

‘Artfully’ Masquerading. Artification of Masks through the Lens of the Applied Arts and in Dialogue with Contemporary Art

‘Enmascararse’ con arte. Artificación de las máscaras a través del prisma de las artes aplicadas y en diálogo con el arte contemporáneo

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Resumen

En un contexto contemporáneo de progresiva estetización en todos los ámbitos de la producción cultural, las prácticas de enmascaramiento también están experimentando interesantes procesos de artificación que forman parte de dinámicas más amplias de patrimonialización. Gracias a las actividades de investigación y documentación etnográfica realizadas en el marco del proyecto europeo MASKS, tuve la oportunidad de observar algunos rituales de enmascaramiento que tienen lugar en pequeños pueblos del interior de Basilicata (Italia), además de la artificación a la que han sido sometidas las máscaras, particularmente en el contexto de las acciones de comunicación y promoción llevadas a cabo por individuos, instituciones locales u organizadores de eventos en los que se insertan las máscaras. Este artículo se centra en el análisis crítico de dichas experiencias, a través de la descripción de tres estudios de caso que abordan dilemas, confluencias, tensiones y aspiraciones que el recurso a las artes aplicadas (ilustración y diseño gráfico), así como al arte visual y digital, habría generado, favorecido o dificultado.

Abstract

In a contemporary context of progressive aesthetisation in all fields of cultural production, masking practices are also undergoing interesting experiences of artification that are part of broader heritage-making dynamics. Thanks to the ethnographic research and documentation activities carried out within the framework of the European project MASKS, I had the opportunity to observe some masking rituals, which take place in small villages of the inner areas of Basilicata (Italy), in addition to the artification to which the masks have been subjected, particularly in the context of communication and promotion actions by individuals, local institutions or organisers of events in which the masks are inserted. This article focuses on the critical analysis of such experiences, through the description of three case studies focused on dilemmas, confluences, tensions, aspirations, which the recourse to applied arts (illustration and graphic design), as well as to visual and digital art, would have generated, favoured or hindered.

Palabras clave

máscara enmascaramiento memoria cultural artificación sur de Italia

Keywords

mask masking cultural memory artification southern Italy

1. Introduction

During an event organised in the city of Matera by the Matera Hub Consortium for the Crafting Tomorrow project, I met some women from Ukraine, who were exhibiting their creations at the fair entitled “Handicraft as a form of resilience” (1) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn1>).

The artefacts produced and displayed were exactly handicrafts made by applying creativity and technical know-how to so-called traditional materials, with a focus on innovation and sustainability, through the practice of recycling and bricolage. In all the communication devices of the event (i.e. descriptive panels, captions of the works, information brochures and so on), as well as in the words of presentation of the women interviewed, the term used to define themselves was artists and not craftswomen, as I would have expected during an event specifically dedicated to European craftsmanship. This episode prompted me to reflect on the preference of Ukrainian women to self-represent themselves and be identified as “artists”. The event organisers told me that it was a choice shared by the group of artisans/artists and had been had long been debated. They had finally accepted it, although they did not fully agree with them, because they feared that it might generate possible misunderstandings regarding for example the title of the event.

What processes transformed craftsmanship into works of art? If they weren’t already, how and when did craftswomen become artists? Or when did they start considering themselves as such?

I therefore tried to reflect, following Roberta Shapiro (2019: 266), on “not only how we come to call things art, and people artists, but what conditions triggered that change and what it entails”. I assumed that the participants would probably recognise themselves better in the definition of artists, for several reasons maybe related to their professional history. I also believe that presenting the handcrafted creation as artistic, endowed with a certain aura, could generate greater appeal. In the widespread imagination, in discourses and representations, an artistic creation, or one presumed to be such, always tends to acquire, even if only symbolically, greater aesthetic, emotional, cognitive value and more prestige than an handcrafted one (Santoro 2023).

But I also think that this question could also be well inscribed in the so-called “artification processes” and acts through a specific social and cultural process of “categorisation”, which concerns “the ways in which different forms of action, their agents and their products come to belong to – or (...) to transit through – a specific category of practices and practitioners, objects and performances: the category of art” (Bassetti 2012: 1). Nevertheless in this example the shift in meaning left, once again, the relationship between craftsman and artist in a kind of “ambiguity” from a conceptual point of view with regard to their respective expressions and related aesthetic values (Herzfeld 2015).

The question, which emerged at the European craft fair, concerned not only issues that have been widely debated (Carosso 2015); it is somehow relates to the question of the “appropriation” of cultural elements of anthropological interest, such as know-how, memories and craft productions, by artists or presumed to be (2) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn2>). The appropriation has almost always been limited to a “general primitivisation of cultures”, as well as a “decontextualised fetishisation of their artefacts” (Marano 2018: 16).

The aforementioned case seems to me as an emblematic example of the unstoppable and dynamic process of artification; a notion by which is meant the “artistic making of many fields of the social, which invests the economy, politics, the relational and intimate life of people”. This is a widespread and articulated tendency, which entails “an extension to previously unseen areas of social life, of the primacy of taste, style, communication, display, staging, spectacle”. Where aesthetisation becomes “the way of structuring subjectivities, of the formation of much heritage sensitivities, of the generalisation of museum gestures and imaginaries entirely sympathetic to the phantasmagoria of commodities” (Padiglione and Bargna 2018: 9).

As part of the research and documentation activities carried out for the European project MASKS (3) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn3>), I had the opportunity to investigate some masking rituals, which take place in small villages in the inner areas of Basilicata, and the processes of artification (Heinich and Shapiro 2012) to which I believe masks have been subjected, particularly in the area of communication and promotion actions by individuals, local institutions or organisers of festive events.

Since “the art-culture system remains for anthropology a central terrain for understanding contemporary socio-cultural dynamics” (Padiglione and Bargna 2018: 11), through the recourse to three case studies, concerning specific masking practices, I will propose ethnographic observations, focused on dilemmas, confluences, tensions and aspirations, which the recourse to applied arts (illustration and graphic design), as well as to visual and digital art, would have generated, favoured, or hindered.

My reflections will emerge, therefore, “through the analysis of the concrete situated actions –both discursive and material– that constitute the process, that do –and not only say– the accession to the status of art/artwork/artist” (Bassetti 2012: 1). The analysis of such cultural practices related to masking has, moreover, revealed the presence of agency, in other words intentional action, on the part of heritage individuals and communities (Mirizzi 2016 and 2021), who are not only products, but also producers of their own culture (Remotti 2013). It has shown capacity for continuity, adaptation and change, capable of responding creatively to the needs of the multifaceted local and global contemporary heritage arenas.

Masks of Basilicata have become the object of (in)conscious processes of heritage-making (Padiglione 2017) and are recognised as shared cultural symbols of belonging, as well as devices for the construction of local identities, the production or re-production of cultural memory and a privileged object of self-representation, in dialogue with broader global scenarios.

