

## E rnesto Basile's professional work–study

bears witness to his continuity of activity. We find more than family belongings and evidence of professional affinity between the protagonists of this story, from generation to generation. It is more a matter of objects and places, memories which have been handed down in private spaces and reactivated in the spaces of the city, to the present days.

The size of an architectural firm, as there may be some partnerships with private clients – of course, in this matter the more immediate association is that with the name of Florio – tends to be seen, however, as an element of connection with “the public”, municipalities in the first instance (Pics. 1–3).

Basile's architectural works, and those of their school, can be explained as offshoots of a thought, an idea as well as the practice of construction and design that is more akin to urban planning, because their work has contributed to the face and character of the city. But it would be more correct to say “cities”, because of the range and timespan of activities associated with them persisted for more than century in many places as an on–going dialogue with the environments in which they chose to work and the places where their work was reflected.

An architect's work cannot be isolated, even when he or she imagines and draws never–tried or visionary solutions. This is true even when the architect knows that those solutions will never be realized. The luck of the Basile's studio was its great ability to work within a professional practice that was home to an entrepreneurial and pragmatic spirit, with an artist's vision and an active intellectual

sense in society. This allowed Basile's atelier to become a catalyst for the energies not just of Ernesto Basile himself but for other professionals, intellectuals and artists (Pic. 4).

He recognized in the customers, and in some cases he raised, the desire to represent and identify themselves more and more in their "houses" (Pics. 5-7), through decorative details, furnitures (Pic. 8), objects, comfortable spaces, a modern way of living modulated on a wise knowledge of the past and a designer brand: "Ernesto Basile Architect". The exhibition, called "Basile's Atelier. Crossroads of Arts and Crafts", which took place in the large and picturesque headquarters of the Historical Archive of the City of Palermo, lets us enter into the places that were dearest to the Basile architects. Between a range of different works, reveals great watercolors of Giovan Battista Filippo, with all their amazing details, we publish in this volume several unpublished and unknown works. These include the presentation, which is shown for the first time to the general public, as well as the specialists, of two pencil drawings with decoration studies, signed by the young Eduardo Basile, who is known to have participated with his brother Ernesto in the construction management of the Massimo Theater. And then, but not least, we had the opportunity to show the objects that were on the Ernesto Basile's drawing desk, his tools, his pocket diaries, his notebooks he was used to keeping in his hand for an idea, a sudden sketch. The volume of drawings is impressive in itself, and provides evidence that we are dealing with a team of highly passionate men, including Giovan Battista Filippo, then Ernesto, Alceste and Eduardo, and finally, in the last generation, Roberto, Giovan Battista Filippo Junior and Massimo. All were so totally taken with their jobs that this was not just a business received as a legacy but an art – and more, a reason for living. I believe this explains the success of the exhibition, which was given an extension

because of the size of the turnout and the interest with which it was welcomed in the city by the numerous visitors, women, men and students of different ages. We couldn't wish for more. The original idea, the heart of the idea – immediately seized by Maurizio Carta, whom I want to publicly thank here for his support started with the exhibition we held last autumn at the Villino Florio (“Ernesto Basile and the Portrait”) and for the sensitivity and depth of his inaugural speech – was to not only to open the Basile's atelier, presenting the men and the soul of their work, but to research the materials kept at the Basile Archive and reveal the coming and going of people who, in an osmotic way, took and gave to the Basile architects. During our on-going work, I felt as though we were under the spell of the documents, and it was then that we understood that an audience would need the warm sight of the archive, not only the fruition of documents to know and love the Basile architects, the ancestors of those who care about our city. This was initial spirit which at the heart of this project as well as Massimiliano Marafon Pecoraro, who was instrumental in proposing an extension for this project, confident that visitors would be eager for further investigation. On the other hand, believing that this story has unfolded exclusively around working relationships would be reductive and simplistic. The documents tell us that it was not so. There is affection in those lists of appointments. There is loving care for the visits that at the end of December Ernesto with his wife Ida was used to making annually to the dearest friends and colleagues. There are generations that intertwine and lessons to bring forward, and then new ideas to change something. It occurs to me that the meeting that took place at the Massimo Theater in Ernesto's studio, on February 8, 1897, was full of love and care. I see with my own eyes that document, filled with signatures placed beneath a short text, still speaks eloquently:

“The undersigned, who have gathered together in the studio of Prof. E. Basile at the Massimo Theater day February 8, 1897 at 16, have mutually agreed to combine their work and form a private art exhibition in the upcoming May holidays. All expenses necessary for this purpose will be equally borne by them.”

