

TUTTO IL MONDO E' PAESE

Hollywood-Palermo. One-way trip.

Interview with Maurizio Cattelan

Indians, Mexicans, cowboys and pumas: there was plenty of life in Hollywood's hills long before the American movie business took possess of it. Hollywood was named after a ranch which by 1897 had grown to the size of a little town. Only in 1907 the film industry started to colonise the hills of California: within a dozen of years Hollywood became the factory where to fulfil the American Dream. The sign was born in 1923: originally conceived as an ad, it was intended to increase the sales of the estates on the hills. However, little by little the dazzle of the American stars reflected on these letters in iron and sheet steel, making it one of the most celebrated icons of the 20th century. Now **Hollywood is landing in Sicily, why?**

In fact there is nothing new about it: Hollywood is already everywhere. Whether you switch on the tv or browse the newspapers, it is a word that recurs anywhere. It is a sort of contemporary obsession, something we have all been dreaming of. You do not even need to go there: you know what it is, you know where it is. Hollywood is a place in imagination, that can be in Sicily or in any other corner of your memory.

Have you ever been there?

No, but this does not really matter. Hollywood is an image that grows inside you, that you always carry in your mind. After all it is a quite banal object: nine metal letters, put up eighty years ago, without particular care about the results. There is nothing fascinating or hypnotic about it, but little by little it turned into an illusion. It is an anonymous writing, on which desires and frustrations are encrusted. It would be exciting to find how many have left their families and friends to pursue the dream inscribed in this sign.

Somewhere I read that in 1933 more than 400 people killed each other in Hollywood...

This also fascinates me about Hollywood: to discover how many victims you need to construct a legend, how many failures hide behind a victory. As all images, Hollywood is only a projection of desire, a mirror of our obsessions. To carry Hollywood to Sicily is a sort of experiment, an exercise pending between geography and psychology. I would like to find out the side-effects of celebrity.

But yours is also a comment full of irony. Unfortunately the image of Sicily is still associated with mafia, killers, evil. Sicily is the exact counterpart to Hollywood.

Hollywood and Sicily are close relatives. There is more violence in the narrow streets of Los Angeles than there is in Palermo and the American movies always drew from the gangsters mythology, turning it into show-reality. In good and in evil, Sicily and Hollywood share the same destiny: both places became legends, epic tales of real men and "femmes fatales". Transplanting Hollywood to Sicily is also a h mage: a way to share a dream and thus return ill-gotten gains.

But still there is a macabre note in your project. Your Hollywood grows beside a dump: it is a dream made of rubbish.

Reality is never black and white: it is a complex of nuances and contradictions. It is easy to turn a dream into a night-mare. Images should reflect this complexity: they need to be manifold, sweet and merciless. Since the beginning Hollywood has become a metaphor of our dreams, but also of our unscrupulous ambitions. Hollywood is a universal icon in which different meanings overlap and cancel each other out. This is why nobody can tell who it belongs to: you can reconstruct it wherever you want, since it is already part of yourself. After all, to bring Hollywood to Sicily is like one of those children's games: your parents do not buy you a present, so first of all you cry, then you take any object and make it what you were longing for. Hollywood is a portable dream.

How long did it take to produce this project?

Works in Sicily started in April. The writing will be finished by the beginning of June. It is a huge project, with tons of iron, sheet steel and concrete. And then the architects, the surveyors, the licences and the letters to the mayor... But when you see the writing on this hill, you do not think of the construction anymore: All of a sudden everything seems necessary and simple. Hollywood becomes a hallucination, a light reflex. Only the image remains. It is like putting up mirror in front of reality: you construct a perfect replica and then you let the others decide what to make out of it.

How do you think the citizens in Palermo will react?

There will be some gossips, maybe some complaint. Maybe young people will go there for petting. Somebody will send a postcard to some far-away relative, who emigrated to California a long time ago. Somebody will take the kids on excursions there and then with a pen they will write some insults on the letters... Any reaction is licit, as it adds new meanings to the image. I would only like to avoid Hollywood becoming a monument: I always hated these rigid sculptures in the centre of a squares. Hollywood should be a magnet for emotions, like some streets and some buildings that nearly involuntarily become deposits of memories. Yes, I would just like that somebody woke up one morning, opened the windows feeling lighter because for a moment he can feel the breeze of celebrity.