

# frieze

## Un'Espressione Geografica

by Barbara Casavecchia

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ITALY



### Un'Espressione Geografica Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Turin

'It might be London', grumbles Lucy Honeychurch about the other British guests staying at the Pensione Bertolini in Florence, in the first chapter of E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908). Despite fantasies of 'otherness', most tourists travel with their *habitus*, which the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu explained as the assumptions that determine how a social group perceives, judges and behaves in the world.

As the epicentre of the Grand Tour since the 17th century, it can be hard to separate Italy as the *bel paese* (beautiful country) described in travelogues from the complex *paese reale* (real country) of today. It's apt, then, that Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo decided to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Italy's birth as an independent nation with an exhibition that examines the perception of the country through foreign eyes. Titled 'Un'Espressione Geografica' (A Geographic Expression, a phrase coined in 1847 by the statesman Klemens von Metternich to describe Italy as the mere sum of its states) and curated by Francesco Bonami with the help of Stefano Collicelli Cagol, the show includes new works by 20 artists who were each assigned a region of Italy at random, and who made work in response to the area after travelling there in the company of a local curator.

In its fascination for all things idyllic, remote and auratic, the show works well as a case study on the *habitus* of artists. Folklore lies at the heart of Ulla von Brandenburg's film on Sardinia (*Mamuthones/Issahadores*, 2011); Victor Man evokes the Piedmontese penchant for mysticism with the sculpted stone slabs of his *Places, Lodgings, Company = (il cavallo torinese)* (The Turin Horse, 2011), while Markus Schinwald replicates the marble step of the sanctuary of the Virgin in Loreto that has been 'sculpted' by the centuries-old passage of pilgrims on their knees (*Untitled [mimik]*, 2011). Isabella Comaro returned from Puglia with 'Of Cinematic' (2011), a series of plaster casts of architectural elements of the Basilica della

Santa Croce in Lecce, eroded by time, which she multiplied by two and rendered in grey, like photocopies. Gintaras Didziapetris filmed a trip from Florence to Livorno as a sequence of epiphanies, echoing the tradition of Byzantine icons and mosaics (*A Byzantine Place*, 2011).

Contemporary Italy is only glimpsed. Paying homage to the cult of Romantic ruins, the photographs of Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs (*Constructions I-X*, 2011) portray unfinished and unauthorized constructions in Basilicata; the ironic video *Communal Sense* (2011) by Ruti Sela and Maayan Amir records the artists' meetings with several mayors in Umbria, touching upon hospitality, institutional rhetoric and private life. In *Balancing at the Toe of the Boot* (2010), Roman Ondák narates his travels in Calabria with his wife on seven postcards inscribed with 'We Are Still Alive', a reference to both On Kawara and to the dangers of living in the region; Ondák also plays on the ambiguities of reportage with 16 fictional, framed articles in local newspapers about his trip, illustrated by snapshots of commonplace locations. Gabriel Kuri's installation *Pizzo* (2011) – the protection money paid by businessmen to the Camorra – reflects the chaotic negotiations Neapolitans regularly experience by coupling the random numbers of the local lottery and a dozen exotic ferns that adapted to the local climate in the city's Botanical Garden. Ibon Aranberri's installation *Extinction Made This Place Vital* (2011) reinterprets the museographic display of prehistoric rock carvings in Valtellina by questioning our appropriation of the past: one of the recurring symbols is the *Rosa camuna*, chosen as logo of the Lombardy Region in the 1970s, and now heralded as emblem of the so-called Padania, the name by which the secessionist, right-wing Northern League party refers to the northern part of Italy. A personal favourite was Nathaniel Mellors' video *The Nest* (2011), an episode from his series 'Our-house' (2010–ongoing). Shot in the park of Villa Pisani in Strà, in Veneto, the same location chosen by Pier Paolo Pasolini for *Porcile* (Pigpen, 1969), it adds a new chapter to the saga of the dissolution of an upper-class family. Mellors confronts the history of his working-class family with Pasolini's reflection on the disappearance of the 'real people', under attack from 'bourgeois entropy'. 'Real Italy', for once, looks just round the corner.

Barbara Casavecchia

SPAIN

### Maja Bajevic Palacio de Cristal, Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia Madrid

In the brochure for her exhibition, 'Continuará' (To Be Continued), Maja Bajevic likens the architecture of the venue – the Palacio de Cristal, an 1887 iron-and-glass structure in the grounds of the Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia modelled on Joseph Paxton's 1851 Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park – to a sleepy princess in a lace dress, lying long-dormant in the beautiful Parque del Retiro. It's a striking image, and highlights the confluence in this exhibition of elements found elsewhere in Bajevic's *oeuvre*: lace and embroidery, windows and glass, ephemeral structures and states, a powerful feminine presence, an intimate sense of history. But in 'Continuará' Bajevic has widened the scope of her thematic focus to take in nothing less than the tumultuous history of much of the world over the past 100 years, and accordingly extends her use of metaphorical confluences with deftness and dexterity.

The exhibition combines various formats and registers – performance, video, participatory sculpture, sound installation, research and archival material – in an intricately layered configuration woven together via a unifying motif: a compendium of political and advertising slogans from the last 100 years, such as 'Better Dead Than Red', 'Guns Don't Kill People, People Kill People', and 'No Blood

Gabriel Kuri  
*Pizzo*  
2011  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable

