

Guarderia El Petit Compte_ Alessandra Forastiero



A child's game. La Guarderia El Petit Comte, Besalù

Besalù. Faraway a rainbow, a vibration of colors... an intriguing building rests by the landscape.

When descending along the east side of the school, the sensation is of a slow discovery. What once from a distance might have seemed like a barrier, is a wonderful sequence of single colored cylinders that allow the light to filter into the inside of the school's spaces.

I personally found fascinating to discover that the cylinders spin on themselves without much effort. The strength of a small child is sufficient to generate the spin. What incredible interaction children can establish with their school building. No concrete or brick walls really inclose them. The entire structure's perimeter is a "game they can play".

I felt immediately an association with the Tibetan Prayer Wheels* .

The Tibetan Prayer Wheels have been made for many centuries in a wide range of sizes and styles - from hand-held and table-top wheels, all the way up to the larger than human size 2.5 or 3.5 meters and some Prayer Wheels reach the diameter of 1.5 to 1.8 meters.

They are often built around Buddhist Stupas and Monasteries, there may be long rows of prayer wheels which people will spin as they walk clockwise around the building, reciting what is considered to be one of the most profound and beneficial mantra.

It is believed that the practice of the prayer wheel brings the benefits of harmonizing the environment, increase compassion and wisdom, encourage a peaceful state of mind and assist practitioners on their life journey.

According to the Tibetan Buddhist belief, spinning such a wheel is just as effective as reciting orally the mantra.

When the cylinder spins , the prayer that it incloses inside will disperse in the air and the wind will transport it around the world, in all directions.

A message of life and joy is created by the infant school's perimetral colored cylinders. The child's innocence, the vivacity, the creativity, all is clearly present even when the school might be empty of people.

Progressively from the inclined street one perceives the dimensions of the building, arriving gradually to the school's ground level by the entry ramp that brings to the interior hall of the school.

One enters the school to find himself once again outside, shield by colored lightfilters on the external perimeter of the playground. The space between the cylinders increases on the south side facing the landscape. The gaps reveal what is happening on the outside as well as in the inside, boundaries are blurred.

The daylight is very present, entering from the playground and the lightwells.
All seams developed around the patio and the interior courtyard. The voids structure the space.

Colour is used to improve the child's orientation, distinguishing every classroom with an individual color.

Colored cylinders roll down the street, children coming, children going. Tomorrow another day to play.

Alessandra Forastiero
Roma 18 settembre 2013

*A Buddhist prayer wheel is made of a hollow metal cylinder, often beautifully embossed, mounted on a rod stick and containing a tightly wound scroll printed with the mantra: OM MANI PADME HUM.