



Being an Albanian Immigrant in Italy: "Amidst Great Friendships and Great Prejudices"

Ilaria Costa (November 18, 2007)



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Adrian Paci. Born in Albania, he has been an Italian citizen since 1997. His artistic production is profoundly influenced by his own experiences and his life as an 'immigrant'

This new interview in our series on young Italian artists that live in or gravitate around the New York contemporary art scene is with Adrian Paci. Born in Albania, he has been an Italian citizen since 1997.

Last week two of his individual exhibits opened at the same time: one at the Smith-Stewart Gallery on the Lower East Side, and the other at the Peter Blum Gallery in Chelsea. He is also featured in the collective show "Senso Unico" at P.S. 1 MoMA with 8 other young Italian artists. These shows are the sign of the international acknowledgment that he has achieved non only on the European circuit, but on the other side of the ocean as well.

His artistic production, comprised of a vast range of different artistic mediums - from video installations, to photography, to painting, to sculpture - is profoundly influenced by his own experiences and his life as an 'immigrant'. Born in 1969 in Skhoder, Albania, he lives and works mostly in Italy, out of his studio in Milan.

After his formal training as a painter at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana, his artistic practice changed forever after his decision to move to Italy, leaving behind his homeland to begin a new life in Milan.

For Adrian Paci life and art are inevitably entwined and inseparable and they constantly inform one another; it is the theme of immigration that is the common thread links the various works in the three New York exhibits.

Adrian is a direct type, answering questions about immigration and art in a straightforward way, often terse, leaving aside any 'artist' jargon to get directly to the point and deconstruct trite clichés and prepared answers. He tells us that he lived his condition as an Albanian immigrant in Italy 'amidst great friendships and great prejudices'.

A question that you must hear a million times: what are the reasons why you moved to Italy in '97



leaving behind your homeland, Albania?

"Wanting to explore the world, the complete isolation of communist Albania, the desire to leave the past behind, the dream of Italian well-being, the anarchy of '97, the love for Piero Della Francesca, Leonardo, Fellini, the lack of electrical power, pizza and spaghetti...I can keep on going, but I'd rather stop here, because I think these examples convey the great push that spurred me."

How did you live first hand as an Albanian immigrant in Italy?

'Amidst great friendships and great prejudices'.

When did you decide/realize you were an artist?

"I always knew..., ...all joking aside, when I was young I would draw and paint and then my dad started bringing home books and I began to myself with the classics of art at a young age; then the high school for the arts, the academy. I don't remember a single time in my life when I thought of doing something else."

Your personal experiences influence all of your work from the videos to the photographs, sculpture, etc... in what way does your personal experience as an immigrant influence your work?

"One can be a victim of their personal story or can choose to use it. I have chosen to avail myself of it, and when I say avail myself I don't mean to just describe it, but something more. There is always a change in quality that has to happen between the life experience and its transformation into language. "

In light of recent events, what do you think of the current immigration situation in Italy? What should the Italian government do to deal with this issue more effectively?

"Oh please, don't ask me to give advice to the Italian government!..."

All I know is that immigrants are indispensable in every nation, if only because they are the ones that push us to put the concept of nation up for debate."

How much of 'Albanian' is there in your work and how much of 'Italian'? How do you think that Italy has influenced your artistic imagination and how much of your homeland is mirrored in your work?

"Well actually I hope that there's also some 'Indian' in my work!...I mean..., I think that art should speak to everyone!

Certainly Italy has influenced my work in a definitive way. From Leonardo to Pasolini, from ancient Rome to the Law 'Bossi-Fini', it even rhymes."

Do you see substantial differences between immigration in the US and in Italy?

"Tragically migrations all look alike, even if there are unique situations. The Albanian migration arrived in Italy with the energy of an explosion caused by the pressure felt after 50 years of isolation imposed by the communist regime. This brought about a mix of enormous energy but also violence.2



What is the message of your work?

"In a lesson given by Agamben in Venice I took note that ' the function of thought is to make life livable'. There, I hope that my work contributes to 'making life livable'."

What do you want to be said about your work?

"That they open possibilities,...that they contribute to 'making life livable'.

Did your family support your life choices?

"Very much."

Future projects?

"Keep going."

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