

## UNIDEE - UNIVERSITY OF IDEAS 2016

*There is no surer way of evading the world than by Art,  
and no surer way of uniting with it than by Art.*  
Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *The Maxims and Reflections of Goethe*

In 2015, UNIDEE - UNIVERSITY OF IDEAS, inheriting a long experience of residency for international artists (2000-2012), launched within the unique and special context of Cittadellarte – a research centre and an exhibition area – **the experimentation of an educational prototype or ‘model’ that combined theory with practice**, which bases the processes of learning on doing and discovery, favouring the exercising of imagination through a meeting with the differences and plurality of languages, and that responds to the desire and need to delve more deeply into things, phenomena and stories through relationships, dialogue and the exchanging of views of the participants. Through residential dynamics, UNIDEE **sees education as a life experience and social process characterised by the particular cognitive and emotional intensity of the exchange** by members of the **spontaneous community** that is formed each week within the module.

This is an educational model based on a **research and project laboratory** under the guidance of a mentor who is an expert in the theme of that specific module and the active participation of a guest with the objective of examining the topics in their complexity and many facets, trying to maintain a **balance of the thought forms (theories) and free or unforeseeable situations (creative processes)**. The participants create a **common space, conversational and relational**, in which attention is placed on the procedure and final collective shape that closes the educational experience without turning to easy and pre-established formulae but through the organisation of complicated situations that vary each time, without worrying about precise goals that need to be completed but reaching their conclusions slowly following the time required for reflection, deeper consideration and imagination. The laboratory modality with which we work together with mentors requires the participants to be involved in questioning their own field, using dialogue and collaboration to evolve their ability to interact in this game as though exercising in a gym of complexities, the unpredictability of performing moves; this allows the **development of a doing attitude, giving value to mistakes, comparing contrasting points of view**, opening up to view and do things differently than usual, **shifting from one position to another without losing attraction for personal territory or language**; favouring the **ability to localize problems**, enter into details, **ask questions**, confound significance and uses, and **create new openings in meanings**.

The didactic approach is a *demo-practical* one of responsible use of power, in the manner of circulating and distributing knowledge within the group, which is expressed, for example, in the dual-dialogue between mentor and guest and between the mentor and participants where the **horizontal and**

**circular sharing of knowledge is aimed at the creation of a common ground and language.** A brief time, a pause of one week or longer (for those deciding to return) is what the participants allow themselves away from their usual routine so as to expand on a topic or add final touches to a project, and therefore return to study or work in their own contexts. The intent of the modules is to form **'artivators'**, people who intend to use **art as a methodology, practice and language**, becoming agents for the **activation of responsible actions and processes in urban transformation and social emancipation** in the territories in which they live and carry out their professional activities.

The originality of the UNIDEE programme lies in its **collaborating with Universities and Academies of the Fine Arts** so as to identify reciprocal shortcomings and intervene in the more immediate critical necessities to **elaborate together and find another path compared to that indicated by the traditional educational system**; and, furthermore, thanks to the flexibility of the modules, to **invent new residential formats**, similar to what happened with the re-defining of long residencies and in the development of **two projects co-financed by the European Union** "Ottomans and Europeans" and "Understanding Territoriality: Identity, Place & Possession – TIPP", where every week the artists in residence met couples of intellectuals and operators in the sector at an international level and exchanged ideas and opinions with them, having collective discussions full of new stimuli and in-depth content for the final Open Studios.

Encouraged by the unexpected **high number of participants** (111 presences from 16 different countries) and their enthusiastic feedbacks and proposals for future developments of this new educational model experimented in 2015, the intention for 2016 is to continue to analyse and thus fine-tune this educational method through the close examination of three other macro-topics, which are **research, gift and alteration**, considered central to both theoretical reflection and the practice of artists operating in the public sphere. With an interdisciplinary approach articulating these three concepts according to the *Trinamic principle* of Michelangelo Pistoletto, that bases the cognitive process on the combination of detachment of an analytical approach with the implication of who is profoundly involved in the situations, the three semantic areas are considered in their inter-relationships as sites for generating forms of resistance, new possibilities in meaning and social transformation.

