930s) universities have been frequently a location for art, ranging from a purely decorative function to more recent experiments that attempt to integrate art into the university as a practice<sup>19</sup>. During the first half of the century, the presence of art in university buildings especially fulfilled decorative functions, as a rule related to the late nineteenth-century trend to embellish the walls and ceilings of public and private buildings with thematic murals often related to the function of these environments. In Italy, especially from the 1930s onwards, the relationship between art and architecture in university buildings assumed a complex character. In this period, architects and artists came to work together for challenging assignments, such as the university campus of the Sapienza in Rome, or the Livianum palace of the University of Padua. Both projects are highly representative examples of the all-pervasive ideology of the public destination of painting and sculpture seen as strictly functional to a specific political inspiration<sup>20</sup>. In Rome, the mural *L'Italia fra le Arti e le Scienze (Italy between the arts and sciences)* in the main Aula, executed by Mario Sironi 1937, and the monumental *Athena* sculpture by Arturo Martini (functioning as the visual axis of the campus) are part of an ambitious architectural and cultural program aiming at the 'unity of the arts' with the sciences<sup>21</sup>. The Livianum building in Padua, an important architectural project by Gio Ponti, who also

<sup>18</sup> As pointed out in the document "Fostering and Measuring *Third Mission* in Higher Education Institutions" at University of Valencia in 2012; Green Paper, 2012, p. 2. This *Green Paper* is a document signed by several associated universities from Spain, Austria, Finland, Portugal, Ireland.

<sup>19</sup> Earlier cases in Europe are worth mentioning, in particular those of the early twentieth century avantgarde, among which Gustav Klimt (*Aula Magna*, destroyed paintings, 1900) – cf. Di Stefano 1999, pp. 26-27 – or the never realized Van Doesburg's colour project for a University Hall (1923) with architect van Eesteren. Cf. Jaffé 1983, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> See: Fagone *et al.* 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See Lux, Coen, 1985, and Margozi 2001, in Cazzato 2001, pp. 123-214.



designed its furnishings, hosted a sculpture by Martini *Tito Livio a confronto con la storia* (*Titus Livius reflecting on history*, 1942) and mural paintings by Massimo Campigli representing archeology as the source of Italian culture, heritage of scholars and, at the same time, of the common people. This building suggests to the beholder a unified message with a coordinated style linking past and present, classical antiquity and contemporary art<sup>22</sup>. Both in Rome and in Padua, these decorative projects construed a link between the university and society by means of art, which underlined the ideology of the Fascist government. Yet, they are significant examples of the intimate relationship between art and architecture as was pointed out in the 'Volta Congress' (1936) about "Rapporti dell'architettura con le arti figurative" ("Relationships between architecture and the visual arts") in which Piacentini, the principal designer of the "Città universitaria" in Rome in 1935, played a central role: the main inspiration underlying the project being the desire for integrated totality of architecture and visual arts to be expressed in the style of a monumental classicism<sup>23</sup>.

After the Second World War, contemporary art was deployed in Italian university buildings with rather different ideological aims. These are connected to the university system developments and to the role that art increasingly tends to assume in society. Autonomous art works installed in one or more venues of the university buildings, and art decorations 'functional' to the entire architectural design were added as an aesthetic enhancement to the whole architectural setting. Sometimes, the university became even a sort of art museum with a picture gallery. This is the case of the Picture Gallery of the University of Trieste (since 1953) that, although planned to decorate the university rooms, constitutes, at the same time, a specific museum belonging to the university. And therefore, it should be analyzed, first of all, as pertaining to the category of university art museums<sup>24</sup>.

During this period schools and universities, just like hospitals or ministries and municipality buildings, frequently hosted contemporary art as mere decoration, filling up wall spaces and promoting the livability of public space<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> For Gio Ponti, aiming at such a style was a "civilization problem", as pointed out by Nezzo, 2008, p. 217. Worthy of note is the engagement of the rector magnificus Carlo Anti in Padua in the 1930s, who adopted the 2% art program for the university building and who wanted explicitly: «portare la pittura nelle aule» [bring mural painting in the classrooms] (see: Bernabei 2008 in Nezzo 2008, p. 74).

<sup>23</sup> A special aspect of this plan was the particular interest, theorized in 1933 by Mario Sironi, in the educational value of the mural paintings. See Ciucci *et al.* 2012 and Lux, Coen, 1985.

