

un film di Roberto-C.

PADRONE E SOTTO

(MASTER AND SERVANT)



LOGLINE

Padrone e sotto is a film about the Neapolitan invisible classes, a close-up account of the daily efforts and aspirations of those who have no power, no money, no education, nor public voice.

SYNOPSIS

The “social question” in Naples is the permanent backdrop to the discourse on the city: as an endless emergency, latent violence, suffering both given and received. Its protagonists are subject to constant public scrutiny. Yet, its core remains a taboo: denied, immutable, unchanged over time. The reasons and essence of this phenomenon are not the subject of question and it never becomes a political issue. It may be beneficial to draw upon the theoretical insights of Frantz Fanon, rather than those that we inherited from Marx, to identify and bring it to light.

The stories of Pio, a precarious worker in the tourism industry; of Ugo’s family, seeking truth and justice after the boy’s murder; and finally, the one of the organized unemployed who have been fighting for years for a dignified job, they reflect three movements along a single trajectory, which unites the lives of the invisible and voiceless of the city.

It is not necessary to hold a university degree to realize that your life offers no prospects. On the other hand, one would have to live like a hermit to escape the obsessive messages coming from the society of the integrated: make money, be successful, consume without limits, or you will be nothing. Yet, some know how to escape, how to recognize the trap of self-destruction. They clench their fists, lower their gaze and accept what is there; they keep their dreams alive, and in the meantime they do not “integrate”.

Then there are the others. Those who burn all bridges behind them, those who would like to turn back but they find it’s already too late. They are the ones who will give and receive grief, who will drive into a wall on their own or will be forced into surrender.

There will be no integration. The invisible ones must find a way out together, or they won’t find one at all. They will have to find their own paths to emancipation — or maybe together with those who still have the strength to stand by them: without mental reservations and without pinning medals on their chests. They will have to do it themselves, but it is not up to them.

