

## Devastation In Central Italy

"TO BE ABLE TO WIN THIS CHALLENGE OF RECONSTRUCTION, THAT THE WHOLE OF ITALY IS CALLED TO FACE UP TO, IT'S NECESSARY TO RECUPERATE AND RESTORE THE HISTORICAL CENTERS THAT HAVE BEEN RAZED BY THE EARTHQUAKES."

—DARIO FRANCESCHINI, ITALY'S MINISTER OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

On April 27, at the invitation of Dario Franceschini, Italy's Minister of Culture and Tourism, I went about 54 miles from Rome with a group of around 40 co-members of The Foreign Press Association in Italy to Cittaducale, a small town near Rieti. There, in part of the barracks of the former State Forestry Corps, recently incorporated into the *carabinieri* (National Police Force), are deposited the damaged artworks, predominantly from Amatrice, awaiting restoration after the three major earthquakes in central Italy during 2016 and 2017. There are four other such deposits, one in the Abruzzo at Celano near L'Aquila, where the artworks salvaged after the earthquake at L'Aquila on April 6, 2009 (magnitude 6.3) were also stored and many still are; one in Umbria at Spoleto, and two in the Marche at Ascoli Piceno and at Ancona. We were accompanied by Francesca Saccone, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Press Secretary, and Sicilian Fabio Carapezza Guttuso, the adopted son of the world-famous Sicilian painter Renato Guttuso (1912-87) and the Prefect of the Ministry's Crisis Unit founded after the 1980 earthquake (6.9 magnitude) in Irpinia, a region of the Apennine mountains near the city of Avellino, which is about 25 miles east of Naples. On the way there, Carapezza Guttuso, who began working at the Ministry in 1992 as a specialist for the safety of Italy's cultural patrimony, provided us some heart-breaking figures.

"Unfortunately, I've co-ordinated the salvage and safety of Italy's cultural patrimony after many natural disasters: earthquakes in Umbria/Marche



severe damage in 172 municipalities in 4 regions: Abruzzi, Latium, Marche, and Umbria. Of the 299 victims, 237 were in the mountain-town Amatrice, where many Romans have their origins and second homes. Here in August they traditionally hold family reunions and celebrate the festival of the local dish, *spaghetti all'Amatriciana*.

Had the first earthquake not struck during this traditional summer holiday season, known as *ferragosto*, many fewer people would have died."

The statistics are overwhelming. In the four regions over 1,000 churches, 16,111 works-of-art (with at least another 600 identified still under the rubble), 2,963 archives and 6,921 books were damaged and are in need of restoration. Of these 1,000, in Lazio 115 churches were damaged, and 92 of these 115 churches have artworks on deposit in Cittaducale, while the artworks of 15 additional churches were

Above, rescue workers surveying the damage (Ministry of Culture).  
Left: Fabio Carapezza Guttuso (Ministry of Culture).  
Below, restorer Federica di Napoli Rampolla (Lucy Gordan)







wall frescoes, which restorers on loan from Rome, Federica Di Napoli Rampolla and Silvia Borghini, are trying to piece together again. For now they're working in the hanger, but soon will move to another building being transformed into a proper laboratory for restoration. Of the 16,111 art-works 2,856 were from Lazio, 70% of which came from Amatrice or very nearby; of the archives 530 were in Latium, and of the books "only" 671.

"Of course the most important thing is first and foremost saving lives," continued the Prefect. "Then, after the rescue teams of fire brigades with the help of the army, police, and civil protection volunteer rescuers have found all the survivors and victims and stabilized the buildings still standing, it's our turn. We have to evaluate the damage to cultural patrimony, describe and document what happened to each monument and work-of-art, evaluate how much money is needed for each restoration and if it's worth the effort, and, if yes, take what's transportable to a safe place so that it won't get stolen or further damaged. On the day of its discovery each work of-art was photographed and registered by its monument of origin, date of when it was found, and its history, if known, so that there would be no later confusion. All this information was put on a computer data base with pre-earthquake photographs together with the location, ie. the shelf number, of where each object is being stored in the barracks' storage hanger. You'll see the database as well as the artworks in Cittaducale, where we've tried to store objects from the same place together. The artworks include statues of the Madonna and of many saints, paintings, crucifixes, processional crosses, altarpieces, reliquaries, tabernacles, candlesticks, vestments, and church bells."

Another consideration brought up by Carapezza Guttuso on the bus and then later in Cittaducale by the restorers, who began working here just over a week after the August earthquake, on September 1, is that, even if they succeed in restoring the works-of-art, which are mostly ecclesiastical, where are they going to put them if the churches they were made for have been razed to the ground?

This is obvious for the frescoes if there are no more walls to attach them to. Not to mention the bells dangerously hanging in tottering church towers often miraculously saved from above by fearless firemen.



There are 40 of all different sizes at Cittaducale.

Carapezza also mentioned another problem: that these government inventories of damaged artworks don't include those privately owned and that, in the confusion of such disastrous events, it's easier for them to disappear and be sold outside Italy, which under normal circumstances would be traceable and is illegal.

However, everyone agreed that the biggest problem is the cost of rebuilding and restoration, which has been estimated at 20 billion euros or nearly 22 billion dollars.

Here and above, damaged artworks (Lucy Gardner)



"Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission," Carapezza Guttuso told us at lunch in the barracks, "went to Norcia, the birthplace of St. Benedict, the patron saint of Europe, to assess the extensive damage there for himself. Europe has promised us 7 billion euro, but not a cent has been deposited yet."

Since my husband is from near L'Aquila, I've known for many years that none of the works in Cittaducale would be, or was indeed, by great artists so they're not likely to bring in big donations for their restoration.

Yet they're deeply beloved by their communities and sociologically important because they represent the history of religious devotion, particularly of the 1300s, in poor rural areas, often still fairly isolated today.

"The most important work we have here," architect Cristina Colletini, who is in-charge of the storage hanger, told me during our visit, "is a painting of the Holy Family with St. John the Baptist as a Child by Nicola Filotesio, known as 'Cola of Amatrice.' It dates to 1527 and was in Amatrice's Municipal Museum. Another is a small cameo of the Virgin Mary, known as the Madonna of Filetta, Amatrice's patron saint, from the Church of St. Agostino."

"As much as possible, the idea is to build as it was," said the Prefect. "We're salvaging artifacts and construction materials so that the towns will be as authentic as possible. That's the profound sense of what we're doing."

To help make this intent possible, Minister Franceschini has introduced a program called Art Bonus, where 65% of every taxed euro donated can be deducted. To learn more click on [www.art-bonus.gov.it](http://www.art-bonus.gov.it).