<sup>24</sup> The Picture Gallery is part of the historic-artistic heritage of the University of Trieste. See Zanni 2009. For the discussion about the university museum between showcase and workshop, see Palermo 2012, for the important challenges advanced by some university museums in the United States and in Europe in the last decades.

<sup>25</sup> Can be mentioned, among others, Paolo Ricci's mosaic for the Faculty of Engineering in Naples (1965), as it exemplifies the continuity of art works used in architecture as part of the aesthetic complex. See Cassese 2010, pp. 31-35.

Soon, however, art works in public spaces became related to the developing social mission of the institutes of higher education to reach a larger part of Italian society – and therefore also a broader range of students. Artworks in public spaces, in this period, also reflected the fundamental changes in the visual arts towards new movements characterized by combination of media and performances<sup>26</sup>. However innovative encounters between contemporary art, museological settings, and university missions, met with some disapproval.

This is confirmed by an experiment at the university of Genova, where in 1963 the art historian Eugenio Battisti founded the Museo Sperimentale d'arte contemporanea to promote the study of contemporary art, based on works donated by artists, and to give a new promotion role to the university in the area. After only two few years, in 1965, Battisti decided to hand over those art works to the municipal museum of Turin because of practical problems in the realization of this project especially due to his leaving for the U.S.A. At the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin an exhibition was held in 1967 to show the collection of the Museo Sperimentale from Genova, but afterwards it was not any longer open to the public. And thus the donor's intention was ignored and essentially contradicted: some works were isolated from the collection and included in the permanent exhibition of the gallery<sup>27</sup>. As a matter of fact, in the 1960s the museum was seen as a *temple* rather than a *forum*<sup>28</sup>. The Battisti collection coming from the Genoa University was considered better at home in a museum for his conservation than the complex and multifaceted university location.

A pioneering and groundbreaking initiative like that of Battisti was suddenly mislaid having actually no catalyst effect for innovative ways of interacting between university missions, museological aims and contemporary art practices. And yet, at that time, Italian modern art museums started to become social agents and began to work in collaboration with other institutions<sup>29</sup>. While, as to the universities, Italy definitely lacked a detailed policy for education as it was developed in the meantime in other European countries which hampered the introduction of art in this context. Restricted notions of research excellence

<sup>26</sup> Woods *et al.* 1972.

<sup>27</sup> This experience deserves a further research not yet started. See Battisti 1967, Battisti 1985 and Maggio Serra 1985, pp. 11-21.

<sup>28</sup> Maggio Serra 1985, p. 16 who refers, as to the Museum as a *Temple* or a *Forum*, to the groundbreaking article of Duncan F. Cameron dating back to 1971 (Cameron 1971 pp. 14-24). She then writes that «If the Civic Gallery of Modern Art of Turin had continued the path indicated by the Experimental Museum [originating from the university in Genova] developing the relationship in direct contact with the artists and pursuing broader communicative, he would have had a similar evolution. [...]» to the Centre Beaubourg in Paris.

<sup>29</sup> About the history of art museums in Italy as a “relational system”: see Marini Clarelli 2011.

overshadowed the social goal of the university in this period, and academics frequently retreated into the ivory tower of the old days<sup>30</sup>.

### *3. Inside or Outside the University Walls: Museum Collections, Site Specific Works or 'New Genre Public Art'?*

From the 1970s onwards, it is possible to detect an increasing intersection of social engagement required by Italian and European university policies with a pioneering attention in some Italian universities for contemporary art, both as to collections available for students as well to attempts aiming to reach external audiences. Thus, there was a growing interest in the pedagogical role played by the arts in the cultural and economic development of a territory. This was connected with the idea that «national cultural capital could be measured by the degree of development of the educational system»<sup>31</sup>. Though this interest emerged for the first time in Europe during the late nineteenth century<sup>32</sup>, only in the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century contemporary art started to play an increasing role in social engagement.

Yet in the seventies, sporadic attempts in the dialogue between art and university concentrated essentially on academic and didactic aims<sup>33</sup>. The CSAC (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione; the Study Centre and Archive of Communication) of Parma University started to show artworks and photography donated to the university by artists. Giulio Carlo Argan and Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, both professors in art history at the university, transformed this center into a specialized research structure, an archive rather than a museum, for the use of scholars and researchers. It also aimed at reaching a larger audience, not only during exhibitions, but opening up to students who strongly needed a richer education than simple knowledge picked up from manuals<sup>34</sup>. In this case, the works of art were inserted into a predominantly didactic context where it was supposed to overcome hierarchies between the museum, the documentation centre and the exposition venue<sup>35</sup>.