It was not exactly a beginning, because the story is older, but the time was ripe. Ernesto had recently turned 40 and he was an accomplished professional. Around him, certainly looking at other more famous secessions, desires and intentions gather as a clot of energies. Among the signers in the secession of Palermo there are Michele Cortegiani, Ernesto Armò, Rocco Lentini, Antonio Ugo (Pic. 13), Benedetto Civiletti, Giuseppe Patricolo, Mario Rutelli, Ettore De Maria, Luigi Di Giovanni, Francesco Lojacono and Carmelo Giarrizzo (Pic. 9). Giovan Battista Filippo senior had been dead for six years and Ernesto had his studio in that suffered huge construction site that is the Massimo Theater. Mindful of the hard days there was also Mario Rutelli. More than a contributor to Ernesto, he was a partner.

It's a partnership with the Rutelli family that lasts and that will see the realization of numerous works. Ernesto compiled his pocket diaries day-to-day between 1892 and 1932, the year of his death. Just opening one of these diaries, we can see the frequency of those meetings. The cross-reading with the “city archive” allows us to reconstruct a precise chronology.

We have proposed a thematic selection of that huge production. Through the educational panels, we have led the visitors backwards in time, between “the papers and the stones”, an expression beloved by the archivists. It is understandably so. We agree with the archivists in beloving this expression, which we use as a guide in our studies.

We are preserving, with great admiration for the arts, the wealth of documents that our predecessors

left us. We are committed to continue research and promote the findings with public initiatives. Also, our intent is to raise the interest of more researchers and experts. Our goal is to raise the awareness and interest of citizens in the protection and enhancement of their cultural heritage.

It is so that we have chosen the Massimo Theater as symbol of this exhibition. It happened for two reasons. One is that Massimo Theater is the place where Ernesto settled one of his first professional ateliers. The second reason is that it is right there that still the best part of the spirit of the city of Palermo identifies itself, looking inwards and outwards also at the international landscapes, hopefully. Maybe never before like today it has become so necessary for the management of our cultural heritage to have the strength and the courage of the comparison with the other countries, from the smallest initiative to the major events.

The consonance with the contemporary era was a true need for both Giovan Battista Filippo and Ernesto. And we want to learn from the lessons of those conscious and wise men, still able today to inspire high thoughts in our minds.

The international dimension of Basile's Studio is evident. It surely comes out through the reading of the contemporary foreign magazines of art and architecture that published Ernesto's house. In "Villino Ida" he produced the most of his creative activity, from the year 1906 on, when it was completed and the architect and his family settled there steadily. But most recent researches we made revealed the presence of foreign noted personalities in his home, such as American and British consuls, for example, or the English architect William fruitation of documents to know and love the Basile architects, the ancestors of those who care about our city. This was initial spirit which at the heart of this project as well as Massimiliano Marafon Pecoraro, who was instrumental in proposing an extension for this project, confident that visitors

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floor and another one, the main atelier, in the basement apartment.

The proper studio, located under the dining area, is where Ernesto spent most of his day sitting behind a desk of solid oak he designed and Ducrot produced. For this plan the architect had designed a series of furniture in solid oak which included, in addition to the desk, several libraries, drawers and roll holders, chairs, tables and the coat hanger. Photos indicate that the basement of the house in Siracusa street was the real forge shop of Ernesto. This is the place he designed to hold meetings with the colleagues, to exhibit the casts of the decorations or sculptures that complemented his architecture, and most importantly, to work on his drawings and create his art.

The numerous photographs of the rich collection of the Basile Archive show us the different spaces. Among the photographs one is relevant because it shows a significant picture of Ernesto, his wife Ida with a stylish hat on and an unknown lady in the basement studio.

The need to assign so many sectors of his home to the atelier and even the decision to conceive the whole idea of the project for his house on the atelier spaces demonstrates the difference between the careers of the two great architects, father and son. Giovan Battista Filippo, in spite of getting very prestigious assignments, such as the Massimo Theater of Palermo and the Italian Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878, never reached the fame of his son, one of the most popular Italian professionals of his time.

Ernesto was surely talented and brilliant but to make a comparison with his father's career we have to say that he lived in a historical period particularly propitious. Between the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century numerous banks opened new offices, many exhibitions took place, the serial production in the furniture sector grew enormously to satisfy the expansion of the middle classes.

In addition to this favourable situation he also got the giant work for Montecitorio Parliament which became the culmination of his career and let him reach the higher position for an architect in Italy at that time. He spent all his energies to make real his ideal lives on, according to the ideal of “art in all”. Like the dream of a possible Utopia, even today this ideal lives in the Montecitorio Parliament, with the activities of the Italian Parliament and with the language of its powerful images. It seems to make reference to his father’s “speaking architecture”. It was true. Then, and it remains true: “The art renews people and reveals its life. The pleasure of the scenes is useless if it is not intended to prepare for the future”.