



# UNA PROMESSA

A FILM BY GIANLUCA AND MASSIMILIANO DE SERIO



SHELLAC PRESENTS



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ORIGINAL TITLE: SPACCAPIETRE

STARRING SALVATORE ESPOSITO, SAMUELE CARRINO,  
LICA LANERA, ANTONELLA CARONE, VITO SIGNORILE

104 MINS - 1,66 - 5.1 - COLOUR - DIGITAL HD - DCP - ITALIAN WITH FRENCH SUBTITLES - ITALY/FRANCE/BELGIUM - 2020

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**SALES**

**SHELLAC**

Félicie Roger

+33 4 95 04 96 09

[sales@shellacfilms.com](mailto:sales@shellacfilms.com)

**PRESS RENDEZ-VOUS**

Viviana Andriani / Aurélie Dard

+33 1 42 66 36 35

[viviana@rv-press.com](mailto:viviana@rv-press.com)

[aurelie@rv-press.com](mailto:aurelie@rv-press.com)



# SYNOPSIS

Under the blazing sun of southern Italy, Angela works in the fields where she is exploited without impunity. One day she never comes home. This tragic and mysterious loss forces Giuseppe, and their young son Antò, to look for her and begin a quest for truth without return.



# NOTE OF INTENT

## PAST AND PRESENT

The main event of the film is inspired by an incident that occurred during the summer of 2015. The death on her workplace of a day labourer from the Puglia region named Paola Clemente and the absurd coincidence with the death of our own paternal grandmother who died working in those same fields in 1958.

Time seems not to have passed and the workers conditions seem not to have changed either. Our grandmother was a day labourer that worked “under boss”. She was handled by the corporals and a victim of exploitation, working without dignity and rights. More than fifty years later, we discover that not only has the situation not changed, it has gotten worse.

The news of Paola Clemente’s death created the urge for us to investigate the invisible reality of thousands of workers, mostly immigrant seasonal workers, but also many impoverished Italians and so many women like Paola. Day labourers travel miles every day by bus, are deported into fields at the mercy of new corporals, “intermediaries” and their bosses gratuitous violence.

The mystery surrounding Paola’s death, in addition to the extremely harsh conditions and unbearable working hours, also seems to be linked to the pesticide exposure to which day labourers are subjected. The weed killers that are used are actually sprayed right under the grape vines, between the plantations rows, just a few metres away from workers who denied any type of protection.

The film is first and foremost an attempt to re-appropriate our grandmother’s soul, whom we have never known, through the body and story of another woman. Like a type of filmic metempsychosis that finds its roots in the past, then through the misery of our country, projects itself into an emergency, Una promessa wants to settle scores with this short-circuit and reclaim this body’s dignity - the Mother - that is lost within our memory (historical and political, but also intimate and familial).



## ***SPACCAPIETRE* THE ORIGINAL TITLE**

In our previous fiction feature, *Seven works of mercy*, we were strongly inspired by Caravaggio's homonymous painting which is kept in the Pio Monte di Misericordia church in Naples. The piece dictated the content, style, light and narrative structure of the film. The tension between the work and our biography was embodied by Antonio's character, his story inspired by the illness of our maternal grandfather.

With this new project art and autobiography are also intimately intertwined. Our paternal grandfather, before leaving for Turin in the 1960s and become a FIAT's worker, was a «stone breaker». He used to break the stones that were then used to fill in railway tracks, just like Giuseppe's father in the film. Thus, as was the case with *Seven Works of Mercy*, it is a great work in the history of Western art that inspired us: the painting by Gustave Courbet entitled, relevantly named, "The stone breakers".

The painting depicts two bodies, those of a father and a son, in profile and from the back, struggling with their hard work as stone breakers, the first helping the second. The father and son are painted without any rhetoric, with great simplicity and realism. The earth, matter and landscape are one with the characters. The two figures almost seem to be a part of the mountain seen in the

background, with the sky barely visible in a small corner on the right. Their eyes are glued to the ground, to their work. Their expression is invisible. The composition is unacceptable for the aesthetic values of the time: it lacks a precise compositional balance and the resulting vertical axis is too off-centre to the right. Moreover, there is no symmetry between the figures, which seem to be placed almost at random.

