



PODBIELSKI CONTEMPORARY

AGNESE PURGATORIO

LEARNING BY HEART





● BERLIN

● ARMENIA

AGNESE PURGATORIO - *LEARNING BY HEART*

MARTINA CORGNATI

An indefinite crowd of refugees drifts forward uncertainly, on a precarious bridge projected into the void and materialised by an image: a map of Italy, floating on the sea. In front of them an artist: she is pregnant, her look is resolute and has a visionary gaze, and she is heading straight in front, into the future. Perhaps you can write to me is the title of the series which this particular work belongs to; it was created by Agnese Purgatorio a few years ago and since then it has been rethought several times, each time modifying it slightly, and thus changing consequently the issue at stake. This work is, indeed, a digital collage, a technique that allows hybridizations and that the artist has been systematically practicing for many years, obtaining thus her most significant series.

These works are often, but not always, coupled with a video installation: Fronte dell'Est, Dalla Clandestinità, Perhaps you can write to me, Torino-Istanbul-Teheran, Solo rose per te and her most recent, Learning by Heart, exhibited for the first time in a solo show at Podbielski Contemporary.



IN THE NEAR EAST

The image shows a diorama set within a dilapidated building. The diorama is mounted on a wooden platform with a decorative floral border. It depicts a woman with long black hair lying on her back, a man in a dark suit holding a skull, and another man in a dark suit looking on. The background shows a skeletal wooden frame and a ceiling with peeling paint. The text 'IN THE NEAR EAST' is painted on the front edge of the platform. The surrounding walls are covered in a light-colored, zigzag patterned wallpaper. A small sign with the text 'LITTLE PARADE' is visible on the right wall.

LITTLE PARADE

Agnese Purgatorio's technical and linguistic choice appears now, more than ever, strategic. In 1994, it entitled her to win the prestigious Panorama European Kodak award at Les Rencontres d'Arles. Indeed, Agnese Purgatorio does not trust the too well defined artistic categories, as well as the rigid dogmas which, for instances, divide and distinguish photography from painting and, also, within photography a specific subject (landscape, portrait) from others.

I would like to stress that photomontage has been "invented" roughly around 1917 and that a good portion of modernism enthusiastically dealt with it, creating some of the most outstanding and disquieting hybridizations in the XX century. Moreover, for almost forty years, many of the most innovative and interesting artists "who used photography" (among other means), in Europe, US and elsewhere, happily devoted themselves to mixing photographic codes with sounds, spatial constructions, installations, projections and much more.

To make the long story short, in her nurturing the image more than photography itself, Agnese Purgatorio does not stand alone. Then again, it may seem quite puzzling nowadays referring to any form of "linguistic purity" in this world of contaminations and mishmashes, in the art field as well as in any other aspect of culture and everyday life.

Learning by Heart 5

Digital Collage

100 x 140

Edition 1/5 + 2AP

Agnese Purgatorio digital collage's strategy entitled her to create a true poetic based fundamentally on the idea of refugee, of "clandestine". She glances down to the world from a platform represented by Bari, a city on the Adriatic coast in southern Italy, from where she has seen multitudes of clandestine refugees making landfall. She has gazed at geographical and anthropological landscapes, which have mutated faster than the very possibility of even measuring and describing them. She has bridged present dramas with past tragedies, she has done her best to transform her images in powerful magnetic fields with which she has attracted completely different shapes and elements: for example she has intertwined the words spoken by women convicted in Bari's prison, with whom the artist has been working for years, with the faces belonging to the artists who trespassed the borders of meaning and history (from Joseph Beuys to Francis Bacon; from Pierpaolo Pasolini to Francesca Woodman) and with the portraits of many anonymous, deprived people, whom the angel of history has shaken off from his wings. Her intention is not to become a reporter but to extend the "clandestinity's" frontline to the point where she can include in it everybody who does not have, or cannot have or does not want to have, any real homeland, who does not belong to any real place, any language, and who does not have any defined meaning. Starting with herself.

Learning by Heart 3
Digital Collage
100 x 140
Edition 1/5 + 2AP





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During her journey, a few years back, Agnese Purgatorio apprehended the history of the Armenians, people who were victim of the first XX Century's genocide and who, deprived of the main part of their homeland, left tracks and clandestine memories everywhere along the Mediterranean shores and beyond. Such also happened in Bari. As a matter of fact, in Bari's surroundings, in 1924 about a hundred Armenian survivors, founded a village called Nor Arax (Nor means new and Arax was one of the main rivers in historical Armenia, which today marks the border with Iran), which found its economic base in the carpets' industry, one of the most typical and ancient Armenian wares. Their mentor and voice was a poet, Hrand Nazarianz, who arrived in Bari some time before thanks to his Italian wife, who helped him escape his death warrant issued by the Turkish authorities. His poem, *Rimani, mi dicesti. E io restai* (Stay, you told me. And I stayed), accompanies the images of one of the Agnese Purgatorio's newest videos, a combination of sequences taken partly in Armenia and partly in one of the oldest "movie theatres" in Puglia, nowadays abandoned. In 1910 a documentary film was projected there, focusing on the Italian-Turkish international relations; today the artist stages, in the same place, a performance during which she writes the poet's words on her snow-white apron; she covers herself with words because life goes on but *scripta manent* (written words remain), memory lasts forever.

