

# THE ITALIAN PROVINCE AND THE AVANT-GARDE IN ART. THE CASE OF FROSINONE AND THE “CONTROAVANGUARDIA”

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## Abstract

### INTRODUCTION

The present research takes shape from the increasingly strong need to methodically probe the facts, the creators, the productions, the exhibitions and the editorial and press activities in the period between 1958 and 1968 in the province of Frosinone.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis is made by comparing the phenomenon under study within the broader national scenario. The importance of the topic lies in the dynamics of development that it assumes in close relation to the changed social values and customs of 1968 (Sessantotto) and how these represent the reasons underlying the dissolution. [5].

### DISCUSSION

In addition to focusing on the favorable socio-cultural moment in which the Italian province was experiencing in those years, the elements that favored its genesis are analysed. It is an opportunity to summarize the most significant artistic episode that took place in the Frosinone area and the sociological aspects that formed the background to the flowering of the lively Controavanguardia (Counter-avant-garde) in the aforementioned decade. [4].

### CONCLUSIONS

The fervent cultural phenomenon not only as an artistic movement, but also as one of opinion, has recently returned to the center of a certain interest on the part of scholars. The discrete bibliography and the new sources available which the archive of the movement leader, the artist Michele Rosa, have proved to be invaluable.

**Keywords:** Controavanguardia, Michele Rosa, province of Frosinone; Sessantotto.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“You are the vanguard of knowledge and consciousness; a new wave in a vast ocean of possibilities.”*

This work takes shape from the need to trace the most significant artistic episode that occurred in the Frosinone area, focusing in particular on the theme of the "Counter-avant-garde". The term avant-garde, widespread in the art world describes a type of visual representation that causes ruptures and shocks viewers to anticipate many aspects in relation to their era. The aim of the avant-gardes was to penetrate art into everyday life, with all the values of formal meaning, of content. The idea is to encourage a social revolution of an aesthetic order that leads to change through the critical reaction of the public. (Leiris, 1993). Engaged in a renewal, experimented in artistic languages or also fueled by political ideologies, the avant-gardes set themselves up against tradition and official culture, questioning the very nature of art and its relationship with society[1].

An era of great changes, on the long wave of post-war reconstruction involves the Italian provinces as well as the major urban centers. Both of these realities are in tumultuous growth and often disrespectful of the rule of aesthetic common sense. [2].

However, for many, art is considered a prerogative of an elite audience not belonging to the people of the suburbs. Over the years, the desire for beauty and the desire for profound change on a socio-cultural level grows more and more. The energy and strength to propose novelties resides in the veins of those who feel, before others, the desire for spiritual and emotional enrichment (Varone, 2006). The desire for beauty grows as a necessity in some strata of society. We are in fact on the eve of profound socio-cultural and customary changes that will revolutionize trends, languages and codes.

Therefore, a fervid cultural phenomenon such as a movement of opinion, which has returned to the center of interest on the part of some scholars, deserves to be observed in more depth, namely the phenomenon of the "Counter-avant-garde", taking advantage of new sources available such as the archive of the Fondazione Michele Rosa. [6].

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sixties are the crossroads between a growing desire for openness to modernity and these element form availability of fresh and creative human resources. The perfect combination for local artists, often disconnected from each other and distant from the idea of a relational connection, but motivated to affirm themselves. The Frosinone area is full of them thanks also to the desire to bring art and wonder into the daily life of the suburbs (Varone 2006). The proposal - in some ways revolutionary - suggests how the inhabitants of the province can experience the periphery through dynamics superimposed on the major centres. They can feel part of it and enhance its peculiarities. [7]. The goal is action in the excluded and ignored province to build there a productive atmosphere to guide the new forces of local intellectual development. In this climate of difficulty and creative drives, there is a need for a pole that is a center of artistic aggregation for all those who perceive the need. Thus was born in the late fifties of the twentieth century the idea of creating an art gallery with spaces for moments of reflection and discussion with area for exhibitions and cultural events. In 1960 Michele Rosa opened the first art gallery in the province of Frosinone; thus group and individual exhibitions followed, becoming a real center of intellectuals who frequented it (Turriziani, 2012). For the first time the capital realizes that it is not the only one in the region to express the genuine emotions emerging from an emerging avant-garde. Thus, the triggering of the development of unprecedented social, intercultural and intergenerational dynamics is obtained (Turriziani, 2012).

