

Ugo La Pietra was born in Bussi sul Tirino, Pescara, Italy in 1938.

He graduated in Architecture at the Milan Polytechnic in 1964, when he also embarked on his research into the visual arts and music. Artist, architect, designer and researcher in the great sphere of communication systems, the activity developed by La Pietra is oriented to the clarification and definition of the “individual-environment” relationship. At the beginning of this work process, La Pietra made learning tools (comprehension models) that tended to transform the traditional “work-spectator” rapport. He works inside and outside the disciplines, always declaring himself a “researcher in the visual arts”; anomalous and inconvenient artist and therefore hard to classify.

His research of the 1960s has led him across diverse artistic currents – sign art, conceptual art, environment art, social art, narrative art, art cinema, new writing, extra-media, new-eclecticism, radical architecture and design – to concretise in his theories of the “De-balancing System”, an original and personal contribution to European radical design. In 1959-60, he started his “sign research” in painting, aimed at recovering a symbolic experimental minimum. In 1962, he founded the “Gruppo del Cenobio” with Agostino Ferrari, Ettore Sordini, Angelo Verga and Arturo Vermi, developing an activity that culminated in shows oriented to the sign art dimension. In 1968, he designed and produced “Ambiente Audiovisivo” (“Audiovisual Environment”) at the Milan Triennale. In 1969, he won several painting awards: the “Premio Termoli”, the “Premio Jan Mirò”, the “Premio Cesare da Sesto”. He also took part in the 4th Week of Painting at the Johanneum Museum in Graz and created an urban installation for the “Campo Urbano (“Urban Field”) exhibition in Como. In 1970 he was invited to the experimental exhibition at the 35th Venice Biennale. In 1971 he designed urban audiovisual tools for Trigon 71 in Graz, Austria. In 1973, he was the founding member of Global Tools, the first and only group of “Architects, Designers and Radical Artists”. In 1978, he was invited to the “Social Art” (E. Crispoldi) section of the Venice Biennale and to the “Art Cinema” section (V. Fagone), “Utopia, crisi dell’architettura. Architettura radicale” (“Utopia, Crisis of Architecture. Radical Architecture”) (L. V. Masini). In 1981, he co-curated and designed the set for the exhibition “Lo spazio scenografico nella televisione italiana” (“Scenographic Space in Italian Television”) at the 16th Milan Triennale. He was curator (with G. Bettetini and A. Grasso) of the “La casa telematica” (“The Computerised Home”) exhibition at the Fiera di Milano. In 1989 he was awarded the “Utopia” prize by Eugenio Battisti during the 3rd International Conference on Utopias at the Teatro Argentina of Rome. In 1991, he organised a personal exhibition (with an environment dedicated to the Mediterranean ?/ living unit) at the Musée d’Art Contemporain de Lion. In 1992, he was the curator of the “La vita tra cose e nature, sezione naturale virtuale” (“Life between things and nature, virtual natural section”) at the Milan Triennale. Between 1993-2003, he organised several personal shows (Galleria Borgogna, Avida Dollars, Arte Studio of Milan, Rocca Paolina in Perugia), in which he uses designs, paintings and objects to explore the themes of “New Territoriality”: Genius Loci, Nationalism, Ethnic Cleansing and United Europe. In 1997, he organised a personal exhibition of mosaic objects at the Fortezza da Basso in Florence. In 1998-99-2000, he curated the exhibitions “The Diversities” at the Fortezza da Basso in Florence. In 2001, Vittorio Fagone organised his own personal exhibition at the Fondazione Ragghianti of Lucca. In 2002, the Provincial Council of Perugia organised an extensive personal review of la Pietra’s work at the Rocca Paolina. In 2005, Cineteca Italiana organised a retrospective of all his 1970s’ films at the Spazio Oberdan of the Provincia of Milan, presented by Vittorio Fagone. Ugo La Pietra has produced more than 900 personal and collective exhibitions at the Venice Biennale in 1970, 1978 and 1980; at the Milan Triennale in 1968, 1972, 1979-80-81, 1993 and 1996; and has shown his work at the Museum of Modern Art of New York; at the Centro Pompidou of Paris; at the Museum of Contemporary Craft of New York; at the Palazzo Galvani Gallery of Bologna; at the Neue Galerie of Graz; at the Palazzo dei Diamanti of Ferrara; at the Fortezza da Basso in Florence; at the Ragghianti Foundation in Lucca; at the Musée Departemental of Gap; at the Museum Für Angewandte Kunst in Cologne; at the Nordio Linz Museum; at the Permanente Museum of Milan; at the Royal College of Art in London; at the

