

Fondazione Ghenie Chapels

Mecenatismo per l'Arte

Creating beauty by experience

THE FOUNDATION

The creation of the Foundation in 2022 was inspired by The Ghenie Chapels project at the Chiesa della Madonna della Mazza in Palermo, which saw the permanent installation of site-specific artworks by Adrian Ghenie, one of the most celebrated contemporary artists of his generation.

Building on a centuries-old tradition in the family history of the Foundation's President, Alessandra Borghese, the vision for the commissioning, installation and conservation process encompasses nurturing contemporary art and protecting classical art. Beyond maintaining and developing the artistic heritage of the chapels and the church, the Foundation's aim is to promote moments of cultural exchange, developing national and international projects that stimulate open cultural discussions and promote the ideals of art and social inclusion. In line with this mission, the Foundation places particular emphasis on community by bringing together artists and diverse communities, both secular and Christian.

ADRIAN GHENIE

Born in Baia Mare, Romania in 1977, when the country was still under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Adrian Ghenie graduated in 2001 from the University of Art and Design in Cluj where, in 2005, he co-founded Galeria Plan B, a space that subsequently expanded to Berlin, where he currently lives and works. The artist uses palette knives and spatulas rather than paintbrushes, allowing incidental effects into his paintings rather than following a precise plan. His initial studies are collages, in which he combines extracts from newspapers and other materials to build the composition of the artwork. His paintings are a symphony of colours: he sets tube upon tube and layer upon layer of paint, which he overlaps and combines to produce the final lighting and tonality.



©alessandradurso

An unconventional artist, his primary interest lies in the paradoxes of contemporary history. Ghenie's ability to immerse himself in the collective subconscious allows him to express the complexities of our time, depicting them with strength and depth. His works are featured in prominent collections of contemporary art worldwide, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Tate in the UK.

THE TWO WORKS OF ART FOR THE CHAPELS THAT FLANK THE CHURCH'S MAIN NAVE

For The Ghenie Chapels project, Adrian Ghenie has created two new, site-specific paintings that address the theme of contemporary martyrs of the church. On one side of the main nave, he depicts the crucifixion of Christians that takes place to this day in the Middle East and, on the other side, the martyrdom of Blessed Pino Puglisi, who was murdered by the Mafia in 1993. These works of art were donated and permanently installed under the curation of Alessandra Borghese and thanks to the work of Father Giuseppe Bucaro, Director of the Cultural Heritage Department of the Archdiocese of Palermo. The creation of The Ghenie Chapels in Palermo originated from the desire and need for the contemporary collective imagination to confront the eternal. Ghenie's artistic intervention makes the church a place of ecumenical and artistic pilgrimage. The Ghenie Chapels situates itself in Palermo as the Matisse Chapel (decorated by the artist Henri Matisse between 1949–51) does in Vence, France, or the Rothko Chapel (the non-denominational church founded by John and Dominique De Menil with 14 works by Mark Rothko) does in Houston.

THE CRUCIFIXION

This painting was inspired by the artist's realisation that crucifixions are not merely events of the past but are a fate still suffered by persecuted religious minorities to this day. He depicts a contemporary version of the figure of Christ on the cross, inspired by reports of recent crucifixions of Christians in Syria. For Ghenie, this became a way to revise and modernise a classical theme, while also drawing on the iconography of crucifixions from art history, including those by Goya, Guido Reni, Tintoretto, Veronese and Titian. In his reinterpretation, the man is bound to the cross with rope, rather than nailed there like Jesus, and he is clothed in branded sportswear. The Catholic Church has recently canonised a group of Christian martyrs in Libya who were killed by Islamic extremists. It is not by chance that the figure of an armed terrorist can be seen going towards an orange element on the left, a reference to prisoners of Islamic State who were made to wear orange overalls before their execution. The background of the painting picks up on the greys found in the Chiesa della Madonna della Mazza, situating the work in both time and place.



THE CRUCIFIXION
Adrian Ghenie 2019
Oil on canvas 320x280 cm
Curated by
Alessandra Borghese.



THE MARTYRDOM OF PADRE PINO PUGLISI
Adrian Ghenie 2020
Oil on canvas 320x280 cm
Curated by
Alessandra Borghese.

THE MARTYRDOM OF PADRE PINO PUGLISI

The composition of this artwork is inspired by Michael Pacher's famous medieval painting Saint Augustine and the Devil (c. 1483), preserved in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. Ghenie depicts the historic encounter between Good and Evil in a way that is easily legible to the public. The Church has always honoured people who have given their own lives for their faith, such as Padre Pino Puglisi, recognised as a martyr for defending the rule of law in Palermo against the Mafia. With a gun in his hand, the assassin takes on the appearance of a contemporary devil, dressed in a yellow bomber jacket – the colour of Lucifer's envy of God and goodness. Padre Puglisi carries the baby Jesus on his shoulders, like a modern-day Saint Christopher. With one hand he blesses his killer; even when confronted with violence, a true saint is incapable of hating his enemy. From the lower half of the devil figure, his innards emerge, taking the form of a snake that tries to wrap its coils around the saint. In the background are the buildings of Brancaccio and the door of the Sicilian priest's house.

ALESSANDRA BORGHESE

Alessandra Borghese is a journalist, writer, cultural entrepreneur, and scholar of art and spirituality. Over the years, she has organised international exhibitions in collaboration with public museums and private institutions, including the artists Tamara de Lempicka and Leni Riefenstahl, and curated the exhibition *la Seduzione da Boucher a Warhol*. She brought Mexican artists Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco to Italy for the first time. During Manifesta 12 (2018) in Palermo, she managed relations with the Prince Claus Fund in order to bring an abridged version of *Bintou Were*, a Sahel Opera (the first African opera with its libretto in various Sahel dialects) to Teatro Massimo. She created and produced the documentary *Futuru: an inside look at Palermo*, distributed by www.corriere.it. In September 2020, she developed *Il Leonardino*, a cultural and nature-based itinerary that retraces the steps of the young Leonardo da Vinci through the area in which he was born. Since 2020 she has developed and curated *The Ghenie Chapels*, together with the artist Adrian Ghenie, for the Chiesa della Madonna della Mazza in Palermo. Her books, which have been translated into many languages, include *Noblesse Oblige* (Mondadori 2001), *Con occhi nuovi* (Piemme 2014), *Sulle tracce di Joseph Ratzinger* (Cantagalli 2008), il romanzo *La Padrona* (Mondadori 2013), and *For Friends* (Steidl 2016).



©alessandradurso



LA CHIESA DELLA MADONNA DELLA MAZZA

Built between 1603 and 1606, La Chiesa della Madonna della Mazza is situated in the pedestrianised area of Via Maqueda on the island of Sicily and for centuries provided a place of respite for the city's poor. The church takes its name from the traditional iconography showing the Vergine del Soccorso holding a small club against the Devil, a powerful image symbolising divine omnipotence against Evil.

A wooden statue depicting its namesake, the Madonna della Mazza, is in the niche above the altar in the main nave. There are numerous works of art within its walls, by artists including Battistello, Zoppo di Gangi, the school of Caravaggio and, now, Adrian Ghenie.



Via Maqueda n. 391

A short film was made about the commission, creation and installation of Adrian Ghenie's two works, and a book is in production.