



An introduction to the theme of the 30th edition of the International Sculpture and Design Competition “Scultura da Vivere,” by Ivana Mulatero, art historian and director of the Mallé Museum.

The Wheel in the Journey of Humanity Michelin: 120 Years in Italy

The Peano Foundation celebrates the 30th anniversary of the “Scultura da Vivere” Competition, highlighting its deep roots and its ongoing commitment to promoting young artistic creativity, closely intertwined with the local territory. In Cuneo, where the Foundation has been active since 1993, there is a major Michelin plant, a global leader in tire manufacturing, which has been present in Italy since 1926 with its Turin facility. It was in fact 120 years ago that Michelin opened its first production sites outside France in Italy, among which the Cuneo plant stands out, established in 1963, featuring a cutting-edge robotic production line unique in Europe.

This important anniversary for the city of Cuneo, which now coincides with that of the Foundation’s Competition, offers an opportunity to explore how the wheel has been fundamental in the evolution of humanity, from a technological tool to a powerful artistic and cultural symbol. For this reason, the Peano Foundation, in collaboration with Michelin, aims to promote this year’s competition theme, centered on the idea that technology (represented by the wheel and the tire) and culture are engaged in an ongoing creative dialogue. To this end, the winning proposal may find a suitable location within the Michelin complex in Cuneo, which includes both the production facilities and the recreational spaces of the “Michelin Sport Club.”

The wheel is one of humanity’s greatest inventions. Although its exact origins are shrouded in mystery, its impact has been crucial to the development of civilizations. The earliest evidence of its use dates back to around 3500 BC in Mesopotamia, where it was employed in pottery-making through the potter’s wheel. The real revolution, however, came when the concept of the wheel was applied to transportation, leading to the creation of the first carts. Over time, through continuous technological refinement, the wheel enabled the invention of complex machines during the Renaissance, such as the mechanical clock and early forms of automation. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, wheels were used in trains, radically transforming land transport. Above all, it was the discovery of vulcanized rubber by Charles Goodyear in the 19th century that led to the development of modern pneumatic tires, which became essential for automobiles and bicycles, significantly boosting transport and trade.

It is well known that the wheel has influenced not only material culture but also artistic representations of society—from the ancient Standard of Ur (2500 BC) to Roman mosaics, from Romanesque portals featuring the zodiac wheel to Renaissance paintings where the iconography of the Wheel of Fortune symbolizes the rise and fall of human destiny. Only between the 19th and 20th centuries did the representation of the wheel move beyond allegorical narrative to become

an aesthetic investigation of matter and technology. In contemporary art, it is interpreted through a variety of languages, ranging from Futurist dynamism to Dadaist readymades, from Pop Art to conceptual and kinetic art. Just as the wheel has been reinterpreted by modern art, so too has Bibendum (the Michelin Man), created by the French illustrator Marius Rossillon in 1898, undergone various stylistic transformations over more than a century, becoming one of the most recognizable logos in the world and an example of how industrial design can become a cultural icon.

These examples clarify the meaning of the theme proposed by the Foundation for this year's competition, with the confidence that the vibrant creative imagination of the participants will be able to express, through the forms and tangible materials of sculpture, the many suggestions inherent in the wheel as a plastic, technological, and philosophical object. The aim of the competition is also to invite the creation of works capable of combining the weight of matter with the lightness of the concept of rotation—works that reflect on the wheel as a tool of transformation, a cosmic symbol, and a metaphor for human destiny.

The wheel, a fundamental technological innovation, is also an archetype that occupies the space between the static perfection of the circle and the dynamic imperfection of movement. If the circle represents eternity, the wheel generates rotation, giving rise to cycles, the inexorable passage of time, and the continuous renewal of matter.