

Utopia Dystopia: the myth of progress seen from the South**Curated by Kathryn Weir****09.07 - 08.11.2021**

Utopia Dystopia: the myth of progress seen from the South brings together the works of more than fifty Italian and international artists, including thirty-five from Campania and six others who worked in Naples and the region during the production of their works. Conceived in relation to the Madre's collection, the exhibition investigates contemporary practices that have responded to the massive social changes of the last half century: urbanization, industrialization, the creation of new urban peripheries, the demographic transformation of rural space, struggles related to bodily choices, freedoms and constraints.

The exhibition proposes an analysis of the utopian promises and dystopian experiences of modernity, with particular attention to southern Italy, as well as to the representation of the substantial failure of the violent logics underpinning economic progress. From Mimmo Jodice's sharp observations of peripheries, industrial architectures and southern landscapes in the Sixties and the Seventies, to Antonio Biasiucci's photographic tributes to abandoned villages and pastoral life in Campania, to Raffaella Mariniello's and Ibrahim Mahama's investigations of the industrial space of Bagnoli, with its powerful and toxic beauty. Also explored is the potential through artistic intervention to open spaces of transformation within dystopian realities, and to create alternatives. Joseph Beuys wrote on the poster for his 1971 exhibition in Naples (created on the basis of a photographic work on show here): 'The revolution is us'.

The modern ideology of progress affirmed the ability of human beings to reshape their lives and environments with the help of technology and science, creating new infrastructure and providing access to medical services, education and waged labor. New choices and freedoms were promised to women and others that had been historically marginalized or economically disadvantaged. Many rather found themselves isolated in the suburbs, in small households and with precarious, poorly paid and often dangerous work. The creation of utopian spaces for knowledge sharing and artistic experimentation in the periphery animated several artists in the Neapolitan context from as early as the late sixties. The work of Riccardo Dalisi, who collaborated with the artisans and young people of Rione Traiano, was exemplary in this regard. In the same period, Tomaso Binga interpreted through her artistic work the dominant media vision of women as sexual objects, far from the independence and respect declared by a society that proclaimed itself progressive. A large number of artists have sought a way out of an apparent systemic dead end, questioning, in historical perspective, the established order and accepted norms.

From the period of the unification of Italy, often experienced as the undue imposition of a northern economic and social system, the existence of a devalued and exploited south needing to reaffirm itself has been underlined, as Giulio Delvé's work in the exhibition, *Viva il Brigantaggio*, reminds us. Progress and the economic system of capital growth require constant expansion, cheap labor, and new resources. The collaborating duo Bianco-Valente work with various communities in regard to the effects in the Mezzogiorno of this system, which has led to the expropriation of land, migration to the north and the big cities, with the ensuing loss of roots, cultural identity and memory. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has defined neoliberalism as 'a program designed to destroy collective structures capable of obstructing pure market logic' (*Le Monde diplomatique*, December 1998). The south nonetheless asserts itself as a territory where these structures and values are preserved and where the extreme beauty and fragility of existence are still collectively celebrated: a territory where another future can be imagined.