



CRASES



C O M U N I C A T O S T A M P A

Oggetto: Mostra fotografica

Titolo della mostra: SICILIA il paesaggio

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Conferenza di presentazione: Chiara Fragalà

Soggetto promotore: CRASES Centro Regionale Attività Socioculturale all'Estero ed in Sicilia

In collaborazione con: MUSEUM Osservatorio dell'arte contemporanea in Sicilia

Soggetto finanziatore: REGIONE SICILIA Assessorato al Lavoro ed all'Emigrazione

Patrocini: Consolato Generale d'Italia, Istituto Italiano di Cultura e Comites di Chicago, Comune di Bagheria

Inaugurazione: sabato 8 dicembre, ore 4,30 pm

Date: 8-18 dicembre 2007

Orari: 8,00 am-18,00 pm

Sede: DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY, 7900 West Division Street, River Forest, IL 60305 (USA)

SICILIA il paesaggio

Robert Cameriere, Walter Leonardi,
Giuseppe Leone, Angelo Pitrone,
Sandro Scalia, Ferdinando Scianna.

E' la Sicilia dei paesaggi di straordinaria bellezza, dei tramonti suggestivi, delle montagne innevate, del mare sublime, quella ritratta nei 30 scatti di sei fotografi siciliani per la mostra "Sicilia il paesaggio".

Finanziata dall'Assessorato al Lavoro ed all'Emigrazione della Regione Sicilia e promossa dal CRASES, la mostra fotografica è organizzata dal MUSEUM di Bagheria e ospitata, dall'8 al 18 dicembre 2007, presso la Dominican University di River Forest (Illinois - USA).

L'esposizione rientra nell'ambito delle attività culturali organizzate al fine di promuovere all'Estero la cultura italiana. E' una Sicilia dal forte impatto visivo, pregna di emotività quella che viene promossa nella mostra, come Chiara di Cesare mette in luce "L'immagine fotografica è una testimonianza preziosa del rapporto che si viene ad instaurare tra il fatto e il sentimento, tra il contenuto e la forma, tra la rappresentazione oggettiva di un luogo e la esuberanza creativa ed interpretativa di chi lo osserva".

I lavori presentati sono stati realizzati da alcuni dei migliori fotografi siciliani nel corso della loro decennale carriera; artisti di risonanza internazionale che nell'ambito della propria esperienza lavorativa, hanno indagato, scrutato e rappresentato, ciascuno diversamente e nel rispetto della propria inclinazione personale, le molteplici sfaccettature e sfumature che la Sicilia, terra tra le più composite e complesse al mondo, è in grado di offrire.

La mostra si propone di fornire ai fruitori un excursus esaustivo ed emotivamente coinvolgente delle bellezze paesaggistiche della nostra isola, di rafforzarne il legame affettivo dei molti siciliani, residenti ormai da anni in America, e di farla conoscere ed apprezzare a coloro i quali non hanno mai avuto l'opportunità di viverla.

Durante la cerimonia di inaugurazione, intermezzo musicale del soprano Liliana Bartolotta.



Il Console Generale d'Italia e il Sindaco di Bagheria

Bagheria: the villas' town

Bagheria is a town of approximately 56,000 inhabitants in the neighbourhood of Palermo in Sicily, Italy.



In 1658 Guiseppe Branciforti, Prince of Butera, a former Viceroy of Sicily retired here and built a large villa, in the early 18th century several other aristocratic Sicilian families built villas here to retire to from Palermo. In 1769 one of the Prince's descendents redesigned the former village into a well planned Baroque town, it immediately became a fashionable resort, and many villas in the popular Sicilian Baroque style were built. Most of these have now fallen into ruin, but one such villa, the "Villa Palagonia", renowned for its complex external staircase, curved facades, and marbled interiors remains in tact. Designed by Tomasso Napoli, it is today open to the public.

This territory has an ancient history. The first vestiges take us back to protohistory times and are on the Monte Porcara and at Pizzo Cannita, as well as Phoenician and later Hellenistic-Roman Solunto, and on over the aqueduct bridge over the Eleuterio in late Gothic style to the Solanto barony. From the latter there was born the town of baroque villas, the swansong of the Palermo aristocracy.

The history of the cultural heritage goes hand in hand with that of the agrarian landscape: the forest, sugar cane, vineyards, tomatoes and lemons.