The reference to the artisanal dimension of the masks and to the peculiar ways in which they are created or made up can, in my opinion, be useful, because, in the experiences observed, it tends to intersect with processes of artification to which these masks are subjected, declined or forced. The following will emerge: on the one hand, the creativity of individuals and groups involved in masking actions, considering that the act of creating produces knowledge, constructs contexts, transforms lives (Ingold 2013); on the other, the contribution to the production of a strong sense of shared practices and rootedness in the respective territories during ceremonial moments referable to the Carnival period. Masquerades, including those of my reflections, “carry with them the memories of life contexts, incorporating them into the materiality of things and gestures; (...) they are not reduced to a private affair but contribute to the sense of being together” (Bargna 2021: 138).

The experiences, which I will describe below, are mostly within the framework of articulated, hybrid, nuanced communication strategies; they connect popular cultures to artistic languages, in some cases managing to take root in the cultural memory, embedded in the communities, and in the territories to which they belong. They can be included in the actions that Vincenzo Padiglione (2017: 124) has defined as “dissemination”, i. e. the result of a “creative flow”, generated with the complicity of mediatised visual culture, which lies between carnival and “metacarnival” and can also include heritage-making and resonances (4) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn4>). These are the “artistic and political uses of the mask as a space for experimenting with a performative artefact that activates a social magic through which one not only becomes other but also imposes this different identity on a public level”.

It has emerged from the ethnographic experience that many contemporary artists would seem “to play” in these terms with the mask object and the concept of disguise. Sometimes, through recuperation and re-evaluation, or “through the embodiment and staging of the mask”, they attempt to enact an “ironic and painful critique of contemporary mimetic processes, of imposed and desired changes of identity” (Padiglione 2017: 124).

I would add that, “looking at the contextual dynamics and the processes of adaptation and

transformation that characterize the individual Carnivals in their uniqueness and diversity” (Mirizzi 2021: 12), these actions of artification observed in the masks of Basilicata are also linked to, and part of, ongoing processes of heritage-making.

2. Artification of popular cultures

The term of artification, a neologism coined by Nathalie Heinich and Roberta Shapiro (2012), is intended to define not so much what art is, nor how it should be considered, but in what ways and under what circumstances it occurs. There are many “devices”, or “operators”, of artification, such as: terminological, juridical, cognitive, temporal, spatial, institutional, commercial, editorial, semiotical, media-related, corporeal, organizational, practical; aesthetic and also discursive.

Moreover, Heinich and Shapiro identify groups of “actors” –or so-called “circles of recognition” that put into practice these operators. As well as, assuming that the artification is a dynamic, ongoing change process, the authors identify some possible “outcomes”: “durable, partial, ongoing or unattainable” (Heinich and Shapiro 2012: 36). Finally, they propose “seven effects of the considered process on the activities, objects and practitioners undergoing it: legitimization, autonomization, enlargement of art thresholds, aestheticization, individualization, authentication, rarefaction”.

If we adopt the “artification lens” as analytical tool in Western countries, where “public policies in the field of art and culture play a fundamental role” (Bassetti 2012: 2), it’s clear that some of these effects are strictly connected with the State intervention, the public/administrative recognition/mis-recognition and the role of the media implemented through specific communication strategies. Today, however, “the process of artification is not unique to the West, but is now an integral part of social and political change around the world” (Shapiro 2019: 267).

As Rosario Perricone (2018: 113) writes in this regard, “by activating a hyperbolic ‘aurea’, of Benjaminian memory, artification becomes a model that shapes society, transposing its logics and readjusting them to its own needs”. He adds that this phenomenon of “generalised artification” is above all “provoked by communication used for capitalist purposes”. Since art is also recognised as a category that must be defined by reference to context and use, as is the case with communication, the two disciplines can be united at least from a semiotic point of view. Moreover, both have a performative value, i.e. capable of transforming concepts, but also of affecting people, those who produce and, above all, those who receive. However, not even contextualisation always and clearly resolves the “reductionism” that could lead to artification, especially if there continues to persist “an underestimation of the agency of artefacts based on an ethnocentric separation between aesthetics and function (between handiwork and artefacts), between practical knowledge and symbolic representation, ultimately between science and art, when in fact these concepts are closely linked” (Marano 2018: 17).

Heinich and Shapiro (2012: 4) identified at least ten constituent processes: “displacement, renaming, recategorization, institutional and organisational change, patronage, legal consolidation, redefining time, individualization of labor, dissemination, and intellectualization”. These microprocesses, that constitute the macroprocess of artification, “bridge a large span of practices dispersed in space and time” (Shapiro 2019: 267). Between these, “extracting or displacing a production from its initial context is a prerequisite for artification”. Even the question of authorship is not trivial, because artification brings with it, by definition, reference to an author, individual or collective (D’Agostino 2019: 15). Furthermore, terminological change, discursive reinforcement and the intellectualization of practice are essential parts of artification processes. As also demonstrated by the case of the Ukrainian artist/craftswomen mentioned at the beginning of this article and the “renaming” of their handicraft object (Shapiro 2019).

The semantic shift from the concept of craftsmanship to that of art, in the context of processes of progressive artification, also concerns the area of masking practices, in which the artistic aspect “emerges over time, as the sum total of both institutional activities and everyday interactions,

technical implementations and attributions of meaning” (Heinlich and Shapiro 2012: 2).

The masks of Basilicata are often created through craft processes, local know-how, both in cases where they are made for rituals and in cases where they are simply made from, for example, poor and recycled materials. Like a bricoleur, each mask-maker periodically works creatively, for him or others, to reiterate the local tradition of the mask-making and masking ritual. The act of creation is itself a complex process, in which makers and materials coexist in mutual interrelation (Ingold 2013) generating the forms imagined and/or learnt from tradition.

As I have written elsewhere (Santoro 2023), although the bricoleur-craftsman is accustomed above all to “thinking with his hands” (Sennett 2008), relying on “bodily memory” and on manual labour and know-how embedded in and first and foremost transmitted orally, it is not surprising that he is able and willing to be open to innovations, to seize inducements and opportunities, or to experiment with contaminations with adjoining fields, for instance the artistic one.

The case is different when artists “burst” into the field of craftsmanship and popular traditions, through interpretations, creations and inventions. As Padiglione and Bargna (2018: 10) argue, when artification concerns the areas of “craftsmanship, food, folklore, popular festivals (not only in their outcomes but also in the very minute practices of production)” it could be considered as if it were “the revenge of the culturally low, the popular, the plebeian, the anonymous and the plural, the necessary and the useful, or rather of what is by definition excluded from illustrious aesthetic enjoyment”. Moreover, such recognition, acting through a dislocation, both material and semantic, implies not only an “inevitable transformation (...) but also casual and ‘creative’ manipulations”. Sometimes the artists do not distinguish “between the use of a work and the interpretation given to it, while use is a process of appropriation that finds its limits only in what hinders it, interpretation is bound to the ‘rights’ of the work, of the people and cultures that generated them, in their irreducible autonomy of meaning” (Padiglione and Bargna 2018: 10).