In 1985 a similar museological approach, influenced by the methodology in the field of contemporary art developed by Lionello Venturi and by Giulio

<sup>30</sup> See, for example: <<http://www.younipa.it/2012/12/14/perche-la-terza-missione-deve-diventare-il-primo-impegnodelluniversita/248/Commenti>>, 6.03.2018.

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, Darbel 1991, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> About the Italian situation, see: Netti 1885.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the CSAC ("Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione", the Study Centre and Communication Archive) of Parma University founded in 1968 by professor Arturo Carlo Quintavalle. <<http://www.csacparma.it/en/who-we-are/>>, 5.03.2018.

<sup>34</sup> <<http://www.parmacultura.it/it-it/luoghi/museocentrostudisac.aspx#>>, 15.03.2017.

<sup>35</sup> Zanella, Colombo 2016, p. 19.

Carlo Argan and his school, inspired the institution of the Museo laboratorio d'arte contemporanea at the Sapienza University in Rome. The introduction of the first published catalogue stated that

The birth of this museum-workshop is an event that crowns a tradition of interests and studies, realizing an encounter of students and general audience with artworks and artists [...]. [here the] exhibition becomes an educational format that can be used in the future

for cultural and social development<sup>36</sup>. However, as we can read elsewhere, in the MLAC an exhibition was never just an aim in itself: interactive lectures, artist talks, panel discussions, publications, and reports have systematically enriched the current exhibition, contributing to shed light on the complex and difficult processes of artistic creation and criticism of the action<sup>37</sup>. The Museo Laboratorio of the university, indeed, opened its doors with the clear aim «to disseminate knowledge and history of art in a continuous dialogue with the history of the town»<sup>38</sup>: a museum that wanted to promote, safeguard, study, enhance and raise awareness of international contemporary art, addressing not only students, academics and experts, but also artists themselves and the widest audience possible<sup>39</sup>. Simonetta Lux, founder of this museum, and also her successors Maurizio Calvesi and Domenico Scudero, wanted to use the 'MLAC project' as a permanent workshop for the university training of professional figures, ready to develop their skills in the service of society<sup>40</sup>. This museum annex laboratory did not possess a permanent collection, but it organized, although with interruptions, exhibitions and offers workshops

blending a multiple combination of activities for contemporary art that are normally separated and sometimes viewed as antagonistic-scientific, historical and critical research – high-level education and training – cultural and creative activities and exhibitions-artistic production<sup>41</sup>.

But many of these statements mostly didn't grow beyond good intentions.

The activities of the Museo Laboratorio were rather confined to university walls reaching only small groups of people, beside students, who were already interested in contemporary art.

Yet the former aims of the workshop formula for contemporary arts in the university settings was reformulated between 1999 and 2002 by Daniela Lancioni, Silvia Bordini and Claudio Zambianchi, into social intervention beyond the walls of the museum-laboratory and even the university campus.

<sup>36</sup> Calvesi 1987, p. n.n.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Lux 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Lux 1987, p. n.n.

<sup>39</sup> <<http://www.luxflux.org/museolab/ilmuseo.htm>>, 10.09.2016.

<sup>40</sup> Scudero 2004, pp. 280-281. This work provides several references to and photos of the MLAC exhibitions and activities. Actually (2018) the museum's director is Claudio Zambianchi.

<sup>41</sup> <<http://www.musei.uniroma1.it/informamuseonew>>, 09.09.2016.

They involved artists and students (working together) in suburban and degraded areas of Rome, like Tor Bella Monaca. Artists such as Giacinto Cerone, David Tremlett and Giuseppe Penone were invited to work in a garage realizing large installations. Such an experience tested contemporary art and social dimension (when promoted by the university beyond his walls) as well as the traditional museum circuit. Actually, we do not know how many people of that degraded area were involved in the project. But we can assume that his original intentions stayed behind, bringing finally the realized artworks to the museum setting: one of these (by Penone) was purchased by the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna at the conclusion of the project<sup>42</sup>.

