

Open studios – Artists in residence

Nicola Di Giorgio



Nicola Di Giorgio
Credit : Dodo Veneziano

**villa
arson**

Residence: January 8 - April 6, 2024
Open Studio: February 29, 2024

studio n°1

nice

Visual artist Nicola Di Giorgio is the first laureate of the New Grand Tour residency at Villa Arson. He is in residence from January 8 to April 6, 2024 with the support of the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris.

Nicola Di Giorgio (Palermo, 1994) lives and works between Milan and Palermo. After completing a first-level Academic Diploma in Graphic Design in 2019 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo, he concluded his studies in Photography at ISIA Urbino in 2022.

Between 2018 and 2019, with the project *Undefined Space. Identity of a place*, he began an observation of the urban landscape in relation to public and private society, going beyond the boundaries of dwellings. At the same time, he undertook a theoretical study of the origin and evolution of the term landscape and its relationship with photography.

Between 2020 and 2023, he realized projects such as *1000008988* and *Calcestruzzo*. In the latter, he deduced the correlation between art and science, consciousness and unconsciousness, image, and writing. Alongside these methodologies, he incorporated collecting and the use of archives as artistic and taxonomic research practices.

In 2022, he received the Graziadei Photography Award, 8th Edition, in collaboration with MAXXI - National Museum of 21st Century Arts in Rome. The same year, he was a finalist in the 11th Edition of the Francesco Fabbri Prize for Contemporary Arts.

From 2021 to 2023, he worked as studio manager for Francesco Jodice and, in 2023, as a co-teacher in the Master's Degree in Visual Arts and Curatorial Studies directed by Marco Scotini at NABA - Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan.

In 2023 his research was selected by CAMERA - Italian Center for Photography in Turin for the European Futures Photography programme.

His works are part of several public and private collections

Gil Lekh: Hello Nicola, can you tell us a little about your background and what made you go from design to photography? Is there a link between the two?

Nicola Di Giorgio: Hi Gil, my artistic path did not involve a clear-cut transition from graphic design to photography. At the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in studies that included photography, contemporary art and graphic design. Subsequently, I decided to continue my specialisation studies at ISIA in Urbino (Higher institute of artistic industries), focusing in particular on photography. However, it is important to note that ISIA was founded by Albe Steiner (graphic designer), Carlo Bo (President of the University of Urbino), Livio Sichirollo (philosopher) and Giancarlo De Carlo (architect), so it is inevitable to separate these disciplines. I never considered becoming a graphic designer by profession, but my training and experience in both fields enabled me to merge the two disciplines. The concrete art movement has been and continues to be a significant source of inspiration for me. From my earliest years as a student I simultaneously explored the works of Bruno Munari and Luigi Ghirri, essential figures in my artistic career. They both helped shape my sensitivity and *modus operandi*, laying the foundations for my future career. One of the first activities I undertook at the Academy was the continuous reproduction of Munari's *Libro illeggibile MN 1 (Unreadable Book MN 1)*, with the intention of leaving the evolution of the book through various colour combinations to chance. It was at this time that my interest in photography, art and colour theory was born.

G. L.: In your work, you study the urban landscape in relation to contemporary life, and we particularly notice the presence of concrete materials. What perspective does your work offer on this subject?

N. D. G.: The landscape is part of the existence of every human being, animal or plant. When we are born, the first thing we do is open our eyes, look at the world and weep, because it is not the landscape we knew until the moment before. The landscape is closely linked to our past, present and future history. Its change depends on us and the evolution of species. Theory is important for understanding the origin of the word *landscape* and its evolution; in fact, it has been the subject of my research for several years. For me, in the past as today, it is essential to answer the basic questions of life: why does the sun exist? Why does fire exist? Why does the landscape exist? But above all, what is landscape? The origin of the word is linked to the Dutch language, born in the second half of the 15th century from the fusion of *lant* (land) and *scap* (in the sense of community), leading to today's English word *landscape*. The word *landscape*, as we know it today, came to using the Neo-Latin strain through the French *paysage*, whose core is *pays*, a contraction of the Latin *pagensis*, indicating both the inhabitant of *pagus* (village) and the territory of a village: *pagensis* (ager). In other words, "Far Country"; therefore, the landscape is detached from individualism and matures into the idea of collectivity.