Nevertheless it has long been recognised that art, in its various forms, has accompanied anthropology in its “mission to force the conceptual order of the familiar and the foreign, to represent worlds that are resistant to definition” (Padiglione and Bargna 2018: 10). The artistic field has thus also become “evocative/creative, as ethnography has long been, of plural visions, of alternatives to the existing, suspended between the real and the possible”.

3. Masks of Basilicata: cultural memory, processes, actors and contexts

In a contemporary context of progressive aestheticization in all areas of cultural production, even masking practices and related artefacts, whether manufactured or packaged, are undergoing interesting processes of artification. There are numerous artistic experiments that attempt to reinterpret masks and masking rituals (5) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn5>); there are also many cases of artification in the context of Carnival masquerades, “a privileged festive context for transformations in the popular imagination” (Padiglione 2017: 120). Let us not forget that among the “classic themes” of anthropology, “those that have been associated with the discipline by common sense and which have fascinated artists”, are “those of ritual and ritual masks” (Marano 2018: 16).

The use of masks, as well as the practice of dressing up, can be found with some frequency in almost all human cultures. Most masks are created and used in different societies to be worn by certain individuals or groups of individuals on certain pre-established occasions. In many non-European cultures, but not only there, the appearance of masks, alongside traditional and ceremonial costumes, accompanies the most important social moments, collective celebrations and festivities, which follow a periodic cycle based on the changing seasons, ecological rhythms, production cycles. They refer to different cosmological or religious concepts and mythical narratives.

In the Western context, and specifically in Europe, masquerades today take on other different meanings, as we will see later, connected with the needs of contemporary life. We are aware that each mask can

only take on “its full meaning when worn by an individual performing certain ceremonial actions in a specific community context” (Comba 1996). Its function is expressed and manifested above all, and beyond the practice of dressing up, through various performative modes, such as dance, music, and the actions of masked and unmasked individuals. In the latter case, the obvious contradiction between the individuals wearing the mask, acting as personifications of the being depicted, and the unmasked individuals (who show that they believe in the presence of mysterious and superhuman entities) is produced and reproduced at various levels in the representation of masking ceremonies.

It is a broad and complex cultural context; as Comba (1996) writes, “the social occasion on which the mask appears, the roles and functions of those who wear the masks and those who watch, the meaning and function of each participant’s behaviour, and so on, naturally vary from one society to another”. The meaning of a mask is therefore “closely intertwined with a complex web of symbolic relationships and cultural values specific to a particular society”.

Masks should be observed above all through the practice of masking, understood as “a dynamic place marked by the ambiguity and reversibility of putting on and taking off (...) an action that can be performed in many ways and using different objects, often very far removed from the stereotype of the face mask” (Bargna 2004: 146). The identity of the mask cannot be established by limiting oneself, for example, to the analysis of the facial element or the costume worn, taken separately or isolated from the context of action, since “masks consist of masquerade” (Bargna 2004: 147). The protagonists of masquerades consequently recognise a certain ceremonial significance in their disguises, a ritual ethos, especially in relation to those actions that transform them into the desired otherness (Padiglione 2017).

With regard to Basilicata Region, these rites and events, during which masking takes place, concern mostly the Carnival festivities and in some case other so-called “winter rites” (Mirizzi 2021: 12). Carnival is “the product of a process of adaptation of various symbolic forms with common contemporary traits” (Clemente 2016: 18). As for the dialogue between Carnival and the various cultural traits it synthesises in the festive machine, “it can perhaps be said that, within its temporality, Carnival becomes a ‘form of life’, a ‘total social fact’, and thus appropriates multiple phenomena that also have life outside of it, and which outside it also have their own symbolic dynamics” (Clemente 2016: 20).

The anthropologically interesting aspect is the contemporaneity of these rites, which are characterized by the production and use or re-use of masks. Indeed during the contemporary ritual practices these masks of Carnival ceremonials and traditional masquerades are re-actualize, re-signified and re-functionalised, in forms and configurations, that are almost always more organized and structured than the improvisation that characterized them during the past. Sometimes assuming different symbolic value for the community heritage or for new generations, such as who decide not to emigrate or who returned to live in their villages after experiences in other places and try to seek a connection to the place of origin.

Furthermore it is very important to look at the contextual dynamics and processes of adaptation, transformation and heritage-making that characterize the individual Carnivals and masquerades “in their uniqueness and diversity, beyond hypothetical common traits that could be highlighted” (Mirizzi 2021: 12). In other words these masks have become mostly functional for the redefinition of local belonging and territorial identities in the present.

We can consider the mask as a “cultural symbol”, regardless of its composition and formal qualities, as an object and product of cultural creativity, understood as “the ability to innovate existing models made available by history and tradition, a capacity that brings experiences and provocations and can boost self-confidence and improve quality of life” (Mirizzi 2016: 41). So it has an important function as a cultural memory, a device capable of connecting the past with the present. All human cultures “inscribe their existence in the world through the creation of artefacts that offer material support to

words and thoughts, enabling communication over distance and the transmission of individual and collective memories over time” (Bagna 2021: 137).

In fact, the mask is an artefact of human creativity and requires considerable manual, craft and/or artistic skills. It is closely linked to a specific context and the cultural memory of communities. It is, first and foremost, a technology for the production of identity, “a device for the production of reality and, as such, falls within the realm of ‘technique’, understood on the one hand as a prosthesis and extroversion of the body and, on the other, as an agent of anthropopoietic introversion” (6) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn6>) (Bargna 2004: 143).

In this sense, in most masquerades, and the winter rituals of Basilicata are no exception, masks contribute “to constructing the real world”, while alluding to other possible worlds; since simultaneously “the place of the mask is that of ambiguity, metamorphosis and transformation” (7) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn7>) (Bargna 2004: 144).

The importance of the object dimension of mask production is one of the aspects on which the MASKS project is attempting to focus. In addition to contextualising and updating their use in masquerade rituals and in terms of representation, symbolic and social value. This argument could even be valid in the case of masks that are, so to speak, the product of «invention» or complete artification. This is the case, for example, of the ephemeral artistic masks created during the Carnival of Castronuovo di Sant’Andrea in Basilicata, which I consider emblematic in this regard (8) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn8>).

In the three case studies briefly described below, I will try to highlight some aspects of the masquerades observed and related to the artification practices of/on local masks. I will not describe the masks and their symbolic meaning, nor the respective ritual or performative contexts in which they are made and worn, referring such information to the bibliography available. Instead, I will focus on the interesting experiences carried out by a graphic designer, an illustrator and a visual artist, respectively; in some cases, members of the heritage community (9) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn9>), or who share common roots and origins in Basilicata. These experiences with/on masks will reveal actions of artification, which took place at different times, arose from various needs and with different objectives, and had unexpected results in terms of the success or failure of the operation in local reception.

