

## Luca Vitone at Centro Pecci, Prato

Barbara Casavecchia gets swept up in the artist's visual odyssey to 'Romanistan'

By **Barbara Casavecchia**



*Der unbestimmte Ort (The Unspecified Place), 1994, mural painting, wheel cart. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin*

**E***ppur si muove* ('And yet it moves') is a sardonic Italian saying, originally attributed to Galileo Galilei in 1633, at the end of his trial for heresy by the Inquisition, which forced him to proclaim the Earth as the stationary centre of the universe and sentenced him to perpetual immobility (ie, house imprisonment for life). Since the early 2000s, Luca Vitone has used *Eppur si muove* as the collective title for an ongoing series of installations, sculptures and works on paper in which freedom of thought and movement are represented by his encounters with the nomadism of Roma culture. Romanistan groups them, but also inscribes them in a broader 'nostos narrative' (nostos being the Greek word for 'homecoming'), an odyssey across space and time that is both collective and private, and infused with nostalgia (nostos + algos, 'the pain associated with longing').

The exhibition reflects a number of journeys. The foremost is the migration of the Roma and Sinti people from India to Europe; Vitone recently reversed it by travelling by camper van from Bologna (where Roma are cited in an official document from 1422) to Chandigarh (where the first international centre of documentation on Roma opened in 1970). He was joined by a group of friends guided by the Roma musician, musicologist and lecturer Santino Spinelli and his son Gennaro. During the trip the artist shot a road movie (*Romanistan*, 2019), screened once a day in the museum's cinema, while a monumental video projection in the exhibition space condenses this to a short loop (*Romanistan (Video)*, 2019). The film is often silent, with long tracking shots of the landscapes flowing outside the window, from the Mediterranean and the Balkans to the Caucasus and beyond. As in Vitone's signature 'atopic maps', where the conventions of cartography are replaced by personal notations on what makes a site 'specific' (*Carta atopica (Atopic Map)*, 1988–92, is on display), landmarks remain unmarked, such as the prehistoric stone circle of Carahunge ('speaking stones'), in southern Armenia, where the wind blows through circular holes pierced atop the megaliths, possibly to observe the same solar trajectories studied by Galileo. The stops along the road are punctuated by interviews with Roma politicians, activists, musicians and academics who voice their opinions on Roma culture, identity and discrimination. The term 'Romanistan' was originally coined by the Bulgarian activist, theatre director and politician Manush Romanov to describe an imagined country formed by all the Romanes-speaking peoples.

In another rearward journey, the show traces Vitone's practice back to 1994, when he involved Cologne's Roma community in his exhibition *Der unbestimmte Ort (The Unspecified Place)* at Galerie Christian Nagel. A wall is painted green (land) and blue (sky), a red wooden cartwheel at the centre – the Roma flag. The photographic diptych *Eppur si Muove (Alba)* (2005) documents the donation of a plot of land by Situationist artist Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio to Sinti families in 1956, so that they could legally reside within the borders of his city (Alba, in Piedmont).

The third journey is very much a sentimental one. In 1977 a teenage Vitone embarked on a family car trip from Genoa to Iran. The driver was his father, the artist and poet Rodolfo Vitone, now recently deceased and evoked by a pair of old leather sandals, cast in bronze (*Romanistan #3*, 2019). During his trip to Chandigarh, Vitone decided to put himself literally in his dad's shoes, by wearing them, and to keep in touch with his teenage son Leo by sending him 11 postcards from all the countries he visited (*Romanistan (Postcards)*, 2019). To close a circle, and then move on.

**Luca Vitone: *Romanistan*, Centro Pecci, Prato, 8 November – 15 March 2020**