Concrete is an artificial conglomerate consisting of a mixture of binder, water and aggregates. In the 21st century, the binder used is cement, which, with the addition of iron, becomes reinforced concrete. This innovation, introduced in 1867, is due to French gardener Joseph Monier, recognised as the pioneer of reinforced concrete. Concrete is part of human evolution. It is impossible, for example, to imagine our time without concrete. What artificial intelligence could bring us back to today without such a revolution?

Let's be clear, I am not documenting a history that has happened, but rather an anachronistic journey in search of the landscape and the elements that make it up. To give you an example, Nice gives me the impression of an urban agglomeration that tries to be the first to have conquered nature. A dialogue between nature and artifice? But nature is man's artifice. So which side really rules the other? Probably none. Therein lies the secret. They coexist in existence, with the privilege of both looking at an endless horizon that reminds us of human's fragility.

G. L.: How do you plan to incorporate this research into your New Grand Tour residency at Villa Arson? Will the photographic medium remain central to your work?

N. D. G.: Photography is the basis of my research. Every work of art, be it sculpture or installation, I imagine it in my mind as a slide. It accompanies me throughout the production process, day and night. For me, it becomes an obsession and a challenge to send back the viewer the same image encoded and projected by my mind. A kind of latent image, which is not developed by any chemicals. In the series *Calcestruzzo* (2020-ongoing), the work *Pila C.A - Water, cement powder and iron, Palermo, #03, 2020*, the photograph becomes the instrument of representation while the sculpture takes on the role of representation. The *Pila* (pillar) embodies, iconographically, the historical period from the Economic/Building Boom of the 1950s and 1960s to the Economic/Building Counter-Boom of the 1980s and 1990s. The *Pila* kept and concealed in my studio where its plasticity makes it part of the scenography, continues to be shown as a photograph feeding the process of the cyclical nature of the work within the work and the image within the image.

At Villa Arson, I am producing the recent series *L'ultimo respiro del corpo nel pensiero dei mondi, caduto tra le mani del fato sottratto, #4, 2023-2024* (*The last breath of the body in the thought of worlds, fallen into the hands of subtracted fate, #4, 2023-2024*), consisting of five photographs, four paintings (2 diptychs) and an installation with twenty ceramic spheres, addressing the theme of emptiness. The five photographs, executed during a brief residence in Cadaqués, were taken inside the Salvador Dalí House-Museum, where the painter lived until 1982, the year his wife Gala died. The ceramic spheres face a hypothetical space, in which the four white walls dialogue with the white of the spheres and the cold grey of the floor. The image generated by the manipulation of the architecture and the scenographic choice will also be a work of art. The specific weight of the sculpture, the installation and the photograph will be equal in measure and density.

G. L.: Can you tell us how you work? What is your research and creative process?

N. D. G.: My research process has always been linked to my emotional state and my sensitivity to the world. I face the reality that is in front of me with resolution and determination. In moments of lack of lucidity, I try to face the impossible with the possible and not give up on the goal I set to myself. The limit in itself is a limit, you just can't hold on to it. During my residency at Villa Arson, I was chatting with a student who told me "I am not an artist yet, I am a student". As if creativity, a term I think does not exist, or "being an artist" is somehow transmitted through an educational path. I believe that an artist's journey begins at the very first moment of life and ends, with the body, with the last breath in this reality. What must be sought through study, experience and confrontation is the artist's "primary reason", for being an artist.

My dreams often act as active conductors of sensory stimulation and slide images. During the night, the film unfolds rapidly in my mind, in a succession of often silent images or written statements. The voice, persistent and restless, speaks of minimal art, not just of what minimal is. Minimal represents a subtraction of complex thought, a direct link between gesture and theory. It is more about form than simplification of execution or design.

My mind stores film slides that are transmitted at night, and decides to show them during the day. Like a classroom with black walls where a light passes through a lens and the image is transmitted to the eyes. Standing still does not mean doing nothing but working with the mind. At Villa Arson, at the first light of dawn, writing allows me to compose haikus, which, through their compositional simplicity, convey direct messages.

*Anima distrutta
cercando la parola;
nessun suono teme il mondo.*

Nizza, 29 gennaio 2024

Shattered soul
searching for the word;
no sound fears the world.

Nice, January 29, 2024

The rest of the day, in some cases, they are part of the works, like a series of writings where haiku excerpts are printed on a background painted Naples yellow with a vibrant red.

G. L.: In addition to taking on concrete subjects that are rooted in reality through their documentary dimension, you also propose work projects, speculations of a sort, that nonetheless deal with serious, philosophical questions. Are these projects going to take shape? Will you be producing any in the context of your residency?

