

September 15, 2021
(where the hell did the summer go btw?)

Dear R—,

I know you can't travel, caught up in another lockdown, and so I wanted to torture you a bit by regaling you with tales of my Italian summer. I was invited to a festival in Le Marche, the middle of greeny lushness, where we all saw lots of art works but we also ate and drank and swam and danced. Just for a little while time unfolded in a different fashion, more slowly, with a common deliberateness. I was invited there to read poems. The curators: Matteo Binci, Pietro Consolandi, Giacomo Pigliapoco and Bianca R. Schröder asked me to read something that went along with the theme of "rurality," and so I went in that direction, calling on Philip Whalen and Giulia Niccolai (two of my poet-heros) to invoke a Buddhist appreciation of nature, an echo of nature poetry from an era before the internet, poetry to talk to the "wood wide web." I even made a 'zine with flowers and phrases and called it "Light through a gate: Zen nostalgia." But I was the last performance of the whole weekend, right before a simple dinner among friends became a bacchanalia dance party by the hosts' inground pool—no longer placid but just as blue as in the photos.

So yeah, we arrived on the winding roads in from the coast and settled into our agriturismo. It was rustic and sweet. My partner, you know, Giulia, and I had a friend with us, a dear theater director pal who's going through a pre-mature midlife crisis and wanted to drink all the wine. And so, he did. Sitting under the hot central Italian sun he sipped sparkling whites and leered at the other artists and guests making out by the fruit trees, tumbling and fumbling with one another. Eventually we lured him away from the pool and went to see some events. A lot of artists were there in the little towns and it was nice to hear them talk about their own work, its context. I'd never been to these places of course but it felt like a coming home, the "festival of gentle souls," what other way is there to end the summer. In the "hills of desire," rolling through with fresh air, a sea breeze arriving through the forest.

The artists included over the three days were: Above the Tree, Costanza Battaglini & Flavio Pacino, Jacopo Belloni, Marina Cavadini, Beatrice Celli, Bekhbaatar Enkhtur, Futurefarmers, Riccardo Giacconi & Carolina Valencia Caicedo, Allison Grimaldi Donahue, Diego Gualandris, Eleonora Luccarini, Eleonora Moro, Myvillages, Ella Navot, Francesco Nordio, Luca Poncetta, Maria & Carminda Soares, Filippo Tappi, Undicesimacasa, Mattia Valentini, Agnès Varda. I didn't see all of the work but I did see a lot of it so let me tell you some things.

First there was my friend Eleanora Luccarini's performance "Sei poesie" six poems, in the Teatro Mario Tiberini in San Lorenzo in Campo. The poems she read boomed forth, modern cries in this beautiful little 19th century theater. (Did you know there are 365 theaters in the villages of Le Marche!? One for each day.) The rural theme was carried into her gentle treatment of life, a tender gaze towards the self in light of the violence the body must face daily thanks to our capitalist patriarchal heteronormative society. We saw Filippo Tappi's installation, a marble asterisk, black and almost camouflaged, a 21st century intruder in the town's architecture—sneak attack. The next day in San Vito sul Cesano there was the collective show with Jacopo Belloni, Marina Cavadini, Bekhbaatar Enkhtur, Futurefarmers, Ella Navot, and Luca Poncetta. The tiny village was suddenly filled with contemporary art, passersby stopped to look and listen inquisitively, extending the vibes of inclusivity and welcome. Jacopo's candles reconsecrated the public space, burning down, making shapes. Marina's videos reminded us of the necessity of our contact with nature, but not only, also that we are part of it. Luca's installation troubled the nature of touch and cleanliness, textures and material moving towards softness but collected from animals. And then Bekh's sculptures. I feel so lucky to know his work, how it adapts to environments and lives only temporally, for the time destiny allots.

A little later Riccardo Giacconi and Carolina Valencia Caicedo shared three sonic documentaries about rural life in different Italian locations. It was beautiful and moving and inspirational. We all sat in the piazza, rapt. A while later back in San Lorenzo in Campo, in the theater we saw Maria and Carminda Soares perform. They're twins and each gesture was made in perfect coordination, disturbing and ethereal, sensual and innocent, time stopped as they moved together.

After this we all went to an agriturismo where Eleonora Moro had prepared a truly exquisite meal, "Desiderio vegetale," vegetal desire...how lovely. It was all vegan and colorful and full of new tastes and textures as we sat in the garden and listened to music, chatted, sipped our wine. Undicesimacasa played a Dj set that awakened our animal hearts as we grooved and moved.

We headed home after that to have one last drink under the olive trees before getting some rest. In the morning we headed back to the pool, had a relaxed lunch under the grape vines and went into Pergola to watch *The Gleaners* by Agnès Varda. You know it's one of my favorite films, but watching it in such a calm environment, in community, was even more powerful. After that we headed to the Church of Santa Maria delle Tinte, a gorgeous gem of a baroque church, and listened to "Above the Tree" a sound installation that brought me to tears. The vibrations combined with the holy setting overwhelmed my senses, I felt so close to this ancient church, to this small village.

As we came closer to the hour of my performance my heartbeat quickened. The weather cooled and as we arrived at the agriturismo where I would share my poems the sun set over the pool and over the not-so-distant mountains. After the reading we ate and drank and laughed. Gilberto Zorio and Grazia Toderi made an appearance and reveled along with us.

So often it feels like the "art world" really isn't made for making friends. We try and make friends but we're pitted against each other constantly, fighting over crumbs, of course. These days at the *TRAFFIC Festival delle Anime Gentili* (whose name contains multitudes) were something else. They were a chance to reconnect and spend time listening, to engage with other people's practices, ask questions, sleep in, sleep out, kiss and make up. All I can say is that there should be more of this: an improvised community might well be the best kind.

Next time you will be there, too.

With love, always,

Allison Grimaldi Donahue