



Tony Grisoni, *Cinema di Poesia*

Tony Grisoni is an award winning writer and director known for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *In This World*, the *Red Riding* film trilogy, *The Young Pope* and an adaptation of China Mieville's novel, *The City and the City*. He has worked closely with a number of directors including Michael Winterbottom, John Boorman, Sean Durkin and Terry Gilliam, and often collaborates with artists including Oona Grimes, Brian Catling, Dryden Goodwin and Marcia Farquhar.



Oona Grimes *a spritz of grrrls #7* 2018
coloured pencil on paper
21 x 29.7 cm

The people do not pass over to the side of the camera without the camera having passed over to the side of the people.
- Gilles Deleuze.

Hail the new Etruscan is a new body of work (2018) by Oona Grimes which fuses drawings, stencils and film. *Hail the new Etruscan #1*, the first of three solo exhibitions, focuses on drawing. The touchstone here is clearly post-war Italian cinema and the films designated as Neorealist. This canon of films ranges from Visconti's *Ossessione*, (1943) and Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta*, (1945) to Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, (1960), and Pasolini's *Accattone*, (1961) and beyond. The earlier of these films were inexorably tied to the social, political, and economic reorganization of a nation — an antidote to Fascist-era national identity. That said, they were not the naively literal narratives as often characterised. Film may have given Pasolini the 'quintessences of factualness' he needed, but he reinvented and improvised far beyond this beginning. Deleuze holds that the time-image threatens boundaries between stable binary oppositions. He locates the power of the Neorealist cinematic image between reality and dream, the subjective and objective, the self and other — the very same liminal space Grimes' drawings inhabit.

a spritz of grrrls — the spare, crayon drawings on white paper of brutalised faces running with snot and blotched with cold — are a hymn to unsung extras. These are the unknown players, without credit or lines of dialogue, who inhabit the background action of Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta*, (1945) or Fellini's *La Strada*, (1954).

Daily I would walk to Piazza Rotunda and beyond, just to be in Rome, early before the crowds; to watch the road sweepers and shop keepers setting up, to see the light changing over the city. Gradually those walks, and those films wove themselves into my dreams and my drawings. - Oona Grimes

Sometimes, in the larger stencil drawings on black paper, the bit players are allowed to rise to command their own self-contained episode within a film. In *the nest* is served a woman wearing a headscarf decorated with sparrows and hawks avoids penetrating — possibly threatening — eyes. Her straggly hair echoes her accuser's threadbare appearance. As in Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (1966) where a woman won't let her children get out of bed for fear of their hunger, there is poverty here. And there is a wry humour too.

*...fundamental to neorealism are "subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies, where the character does not act without seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing."*¹

Visually, these drawings could not be further from the grainy black and ivory white of analogue film. Colours float in a blackness made denser by occasional repair patches, (mirroring restored frescos or stone work). The strong pallet was newly developed by Grimes on her Rome fellowship. These are a fugue dream of the Neorealist films. The emerging and receding images are layered with hypnagogic memory and sensation — fluid and hyper-associative. Like Terence McKenna's self-transforming machine elves, characters such as the twins in *i gemelli di Fellini* will sometimes speak or sing into existence a shape or physical object.

As with the repair patches, the colour coding squares that appear at the corners of these pictures recall printing technology. Drawing our attention to the making, these quotes act as an ironic counterpoint to the highly subjective. Like caricature, they allow us a brief step back to reflect.

Patterns derived from painted folds, Etruscan porn or icons from a particular film adorn material and clothing: the levitating woman from Pasolini's *Teorema*, 1968 (*la maggiorate and Santa Veronica*), the birds on the hat in *mani parlanti*; sometimes headdresses, sometimes disembodied garments floating free, these phantoms or snakes seem to be searching for a shape — and for connection to the featured character.

The larger than life characters that invade these pictures, whether played by Giulietta Masina or Anouk Aimee (featuring in *roman Skandals*) remind me of Kauffmann's descriptions in his 2018 review of *Accattone*:

The minor characters are chosen like gems by a jeweller: Mario Cipriani as a turkey-cock thief; Umberto Bevilacqua as a Neapolitan hood whose beetle-browed, broad smile is scary; and an anonymous, runty, wide-eyed girl as the bereft wife of a man in jail, with a brood of kids who move around her wherever she walks like an animate hoop skirt.