Though during the last decade, universities developed, in collaboration with public or private institutions such as museums, associations, companies and corporations in the vicinity of universities, new trends of mutual interactions in the social and cultural fields.

Many examples of these trends should be reported: the indoor and outdoor initiatives of the University of Siena and of Ferrara of last decades<sup>43</sup>; the TASC (Laboratorio, Territorio, Arti visive e Storia dell'arte contemporanea) set up in 2009 at the Department of Humanities of Salento University (in the southern regio of Puglia)<sup>44</sup>; the BAG – Bocconi Art Gallery<sup>45</sup> started in 2009 in Milan; the CAMUSAC (Cassino Museo Arte Contemporanea) which was officially opened in 2013 thanks to previous agreement of the local university with art collectors<sup>46</sup>; the several initiatives taken by the University of Salerno and the Second University of Naples, since 2016 named University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”. Each would deserve special attention, but we will limit ourselves to point out a couple of cases.

The tradition of the museum art gallery emerged at the Bocconi Gallery as a part of the Bocconi University for economics and management: lending works of art from various collectors (such as the Panza di Biumo) and galleries, there the task was of embellishing university spaces with paintings, sculptures and installations, under the guidance of a Committee for Contemporary Art<sup>47</sup>.

In Salerno, instead, art did not arrive at the university through galleries or private collectors. Though, here too, contemporary art remained completely inside the university walls when, in 2005, the campus located outside the city was embellished with the so-called 'Cloister of Peace' designed by Ettore Sottsass Jr. and hosting sculptures by Enzo Cucchi. It is an environmental

<sup>42</sup> Bordini, Zambianchi 2012, pp. 53-60.

<sup>43</sup> See: Bignardi 2012 and Fiorillo 2012, respectively pp. 73-83 and pp. 61-71.

<sup>44</sup> See: <<https://bbcc.unisalento.it/tasc>>, 24.04.2018.

<sup>45</sup> «Bocconi Art Gallery is the path by which the University approaches a “different” contemporary world, the cultural and artistic world that is part of everyone’s life» as in <[https://www.unibocconi.eu/wps/wcm/connect/Bocconi/SitoPubblico\\_EN/Navigation+Tree/Home/About+Us/Initiatives/Bocconi+Art+Gallery/](https://www.unibocconi.eu/wps/wcm/connect/Bocconi/SitoPubblico_EN/Navigation+Tree/Home/About+Us/Initiatives/Bocconi+Art+Gallery/)>, 22.10.2016.

<sup>46</sup> <<http://www.camusac.com/>>, 20.10.2016.

<sup>47</sup> Masoero 2011, p. 24 and <<http://www.unibocconi.it>>, 22.10.2016.

installation creating a meeting point and a resting place especially for students. It represents an opportunity for art and architecture to be a 'place' where any student or passer-by can perceive that the cultural environment in which the work of art is inserted determines its worth and its meaning, and where one may live the total integration between art and architecture: yet «a work of public patronate particularly interesting because it is not usual that an University in the South of Italy promote an enterprise that is not strictly related to research and teaching»<sup>48</sup>.

But the university of Salerno has made further choices that close the teaching and research approach in the contemporary art to curatorship influenced by the afore mentioned 'new genre public art' propositions. As it was formulated by Angelo Trimarco and Stefania Zuliani, both professors there of contemporary art history, working at the university ask «to explore the possibility that an artistic practice could actually influence reality»<sup>49</sup>. They meant to activate, in particular, educational workshops in collaboration with contemporary art museums, schools and private foundations.

Thus, more recently, they intend the university to become a "contact zone" between education and curatorship, aiming to act as antidote to the actual art system characterized by an excess of information and consumption. The intended goal is to ensure the quality of the encounter between contemporary art, museums, students and citizens<sup>50</sup>. But also in this case, the inspiration came from the local tradition of art historical didactics, developed in the Seventies, sometimes not able to go far beyond the university walls<sup>51</sup>.

During the last decade, other Italian universities have provided space for temporary art exhibitions with more or less extrovert goals, waiting to be verified according to the parameters of the 'third mission'. A relevant case is the exhibition space at the Università Ca' Foscari in Venice in 2009, used as one of the three sites of the Bruce Nauman's contribution to the 53th Biennale. There «the exhibition also intended to challenge the internalized, monolithic ideological foundation on which the national pavilions historically lie» contributing to the «dissolution of the boundaries that are conventionally perceived to demarcate personal and socialized space»<sup>52</sup>. But one wonders whether also this initiative could be not more than one of the many recent examples of art in public places testing the relationship between contemporary art and public institutions.