The word **'research'** contains the act of **'searching anew'** that refers back to semantic proximity, as well as for assonance, in the action of **'encircling'** something, a study object, a disciplinary field, a territory and leads us back to that which is an aspect of the study method, in other words to the **condition of losing one's self while researching**, with the impression of moving in a labyrinth (in which the work, from *labor*, shares the same etymological root *labh*) to regain the thread, relocate direction. Besides the willingness to lose one's self, the research also includes **the strain of intellectual and poetical in-depth analysis, attitudes of care and dedication, the ability to enter into the crevices, into the circles of things and discover hidden details**

**due to curiosity and amazement.** Today this is nearly a privilege, as it is so difficult, to take a break from study, without taking anything away from work, to think according to the slow time of research that favours activities of reflection, impossible under the pressures of a project.

The latter, was already used by conceptual artists in the late 1960s (in particular by the Art and Project Gallery in Amsterdam) to denote **a proposal for an artwork**, from the 1990s it became a broad term used to include various types of social art (collective practices, groups of self-organised activists, participatory art and socially involved and curatorial experiments), in which duration and process are more privileged compared to the aesthetic solution. In the present phase of cognitive capitalism dominated by networks and projects **our working life is described by a succession of 'projects'**, based on efficient connections the value of which lies in the fact that they allow us to generate or enter into a following project, often very different in context and content (L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2005).

Having *liberated* the restricted space of the canvas and metabolised the processes and *dispositifs* through which life enters art and vice-versa, **the challenge for artists today is to not abandon their own field of research but to occupy themselves with it, taking care to examine any potential in depth and to cultivate new possibilities.** To not tie one's self totally to the exclusive rules and transformative power of the art system, but rather stop without losing interest in one's own research and language, and without being satisfied with *crossings* connected to the themed projects of a certain Biennale or exhibition or space.

*What are the survival strategies to resist the neo-liberalist spiral emphasized by multiple projects? How do we regain the slow and unproductive time for research today?*

By '**gift**' a particular kind of gift is meant, the *munus*, aligned with the semantics of **duty**. The *munus*, contained in the Latin etymology of the term 'community' from *communitas*, is written into the dynamics of obligation: once accepted, it requires a suitable action to be released from that obligation (R. Esposito, *Communitas*, 1998). It involves making an exchange, which puts into motion a continuous exchange, and this creates a bond between the individuals based on a common **commitment**. Considering the *munus* as a starting point, a new added value is found for the community and the *relationship* in juxtaposition with the *donum armonicum*, carried out in conformity with the autonomy of the subject and spontaneity of the gesture. With the *munus* the project of modernity and modern individualism is interrupted thus handing people the duty that binds them to each other and establishing between them a '*contamination of relationship*'. The gift produces an asymmetry determined by the obligation to give, as though it expected to be given back or that something be returned in its place.

**Therefore the gift, while on its own light, is in truth harder than the contract**, in fact, it is a kind of non-crystallised contract. This is why it creates

**social ties** and alliances. The **promise** is another variation of the gift, it is implicit, and means we owe **trust** and loyalty to each other. **Recognition** is the aspect of the gift that establishes dependence, asymmetry, a debt of gratitude towards another.

The intent is to investigate those signs, artistic experimentation and experiences that, uniting the dimensions of duty and freedom of dependency and inter-dependency as well as interest and disinterest, generate **new life models in common and sustainability**, outside of economic mechanisms that instead involve every human activity, based on social ties that are formed through the gift and **generosity**.

*Is it possible to have models for sharing riches and exchange mechanisms based on the value of a gift and hospitality? How do we stimulate new forms of social relationships based on reciprocal trust?*

The concept of **alteration** contains both the action that makes one thing 'more' than itself, as well as its result, or rather the mutation, modification or change that occurs through contact, relationship and comparison. The term 'modification' and the verb 'modify' come from '*modo / modus*' and '*to do / facere*', and indicate the introduction of acts that generate ways of being and doing *for* the other and *in virtue* of the other. Dealing with alteration means carrying out **a reflection on different modalities, forms and methods to active transformative processes**.