Totò (il Principe della risata) embodies the Commedia dell'Arte, the musical hall, the pantomime. A genius of the surreal, radical and naively immoral he is unknown in the UK, but a national treasure in Italy. The great Totò lives on. He features in *Toto and le tre sorelle Fontana*, pronouncing with the insane ingenuity of a magician to le tre sorelle Fontana — drawn from the Fontana sisters who founded an Italian fashion house in 1943 and helped reinvigorate a shattered nation. Here, the sisters keep their conjoined thoughts to themselves, so fearsome is Totò's manic energy. *cinzano and cherry soda* sees Totò weeping alongside his sidekick, Ninetto, Pasolini's life long companion. Their despair may be theatrical, but it becomes real as children's games become real. We are what we

believe. The decorations on their headgear may be a clue to their distress. A writhing and highly decorated stole seems to offer some comfort, though as in many of these pictures, its nascent animation means it is still trying to figure out what its purpose should be.

...in this globalized world where it seems that everyone sees the same movies and eats the same food, there are still unbridgeable divisions between cultures. How can two peoples ever come to understand each other when one of them is ignorant of Totò? - Umberto Eco

Throughout this collection of irreverent juxtaposition, fever-dreams and mischief, we are always minded of Grimes' starting point: the humanity and the pathos of those post-war films. *biscottino* sees a village fool hypnotised by a magically folding and unfolding material shape, momentarily forget the loaf of bread he thieved. In *angelo del fango* Paola's deceptively simple cartoon face dreams herself away from a patterned garment willing itself into existence. As in *sempre le ginocchia*, it is only a matter of time before it morphs into an ally. Or an enemy.

¹ Justin Horton, *Mental Landscapes: Bazin, Deleuze, and Neorealism (Then and Now)*, 2013.

Renée Tobe, *Hail the new Etruscan*

A film-script in three parts

Part 1 – The Stencils aka the Cast of Characters

Part 2 – The Drawings aka the Audience

Part 3 – The Films – aka the Gestures

Hail the new Etruscan; part 1

CAST

Two Men Weeping for Birds of Prey and Little Birds

The Village Gossip

Two Would-be Eunuch

The Bird Nest Lady

The Dirty Sisters

The Waitress

La Femme Fatale

The Village Idiot or The Holy Fool

The Audience

Unable to turn away, watching as a collective, each possessed of their own shocking personal dramas that seem to play on an endless loop in front of their eye, they watch the drama unfold, and wonder if this what real life looks like? If so, this pouty bunch prefer to remain disconnected, remote, with their drippy noses and unhappy mouths, undefined.

Setting

This story brings the colour of Rome back to the grey-scale of black and white film. In the background, competing for our attention, a white rectilinear modernist fascist-era train station or an imposing civic building from the EUR, extrudes whitely from the bleak landscape of Rome's *terrain vague*. Planes taxi slowly along an invisible runway, as if unable to take off. The horizon is still the horizon, the unfinished buildings of modernity are still incomplete, the medieval tower, (is that Castel Gandolfo), still stands against the landscape, and, as if treading Jacob's Ladder in reverse, two characters slowly stroll along a curved concrete exit ramp, abandoned, leading from nowhere to nowhere but traversed with utter dignity.

Synopsis

The story is told through the vivid, exaggerated, prolific and expressive hand gestures. In Rome, hands are everywhere: pointing, holding, extending, clasping. Fingers wave about, open eyes exaggerate, and gestures make it personal. Everything is expressed through eyes, and of gesturing hands with expressive fingers, each of which strikes its own singular pose. Gesture is everything. Fingers outstretched, spread,

folded, poignant, affected; each relating its own account. The composition doesn't change but the restless, constantly moving hands tell a narrative within the frame, a story of their own: hands opening and closing, hands waving hello, hands waving in dismissal.

White hair narrates thought; thoughts escape, birds flap about and silently eyes speak. Eyes staring. Eyes cast down. Eyes looking unfocused into the distance. Shining eyes. Soft eyes. Blue eyes in a brown eyed culture, in a black and white film. Eyes telling their own story. Naive eyes. False perception. Eyes of knowledge.

Eyes of the knowing women. Eyes converted to pious eyes by the donning of monk's robe. Eyes of recognition. Eyes that pop up everywhere, staring back at the character, who is startled at being stared back at.

Eyes that have an intelligence behind them. Eyes looking askance. The side-ways glance. Eyes imploring with pride. Eyes casting angry scorn. Eyes that look right through you. Eyes covered by hands. Eyes thinking about the future, worried, sad, expectant.

Eyes dreaming of happiness. Eyes filled with despair. Angry, not understanding eyes. Eyes putting on a brave face. Eyes seeing things they shouldn't. Eyes filled with tears cast down. Eyes bright with tears looking up. Eyes shining through tears. Eyes acknowledging our watching.

Renée Tobe was Paul Mellon Research Fellow at the British School at Rome. She trained as an architect and is currently Reader in Architecture at UEL. Her publications include *Film, Architecture and Spatial Imagination* (Routledge, 2017). Her research investigates the political structures of cities expressed through the medium of film.

Cover: **Oona Grimes** *roman sKandals* 2018
spray paint, coloured pencil and collage on paper
75 x 110 cm

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