In this piece as in others, not only does Courbet impose an anti-aesthetic viewpoint, breaking the academic rules, he revolutionizes contents and subjects. He places the poor at the centre of his universe: workers, servants, prostitutes, outcasts and rejects from society. His works are visual documents that create the shock of truth.

Moreover, one of the most interesting aspects of the painting is the emptiness left by this picture: the canvas was destroyed by the bombing of Dresden during the Second World War. It is now a lost image, of which only traces and footprints remain. Ghosts.



## THE STORY OF A FATHER AND HIS SON

The journey for the re-appropriation of the lost image of our grandmother can only happen through the story of a father and a son who find themselves having to fight for their survival after the mother disappears.

Giuseppe and Antò mirror a hidden Italy that is strenuously trying to overcome adversity and abuse while recovering its own identity.

These two complementary figures - in natural conflict, but allied in a common purpose - try to find the way to face hardships together. Giuseppe, a former quarry worker that was laid off because of vision problems

caused by an accident, joins, after his wife's demise, the many new poor who queue up at the soup kitchen. His son Antò, an intelligent and precocious child, becomes his father's only reason for living and his only incentive to move forward.

It is with the promise made to his son that he will see his mother again, a promise as impossible as it is powerful, that their adventure begins. Their journey of survival thus becomes a true creative journey of recreation of the mother (and a possible future for little Antò).



## THE LANDSCAPE: PICTURE OF AN ERADICATION

In the brief introduction where we see Angela travel to the remote countryside for work, we enter the countryside's natural world as in a death grip, a metaphor for the fate that seems to await and embrace Angela and many more like her. The landscape in «Una promessa» is indissolubly linked to the characters bodies. It is through them that we discover it, it is in their skin that we perceive it.

In the first part of the film, Giuseppe and Antò live in the small town of Spinazzola, where the historical and now dilapidated houses blend with buildings of the 70s. The small town is a change of scenery. Its appearance is similar to that of stone, the material from which it is made and it has been emptied of its inhabitants, it is like its own cemetery: a land of ghosts. The surrounding countryside is that impossible «beyond» to have (again): eternal counterpoint that defines and condemns a people to never be reconciled with nature.

However, Giuseppe and Antò's first escape from this universe is a journey made of a bitter discovery: the mother's death. Then comes the beach, in sharp contrast

with the image of the seaside beaches of Puglia that we know, a landscape of death foretold, burnt by the sun. It is in this landscape that consciousness matures, before Angela's disappearance.

In the second part of the film, through the dive into the hereafter of field labour, the landscape of flat and monotonous cultivated fields opens up and suggests new and unknown universes: the shacks where live the immigrant day labourers, the ghetto's microcosm made of Barracks and latrines, the manager's fortress residence with its rules and hidden violence.

Here, it is above all the landscape, bearer of this eradication of nature, which manifests itself as irreducible to man. Yet, it is also here, within this violated but reinvented nature, that Giuseppe and Antò will find their clues. The change of view becomes a new awareness of nature.



# REALISM

It is not only because of the reference to Courbet (founder of “Realism” in art) that the film is permeated with realism, nor because of its obvious relevance to contemporary reality.

The stylistic approach we want to imprint in the film is realistic. It's not simple naturalism: we want to show reality without any frills or symbolism.

Una promessa is a slap in the face, nourished by memories of our family, readings, meetings, investigations on migrant exploitation, corporals and modern slavery within the agricultural latifundia. The faces and stories Giuseppe encounters in the property ghetto are real.

Paola Clemente's death inspires the introduction of the film, the streets and neighbourhoods of the ghetto villages are its backdrop.

This immersion into reality will be set in a family melodrama and will slide further and further into darkness as the protagonists find themselves confronted with their destiny. Their journey will be a plunge into the world of the living that substitutes itself with the world of the dead. Another reality then comes into play, with its ray of light: Antò's gaze, his hope, his innocence.



