



## EMILY ALLCHURCH - PASTORALE / URBAN

Emily Allchurch's study is based on paintings by the great European painters, masterpieces by various artists such as Giorgione, Claude, Friedrich and Turner.

The artist then recomposes the works using a contemporary language, where each painting is recomposed using hundreds of photographs taken mainly in South and East London, where Emily Allchurch lives and works.

Emily uses the picture as a guide, and her aim is to discover buildings and objects in the area where she is working, objects which can be used to retrace and update the original compositions.

These images are digitally superimposed to create a seamless and pictorially aesthetic collage, where the boundary between photography and painting is very faint.

This is the way the artist tells us about the work she prepared for **Storie urbane (Urban stories)**:

"I found Reggio Emilia to be an interesting place to work, where there are strong limits and divisions, both at a physical and psychological level. There is a clear separation between the old and the new districts, identified physically by a ring road which marks the old town walls. The architecture and atmosphere are compact, historical in the old town present in the high prestige of the middle-class houses. The districts beyond the ring road, alternate between high-level districts consisting of new buildings to the poorer housing complexes, which house the workers and the immigrant communities of Reggio Emilia. This appears to be a crucial period for the history of Reggio Emilia's suburbs, with the old and the new competing strongly to exist, inside a weak link. My work is based on the concept of artifice and theatrics, the idea of raising the daily ambitions by creating artificial settings in which the buildings can exist once again. In particular, I was attracted by the town's scenographic tradition, used not only as backdrops for the theatre, but also for domestic settings and as a form of public art for the real processions of the 18th and 19th century. This group of artists was headed by Prampolini and by Fontanesi, and painted imaginary pastoral scenes for the middle-class houses, inspired by the countryside of the Emilia Romagna Region. In addition, they produced refined panels with imaginary architecture to decorate the streets when the Duke passed by. I was fascinated by the fact that the town tried to improve its image by using these artificial solutions. I am interested in discovering and in enhancing the forgotten and neglected areas of a town, to give them dignity. I was attracted to this project by the complex situation that I found in Reggio's suburbs. There are two aspects of the suburbs which I want to investigate: the rural aspect and the architectural aspect.

Taking **Fontanesi's** scenographic compositions as a model, my rural scene for Reggio Emilia today is a synthesis of traditional and modern features. There is the town's foundation plaque in the foreground half obscured by urban debris. Around this nature

grows among the rubbish tips, abandoned projects, building materials, advertising hoardings and urban decor. The characteristic tree of the Emilia Romagna Region struggling to find a place close to the new rows of poplar trees planted by Max Mara. The typical rolling hills of the Romagna Region act as a background to the variety of uses that is made of the territory today, from the farm vineyards to the hyper-realistic perfection of the golf course. One can see on the horizon the development of new property and the speed at which buildings are erected. The statue of a boy carrying a whole Parmesan cheese on his back in the middle of the green belt area, bears witness to bygone values. Giano's two faces have been separated by the Magnani Palace on the opposite sides of the composition, suggesting a different approach to the development. Facing the observer, both figures represent a warning of our responsibility for the past while we move towards the future. The entire scene with its stormy and threatening clouds is reminiscent of Giorgione's "Tempest". However, the sun that can be glimpsed in the background also opens up a reassuring view. I have created a portrait of Reggio Emilia on my own without the help of the tourist postcards, by choosing to photograph a well-known building in the historical centre. I travelled through Reggio's suburb districts using this characteristic feature of the place as a guide, photographing buildings and objects that can be used to substitute the original building with a building that could be more representative of the versatility of the architecture found in Reggio Emilia today. The objective was to challenge the prejudices people have, but also to literally raise the condition of the suburbs by taking its buildings into the historical centre for the first time".

[an extract of the interview produced for the video-documentary entitled **Molte città, Sguardi diversi** (Many towns, Different views), prepared for the European Photography Week].