



***Introduction to the theme of the
29th edition of the International Sculpture-Design Competition
"Scultura da Vivere" curated by Ivana Mulatero***

"The Work. The Struggles of Man Between the Past and Present"

"Work is tiring," said Cesare Pavese in 1936, but this has always been true. Exhausted by the constant presence both online and offline, the difficulty of securing a dignified job, and the confusion between work time and life time, along with the resulting goals of well-being, the theme of work is particularly significant and deeply felt. In this regard, the Peano Foundation proposes the theme "Work – The Struggles of Man Between the Past and Present" for the 29th edition of its Sculpture-Design Competition 2025. We believe that the young people of the Fine Arts Academies and the Departments of Architecture and Design, like all their peers concerned about their future, will be able to express, through their sensitivity and artistic ability, the anxieties, hopes, and aspirations related to the theme of the competition through sculpture. The question is obviously not about the pure and simple realistic depiction of various types of workers but about the possibility of attempting to tell the story of contemporary work, using chosen materials and personal expressive styles, capturing different facets and characteristics of the concept of work. Of course, the artist will select one aspect to focus on in their research and proposal of the model. The examples are countless; from antiquity to the present day, the evolution of human labor has been at the center of various fields of knowledge, from sociology to literature, from economics to politics, with careful iconographic documentation ranging from ancient Egypt with agricultural scenes along the Nile to depictions on the walls of Pompeii of Greek and Middle Eastern slave figures. Throughout history, the world of work has continually inspired artists with subjects and messages.

The subject of work, however, enters a specific horizon of art from the second half of the 19th century, and the theme emerges with constant progression, radical intent, and a diversity of content that are closely tied to the real and concrete issues that still dominate contemporary debate, marked by new professional figures, new precariousness, and news events such as

workplace accidents. Since the last century, artists have sought to highlight the contrasts between the prosperity of emerging classes and the difficulties and sufferings of the poorer categories. Initially, through overly sentimental depictions, and later through harsh and dramatic portrayals of life and survival conditions in fields, workshops, factories, construction sites, mines, and cotton mills. The artistic interpretation has primarily been a visual narrative that sought to highlight the physical strength and human aspect that develops in the workplace. One of the most typical iconographic motifs is that of workers with hunched backs, derived from the French tradition: peasants, diggers, gleaners, fishermen, and seamstresses, whose work is seen as a strenuous human activity and, at the same time, as a tool for progress and social uplift. In 19th-century social realism, workers ceased to be "invisible" to the history of art, fully entering the subjects of both literature and painting. From Pellizza da Volpedo's *The Fourth Estate* to Millet's *The Gleaners*, and Courbet's *The Stone Breakers*, the 19th century was the century of rediscovering the value and dignity of labor. However, today, work has changed: and with work, so have the practices of exploitation, oppression, and alienation. Labor dynamics have become fragmented, fluid, and camouflaged. Consequently, its representation has inevitably changed. Today, with the computerization and automation of production processes, work, as a physical and strenuous activity, has ceased to be the primary productive force, as the large-scale production of goods now involves fewer and fewer workers, with production processes increasingly delegated to artificial intelligence. But this great leap in technical progress raises an unavoidable question: will society be able to achieve a regulated distribution of employment, or will scenarios of severe inequality and relentless precariousness emerge?

Building on these reflections and drawing inspiration from artists, works, or artistic movements of different genres, participants in Peano Foundation Sculpture-Design Competition 2025 are invited to outline a project on the theme "The Work – The Struggles of Man Between the Past and Present." Through this, personal interpretations and expressive methods may emerge—through synthesis and paradoxes, allegories and symbols—that offer an updated representation of the many facets of the important theme of work. In this representation, man and machine, human intelligence and AI tend to merge into an increasingly inseparable whole.