4. Symbolic imagery in graphic design for the representation of the Cucibocca mask

In Montescaglioso, a village in the province of Matera, on the night between 5 and 6 January, La Notte dei Cucibocca (The Night of the Sewmouth) is celebrated. The Cucibocca are figures (image 1) “who, with their black cloaks, hats made from discs used in old oil mills and long beards made of hemp, walk the streets of the town on the evening of the eve of Epiphany” (Mirizzi 2021: 12).



Image 1. The Mask of the Cucibocca of Montescaglioso (MT). Taken by Antonella D'auria.

Similar to Carnival ceremonies, this ritual of assuming another identity is defined by “performative situations in which masked characters present themselves to the spectators of the stage action in the act of re-enacting a symbolic condition believed to be true with reference to a distant era, but which draws its credibility from evoked memories, narrated experiences and shared beliefs” (Mirizzi 2016: 38). Over the years, it has been able to rely on coordinated, dedicated and highly recognisable representation strategies and communication tactics.

Franco Caputo (2025: 2), one of the promoters of the event, writes:

“In the 1980's and 1990's, the custom fell into disuse, but since 1999, the Centro Ricerca e Animazione Culturale e CooperAttiva, members of the association, in collaboration with other operators, has revived the tradition, which has once again become an event that identifies Montescaglioso, the Matera area and the Murgia Park. (...) Research and interviews conducted in 1998 among the elderly and the vivid memories of veterans and organisers of the event have made it possible to reconstruct the customs and many legends, suggestions, narratives and interpretations of Cucibocca as rooted in the collective memory”.

Adding that: “In the costumes and some of the tools used by the Cucibocca, recontextualised in the character, refer to the world of farmers, shepherds and farm managers, but above all to transhumance”.

As Caputo said several times, regarding the “return of the Cucibocca” (10)

(<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn10>), which is linked to “practices and interventions that mark the impact of tradition on the community”, in the 1990s, due to the social emergency caused by the strong presence of local crime, both the Cucibocca and the Carnevalone, the main figure of the Montescaglioso Carnival, had almost disappeared (11) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn11>). “No one dared to open their doors to masked characters anymore. In 1998, young parents, mindful of the ancient ritual, organised the return of Cucibocca and Carnevalone. The aim was to restore the traditions of their fathers and grandfathers to their children and return to the media with elements of great positivity”.

Furthermore, the operation was designed “to promote the development of the local tourism and cultural

industry” (Caputo 2025: 12).

In the case of Cucibocca, therefore, the mask appears “as the site of numerous apparent contradictions and antinomies, as an expression of a fundamental ambiguity. (...) An ambiguity that lends itself well to signalling critical moments, phases of transition, intermediate and marginal areas of social life, and the more or less defined boundaries between one domain of reality and another” (Comba 1996).

The idea of promoting this mask with an innovative graphic design linked to contemporary culture also came about after the summer of 1998, following a series of contemporary art residencies organised in the village, in which the figure of Cucibocca often appeared as a source of inspiration for Italian and international artists. Since its first edition, Mauro Bubbico (12)

(<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn12>), a graphic designer who was also one of the promoters of the revival of the tradition, has been responsible for the graphic design in the communication of the La notte dei Cucibocca event. His work, according to Caputo (2025: 14):

“explores and investigates the evocative power of Cucibocca: costume, needle, owl, fear and storytelling for children... (...) In Mauro Bubbico’s research, the Cucibocca finds further and unprecedented specificities and characteristics associated with the identification between event, tradition, local community and graphics, with recognition obtained well beyond the local context. In the management of the event, the poster has taken on the role not only of communicating programmes and activities but also, one might say, of a celebratory tool”.

For each edition, the creative work and graphics of the event have drawn inspiration from multiple themes and suggestions, always tenaciously linked to the territory or the narration of the circumstances of the moment, whether festive or unpleasant (13)

(<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn13>). Over the years, the Cucibocca graphic design, which is highly effective in terms of communication, “has evolved from an initial philological representation, linked to the simple stylisation of the characters, to introduce new and varied meanings linked to the circumstances, creating a large group of different but significant characters (man-beasts)” (Bubbico 2024: 14) (images 2, 3 and 4).



Image 2. Poster of the Cucibocca by Mauro Bubbico – edition 2017.



Image 3. Poster of the Cucibocca by Mauro Bubbico – edition 2025.



Image 4. Poster of the Cucibocca Stay to home by Mauro Bubbico – edition 2021.

Bubbico’s work is certainly “authorial”, which is one of the reasons that produce artification (Heinich, Shapiro 2012), as we have seen previously.

The poetics that have guided his work, which he defines as “narrative of the real”, in addition to his conviction that graphic culture lies in the “ability to construct great narratives”, are explicitly stated, together with the names of intellectuals and thinkers who have inspired him, in one of his recently published writings.

Bubbico (2024: 10) says about it:

“I think our work is linked to the economic and social context in which we choose to operate, and the people we come into contact with are also part of that context, as they represent our references and our first audience. (...) These are the reasons why I approached traditional cultures: to connect with my context of reference. In fact, my work revolves mainly around the values of identity and memory, because tradition is a powerful generator of imagery, and this means that my task has been to combine memory with design expertise”.

This is how folk art and oral storytelling, from this point of view, have become a real “powerful source of inspiration”. The website features praise for his work from designers and graphic artists (14) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn14>), such as Mario Piazza (2025: 68), who describes him as a “brilliant bricoleur”.

Specifically, I believe that the meaning of the complex graphic and artistic work dedicated over the years to the mask of Montescaglioso can also be read through his words, which in a certain sense refer to the reversal of roles in masking practices, the polysemy of masks and their different symbolic meanings. At the same time, they tell his story and that of his territory and community (Bubbico 2024).

Marano (2018: 19) argues, with regard to the ability of a certain type of artistic practice to engage with reality, that “since Duchamp, aesthetic pleasure no longer derives from the artist's imitative or interpretative ability, but from art's ability to make us reflect on crucial contemporary issues”. In the creative, artistic, but also responsible and committed work of Mauro Bubbico, again to quote Marano:

“within reflective poetics, appropriation and relationship play a significant role, presenting themselves as intertwined dynamics that the interpretation of the work/project must grasp in order not to fall into the transcendentalism that the concept of agency could risk evoking by attributing ontological independence to objects and subjects, outside the contexts, relationships in which they transit and the appropriations they imply”.

Indeed for Bubbico, design is nothing more than “a combinatory activity, the construction of relationships between things and people”. So much so that he is convinced that there is no need to “produce new images: our task is to reveal them, to tell their story so that they can be understood” (Bubbico 2024: 10).

