

ARTURO AGOSTINO

MR. AGOSTINO: Thank you very much. After what Professor Perri told you about the projects of San Pietro Infine and Historiale, now, I wanted to guide you through this itinerary. The journey that one takes in Historiale -- and it starts already from the outside of the building, which accommodate it and reminding the visitor with a visual language through some kakemonos which are placed on the side walls that narrate how the visitor finds himself in the land of St. Benedict; a land, which is a symbol of the European and Christian civilization.

And once inside the museum, a guide offers a brief explanation of instructions for you, to introduce the technical context of the communication intention. Which is to explain the communication coding, even through the visual language, for instance a photograph or a film, which seem self-explanatory. Trying to provide the visitor with a code, which is always implied by the signs and which holds the key to their interpretation.

Every room has a title, which is very visible, a cultural designation, which includes all the exhibit components, and which represents the orientation referenced to the proposed historical and cultural pathway. The different techniques and technology support the hypertext communication and the main narrative thread which transforms into story, the contribution of the historians, Professor Roberto de Mattei and Professor Francisco Perfetti, provide a framework for the development of the events; sometimes visually, sometimes through sound.

And all of this accompanies the visitor. Details, main theme of the exhibit unwinds through different topics, each dedicated to a theme using different artistic and communication techniques. At the same time, room after room, a set of details, sometimes symbols, sometimes artistic details, but mainly visual and documents or sound and music invite the visitor to study more and not only from the knowledge point of view but also to stir emotions. The visitor is involved since the beginning in this journey through fragments of images in rear projection which have been chosen among the most known icons which are usually used to refer to the tragedy of the Second World War. And it's indeed the eclipse of the European conscience, which is the title of the first room, which will determine its dire destiny amid refugees, firings of deported Jews which have been documented in giant posters all surrounded by rubbles. The face of the monk perceived through a talking head, a three dimensional mold with rear projection, which introduces to the themes of devastation, doing it through a real absolute realism. The crisis of the European conscience which started in 1914 open the second room which is called, in fact, Europe in Flames, which gave rise to totalitarian regimes which led to the world conflict from 1939 to 1945. And they're underlined from a distressing march of studded boots inside a very narrow space which becomes more and more narrow both physically and through the use of a variation of sound diffusion which are perceived by the visitor. In this total war, Italy will find itself to face a separated peace. And this is the room of the armistice. It's a terrible trauma which is rendered in a plastic way through the installation of contemporary art which documents the explosion and the territorial fragmentation of Italy after the armistice. While there is the broadcast, a radio

broadcast of the original speech of General Badoglio. In the fourth room, one can find a rich photographic documentations which, in fact, documents some moments of the great battle of Cassino by tracing back the advance through the different villages and different battlefields. And there is a text on the wall which has the task of guiding and contextualizing for the visitors the historical facts. The images of the destroyed abbey, an uprooted tree, and a life-size diorama of the ruins which characterize what once were festive and happy villages give a sense of the dramatic dimensions of those events. While on a graffiti on the wall one reads a part of Elliot's poem (phonetic), desert and hollow, desert and hollow and darkness on the edge of the abyss. The following rooms have to satisfy the need of recounting facts and military strategies which are not easy to understand. For this reason, while veterans tell their story and they're shown on the small monitors, on the screen there is a sequence of silhouettes of many soldiers of many flags of the warring parties with the related national anthems. Geographic maps, military geographic maps, and two characters, a German officer and an American officer, rendered three dimensional through a play of optical images narrate objectives and military strategies so that the attention of the visitor is captured and information and knowledge hard to understand are transmitted. After that, to tell the drama of the civilians with the help of large images which are asynchronous, there are the witnesses of civilians who are still alive today. They tell us about their experience in a setting planned at a normal life size so that it conveys a character of proximity to these testimonials. In the subsequent room, the immigration drama is represented thanks to an artistic installation which is based on objects of the daily life which have been given by the local population. And in the last room, there is a wooden monochrome sculpture of Rambaldi while a movie about the rebirth and the revival reminds us of the fact that Cassino and Monte Cassino have risen back and they have shown a desire of obtaining a new life. And the desire of having a new life is always stronger than the pain and devastation. This, in general, are the themes and suggestions which are offered by the Historiale. A few words now about the other memorial, the one of San Pietro Infine. The selected building to be used as a welcoming center wants to represent the historical memory. And in fact, this is an ancient oil press where one finds a tombstone in remembrance of the fallen of the 36 Texas Battalion. And this is, in fact, a natural starting point for the visit of the village. Once entered in museum, we enter in the first section of the scenographic pathway which relates to San Pietro Infine before the war. And then one steps into a natural gorge of the cave where the people of San Pietro had taken refuge. And the visitor continues its itinerary by walking to this short tunnel which, from a symbolic point of view, given its oppressive character, represents the tunnel of war, of violence, and of death. And then in the subsequent rooms, we are going to set up an optical theatre which will show the scenes of the daily life of the people of San Pietro Infine who took refuge in the caves during the war. Finally, the intention of the committee in creating this memorial is to make San Pietro Infine an emblematic place which leads to meditation and contemplation and discussions of the themes of peace and war. Thank you for your attention.

(Applause)

MR. BOBLEY: Any questions or comments? Okay. We've got one in the back. Let's wait for the mic.

MR. FLYNN: Hi. I just have two basic questions. One is the scope of the site is very impressive in terms of covering issues such as the ideological and moral fractioning of Europe in the Second World War. The first question would be I would hope to hear that there has been funding for this site from the European Union or from countries involved in the conflict such as Great Britain, Germany, and United States. And the question is what are the statistics of visitors to the site in terms of how many are from Italy and how many are from other European countries or the world.

MR. AGOSTINO: As for the financing, for the historiale of Monte Cassino, the project has been financed by the Ministry of Culture. For the project of San Pietro Infine, the funds come exclusively from the municipality of the village itself, and they relate to the first module, the first phase of the project. But after having said that, we would welcome any contribution from any other -- (Laughter) MR. AGOSTINO: As for the second question for the statistics regarding visitors, for the historiale, San Pietro Infine will be inaugurated in November. So we don't have any statistical data. As for the historiale, last year we had 25,000 visitors, 60 percent of whom were non-Italians, and then many of them were Polish because, as you know, Poland is one of the nations which was involved in the battle.