## 3. DISCUSSION

Over the years, art continues to be a means through which producers and users express their ideas and feelings (Zani, 2019). [3]. It is what sprouts from the defined territorial entity, becoming the spokesperson for the interpretation of a cultural era anchored to the Ciociaria and the Alta Terra di Lavoro. The changes are in the taste of going to the few occasions of the theater, to the cinema. The Counter-avantgarde principal resists over time without losing its initial characteristics; some artists reject the statements of the movement since acceptance would be equivalent to giving up the advantages that the sirens of politics offer them. The advent of 1968 also plays a fundamental role, as it sees the Marxist model take hold more and more, affecting an increasing lager of population. [8].

The Counter-avant-garde together with all the creatives who let themselves be affected, has give through contemporary questions and offers, has been able to interpret the space of the geographical

and cultural periphery in the experimentation of new communications and narrations of the territory. Michele Rosa thought of exchange as growth for all the cultures that inhabit it, acting as a mediator between the citizen and the community, encouraging comparisons, experiences and emotions, especially for the future. [4].

Speaking of Controavanguardia in the Frusinate area, one cannot overlook the important figure of Michele Rosa, born in Sora and who at the age of thirty-six was already a talented artist. Although he was well introduced in the artistic and entertainment in the capital city, he stubbornly opposed the marginalization of the territory to which he belongs. In comparison with the national art system, this induces local artists to seek professional success prospects in emigration (Turriziani, 2012) [9]. However, Michele Rosa realizes that to create something original it is not necessary to do something new. This awareness will lead him in 1961 to open the first art gallery in Frosinone "La Saletta", located in Corso of the Republic. Strengthened by the experiences gained on the national and overseas intellectual and artistic square, he thus wants to put his ability to intercept the public at the service of creative work. With him the rigid world of provincial art is shaken to its foundations and his canvases and ideas pave the way for experiments in the aesthetic field (Varone, 2006), thus emerging from a "non-figurative" artistic period in which production is strongly impacted by Mid-century North American Contemporary influences.

Michele Rosa appreciates the beauty of a reality that would soon be transformed and lost forever. For this reason he begins to paint rural landscapes and Ciociaria women bringing back on canvas the sensations aroused by the sight of the great psychic stimuli coming from the Alta Terra di Lavoro and from Ciociaria. Michele Rosa, acting with his convinced ideas across the board, guides Frusinate artists to take the risk of breaking away from convention. He teaches that novelty in the aesthetic field must not be seen as a gamble but rather as an innovation. With Michele Rosa, father of the Counter-avant-garde, the adherents of the movement enter a post-avant-garde phase characterized by the use for artistic purposes of the principles to which they wanted to adhere with conviction.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In the decade 1958-1968, on the national and regional scene, we witness a closer confrontation between the center and the periphery which entails greater consideration of local artistic events. Distances between the various regional areas and to the diffusion channels and are reduced to the diffusion channels and art institutions. Through Michele Rosa's projects and his baggage acquired

before venturing into the enterprise, he has made it possible to play a central role in the formulation of ideas and their implementation, thus introducing new ways in intellectual production by dedicating himself first to listening, meeting and discussing and then activating exchanges and knowledge. In the wake of political, social and cultural changes, Michele Rosa has achieved developments within the mechanisms of contemporary art, has fostered an awareness of the traditional state of the art, has shown the necessary courage to propose a line of visual art in countertrend with greater public involvement. [5].

In conclusion Michele Rosa, promoter, and animator who, like Libero De Libero titular of the History of Art, had returned from a long and constructive experience in the States, embodied the almost paternalistic attachment to the desolate province as a place of return, to the obtuse provinciality as a peripheral space full of contradictions, and so stingy with recognition for which one had to fight its shortcomings and forgive its torments. This is concept expressed in an emblematic sentence: "...the province: the joy that pains me, the daughter I love with an unhappy love..." (Varone, 2010) [10]. which leaves the spirit of the movement itself.



(Michele Rosa, 1925-2021)

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