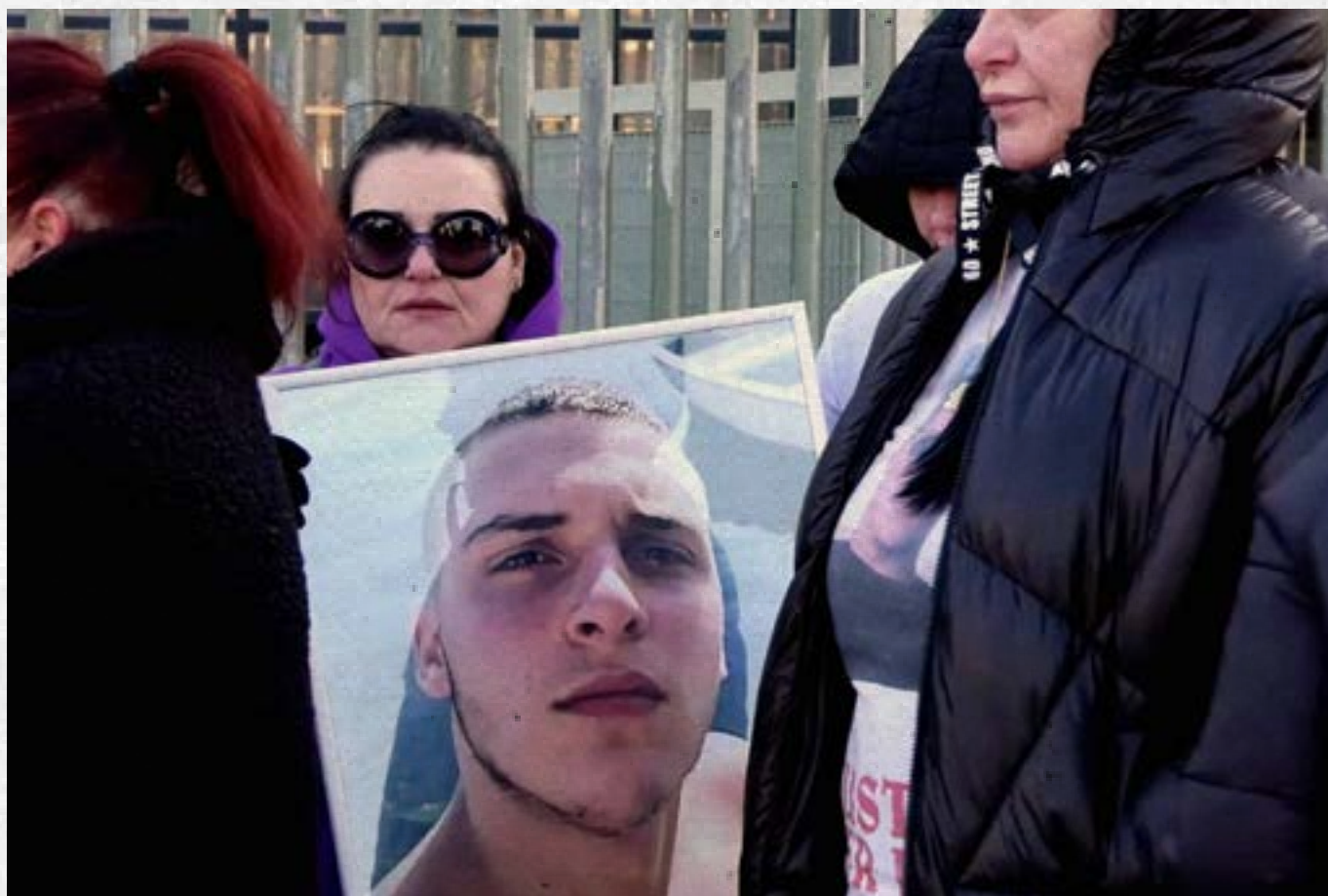
I PROTAGONISTI E I SINAGONISTI



THE EXPLOITED

Pio is a thirty years old man from the Spanish Quarters. We've known each other since he was a bright and restless kid, and later when he turned into a histrionic teenager, passionate about rap and well integrated into his neighborhood's migrant communities. We had already filmed him for our first movie, *The secret*. Now that he is a young precarious worker, a cog in the wheel of mass tourism services that is quickly transforming the historic center of the city, we worked with him again. He had moved to work in a Northern Italian city, but hard work and loneliness brou-

ght him back home. For two years, he was employed in making sandwiches in a downtown pub, but he was fired when he asked the owner to provide him with a regular contract. Now he is looking for work again. His creative attitude and his desire to live still appear every now and then, but the path that awaits him seems marked in advance, as the flame of his diversity fades away, one day after another.



THE CRUSHED

Ugo was killed when he was fifteen, while trying to steal a Rolex watch with a toy gun. The watch was worn by a Carabinieri military policeman, off duty and in plain clothes, only slightly older than him. Ugo's family members, and a supporting group of activists and neighborhoods, engaged into a campaign to shed light on the circumstances of his death. They take the streets with Ugo's many friends and peers at each anniversary of his murder; they chained themselves in protest in front of the Court to push for the start of the trial; and they traveled around Italy to

explain the story of Ugo. A large graffiti with the boy's face was painted on the wall of a square not far from the family's home. The municipality of Naples and a judge, however, considered the painting illegal and sentenced it to erasure. To prevent a police intervention, members of Ugo's family finally decided to apply a coat of paint on the boy's image, once again drawing attention to the conditions of the many boys who live in working class neighborhoods, and who are denied a proper future.



THE UNYIELDING

In the mid-1970s, when unemployment and the cholera epidemic had brought the city on its knees, unemployed Neapolitans such as artisans in crisis, laid-off workers, returning migrants, organized committees to claim the right to what they called “stable and secure” employment. The forms of struggle that developed in that period are still being revived and updated nowadays. Today, the committee of unemployed workers gathers approximately six hundred people, both

men and women, and after ten years of struggle they seem on the verge of achieving their goal. The last word, however, has not been said, since this game is played inside institutions, but also on the streets of the city. Through assemblies, marches and demonstrations, the story of the movement of unemployed workers emerges from the past but gives us a glimpse of the future, a way out from exploitation, isolation, and resignation.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES



*To own the world in the form of images means,
precisely, to re-experience the unreality
and remoteness of the real. (Susan Sontag)*

Our first two films were shot in the almost square 4:3 format. This was perhaps driven by the desire to establish an equal dialogue with archive images. A further impulse must have come to us directly from the light that falls from above in the alleys of Naples, diving between buildings and tracing their outlines. Verticality is needed to narrate the stratigraphy that goes up and down, from the low-rise buildings to the antennas; it is necessary to keep that inextricable tangle of misery and nobility in a single glance.

This time we added shots in 16:9 framing, letting the images compress and expand like an accordion. Always avoiding anything panoramic, stubbornly resisting a certain oleographic narrative of the city, that is all too often made up of views that do not truly look. On one hand, we reduce the filmic space to avoid distractions and winks; on the other, we expand the gaze, reverse its course, to stay in the focus, merging with reality without renouncing to mix it with a lie fertile with sorcery. So, in this film, things and people appear and disappear, they dig and are dug, they are visible yet not perceived, they advance and retreat in time.

We see giant paintings that vanish and reappear, frosting faces that are chewed up, sewn and unsewn drapes, thumping sounds and deafening visions. It is the eternal battle of images, which are everywhere yet risk being lost in the continuous flood of the present MediaAge.



THE AUTHOR

Roberto-C. together with **Luca Rossomando** – under the name **cyop&kaf** – has made two films: **Il segreto** (2013) and **Lievito** (2021).