

## Naples/New York B. Amore – Artist Statement

The origins of the “Naples/New York” exhibition stem from a 2009 book tour when I picked up intriguing objects from Neapolitan streets, Spaccanapoli, Via della Stazione, Via del Duomo. They became counterparts to what I was already finding in New York in Soho, Chelsea, on Broadway, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and 14<sup>th</sup> Street. All of these were *custodito* – conserved; each “find” in one city finding its complement in the other; some delicate, some crude; the gloves, preserved in bronze, reach across the distance of the Atlantic’s watery divide to clasp hands with one another. Fragments of tar roofing from the original Ellis Island Immigration Station are interspersed throughout these present works which are a continuation of my “Street Calligraphies” series. The pairing of these two cities seemed natural. Each was a locus of tremendous immigrant activity. There was so much trafficking back and forth between the ports that the immigrants were called *Rondini di Passaggio* (birds of passage).

When Pellegrino D’Acierno shared his vision for a conference, “Delirious Naples,” and invited me to participate, I began working on the series with an even more keen sense of purpose. All of my art integrates image, text and sculptural elements. Experimentation and work with found materials is key to my working process in which accident and innovation are in constant interplay. I may enhance the given materials in subtle ways by sometimes adding a patina, but always respecting its innate nature. Like illuminated manuscripts, where ordinary letters are enhanced, the common street elements undergo a transmutation. I thrive on the interaction of an inner dialogue and the formal challenge of transforming such disparate materials into a work of art so that the entire piece becomes a kind of weaving. There is a constant search for a balance between a personal reality and the demands of the increasingly complex world in which we find ourselves.

Neapolitan song, known all over the world, became the aesthetic leitmotif linking the pieces.\* Many popular Neapolitan ballads were written by poets and writers both in Italy and in America and were published and exported between the two countries. The found pieces, flotsam and jetsam of city life, are juxtaposed with these elegantly designed music covers or actual scores. As an artist, I feel that I am using a modern idiom to collaborate with artists from the past. There is an interplay between high and low culture, which finds its integration in the finished work of art.

The songs tell stories in the words of the people who lived the dichotomy of belonging to disparate worlds. In ways sometimes poignant, always expressive, and often ironic, Eduardo Migliaccio “*Farfariello*,” a Neapolitan writer and entertainer who performed in New York, commented on the plight of the immigrant as only an insider could. Using

coded Neapolitan dialect words and Italian-English hybrids, he expressed the contradictions and everyday dilemmas best when he wrote "*Lu cafune che ragiona*" (the peasant who reasons), exposing the seeming naiveté of the protagonist and his insightful observations of his new countrymen. These songs written on both sides of the silver ocean give us particular insights into the complex situations of Italian immigrants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; the stressful work and living conditions, the ability to make money, the strangeness of a new culture and always, the longing for home.

The finished assemblages are like palimpsests, with layers of images, texts and street materials revealing both the history and sociology of fertile immigrant life. Like present day immigrants, the objects exist in the shadow of modernity, inextricably tied to an inevitable transience. What tells more stories about a populace than what it throws away? Like the shadow side of what is customarily preserved, it completes the whole, complementing the *bella figura* of art, antiques and prized personal possessions. What is "refused" or refuse, i.e. detritus, bears scars and wounds which are generally hidden. To take these elements, lovingly preserve them, and make them into art, is a true transformation, a healing of the incongruent realities that surround us, both personal and societal. These sculptures evolve in the midst of all of this to create a sense of wholeness out of the myriad parts. Is this not the task which we face every day in this increasingly intricate world?

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