

10 years of EMA through 10 years of Luigi Micheletti Award. And beyond

By René Capovin

Launched in 1996 by the Luigi Micheletti Foundation and the European Museum Forum under the patronage of the Council of Europe, from 2011 onwards the new format of the Luigi Micheletti Award has been administered by the European Museum Academy. Dates confirm that telling the story of the second life the Luigi Micheletti Award is also a way to recapitulate the first 10 years of EMA.

In 2010 the Award Ceremony took place in Tampere. EMA was already born, but our Prize was still under the EMF umbrella. The winner was the Museu Agbar dos Aigues. Water is a very symbolic element. It has been a continuous source of inspiration for plumbers, but also for philosophers. When Heraclitus said: «No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man», perhaps he was not thinking to the changing identity of a prize for museums, but it is also true that nobody can say the opposite. That crucial moment was also my first time as prize deliverer. I launched a new genre of oral literature, in which an almost elegant man delivers a speech in italenglish to people obliged to give the impression to understand. Being very charitable, the fact that this format remained unchanged for 10 years can be understood as a mark of success.

In 2011, Dortmund. Back to our roots: our guest was the DASA of Dortmund, the first winner of the Luigi Micheletti Award. DASA is the only permanent exhibition completely dedicated to safety at work. And our Prize came home safe and sound, thanks also to our local friends Gerhard Kilger and Wolfgang Müller-Kuhlmann. Also for this common story a special prize was delivered, the DASA Award - supposed to be temporary, it turned to be permanent. Exactly like the Luigi Micheletti Award, conceived in 1996 as a personal homage to Luigi Micheletti by Kenneth Hudson and later... Marx told that story that repeats itself becomes false, Baudrillard replied that false that repeats itself becomes History.

In 2012 the Ceremony was hosted by the winner of the 2011 Edition, the TIM – Textil and Industry Museum of Augsburg. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship: Karl Murr, TIM director, museologist and great expert of Charlie Brown, will become some years after the coordinator of the EMA Panel of Judges. «Culture is not just cream on a pie», he said in the final event, just before to deliver the prize. I never asked him, what is more beautiful and necessary than cream on a pie. Anyway, this was the kick-off of another type of oral literature, in which a very elegant man delivers sophisticated talks in perfect English to people obliged to give the impression to adore Charlie Brown.

In 2013 we went to Bursa, the fourth city of Turkey, a city rich of history and museums, and very friendly with EMA. In fact, judges could have free access to an unforgettable hammam. Nevertheless, the ceremony had to take place. A prize was delivered to a wonderful museum (the National Military Museum of Germany, in Dresden – consequences of a war are unpredictable), it is sure, but any photo is available of that ceremony, with me.

In 2014, the Ceremony was housed by the Riverside Museum of Glasgow, the museum that had received the Prize in 2012, just after the «Cream on Pie speech». I had the reassuring impression to find people speaking English worse than me. If I have correctly understood, the winner of our prize was the MUSE of Trento (Italy). I have photos with the director showing the prize, anyway now it would be too late to tell that he was not the real winner. Falsehood not amended becomes truth, truth non amended, the same. From this edition onwards the delivery of DASA Award was introduced by a third genre of speech, in which a man (Gregor Isenbort, DASA new director) obliged to be elegant delivers a very passionated and involving speech to people that sadly ignore what «Borussia Dortmund» is.

In 2015, for the XX year of our award, as Micheletti Foundation we dared to organize the event at our home, in Brescia. Well, 0 dead, but a bunch of moral injured : the staff of our museum, the *musil* – museum of industry and labour. They were waiting the guests, but both the autobus missed the museum and the visit, just like the war of Gulf according Baudrillard , never took place. In both cases, some people did not laugh.

Because real wars are always divided in three: words, acts and consequences. In 2015 Lesbos was the symbol of the third part of Syrian war. In 2016 this island became also the location of the EMA Awards, as decided in 2014 (when we had decided to put DASA Award on the same level of the Micheletti Award, transforming the «Luigi Micheletti Award Ceremony » in «EMA Awards Ceremony ». Less exotic, more European and, first of all, shorter). Some people did not appreciate the lack of tact («being there, where those things happen»), people from Lesbos appreciated a lot the demonstration of tact («being here where these things happen and we have to continue to live»). Words are the first part of wars and the totality of the rest.

In 2017 a very brilliant idea would had been to organize three Ceremonies: the first in Skopje, capital of the Republic of Macedonia ; the second in Skopje, capital of the Republic of North Macedonia; the third in Skopje, capital of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In this sense, the new label «EMA Awards» could had been very adequate: a not defined number of prizes, to be delivered in parallel ceremonies, in a plurality of time-spaces. Brilliant ideas arrive always late, exactly like me, so we delivered only one prize in a *rétro*, simply newtonian space, but using the three labels in a quite uncontrolled way and, doing that, continually risking to prompt a real war. Luckily enough, it is a matter of fact that this war did not take place, at least not yet, and not because EMA.

In 2018 Den Gamle By, winner of the Lesbos edition, hosted the Ceremony in a theatre. We were told that we were in the Elsinore Theatre, rebuilt in Aarhus. Elsinore, Hamlet, skull, tricky questions... It sounds quite ironic that the winner of a so potentially dramatic edition was the Chaplin's World.

Many lessons could be extracted from all these stories and all the related museums, and normally it means that *no* lesson can be learnt . Too many informations, too many contradictory trends... How to detect an order into such a mess? The rise of entropia is a physical law, which also our very short survey on recent museums' world confirms. And consider that each new edition means more and more museums. In the meanwhile, new prizes emerge, related to new institutions or new networks... Sometimes one can be seduced by a sort of declinism, concisely depicted by Jorge

Wargensberg using another physical principle: "There is, one might say, an unwritten conservation law that combines the concepts of quantity and quality in relation to human knowledge: the greater the quantity, the lower the quality".

Moreover, today museums have to be more and more things at once: they have to be what they were, but also creative hub, and, why not ?, also directly engaged in social issues, and so on. Like politics and unlucky sons, museums are asked to absorb every type of "should be".

Inflation of number and aspirations make the contemporary landscape more and more heterogenous, but it would be unfair to say that it always had direct impact on quality. What we can experience is a larger range of compromises between very different social demands.

In this sense, both a prize and an academy can have an important role, even in such a explosive complexity. This role is not fixing abstract guidelines, nor providing general visions (both fields are very popular and often badly populated), but documenting the multiversum of contemporary museums.

"There are more museums in Heaven and Earth, Charlie Brown, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy".