

sGinny Sykes/Collaborations Beyond the Veil/Diary in Residence June 7-24 2019
Part 2



June 14

In the late afternoon I wandered around the tower to see the view over the east facing valley. I picked some cherries from the tree in the park by the Villa. When I returned to the villa a spectacular sunset had begun, the best of my entire stay. It lasted long into the evening and was the first time I could see the magnificent Alps clearly in the distance.





The Tower, Conzano



Sunset over the Alps, Conzano



Sunset over the Alps, Conzano



Villa Vidua at night

June 15

Amid my preparations for my talk, I met Mario Fallini whose art was on exhibit at the Villa, along with a senior Egyptology curator Enrico Ferraris from the Museo Egizio in Turin. I learned more about the fundamental connection between Count Vidua, whose villa it was and that I was now staying in. There is a major connection between the museum's creation, and that Count Vidua, who had strongly advocated for the museum's creation. I had already planned to go to Turin, but learning this added a new imperative.



L-R Curator Enrico Ferraris from Museo Egizio, Mario Fallini, Ginny Sykes, and Sindaco Emanuele DeMaria



Painting of Count Vidua



Interior, Villa Vidua



Interior, Villa Vidua

June 16

Sunday morning artist and friend Janet Jaffke and her husband André stopped on their way from Bologna back to France. We knew each other in Chicago and thanks to FB we connected in Italy. It had been 7 years since we had seen each other, so we shared stories of our lives in Europe over lunch and wine.



Ginny and Janet in Conzano

That afternoon I presented my work to a good attendance of community in the afternoon at the Villa, along with a Q & A with Renata. Thanks to help from many people, all the tech worked. I was very happy to have great press--four articles and one video interview in relation to the residency.



Ginny Sykes with Renata Summo-O'Connell



After the talk and reception I met a number of interesting people, five of whom literally whisked me away with them for drinks that evening in the nearby beautiful town of Moleto. We hung out at the Bar Chiuso, which is in a big open field, and watched an amazing moonrise. We continued to discuss issues and topics stimulated by my presentation. until late in the night.





Moonrise over Moleto

June 17

Monday, exhausted, I slept off and on all day, after reviewing things over coffee with Renata before she left. I learned that the labrys, which appears a lot in my work, is similar to a symbol used by Mussolini, and that this had understandably disturbed some attendees. Unfortunately I had no prior idea of this, nor opportunity to explain how my reference point was different. Reflecting on my talk, I want to do things differently going forward. I feel done with the long overview format. I also realized that the separation of figure and abstraction I have always perceived in my work as a severe split is not so; there are many overlaps and intertwinings and it has always been thus. In the new painting, I am working on, I combine them through the intermediary medium of my physical body. The figure emerges as part of the abstraction.

I decided to do a video performance with the painting, using its length of more than 17 ft x 4 ½ ft. I will take it to a stand of woods that has intrigued me since my first day here.



This idea spirals back to previous ideas. I see it in my previous videos and performances, how I edit and layer images, and in my paintings. I am now using fabric paint to stain the semi-transparent linen. This seems the right vehicle for now. Between polarities, or tensions of opposites as Jung would call it, I slide between thick and thin, figure and abstraction.

I was invited to Sara Binetti's film animation school graduation in Turin on Friday, The timing is perfect, aligning with my plans to go there anyway.s



Untitled Poem

I sit in a tower
and contemplate a tower
perfect viscosity of afternoon's shadow and light,
the faceted stone a speckled color,
I can only call blissful.

Sheltered by the towering cherry
just outside the window where I sit,
I paint in the fading light,
In this miracle of a town,
Where silence rules
and I go about my business in silence.

I wake from my second nap to the wonder of the full moon,
To the voices of teenagers in the park outside my window,
My seven windows open to the deep blue of the evening.

Light falls in soft patches
Casting shadows on the white arm chairs
On the linen paneled ceiling
On the smooth wood floor.

This velvet darkness brings relief from the heat and another day comes to closure
Numbered bronze tags on the furniture remind me of my guest status
in this 14th/17th century marvel.
My joy is a privilege,
a constant sense of humility and gratitude that I am even here.

Breathing this air
Drinking in this evening
Holding close these sentiments
Feeling the tempo in each breath
Wandering, poco a poco,
Yet my mind runs free.

Great gift of innocent laughter
Great gift of promising horizons
Sweet nuance of gentle breezes
Wash over me with a kindness that lifts my soul in new directions
I sense the presence of an eternal well beyond my earthly moment

I shine my heart upon my painting,
draw my color into song
Fan the fire of creation,
And feel I can't go wrong.



June 18

A thought upon waking:

Italy has given me so much.

Painting last evening when it was cooler, I began to move about the two lengths of canvas in a choreographed dance of body and brush. While familiar, I felt the connections differently. I can dip into the deep well of abstraction and figuration that is my visual language, and hone my expression toward a new synthesis. I felt it in every move, every color choice, every brush selected. I felt a oneness with alchemical creation, of materiality, a materiality that Greenbelt describes in *The Swerve*, as a sensation of being alive within the poetic and scientific inquiries of the past. I felt this oneness spread out as I held it steady, of Italy, of all my years of study, of today's rest, of the gift of solitude and quiet, of being high up and able to look onto vistas, part of and yet tucked away from, living in the tension and harmony of opposites that Jung describes as being the core of who we are. I am a microscopic particle of matter in my current incarnation, and another element clicks into place, Teresa's *io sono un intero*, and I feel her words. I feel her with me and through me as I paint, no demarcation between my process and these observations, an epiphanic process, with which came a feeling of universal love for everything and everyone that has led me to this moment. I think Teresa would have been very happy. Her writing is a great gift. Working with it for my Prato performance was a step toward realizing the text in form. Regardless of how this particular painting ultimately turns out, or how the performance evolves and changes, these have been transcendent experience, integrating masculine and feminine, anima and animus energies in balance within me.

The full moon is up overhead, it must be close to 3am. I hear the chords of Victor's music in my head like a haunting lullaby.

Italy has given me so much.

Later that day Anna Bruno and I went to the synagogue in Casale. I was moved by its history, by being Jewish, by the incredible Baroque décor. I felt sad about the lack of a community today, by how the entrance had to be on a side street, no public way was allowed, ghettoized, but heartened by the numbers of people who visit it, now more a museum.





The contemporary artist menorah collection, part of which is now in Matera and then goes on to Lecce.



Synagogue in Casale Monferrato

We went on to the 11th C Duomo, built over an earlier 9th C structure. It is extremely unusual for having a narthex, (a kind of covered entrance to the building that is thought to have had a civic function), a beautiful overall mix of Romanesque and Gothic architecture.



Duomo Casale di Monferrato

I had time to paint a little in the afternoon, and it is ready (enough) for the video we will attempt tomorrow. The Sindaco found me a young man, Matteo Gusto, to help with filming, which we discussed at the bar. We will meet Thursday in Piazza Australia at 6:30am. I bought Ashter a drink, the first anyone has allowed me to pay for.

June 19

Milan. I got there at 10:30, and after endless parking attempts, the curator I went to meet with miraculously found a spot near his street. I hadn't been to Milan in 16 years, and did not recognize it. We met at his studio/atelier, a Parisian sort of locale, and spent the afternoon talking intensely about art, philosophy, my projects, his work, feminism, and other topics. He challenged me to think of my painting in the performance as an extension of my body, and to consider my work within the corpus of feminist body performance—and, to face my resistances and fears. Since I made the painting with the movements of my body, out of my body, I would take this new painted "body" and wear it like a second skin. I also see it as a shroud. We discussed relationships of these ideas to ancient myth and ritual, and the recurring need for the hidden female body to be seen again when times call for it, as an antidote to over-rationality. He recommended I read J. J. Bachofen's *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*. I came back to Conzano feeling fiery, antsy and aggravated.

June 20

First video try went ok, but we quickly lost the light. Tomorrow we will start an hour earlier. I sent some rough footage off to Milan, and he suggested I excavate a "womb" in the earth, bury myself and then emerge. I don't yet see the order, or how to connect the parts, but I trust I will learn this in the process. I found a dress the same color as the earth and I will lose the long walk from yesterday's shoot. I want more rawness, primal emotion, and instinct to evoke the Dionysian, which constantly seeks to affirm life. I feel a violence building in me, a need to break through something, within the erotic poetics of the earth.

June 21

The work was better today but the light was flat. I had sewn the two halves of the canvas together so it worked better, and we adjusted the camera closer to the action. The buried start went well, the feel of the heavy earth over me was intense, both pleasurable and scary to be covered and weighted by hunks of clay-based soil. I felt pressure in my chest, a sense of loss, I warded off panic by slowing down my breath and listening to the birds. We did two takes, the mosquitos were relentless, but becoming naked was easier this time, and I wrapped myself in the painting around a tree at the end.