# TENDERNESS AND VIOLENCE

The film feeds on two seemingly opposing forces: tenderness and violence.

Tenderness is within both protagonists: it is the instrument with which they struggle and find their solutions. They both keep a child's gaze of the world, a vision that is open to discovery and creation. Without this gaze, they would be crushed.

Their tenderness is, however, suffocated by the violence against which and in which tenderness seems to struggle to claim its way. The violence is that of the world in which our protagonists evolve: poverty, the hypocrisy of power, the fierce struggle for survival, the exploitation of workers, the violence against women, the hidden and sand-bound dead. To this violence, Giuseppe can only respond with the same violence. His final gesture is one of vengeance which paradoxically becomes one of sacrifice.

# LOVE AS A CHANGING OF THE GAZE

Giuseppe and Anto's tale is above all a love story. Angela's loss pushes Giuseppe into making a deflagrant proof of love to his son. To be able to keep this promise is illusory and oniric, it is the proof of love from which Giuseppe cannot escape.

But it is only after their encounter with Rosa, an epiphany in the microcosm where our two protagonists arrive, that will be provided to them a glimpse of the possibility that this promise can be fulfilled. It will be a new and unexpected feeling, a kind of reincarnation of past love.

With this new act of love a small miracle is thus realized: the change in the way we look at reality itself. Reality is no longer an impenetrable and unfair surface, but a fertile ground for transformation and mutation.



# BIO FILMOGRAPHY

## GIANLUCA & MASSIMILIANO DE SERIO

Twins, born in 1978 in Torino, have worked together since 1999.

In August 2011, *SEVEN WORKS OF MERCY*, their first feature film, was presented in the international competition of the Locarno Film Festival, where it won the Youth Jury Prize and the Don Quixote Prize. The film then went on to participate in 80 festivals and won 27 awards...

In 2015 they directed *RIVER MEMORIES*, a documentary that had its world premiere at the 2015 Venice Film Festival, and in the international competition at the 2016 Visions du Réel Festival. The film was then screened in more than 25 festivals.

**2015 RIVER MEMORIES**

**2011 SEVEN WORKS OF MERCY**



# SALVATORE ESPOSITO

Born in Naples in 1986, made his screen debut in 2013 as Domenico Ruggiero in *THE CLAN OF THE CAMORRISTS*. In 2014 he was critically acclaimed after portraying Genny Savastano in the series *GOMORRA*.

He also plays the lead role in *THEY CALL HIM JEEG ROBOT*, *ZETA*, or *TAXI 5*. He will soon play one of the protagonists of the new season of *FARGO*.

# SAMUELE CARRINO

Samuele Carrino was born in 2009 in Gallipoli, Puglia. He was 10 years old at the time of the shooting of *UNA PROMESSA* and has already played several roles in the cinema and in fictions produced by RAI 1.



# CAST

GIUSEPPE SALVATORE ESPOSITO  
ANTÒ SAMUELE CARRINO  
ROSA LICA LANERA  
CAPO PODERE VITO SIGNORILE  
ANGELA ANTONELLA CARONE  
MIMMO GIUSEPPE LOCONSOLE  
AZIZ MAMADOU TOURE

# CREW

DIRECTING	GIANLUCA & MASSIMILIANO DE SERIO	MIXING	FRED BIELLE
SCRIPT	GIANLUCA & MASSIMILIANO DE SERIO	MUSIC	GATTO CILIEGIA CONTRO IL GRANDE FREDDO CHRISTIAN ALATI GIANLUCA DELLA TORCA MASSIMO VIALE
IMAGE	ANTOINE HÉBERLÉ <small>AFC</small>	LINE	ALESSANDRO BORRELI
COSTUME DESIGN	ANGELA TOMASICCHIO	PRODUCERS	THOMAS ORDONNEAU GRÉGORY ZALCMAN
SET DESIGN	GIORGIO BARULLO		
EDITOR	STEPHANO CARVERO <small>A.M.C</small>		
SOUND	MAXIMILIEN GOBIET		
COLOUR GRADING	MICHAEL DERROSSETT		

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