# Artistic Craftsmanship in the 19th Century (Mendrisio, 24–25 Feb 22)

Mendrisio (CH), Feb 24–25, 2022
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Tradition, Persistence, and Innovation in Artistic Craftsmanship and in Building and Architectural Production between the Napoleonic Era and the Restoration: Milan in a European Context

International study seminar organised by Romain Iliou (AHTTEP, ENSA Paris-La Villette), Serena Quagliaroli (Università della Svizzera italiana, Accademia di Architettura, Archivio del Moderno) and Stefania Ventra (Università della Svizzera italiana, Accademia di Architettura, Archivio del Moderno)

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With Milan proclaimed first the capital of the Cisalpine Republic in 1797 (from 1802, Italian Republic) and then in 1805 the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, the city was challenged to reconsider and rebuild its image and its urban spaces in order to adapt them to its new role. Part of a network of capitals responding to a single central power, both political and cultural, Milan experienced a period that featured significant incentives for public and private architectural building works and for the transformation of urban spaces. These conditions make the Lombard capital a privileged context in which to investigate the multiple forms of organization of artisanal and artistic work, as well as the circulation of people and materials. The seminar aims to reflect on the dialectic between the new status quo and the centuries-old stratified traditions inherent to the Milanese territory, also taking into consideration the Restoration period, when, in the new political-administrative structure of the Lombard-Veneto Kingdom, Milan, while remaining the capital, found itself in a new context that established a variety of artistic geographies.

The workshop aims to provide a meeting point for ongoing research that analyses the organization and definition of professions, materials, tools and the techniques of artistic craftsmanship, and of building and architectural production and design. It will reflect both on the transformations and the phenomena of continuity and persistence that characterize the city of Milan between the Napoleonic era and the Restoration, in an artistic, architectural, social, and economic context, with regard to the political administrative management of urban spaces and links with the surrounding territory.

Events in Milan can be better understood if placed in dialectical comparison with what occurred in other cities in both Italy and Europe: contributions will be welcomed, therefore, which, in a comparative perspective, present case studies aimed at exploring other urban realities. Particular attention might be paid to the relationship between Milan and the Canton of Ticino and to the changes that this centuries-old bond underwent over the period of time under consideration.

Proposals for contributions must concern one or more of the following topics, with particular attention to the connections with events relating to government policies, to administration and to the organization of the artistic and cultural system:

- Artistic craftsmanship, building and architectural production, and society. Actors and materials:
What are the particularities of the considered period in the context of the commissioning, design and organization of the building works that redefined the space of the city?
What was the impact on the shape of the city of an artisanal presence, with its workshops, warehouses, transport networks, and economic activities?
Alongside architects and engineers, which other professional figures emerge from archival documents and sources? What was their status, their education and training, what were their forms of aggregation and organization? What was the impact of the presence of workers from Ticino?
What materials were used, what were their trade routes and the supply chains for their production processes? What were the mechanisms of exchange and circulation?

- Tradition, continuity and innovation:
New materials, new techniques, and new construction ambitions, linked to market and bureaucratic requirements, joined the established crafts, practices and knowledge. This created a new form of professionalism which needed not only know-how but also the ability to organize, to establish relationships and to mediate between different skills and different social contexts.
How did education and training change and how did these subordinate practices establish a relationship with academic artistic and architectural teaching, its programs based on consolidated tradition? What skills and techniques were available as part of artisanal training? How, from a historiographical point of view, can we trace the changes and innovations in production techniques, which are often not codified? And how did the survival of traditional practices and figures fit in with the new context? How and to what extent did political authority intervene in the regulation and systemisation of professions and the transmission of knowledge? Was innovation actively encouraged or, on the contrary, were disincentives employed?

- Territory, materials and techniques:
In addition to insights into the processes of the acquisition of technical knowledge, at the centre of the investigation lie tools and materials: were there tools designed to standardize and serialize work? Can divisions be found in the broad sphere of materials between those intended for the public and those intended for the private sector, or can their interactions be investigated? What is the contribution made to artisanal and building production by surrogate materials and materials designed for ephemeral projects?
Other issues contributors are invited to explore include the importation, exportation, and adaptation of models, techniques and solutions, as well as the relationship between the city and the territory: what impact did the availability or lack of materials and infrastructures have on what was built?

It is planned that the workshop will be held in a blended format with a mix of online and on-site presentations on 24-25 February 2022 at Accademia di Architettura, Mendrisio (CH). Depending on the evolution of the international health situation, the organisers will endeavour to guarantee the best solution in compliance with national recommendations.
Proposals (in Italian, French, or English) should be sent to workshop.artigianato2022@gmail.com in the form of abstracts (300-500 words) and be accompanied by a short biographical presentation (150-200 words) by 31 October 2021.
The selection will be communicated by 30 November 2021 at the latest.

Reference:
CFP: Artistic Craftsmanship in the 19th Century (Mendrisio, 24-25 Feb 22). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 16, 2021 (accessed Nov 16, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/34785>.