

GRUPPO MOSAICISTI RAVENNA

Brief history

The Mosaicisti Ravenna Group has its origins in 1948 and immediately began work as a workshop of professional mosaicists. On June 6, 1974, the Mosaicist Group of the Academy of Fine Arts of Ravenna changed its name to "Cooperativa Mosaicisti dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Ravenna". The choice to adopt a model of cooperative-type corporate organization guaranteed greater social justice and greater protection for the work of mosaicists. From the charter, which sanctioned the transfer to Cooperative, subsequently disappeared any reference to the Academy of Fine Arts with which the group had collaborated at birth, indicating the progressive weakening of that exclusive relationship that had characterized the activity of the shop from the beginning. This process of emancipation reached full maturity in 1985 when even in the denomination the "Cooperative Mosaicists" lost any reference to the Academy.

The history of the Group, however, is articulated and varied and as said goes back to the fifties of the twentieth century. The urgent need to preserve the mosaic heritage of the city led some Ravenna graduates from the Academy of Fine Arts of Ravenna, to commit themselves indefatigably in the restoration of the mosaics, addressed by the newly founded Superintendence of Fine Arts born in 1897.

It was necessary to establish a school that would give continuity to the Byzantine tradition, providing students with a technical initiation to the way of making mosaic. The will to keep alive the mosaic practice was stimulated by the imposing heritage present in the city that required continuous maintenance and prompt care. The Academy of Fine Arts faced the need to form a new generation of mosaicists, instituting in 1925 the Mosaic School and placing it under the guidance of Giuseppe Zampiga, who was succeeded in 1935 by Renato Signorini, one of his students, who held the position until the seventies when the Academy obtained the recognition of the degree of study and relegated the mosaic to a special course.

Under the direction of Zampiga, Renato Signorini, Giuseppe Salietti, Libera Musiani and Zelo Molducci were introduced to the knowledge of art and mosaic technique.

Students not enrolled in mosaic courses, not obligatory in those years, but interested in learning the technique, were used to entertain themselves beyond the lesson time in the premises of the Academy to engage with the subject mosaic. This was the initiation to the mosaic by Antonio Rocchi, Ines Morigi, Romolo Papa and Lino Melano. It was then thought to exploit this situation that had been created within the Academy by establishing the "School Workshop of Mosaic" and placing it under the direction of Renato Signorini, already at the head of the School of Mosaic. The study welcomed students trained by the Academy, absorbing the skills and knowledge acquired to use them in the restoration and maintenance of mosaics in Ravenna and in external commissions for public and private. This kind of collaboration lasted beyond World War II.

The activity of the Scuola Bottega del Mosaico resumed immediately after the war, then changing its organization: on March 18, 1948 the "Group of Mosaicists of the Academy of Belle Arti" was established a company that included Giuseppe Salietti as director, Zelo Molducci as director, Lino Melano, Ines Morigi, Libera Musiani, Romolo Papa, Eda Pratella, Antonio Rocchi, Renato Signorini.

Then, starting from the fifties, the Group was enlarged with the entry of new mosaicists who also compensated for the natural defections: Isler Medici, Sergio Cicognani, Luigi Guardagli, Giuseppe Ventura, Sergio Pezzi, Santo Spartà, Gabriele Strocchi, Riccardo Bissi and Claudio Ricci. The Group that was awarded the title of "Academy of Fine Arts", was linked to this institution by the bond of hiring and employing in the workshop only students from the Academy of Ravenna.

In the first times the main activity was evidently the restoration: the bombing and the destruction perpetrated by the war had hard tried the assets of Ravenna and therefore urgent timely recovery interventions. The daily relationship with these testimonies of the past was the occasion for an accurate analysis of the tessellates (chromatic values, material characteristics, cutting and laying of the tiles). Fascinated by the beauty of the ancient mosaic cycles, the members of the Group accurately and faithfully reproduced the most famous details of the decorations through the production of cartoons and casts. On the basis of pictorial cartoons, magnificent copies of mosaic details were made. These copies from 1951 were exhibited in an itinerant exhibition in many cities around the world. The "Exhibition of copies of ancient mosaics" constituted a strong vehicle to promote long-range skills and technical skills of the members of the Group.

A considerable boost to the creation of mosaics on the basis of cartoons by contemporary artists came from another exhibition of great resonance, the "Exhibition of modern mosaics" of 1959, an initiative promoted by a committee composed of some city bodies (Rotary Club of Ravenna, Chamber of Commerce, Ente Provinciale per il Turismo, Azienda Autonoma di Soggiorno e Turismo). For the occasion, several Italian and foreign artists were invited to present paintings and sketches that the members of the Group translated into mosaic. This was an opportunity to engage with the works of great painters and to show that an ancient and "obsolete" technique such as the mosaic was suitable to transpose even the most modern artistic expressions. The formal and chromatic synthesis, often sought by contemporary art, was well suited to the technical and expressive needs of mosaic, characterized, in the words of Giuseppe Bovini, by "shapes and colors brought to a high degree of simplification".

These two famous exhibitions, together with the Mostra di mosaici a soggetto dantesco (1965), were important prerequisites for the revival of Ravenna as the "city of mosaics" in the wake of its glorious tradition. In this context, the Mosaicists Group, which over the years had worked together with internationally renowned artists (Chagall, Guttuso, Severini, Saetti, Erni, Ortega, Kokoschka) played a leading role.

Another major change marks the Cooperative in 2008 that renews its name as a cooperative and is set up as an independent company maintaining its original name Mosaicisti Group giving continuity and since then until today led by Marco Santi, A student of the aforementioned mosaic masters. Today the Mosaicists Group of Marco Santi continues to work intensively both in the field of restoration and in the creation of modern mosaics.

As for the restoration, the vast experience gained on the field and the rigorous work, always in line with the restoration criteria recommended by the bodies responsible for the protection of cultural heritage, justify the enormous fame of the Mosaic Artists Group of Marco Santi. Over of its long history the Group has always distinguished itself for its ability to reconcile the practice of techniques derived from the tradition of Ravenna with the scrupulous experimentation of innovative materials.

But what really qualifies his activity is the serious artistic preparation of his mosaicists, matured with training at specialized schools (Art Institute, Academy of Fine Arts, Degree Courses in Conservation and Restoration)but above all with the frequenting of the workshop where the

relationship with Italian and foreign artists is a guarantee of an intense cultural exchange. The mosaics made by the workshop in Ravenna are scattered all over the world from the sumptuous palaces of the Saudi princes to the representative buildings of the capitals of art. The respect of the Byzantine tradition in the choice of materials, in the cutting of the tiles, in the laying of the enamels is a guarantee of the high quality of their craft that continues to catalyze collaborations with artists internationally renowned.