

Hail the new Etruscan

Oona Grimes (Bridget Riley Fellow 2017–18) started 2019 with two solo exhibitions featuring work made during her residency last year. In this blog Oona discusses her Rome experience and the genesis of the work made. Oona also describes her adventures in film-making and what comes next.



roman sKandals, spray paint coloured pencil and collage on paper, 75 x 110cm

I arrived in Rome on 2nd January 2018 with the sound tracks of *Nights of Cabiria* and *Roma Citta Apertà* playing in my head.

I was on my way to revisit the films of the Neorealists, films I'd watched as a child and misremembered ever since.

Day 2: returning from a Cavallini eye fest I stumbled into Il Museo di Roma in Trastevere and met Toto.....Italy's most loved and respected and irreverent comedian.

Toto agreed to become my leading man.

The giant story board began.....

Danielle Arnaud, London

The British School at Rome

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June Mostra 2018, installation shot

He starred in a number of stencil drawings: drawings on black paper celebrating the flatness of frescoes, blackness of analogue film & badly restored conservation patches:

'Toto & le tre sorelle Fontana', 'Toto meets San Bartolomeo' & later 'cinzano & cherry soda' & 'the lovely season'.



toto and le tre sorelle Fontana, spray paint coloured pencil and collage on paper, 75 x 110cm

Just Being on the streets of Rome I was surrounded by the cast, all in mid flow enacting their daily dramas.

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I had arrived with specific Missions – visits to Cinecittà and plunderings of the archives at Centro Sperimentale; time to spend with the Etruscans and my love of their graphic flattist tomb paintings, all of which were topped and tiramisu-ed by anamorphic murals in Trinità dei Monti, underground scavi-scavenging in San Giovanni in Laterano – adventures from Mithras to Mussolini, Etruscans to E.U.R. toga tying, fascist fountains all the fascinating tangents that emerge from the kind of casual conversations that can only happen at the BSR.

Rewatching the films from Rossellini to late Fellini on their home pitch I wanted to understand the films more intensely, and my way of knowing is through drawing.



a spritz of grrrls #7, coloured pencil on paper, 29.7x21cm

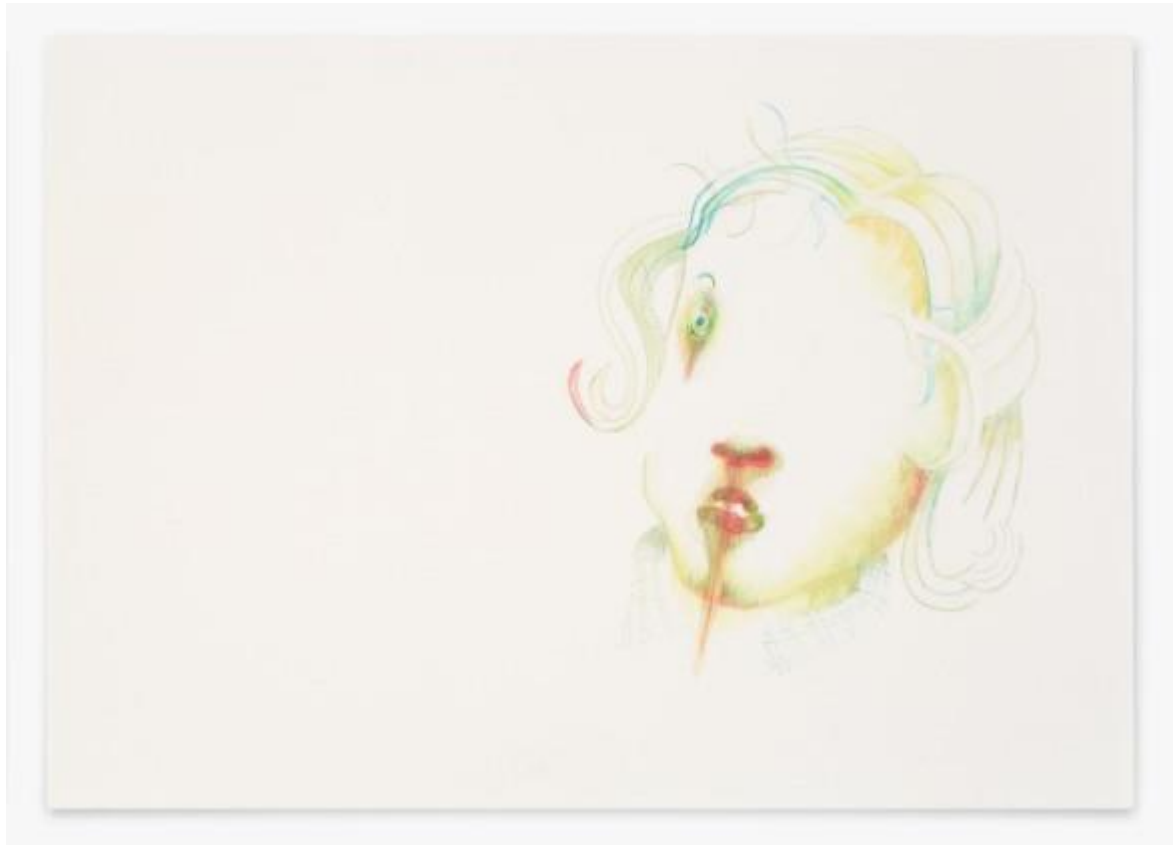
Daily I would make A4 coloured pencil drawings from my mis-memories of films watched as a child; fast drawings *'Not a Neorealist Storyboard'* and larger slower stencil drawings continually circumnavigating the left brain: *'the fumetti grrrls'* and *'ragazze e ragazzi romani'*. Filling notebooks in order to make sense of the overwhelming input and to ground myself in the sea of visual treats. The pile of books grew daily; the gestures & observations, colours and pattern, the folds & drapes of melty marble all subtly oozing into the drawings – a thesaurus of stolen characters.