Chaterauroux Biennial; at the Albisola Biennial, at the “Masterpieces” exhibition - Palazzo Bricherasio, Turin; at the Umberto Mastroianni Foundation of Arpino (FR); at the Spazio Oberdan (Cineteca Italiana); and at the Villa Croce Museum in Genoa. In addition, he has been editor of the magazines In, Progettare Inpiù, Brera Flash, Fascicolo, Area and Abitare con Arte, and is currently editor of Artigianato tra Arte e Design. He has also been the sector editor for Domus, D'ARS and AU. Winner of the first prize at the Nancy Film Festival in 1975, of the Compasso d'Oro award in 1979, of the 2° Prize of the Competition for the ex-Manifattura Tabacchi Urban Park in Bologna in 1985, Ugo La Pietra was also nominated for the 1st level of the Competition for the restructuring of the San Lorenzo Columns in Milan.

“In the Eighties all my work is focused on the attempt to match conceptuality, cultivated in the Sixties and Seventies, and the growth of a desire for spectacularity. The XVIII century garden, place for a pleasant stay (spectacularity) and contemplation (conceptuality) was the model to which I referred directly, but more often as an ideal space for the representation of the two categories above mentioned.” (...)

“Unfortunately today there’s the lack of any social green theory, invention and practice; today we accept to call it standard and have it sold in square metres per inhabitant, whereas the communal gardens are filled of monuments entitled to the officer, the sergeant, policeman, and other many, too many, fighters. So while I was thinking about urban places organized beyond the so-called “garden art”, while I was designing spaces organized and quipped as spaces to enjoy in the fullest sense of the word, I also tried to create some objects that recovered these design ambitions.

Natural objects, vases with gardens...that allude to a renewed use of figuration in furniture and to the desire of recover a disciplinary area as it once was the ornate. Having always in mind the production world but maintaining the necessary distances towards the latter!” (...)

The spaces that I often imagined and designed are organized and equipped as places to enjoy in the fullest sense of the world: spaces for a rest, spaces for educating, spaces for arousing curiosity, spaces for surprising... Thus, a particular bench is no longer conceived only as a piece of furniture for a rest, but as a place from which to watch...an “observatory”. (...)

From this basic observation, for example, the project of “Viewpoint Gazebos” was born: facilities where you can stand at different heights, with different angles, from where one can “stand and watch”; almost like some camerae obscurae built in the countryside. These are constructions designed to stimulate and enrich our “stay in the parkland”. (...)

Going beyond the idea of an architecture increasingly made of monuments to the archistar’s ambition (“monumental architecture is the aestheticism of a society instead of its accomplishment”), limiting the growth of objects where design seems engaged exclusively in satisfying our vices and allaying our fears in the closed domestic spaces, we should instead develop a subject area capable of triggering processes of creative involvement, making good use of knowledge ranging from urban anthropology to sociology, art architecture and design “inside” and “for” the society. (...)

The architecture insists on building houses, streets, neighbourhoods, cities introducing the “greenery” in the built-up areas, meant as an element capable of accomplishing or “performing” various functions. The architecture always forgets that greenery, unlike the built-up areas, has its own life and its own development and always got it better of it throughout time. (...) Today the greenery in the city is forced to deal with traffic jam, parking, it is stifled by the asphalt, it is placed in a few ground inches flower-beds, organized in small gardens where indefinite green frames far too many memorials! The street furniture, the discipline born in the early Eighties that was supposed to give meaning, value and identity to the places, it has become in a short time a project area committed to shaping the bollards, bins, benches, barriers...