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Luca Vitone

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Dena Foundation Art Award 2002



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## Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art Award 2002

Cities and their outskirts are the mirror of the changes that have followed one another, each change reflecting an economic cycle. They bear the visible signs of waves of immigrants that, over time, have settled there, have merged into the environment, and have altered the appearance of those cities. They have followed the same process as architectonic styles that, accumulated over the centuries, formed stratified layers.

Cities and their outskirts, with their irregular and unplanned topography, have become part of the map of the planet, the planet we live on. We have pushed the earth into a dead end street, as testified by the frequent, almost apocalyptic, TV images of natural catastrophes, ecological and environmental disasters that have often become part of our daily lives.

The proposed strategies on the table at Johannesburg should be able to stem the deterioration of the planet and give hope to younger generations for the so called sustainable development in the future which should also include the development of cities, that is in macro and micro systems where human action is more immediately evident for its impact and tangibility.



The *Zingonia Arte Integrazione Multiculture* project is an example of a possible form of interaction between the different forces that strive to put into action real social development in communities which include different ethnic groups and which occupy a specific and common urban area. The *Zingonia Arte Integrazione Multiculture* was started in the year 2000 and its most distinguishing and original feature is the role attributed to artists. It is through their sensitivity that communication modes and space are reconsidered in order to make actual communication possible.

At the request of the Municipality of Ciserano, one of the five included in the Zingonia area not far from Milan, Gennaro Castellano has submitted this project and chosen as his collaborators Stefano Arienti, Liliana Moro and Luca Vitone, in the light of the work already produced by them.

The Carrara Academy of Fine Arts has also been involved and its students have worked in close contact with the artists. A book on this experience has been published by 'a+m bookstore'.

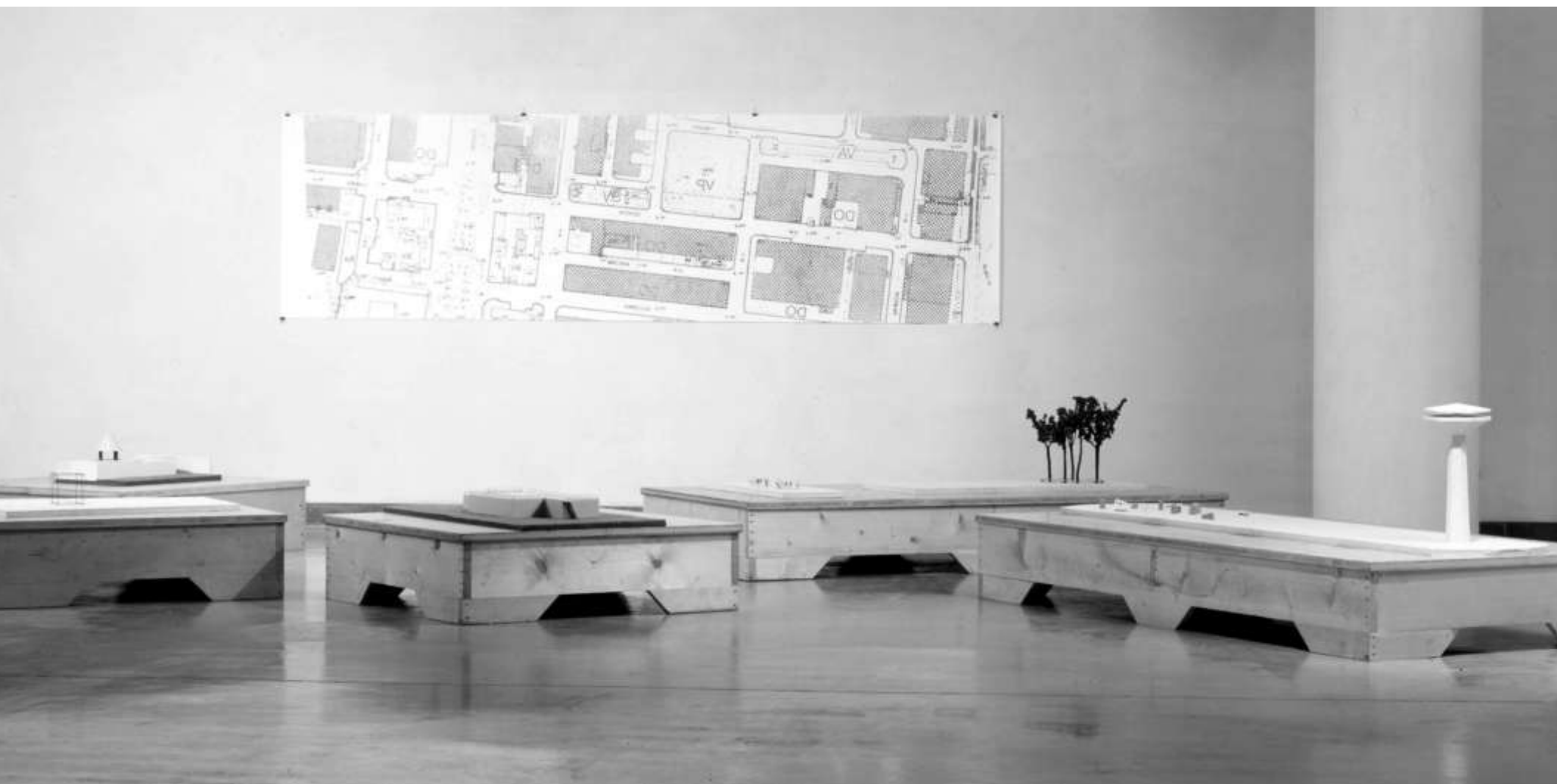
The artists have run workshops with immigrant and resident citizens, and their creations have been acquired by the Municipality and are now on display in the Civic Centre of

