

Basilicata, a land of spirit and inspiration

The creation of this “Presepe” draws inspiration from the cultural landscape of Basilicata, especially from the uniqueness of Matera, a UNESCO World Heritage site and European Capital of Culture 2019.

Matera’s old town – the “Sassi di Matera” – boasts a vast array of rupestrian churches; between the 6th and the 9th Centuries, Italo-Greek and Benedictine monks chose to live in this area, creating a rock-cut settlement permeated with sacrality thanks to more than 150 churches, monasteries and sanctuaries. An astonishing heritage that for its range, quality and value can more than compete with the rupestrian churches of Cappadocia, Turkey-Europe. During the day the sunlight envelops the stone houses, giving the Sassi that extraordinary charm that led Matera to be chosen as a film set by Mel Gibson for “The Passion”, by Pier Paolo Pasolini for “The Gospel According to St. Matthew”, by Bruce Beresford for “King David”, by Catherine Hardwicke for “The Nativity Story”, by Cyrus Nowrasteh, for his “Christ The Lord: Out of Egypt” and by Timur Bekmambetov for the remake of “Ben-Hur”.

Basilicata, experience the Region

The region Basilicata is a timeless land, narrated by travelers and artists, writers and moviemakers who have chanced upon it. A particular mixture of ancient and modern, a kaleidoscope of landscapes and moods; the most suggestive adjective to describe it seems to be “poetic”. It is an Italian region steeped in history and culture, with a great cultural and historical heritage: archaeological sites, medieval castles, abbeys and villages. The beauty of this land is enhanced by contemporary art works, events and by a well-established food and wine tradition. A land of inspiration for poets, writers, musicians and film directors, this region still preserves the typical “light” of Southern Italy. A natural and rich landscape, stretching from the Tyrrhenian Coast of Maratea, considered to be the Pearl of the Mediterranean Sea, up to the Ionic Coast, the cradle of the Greek culture, and through to the Apennines mountains.

The Nativity Scene is a way to introduce you to the discovery of Basilicata, an unusual and extraordinary land, quite unknown even to many Italians. An “authentic, pure, preserved” land waiting to be discovered.



www.basilicataturistica.it/en/

Under the auspices of the Consulate General of Italy in New York,
the Basilicata Region and the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii

The Nativity Scene from Basilicata ~ Italy

Our Lady of Pompeii Church
December 8th, 2023 - February 2nd, 2024



The Nativity takes to the road

The crib in Basilicata is a message of peace and hope, that travels from the provinces of southern Italy to the cathedrals of the world. It comes from a place where time seems to flow more slowly, reminding us in the hustle and bustle of everyday life that Christmas can be anywhere, that light returns, and that humanity can find relief from the pressures and anxieties of life in divine faith.

Like a message in a bottle tossed into the ocean of everyday life, it brings the Christian values of faith, set in the scenes of ancient Lucanian culture. The Nativity created by the artist Francesco Artese is depicted in the always surprising landscape of the Sassi of Matera, one of the oldest places in the world. The work tells the story of Lucania's tangible and intangible heritage in a figurative journey that leads virtually from the UNESCO World Heritage rock habitat to the entire region. The message of the Gospel becomes expressive simplicity,

immune from the passage of time, and revives an ancient ritual. Your gaze loses itself in the reconstruction of alleys and neighbourhoods, and you seem to hear the echo of people's voices, of slow but industrious life, in a space crystallised as if in an eternal wait for rebirth. A message that will be possible to "read" in New York from 8th December 2023 to 2nd February 2024 and which will be possible to "live" throughout the year, as an experience of cultural and religious travel in Basilicata. Thanks to the Consulate General of Italy in New York and the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii for their valuable collaboration in the realisation of the initiative.

Vito Bardi, *President of the Basilicata Region*
Antonio Nicoletti, *General manager APT Basilicata*



Artist Francesco Artese interprets a Basilicata landscape as a universe involved in the central event of Christian history: the birth of the Son of God.

A landscape with its typical lanes and steps, caves and mansions, arches and balconies, gardens and terraces, that then surprise us with characteristic chimneys or the bell towers of underground churches decorated with frescoes that represent the art that binds people to God. The houses dug out of the tufa and wedged together evoke the artisanal expertise handed down from one generation to the next, resembling a tapestry woven with joy by humans and Mother Nature together. Life is lived busily in this intense tale of neighbourhood culture, speaking of solidarity and sharing among families in that human and urban maze, a way of life that lasted centuries. These are Matera's Sassi, UNESCO world heritage since 1993, a crèche-town as Giovanni Pascoli defined it.

The Nativity scene comprises a sequence of tableaux with over 120 characters, depicting different moments of daily life, in a simple but bustling scenario, inspired by images from rites and traditions of Basilicata's rural life, still alive and heartfelt by younger generations. The scenes include the Accettura "Maggio", showing a group of oxen led by men, hauling the a large tree trunk; a symbolic procession dedicated to profound and widespread devotion to the Virgin Mary, in which the faithful carry on their heads compositions of candle architectures called "cinti", ex votos in which hope and expectation meet, but also express gratitude for grace received.

The Virgin recalls the bronze sculpture of the Madonna del Pollino by the Dutch artist Daphné du Barry in the act of giving her Son to humanity, while the figure of St Joseph recalls that of the 16th-century nativity scene by Altobello Persio from Montescaglioso, on display in Tursi.



The crib 2023: technical notes

Artist: Maestro Francesco Artese (Grassano, Basilicata Region, Italy).

Size: 20 m2 wide, 4 m high.

Materials: polystyrene covered by a layer of resin stucco resembling tufo (volcanic tuff) with elements of metal, wood and terracotta.

Statuettes: different characters, each one 27 cm tall, made entirely in terracotta by Cantone sas di A. Cantone&C. (Naples) in starched clothes reproducing the typical costumes of Lucanian tradition - all under the direct supervision of Maestro Artese.

Assistant in the assembly: Giuseppe Tortorelli

Organization: Basilicata Tourist Board