Video stills

Better but still not there, not as free as I wanted to be, most likely because I was with a 25 yr old man I did not know, mature as he was. I had a brainstorm to ask Adriana who I had met at my talk to help me try once more, and she said yes. She is a photojournalist from Brazil with 25 years of experience behind the camera. We planned for Sunday at 5:30 am, which would be my last chance here before I had to leave. I would pick her up in Casale on my way back from Turin, she would stay overnight with me in Conzano.

I got to Turin midday Friday. A city new to me, it reminded me a bit of Berlin, as it is in an orderly grid structure as opposed to the centrifugal layout of other Italian cities. The hotel's recommended garage, two blocks from the historic center, was in a predominantly and lively Muslim community with bakeries, barbers, small cafes, and shops selling all kinds of wares. Above the garage was a makeshift mosque and midday prayers were on, it was a strange juxtaposition to head below and hear the melodic prayers emanating from the barred window above.



To see Sara Binetti's graduate from this prestigious film animation school, to share it with this lovely family I have known for 30 years, and see her realize her dream, one she has nurtured since childhood, and accomplishing it at such a high level was just wonderful. And now as artists, we share another special bond.

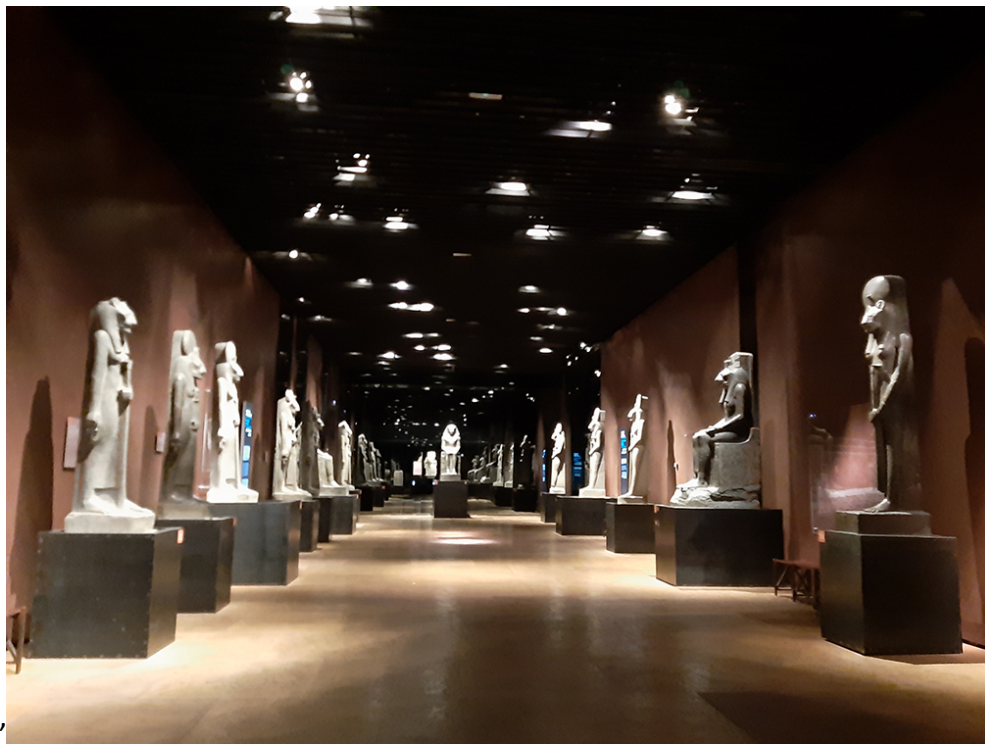


June 22

In the morning I went to the spectacular Museo Egizio, quite perfect timing to go before my reshoot. I had many ideas stimulated from this stunning collection.