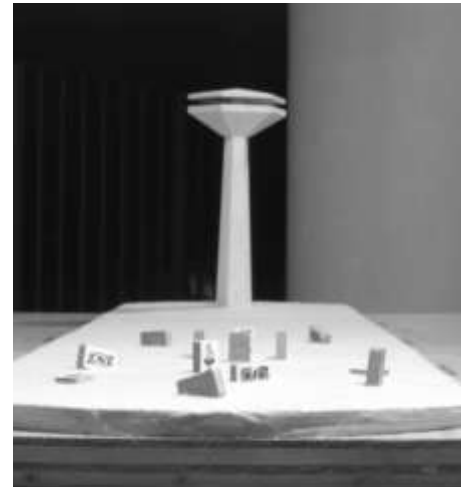
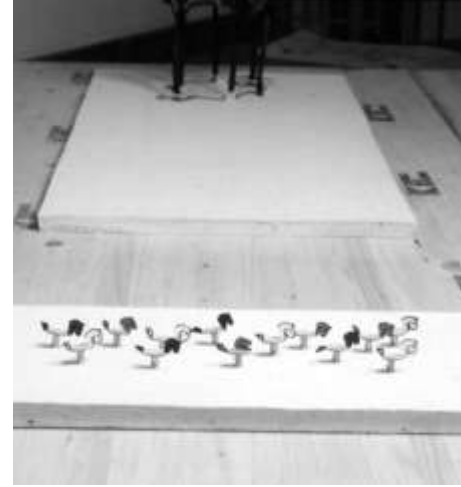
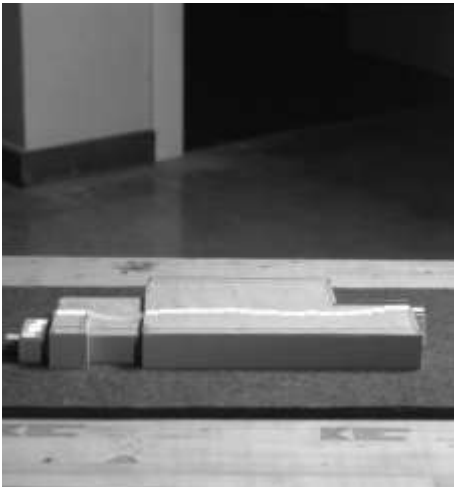
Ciserano. The suggested changes are not intended to substitute the work done by the city government but they take collaboration as their point of departure and recognise the indissoluble bond between a population and the area it lives in.

Because of the social relevance of the project and because of the commitment that the artists have demonstrated, the recipient of the Dena Foundation 2002 Art Award has been selected from among these artists. The Award goes to Luca Vitone.

