

## Voices from the Casilina

Casilina, at first glance, may not seem promising material for an exhibition on the cultural heritage of Rome. Today it is characterized by densely packed housing and a population that hails from all over Italy as well as immigrants from abroad. Overlying Roman and medieval roads that led to ports in southern Italy, this part of Rome has, for millenia, been a gateway for those seeking to start a new life in Rome.

It was all very different in the Roman period. This area was incorporated into one of the most important possessions of the emperor and the bucolic nature of the environment is evident from its name, *Ad Duas Lauros*, - 'at the two laurel trees'. The emperor in question was Constantine who, according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, donated the area to the church. Constantine's mother, Helena, had her mausoleum here, and according to the archaeologist, Professor Filippo Coarelli, Constantine wanted to be buried here himself. St Helena's mausoleum is known locally as Tor Pignattara, the Tower of Pottery, referring to the amphorae which can be seen in the fabric of the construction and which were used structurally to lighten the weight of the dome. The funerary basilica which once would have accompanied St Helena's mausoleum no longer exists, but the catacombs with the remains of the martyrs who perished in the Diocletianic persecution that preceded Constantine are now open to the public after a long period of closure. Few tourists make it this far out of the *centro storico* to see the magnificently painted catacombs of SS Pietro and Marcellino but they are much appreciated by local people.

Eight of Rome's eleven aqueducts converge on Porta Maggiore, one of the highest points of the city, beginning their journey in the foothills of the Apennines, south of Rome. The long arcades of Roman arches winding between apartment blocks and forcing traffic to squeeze through their narrow gaps is one of the most unforgettable sights of the area. The most prominent aqueduct in Casilina is the Alessandrino, the last to be built in 226 CE. It forms a visual reference point and in the shadow of its solid presence, have been created children's playgrounds, parks and communal spaces.

For local people, a key aspect of their daily life is the yellow tram connecting them to the *centro storico*. First opened in 1916, and originally just one track that ran nearly one hundred kilometers all the way to Fiumicino, it has survived several attempts to close it down. Today it finishes at Centocelle and part of its track has been superseded by the new Metro Line C, but its role in the life of the via Casilina community remains undiminished.

The tram stands as a symbol of the rapid development of low-cost housing along the via Casilina in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century. Built to accommodate workers attracted to Rome by the employment opportunities, the expansion was not always trouble-free. Low-income families often had to rely on illegal housing which meant that it was poorly constructed and deprived of public services. The illegality of their situation made them powerless to object. When, in the later twentieth century, immigrants from Bangladesh and Senegal moved into the area social tensions led to much publicized racist incidents.

In recent years conflict in the Middle East and Africa has seen an unprecedented wave of people fleeing across the Mediterranean to escape the conditions in their own country. It was in response to this need that Casa Scalabrini 634 opened its doors in 2015 with a mission not just to provide shelter but to integrate refugees and immigrants into the local community, and to use the power inherent in culture to build bridges of communication. This exhibition aims to contribute a small piece to their mission.



Photo courtesy Emma Chepkwony

## **The Partnerships That Created This Exhibition**

### **Sustainable Cultural Heritage, American University of Rome**

The M.A. in Sustainable Cultural Heritage aims to shape a new type of professional by offering Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Science majors the opportunity to acquire the practical skills necessary for managing heritage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The program lays particular emphasis on the role of heritage as part of cultural identity and the importance of engaging the local community in its stewardship. Whilst public attention is usually focused on major national monuments and UNESCO inscribed sites of international importance, 'Voices of the Casilina' aims to show that cultural heritage is everywhere and belongs to the local community – it embodies their collective memory and tells their stories. Cultural heritage is not to be valued solely on the basis of the tourist dollar it generates. It builds communities and binds society, is the basis for self-identity and feelings of rootedness, and can be used to understand ourselves and others and bridge gaps in cultural communication. 'Voices of the Casilina' is not about the past of Casilina, it is about its future.

### **Casa Scalabrini 634/ASCS**

Casa Scalabrini 634, a program of the Scalabrinian Agency for Cooperation and Development – ASCS Onlus in Rome (Italy), is run by the Missionaries of St. Charles – Scalabrinians, a Roman

Catholic religious order that has been active for 130 years serving migrants and refugees in 32 countries worldwide. Their mission is to promote a culture of welcoming and integration among refugees, immigrants, and the local community. Our team works in synergy and continuity with associations and other organizations that operate in the same field, creating a network from the grassroots. Working together helps **to** break down the “borders” that limit the creation of communities where everyone feels welcome and can actively contribute to the common good. +info: [www.scalabrini634.it](http://www.scalabrini634.it)

### **Ecomuseo Casilino Ad Duas Lauros**

The Ecomuseo Casilino ‘Ad Duas Lauros’ Association is an organization dedicated to the protection, enhancement and promotion of the archaeological area named *Comprensorio Ad Duas Lauros*. This area, which extends from Porta Maggiore to Via Tor De Schiavi and from Prenestina to Casilina, is a unique patrimony of history, archaeology, anthropology, spiritual and social practices, landscapes and environment. The Association promotes the creation of an urban Ecomuseum in this peripheral area of Rome, working with local communities, the municipal and regional authorities and government Superintendencies. The intense research work, the high number of citizens involved and the impact on the preservation of the local heritage, on intercultural dialogue and on the local storytelling, led the International Forum of Ecomuseums to recognize formally the Ecomuseo Casilino.

