

Masks, matrices and models in Guatteri's art

The ancient metal matrices, the chalk models and the cloth masks that are conserved in the Museum all have a great cultural importance, thanks to their artistic uniqueness and for the fact that they depict all of the steps that were necessary to create Carnival masks.

The pieces were all restored and they are arranged so that follows the unique manufacturing process used by the Guatteri family when they created their masks.

One of these processes used negative chalk models (that were probably created from positive clay models) to create personalized shapes for every character. Another technique used metal matrices and locks to create the masks.

These were the main techniques used to create the great variety of cloth masks that are exposed in the Museum, which are connoted by the plasticity of the depicted subjects. The inspiration for the type of masks came from the caricature depictions of the citizens of Castelnovo di Sotto and its surroundings.



Al Castlein

He was born in 1994 and is the symbol of our Carnival. He's a suitable heir of the King of Craziness, who was created in 1885 by the first Carnival Society. Sandroncino was the unaware emblem of the turnover of normality that is part of this holiday.

Information

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**Museo della Maschera
del Carnevale**
Centro di Documentazione e Ricerca



Castelnovo
di Sotto

Provincia
Reggio Emilia

The Museum of Carnival Masks

The **Museum and Documentation Center of Carnival Masks** has opened in 2007 and is located inside of the historical Municipal Rocca of Castelnovo di Sotto.

The main core of the museum's display is the extraordinary collection of masks, ancient metal matrices and original chalk models that were bought in 1997 by the Municipal Administration. Also in the year 2002 the collection was enriched by the collection of masks donated to the Municipality by the famous art collector Mr. Eugenio Gabrielli.

This collection is an unique artistic and historical inheritance, and it is constituted by 222 pieces, that are all amenable to the handicraft factory of masks built in 1810 by Prospero Guatteri and that closed in 1933. The factory was located in Castelnovo di Sotto, and it had a great reputation, thanks to its high quality products and also because they exported their manufacture articles to many European countries.

The Province of Reggio Emilia and the Istituto per i Beni Artistici, Culturali e Naturali of Emilia-Romagna have recognized the historical and artistic value of



this inheritance by supporting the cataloguing and the restoration of the pieces, and also helping the preparation of the museum.

The selected pieces are placed in the museum to create a didactical route of fruition of the collection. This didactical route is tied with the traditional Carnival of Castelnovo di Sotto, showing the history behind carnival masks and the techniques that were used to create them.

The Museum is also a documentation center that collects all of the documents connected to the creation of the exposition that are necessary for the correct conservation of the pieces and also for their valorization.



Masks and masked marches from the XIX century to our days

The Carnival has always been one of the most important and diffused holidays. It is a time in which each Community gives to its citizens and to the whole world happiness, joy and wealth by carrying out propitiatory rituals directed to symbols of the other world (the masks). These rituals are based upon a cyclical idea of time, where the rotation of seasons refers to the link between life and death.

The tour of the Museum begins in the first section. Here the history and the importance of this ancient holiday is explained. Carnival has been the object of repressive attacks by both clerical and secular authorities who wanted to control every kind of manifestation that could disturb public order or trespass the dominant moral code.

The conflict between censorship and the recreational transgression expressions that the community has adopted to breach through it is an important part of Castelnovo di Sotto's history, starting from the second half of the XIX century and arriving to our days.

On the illustrated panels that are found in the first room of the Museum it is possible to see a visual depiction of the evolution of the parades, that in the XIX century are known with the name of

Mascherate. These parades originate the first organized theatrical pieces, the "Filodrammatiche" (also known as Mascherata and Maschera con Rima) and the "Teatro di stalla" in which the popular culture has expresses itself in original ways.

Parades of floats and chariots as we know them were born in the XIX century and most of them had an allegoric connotation. This kind of masked parades have an aristocratic and urban origin and are the historic antecedents of modern parades of floats built by the different that were born in the second half of the XX century, after the end of the Second World War and of Fascism's censorship.

In the **first room** there are also depictions of the floats and



the masks that have animated the most important Carnival parades of Castelnovo di Sotto from the end of the Sixties to our days, and also the history of the creation and organization of modern representations made by the Società Cooperativa "Il Carnevale". The Cooperativa was born in 1977 and it inherited the legacy of the first Comitato per il Carnevale, which was born in 1946, and both of these societies ideally carry on the objectives of the Società per il Carnevale, which were to "promote and coordinate all of the Carnival amusements to help local industries and commerce".

The **second and the third room** of the Museum are dedicated to the reconstruction of the history of The Guatteri Mask Factory (1810-1933), who's tradition and professionalism were briefly inherited in 1944 by the "Mascherificio Italiano Cervi & C." of Fornovo di Taro. These rooms also host the valuable collection of ancient metal matrices, chalk models and cloth masks.

The Guatteri: a family of artists and craftsmen

The Guatteri family moved from Reggio Emilia to Castelnovo di Sotto in the XVIII century. For the following two centuries, the members of this family are known not only as wood carvers, decorators, gilders, painters and as the artists behind many beautiful artistic pieces, some of which are still partially conserved in churches. In fact this family was also known as the creators of the mask, floats, scenographies, pyrotechnical and theatrical gears that entertained the people who participated at the local parades of that time.

In 1810 Prospero Guatteri built the mask factory that was kept open by his heirs till 1933. As said before, Prospero Guatteri didn't only make masks. In fact his artistic and handicraft abilities were used in the construction of allegoric floats and in fireworks. These abilities reached the peak of their expression in 1842 for the celebration of the wedding between the Crown prince Francesco V and Adelgonda di Baviera. In this occasion two Neoclassic floats were built, and they were called "Apollo e le nove Muse" and "La Pace". Depictions of these floats made by Prospero Vanni are exposed in the Museum and are the first specimens of the type of floats that are still used by our Community to celebrate Carnival.

