"I am undertaking this praise to the hand as I would fulfill a duty to a dear friend. When I start to write, I see my own hands soliciting my mind, leading it. They are always there, these tireless companions, who during so many years completed their arduous tasks, one holding the piece of paper in place and the other tracing multiple hurried marks, sombre but active, onto the white page. With them, man becomes aware of the difficulty of thought. They transcend the writing pad. They grant the pad a shape, a context, and on top of that they add a style to the writing itself" (Focillon 2006: 105)

Henri Focillon’s In Praise of Hands does not refer only to writing, with the central theme being that of the use of the hand, which today has been quite easily forgotten. In drawing, free-hand thoughts are represented with images that resemble them through figurative or conceptual analogies, by virtue of the association of ideas accompanied by emotions and which manifest themselves in the process of attributing a meaning, which underlies both the act of outlining as well as interpreting hand-made graphic gestures.

The theme of issue no. 11-12 of the journal focuses on manual drawing as a privileged framework of teaching and research within the European schools where this practice enjoys more attention, may be of some interest. It is a question of reflecting on how much the various forms of analogical representation (from the drawn figure to the painted one, from the scheme to the diagram, from the collage to the maquette) are opportunities for critical thinking not overcome by computerized analytical procedures. Consequently, for this thought to be conveyed with incisiveness and clarity, the developing of manual communication tools and techniques should be guaranteed in the courses and syllabuses of the schools of Architecture, Engineering and Industrial Design. In a historical context that is so strongly marked by the debate on the Digital Twin, the proposal to re-align the reflection on this founding dimension of Design is still alive and to be involved. It is a question of recognizing that manual drawing is the architect’s thought-form, the place where, first, formal thought becomes manifest, then declining into communication and memory. Immediately afterwards, it is a question of ascertaining how the direct action of drawing is subject to mutations, which risk undermining its role as a decisive and unrepeatable moment in the understanding of reality and in the ability to communicate a formal thought.

More and more frequently, both male and female students work less and less freehand: we feel the uncertainty with the request to decisively draw a line on an empty ‘field’ or the embarrassment of representing what we have in mind instead of describing it in words. Thus, a widespread difficulty is manifested in elaborating and constructing abstract thoughts and in dominating a visual thought through the principles of a formal structure, which is independent of any forms of technology and software.

The theme is therefore broad and involves areas that in part go beyond the specific discipline of Drawing, affecting those complex transformations of cognitive processes and thought processing linked to the introduction of new digital technologies. However, limiting the theme to the specific sphere of architectural and graphic culture to reopen the debate on the role of analogical tools and techniques in design, affecting those complex transformations of cognitive processes and thought processing linked to the introduction of new digital technologies. However, limiting the theme to the specific sphere of architectural and graphic culture to reopen the debate on the role of analogical tools and techniques in design, affecting those complex transformations of cognitive processes and thought processing linked to the introduction of new digital technologies.

In Praise of Hands is a thought-provoking reflection on the role of drawing in the development of human thought and communication, and on the importance of maintaining the practice of drawing as a means of expression and reflection. It is a call to appreciate the value of manual drawing and to recognize its role in the expression of ideas and emotions. The theme is therefore broad and involves areas that in part go beyond the specific discipline of Drawing, affecting those complex transformations of cognitive processes and thought processing linked to the introduction of new digital technologies. However, limiting the theme to the specific sphere of architectural and graphic culture to reopen the debate on the role of analogical tools and techniques in design, affecting those complex transformations of cognitive processes and thought processing linked to the introduction of new digital technologies.
architecture made up of multiple spaces and infinite reasons, for which the undisputed potential of digital and virtual representation forced an overall rethinking of the discipline.

On the contrary, it now seems important to reflect on the specificity of that drawing which, “tracing as a real-time transcription of the energy that flows through unconscious research” (Purini 2007: 41), brings into play that fundamental short circuit between thought and visual image, in which it is possible to recognize the unique and unrepeatable quality of the sign and of the gesture that produces it. If, therefore, the idea of architectural drawing is no longer conceivable beyond the digital context, it is also true that the direct action of the sign and of the gesture that produces it.

In this process, time, understood as execution time, plays a fundamental role. Not only a mental image can be quickly fixed in an instant graphic note, but it can also generate a complete complex figure, created over a long period of time. In the first case, the sketch allows for control of the idea which, through it, is enriched with awareness; in the second, the slow and detailed execution triggers a cognitive process which, from the private sphere, opens the communicative will to third parties. In both cases, the temporal dimension is part of the rhetoric with which the narrative is accomplished. Regret, corrections, overlays are somehow the tangible outline of a story that every manual drawing tells. However, there is more. Manual drawing incorporates a more complex temporality, into which the events that accompany the execution forcefully enter and, ultimately, the dimension of the body "as a globally thinking entity" and absolute protagonist of a process in which hand, body and mind are measured with the ability to organize the experience of reality and its representation as well as to dominate graphically concepts such as extension, density, weight, number, etc., extending the value of the investigative experience in space and time with skills that they require not only innate talent but also education, habit and practice which, unfortunately, no longer seem required in the formation of the architect. "The hand", says Foucillon, "is about action: it takes, it creates, and it could be said that it thinks. When resting, it is not a soulless tool abandoned on the table or hanging down the side of a body. Habit, instinct, and the desire to move are latent within it, and it does not take long to determine the intended action" (Foucillon 2006: 106).

Alessandra Cirafici, Paolo Giordano, Ornella Zerlenga – Editorial. Freehand Thoughts