The new suggested pathway unfolds along the central axis that crosses Zingonia. Its intermediate resting places make it the ideal playground for children who can play, for example, on the roof of an old garage transformed into a shelter in the shape of a Senegalese hut. It is also a meeting place for adults who can stop in small shaded areas created among the trees and include benches built in the shape of the local playing cards. Finally, it is a romantic place where you can enjoy a wonderful view from the tower/reservoir which has achieved the dignity of a privileged standpoint over a landscape that, thanks to art, has taken on a new identity.

*Giuliana Carusi Setari*







## Excerpts from an interview with Luca Vitone by Roberto Pinto

*I would like to start with the Zingonia Project. How did it begin?*

The project started when Antonella Annechiarico, an executive of the Municipality of Ciserano (one of the five municipalities between Milano and Bergamo where Zingonia is) invited Gennaro Castellano to propose an art project involving the different communities living in Zingonia. Gennaro invited Stefano Arienti, Liliana Moro and me to create some artistic initiatives involving the people of Zingonia, an area with a significant presence of foreigners, in order to develop other ways of living there. All the results of the work were presented in a catalogue edited by Emanuela de Cecco (a+m bookstore – Milano).

*Therefore a dialogue was initiated among the artists...*

Yes, also for the purpose of understanding what we could make or offer. Almost immediately we had the chance to meet Natale Zucchetti, the Mayor, and Hamath Diagne, a young Senegalese official from the Immigration Department so that we could understand with them how to operate and how to involve the different people. The meeting place was an empty shed, tem-

porarily lent to us by an industrialist. Almost every Saturday we used to meet and work there. In that place we also organised meetings, parties and so on.

*How did people react to this?*

I would say that the main feeling was curiosity, above all from people of Senegalese origins (thanks to Hamath), the biggest community after the Italian one.

*Zingonia was idealised as a project for a utopian city, a town plan involving work, housing and culture. How much were you affected by the peculiar history of the place?*

The failure of Zingonia is due mainly to economic reasons. The project was thought up during the economic boom of the sixties, but was carried out during the oil crisis of the seventies. Even the entrepreneurs that at the beginning supported this project later abandoned it. Maybe ten years before or ten years later it would have been successful. We must also think that at the end of the 19th century there were many projects aimed

at 'closed communities' – that was good for that time – but in the middle of the seventies the same projects became very dangerous because they could transform these 'closed communities' into 'ghettos'. Just to give you an example, a symbol of this failure is a luxury hotel built to host clients of the large industrial companies. It is a huge place actually abandoned, destroyed and nowadays used as a collective dump, a refuge for drug-addicts or illegal immigrants.

Going back to your question, we did not think very much about the utopian city, but we felt that Zingonia was, in a way, a ghost city. These outskirts belong to five municipalities that were never integrated, with their own schools, transportation and rubbish collection. All this transformed a utopia into a suburb abandoned to its own destiny.

During the nineties the economy started up again. Because of this, labour was needed and therefore the immigrant population grew to almost 20%. The five municipalities, instead of going on with the exasperated initial autonomy, created a consortium unifying services for transport, rubbish collection and so on. Nowadays the five communities around Zingonia have more than 40.000 inhabitants, with a greater political and

economic strength and can therefore better compete with the Lombardia Region – also in obtaining European funds for the re-structuring of the urban and suburban areas.

Our project is also aimed at the re-vitalisation of the area.

*How did you work on the project?*

The four of us worked in the industrial area of Zingonia and all the projects were exhibited in a permanent show at the new civic centre of Ciserano.

*I think that a common point in all your works is the way in which you approach people through a game element. Did you develop this strategy during your initial discussions?*

I think it came naturally for everybody. You try to overcome the initial distrust of people (more present among the Italians than among the foreigners) using a game element to 'break the ice' and start up an initial relationship. Inside the industrial area I have developed a step by step pathway, each step conceived as a meeting place for a game or amusement.

*(You talked of the entire project)... Can you possibly linger over*

*your specific intention when aiming to create a pathway inside this territory...*

I must state in advance that each one of us has had two assistants from the Bergamo Academy.