Certainly, his creative work aimed at producing the graphics for the event, on the one hand, helped to keep the focus on the ritual of masking and to preserve it; on the other, strongly influenced and characterised the representation and imagery of the mask in an authorial and artistic manner.

5. Pop experimentation of visual and digital art: the Demon of Teana

As documented in similar contexts and in various areas of intangible cultural heritage, the rapid rise and spread of communication media, technologies and, more recently, the opportunities offered by Artificial Intelligence, have distanced regular visitors and participants from events, feasts and performances, changing their models, needs, opportunities, tastes. Among other things, new communication and promotion needs have emerged on the part of institutions and groups involved in local heritage practices. In this complex and rapidly changing context, contemporary and visual art finds its place in various forms of expression and communication, such as artist residencies, video installations or video games.

The project Il Demone di Teana (15) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn15>) by visual artist Silvio Giordano (16) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn16>) is an example of this process, which in our case

refers to the artification of the zoomorphic mask of the Urs (the Bear). It will also help us understand the political strategies, heritage postures, tactics and communication objectives, which in turn consist of hierarchies, choices and priorities, that were employed by the main social actors involved.

According to information provided to me by the organiser of the Teana Carnival, in the province of Potenza, and specifically by the president of the Pro Loco, Vincenzo Salvo (17) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn17>), Giordano's video art work was intended to help attract, engage and involve a larger number of participants through "more appealing forms of communication" than "traditional methods", which are "more suited to young people". As we know, another result of artification as "a process of institutionalisation is changing people's relation both to past generations and to the future", write Shapiro (2019: 270).

The work was the result of Giordano's artistic residency in July 2024 (images 5 and 6).



Image 5. Poster of the residency with the artist Silvio Giordano.

Image 6. Frame from the making of the video Il Demone di Teana by Silvio Giordano.

For the organisers "the work combines tradition and new forms of communication, catapulting the viewer into a new dimension". They add, although I am not certain of this, that this is "the first time that a tradition as deeply rooted as the Teana Carnival has approached transmediality, making it the first carnival in Basilicata to present itself to the travellers of tomorrow through new technologies in order to promote its unique characteristics" (18) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn18>). It is useful to quote the artist's words describing his work:

"I am very fascinated by the bizarre and disturbing figure of the Demon of Teana. I believe that these kinds of creatures are perfect for video art. I created this project in the summer during a happy and inspiring artist residency in Teana. Among woods, waterfalls and zoomorphic monsters, bears and goats, I discovered the Urs (...). The tribal demon we carry within us. This experience was a unique opportunity to

explore the boundary between human and animal, between tradition and future, through digital art and artificial intelligence" (19) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn19>).

The work stems primarily from his artistic poetics, the New Digital Humanism, which is in line with other acclaimed works produced on similar themes and in similar contexts. The concept refers to wanting to "bring back humanistic themes and thoughts that can create critical awareness in others. To develop profound existential themes. It is no longer the time to create only aesthetics and develop new technologies: it is time to create strong content" (20) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn20>).

According to Mirizzi (2015: 26), masks lend themselves well to "representing the intrusion of the demonic and the uncontrolled return of the dead to the world of the living, just as, more generally, Carnival is functional to temporary institutional and social disorder, destined to end with the expulsion of the masks, the end of the world turned upside down and the restoration of the normal course of life". Comba (1996) also reminds us that:

"A large number of masks in different cultures feature images of animals or fantastical beings with attributes that are partly animal and partly human. In these contexts, it seems that wearing a mask allows the individual to momentarily abolish the barriers that separate the human world from the animal world, the present time from the time of the origins, the dimension of everyday life from the world of spirits or the dead. The mask causes a partial confusion and interchangeability of the different spheres, made explicit through a multiplicity of fantastic forms, in which the human face and animal characteristics combine and merge in various ways".

Although the Urs mask is not strictly demonic but zoomorphic, and although the aim of the costume and the ritual performance in which it is used is to frighten people during the parade (21) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn21>), Giordano decided to emphasise exclusively the terrifying, and bestial aspects, removing the mask from its ritual and performative context. This is an aspect that, it has been written, stems from his specific interest in animal figures and monstrous or demonic characters placed in a natural context. For Giordano, Basilicata has, in this sense, "a mystical role"; and it is "poetically a fertile ground where the divine and the diabolical meet. (...) where the anthropological figures of Carnival are devils, green hermits and transcendent, otherworldly creatures. For me, it is a land of the imagination, it is mythical, mental inspiration" (22) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn22>) (image 7).



Image 7. Sculpture of the Rumit Mask by artist. Taken by Silvio Giordano.

In Teana's case, therefore, one of the objectives was to stimulate certain reactions through visual artwork, using provocation, excess and ambiguity, as well as to generate new visions and original forms. The artist invited viewers to reflect on the relationships and contradictions between tradition and innovation in the practice of masking (23) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn23>) through the enjoyment of his artistic work.

From this point of view, Giordano's work aims to evoke imaginative scenarios in order to amaze, disturb and, to quote Gabriella D'Agostino (2019: 5), "provoke modes of knowledge and understanding according to non-linear sequences and unexpected connections". In short, the artist has radicalised "the annulment of the classic face-mask opposition, a cornerstone of Western visual culture", staging "a plurality of mutant identities" (Padiglione 2017: 125).

The project of artification creating the Urs mask, which is technological, is positioned in what Perricone (2018: 117) defines as an "elastic zone between signification and communication, between semantics and pragmatics. This zone consists of productions that surround and prolong the work in order to 'publish' it, that is, to circulate it, ensuring its reception and consumption".

On 28 February 2025, I had the opportunity to attend the public event organised for the presentation of the artwork, entitled: Tradition and new forms of communication. The Urs, the Demon of Teana. The artist, representatives of the institutions, the organisers of the Carnival and some citizens of Teana were present.

I had come to the village to moderate a round table discussion the following day for the presentation of the European project MASKS and the first results of the documentation work on the local Urs mask (24) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn24>). Giordano's video was well received, enthusiastically so I would say, especially by the institutional representatives, who had in fact supported the initiative and welcomed the artist's proposal, even accompanying him during his site visits and filming in the woods around the village (25) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn25>). There was not much room for debate,

but the artist was given free rein to talk about his experience and the meaning of his work.

As for my personal impressions of the video, I must admit that I found it interesting, but also disturbing, disharmonious due to the pounding music, the moving images and the gloomy settings; I also glimpsed a sort of exoticising gaze on the part of the author. There was nothing that recalled the ritual in which the mask is worn and paraded or the ways in which it interacts with other masks and the rest of the participants. In short, the ritual context was missing and the symbolic meanings of the mask shared by the heritage community did not emerge. I communicated my impressions to the artist and understood that this was what he had hoped to achieve: wonder and dissonance, so to speak. His art project was perfectly successful.

