

Introduction^{*}

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Giovanni Battista Giorgini, The Man Who Sold Beauty

I just would like to explain the title we gave to the conference, in order to create a context for the lectures. Giorgini is known as the man who started Italian Fashion as a system. We are trying to move forward with this idea. We would like to introduce him as a man who did a lot for Italian handicrafts and Made in Italy in general, since the 1920s. We would like to demonstrate that fashion came about as a form of craftsmanship. Furthermore, we would like to explain that thanks to fashion and much more, Italy has been able to promote what has been called Soft Power.

Soft Power is a geopolitical theory started by US president Woodrow Wilson in 1911. Most certainly during the 20th century, and still active today, the United States has the capability to export not just consumer items but a way of life. There are just a few other countries that can do something similar. We think Italy is one of them. Art, architecture, culture, landscape, music, Opera, craftsmanship, design, contemporary art, cinema, fashion, sport cars and motorcycles, food and wine.

We were a model for elegance in the 1950s and again in the 1980s, when fashion became a big industry, thanks to firms like Armani, Versace and many others. The Slow Food Association, started in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, has been the biggest counterargument to American fast food. Slow Food has 200 chapters in the US, and it is not just about good food. The most important US institutional buildings have been built with reference to the classic style introduced by the Italian architect Andrea Palladio. From the 18th century onward Italy has been a place to go to look for beauty.

Beauty is not merely a function of aesthetics. Beauty is an all encompassing expression that is played out in the way one lives. In Italian we have an expression explaining this: “vincere in bellezza”, “winning in

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beauty”. A win “in bellezza” is a win that is not easy, even though it may look easy. It is a win you can only say good things about. I think Giovanni Battista Giorgini knew how to enjoy life with beauty as its centerpiece. He was able to transmit this feeling to his many international clients. This was the secret of his success. He knew that there was and is an Italian life style with an enormous potential, and Italy must be able to showcase it and export it.

Giovanni B. Giorgini, The Ambassador of Made in Italy

I would like to say, in the first place, that I feel honoured to be here on behalf of the University of Bologna, in this magnificent site, historically so important, and decisive for the momentous outcomes of the event that we are here to celebrate. It is my great pleasure to express you the welcoming address of the chair of my Department, professor Claudio Stefanelli, and the director of its International Centre of Fashion and Communication, professor Federica Muzzarelli, in my function here of scientific coordinator of the current research project in collaboration with the Fondazione Archivio Giorgini and its president, Neri Fadigati. I would also like to thank personally, and not only on behalf of the University of Bologna, all the sponsoring organisations of the present conference.

Then, in the second place, The Giorgini’s Archive, it’s known, has been declared of considerable national historical importance, but until now the only documents that have been studied are those on Italian fashion from 1951 to 1965. I have the honor and privilege of studying in preview all the unpublished historical material of the Giorgini’s Archive. So I thank personally dott. Neri Fadigati with all my gratitude.

So, the analysis of the documents in the Archive of Giovanni Battista Giorgini offers unprecedented research opportunities related to the development of artistic craftsmanship and to the importance of trade in international relations during the twentieth century.

In particular, from the point of view of contemporary historiography, these documents, that cover the chronological period from the end of the 18th century to the year 1971, make it possible to identify the political, economic and cultural relations between the United States and Italy in the course of the last century. It is a historical archive of special importance because from a documentary point of view, we find all the documents of Giorgini’s activity and all the original American documents.

Not only.

These documents make it possible to reconstruct, on the one hand, the relations between Italy and the United States, starting from 1924, and, on the other hand, the relations that, together with Italy and the United States, are intertwined with Germany, France, Spain, and England in Europe, and in the East with Japan. We find all the original documents of these international relations.

The research is underway, but I can already officially confirm that this archive contains extraordinary fundamental historical documents. In this sense and in my perspective a depth study of Giorgini’s activities, it’s necessary since these activities are a crucial part of the international relations framework of global history.

Giorgini was far-sighted. His activity falls within the framework of international relations; he acted in an international geopolitical framework for the development of Italy. He has built founding relationships with the American and Italian governments, the American banks, and this in connection with embassies, and all governmental and economic, and diplomatic bodies. Giorgini worked with all these realities, which played a fundamental role.

Therefore, from my point of view, studying Giorgini’s activity means studying craftsmanship and fashion, made in Italy, but also within issues of greater national and international historical relevance. There are many open questions: thanks to Giorgini’s archive, we can study these issues and offer unprecedented research opportunities.

At present, I can only summarize some key moments based on the documents I am studying.

The First Phase is characterized by the activities and relationship between Giorgini and the United States. This means relations with the Italian and American government and their respective embassies, American buyers from 1924 to 1946: from Giorgini's first trip to the United States to the constitution of the Allied Forces Gift Shop in Florence (1944-1946).

During this phase, Giorgini managed relations between the American buyers, the American government and the fascist government, in particular during the crisis of 1929 and the economic and political recovery. And the geopolitical foundations were laid for the establishment of the Allied Forces Gift shop. The Second Phase of Giorgini's activities, is characterized by the transition from craftsmanship to fashion, between 1947 and 1951. There are many open issues in this regard. From my perspective this phase is fundamental to understand not only, overall, the Marshall Plan, but also the dealings that Giorgini carried out at first for crafts and then for fashion. In my opinion, it was more than just a specific matter of fashion.

In the Third Phase, we find the organization of the Fashion Shows in Florence from 1951 to 1965, but we need to study Giorgini's activity, in agreement with the Americans, and at the same time with the European bodies and governments. The documentation of this phase shows how Giorgini and his staff acted on a European level, while in Italy there was a strong contrast between the various fashion bodies.

Specifically, during this phase, we find a broadening and expansion of Giorgini's international relations in accordance with the American and the Italian governments towards Japan. At the moment, I can only say that here once again Giorgini's role is crucial: he is at the center of Italian international cooperation relations between the US and Japan.

In brief, the joint-stock company, called Lucrezia, was established in Florence on 10 December 1963. The name was given in honor of Lorenzo the Magnificent's mother of the Medici family. In Japanese, the name was LUCREZIA KABUSHIKI KAISHA High Fashion House. It was created in collaboration with ISETAN COMPANY (department store) and ASAHI CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES. The House of Lucrezia was located in the ancient Palazzo of Prince Corsini.

In a Japanese document (April 1965), with the English translation alongside, we read:

LUCREZIA a high fashion house was opened in Florence in December 1963. Lucrezia was created in collaboration with a Japanese and Italian group; the capital being put up by the Japanese concerns ISETAN DEPARTMENT STORE and ASAHI CHEMICAL INDUSTRY. The creation of this firm was the idea of the late Mr. Majima, whose constant desire was to unite the Japanese with the Italian world fashion. Since its opening, LUCREZIA has shown its Boutique & Ready to Wear collections both in private and public, such as at the Pitti Palace Italian Fashion show. The market for these clothes has become worldwide. The specialties are made to order, boutique, and ready to wear clothes. The House of Lucrezia is located in the ancient Palazzo of Prince Corsini. April 1965.

Even in this case, Giorgini's activity in relations with Japan, includes the directives of the Italian government and the American government. Giorgini is once again at the center of the management of an international geopolitical plan: for example, on the one hand, the Italian government finances the Italian fashion show in Japan and Hong Kong in 1965; and, on the other hand, the American government manages the financial transactions with Lucrezia between Italy and Japan. This is a synthetic view of what is emerging from the Giorgini Archive. On these basis, we can understand why Giorgini has been defined, by the national and international press, as a national hero, The Father of Italian Fashion.