Learning by Heart 7

Digital Collage

100 x 140

Edition 1/5 + 2AP

Agnese Purgatorio, who identified them as the perfect stage for her series, *Learning by Heart*, has systematically visited the aforementioned and other abandoned movie theatres. A forgotten, repressed landscape, a heap made of contradictory and spurious tracks, a scene in themselves, scene and representation of nonsense and desertion. What an opportunity to stage another story, a different story, another dirty story, created by relics and contaminations: the vertiginously growing numbers of victims of the Armenian genocide, collected one month after the other and referred to the years 1915-16, are combined with some drawings taken from the American fund-raising campaign organization, in order to help Armenians during the first World War (it was called Give or we perish) and with some images taken from a French satire written in the Twenties. This ambiguous, sharp, very striking image becomes the result of a continuous, never-ending editing of the same parts, which literally migrate from one position to another and from one role to another. The last image does not exist; it is yet to be created by the artist. The image itself, one could say, is nothing more than a soft shape, ceaselessly transforming itself; it lends itself, just as soft clay, to interpret the subjective position of the artist in that very moment, the temporary condition of the "I". The image is a passage in which past and present time, splendour and decay, hope and destiny, beauty and anxiety interweave with one another on the same ground, endlessly negotiating their own space and their intangible and always temporary pervasiveness.

Learning by Heart 4
Digital Collage
100 x 140
Edition 1/5 + 2AP





220000

56000

164000

225000

16800

208200

1185000

112800

1072200

Still from
J'ai utilisé la mémoire
video performance
4,44 min
2013



Unintelligible words overheard from a Russian radio station, seraphic voices whispered through the stones of an ancient church and the strong sound produced by the wind, desiccating the closed border protected by the military forces between Armenia and Turkey, next to the ancient city of Ani, accompany the images of the video *J'ai utilisé la mémoire*. This work is a tribute to all the Armenian women who survived the genocide. The artist tosses bouquets of roses, flower that belongs to the Armenian plateau, in the "canyon" which divides two countries which words, agreements and the negationism's obstinacy were never able to reconcile, while she recites their names: names that were able to flee the carnage's anonymity.

Learning by Heart 2
Digital Collage
100 x 140
Edition 1/5 + 2AP

Agnese Purgatorio is an artist who works primarily in photography, video installations and performances. Born in Bari, Italia, she lives between Belgrade and Beirut. She draws her inspiration from a melting pot of cultures and with her artistic work she invents her own space, a poetic space, a mix of reality and imagination. An hybrid floating reality that invites the viewer to interrogate personal narratives and collective memory. Graduated in Foreign Languages and Literatures, she holds an M.A. in Art Therapy. Her training as an artist began with a period of study in São Paulo, Brazil, at the Lasar Segall Museum and at the SESC Pompéia Factory (drawing techniques, printmaking and photography). Since 1990 she has exhibited her works both in Italy and abroad, in solo and group exhibitions [Galleria Bonomo (Bari), Gallery Onetwentyeight (New York), Mars Gallery (Melbourne), Podbielski Contemporay (Berlin), Venice and Moscow Biennale, Triennale di Milano, Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art - Yerevan and many others], and she has been awarded with important international awards. Her works have been included in many private and public art collections [Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Musée de l'Élysée - Lausanne, Moreland's public art collection - Victoria (Australia), Fondazione Fiumara d'Arte - Catania, Museo di Fotografia Contemporanea - Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), Museo di arte Contemporanea Horcinus Orca - Messina, Musinf - Museo d'arte moderna e della fotografia -Senigallia].

Dalla Clandestinità
Digital Collage
90 x 140
Edition 3/5 + 2AP



Selected International Exhibitions, Awards and Events

2016

L'Altro sguardo Fotografe italiane 1965-2015, Triennale di Milano, catalogue
Il corpo solitario, musinf - Museo d'arte moderna e della fotografia, Senigallia, catalogue
Utopia, ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION 2011-2016 , Podbielski Contemporary, Berlin

2015

Learning by Heart, Podbielski Contemporary, curated by Martina Corgnati, Berlin, catalogue
MIA FAIR, solo exhibition, Milano, catalogue
Breaking News II, Podbielski Contemporary, Berlin
Horcynus Festival 2015, Terme di San Calogero, Lipari
Gli orti del paradiso, Il Filatoio, Caraglio (CN), catalogue
Collezione Farnesina, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, catalogue

