



Eugenio Re Rebaudengo and the art of business

The globe-trotting Italian next-gen talks dead squirrels, crazy parties and online curatorship

Published on Nov 20th, 2014 By [Jeremy Hazlehurst \(mailto:jeremy@famcap.com\)](mailto:jeremy@famcap.com)

Eugenio Re Rebaudengo had a slightly unusual upbringing. The son of art collector Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and her husband Agostino - who founded the Asja Ambiente Italia renewable energy company in 1995 - remembers that once visitors to his home were greeted by a life-sized mannequin that the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan made of himself, hanging by the neck from a metal frame, in the entrance hall.

“And we had a suicidal squirrel in a small kitchen,” Eugenio chuckles, eyes sparkling. (This is the famous Bidibidobidiboo, one of Cattelan’s best known works.) “I love them. I remember the reaction of people entering for the first time, they were a bit surprised we were living with that,” he adds, then cracks up with laughter. “Artists are not normal,” he shrugs. “But who is normal? It is difficult for me to define.”

Eugenio’s introduction to art came when mother set up her Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in 1995. She is renowned as a serious mover in the world of contemporary art. “Mum collected a lot of YBAs [Young British Artists], Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, also Anish Kapoor, Cindy Sherman,” says Eugenio.

“There has been really a variety of artists and artists coming into the house, doing work and shows, so I had a privileged viewpoint on what was going on in the art-world.” Although he has just turned 27, he has “20 years of experience in contemporary art. It is a big advantage to have this background.”

He is putting that to use, with his own online art company [Artuner](http://www.artuner.com/) (<http://www.artuner.com/>) which launched in 2013. The idea is to curate online exhibitions of artworks for a global, digital audience of collectors or would-be collectors. These days, he says, screen resolutions are so good that people are willing to spend money on art that they haven’t seen. And of course it is easier to show the works of artists from all over the world on-line, as works don’t have to be shipped halfway round the globe, and you can easily reach collectors wherever they are.

So far there have been seven curations, and they have shown over 150 artworks by 23 artists. The operation looks very slick. Are they selling a lot? “We are doing okay, but we can always sell more,” Eugenio says. “We are doing well because we have good artists. It is important to collaborate with good people.” His contacts, of course, mean that he knows them.

But Artuner isn't just an online business, and they recently put on an exhibition at the Italian Cultural Institute in October, and in November a huge one in a 1,300 sq m space in his home town of Turin featuring three artists from Brazil, Germany and Norway. He likes to work with young artists, he says, “who are internationally already recognised but at the beginning of their careers, so collectors can get in early and get great works at prices that are very reasonable for the quality of the work.” The business is certainly keeping him busy. He says he spends 70% of his time in London and the rest travelling to cities around the world, meeting people and looking at art.

As you might expect, Eugenio says that his mother is happy about his career. “Mum sees in it a continuation of her passion, says all the time and effort she spent in art wasn't wasted - that is what she tells me often, she is happy and proud. She has been and is incredibly helpful, she is a reference point, we discuss a lot of art-related topics. She has fantastic experience I can share, and of course her network.”

Surrounded by all this creativity, didn't he ever want to be an artist? “When you grow up in a family of collectors in contact with artists and successful artworks you have some respect and understanding of what is good art,” he says. “If I do something I need to do it well, and it was not my vocation, I was better with Greek or maths at school than drawing.”

And what about the family business? After all, this is a serious operation which has built wind, solar, hydro-electric, landfill gas and biomass power-generation plants in Italy, Brazil and China and Albania. Being privately owned, there are no figures about earnings or profits, but clearly they is enough to comfortably afford many, many works of contemporary art, which don't come cheap. Re Rebaudengo senior is now president, and the business has a non-family CEO, but the company is still entirely family-owned so there presumably would be a place for Eugenio if he wanted it.

After studying at London School of Economics, Eugenio worked for his father for six months, but says that “it's a bit too early for me to move into the family business,” although he is “marginally involved”. He adds: “My dad is still young and doesn't necessarily need me, and it's also important for me to do an independent experience where I can prove myself and be autonomous, make my own decisions and learn a lot in an international environment.”

For now he is enjoying the art world too much to give it up. With relish he tells the story of an artist who recently stayed at their home in Turin, and started “partying hard, there were naked people in the garden and super-loud music at five in the morning - and this was in Turin, which is a very conservative city.

He adds: “In the art world you are dealing with people who are full of energy and think outside the box. It’s really fun. I am very lucky.”

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