I have worked with Nicoletta Freti and Loredana Rescigno and we have had a very useful exchange of ideas. My pathway starts from a large square above a garage between three condominiums. It crosses slowly a large part of Zingonia and ends in Piazza Milano, an abandoned area between industrial sheds. In this pathway there are seven resting places, that become public zones where people can sit, meet and read the newspaper.

In Zingonia there are no places with any such characteristics, there are no benches and people meet only in the bars. Children play where they can, even if there are many green spaces – abandoned and undeveloped.

The first stop is a Senegalese hut that children can use as a shelter. Then you can go to a green area, in the centre of the main street, where I have designed a circular see-saw.

There people can swing backwards and forwards while looking at each other. Then you again cross the street and arrive at a

garage in the middle of three other condominiums. Over the roof of the garage there is a mini sand pit for the children. The pathway goes on over a long and narrow, green path where there is a group of rocking horses built on springs. At the end of the path you find a group of trees in a circle. I have considered installing a ribbon of benches around them, that follow the form of the trees, as in the gardens of the first half of 19th century.

Going on, you walk along a huge green space where “bergamasche” playing cards – driven in the ground in open order – become places to sit. In my project there is also a small wood with a water reservoir. If you could sit on the tank, you would have a panoramic view of Zingonia and of the pathway which is situated in a completely flat area where you could normally never see the landscape around you. It is a way to re-visit the territory where you live, looking at it from a different point of view. Of course all the area should have been cultivated with flowers and plants, in order to give an even better impression. All the pathway is marked by tiles on which there are drawings made by the inhabitants of Zingonia. We have collected a lot of images and at the end the drawings become a whole story made as a ‘cadavre exquis’, where the first person sketched his



drawing, folded the sheet of paper and gave it to the following person who, from these basic lines, continues the story.

*Do you usually use an element of play with people?*

Working out a project involving other people I have always tried to give the sensation that the project was tied to amusement. After all, I think that art is a game: you have always to play a different role, entering in discussion with yourself, and you can never receive a final answer. I have always tried to behave in this way either with my assistants in performing a project or with spectators interacting with me.

*You have made pathways also in other works. Is it a way to re-visit the territory?*

I think that through a pathway you can get acquainted with and re-visit the site. Of course the pathways are differently oriented according to the project. For *Wide City* in Milan we organised guided tours once a week. People could visit the foreign cultural centres of the city, where a representative of the Centre

welcomed them explaining the activities. I have also built urban pathways for other projects (for example in *Stundàiu* and *Liberi tutti*) giving a guide to interesting places to visit. You could freely cover the pathway through the city interpreting it in your own way. These projects were linked to Rome, that is, of course, the capital of pathways.

*You have been often interested in the point of view of foreign communities. Is this also a way to re-generate the site?*

When I started at the end of the eighties, I chose the relation with the site, having in mind the consciousness of the native and the role of the foreigner. Both give to the site a new identity, using their individual experiences. The confrontation with the foreigner is enriching not only for the original point of view it gives us, but also because it is an instrument for understanding better our own culture. Discussing with them you must automatically investigate your own culture. This idea is very near to the work I have done with ethnic music. In 1989, I started producing recordings of traditional music of the place where my show was exhibited, aiming to compare the relationship with

our own traditions. Music and food are the most direct means of coming closer to a culture which is different from ours. For this reason I have often used these elements in my work.

*Of course the risk of using food and music is to take on the stereotyped elements of a culture. Have you ever felt the danger of being overwhelmed by these stereotypes? ( For example, I refer to some of your shows where you asked the local tourist offices to give you information about typical food). After all, we often try to deliberately create or to emphasise a tradition for tourist and commercial purposes...*

I think that stereotypes are everywhere and dominate us even if we aim to be different. All of us are dominated by stereotypes, we love a piece of music because it becomes a stereotype of itself. We think that Beethoven is good because we are compelled to think so (but this doesn't mean that he isn't). We are inspired and we follow our prejudices. We love ethnic music because in this way we think we are keeping up with the times. In the end, we always follow a stereotype and therefore to continue looking for typical ethnic products becomes a way to

be accepted. The use of music and food is also a way to work around the stereotype, to work on something which becomes, in turn, a stereotype of itself.