2014

Rimani mi dicesti ed io restai, Italian Institute of Culture, curated by Martina Corgnati, Tirana, Zagreb, Köln, Strasbourg
Venti per una, Italian Institute of Culture, curated by Martina Corgnati, Zagreb

2013

Twenty for one, Special Project, 5 Moscow Biennale of Contemporary art, curated by Martina Corgnati, Zurab Tsereteli Art Gallery, Rizzordi Art Foundation, St. Petersburg
20 x 1, Centro Culturale Recoleta, Buenos Aires; Spazio Culturale Museo delle donne, Córdoba; Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo – Montevideo; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, La Plata, catalogue

2012

J'ai utilisé la mémoire, performance, Armenia-Turkey border
Remote sensing, Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art, curated by Martina Corgnati, Yerevan

2011

54° Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte Della Biennale di Venezia, Padiglione Italia
Waves... The Tides of Time, Gallery Onetwentyeight, New York
Dalla cella all'atelier, permanent art collection IGAV curated by Alessandro Demma, Castiglia di Saluzzo (CN)
Sulla linea verde, performance, Horcynus Orca Fondation, International Art Festival, Messina

2010

Era un giorno di neve, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje
Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, video presentation, curated by Martina Corgnati, Murcia
Contemporary Artists between Italy and Turkey, video-installation Torino- Istanbul-Teheran, Yapi Kredi gallery, Ministry of Italian Foreign Affairs celebrate Istanbul European Capital of Culture, catalogue

2009

Dalla clandestinità, performance and video installation, Mars gallery, Melbourne

Fronte dell'est, performance, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Melbourne

Perhaps you can write to me, performance and video installation, Horcynus arti visive, Horcynus Orca Fondation, International Art Festival, Messina

2008

International Experimental Film Festival, Museum Florean, Carunari

Le porte del Mediterraneo, Palazzo Piozzo, curated by Martina Corgnati, Rivoli (TO)

2007

Fronte dell'est, Galleria Bonomo, Bari, catalogue

Funny women, 23 international artist, Gallery 128, New York, catalogue

2006

Stanza dei Portatori d'acqua, Art Hotel Atelier sul mare, Castel di Tusa

Bienal B, International Art Festival, Porto Alegre, R.S.

2005

bac!05, 6° International Festival of Contemporary Art in Barcelona, catalogue

Milano e Torino Incontrano... l'Arte, Award, Palazzo Affari ai Giureconsulti, Milano

2004

Self-ish, Gallery Onetwentyeight, New York

Superheroine, Gallery 128, New York

2003

Maternità dell'opera, Galleria Bonomo, curated by Teresa Macrì, Bari, catalogue

Anima e corpo fra tradizione e cibernetica, 43° Suzzara Award, curated by Martina Corgnati, catalogue

2002

Extraordinario, art room Il centro molle, Casa Museo STESICOREA, curated by Teresa Macrì, Catania

Arte Maggio, curated by Linda Blumberg and Marilena Bonomo, Sala Murat, Bari, catalogue

2001

Mille e una Biennale, in conjunction with 49th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Bevilacqua La Masa Fondation

Border Stories, IX International Torino Biennale of photography, Palazzo Bricherasio, Torino, catalogue

2000

Non Racconti, Aroma Photogalerie, Berlin

Art Woman, Castello Carlo V, Lecce, catalogue

1998

Romeo Martinez International Award, San Marino catalogue

Il demone ambiguo, Fondazione Italiana per la Fotografia, curated by Roberto Mutti, Torino

Stati Estensi 199A project Casalgrande (RE), artist book with critique essay by Massimo Mussini

ART&MAGGIO, Prima rassegna d'arte contemporanea, curated by Marilena Bonomo, Bari, catalogue

1996/97

Tribus, Exposition France-Italie, Le Génie de la Bastille, Paris; Artoteca Alliance, Bari

The European Face, The Copenhagen 96 Ferry - M/F Kronborg, Copenhagen; Danish Cultural Institute, Hannover; Galeria Foyer, Gdansk; Fotoforum West, Innsbruck; Weesper Synagoge, Weesp (Amsterdam); Galerie FotoForum, Bolzano; Jewish Culture Centre, Krakow; PS Gallery, Poznan; Estonian National Library, Tallin, catalogue

1995

The European Face, Talbot Rice Gallery - University of Edinburgh and The European Union Cultural Forum, Edinburgh

Comme dans un miroir, Le portrait dans la collection du Musée, exposition itinérante, Musée de L'Elysée, curated by C.H.

Favrod

1994

European Panorama Kodak Award, international selection Paris, winners exhibition: Eglise des Jésuites, Rencontres Internationales d'Arles

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Learning by heart, Agnese Purgatorio

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