

Murals

The tradition of wall art in Orgosolo dates back to the late 60s. Here murals are particularly well-known thanks to Francesco Del Casino, an Art history professor born in Siena who in the spring of 1975 started depicting the Sardinian agricultural and rural life in a very intimate and inspiring way. He painted numerous murals either on his own or engaging local middle-school students, community members, and colleagues. His works have a strong ideological character and express themes of resistance against the repressive action of the State and the suppression of rights by authorities.

The mural on the main façade of the old Town Hall, titled '*Concimi, non proiettili*' ('Fertilizers, not bullets') was painted in 1984 by Del Casino alone over an earlier 1976 fresco on a similar subject, which had been destroyed during the Town Hall renovation. The work depicts one of the most important events in Orgosolo and in the whole of Sardinia, the Pratobello riots, which took place in July 1969 when the citizens, together with the mayor and the councillors, organised a three-day non-violent protest and a form of passive resistance against the decision of the Italian government to set up military bases on the 13,000 hectares of land on the plateau, a place that farmers had always used for grazing livestock. On that occasion, writer and former partisan Emilio Lussu, who had fought against all forms of slavery and injustice, also expressed his strong support for the cause of the Orgosolo community.

The mural, which seems to blend with some of the building's openings (entrance door, two ground-floor window grills, a French window with balcony on the first floor, with a silhouette of a man holding a sign above his head with the title of the work), consists of three distinct but interrelated paintings, which should be admired from the left to the right. The author used a cubist-inspired approach to best express that heated civil and political conflict.

The first scene, painted in dark tones, symbolises the death and destruction of the past war. We can see the trenches and armed infantry in the background, but our attention is drawn to the foreground, with a dying soldier with a piece of paper in his hands asking for peace and a wiser distribution of land. The figure almost seems supported by the force and pride of Lussu's words below, in italics, dating back to 24 May 1922, as a warning for the future.

The central part is separated by a natural backdrop of cacti and prickly pear plants, which create a stark contrast with the harshness of barbed wire. Here we can see a colourful procession of men and women of all ages with horses, flags and banners, surrounded by reproductions of real posters of the time asking for a new Sardinia, free of military interference.

On the right, painted in red monochrome to allude to a specific political identity, another group of protesters seems to merge with the large portrait of Lussu and the words of the telegram sent by the writer on that occasion. The text is transcribed in full and contains words of solidarity and hope, conveying the belief that the only possible destiny for humanity cannot a dystopic one, in which shepherds and their families are treated like criminals, but rather a peaceful and virtuous coexistence between human beings and nature.

Among the countless murals (at least 400) adorning Orgosolo's streets, one of Del Casino's most famous works (perhaps his best-known mural in town) can be found at the historic shop at 274, Corso Repubblica.

Dating back to 1984, 'Caccia grossa a Orgosolo' (Big Hunting in Orgosolo) is based on a true event that took place between July 9 and 10, 1899. It went down in history as 'the battle of *Murguliai*' after the dialectal name of *Morgogliai*, a village located 30 kilometres away from Orgosolo, on the outskirts of Oliena.

On those dramatic days a violent firefight occurred between the police (nearly two hundred policemen and infantrymen were involved) and a bunch of outlaws. In the end, Deputy Sergeant Lorenzo Gasco was wounded, while soldier Giuseppe Amato and policeman Aventino Moretti (already famous for having captured and killed Giovanni Battista Salis, known as 'Crobeddu, the Nestor of the Island's Scrub') were killed, together with four out of the five ferocious bandits who had dominated the area for years: brothers Elia and Giacomo Serra-Sanna, Tommaso Viridis and Salvatore Giovanni Pau, all wanted and with a bounty of 30,500 lire. The only one to escape was Giuseppe Lovicu, who was captured and killed two years later.

This was just one of the many episodes of the Italian government's harsh fight against crime carried out by the Pelloux government (the so-called 'big hunting' that gives the title to a book that was written by Infantry Officer Guido Bechi, who took part in the operations in Sardinia, and was published the following year), and to commemorate the successful raid, some policemen and soldiers posed as victorious hunters over their prey, displaying the bodies of those killed as trophies.

Although ambiguous and sinister, these morbid pictures are a reflection of society and its contradictions at that time. This controversial event was the source of inspiration for Del Casino's works: here the cubist style emphasises the tragic outcome of the event, the complexity of banditry – which is still a subject of much debate in Sardinia – and the need to recognise the dignity and value of every human being, who must never be treated as a beast to be exploited and disposed of at will.

Text by Cecilia Mariani