The recent history, in the century we have just left behind us, is the vine and wine history of the Alliata family, that of the big families linked to tomato processing (Dragotta, Verdone, ...) and lastly the history of the citrus fruit industry. It is also a story of intellectuals and artists:

F.Scaduto,G.Cirincione,I.Buttitta,R.Guttuso,F.Scianna,G.Tornatore, and D.Maraini. Today Bagheria is a town of service industries, with a population of just over 50.000. It is witnessing the decline of its lemon growing,food and agriculture tradition,and is trying to find its way into a future that cannot only be made up of building.

People in the town are beginning to realise that the time has come to re-qualify what exists:

- they are gathering up the relics of their history, reopening the villas and constructing a museum circuit;
- they are the datum points of the Bagheria of the future,which is already on the way,a way which is being taken with determination, in the rediscovery of rules and pathways of legality, in which the capable,the willing and the onest will be valorised. Bagheria is already a quality place in the eastern outskirts of the metropolis, and it wants to be one more and more.



Solunto

This town is rediscovering that artistic and cultural identity that sees its imprinting in the building of villas and the work of the priest Castronovo,and aims at rediscovering a space in the higher educational system in the metropolitan sphere. Bagheria is reviving the traditional welcome at the trattorias where the “caravans” sought refreshment after loading wagons with lemons, and is broadening its accommodation. It is preparing to receive all those who choose to spend a holiday rich in stimuli there: these pages are addressed to these people.

You can get to Bagheria along the coastal state road that goes from Palermo to Messina in an interminable succession of bends. The outskirts of the capital seem never to end, infinitely extending into the buildings of the villages in the “metropolitan belt” which have reached into every corner of the plains that slope down to the sea, sliding down from the mountains, whose light-blue shapes are heaped up on one another opposite the coast.

As you go through the outskirts of Bagheria, you have the marked sensation that here the fantasy of architects has decidedly freed itself of

all imaginable stylistic ties: buildings with strange shapes and unusual colours stand side by side with more rational ones in yellow tufaceous stone, and all together they give rise to a very picturesque whole. One wonders if there is something special in the air, something that in the past also struck the Prince of Palagonia, one of the most celebrated Bagheria personages, who designed that “villa of monsters” that today is the main attraction of the town.

Ferdinando Gravina was certainly an exceptional character in the eighteenth-century Palermo elite.

Goethe, who had the chance to meet him, describes him as “scrawny gentleman... a solemn and grave old man, all spruce and powdered”, an old-fashioned nobleman, at least in appearance.

Actually, though, the prince was quite different from his peers, so much so that some have seen him as an ingenious precursor of surrealist art. His contemporaries did not hesitate to judge him mad: how else could they have defined a person that filled his park with statues absolutely devoid of grace, extravagant, monstrous, ugly in a word? As if this were not enough, the prince enjoyed playing jokes on anyone who had the misfortune to visit him: just to give an example, the legs of chairs were sawn, making it impossible to sit on them, and in the padding of the ones that were whole, terrible nails were hidden.

On arriving at the villa, the work of the friar architect Tommaso Maria Napoli, in front of the main entrance the guest was received by two solemn characters that, sitting on stone thrones, scrutinised him with imperturbable stone gazes, sixteen of them to be precise, since one of them had six eyes while the other one, in addition to its own, could dispose of those of two goats and two stone heads that, elegantly placed, served as its hair.

Inside the villa you can visit the vestibule, frescoed with “The Toils of Hercules” and the “Mirror room”,

lined with countless fragments of mirrors placed at angles which are all different, so as to multiply images infinitely.

Also outstanding are the “Billiards room and the inside chapel. Prince Giuseppe Branciforti, a member of one of the oldest families in Sicily, with many blanzons, had the merit of building the first mansion, which the gave rise to the urban nucleus of the town. The prince, embittered at the ianuspicious outcome of a conspiracy that was intended to put him on the momentarily vacant throne of Sicily (and instead ended with the death of many of the conspirators) and some family bereavements, decided to move his residence out of the city, and had a small palace built with crenellated towers in the heart of the fertile valley east of Plaermo, Bagaria.

On the main door, looking towards Palermo, he significantly had the scornful words “O CORTE A DIO” (farewell court) incised, and he refused to take any further part in politics, looking after his estate instead. In his retinue there went a large number of people who installed themselves all around the princely mansion, witch thus became the fulcrum of a small agricultural village.