<sup>48</sup> See Trimarco 2009, p. 78 and about the Cloister of Peace: <<http://www.chiostrodelpace.it/>>, 16.11.2014, and Passaro 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Zuliani 2012, p. 45 (translation from Italian).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46 (translation from Italian).

<sup>51</sup> Local tradition of art historical didactics here is personified by Filiberto Menna. About Menna, see: Trimarco, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Nauman 2009, p. n.n.

#### 4. *Towards the Third Mission?*

Inside or outside the walls? What is, in other words, the future role of contemporary art in relationship with university education and the Third Mission ideology? Art may assure educational perspectives with experimental workshops or create new exhibition venues in addition to the museum circuits, but also use artworks as concrete marks, inside or outside the university walls, engaging a process for knowledge acquisition by larger audiences than just the university students.

The column (2005) made by Luciano Fabro at the centre of the neoclassical courtyard of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the violin player (a work by Riccardo Dalisi, 2006) kneeling on a pile of books near the stairs of the university Suor Orsola in Naples, or the huge fiberglass sculpture located at the entrance of the former Second University of Naples (S. Maria Capua Vetere, 2011) are symbolic landmarks but not more than site specific artworks. However, they can be viewed as visible marks of openness to a different logic within the university even if only for the academic community itself. Notwithstanding the fundamental aesthetic and decorative function of these site-specific artworks, new possibilities for initiatives outside the university borders, in the direction of the 'third mission', could be opened. Yet it does not depend only on the artistic and aesthetic quality of the artworks, but on the attitude and the political engagement of the hosting university in relationship with the territory and his society.

During the last years, this engagement with the surrounding social environment has been at the forefront of the initiatives developed at the Second University of Naples based in the province of Caserta 'Terra di Lavoro'. The university is located within a territory with a great need of socio-economic development. In 2003-4, an exhibition of electronic and interactive artworks (organized as a workshop with the students) entitled *Paradossi* opened the doors of this University to contemporary art. Some years later (from 2011 onwards) a project *Le Aule dell'Arte* (organized by the author in collaboration with Nadia Barrella and Luca Palermo) inaugurated a cooperation between contemporary art 'in progress' and the university as an institution for higher education and research. Thanks to the support and the cooperation of generous local companies (like Bunker Art Division), seven large sculptures have been placed in the university courtyard, an old monastery built on the ruins of the ancient Roman forum and in the 19th century used as a prison. In 2015 other seven artworks have been located in a different building of the department, the so called 'Aulario'<sup>53</sup>. In both cases, the art works in this space evoke, with their presence, local creativity: recent history of local artists, for example, mostly

<sup>53</sup> The installation of the artworks in the 'Aulario' in S. Maria Capua Vetere (Caserta) has been taken place on 21th of january 2015, with the title: *Sette artisti per un progetto*.

underestimated by the university as well as by local community. The installation of those works of art has been accompanied meanwhile by a reflection on the relationship between contemporary art and university spaces in an international conference (2011) where Italian and foreign scholars have discussed their different experiences concerning the various aspects of this issue<sup>54</sup>. Many of them have focused on the importance to integrate art into the university «as a practice, as a form of knowledge, and as a form of discourse», as has been pointed out in a similar symposium held in Germany almost at the same time. Here the priority was given to bring artists into the university in order to focus «on the different ways in which the artists practice is integrated into university structures»<sup>55</sup>.

Still open is, however, the question of further developments of such good practices. Limited to the case mentioned as of the Second University of Naples, it can be attested that these events inspired further initiatives and activities not only for students but that are actually open sometimes to a broader audience. Workshops were organized about a specific work or artist (like the one devoted to Gianni De Tora in 2013), performances of guest artists and dance events (such as Carlo De Meo in 2012 with the Danza Flux group, or one with school children organized in May 2014 with a composition inspired by one of the artworks).

