

Distractions of art (Article for the magazine Effetto Arte)

Perhaps poets and writers work in silence. To tell the truth I do too: when I write for you or for myself I usually do it without visual or acoustic distractions. But for what strange reason does the visual artist, in the act of bringing his idea onto the canvas or into the material, feel the innate need to distract himself?

A scientific inquiry ought to be conducted to understand the reasons. Perhaps the anxiety of seeing a good result turns into the fear of finishing too quickly; perhaps we are seized by the childish habit of doing our homework while watching cartoons; or perhaps, quite simply, working is tiring.

In any case, in art studios one can observe various ways in which the artist likes to distract himself, from the most classic to the boldest and most creative.

Coffee is certainly the first and universal distraction of any art studio. The essential thing is to use the moka pot and not the modern capsule machines: the time needed for the water to pass from the boiler through the coffee and down into the cups allows us a brief rest and a chat with assistants, gallerists, visitors — or, failing those, with imaginary characters. Besides, we remain certain that after a good coffee our work will proceed more briskly.

In reality, at the eighth coffee of the day the habituated body derives no benefit at all; and many like to smoke interminable cigars precisely after a good coffee, which makes art studios rather smoky and almost entirely devoid of oxygen, and this contributes to a mild, widespread drowsiness.

So coffee is good for nothing, we are led to think.

The telephone, like coffee, is a continuous blessed source of distraction: it chirps at every message, every share on facebook, every message from the operator, every appointment and reminder; it shrieks to announce friends, relatives, colleagues and unknown numbers wanting to charm us with offers and incredible stories — evidently inspired by some angel who has taken pity on our bored condition as executors of our own creative idea.

The last classic cause of distraction is the questions of your assistants and collaborators: questions almost always pertinent, and due to the fact that you deliberately did not explain the work to be done properly, so that they might disturb you as soon as possible.

To settle doubts about the shade of gesso to spread on the canvases, or the shade of monochrome to use, there is nothing better than stopping for a moment and, first of all, making a good coffee.

And so the cycle starts again.

But for many all this is not enough, and so, next to the easels, there arise self-propelled stilt-houses made of art books, bearing on their summit sixty-inch televisions, surround systems

with amplified subwoofers capable of overturning or exploding every glass in the neighbourhood, more or less elaborate systems for listening to music, audiobooks, lectures, watching football matches, dictating memoirs, weaving relations of love and of work.

All in order to be distracted a little and not to have that terrible sensation of being at work.

The need for distraction is a pathology which, sooner or later, strikes every artist and creative person; one may as well resign oneself and choose the distraction one prefers. I recommend readings of the classics and live music: having somebody behind your back who reads, plays or talks will also help you get on with your work, if only as a matter of ego.

The atrocious price paid for this syndrome consists, naturally, in spending Saturday and Sunday alone in the studio, finishing the work you have been carrying on limply all week — a price that, in the end, one pays willingly, because it makes us feel truly passionate about our work.

Luca Motolese · Torino 2017

motolese.com — Original text in Italian