



Massimo Negri

MEET OUR COMMITTEE: MASSIMO NEGRI

Massimo Negri is a post-war product. He was born in Milan in 1947 and he has lived and worked there ever since. His background was solidly middle-class and he sees no particular reason to be ashamed of the fact, nor of being much the best-dressed male member of our Committee. But in Milan someone with his name finds it relatively easy to be anonymous. A quick look at the local telephone directory shows that a high proportion of the population shares his name. Over the centuries the Negris have clearly been a prolific tribe, which seems to point to energy above the average. This particular Negri is perhaps more energetic than he would care to admit. His easy manner, his exceptional kindness and thoughtfulness, his omniscience and his ripe wisdom have been of enormous value to us ever since he became a member of our Committee in 1982.

He would be the first to say that he has had a life, not a career. 'Career' implies a straight line running from one's first job to the day of one's retirement and Massimo Negri has most certainly not moved like that. As a very young man, he wasted - the word is his own - five years studying industrial chemistry. Well before the end of that period he had come to realise that he was not going to become one of the world's great industrial chemists, but he thought it prudent to complete his studies and to obtain a piece of paper certifying that he was fit and qualified to earn a living in that field.

That accomplished, he abandoned chemistry with a deep sigh of relief and for ever, transferring himself forthwith to the University of Milan, where he obtained a degree in English and Spanish and discovered the real Massimo Negri in the process. This degree, he says, was 'the Great Liberator'. Life opened up for him and he began to experiment in all directions. He taught for some time in a school for the mentally handicapped and was granted two Fulbright Awards, one in 1976 and the other in 1978, to study in the United States. One of these periods he spent at Pennsylvania State University and the other at the Smithsonian.

By this time, one of his major interests had become industrial archaeology and his main reason for going to America was to inform himself about American progress in this new and exciting field. Between 1977 and 1980 he was an Assistant Professor in the University of Milan, within the Department of American Studies, but his passion for industrial archaeology continued unabated. In 1977 he founded the Italian Society for Industrial Archaeology and from 1976 until 1983 he was the Italian representative on the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage.

Books and articles on industrial archaeology poured from him and he became a much sought after and respected consultant on the safeguarding of industrial monuments throughout Italy. The industrial chemist had returned, so to speak, to industry through a much more agreeable back door. During this period of his life, he worked for central state agencies, regional governments, municipalities and private industrial firms. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was Mr Industrial Archaeology for Italy, a country which had so much archaeology of other kinds that it tended to overlook its considerable contribution to this less well publicised field.

In 1982 he made another change of direction, when he became a director of a pioneering bookshop in Milan which specialised in foreign books. It was associated with an art gallery and this allowed him to develop his own independent activities as an art consultant and art exhibitions organiser, with a special interest in international contemporary art. After leaving the bookshop in 1988, he spent two years as managing director of special projects with a leading Italian publishing house. This involved him in a great deal of foreign travel, especially to what were then the Communist countries. In 1990 he launched his own firm, Kriterion, which specialises in the production of art exhibitions and art books.

Massimo Negri can hardly be said to have wasted his 46 years, and he has certainly come a long way from industrial chemistry. His value to the European Museum of the Year Award has been immense. He has an enormous range of influential contacts in Italy, he is a master of the art of fundraising, he knows who is coming up and who is going down, he gives us utterly reliable advice as to what is possible and what is not. He has taught us that in Italy official bodies have no real power at all and that everything depends on personal contacts. We need, but we have not yet found, his equivalent in Spain, in Belgium, and in that modern Vatican, the European Community in Brussels.

But his most profound importance to us has been of another kind and on another level. He is an essentially peaceful man, who knows how to defuse explosive situations and how to make the voice of common sense prevail. Always optimistic, always full of sound, practical ideas, totally international in his outlook, the strange world of EMYA would have been much poorer and less effective without him. What niche would he have found for himself, one wonders, in 14th or 16th century Italy?

BRIGHT IDEAS FROM GREECE

National Museum of Greek Popular Musical Instruments, Athens

Classes to teach children to play traditional instruments and to learn folk songs.

Since the shop and the café are run by the Friends, not by the museum, the profits do not have to go to the Ministry of Culture and can be ploughed back.



BRIGHT IDEAS FROM PORTUGAL

Municipal Museum, Loures

The cafeteria sells elegantly-packed take-away cakes, as enjoyed on the premises.

Each art exhibition, lasting a month, is a one-man or one-woman show. No attempt is made to grade these local artists or to select only the best. It is felt that, by giving artists a chance to present their work in public, they are able to judge for themselves how good or how bad they are.