More recently the same university has explored the possibilities to intercept new social realities. The community living in the province of Caserta, unfortunately often involved in the illegal activities of local criminal organizations (camorra), has participated, between October 2015 and January 2016, in a most particular socio-cultural event. In the small village of Casapesenna, in a confiscated house, that once belonged to a camorra boss, an exhibition has been organized of local artworks and documentations. The materials and works exposed (including photos, posters, letters etc.) dated back to the 1970s and the exhibition was the result of the research activities of a university group of scholars and students. Thousands of school children and citizens of Casapesenna and surroundings have visited the exhibition, participating in workshops organized by local artists and university students concerning topics that originally emerged in the 1970s, but which are still extremely actual, such as, the waste disposal, bureaucracy, legality and civil rights<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Symposium held at the SUN on 12 October 2011. Barrella, Salvatori 2012.

<sup>55</sup> At Leuphana Universität Lüneburg the Leuphana Arts Program symposium was held on 16-18 November 2011, entitled *Degrees of Freedom. Art Programs at Universities*. See <<http://www.leuphana.de/lap>> 17.11.2014.

<sup>56</sup> See for the exhibition, entitled *Ars Felix. Gli anni Settanta all'ombra della Reggia*, Centro giovanile di aggregazione per l'arte e la cultura, 24 ottobre 2015-24 gennaio 2016, Casapesenna (Caserta): <<http://www.lettereбенiculturali.unina2.it/index.php/bacheca/notizie/1338-ars-felix-gli-anni-settanta-all-ombra-della-reggia.html>>. 5.02.2016.



These initiatives were not only meant to promote the study and knowledge of contemporary art, but also the theoretical and academic training of students in the multifaceted world of the arts and their actual production in the context of local, national and international dynamics. They actually emerged from the need to renew educational strategies within the university itself. However, these initiatives were inspired by a more or less classical idea (not yet sufficiently put into practice in Italy), namely that culture and art could contribute to improve society and consequently attract new kinds of public to the university and, at the same time, have a positive influence on marginalized people. Those initiatives essentially try to trigger an interaction between the various components of the system of contemporary art (artists, museums, galleries, private collectors) and that of the university as an institution devoted to education through research and teaching. This interaction has started, for the students and the entire academic community, from the direct appreciation of art works in progress (thanks to the artists's involvement) to strategies for their conservation and communication. That seems to bind university practices, in educational strategies concerning contemporary art, with 'new genre public art', testing strategies and modalities of socially engaged interactive art for diverse audiences<sup>57</sup>. But since no analysis and specific studies on this issue have been developed, we still need to establish to which extend the mentioned initiatives of contemporary art at the university (when not limited to singular entrepreneurs) can be considered a contribution to the development of the 'third mission'<sup>58</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

The future is thus looking at the best practices of the past with an eye open to needs for the actual society strengthening a deep-rooted tradition of the university, that is, its vocation as a promoter of culture, active on several fronts: from publishing research results about contemporary art to spreading knowledge of projects of relevant and ground-breaking practices, stimulating the interaction between art and theoretical research, increasing social inclusion and broader participation of multifaceted audiences.

Indeed, the issue under scrutiny has presented two connected faces: an intersection of contemporary art practices with teaching and research at the universities and the relationship of these practices with museological problems.

<sup>57</sup> Lacy 1995, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Studies about this issue have been pointed out mainly from the general point of view of university museums, and in particular of scientific museums in universities. See Miglietta, Boero 2016. About the emerging exhibition trend devoted to contemporary art in Italian university, see the reference in Martino 2016, pp. 50-51.

All the cases mentioned could be considered, in varying degrees, examples of both. Indeed, the topic is intimately connected to the discussion about museums, that is still whether they are to be viewed, used or interpreted as temple, showcase, and/or forum<sup>59</sup>. Actually, when contemporary art and artists walk in through the doors of the university, leaving a sign of their presence with a temporary or permanent work of art, or simply with a performance, they can generate new research initiatives which may enrich or even transform some aspects of the educational system opening it up for differentiated and broader audiences.

Considering the cases under scrutiny, we could ask, finally, whether the university has built enough background, or it is only at his first steps, to develop new possibilities to become a kind of cultural interface between the academic world and a larger part of the society<sup>60</sup>. Further analysis and specific research on the topic are evidently still necessary.

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<sup>59</sup> Zuliani 2009. See, for discussion: Miglietta, Boero 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Palermo 2012, p. 21; and specifically related to the 'Third Mission's goals, cf. Miglietta Boero 2016, p. 57.

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