

**Gibellina 1968 – otto minuti dopo le tre**

In the early hours of the morning of 15th January 1968, the Sicilian town of Gibellina was shaken to its core by an earthquake. The human cost was immense. Two hundred and thirty one people died in Gibellina and the neighbouring villages of Poggioreale and Salaparuta. Families were torn apart and lives left in tatters.

For months after the earthquake, the residents of Gibellina lived marginal lives in tents and temporary shelters, the devastation so complete that it was impossible to even think of rebuilding the old town. Instead a new Gibellina rose in its place. But this was a Gibellina where planning and community did not go hand in hand. Where the old Gibellina was outward looking with shared communal spaces, the new Gibellina was an inward looking city of private spaces, a place that discouraging the open society of the former town.

While the new Gibellina was a shell of a town, half-lived in and half-experienced, the ruins of the old Gibellina became a site of artistic installation, a place where internationally renowned artists were asked to respond to the devastation with the production of new works. One of the artists was Alberto Burri. He responded to the catastrophe by covering the rubble of the town with a thick layer of white concrete, with his trademark cracks running through it in parallel with the original town plan. This artwork, called Il Grande Cretto (The Great Crack), is a conceptual sarcophagus, a memorial to the town of Gibellina.

Giuseppe Iannello’s exhibition is a portrayal of a town where, in differing ways, both young and old have seen their communal lifeblood ripped away both by seismic and manmade catastrophes. For the old, it is the destruction of a way of life that was part of the streets, the squares, the steps and the land of old Gibellina. For the young, who have never experienced the communal way of life of the old town, there is a dislocation from these older generations. They live in the shadow of a way of life that is always present in the collective memory of those who remember it, but always separate from those who were never part of it.

This dislocation is apparent in the projections that Iannello made of Gibellina. As a child growing up in the 1990s, Iannello was fascinated by the stories his architect father told him about the town, the people, and the artwork. Year after year, Iannello returned to the site to try to get an understanding of what Burri had meant by Il Cretto, tracing and retracing the cracks, imagining the lives that had once lived in the streets that they represented. And as he began to picture what Burri, Gibellina and the earthquake had meant so he questioned the meaning of memory itself.

For this exhibition, the fragmentation of memory is apparent in the archival images Iannello projected onto the walls of Il Grande Cretto. Here, in these images, the lives of the past merge with the arid stone textures of the present. In these pictures Iannello recreates the streets, the daily life and the faces of Gibellina before the earthquake. It’s a nostalgic picture of an idealised Sicilian town, but it’s an idealisation that, in Iannello’s images is crumbling together with the walls of Burri’s Grand Cretto.

The past is here, but it is blurred, it is fractured, it is decaying with time. And as it decays with time, so the gap between the past and the present, between the memory of Gibellina and what it now is grows ever wider. Until soon, everything will crumble and we will be left with nothing but dust. And nostalgia.

**Colin Pantall**