*At the very beginning I considered your work more theoretical and in a way more detached. On the contrary I think now that a narrative scope is emerging with greater vigour in your recent work...*

Looking back, I agree with you that at the beginning I probably needed to give my work a more dry, a more theoretical, basis . We were coming out from a period in which the artistic system, particularly in Italy, was dominated by very distant aesthetic practices ( they were the years of Transavanguardia ). I felt the desire to wipe the slate clean, to start again from other premises, connecting myself to artists of the sixties and seventies. After this first period, I wanted to raise my sights and to tell stories, to express my vision of the world in a more talkative and complete way, and therefore my work has taken a different form.

*This more talkative form is born also from the need to get more*

*in touch with 'the public' and with people co-operating on the project?*

Perhaps you are right. Particularly while working on more complex projects, I wanted to work in a team, as if I was in an architects studio or on a film set. To make a film it is necessary to have not only a director, but also a cinematographer, an art director, an editor, and so on. Here there are many people working together, not only technically but also intellectually, towards the final goal. In this period I became aware of the significance of these characters, from the curator with whom you can exchange ideas to the people that participate directly or indirectly in the realisation of the project.

*How did the idea for the book come about?*

The book is a series of photos of street musicians that I took in the different cities I visited last year. The street musician is an ambivalent personality that condenses two possible ideas taken from our imagination. In one sense it takes us to a street corner representing a romantic dream with of the bohemian concept

of freedom of movement, uncertainty and freedom of thought. In the other sense it bothers us with its superficial consequence. It does not matter if it is a gypsy playing at the entrance to the underground or a good looking youth with a scarf around his neck, a music-stand and a musical instrument in his hand. They are always metaphors for something that we don't want to see, rendering banal the role of music and of its interpretation. In spite of this and yet because of it, these are stereotypes of the urban scene, contributing to the sound track of the city. Their tales enrich the map/music score of the city which defines, in turn, the image/sound of the same modern city.

Milan, August 2002



As a non-profit organisation, Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art has the mission to promote the distribution of international visual art in the perspective of international exchange, using conferences and exhibitions organised in collaboration with art centres and museums. It also supports studio and artists-in-residence programs for emerging artists.

The annual Dena Foundation Art Award - which is the focus of this publication - has been given this year to the Italian artist Luca Vitone. He has been selected by art historian and critic Roberto Pinto for his installation in the context of the project *Zingonia Arte Integrazione Multiculture*. The project was conceived by Gennaro Castellano following the initiative of the Municipality of Ciserano, with the aim of improving either the quality of communication among the multiethnic population of Zingonia or the quality of the territory, through the presence of works of art.

The coincidence of the presentation at the Palais de Tokyo of the OneStar Press edition - which publishes this book - has been the occasion for inaugurating a collaboration with this innovative institution devoted to the younger creativity. Furthermore

Dena Foundation has been asked to contribute to the publishing of *Je veux* by OneStar Press, inviting international and Italian artists of its knowledge.

ArtOmi Summer Program at Omi, New York, has been once again selected for the annual scholarship provided by Anna Rosa Cotroneo Bidolli, one of the foundation trustees. There the Italian artist Francesco Jodice, which had been invited with Multiplicity to this year edition of Documenta, Kassel, has been given the opportunity to meet a number of artists of different origins and nationalities and to share knowledge in a program organised by specialists from the art world.

Carla Accardi exhibition at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris last January was made in collaboration and with the support of Dena Foundation, with the purpose to bring even wider attention of European audience to the work of an artist who has crossed recent decades and remains a strong and vital example with her recent production, not to be missed by the younger generation. The response of both the public and the press was enthusiastic. The catalogue *Carla Accardi* has been published by Paris Musées.



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*Editorial coordination*

Giuliana Carusi Setari

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Philip Sands and Giovanni Cotroneo

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Photos of Luca Vitone's work in Zingonia  
courtesy of Municipality of Ciserano

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[www.denafoundation.com](http://www.denafoundation.com)

Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art  
2, Quai des Célestins, Paris 75004 France  
[info@denafoundation.com](mailto:info@denafoundation.com)



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A collection of books, movies and multiples by artists

16, rue Trolley de Prévaux

75013 Paris, France

tel: 06 63 01 22 87

[info@onestarpress.com](mailto:info@onestarpress.com)

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