Another interesting aspect of the Giordano's artification work, both "aesthetic" and "cognitive" (Heinich and Shapiro 2012), concerns the broader contribution made to the 2025 edition of the Teana Carnival. I am referring to the creation of the posters, designed for the various events in the programme, for which he said he chose to create the content using generative Artificial Intelligence, by entering prompts on context and mask and choosing, from those proposed by the system, the image most evocative and visually efficacious (image 8). Regarding the use of AI, he said:

"I use artificial intelligence because I have now proven everything with digital art. I would say that I have been creating works since I was 14, when only Corel Draw existed. But now, by writing prompts and linking them directly to my work, I avoid the whole process of using Photoshop and other similar programmes. I am interested in developing my ideas, not proving that I know how to do something" (26) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn26>).



Image 8. Poster of the 2025 Teana Carnival made with IA by Silvio Giordano.

In my opinion, AI should be a topic of great interest and anthropological study, because "AI will transform anthropology in unimaginable ways, challenging our theories and methods and pushing the frontier of what we thought possible. The future of anthropology is AI. We should embrace it and help shape its development, or risk being left behind" (Artz 2023). It is a truly complex and controversial

issue in some respects, raising crucial cultural and ethical questions, for example regarding culturally mediated content produced through AI, and is now redefining social and economic structures and power dynamics.

Even the use of AI in the field of cultural heritage must be analysed, whether or not it is connected to artistic practices, such as those described above.

6. (Re)invention of tradition in the «forgotten» masks of Stigliano

In 2019, the municipal administration of the small town of Stigliano, in the province of Matera, invited citizens to “rethink Carnival” through a competition “for the rediscovery of ancient anthropological masks” (Cecere 2024: 183).

Since the 1980’s, Carnival celebrations have been held with the creation of allegorical papier-mâché floats, thanks mainly to the efforts of two local artists, brothers Giovanni and Mario Sansone, who in the early 1980s learned the craft from traditional papier-mâché masters in Lecce and brought together several young people to help them create the floats (27) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn27>).

As recounted by Mimmo Cecere (28) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn28>), an illustrator and retired teacher who moved with his family from Stigliano to Milan at the age of 11, the “rediscovery of the ancient traditional masks” happened almost by chance, “while tidying up some folders containing documents from research carried out in his home village during the summers of his youth”, when he used to spend whole days wandering around the countryside, “trying to collect the memories of the elderly ‘like an anthropologist’ before their final disappearance”. In the words of a 90-year-old farmer, Cecere found an account of how Carnival was celebrated on a local farm. During one of their long conversations, his elderly interlocutor told him about two masks, called Spiga and Caprone (Ear and Goat) which were usually made by farm labourers and cowherds using poor materials available to them.

Cecere (2024: 186) suggests that this “double mask” embodied “the two most common types of work in the Matera hills in the past: farmers and shepherds”. With the disappearance of the agro-pastoral world and the economic and social changes, the masks fell into oblivion. According to him, Carnival was celebrated in different ways in the village and in the countryside. For this reason, no memory of it remained in the village, although the memory was still alive, at least for the elderly farmer.

Furthermore, the local intellectual, Rocco De Rosa, who remembered their features and characteristics in the same way, having lived in the countryside of the village during his childhood, confirmed the existence of the two masks in the 1970’s (29) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn29>).

During a meeting with Francesco Micucci, mayor of Stigliano, Mimmo told him about his discovery and the mayor urged him to take part in the competition organised by the municipal administration, which had already been held the previous year without any winners because the entries received were considered off-topic. So, in 2019, Mimmo drew some illustrations of the two masks, the Spiga and the Caprone (image 9), and won the competition. In addition, during a workshop with local schools, he went from illustrated sketches to the creation of prototypes of the masks, made of clay and materials he managed to find, including an old shepherd’s waistcoat considered by everyone to be impossible to find (images 10 and 11).



Image 9. The traditional Masks of Stigliano illustrated by Mimmo Cecere.

In the 2023 edition of the Stigliano Carnival organised by the Make the Carnival Association, “anthropological masks rediscovered from tradition” (Cecere 2024: 187) will be paraded for the first time. The masks were created during an artistic residency organised for the AppARTengo Public Art Festival by the artist DEM, who took up Cecere’s work and, at the same time, reinterpreted the traditional masks, proposing a more artistic version, once again made with locally available materials and incorporating some variations of his own creativity.

DEM, who describes himself in his biography on the website (30) (<https://gazeta-antropologia.es/#edn30>) as an artist who prefers “anthropological and nature-related themes”, greatly appreciated the results of Cecere’s work in Stigliano and shares some of his objectives, which seem to have inspired him. He writes: “Mimmo Cecere’s studies on shepherds and farmers in the Matera countryside have brought to light stories of past carnivals and traditional masks that were worn as early as the beginning of the 20th century”. He agrees that “reviving this tradition, which has survived only in the memories of a few elderly people, helps to revive its memory, which has been almost erased by depopulation and abandonment of the area, with the consequent loss of traditional culture”.

The masks of the Spiga and the Caprone, he explains, echoing the words of Cecere, express “the importance of the bond that ancient populations had with nature, on which their survival depended through agriculture and livestock farming, and represented a symbol of good luck and fertility” (image 12).



Image 10. Mask of goat made in papier-mâché. Taken by Mimmo Cecere.

Image 11. Prototype of the Spiga and Caprone masks. Taken by Mimmo Cecere.

Mimmo Cecere's passion for the recovery of local cultural memory, which inspired and influenced the artist DEM, has, in my opinion, led to a sort of double artification of the two masks, in the transition from oral testimony, preserved in the memory of the elderly farmer, to graphic illustration, and then to reinterpretation through contemporary art. But from an emic perspective, that is from within the heritage community, the outcome of this operation could also be read as an example of "resistance to artification" and, at the same time, of "resistance against heritage-making", or as a case of "unattainable artification". This form of resistance is not uncommon, but it is "a built-in, structural component of the artification process" (Heinlich and Shapiro 2012: 12).

In the years following 2023, after DEM's artistic residency, the «traditional» masks were no longer considered. According to Cecere, who expressed this opinion on several occasions, there was an "internal resistance" that prevented his "discovery" from being properly valued and the commendable initiatives launched between 2019 and 2023 from continuing.

Although Cecere never positioned himself in opposition to or as an alternative to the "modern" carnival, but proposed working together on "a process that does not intend to exclude the rich wealth of skills and expertise acquired in four decades of working with papier-mâché" (Cecere 2021), some citizens of Stigliano claim that it is an invention, the fruit of his imagination or that of the elderly man who shared the story with him, and that these masks never actually existed.

