



An interview with Felice Limosani

BY BRENDA DIONISI (ISSUE NO. 92/2008 / DECEMBER 11, 2008)

Concept designer

When I walked into Felice Limosani's office overlooking Piazza Duomo on a brisk November afternoon, I had the impression that this would not be your ordinary interview. Entering the beautiful palazzo on via Roma and the office just above the Luisa Via Roma store, where Limosani is creative director, I felt a wave of anxiety because, quite honestly, I still could not grasp exactly what it is Limosani does for a living. Creative director, trendsetter, concept designer, digital storyteller, brand manager, multimedia artist, innovator—these are among the many buzzwords used to describe Limosani and his work. After an hour-long conversation and demos of his work, I started to get it: he engages the sense, probes emotion, tells stories and communicates 'concepts' and corporate values through multimedia art installations. He is pioneering new forms of corporate branding to engage the twenty-first-century consumer.

The Florentine: I'd like to start the interview with complete honesty and admit that, after much research, I still don't understand what your job is. Would you mind describing what it is that you do?

Felice Limosani: [*Laughing*] So many people ask me this question, and all I can say is the most important thing is *how* I do what I do, and not what I do per se. Being unable to describe my profession means that I do very new things; if I could describe them, they wouldn't be that new, would they? [*Smiling*] In short, and with much irony, I think the best way to understand my profession is to stop trying to understand it!

TF: Your work is so varied. You combine many skills and abilities and apply them to several forms of media. Can we say you are an innovator, just to give your work a name?

FL: Innovation is in the air and I am just an interpreter of things and ideas that already exist. Some say I am this and some say I am that, but, again, the important thing is that I do high-quality work. I use my instinct and try to tune into to the contemporary and take things from there.

I am also involved in a project with a sociologist from Milan, Francesco Morace. I hold workshops on how to develop global trends in aesthetics, consumption, communication and distribution in the 'Third Renaissance'.

TF: What's the 'Third Renaissance'?

FL: We are in a period of great changes that I believe is sort of a 'Third Renaissance' where communication and eventually everything else happens from the bottom up. Today, information originates from ordinary people who then consume it.

It is a very different reality from the past. Traditional forms of communication and marketing were created when information was only one way, but today they are inadequate. We need to understand these changes and start inventing tomorrow, not continue to re-invent yesterday.

TF: What's your professional vision in light of these changes in course?

FL: I think consumption needs to be re-thought primarily because the concept of endless growth is no longer sustainable. We need to start thinking in terms of horizontal growth, not vertical growth, and the world needs to become more competitive, humble, and collaborative. In the end, this is something the Renaissance did.

TF: Tell me how you communicate a brand or product.

FL: I flirt with branding and art at the same time. I don't produce anything except my video or digital installations that are based on a concept or a certain value that exemplifies the product or company I work for. It's an act of transfer: I transfer the values of the company to the consumer by creating an emotional relationship between the brand and its public. I create this relationship through art and creativity.

Then, if the product is valid, it will sell, and if it doesn't sell, it's not my concern. My concern is to communicate a product, not sell products. My work is aimed at a concept or feature that evokes a product; it is not based on the product itself. It *seems* all very elusive and intangible, but the companies I work for have understood this concept.

TF: There is also an important emotional component to your work.

FL: In my installations, the product becomes a story to tell, an emotional experience, something that will be difficult to forget. Today, products are so banal; they enter and exit our minds almost automatically. We don't consume in traditional ways anymore, we are becoming more sophisticated and refined-branding needs to be less obvious and more sublime. Another important concept is interaction. Today, people want to be involved in things. Every business sector needs to understand this and encourage the need for interaction.

TF: How did you start working in concept design and branding?

FL: My training is rather unusual because I started working in music. I worked as a DJ for over 20 years. I often hold lectures for masters programs in Milan and Rome, and I tell students that a master for me is not a degree from America but the device on a mixer that harmonizes all the channels. Thanks to my background, I have a different viewpoint than the standard academic one, but the final result is the same: balancing out the volumes, the skills, the abilities, the sensibilities and different kinds of knowledge. It's all a matter of harmony, equilibrium and knowledge.

TF: Do you create your installations strictly for the purposes of art, or do corporate sponsors commission them all?

FL: No, all my work has been commissioned by the corporate sector because I don't have a gallery owner to support and sustain me. Sometimes the installations are so well liked that they become artworks, as did my Alfa Romeo video installation that is now at the Sketch Gallery in London.

TF: What other projects are in the works here in Florence, aside from Luisa Via Roma?

FL: Nothing, really! I live in Florence because I have my clothes here and because I am in love here, but professionally, I work everywhere else other than here. Jobs in Florence have been rather sporadic, like the installation I did for the 60th anniversary of Pucci, but that happens every 60 years! I have completed important projects for Luisa Via Roma; I followed its evolution, I designed its interior, website and new 'look' or visual image. I am usually involved in Pitti Uomo.

TF: What do you think of Florence on a personal level?

FL: I love Florence as a city. I love the food, the cityscape and the surrounding countryside. Professionally, however, Florence does not offer much in terms of contemporary art or creativity. I know there are contemporary artists in the city, but they are not visible, so it's like they are not even here at all. Let's say I make Florence work for me. Thanks to my job, I can do a lot of work online, and that helps. It helps me dream that when I am older, I will be tanned on a beach and perhaps work from my computer.

Felice Limosani, 42, began his professional career as a DJ. He mixed tracks in discos all over Europe until 2000, when he began designing the first emotion services for UMTS-equipped mobile telephones. As a DJ producer, he released *LIMOS-The Night (Goes On)*, released in 2001 by Universal-Sony Music; it was a European hit and the first example of 'emotional house.' As an artist, he has created installations for UNESCO, the Sketch Gallery (London), Ta Matete (Rome and Milan), Tempio di Adriano (Rome) and the Ravello Festival. His video and digital works are on display at the Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo. He is creative director at Luisa Via Roma (Florence) and works for companies like Lacoste, Nokia, Emilio Pucci, Bulgari, Puma, L'Oréal, FIAT, Ferretti Yacht, Tod's and Swarovski. Limosani's work is based on the idea of combining creative expressivity and contemporary art with communication and marketing. See some of his work at www.feliceimosani.com.