

Reciproco/Reciprocal

Greetings from...Saluti da... Ghost Towns, Paesi Fantasma

A project by Wilma Tabacco & Angelo Bellobono

Our collaborative works, seen here in various sites within Readings, have resulted from a series of serendipitous circumstances that enabled us to construct what we imagine to be a geo-anthropological bridge between Italy and Australia.

I was born in a small village in the central Apennine Mountains in the region of Abruzzo, in the province of L'Aquila, an area surrounded by the Gran Sasso and Sirente ranges. Partially deserted due to post WW11 migration and now totally abandoned after the devastating 2009 earthquake, the village is a 'red zone' where no one, for their own safety, is meant to enter.

Via email Angelo informed me that his art practice has, for years, been dedicated to studying the geographic structures and social and anthropological histories of the all the mountain ranges surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. He has climbed them, photographed them and painted them. He considers them a hinge between the towns facing the sea that he fantasises as a large mountain lake. The Apennine range in particular he sees as a formidable antiquated bridge, fragile yet powerful, a ship that pulsates in the centre of this great lake, one that spreads its arms to the four points of the compass.

Over the years I have made many works, both paintings and works on paper honouring civilisations or cities lost either through invasions, wars, natural disasters - earthquakes, volcanic eruptions - or merely disappearance caused by the passing of time.

Angelo contacted my cousin in Abruzzo who took him to visit my hometown where he photographically documented its ruinous condition including footage of my house of birth. The edited video, which also includes scenes from Stuart Mill, a derelict town in central Victoria, is displayed amongst the travel guides to Italy. Once in Melbourne we realised that our common interest in ghost towns would be an appropriate starting point for creating visualisations of our concerns.

Using maps of Italy that Angelo brought with him, in particular maps of the relevant mountain ranges and using those of various regions of Australia in my collection we assembled a montage recto verso map that is intended, obviously, as a metaphor for the blending of cultural identities. We have given prominence to a number of 'ghost towns' (there are over 5000 in Italy) by randomly placing their names in large script onto the map, this way recording something of that that is no longer. Our superimposed postcards pictorialise imaginary aspects of the natural geography of the regions but, more importantly, recalls the practice of migrants sending postcards with the brief, often scribbled message, 'greeting from...'. This, sent to relatives back 'home', avoided lengthy emotional descriptions of life in the 'new country'.

Wilma Tabacco
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