The choice of this word carries the intent to speak of the also delicate, but increasingly more evident, **relationship between art and politics**. Facing a crisis of the big forms of social mediation, it seems that attention regarding the functions of some of these historic models of mediation are returning to centre stage and, among these, **the role of art in the creation of 'another' meaning of things and for the projecting of possible situations next to or in alternative to the dominant categories**. Actions, material and immaterial forms, symbolic and aesthetic, political and social, can alter and transfigure the value systems of *institutions* and re-signify the terms thus generating 'other' models and new institutional imaginaries. This involves social processes that, exploring the *cracks* of semantic and functional categories and broadening the sphere of what is possible, in certain cases represent sources of disturbance and determine the place and time of a crisis, resistance and conflict (J. Rancière).

Having defined the investigation and activated the relational mechanisms (thus combining the two previous terms), it becomes inevitable to talk about ethics: **the artist's responsibility** lies in his commitment to intervene in conditions through action and grant continuity to the dynamics that co-involve the public space and social relationships so that they become a part of daily life and, though without any guarantees, can contribute to the change and 'improvement' of the territory and way of living in it.

*What risks does an artist run when he intervenes in a social context changing habits and rules? How can the possibility of change indicated by art be transformed into a common language?*

**The mentors and guests for 2016** are (in order of appearance): Expodium (Nikos Doulos and Bart Witte); Jason Waite with Adelita Husny-Bey; Lara Almarcegui with Marco Giardino; Cesare Pietroiusti with Aldo Spinelli; Martino Gamper; Giusy Checola with 'L'Italia che Cambia' and 'Transition Town Biella'; Maddalena Marciano with Claudia Losi and in collaboration with Fashion Office of Cittadellarte/ B.E.S.T; Attila Faravelli and Enrico Malatesta with Nicola Ratti; Luigi Coppola with Daniel Blanga Gubbay; Antoni Muntadas with Alessandra Messali; Adrian Paci with Edi Muka; Aria Spinelli with Núria Güell; STEALTH.unlimited (Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen) with Erik Jutten and Piet Vollaard; Daria Filardo with Olafur Eliasson in conversation with Michelangelo Pistoletto.

A difference compared to 2015 can be found in **the experiment of two residential modules lasting two weeks** in collaboration with STEALTH.unlimited (Ana Dzokic and Marc Neelen) and with Adrian Paci. **The desire to expand the two laboratories in space and time come from the singularity of the proposed contexts, able to offer new pathways of sense and content to the collective discussions begun in Cittadellarte, and thus offer a more articulate critical analysis of the macro-themes being studied.** The group will move with STEALTH to **Rotterdam**, an ex-industrial city that is undergoing a rapid process of conversion in a cosmopolitan creative centre; while the participants from Biella will go with Paci to **Shkodër**, the artist's home town, to his new *Art House* space where activities will continue with encounters and conferences with artists and local professionals in the sector in a private and familiar environment.

In 2016, the 'historic' support of the **Fondazione Zegna** in the development of the UNIDEE programme will be consolidated and reinforced through **the co-project of a laboratory and research module conducted by Martino Gamper** aimed at a selected group of international creative artists, with the object of creating prototypes derived from a collective and individual reflection on themes, dear to the two Foundations, of territory, relationships and post-industrial work.

New alliances will be formed with national and local actors, such as the newspaper **L'Italia che cambia** and the **Transition Town Biella** movement through their project involvement in organising the second module 'TIPP', co-financed by the Creative Europe Programme of the EU. Furthermore, an interesting international collaboration will begin with the **Instituto Superior de Arte-ISA of La Havana in Cuba** based on the bilateral exchanges of students, artists and researchers, while relationships will be built with Universities and Academies of Fine Arts in Italy and other countries, among which is the **Escuela de Bellas Artes de Medellín in Columbia** with the organisation of two educational activities: a three-week module in Spanish aimed at a selected group of students and a research

residency with the purpose of writing an essay, reserved for a researcher selected by a panel of judges.

To intensify the dynamics and international nature that have always characterised Cittadellarte, the **programme of long-production residential stays (lasting two months) will continue based on the format of laboratory modules** aimed at international artists, in collaboration with institutional partners: **Illycaffé s.p.a., Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation, Qattan A. M. Foundation, the Resò network**, without forgetting the **Unfunded Residency of UNIDEE** and the **Connective Residency**.

*Cecilia Guida, Director and Curator*