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Diventa fan



With David Totah, Tonino Guerra's Hemingway lives again

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New York - At 183 Stanton Street, a stone's throw from the street that inspired Leonard Cohen's classic ballad Famous Blue Raincoat, a colorful gate mural by Kenny Scharf and a rectangular blue ultramarine sign beckon the passersby to discover TOTAH, "a cultural hub in New York's Lower East Side harboring a variety of projects which transcend the typical definition of an art gallery". Before celebrating its first anniversary, the New York Times already listed TOTAH as a must-see art gallery in the city. Its founder, David Totah, grew up surrounded by art and artists, coming from a family of collectors and art dealers that conducted galleries between London and New York dealing with the works of artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat, Enrico Castellani, Lucio Fontana, Larry Rivers, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso.

David's new space transports me back to a time where I'd leaf through picture books, fantasizing about the images I came across. My childhood. It's no coincidence that this "portal" emerges between a playground where children can let their imagination run wild and a side of New York that, like David and the artists he represents, remains full of verve by staying true to itself.

Boxing, a boundless love for nature, mountains, books and a movie he is developing. David Totah resembles his hub as much as it resembles his relationship with the world: "I think today the new definition of creativity is being fair; building something that inspires and leads people to identify themselves with a bigger purpose" he says. "I always try to operate from the place of the heart". After forging a professional life in finance and opening his own boutique firm specializing in hedge funds investments, David gradually transitioned his activities, and his heart, back to art. "When you understand what your archetype is and what your role is down here, everything flows easier. Everything makes more sense".

David's next mountain to climb bears the name of two great authors: Ernest Hemingway and Tonino Guerra. *Daughter*, a screenplay written by Guerra and Nicola Tranquillino, explores the controversial relationship between Adriana Ivancich, the beautiful daughter of a conservative Venetian aristocrat, and the author of *Across the River and into the Trees*.

At the time, Hemingway was a whiskey-and-war-weary 49, and she, just shy of her 19th birthday. To spare and preserve Adriana's reputation, Hemingway forbade the publication of *Across the River in Italy* for a decade. Yet, that was not enough to prevent a scandal. "I've always had a creative mind but I'm also a concrete person. This is my first project in the cinema field" explains David. "Before deciding to move forward with the film project as its creative producer, I waited to meet personally with Nicola Tranquillino here in New York. The first thing that Nicola told me was that Tonino Guerra believed in magic, like me. That caught my attention. Magic and alchemy, in this case, are the most important ingredients, since all the pieces of the puzzle must come together to maintain the integrity of the film. The director and lead actor of *Daughter* will have to have the right level of sensitivity and sophistication. It's a challenge".

"The director I'm looking for will have to share this level of profound understanding of how multifaceted and enigmatic the mosaic of an artist and writer such as Hemingway can be" he continues. "Hemingway was not a black and white person. He had nuances. He's a character who has demons, he struggles with darkness along the way. While his personal life has always been attacked, on the flip side his intellect changed people's life. You have to have a special light shining inside of you, to create something like *The Old Man and the Sea*". In the screenplay, Guerra, a descendant of Cesare Zavattini, who worked with filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni (*L'Avventura*), Federico Fellini (*Amarcord*) and Andrei Tarkovsky (*Nostalghia*), draws us closer to Hemingway with the subtlety of a talisman in the forest.

Guerra was a prolific poet and writer, with a screenwriting career covering a half-century earning him three Academy Award nominations. He played a vital role as Italian cinema moved away from the Neorealism of the postwar years to incorporate stylization and art. Guerra was sometimes asked to reconcile his roles as poet and screenwriter. "My poems were an essence of images," he said in an interview when he was 80. "They had cinema inside them before I started working for it". This is why Totah feels so connected to his style: "What I love the most about a work of art is the mystery that leaves room to wonder. I'm not into a didascallic style. Poetry and mystery allow me to have my own interpretation and visualization. That's the very subtle genius of Guerra". The strong bond between David and Italian art is already apparent in Totah Gallery - his recent exhibitions featured artists such as Lauro Bazzani, Alighiero Boetti, Gino De Dominicis; David himself partially grew up in Venice (where a large part of the film's story is set) - and that connection to experimental film will find its completeness this coming Spring, in a series of screenings with the works of young artists such as Jimmy Keyrouz (his latest film was shortlisted for the 2017 Oscars) and Francisca Alegria, who won the Sundance 2017 Short Film Jury Award. "What truly touched me about the way Guerra shows Hemingway to us, is his vulnerability. His wounds. His search for love and innocence. Feeling safe. I got motivated to get involved in this project because a rich world of images, depicting a Hemingway unbound by limitations and conventions, has etched itself into the collective memory of contemporary man, despite the fact that none of these archetypes would ever accept being cataloged: they are neither a label nor a cage".

Snapshots of Hemingway's life embody the fibrous compass of humanity's complexity. Daughter's words - light and edgy - have been lost and disputed over time, following Guerra's death in 2012. This labor of love has waited to rise from the ground and live again. By virtue of David Totah's involvement, we may now be able to see it in the form of cinema. Together with Guerra, we step inside Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, one of Hemingway's favorite churches, and discover Papa, a radiant child, trapped in the body of a man, struggling with and for his own identity. Whilst we have David ready to show us, through Hemingway, the complexity of the male identity, on the other hand, Daughter co-writer, Nicola Tranquillino, relates his "insular" experience with Tonino Guerra: "I spent almost three months, from the end of June to the beginning of September 2006, side by side with Tonino at his home in Pennabilli, in the province of Rimini in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. Tonino was my true school of cinema and of life. It's no accident that Daughter is in the hands of a person like David Totah. He and Tonino are very similar. Tonino would tell me, that in order to trace back his passion for art, we needed to go back to when he was ten, to his pre-adolescence full of interests. One day he would write a poem, the next he would draw, one day he thought he was a painter, the next he was a poet".

Before setting off for Pennabilli, Nicola researched the love letters between Hemingway and his Venetian muse Adriana Ivancich: "I consulted many books in the United States, at the time I had access to the New York University Library". Nicola attended the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU with a double major in Film & TV and Philosophy. Hemingway's original letters are conserved at the University of Texas. "Tonino taught me how to write for cinema. He would say that a screenplay isn't written on a desk, but on the streets, talking with people, exploring hidden places". Equipped with a standard definition handy cam, Nicola began filming Guerra in December 2006, upon request from Tonino himself: "Bring over that thing, he used to say. I feel like talking". Buried under heavy snowfall, in the company of the housekeeper, Tonino and Nicola spent the winter swapping stories about their lives. In the morning Tonino would teach Nicola how to paint, in the afternoon he would take him to visit abandoned villages. The first documentary, Cinema's Poet, aired on RaiTre (Italian public television) and the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg hosted a preview screening. "I spent two weeks in Russia with Tonino: unforgettable." The other three (Creations, Self-Portrait, Companions) were commissioned and broadcast by Russian national television.

Guerra and Tranquillino's execution of *Daughter* strengthened David Totah's endeavor to maintain the creative integrity of the project: "When I read the screenplay for the first time, I immediately wrote down my own thoughts on what the message for this film could or should be. I want to preserve Guerra's skillful manner of keeping things elusive and translate this into a film that evokes a speck of dreams and mystery. In order for the film's silence to be translated and evoked appropriately, the composition and alchemy of the director and cast will have to be perfectly aligned. To immerse oneself in Tonino Guerra's imaginary means to comprehend his poetry. Until I find a director that can be up to the task of measuring him or herself with Hemingway's isolation and the complexity of the human being, *Daughter* will remain in my dreams. But I truly think the time has come to set these dreams free".