

Six good reasons to study the history of art

Pubblicato: Martedì 19 Novembre 2013



I am glad to respond to the appeal by Gianni Barba concerning the teaching of the history of art in many Italian high schools. Actually, this argument is not very recent, as it is a direct consequence of the so-called Gelmini “reform”, which abolished this subject in professional schools, reduced it a great deal in technical schools, and reduced it also in high schools that specialise in classical studies and in art, as the effect of eliminating some curricula considered experimental, even though they are well established. However, this argument is fortunately topical once more, after the education decree issued by the Letta Government.

With reference to yet another missed opportunity by the above-mentioned decree, in which there is no mention of art history, two letters were written, the first on 10 October, signed by intellectuals and art historians, like Salvatore Settis, and the second on 12 October, on behalf of the association of history of art teachers, ANISA, and both were sent to the Minister of Culture and to the Minister of Public Education.

So, as I have taught “the history of art and the territory”, I thought I should speak about it with those directly concerned, the students. I asked them to reply to the fundamental question: **WHY STUDY THE HISTORY OF ART?**

These are the answers that we gave each other, and I would like us all to reflect on them.

IT IMPROVES YOUR LIFE. Like poetry, music, dance, it makes life more pleasant, at no cost, so it has a very important social and civil role.

IT TRAINS YOU TO BE CRITICAL AND TO JUDGE FREELY. Formulating a judgement of value about a work, after learning about its history, is a complex activity that stimulates complex cognitive functions.

IT RELATES TO MANY DISCIPLINES. For this reason, studying the history of art lends itself to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary courses and promotes the learning of disciplines, like history and literature.

IT CREATES KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURAL ASSETS. Today, more than ever, it is necessary to promote widespread knowledge of the territory and of cultural assets, so that we can appreciate and preserve them, and increase their value. In this way, students “leave” the classrooms to visit smaller towns, to learn about the territory they live in, they discover the beauty there is, they come into contact with the professionals who work in the field to protect it. The travellers of the future are the students of today: do we only want them to know about factory outlets?

IT ENABLES YOU TO DO PROFESSIONS CONNECTED WITH ART. Let's not think only about the jobs directly related to the history of art and to managing cultural assets, but also about those that profit from knowledge of the world of images, from communication to education, even to the various art therapy techniques. Moreover, let's remember what many people mention, without really understanding it: raw materials, also in terms of economic assets, which Italy has, and which cannot be relocated (they can be sold, to Russians or to the Chinese, alas), namely, the landscapes and the works of art.

IT CREATES IDENTITY, A SENSE OF BELONGING, IT HELPS TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES. All this is experienced in the classroom, every day; the history of art brings foreign people closer, as they get to know and love the country that gives them hospitality, it “captures” the students that are lazy, indolent or in difficulty, whatever the reason, who might otherwise give up.

I expect much more from colleagues and enthusiasts of every type!

LET'S DEFEND THE HISTORY OF ART.

[Redazione VareseNews](#)
redazione@varesenews.it