Soprintendenza
Archeologia, belle arti e
paesaggio per la città
metropolitana di Bari



FROM EXPLOITATION TO RECONQUEST

The Renarration of Cava Pontrelli as a Palimpsest of Deep Time

dott.ssa Caterina Annese - funzionario archeologo / SABAP-BA
dott.ssa Elena Dellù - funzionario antropologo / SABAP-BA
dott.ssa Francesca Romana Paolillo - Soprintendente / SABAP-BA



The Altamura area, in the heart of the Alta Murgia, represents one of the most dynamic hubs of the Metropolitan City of Bari, yet marked by a complex spatial legacy linked to limestone mining. For decades, mining has been a major local macroeconomic driver, but it has generated isolated urban "voids" that are closed to the community. As part of current regeneration policies, these sites are now undergoing a radical semantic reconversion that aims to transform the "quarry" from an environmental wound to a cultural resource. The Cava Pontrelli site emerges as the emblem of this metamorphosis: a context where stone subtraction activity has revealed an invaluable paleontological heritage, forcing the overcoming of industrial logic in favor of integrated narrative models.

Cava Pontrelli's narrative power lies in its nature as a multilayered palimpsest, capable of documenting the overlap between recent anthropization and the deep time of geology. Located in MurGEopark (UNESCO World Geopark) since 2024, the site preserves evidence of 20th-century industrial archaeology, with mining machinery still in situ that narrates contemporary economic history. Beneath this anthropogenic layer, the 1999 discovery revealed a Late Cretaceous limestone paleosurface, dating back approximately 80 million years, where over 25,000 dinosaur tracks are imprinted on an area of approximately 15,000 m2. This exceptional ichnological density allows us to narrate not only the presence of individual specimens, but the life of entire dinosaur communities that populated an area at the time characterized by a tidal flat environment.



The multilayering of the site therefore offers a narrative on multiple levels: the deep geological history is intertwined with the biological and, finally, with the anthropogenic history of work. The coexistence of mechanical artefacts and paleontological traces makes the quarry a "total archive" of soil memory. The re-narration is carried out through a protection and enhancement strategy coordinated by the ABAP Superintendency for the Metropolitan City of Bari, in synergy with the Municipality of Altamura and the Alta Murgia National Park. Despite current multidisciplinary monitoring and conservation testing interventions, a gradual use policy has been adopted to mend the relationship between citizenship and heritage.



Through extraordinary opening programs and recreational and educational workshops, Cava Pontrelli has been converted from a place of exclusion to a laboratory for the production of meaning. The involvement of new generations in fingerprinting fosters the creation of a "community of inheritance," according to the principles of the Faro Convention, in which citizens become aware participants in the protection processes. The challenge lies in transforming this industrial vacuum into a content delivery center, using digital technologies to connect the site to a widespread network of knowledge that also encompasses the biodiversity of the recolonizing Murgian scrub. In this vision, immaterial regeneration transforms the scars of the past into a narrative portal to the future, restoring meaning to a territory that rediscovers in its depths the roots of a new Mediterranean cultural identity.





Michelangelo Pistoletto
Love Difference - Mar Mediterraneo
Courtesy Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto
in mostra al Museo Castromediano di Lecce