The mansion was made up of a long central building which you got to by means of two flights of steps, one on each front. In front of each of them there was a big cortile around which there were the servants' quarters and the church. Over the back entrance there looms up a bust of the founder framed by rich decoration. The mansion was originally surrounded by a big park that no longer exists. Not far from it there is the “Charterhouse”(work for its recovery has been set going), a small neoclassical edifice built in 1797, in which Ercole michele Branciforti set up a singular waxworks, on of the first in Europe.

Carthusian monks with the appearance of well-known personages of the day were set out in natural attitudes in the various little cells, with their servants looking after them. For a long time the little “monastery” was a destination for hordes of visitors, also attracted by an opportunity to admire part of the Branciforti treasure, since the prince had paced pictures and furniture of great value here, and has sent for the famous painter Velasquez to fresco the walls. From the Branciforti villa there starts a long avenue traced out in 1769 by another member of the family, Don Salvatore. With this street and the one intersecting it orthogonally (now respectively Corso Butera and Corso Umberto) he set going the orderly urbanistic development of the future commune of Bagheria.

The prince also commissioned the architects P.Vivaldi and S.Attinelli to build the cathedral church and the new wing of the mansion of his ancestors.



Villa Valguarnera, a mature work by architect Napoli, built by the family of the same name over a period of about seventy years starting from the beginning of the eighteenth century, was one of the biggest and most sumptuous villas, with a big circular courtyard, a monumental flight of the steps, fine statues, and frescoes. Unfortunately you cannot visit it, as it is private.

By contrast, you can visit Villa Aragona Cutò, designed by the friar architect Giuseppe Mariani, which is now council property and houses the central library. Its massive shape is surmounted by a big gallery from which there is a vast panorama as far as Palermo, and indeed from here the Prince of Cutò could assist with his guests at the fireworks that were lit on the Gulf of

Palermo for the festino of Santa Rosalia.

Villa Cutò is one of the elegant holiday homes that the Palermo aristocracy built in the eighteenth century in the Bagheria area. The structure is different from that of other coeval villas, more closely resembling that of city mansions. For example, the access staircase is inside the cortile. The salons on the piano nobile were richly frescoed in the eighteenth century.

Here the town council has placed the collection of toys belonging to Pietro Piraino, a Plaermo antiquarian, restorer and wax modeller.

In the rooms at the eighteenth century Villa Cattolica in 1973 the Municipal Gallery was set up, thanks to

a generous donation of works by the artist Renato Guttuso(whose mortal remains rest in a monumental sarcophagus done by the sculptor Giacomo Manzù, in the garden of the villa); it has been further enriched with works by other important contemporary artists. Since a few months ago, a big section of the gallery has housed the first nucleus of an exhibition devoted to cinematographic art, and in particular to posters. There is a big selection of posters going from 1927 to the first months of 1984. The exhibition was set up thanks to the Lo Medico brothers, the heirs of a Bagheria family of cinema managers.

Going back into the street of “historic villas”, in the town the visitor can see other architectonic jewels like Villa Trabia, though this is private property and you can only see the two facades (which are very particular on account of their two-colour scheme) and a little of the park;

Villa Villarosa- Notarbartolo, attributed to the architect Venanzio Marvuglia, one of the few examples of the neoclassical style in Bagheria, which you can visit by contacting the Pro Loco (local entertainment committee);

Villa Rammacca, in a splendid panoramic position and with a garden still rich in exotic plants, which you glimpse from state highway 113; and Villa Palazzo Galletti Inguaggiato, in Corso Butera, which offers visitors its fine exteriors, different from those of other villas as they are without plaster and are richly sculpted in Aspra stone.

At Villa San Cataldo you can visit the park – one of the rare examples of a historic neoclassical garden extant in Sicily- whose layout goes back to the foundation of the villa in the eighteenth century, as well as the church and inner courtyards. The villa was restructured in the nineteenth century in neo- Gothic style and is reminiscent of a fortress with its corner towers.

You can get into Villa Larderìa –which houses a religious institute- by contacting the nuns and admire the main characteristic of the complex, i.e. the rare stellar plant, not to be found in any other villa in the Palermo area.

Unfortunately the building is incomplete: it has no access steps, which are a constant in Bagheria buildings.