Mecenatismo di nuovo stile
Così scompaiono i capannoni

La Fondazione Cucinelli “decementificata” un fondovalle umbro

Brunello Cucinelli
Society
The case
SARA RICOTTA VOZA – MILAN

What it’s like today
The photo shows Solomeo (Umbria) as it is today, with a backdrop of hills and a plot of industrial sheds built in the ‘70s.

What it will be like
In the same valley, in a year’s time, the sheds will disappear and instead of concrete there will be cultivated fields, orchards, market gardens and a “lay oratory” for kids.

New style patronage.
And the industrial sheds disappear.
Fondazione Cucinelli “decementifies” an Umbrian valley bottom.

To present the family foundation’s “Project for Beauty” Brunello Cucinelli chose the stage of the PiccoloTeatro, where the Servillo brothers are currently appearing in Eduardo de Filippo’s “Le voci di dentro”. On stage, two rustic wooden chairs (knowing Cucinelli, they’re probably hand made) and behind them two blow-ups of Umbrian landscapes, looking like Renaissance paintings.

In this way the cashmere entrepreneur, who is establishing his own personal style of Made in Italy patronage, decided to put on stage the beauty that he sees most threatened and that he, in his small (big) way, is determined (and able) to save. The beauty is that of the landscape, nature, the land.

In one photo we see the valley bottom of Solomeo, Umbria, as it is today, against a backdrop of hills, with an area of grey industrial sheds built in the ‘70s to the ‘90s; in the other photo the same landscape as it will be in a year’s time, with fields, market gardens and orchards instead of concrete.

How will this miracle come about? By “decementifying” and cultivating the 100 hectares that were the site of the six buildings that Cucinelli bought to demolish them and restore the valley to what it was a century ago. None of them was used for actual production (they were warehouses) and Cucinelli persuaded the owners to move them to an industrial zone just 5 km away.

But beauty for Cucinelli isn’t just nature and landscapes, it’s also the people who live in them. So in addition to the market gardens and orchards that will supply the company’s canteen there will be a lay oratory with a stadium where kids can play.

The rebirth of the three parks in the valley is the second part of a project launched in 1985 and completed in 30 years: the total restoration of the mediaeval village of Solomeo, hometown of the entrepreneur’s wife and now a “place of study, art and thought” thanks to the building of a theatre (inaugurated with a performance of Ronconi), a library and an arts and crafts school.

On stage, Cucinelli also decided to have his “friend and teacher” Massimo De Vico, architect and landscape architect, who “realized” his [Cucinelli’s] dreams. But the questions from the audience - managers, analysts, journalists (Italian and foreign) – are more about the “why” than the “how”, given that the money spoken about is the family’s and not that of the listed company. The answers, however, speak a language that comes from afar. “To safeguard the land and give back dignity to the countryside is the dream of my life,” he explains, “… we were country folk and I had the shapes and smells of that world in my eyes and nose”. Beauty that is now under threat. “When I look at my
granddaughter, I ask myself “what world will we leave you?” Hence the sense of responsibility to the territory. “In Siena’s 1309 *Constitutio* it’s written that “it is the duty of those who govern to look after... beauty for the sake of strangers’ delight and good cheer and of the pride of the City’s citizens”. He also explains that his philosophy of life and business is not backward looking. “Voltaire says that if you don’t accept the changes of your times, you only take the worst part, but this too is change, isn’t it?”

And signs of change Cucinelli has certainly noticed: “This pope is a genius who’s come at the right moment; he says “Be custodians of creation”, “Don’t turn your backs on poverty”, “Try to balance profit with gifts””. And Cucinelli, the businessman, is laying down a path with this project that “decemefitizes” instead of building. From the floor, someone quotes the philanthropism of the Giving Pledge and the economist Piketty writing about redistribution of capital. He smiles and one understands that the old father is more convincing, when he asks him: “Do you want to be the richest in the cemetery?”