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The children #2, Coloured pencil on paper, 29.7x21cm

Daily I would walk to Piazza Rotunda & beyond, just to Be in Rome, early before the crowds; to watch the roadsweepers and shopkeepers setting up, to see the light changing over the city.

Gradually those walks and those films wove themselves into my dreams and my drawings.

Surprising shifts began to happen.

Particular scenes began to haunt me, sequences with specific relevance to time and place. I began drawing singular actions and repeating them in order to comprehend them. Repeated actions, drawing them now physically, drawing myself into the film.

'*Umberto d.*' headlined the series, the scene where he is reduced to begging in front of the Pantheon. A deceptively simple action duplicated and filmed over 3 months as the skies changed and the tourists crept in.

i.phone rushes that usually end up on the cutting room floor. Rehearsals. I wasn't acting I was drawing the moment.

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They just happened, they happened by being there, by having time, by having no pressures or deadlines.

I saw them as studies, and just cut them together as if watching behind the scenes preparation.

Looping slapstick-like fragments, stretching the *commedia dell'arte* element by repetition and abstraction, a Sisyphean rehearsal for a never to be released film. Owning the discourse through mis-remembering, imitation and low tech re- enactment.



mozzarella in carrozza (film still)

The scenes from familiar films chose me, and following *'Umberto d'*, *'mozzarella in carrozza'* from *Bicycle Thieves* emerged. Focussing on the excruciatingly painful scene in the restaurant Antonio and his son Bruno can't afford – a scene of misplaced pride, disillusion and the vivid class divide between them and the diners.

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coming soon
Stromboli's bucket

Stromboli's bucket, film still: poster

The studio became a mini props, production design & costume department. The planning behind *Stromboli's Bucket* was perhaps more interesting than the final mini short : fabricating a glass bottomed bucket, negotiating hardware shops and perspex manufacturers, locating a suitable 'Sea' : the Laghetto di Villa Borghese which of course was *chiuso* on the day due to storms, so a nearby fountain quickly stepped in as understudy for the shoot.

Then 'u.e.u.' from Pasolini's '*Uccellacci e Uccellini*' filmed in Garbatella. Bird calls haunted me in the studio, their repetitive song & dawn chorus invaded my dreams. 'u.e u.' is a sublime dance of mis-communication, mis-translation, absurd jumpy hand gestures referencing both kinesics from paintings and everyday communication. Using 16mm film cut with iPhone clips I chased language – both the learning and losing of it – the omissions, the torn, the discontinuity, the patches, the bad repairs.

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u.e u. (film still)

Walking, watching, hand gestures, sign language, language of hands, mis-translation, mis-communication, bird language, dance language.