N. D. G.: With photography I do not adopt a documentary mode in the traditional sense of the word; I do not try to document facts that have happened in order to highlight

or denounce them. Although I have a personal stance, I try to maintain a democratic vision of things. The (imaginative) exhibition wall for me represents a democratic place, where the artist can declare, show, approach and turn upside down the subject he is dealing with. With the *Calcestruzzo* series, I raise several questions, some related to positive aspects and others to negative ones. The final opinion, to draw conclusions (if necessary), is up to the public. In this project, I follow a path from the past, showing the image contained in the picture or architectural elements related to that era. The project, which is ongoing, now also looks to the future and the evolution of what is to come, while maintaining a strong connection to the collective history of my country. Juxtaposing the corrosive reality of the contemporary with more sentimental aspects is part of my *modus operandi*. Rationality dialogues, four-handed, with the experience of phenomenal thought.

During this residency period in Nice, I have observed the city a great deal, trying to understand its complex urbanism and its gentle ability to integrate itself within the natural conformation of the territory. Everything seems to be in its place, as if no element is trying to dominate the other. I am making some "views" from inside the city, a method which comes from a traditional way of observing architecture. It has been adopted by a number of artists, such as photographer Gabriele Basilico, and comes to us from the unprecedented mission undertaken by DATAR (Interministerial Delegation for Regional Planning and Attractiveness) inviting photographers to represent the French landscape of the 1980s. On my days off, I do some sightseeing to see which points are suitable for viewing the city from the inside. I do not like vantage points that offer too wide a view, I prefer to focus my gaze. I need a white sky, capable of spreading an even light over the city. So, with a tripod and camera, I try to recreate the shot I had imagined during the investigation. I try to use the weight of the equipment and my body in the service of thought, executing the image that perhaps one day I will show.

G. L.: Thank you for the generosity of your answers. Your work involves history, philosophy and a singular vision that develops into the poetic writing you share with us. Can you tell us more about the project you are pursuing in the context of the *Letter from an artist to the city of Palermo* residency?

N. D. G.: Thank you, Gil. It was extremely stimulating to be able to discuss the current residency and my research with you. The residency at Villa Arson is delimiting the boundaries of my plausible future, as if they were points of origin of a discourse that opens today and may mature over time. Recently, I have been pursuing the series *Letter from an artist to the city of Palermo*, which includes a letter in three editions, an audio and an image. The latter was probably conceived as the first off-camera photograph in history: the Shroud of Turin. Produced by transfer onto canvas by direct contact, the only image in the series depicts the face of Santa Rosalia, patron saint of the city of Palermo. The origin of this image, to quote Mimmo Rotella, lies in the "ephemeral stratification" that the city has offered me during my long walks. Lately, I have been reflecting on the future of photography, believing that we

are going through a period of dematerialisation of this art form. History shows its cyclical nature, with dynamics that, in their possible variations, return to the present. Photography is now in a state of turmoil similar to that which preoccupied the miniaturist painters in the 19th century. I do not believe there is a definitive answer at this precise moment, the passage of time will provide the answers to these questions. Undoubtedly, no technique truly comes to an end, but persists through the evolutionary dynamics of humanity in the course of time and space. Death, from a technical point of view, implies arrest, decomposition and, finally, dematerialisation. In the movie *A che punto siamo con i fiori* (*Where are we with flowers*) (2019), artist Concetto Pozzatti, says of painting: "painting has centuries of memory, while I have very few". The letter was written in 2023, at Palermo's Falcone and Borsellino airport, while I was waiting in line for boarding. It was a moment of release linked to a topic that slowly emerges within my research: emptiness. An awareness that begins as an individual feeling, and then turns into a collective experience of my generation and neighbouring generations. In the letter, I compare myself to my hometown and my host city: Milan. These reflections generate nostalgia of a past that has never been experienced, the absence of a contemporary and the intangibility of a future. Emptiness is the lack of the contemporary in our time. A frivolous and weak age, in which artificiality and decadence reign supreme, leaving room for irresolution and speculation. There is no need to alienate ourselves from this reality. Although it does not belong to us, it is reality itself that seeks us out, offering us uncertainty. It is a machine that generates gaps, synthesising and leading the individual towards extinction. Being part of a constricting society fuels the desire to abandon it.

Thursday, February 29, 2024

6pm – 8pm

Nicola Di Giorgio opens his studio at studio n°1

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