

Carlo Pittore

American painter Charles Stanley



<http://carlopittorefoundation.org/>

in homage to a friend and great painter from “colleagues” magazine

PITTORE IN PAESAGGIO / PAINTER IN A LANDSCAPE

'Carlo, Carlo Pittore, disegna mi, disegna mi!' shout the small boys as he enters the piazza, chasing after him like the Pied Piper, and when he roars back through his beard they jump up and down laughing with delight, while the older, more sophisticated youths call out, 'Hey, Van Gogh,' and he, clutching his hands to his ears shouts back, 'No souvenirs yet!'

Monticello, repeating it slowly, getting the tongue around those vowels and then beyond the piazza nothing but mediaeval stairways fighting skywards. Down the steps old ladies bearing sticks for bread ovens, and gaunt-faced men leading laden donkeys. Aren't they wonderful, like characters out of Cervantes,' Carlo praises. 'B'sera, Sgnora, B'sera.' Old madams smiling in doorways or sitting out of the april sunshine making lace.

'The highest house in Montecelio,' pants Carlo as finally, breathless we reach it. Nothing beyond but a tumble of ruins and the windy sky. Far below a mottled campagna spreading seawards, pocked by termite hills, somewhere a sniff of sulphur tanning the tongue, and inland the black-brooding molar mountains. The door lintel is inscribed, 'Casa delle Alte Speranze,' and inside on the far wall a giant ochre Atlas holds up the ceiling ('Nothing much else does!') despite gaudy flames licking his-feet, while beneath Dante cries aloud, 'My friends, be not cast down by my vexation, for whatever plots these fiends may lay against us, we will go on!'

Evening with oil lanterns and open fire, Carlo grunting as he cooks, stirring with one hand studying Leonardo with the other. Mmmm!' says he, tasting, garlicky oil seeping down his beard and a thick finger twisting appreciatively in his cheek. Mmmm! Eating is the most sensual thing I know. (Except once when we got carmine-red by mistake in the spaghetti sauce.) 'You're terrible!' he shouts, battening frames for the morning, boiling up rabbits' skin glue to mix with plaster for a primer. No clock on the wall, merely a pair of old shoes tied up, with the reminder 'Michaelangelo went to bed with his boots on.' The donkey below clip clops out while dawn is just an orange crack across the sky, and (or so it seems) straightaway after Carlo thrusts apart the shutters. 'Look at this. Just look! It's all Hooker Green number 2. Like snow spring has fallen overnight felting the landscape in a green haze. The track out of the village lies half drowned in unfamiliar inflorescences; figs candelabraed with fat leaves, olives silver blue, vines sprouting yellow fangs. On all sides frogs belch, insects soar on drunken rampage, swallows swoop under a white sky while Carlo strides on, labouring like a pedlar, sweating under easel, canvasses, paints, wine and panini. 'Mondrian would have gone mad,' he marvels. 'He couldn't stand green!'

A month later we journey south with the help of Banco di Carlo, ('Banco chiuso,' he roars, 'Sempre chiuso!') sleeping in fields, Carlo padding across the forgotten acropolis at Cumae reading his Aeniad like his Michelin Guide; finding the Sybil near the Sacred Way and a grove of oak trees behind the temple of Jupiter, while below, lazily, the winedark seas tempt him south. At Phaestum we sleep out on the beach beyond the pine forests and in the morning pass between the giant doric columns on parade between sea and mauve mountain, accepting inspection. No coiling baroque or Caravagian shadowy dramas but stern patterns of space, like Gods looking out (from a cliff top) on a bright windy day while that old apollonian rag-time 'Man know thyself,' choruses the distant breaking waves. The coast spreads south; strips of sand webbing rocky promontories, flower-potted with tumbling Barbarossa towers, tangled with wild figs and olives. Here Carlo took up summer residence in a stone but formerly the domicile of sheep but now only of their perfume and their pests. And here he painted.

He painted Calabria, never stopping from dawn until the light lessened, working stripped to the waist in an old sun hat among the tangy myrtle until the sullen but halfburied beneath yellow broom and flaming oleanders listed still further under the surprise of his colours, hot as July-seas roaring like lions in the narrow inlets, twisting trees, grinning peasants, tumbling terraces, rocks ochre and agate spilling light, laughter, shadow, surf, and the sand where in fact he slept each night, stretched out like a piece of driftwood. Camerota lay three miles over the headlands and sometimes in the evening we met there at Elicio's-half boy, half beast, hobbling over to collect our plates, muttering his hardly coherent dialect, hitting us possessively, giving us seashell treasures. Like a figure left over from mythology his eyes gleamed with a strange exuberance; hunchback, webfooted, serpents for hair. 'Why look for defects,' says Carlo, sketching while the swordfish boats come in out of the ocean's eye seeking, like senses, fresh hospice. 'He could be beautiful. And now, from far off, sometimes I see the two together sharing my memory, figures in the mind's mural, tasting life like fire-eaters. Carlo clapping his ears when the youths shout 'Van Gogh,' And the small-boy voices calling, calling, 'Carlo, Carlo Pittore, disegna mi, disegna mi, disegna mi.....'

- Anthony Aikman