

The gaze beyond the Vajont Dam

The fourth season of “Dolomiti Contemporanee” comes onto the scene in Casso, a project of artistic residences that is morphing a territory only known for the tragedy of 1963 in a centre of innovation

BY MASSIMO MATTIOLI



In 2011, when it was first brought to public attention, it seemed like the perfect case study of an ambitious and maybe a little unrealistic project, fated to soon be forced to reshape its demands in the wake of insurmountable objective difficulties. The project was to put into motion the dynamics of contemporary creativity in a, by definition, static, slow and reflective environment like the one of the mountain; and the difficulties seemed to reside in part in the “logistic” side of things, in the peripheral location relative to the flux of ideas and experimentations, in spaces that are difficult on a practical level as well, and in the other in the organizational basis from which to start:

structures all to be invented, practically non-existent budgets. Thus, Dolomiti Contemporanee made its appearance in the artistic-cultural landscape. It is an initiative created by Gianluca D’Inca Levis – now artistic director – that found its first venue in Sospirolo, at Sass Muss, just a few kilometres from Belluno, in a former chemical plant, abandoned for twenty years and then recovered in 2006.

The basic idea by which much was accomplished during these past few years was to change those potential difficulties into strong points instead: not importing extraneous cultures, but giving value to the idea of uprightness which emerges from the flatness, working on peculiarity as a resource; “not ruling spaces, but creating them”, as D’Inca Levis says; but most of all creating a network to win over the environmental resistance, putting to work very young researchers and academics, producing more and more new energies. Today, marking three years of life, a lot of those bets have been won: and under a large array of viewpoints. The Dolomiti Contemporanee “factory” at this point offers schedules full of exhibits, workshops, contests, artists’ residences, which put the locations involved increasingly more at the centre of the dialogue, discovering a population that is alert in regards to cultural innovation and open towards guest artists and intellectuals. It has found its headquarters in the Nuovo Spazio di Casso, permanent museum location in the heart of the Vajont, and has started two important partnerships, in Italy and abroad, with institutions like the Mart of Rovereto, the Merz Foundation of Torino, CCC Strozzi of Firenze, the Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation of Venezia. Other outcomes of the vocation to create networks, this time looking outwards: with the important development – which marks a decisive step forward – with the adhesion to the French-Italian network Piano, promoted by the D.C.A. French association for the development of Artistic Centres and by the Institut



Français. Novelty of a 2014 season just presented precisely in Casso, which will see, moreover, another collaboration with the Merz Foundation and Palazzo Riso, in a triangular project with DC that will lead to the three-located (Torino, Casso, Palermo) exhibit “Meteorite in Giardino 7”, and then the International Artistic Contest Two Calls for Vajont, which has taken shape in a double open-call, and that is going to lead to the realization of two artworks of public art, on two of the symbolic locations of the Vajont Tragedy (1963), i.e. on the dam itself and on the façade of the Spazio di Casso (the former elementary school), hit by the wave caused by the landslide which led to the tragedy.

But the bet of Dolomiti Contemporanee can be said to be won under another fundamental aspect as well, and that is the one represented by the economy: that it shouldn’t be merely read by the financial meaning, by the repercussions on the territory of the Dolomites, often neglected even by tourism, but – as D’Inca Levis remarks – of the “economy of the spirit” as well. “The mechanism that makes it possible to focus on these underdeveloped sites, putting under the spotlight their potentialities, and creating occasions of regeneration and relaunch for them”, the artistic director stresses. “In all the sites in which DC has worked to this day, a situation came to definition, in which the location was given the value it deserved, which in turn led to the launching of practices, of different kinds, preparatory to a concrete rehabilitation. A large open network, that links different layers of sociality, culture, productivity, economy and politics: in the first three editions of DC, almost 150 artists have been invited, over 350 institutional, public and private partners have supported the “construction sites”, the residences, the productions, generating overall fluxes of over 800 thousands of Euros in three years, for over 30 thousands visitors involved.”

But there’s another interpretations that D’Inca Levis, whom for the year 2014 is a researcher at the Cà Foscari University of Venice, in the Economy Department, with a focus on, indeed, cultural entrepreneurship and the creative industries as factors of local development, is fond of: “The public mustn’t be counted. The public must be persuaded, and educated. A cultural project is always educative, and, if it is innovative and works in complex and hard to reach contexts, as it is the case with DC, it isn’t the counting that gives the measure of its merit or its success. The Vajont Dam, every year, receives more than 200 thousand pilgrims of the tragedy: a static image of the great death, which for 50 years has crippled a region, becomes a media show with little conscience, generates a hunger that sometimes seems cannibal, produces a spectacular economy and an almost-morbid tourism that doesn’t at all bring to mind, if seen closely, a mechanism of awareness. The mass doesn’t have awareness, it has heard hunger. And often, the group reactions are induced by the number. The individual has awareness. The 10 thousand people whom have visited the Nuovo Spazio di Casso since September 2012, date of the re-opening of the former school, closed down in 1963, year of the tragedy, aren’t, then, an amount. The 7 thousand people whom have visited the former Visibilia factory of Taibon in Agordo aren’t an amount. Each one of these people has come singularly, pushed by an interest generated by an efficient communication about a new project. I believe that each of the 10 thousand people whom have come to Casso to this day, has been somehow taken away from the dam, from its catalysing default, which confines a whole land to its dramatic past. This is the contemporary.”

