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NELLO FORTI GRAZZINI AS TAPESTRY SCHOLAR

On 29 October 2021, Dr. Nello Forti Grazzini (Firenze 29 November 1954) passed away in Milano after a long battle against cancer. To honor the memory of this internationally recognized scholar in the field of tapestry, a colloquium has been organized at the Academia Belgica in Rome on 25 & 26 October 2022, on the theme of “Artistic Relations between Flanders and Italy in the Field of Tapestry”. The six papers in this publication reflect the lectures held by five of his Spanish colleagues and they are completed by an unpublished essay by his widow Maria Taboga.

Nello Forti’s interest for tapestry started with his Master’s thesis in Art History at the Università Statale di Milano devoted to the series of the Trivulzio Months, published in 1982, and later completed by a research Doctor’s thesis in ‘Storia e Critica dei Beni Artistici e Ambientali’. In the following sixty years, he published innumerable studies about ancient tapestries, mostly preserved in Italian public and private collections, in books, exhibition catalogues and articles in reviews.

A short survey of his work may be given here. His first large book analyzes the production and the collecting of tapestry at the court of the Este in Ferrara (1982) and it discusses the still existing pieces of that center. It got at once all the qualities of Nello’s later writings: all aspects were worked out in full detail, with all available references and with a profound critical sense. His next publication was the catalogue

of the collection of the city of Milano, kept in the Castello Sforzesco (1984), forty-five pieces from Flemish early sixteenth century to a copy after Rubens, woven in S. Michele a Ripa in Rome, late eighteenth century. Nello adapted then a method of writing where he included his footnote and references in the main text. This makes the reading sometimes very difficult, especially for non - Italian readers. Later followed the analysis of the ecclesiastical Renaissance pieces in Como (1986) and the tapestries in San Ambrogio in Milano (1988).

His “opus magnum” is undoubtedly his catalogue of the collection in the presidential place of the Quirinale in Rome (1994), in two volumes, comprising 180 items over 570 pages.

After the collection of the house of Savoy in the Quirinale, came the study of that of the Farnese and Bourbons in the exhibition catalogue of Colorno (1998), edited with Giuseppe Bertini, and also of private collections like the Cini Foundation in Venice (2003) and much later the tapestries in the large textile collection of Mr. and Mrs. Zaleski (2015).

I had the pleasure to work with him at the meeting about Flemish weavers abroad in Mechelen (2000), on the famous Passion tapestries of Trento, 1990, and in the large Gonzaga tapestry exhibition in Mantova in 2010.

Meanwhile his fame as independent scholar has been recognized over the Atlantic-, and he contributed for the major exhibitions held in the USA in our century: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2002 and 2007, edited by Thomas Campbell, the collection catalogue of The Art Institution of Chicago 2008, edited by Koen Brosens, and the exhibition of Pieter Coecke as tapestry designer, also at the Metropolitan in New York, edited by Elizabeth Cleland in 2015. His own chapters in these books were authoritative, and they brought innumerable new data.

Nello Forti was an independent scholar of tapestry history. His research and publication were not made as a part of his regular job as teacher in high school, but in his free time and his own expenses. He never got academic recognition, but in 2013, I had the pleasure to introduce Nello as a foreign associate member of the Royal Academy of Archaeology of Belgium.

Nello Forti was always a welcome guest in Spain. He participated in a project of tapestry inventory in Spanish churches, launched in 2013 at the Real Fábrica de Santa Barbara in Madrid, but alas stopped by lack of funding. He lectured at encounters held in 2018 in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid, and at a meeting about the tapestries kept in the cathedral of Badajoz in 2019.

We loose with him not only a great scholar and also, and above all, a very good friend.

Guy Delmarcel
Professeur émérite, KULeuven (Lovaina)