Drapes and folds, pleats and drapes, fabric fashion folds all seeping into the work

Returning to London with a new-found confidence and focus I made 2 new films : *'Oscar's dance'* and *'wheres Marcello?'* The latter shot on Holkham beach Norfolk a cross channel reflection of Sabaudia. *'Angelo del fango'* now fulfilling her role and Cabiria dancing her dreams in Hackney.



angelo del fango, spray paint, coloured pencil and collage on paper, 75x110cm

Danielle Arnaud, London

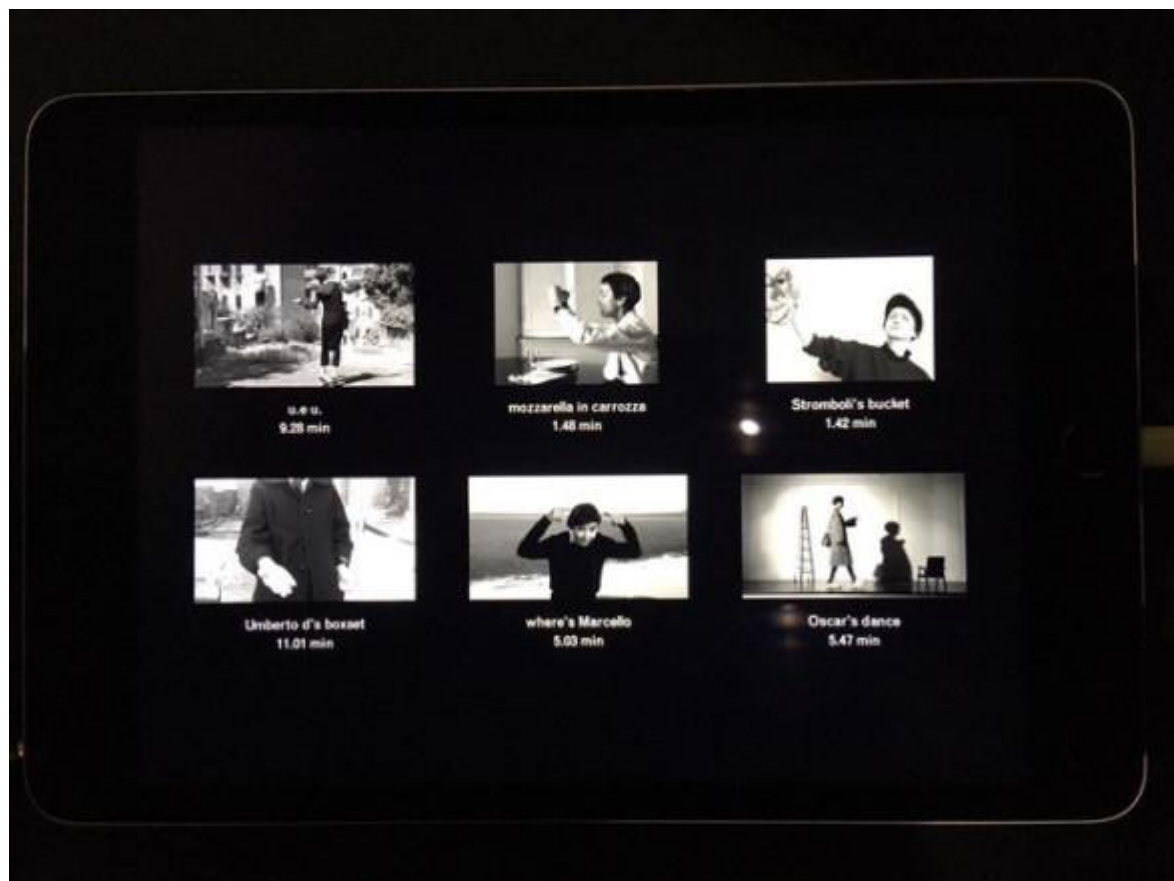
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The one-day schedule remained, initially the time my cameraman came to visit in Rome, but appropriated to retain an element of rawness and rehearsal-ness, using costumes and props that were instantly available.

And I won a prize! My first film festival entry at The Swedenborg Film Festival with '*u.e u.*' and a prize selected and presented by the wonderful and sadly missed Susan Hiller [1940-2019].



i.pad index : Matt's gallery

All six films were shown at Matt's Gallery London on mini i.pads. Hand held like reading a paperback book, one to one, sitting on the floor : '*Hail the new Etruscan #2*' : 19-27 Jan 2019.

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Matt's gallery installation

And the giant story board is on show at Danielle Arnaud co art London : *'Hail the new Etruscan #1'* : 12 January – 9 February.

'ragazze e ragazzi Romani', large stencil drawings patched and collaged filling the Georgian house with Italian characters.

Next A solo show at The Bower in Camberwell 5 June – 7 July 2019 and an off-site adventure at The Venice Biennale in May (contact Danielle Arnaud for details).

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dirty sisters, spray paint, coloured pencil and collage on paper, 75x110cm

Oona's exhibition 'Hail the new Etruscan #1' is open at [Danielle Arnaud](#) until 9 February 2019 (123 Kennington Road London SE11 6SF, T/F: +44 (0)20 7735 8292), the gallery is open Thursday, Friday & Saturday 2-6 p.m. or by appointment. Oona Grimes is represented by Danielle Arnaud.