

Medio Calderoni – the poet of the comet

By Renzo Laporta

I met Medio several times, sharing the common interest of making toys and having friends in the same town of Ravenna.

Now he is no longer living anymore.

Mainly, I saw him playing or making homemade *colourful flying objects*. But for him, “Comet” was the name to call what we usually know as a kite.

I remember him as joyful and cheerful man, always dedicated to his passion of making kites all of them made with natural and scrap materials. Many times and with great generosity, I saw him leading workshops for children during traditional and local festivals. Genuinely and as a gift, he was there donating his time to make simple kites.

Some of the kites he made are now permanently displayed in two different Museums, which are “La Lucertola” (The Lizard) in Ravenna, and “The Eco-museum” in Villanova di Bagnacavallo (near Ravenna).

His own approach to the kite’s engineering was really practical. He never made a proper design for his hand-made kites, he only made a simple sketch, drawing with pencil on pages of old diaries. But those drafts were enough to start making incredible flying objects. After the sketch, the process was mainly led by his own imagination, experience, empirical methods, and the knowledge of tools and materials.

As Roberto wrote in his notes about Medio: “...from his own hands come out vessels, butterfly, airplane, huge birds with wings and wonderful little kites simply decorated by small elements.” In fact and looking closely at these kites, Medio was always rejecting any kind of modern technology and the use of special materials. Tradition was the stream-path to complete the making tasks.

Medio is well also known among his friends as having a great natural talent for storytelling of his own life. Everybody liked his stories, which were all different from each other. Medio lived 89 years participating to one of the most changeable century, and this contributed to give him “materials for our ears”.

“You were sitting near Medio and drinking his stories *as a tisana*. Little or nothing ceremonious, you would get out of his garage a bit taller and feeling thankful to the world” wrote Primo, one of Medio’s best friends.

“Like the other genuine storytellers, and from the beginning of the story, for him it was easy to catch people’s attention and to make listeners’ imaginations fly. His stories were a mix of many tangled things, always combined with humour. In them you can find things of his own childhood and war experiences, kites and his passion for motorcycles, or the first time he saw his wife or that time when he was a coach of the football children’s club. He was so capable to catch the people who appeared the last interested” wrote Roberto about his “master” in kite making.

Finding him was easy. You would usually see him in his workshop, that was his own garage, during the making process of some kites. Otherwise it was possible to spot him in the nearest park, where he was to test his kites.

These kites made him famous amongst kite-makers across the world. Often he was called to preside kite-festivals in different European and Asian towns. Many people around the world still remember him as traditional genius of the kite making art.

“Nemo profeta in patria”, Unfortunately is usually the case, his name and value was better known outside his own town.

With elegance and sensitivity, Primo ended the article about the peaceful Medio saying “he was an international artist of kites”. This article is part of a manual on *kite-making for children and teachers*, recently distributed in the schools of Ravenna.

In his own garage you were to find a lot of objects together in a mysterious mess around tables. Some of them were related with Medio's past job as an upholsterer. From this job he kept alive the use of different suitable glues for different kite-making purposes. Only a few new and old kites were standing on some shelves, all the others were, and still are now, kept in some museums around the world, donated with extreme generosity or given to many children and friends.

Like all good makers of toys built with natural materials, he knew well where and when to pick up the needed resources, such as reeds from rivers or marshes.

Going in the right place, in the right season, moving from one to another corner of the town to get the proper light and sufficiently strong paper and strings. After that, there was the time to store, dry and select materials before he cut and put them into shape by knots and the use of hemp or jute bits of strings.

With the help of the flame of a little stove he was warming up materials, obtaining rounded and bended shapes for his sticks, building with carefully balanced tension incredible supportive nets.

Through this knowledge, he distinguished himself amongst the others, becoming notable for the outline of his objects. All of them always elegant and graceful like sculptures in the air, fluctuating as dancers despite the complexity of the object.

In his field he was a genius, giving to his creations innovative and unique characteristics, still keeping traditional techniques and simplicity as a basis to build upon.

This was something that made him famous as a master, a well skilled practitioner in this particular and popular art.

With intuition he was capable to complete aerodynamic tasks and to find the suitable streamline for the objects he wanted to fly.

The *Poet of Comets* started his journey as kite-maker during his childhood, after he was amazed by looking at the flight of a butterfly. From that moment to his end he never stopped making kites.

Dressed in his own homemade waistcoat, with his white-hair and old fashioned spectacles perched on the tip of his nose, he looked like another Geppetto (the Pinocchio's father) that worked to merely make children happier.

A really big thank you to Primo Fornaciari for his tips, information and pictures.

**For further information see www.medioeisuoiaquiloni.it
and you can send message to : ciao@medioeisuoiaquiloni.it**