Looking at this double operation from an anthropological point of view, some other issues come up. On one hand, it's important to consider the local context, which I've often found to be conflictual and in which friction emerged on several occasions during the ethnography, for example when reconstructing certain local events such as those relating to Carnival. On the other hand, to the complexity of the dynamics involved in selecting aspects of cultural memory to be promoted in the past and today, as well as the different social and political configurations involved.



Image 12. Traditional Stigliano masks artistically reinterpreted by artist.
Taken by DEM.

Moreover, I find indeed interesting the process of artification that characterised the two forgotten masks of Stigliano: the masks emerged, almost by chance, from the oral testimony of an elderly farmer; they became the subject of writing and graphic representation through the art of illustration; finally, they were the source of inspiration for the creative works of a contemporary artist.

Bargna (2021: 135) writes about cultural translation in the transition from craftsmanship or oral memory to an artistic context, as might be the case here with the artification of the memory of a mask transmitted orally:

“What happens to a certain constellation of meanings when it passes from one cultural context to another, from speech to writing, from words to images, from one material to another, from craftsmanship to art? What can be shared and what is added or lost in this work of translation? In all these cases, what passes from one field to another does not remain unchanged but is modified in transit, because such shifts always involve discontinuities, insertion into the coordinates of different systems that require relocation, translation. And since there is no translation that does not require interpretation, every understanding is inevitably accompanied by transformations”.

These are questions and issues that I believe are important to consider in this and other similar cases, regardless of the outcome of such operations and whether they are met with success or continuity. If only to avert certain consequences of processes that involve cultural elements, knowledge, practices and representations that are mostly fragile and, as in the case of Carnival masks, strongly connected to a ritual context.

Finally, although this is not strictly the case but it is worth pointing out, it may happen that even “focusing on the intentions of the Other” – in other words, “the native’s point of view” (Marano 2018: 17) – or belonging to a local context or heritage community is not enough. It is desirable that reflexivity, awareness of modes of appropriation and the ability to contextualise will be placed at the

centre of all the creative and artistic creation processes, internal or external to heritage communities.

7. Conclusions

Roberta Shapiro and Nathalie Heinich opened their article by asking: "How do people do or make things that come to be seen as works of art? In other words, when is there artification?" (Shapiro and Heinich 2012). The two authors proposed an answer that was intended to be symbolic, material and contextual, in other words, "procedural" (Shapiro 2019); one that attempts to connect "meanings, objects, interactions and institutions" (Shapiro and Heinich 2012), considering that "art is not a given and cannot be defined once and for all as the consecrated body of works of established institutions and disciplines. Rather, it is a construct and the result of social processes that are located in time and place" (Shapiro 2019: 265).

What they suggest is to tackle "an old question in a new way", they write, that is to say to attempt "not to define what art is nor how it should be considered", but to try to understand in a pragmatic way "but how and under what circumstances it comes about" (Shapiro and Heinich 2012), through critical observation, an interdisciplinary approach and the analysis of "specific concrete actions – discursive and material – that constitute the process (...) through which new objects and practices can emerge, by which relationships and institutions are also transformed" (Bassetti 2012: 1).

Some of the risks associated with artification processes, which contribute to the dangers of "reification" (Shapiro 2019), have already been mentioned. Gabriella D'Agostino (2019: 2) suggests that these could lie, for example, in "aestheticism", whereby "form, emotions, feelings and entertainment" end up prevailing over "content, thought and learning". Among the possible dangers, we could include a sort of fashion effect, certain formalisms, the commodification of elements of cultural heritage, but also the prevalence of the logic of the event over processes and practices.

Given the complexity of the phenomenon as an unstoppable cultural process, in addition to the variety of fields from which it can emerge and the multiple origins from which it is generated, it is necessary for anthropologists today to continue to question "how this process of 'aestheticisation', especially in the museum and heritage fields, is changing the roles, functions, profiles and postures of the actors involved in the process itself and, I would add, also the perception and way of influencing the sensibilities and tastes of the public" (D'Agostino 2019: 17). Furthermore in many cases "artification emerges not as a linear development but as a composite process, the cumulative result of concurrent trends that may be met by obstacles and contrary developments" (Shapiro 2019: 266).

Moreover, to highlight scenarios of undoubted interest, in which attempts at dialogue between artists and anthropologists emerge –still neither linear nor peaceful– alongside cases of appropriation by artists of cultural elements usually studied by anthropologists (Marano 2018, Santoro 2018), there are also increasingly cases in which anthropologists and ethnographers experiment with the languages of contemporary artistic practices (Marano 2013). Even participatory art, so highly praised and practised today, as supposedly in some of the case studies described, cannot but call for "a collective assumption of responsibility in terms of acceptance, adoption and care, which cannot be left to the artist alone" (Bargna 2021: 140).

This can happen when local knowledge, know-how and practices enter into a concrete and effective dialogue with the needs of artists, while respecting local memory and traditions, as well as cultural diversity. In the specific case of masks and masking rituals observed during contemporary carnivals in Basilicata, but not only, there is a clear reference to tradition, together with a "tendency to remain in the present by resorting to the outdated, drawing on the archaic and revitalising it on the level of communication, to make it the subject of a discourse of and on contemporaneity" (Mirizzi 2016: 45).

The three experiences of masks from Basilicata subject to processes of artification, which I have briefly described, in my opinion, show some of the ways in which the use of artistic practices has –intentionally or not– influenced not only discourse but also representations, perceptions and

imaginaries of masks and masking.

These are cases of experimentation with dense cultural elements, which manifest themselves in festive events and collective ritual performances, which are primarily valued “by contemporary intervention”, but are also present and active “in the embodied memory of people”. It seems clear to me that these can only translate into “poetic and political investments”, where even “individual and collective improvisations oriented in different directions” are produced (Padiglione 2017: 123).

In conclusion, while it is necessary for contemporary anthropology to carefully and critically observe the many “ways in which artification operates in different contexts and how artistic, ethnographic and traditional practices are increasingly hybridising, often dissolving into one another and even inventing new ones” (Padiglione and Bargna 2018: 10). On the other hand, I also agree with Padiglione (2018: 48) when he argues that the challenge could come precisely from the connections between anthropology and art, as happened with ethnography and art.

As the experiences described above reveal, at least with regard to cultural elements and related creative practices, which have become the subject of communication, reinterpretation and rediscovery. It is essential, however, that these connections are concretely capable of activating agency and reflexive processes. From this perspective, a possible common field of experimentation could therefore become a fruitful and unprecedented space for contact, dialogue and collaboration. It could foster processes of re-appropriation and re-signification of cultural elements and practices, primarily by individuals and groups that are locally based and territorialised, but aware that they are acting within a broader, denser and more multifaceted heritage scenario subject to continuous and countless transformations.

Notes

1. See: <https://www.materahub.com/event/crafting-tomorrow/>
2. The appropriation of anthropology by art and artists “can be schematised into “three main, often overlapping categories: 1) appropriation of ethnographic artefacts; 2) appropriation of ethnographic themes; 3) appropriation of ethnographic methods” (Marano 2018: 16).
3. As part of the activities of the European project Unveiling the Arts and the Crafts behind the Masks, we decided to consider the concept of the mask in its broadest sense and in reference to processes, practices, configurations, poetics and policies that revolve around what we could call the «culture of masking», albeit with a specific focus on the winter and Carnival masking rituals of the rural areas of the project partner countries. As we know, the mask is “an artificial object with which to cover the face (and body) of the man or woman wearing it”; but we also know that in certain cases “the covering of the face is only part of the costume of the masked individual” (Comba 1996). Moreover, as also emerged during the research conducted for the MASKS project, masquerade is not limited to masks in the strict sense, but “can be exercised by other objects” (Bargna 2004: 147). Therefore, it was unanimously decided to expand the repertoire of artefacts to be included in the concept of mask, considering e.g. music, dance, singing, etc.
4. According to Vincenzo Padiglione (2017: 123), the process of heritage-making of masks takes place “through the proliferation of discourses (e.g. reconceptualisations as ‘intangible heritage’), publications, conferences, cross-cultural studies, textual and museum reinterpretations, video representations, decontextualised re-presentations also in relation to other masks at gatherings and festivals, theatrical translations, etc.».
5. A description of modern and contemporary artistic experiments between art and anthropology can be found in the volume by Maria Grazia Carriero and Nicola Zito (2021). The two authors, an artist and an art historian, present cycles of artistic works and the ritual, aesthetic and interpretative dynamics relating to the masks represented.
6. Anthropo-poiesis is not only a useful investigative tool for anthropologists but, according to

Francesco Remotti, it is first and foremost a necessity for human societies, which do not limit themselves to adopting models of shaping but need to “develop, among their members, a deep and articulated knowledge of ‘being human’. In many cases, rituals, critical moments and moments of transition do not therefore take on the meaning of a simple repetition of tradition; on the contrary, by allowing a momentary departure from it, they lead to a ‘critical awareness of one’s own forms of humanity’. They propose the sense of “the arbitrariness of forms of humanity” and, consequently, the “sense of possibilities”, of the continuous inventions that can nourish “anthropo-poietic doing” (Remotti 2013: 52-53).

7. On the characteristics of ambiguity and metamorphosis in masks and masquerades, with particular reference to extra-European contexts, see Bargna 2004 and Comba 1996.

8. For information on all the editions of the Castronuovo di Sant’Andrea Carnival and the choice of contemporary artists who inspired the masks, see the website of the MIG International Museum of Graphic Arts:

https://www.mig-biblioteca.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=250:sti-maschr-queste-maschere&catid=14&Itemid=101&iccaldate=2024-12-1

9. For the concept of heritage community see: Council of Europe, Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Faro, 2005.

10. Informal conversation with Franco Caputo on 3 January 2025.

11. These are unfortunate events, which are not readily discussed in the village. The revival of the masking ritual was seen almost as a salvific proposal. Mauro Bubbico (2024: 14) recounts: “The ancient custom, which had fallen into disuse, was rediscovered in 1999, at the end of a dark period in the life of the Montese community. After ten years of violence due to extortion rackets targeting small local businesses, the population had shut themselves away in their homes and stopped gathering together (...). In light of these terrible events, the rediscovery of this apotropaic ritual can be seen as a moment of redemption from mafia violence and a desire to recover not only their autonomy but also their cultural identity”.

12. For Mauro Bubbico’s biography and work, see the website: <https://www.maurobubbico.it/>

13. As for the meanings of the posters linked to contingency, it is worth mentioning the example of the years without rituals, due to the health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, during which Bubbico created the two posters *Restate a casa* (Stay at home) and *Terza dose* (Third dose).

14. See the website: <https://www.maurobubbico.it/>

15. The video launching the work can be found on the Facebook page of APS Pro loco di Teana. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=497572716382460>

16. Silvio Giordano is a visual artist and creative director. His artistic research develops through various media: video art, photography, installation, sculpture, performance and Artificial Intelligence. His biography and works can be found on his website. URL: <https://www.silviogiordano.com/>

17. Informal conversation with Vincenzo Salvo on 28 February 2025.

18. See the post published on the Facebook page of APS Pro loco di Teana on 7 February 2025 dedicated to the video presentation event. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=497572716382460>

19. The description of the work is included in a press release I received from the artist.

20. See the article published on the Heritage Smartlab project website: Silvio Giordano recounts New Digital Humanism. <https://www.heritagesmartlab.it/silvio-giordano-racconta-il-new-digital-humanism/>

21. “The Teana Carnival is a sarcastic-theatrical representation of the life of the town and its inhabitants. As Vincenzo Salvo states, “Carnival served to mock all forms of power: the Church, the Law, Public Order”. This concept is strongly echoed by those who participate in the event. In fact, in the

traditional procession of Teana masks, you can see different figures. (...) The restlessness of the Bear, emphasised by the ringing of the bells it wears, causes fear among the spectators. The event ends with the Carnival Trial, in which 'the law is not the same for everyone' and where the judge condemns Carnevale for his misdeeds committed throughout the year. After being shot, Carnevale, having fallen from the stage where the trial takes place, is captured by the Bear and taken back to the woods, 'restoring' order" (excerpt from the mask inventory card, created by Antonella D'Auria for the MASKS project).

22. See the article: Silvio Giordano recounts the New Digital Humanism, cit.

23. Below is an excerpt from the press release for the presentation event, kindly provided by the artist: "The work, the result of the artist's intense immersion in the natural and cultural context of Teana, explores the link between the traditional bear mask, made from goat skins, and the new languages of video art, immersive video installation and artificial intelligence. Through a contemporary approach, Giordano offers a reinterpretation of the Urs mask, one of the most iconic figures of the Lucanian carnival, placing it in dialogue with the challenges and transformations of the present. Silvio Giordano's artistic research is part of a broader investigation between anthropology and transmediality, with the aim of renewing and reactivating the figure of the 'Diabolical Bear' «.

24. <https://www.prolocoteana.it/lurs-e-il-carnevale-di-teana-25/>

25. During the event, several anecdotes have been recounted about the experience with the artist, demonstrating both the shared nature of the project and the importance of the bonds, above all human, built during the residency, which certainly contributed to the success of the operation.

26. See the article: Silvio Giordano talks about the New Digital Humanism, cit.

27. For a description of the characteristics, history and symbolic meaning of the two masks, see Cecere 2021 and 2024.

28. Informal conversation with Mimmo Cecere on 31 March 2025.

29. For information on the Stigliano Carnival see the Basilicata Cultural Heritage Register: <https://patrimonioculturale.regione.basilicata.it/rbc/form.jsp?bene=87&sec=5>

30. Some works created on the theme of masks are present on the dedicated page of the artist's website. <https://demdemonio.org/Masks>

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