

Reviews

Domenico Mediati, Saverio Pazzano

**M.C. Escher in Calabria.
Memorie incise di un
viaggiatore olandese**

Rubbettino Editore,

Cosenza 2019

pp. 115

ISBN 978-88-498-6041-2



In human history, the theme of travel is an experiential opportunity of personal growth, characterized by the own inner discovery and by the knowledge of places, people and traditions other than that of origin. In particular, these reasons inspired several artists to undertake journeys to increase their cultural background and to make their own the explored and visited lands.

The book written by Domenico Mediati and Saverio Pazzano, of the *Parco dei Greci in Calabria* series [1], focuses on the journey that Maurits Cornelis Escher made to discover Calabria from 28 April to 25 May 1930. The young Escher, together with his intellectual-artist friends Giuseppe Haas Triverio, Robert Schiess and Jean Rousset, visited this foreign reality of southern Italy moved by the curiosity to find new inspirational materials for their research and productions.

They traveled the Calabrian territory by train and by bus, then moving to the inner areas of the region on foot or on mules, discovering a rugged and fascinating land that faithfully reflected the dual character of the local people met along their way.

At that time, that places and people were completely different from those appreciable during the European Grand Tour: Southern Italy showed a simple and authentic beauty whose identity was still uncontaminated. The landscape, the stories, the legends and the relationships with the humble population became for Escher an important source of inspiration for his

subsequent artworks. In fact, in his continuous search for synthesis between art and science, in his travels in the South of Italy Escher collected several ideas and suggestions that characterized his mature graphic production and his complex studies on the forms that undoubtedly made him a unique personality in the art scene.

Through the analysis and reorganization of his travel notes, sketches and drawings, the book retraces the Dutch artist's itinerary by focusing on multiple analogies between the places visited and the subsequent woodcut and lithographic engravings also made in the late graphic masterpieces of the Flemish genius. A reconstruction based on a few elements available and recoverable from the souvenir photographs of the experience and from the artist's travel diary, where he wrote down the kilometers traveled, the costs incurred, the names, the phonemes and the images of the multiple Mediterranean aspects that captured his attention.

The reconstruction of Escher's Calabrian days of stay is within the volume divided into sections: the first part is a chronological narration that reconstructs the travel diary; instead, the second part is a scientific analysis that deepens the relationship between the places visited and the artworks created.

The first part—*News of a new snake*—is structured according to the narration day-journey or day-leg of trip. The reader himself is involved in Escher's travel expe-

rience, reconstructed by the authors with personal eye and suggestions: a likely narrative, but based on real information. The involvement in reading increases with the possibility of seeing the places visited by Escher thanks to interactive photographs, precisely geographically located in the points of photo shooting.

Key elements traceable in the first part, are then extensively investigated in *Drawings and visions of Maurits Cornelis Escher in Calabria*. In this second section the narrative changes, taking on a scientific treatment. Escher's figure is biographically presented in relation to the historical, political and cultural context in which he lived. An artist-wayfarer who, like Theodore Brenson, Edward Lear and Karl Witte, visited Calabria and drew inspiration from it. The part provides an accurate artistic and graphic comparison between drawings, suggestions and "grecanici" engravings, the object of perceptive experiments and reminders in Escher's artistic evolution. In support of the scientific treatment, the study of the artworks is presented through various graphic analyzes related to excerpts from the original prints, decomposition of landscapes

by graphic elements and reflection schemes to better understand principles of the realization techniques.

The two different sections have in common the Dutch artist's incessant search for harmony, which seems to trace in the relationships that exist between the landscape, built and anthropological context of the Calabrian peninsula. *Balance that lives in differences, in opposites*: the verticality of the rocky hills overlooking the sea or inland, the perched buildings, the strong chromatic contrasts and chiaroscuro effects, the ancient languages, legends and traditions. In addition, Mediterranean flora and fauna, holders of metaphors and memories that accompanied Escher in different engravings of his artistic *excursus*.

The volume is a research made of in-depth content and graphic analyzes in which the different correspondences between lived, annotated and reinterpreted places highlighted through Escher's artworks. The book also presents an enrichment of infographics thanks to its interactive dimension available through Augmented Reality [2]. This interesting tool allows the reader to overlay the graphic analyses of the engravings on the photographs taken in the same

points of view; it is possible to verify the changes in the landscape context and any corrections made by Escher in his panoramic representations. In addition, the technology refers to the original images available on internet and it is possible geographically locate them in the points of view identified by the research. Therefore, it is a multi-information book, where a valid graphic contribution is added to the textual and descriptive content. The different forms of representation and images proposed by the authors constitute an appropriate and innovative support for understanding the itinerary, re-reading the visited places and all analysis of the engravings by Escher that bear the signs of the Calabrian days.

Furthermore, this literary and scientific work well reflects the intent of the series to promote, enhance and memorize the cultural stratification belonging to the local Greek heritage, stimulating the reader and the art lover the curiosity to retrace those places and to seek the same suggestions of the Dutch engraver; lived in those lands of uncontaminated and authentic beauty.

Alberto Sdegno e Veronica Riavis

Notes

[1] The Series of the Parco dei Greci di Calabria is an initiative born within the *Neo Avlaci (Nuovo Solco)* Local Development Program financed with

the resources of the PSR Calabria 2007/2013.

[2] Through the *HP Reveal* App and looking

for *Escher in Calabria*, it will be possible to frame the images marked for enjoy further insights.

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