



**REWINDItalia**

## **Summary of Interview with Mario Sasso**

Interview by Laura Leuzzi in 2011

In this interview, Mario Sasso talks about his education at a school of graphics in Turin, where a practical approach was at the base of the teaching. Among his professors there was Armando Testa, one of the most important Italian commercial artists of the 20th century.

He explains he began to work in RAI Radio Televisione Italiana (The Italian National Broadcaster) in 1958. He had moved to Rome to develop his career as a painter. In that period, radio broadcasting was starting to bring its productions into television, and RAI needed artists to create visual designs to represent literary text and for educational purposes. RAI Discoteca's Director visited his studio and appreciated his work and took some of his drawings to meetings at the company. This led to Mario Sasso being asked to collaborate with them.

After a year and a half at Rai, he was asked to design an opening sequence for a TV programme. At that time the idea of an animated opening sequence had not yet been realised. He was asked to produce a sequence that allowed people to prepare for the programme *Non è mai troppo tardi* by Alberto Manzi (*It's never too late*; a programme in which Manzi, a teacher and a pedagogue, taught illiterate adults, using modern techniques, how to read and write that had a fundamental role in the fight against illiteracy in Italy. It was aired from 1960 to 1968).

It took Mario Sasso a long time to come up with an idea for this. He sketched a lot, until one day in Piazza Cavour he saw a man who was writing documents for illiterate people and so from this neorealist inspiration he found a solution. He filmed the man while he was writing and added an animation with some letters.

At the time these opening sequences were structured as a storyboard, a sequence of visual images that could tell a story. The technique was cinematographic. There was a department at Rai with the equipment that was used for cartoon design. The starting point for the work was always the musical composition that was used as a base for the sequence.

In the 1960s & 1970s, Mario Sasso continued to work as a painter, without in his opinion any influence from his TV experience. Only with time he understood the creative possibilities of the camera. In the 1970s the role of the opening sequence changed where it became something more informative. At the time Sasso studied the music and created images that would go with it.

In the 1970s, he didn't share the opposition to Commercial Television led by artists such as Nam June Paik because his experience was different. Rai was a public service with educational purposes that also hosted artists who wanted to experiment themselves.

One of the artists, who used Rai's equipment for their own experiments, was the Arte Povera artist, Pino Pascali, who was fascinated by the poetic relationships between scenography, animation and technology. He was very influential on Mario Sasso's practice.

Pino Pascali made cartoon animations for commercials.

In 1980 at Ferro di Cavallo in Rome, Sasso created an installation involving film and painting.

In the 1980s he also began to use a video synthesiser as a tool to modify images.

In 1982 he made *La Gioconda Paintobox* (The Paintbox Gioconda) a piece in which he used the Quantel's Paintbox to transform the Renaissance artistic styles of the Gioconda (Mona Lisa) with contemporary artistic styles, experimenting with this medium as painter.

It was shown at the Venice Biennale, at Magazzini del Sale, where they used a large Ampex video deck, supported by the Biennale and Rai. It was then used as the opening sequence for the Rai programme *Grandi Mostre*.

Later, he started to collaborate with Brian Eno, at the same time he started using 3D. This marked a new way of production for Sasso because he refused to work on a musical piece that was provided by RAI, but he asked to work directly with Eno, starting with a visual storyboard.

For the 3D he asked an engineer, Pantanetti, to create a software to make an opening sequence for Rai's TG2. It took two and half months work to make 15 seconds of video.

In 1990 he began to work at RAISat, Rai's first satellite channel. He was in charge of the graphic design and commissioned a video *Countdown* (from 10 to 1 in 10 seconds) for RAISat's programmes' opening sequences to some artists who worked with video (as for example Studio Azzurro, Patella, Baruchello, Schifano, Plessi, Cucchi, Boetti). He contacted Nam June Paik too, who sent him a sketch on an envelope and later his idea was developed in Italy.

The collaboration between artists and TV in Italy, in his opinion, has been drastically reduced over the last 30 years.

He began to use the videocamera at the end of the 1980s. He needed the videocamera to be like the gesture of painting, of the walking. The first things he did with it was walking with a camera in his hands, capturing the reality without filters or editing. The results were, for the subjects, similar to his first paintings, but the medium had changed.

The cityscape was always a part of his work. In 1990 he was looking at a satellite image of Vienna when he noticed that it was similar to the style of Kustav Klimt. So he examined other artists' work in relationship to their city's satellite images. So as to understand how the territory had influenced the artists. From this research he made the video work *FootPrint*.

Among the most important events, which marked and influenced his practice he mentions the Festival of Camerino, and outside Italy; the Festivals at Locarno, Montebelliard, Karlsruhe and Lintz.

The Camerino Festival, in particular, was organised by Riccardo Funari, Nicola Sani (musician) and Vittorio Fagone (art critic). They had fundamental intuitions and brought many important artists to Italy.

In 1998 he made *La torre delle Trilogie* (Trilogies' Tower) for iGuzzini (an Italian illuminating engineering company). It was a vertical tower of monitors for which he had to overcome many technical difficulties during the production. He worked on a group of monitors (with modules of 4 x 3 monitors), which were led by more than 700 storyboards. The piece had a running time of 4 mins but it took more than 2 months to make.

In 2008 a retrospective exhibition was held in the Museum of contemporary Art in Moscow. It included all his works, featuring his paintings, videos and TV opening sequences.