



interview

Insegnare la bellezza, trasmetterla ai figli,
rispettare la loro indipendenza e
ritrovarli accanto, capaci e all'avanguardia.

**MARIANGELA
& GINEVRA
CALISTI**

DI PETRA BARKHOF E PATRIZIA MEZZANZANICA

*Teaching beauty, passing it on to their children,
respecting their independence and
finding them beside, competent and avant-garde.*

BY PETRA BARKHOF E PATRIZIA MEZZANZANICA

Mariangela Calisti, gallery owner and interior designer, lives for art and beauty. I have known her for many years, since I was still working in design and doing photo shoots of houses. Hers have always had an unmistakable style, like her galleries, exhibitions, parties and herself, with her extravagant way of dressing and personality. Everything Mariangela touches becomes special: whether it is a carpet, a painting, or the most insignificant of details. She is not only a great expert and art lover, but possesses the art of combining objects, of making them coexist in harmony, of finding the perfect place for them, in spaces that she designs to be both comfortable and refined. There is not a corner, in her homes or in those she has designed, that is not taken care of. And everything comes so naturally to her that I am amazed every time. At least as much as I was amazed, when her children were very young, at how naturally they moved between important works of art and pieces of design. Who knows how much damage mine would have done, whereas they never broke anything!

I have always admired her, and not just for her taste but for the enthusiasm, energy and determination she puts into her work. Also for the ge-

nerous and helpful friend that she is. Today we are shooting in her beautiful country house in the hills around Pavia, where she lives, and I am happy to interview her. As soon as I decided that the theme of this new issue would be Art, I immediately thought about her because she is truly a Lady of Art. And then, very recently, she became the grandmother of Lapo, her daughter Ginevra's sweet little boy. What better occasion for a family portrait for Scimparello? Also because she and Ginevra are not only mother and daughter but, as you will discover in this interview, form a close-knit team.

I can't help wondering what kind of grandmother she will be. To look at her she seems like the quietest of grandmothers, in love with her grandson like all of them, but who knows, probably, as soon as he learns to walk, she will take him to exhibitions and markets as she did with Ginevra and her brother Gian Maria.

And who knows if Lapo too, when he grows up, will end up being involved in art, or architecture, like his mother, father, uncle and even grandfather Roberto who, it is said, literally lost his head for him! He will certainly grow up in art. Under his eyes will pass sketches, photographs, fabric

and wallpaper samples, reams of colours, compositions, objects of all kinds (that for sure he will never brake!) There are so many things that Mariangela has done and so many projects that she and Ginevra have for the future. Especially now that, after Mariangela's appointment as Cultural Councillor for the city of Pavia, mother and daughter have returned to work together.

It has been a long time since we first met!

I still perfectly remember your first gallery and the design exhibition you were going to set up.

I remember it very well too. It was the old quadriportico in Via Santa Maria alle Pertiche and the exhibition was on 20th century Italian design, with a few pieces of Viennese Secession and Scandinavian design.

Although you had started with painting, if I'm not mistaken.

Yes, always from the 20th century, with artists who were then considered minor and later the exhibition on Magic Realism at Palazzo Reale made them known to the general public.

Then came contemporary art.

Again with almost unknown artists, who later found their place in the art world. That was perhaps the most intense and powerful period of my work as a gallery owner. We were really in the vanguard.

How old was Ginevra then?

About 10 years old. I always took her along with her brother Gian Maria. They were always there: at exhibitions, markets, biennials. It was tiring at times, it wasn't always easy to make those environments coexist with children, but I managed to interest them, to motivate them. And they liked it. I never gave up being a present mother but I never gave up my job either.

Then, Ginevra, you grew up...

Yes, I enrolled in architecture and while I was studying, together with mum we opened a cultural association dedicated to young people in a historic building in Pavia. There I started curating the first exhibitions and liaising with artists.

Are you Mariangela a child of art?

I don't remember.

Not really, although my family does have a history linked to art. My cousin is a restorer of ancient works for the Metropolitan and the Uffizi, another cousin is a jockey. Somehow, in one field or another, there has always been an artistic streak.

Whereas you, Ginevra, were definitely born a daughter of art.

Yes, there has always been an air of art and architecture in our house. When I enrolled at university I was initially more oriented towards Literature or Cultural Heritage, but then my bookworm nature, my passion for studying, my desire to know the history behind buildings and works of art pushed me towards Architecture. And after some personal experience, working with my mother came naturally. Without pressure from either of us.

How are you at work? Do you always get along or do you sometimes clash?

M. As far as I'm concerned, Ginevra and I get along very well. I can't say whether by chance, by temperament or because we have always lived a symbiotic life, but there are never any major disagreements between us. Confrontations yes. Many. But no clashes.

G. On a sensibility level, my mum and I are similar. Then, as she says, we sometimes argue, talk, express different ideas, but always with the aim of finding an agreement.

And character-wise are you similar or different?

G. Mum is impulsive, she has a very well-defined personality. You can tell immediately if you like something or not. I think I'm more diplomatic, more thoughtful, (even too much so, sometimes), I study the situation, I watch how it evolves, what the reactions are.

M. I am from the old guard: the paper and pencil guard. She grew up with technology, with autocad and photoshop. At the beginning we had a generational clash about that, which was then resolved because, indeed, technology offers many advantages. So much so that today I rely completely on her for this part.

But if you were to work on a project separately, without seeing or talking to each other, would the result be similar?

G. In the structure and division of space, certainly yes. The details might change perhaps, each of us has our own influences. But the soul of the house would be the same.

M. I agree. In the three years that I was councillor for Culture, I had to leave all the work we were doing together, and Ginevra not only completed them in perfect harmony with what was our common style, but also had other personal commissions.

Besides the houses, you also worked together on the Babylon project...

M. Oh, yes. A beautiful project, a completely different gallery from the previous ones. A place where you could find new atmospheres, a set of objects

that would give you suggestions. We toured the markets of half of Europe, loading all kinds of objects into a van at dawn and having the time of our lives. An extraordinary thing came out of it, unfortunately short-lived. First the assignment as councillor and then the pandemic did not allow us to go ahead with the project.

G. But it's still there, on standby. It was a fleeting love and the desire remained.

And now there's little Lapo. What would you like to pass on to your son, Ginevra, that you got from your mum?

We really are a very close family. My parents have the merit of having taught us without prevarication and passed on strong values. And this is what I would also like for my son.

Will he also become an architect when he grows up?

I don't know. The chances are there because my husband Giulio is also an architect. We hope he will choose another profession, instead. Maybe an accountant, like Giulio's father, or a doctor, a lawyer... But he will do what he decides to do, freely, as happened to my brother and me. And if he really decides for architecture, we'll still be happy. I just wish he had the same values I inherited, that he would follow his passions, so that he would become a serene and aware person.