## Fasasi Abeedeen Tunde

Fasasi studied Fine Art and specialized in sculpture at the Polytechnic Ibadan Oyo State, Nigeria. In 2014 he held an exhibition at Total Craft Art Gallery in Ibadan Oyo State. In 2015 he was forced to leave Nigeria and began a long and treacherous journey which finished in Italy. His passion for art became the pathway towards integration in a new country and a means to recover the autonomy that the flight from Nigeria had taken from him.



“I was a sculptor in my own country, I am a sculptor in Italy, the country that has welcomed me”

Photo courtesy Fasasi



Fasasi  
Serie Approdi

## Heritage of Casilina - The Tram

The Roma-Girardinetti train line has over 100 years of history. Since the original tracks were established in the early 1900s the line has provided a way for immigrants to be connected to Rome. Colloquially referred to as *il Trenino Giallo*, the line was in fact an important factor in shaping the neighbourhoods along via Casilina, one of Rome's most important commuter routes. Over the years, however, the track has been reduced from a 78 kilometer stretch - that reached all the way to Fiuggi - down to approximately 10 kilometers (14 stops) from the Roma-Termini to Centocelle stations.

For many of the migrants who live along via Casilina, this line is their only connection to the heart of Rome. Morning and evening commutes are spent on the train;



many using the time to communicate with family members back home, some to socialize with new friends, and some just to sit in silence, in self-reflection.

Photo courtesy Claudio Gnessi

## Heritage of Casilina - Catacombs

Catacombs were subterranean cemeteries dug in the soft tufa, a porous volcanic rock. The community provided for the burials of its poorest members as an example of solidarity and a symbol of equality of all in death. Similar to the immigrants of today, early Christians were persecuted until the Milan Edict of 313, issued by Emperor Constantine largely under the influence of his mother, St. Helen. She was buried in a sarcophagus made of precious porphyry, a volcanic rock quarried in Egypt, that was probably originally meant for Constantine with its figures representing warriors and captives. It was abandoned together with the entire Mausoleum in the countryside and beautifully represented by Piranesi, the architect and engraver of the 18th century, together with



subsequent addition of farms frequently built with recycled ancient Roman building material. The sarcophagus is at the Vatican Museums today where a lot of cultural

heritage is preserved.

Photo courtesy Claudio Gnessi



## **Heritage of Casilina - Alessandrino Aqueduct**

This project illustrates how the Alessandrino Aqueduct has become a catalyst for community involvement and development in Casilina. Starting as a source of water for the ancient city of Rome, today the aqueduct is a source providing structure for parks, playgrounds, small chapels, and common areas along the aqueduct's arches. Parco Giordano Sangalli is one such park that was able to bring the community together to both clean up and maintain the area for everyone, no matter their background to enjoy. We were struck by how the community saw not a problem but an opportunity to refurbish their neighborhood by highlighting one of their most dominate monuments. With a coordinated effort supported by local groups and volunteers, Casilina now has a beautiful park that they can not only just take pride in but demonstrate to other areas of Rome that they are just as vibrant and caring of their neighbors and Roman structures.



Photo courtesy Claudio Gnessi.

## Participants

**Betty** - is originally from Kansas City, Kansas, USA. Before



AUR she attended Creighton University where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History and International Relations. Upon finishing her Master's she hopes to apply her studies to the field of cultural heritage creating economic development.

**Emma** - Emma is a dual citizen of Kenya and the USA.



Professionally, she is a travel and wildlife photographer who until recently, was based in New York City. She holds a degree in International and Intercultural Communications from Old Dominion University in Virginia. Her passion for

cultural exchange, languages and experiential travel, have been the main forces that shaped her into the multifaceted global citizen that she is today.

**Erin** - is from Seattle, Washington and received a BA in



Psychology from the University of Washington. "My passion for cultural heritage matured during my time as an undergraduate when I studied abroad in Rome. Having been passionate about cultural heritage from a young age and

recognizing how inspired I am by art, architecture, and history I decided it was time to pursue my dream of

working in heritage preservation through the Sustainable Cultural Heritage MA program.”

**Katarina** - grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. She attended Saint Norbert College in Wisconsin, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Studies. She is interested in hidden or little-known archaeological sites as well as visiting places that are not usually visited by tourists.



**Kristin** - is from Springfield, Missouri and comes to AUR after several years as Community Development and Special Events Manager at the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Evangel University and plans to use her MA in Sustainable Cultural Heritage to continue working in the NGO sector raising funds for arts management programs.



**Lisa** – is a trained public historian and educator with seven years of experience in museum work. Her goal is to find effective strategies to manage heritage resources in struggling communities by implementing a pedagogical approach to preservation strategies for museums/heritage sites and the communities in which they serve.



**Olga** - moved to Italy from Croatia in 1992 and now works as a Tourist Guide for Rome and the Vatican City. She has always had a very strong interest in art and history and studying for the Masters in Arts Management has deepened her knowledge and hopefully opened new perspectives for her future carrier.



**Sergio** - is from Los Angeles and comes to Rome with global perspective after studying in Spain and teaching English in China. He previously recruited families to host Chinese high school students in America. His career goal is to work for a tourism board where he can use his bilingual skills to impact the Latin American market.



**Taneisha** – is from Melbourne, Australia. She moved to Rome in 2015 to obtain her BA degree in Archaeology and Classics. Today she is a part of the MA Cultural Heritage program and hopes to continue working in the heritage field with the goal of working with local communities and deepening their relationship with their heritage.