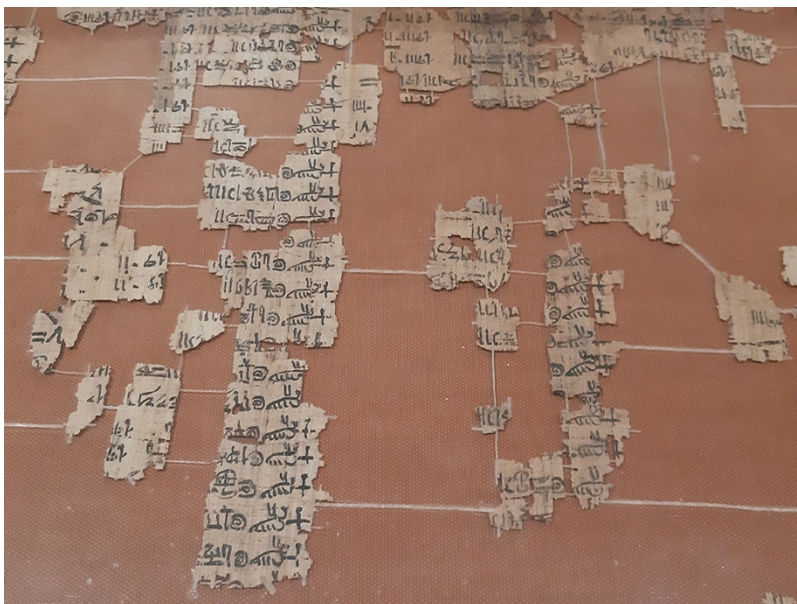
Fragment of an ancient papyrus scroll



Colossal statues in the main hall



Statue of Princess Redji (2592-2543 BC)



Fragment of text

Gigi Binetti, Sara's father, invited me to exhibit within a program at the bank he works at in Milan. After asking my curator contact in Milan if he would curate it, and with his positive reply, I also said yes. Yet another lovely synchronistic outcome of being at the residency, I hope to plan this for the spring of 2020.

Back in Casale, Adriana and Lucrezia and I went to hear live jazz in a lovely setting at the Castello, but I was quite beat, concerned about the early wakeup call and having enough energy to do the work, so we left before the concert's end.



June 23

5:30am. Adriana brought her camera, so we now had two. I set mine to 4K, it would be the moving one with hers set in a fixed position. Already this was a huge improvement. Adriana had great ideas, which is why I love collaborating. The light and weather was great, no one on the road on a Sunday. We found my grave/womb of the previous days, she covered me, it felt even heavier than before. I went much further this time, felt much more inside the performance, much freer, more intense, connected, took my time, and she had great direction.

The energy between us was strong, adding much to the dynamic process. She encouraged certain things in me, I was much less self-conscious, more connected to the cloth as second skin. The light stayed with us, we finished in two hours, feeling confident we had good scenes.

Only a few cyclists rode by, but they did not see us. After breakfast we watched the footage, ate again (we were ravenous); then I went to sleep for an hour. Afterwards she napped while I packed. We took some pictures at the Villa, I hung the painting over the railing so it reached the ground standing above it, then wrapped myself in it.



Video still



Photo credit: Adriana Franciosi



Photo credit: Adriana Franciosi

An extra wonderful surprise was that Adriana was so inspired by doing this, describing it her best day yet back in Italy, as she had been in an artistic/existential crisis, not wanting to take pictures anymore, but this day re-awakened that in her. This made me very happy. We drove to Lu, I wanted to show her the 360 views.



View from Lu





Views of Lu

We headed back to Casale with the idea of biking around, but were both too tired, so we just lazed around her place, got some dinner and then said bittersweet goodbyes. I felt I was leaving a good new friend.



Adriana and Ginny



Photo credit: Adriana Franciosi

June 24

How reluctant I felt to be leaving. This has been an amazing residency, the best ever, for which I am truly grateful. Conzano is now etched in my heart. How strange that I can start over in so many new places. Each time it's like having a tiny new life, where I slightly reinvent myself every time I change places. But this is my chameleon nature, I have always felt this kind of adaptability. As I drove to Asti to return the car and catch the first train for the trip back to Naples, I passed through yet another lovely hilltop town, Montemagno, which had a beautiful castle. I debated stopping to see it more closely, but time was just slightly against it, so I wisely decided no. There is always one more place one wants to see.



This amazing residency has been full of challenges and achievements, and I leave with a sense of fullness. I have learned so much, and leave with new directions, contacts, having experienced such richness and depth. I look back on the one and a half years of planning needed to realize a solid project. On Renata's patient but strong direction without which nothing would have happened. Starting with the program at Prato, to the first day in Conzano and the transparency conversation with strangers, signs of what was to come to the final day of filming and breaking through, literally and figuratively. The time and space to just be, to be so deeply immersed in quiet, to reflect and synthesize and arrive at the newly embodied experience of *un intero*—and, to create new work, it all linked together. I reviewed my proposal and truly touched on all I wanted to accomplish. Editing the video performances is still to come, there is more to think

about, but I see new threads between the many parts and feel confident about moving it all forward. I have many sheets of fabric left, and time to work on everything.



Conzano, from the road