Beat: Travel

Gherardi, Ferrara, Italy: The Cinema Village

History and Rebirth Through Murals

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USPA NEWS - Gherardi, Ferrara, Italy: The Cinema Village
History and Rebirth Through Murals
by Roberto Magni and Daniela Comi – Foto ReD Photographic Agency
There are places that seem asleep, suspended in time, and then suddenly awaken with a creative force capable of surprising anyone who passes through them. Gherardi, a tiny hamlet in the municipality of Jolanda di Savoia, in the heart of the Ferrara lowlands, is one of these. Today this village counts just over sixty inhabitants, yet in recent years it has managed to reinvent itself, transforming into a true Cinema Village: an open-air museum where murals dedicated to the great icons of the seventh art converse with the houses, the streets, and the memory of the territory.
When we arrived here to create our photographic reportage for Foto ReD Photographic Agency, we did not expect to find such a microcosm rich in stories, colors, and visions. Gherardi is not just a village: it is a permanent film set, a cultural laboratory, a shining example of how art can bring new life to what once seemed destined for silence.

A village born from land reclamation
To understand Gherardi's transformation, we must go back to the early 20th century, when the great land reclamation works reshaped the landscape of the Ferrara lowlands. The village was created as a "garden village," carefully designed: low houses, tidy courtyards, streets traced with precision. A place conceived to welcome farming families and give shape to a new rural community.
In the 1950s, Gherardi reached its peak, with around 2,500 inhabitants. Then, slowly, depopulation began. Opportunities dwindled, young people left, and the village seemed headed toward a quiet, marginal fate.

The vision that changed everything
Gherardi's rebirth has a key figure: Stefano Muroni, an actor and director from Ferrara, founder of the project Ferrara, The City of Cinema. Muroni imagined something bold: transforming a forgotten small village into a symbolic place of Italian film culture. An idea that blends memory, art, and territory, and that took shape in 2022 with the birth of the Cinema Village.
At the heart of the project is the creation of a series of murals dedicated to the great masters and performers of Italian cinema. A way to bring culture out of museums and let it live on the walls of houses, in the streets, in the eyes of visitors.

The murals: an open-air museum
The first works appeared in 2022. Today, walking through Gherardi, you can find between 12 and 20 murals, depending on the project phase. They are monumental, intense, vibrant portraits that tell a century of Italian and international cinema.
During our reportage, we photographed: • Federico Fellini, with his dreamlike, surreal world • Totò, the eternal mask of Italian comedy • Anna Magnani, the strength and truth of Neorealism • Marcello Mastroianni, elegance and melancholy • Sophia Loren, a timeless icon • King Kong, a pop tribute that brings a smile
Each mural is an encounter, a memory, a fragment of history intertwined with that of the village. And as we photographed them, we realized that these works are not mere decorations: they are open doors to collective memory, a way of saying that even a small village can speak to the world.

A project that regenerates
The murals have sparked a new energy. They have brought visitors, curious travelers, cinema lovers, and photography enthusiasts. They have generated new cultural initiatives: workshops, guided tours, open-air screenings. They have given residents a reason to feel part of something bigger.
Gherardi has become a virtuous example of cultural regeneration, a model showing how public art can transform not only the appearance of a place but also its soul.

The landscape embracing the village
Just before entering the village, a large pond hosts a colony of pink flamingos. An almost surreal sight, as if taken from an art-house film. It is one of those details that make Gherardi a unique place, suspended between reality and imagination.
For us photographers, this contrast between nature, rural architecture, and urban art was an irresistible invitation to tell the story of the village through images.

Gherardi today: a future written on the walls
Today, Gherardi is living a second life. It is no longer just a small agricultural center in the Ferrara lowlands, but a symbol of creativity, resilience, and vision. The murals continue to multiply, and the Cinema Village grows, evolves, inspires.
Telling the story of this place through our photographic reportage has been a privilege. Gherardi reminded us that beauty can arise anywhere, even where no one looks for it anymore. And that art, when it meets a community, can truly change everything.
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