

Otto, Champion of Justice

Doriana Varì (August 18, 2011)



At the art show IN THE PLACE WE LIVE, showcase for all artists from Long Island City, two Italian girls, a photographer and a writer, Annalisa Iadicicco and Natasha Lardera, have presented a photographic comic book by the title "Ottowatch, for a crime-free and secure community," where a tough rat terrier fights crime and protects his community no matter what.

Aristotle said: "Anthropos zoon politicon", "Man is a social animal"... without a doubt the formula elaborated by the Greek philosopher holds an important political truth but its social and human value is undeniable. For a few decades now, with the advent of new technologies, the meaning of "community" has somehow changed, it seems to be ignored or rather to have dissolved in individualism. There is, although, an urgent need to reestablish the original importance of community.

And the need to resurrect the sense of community as a topic, is the focus of IN THE PLACE WE LIVE, an art show held at the [M55 Art Gallery](#) [2], by curators Carolina Penafiel and Assa Bigger with the support of the [Queens Council on the Arts](#) [3]. The show features the work of several artists all living in Long Island City (residence in that specific neighborhood was mandatory) and who want to express, each in their own way, the meaning of community.



Assa Bigger has explained that the works of art showcased have not been selected with specific aesthetic or thematic criteria, but they extended the invitation to participate to all local artists as long as they were local. At the moment the artists are sixty five but “the number can change any minute. Because we have started a few new collaborations so if they are up to it they can join the show at any time. This means if more artists get inspired and want to bring in their art they are more than welcome to. They can bring in a painting, a photo or a sculpture, or they can sing, dance, perform a piece of theater or recite a poem out loud, anything that helps them express themselves.”

Among paintings, 3D creations, videos, pictures there is something that simply is different from all the rest... something with a very clear message that leaves nothing to interpretation. Two Italian artists, Annalisa Iadicicco, photographer and multimedia artist and Natasha Lardera, writer and journalist, have collaborated in producing a photographic comic book (Ottowatch, for a crime-free and secure community) that tells the story of Otto, Annalisa's real life rat terrier, who is the neighborhood's hero.

Otto, wary and stubborn in everyday life, is courageous and valiant when he sniffs danger approach thus he is founded [Ottowatch](#) [4], a canine community watch program with the goal of ensuring legality and social cohabitation.

Otto and his neighborhood friends go on rounds checking the street with the support of the Local Precinct who welcomes the extra help in protecting the community. Otto, sarcastic and wise cracking, notes with disdain the problem of garbage on the street and of recycling, but most of all he shows his courage through his “Otto Attack”, when he literally attacks a burglar who's trying to break into a house. The dog-hero captures the readers' hearts because, satisfied and full of himself, after having beaten the burglar and having had the police come get him, he then roams the neighborhood streets looking for cuddles and love, a, inconclusive search that leaves him thirsty for more. At the end of the story, Otto, who gets his missions from the local newspapers, reads that something “bad” is happening in Chelsea: “the city needs me,” he states with affirmation” as he embarks on a new adventure... (and literally takes the ferry to get to Manhattan).

Both the images and the text make the photographic comic book dynamic and fast paced: the photographs, mostly taken using a wide lens, show the reader what Otto sees, everything is seen through his eyes thus permitting him, an animal, to appear more human. This means that the text is not simple narration but it is the dog's voice, what he thinks, sees and says. He and the dogs who are part of his watch use very colloquial, slang dialogue while some sentences are just broken and unfinished.. there even are some words in Italian (translation is provided at the bottom of the page) because Otto was raised in a bilingual household... the Italian really works and adds a bit of humor.

The writer, Natasha Lardera, explained that the whole idea was born: “Annalisa had this idea to do a story seen through the eyes of her dog, then we heard about the art show and we thought of doing something specific for it. The theme was community so I put the two things together: a dog in his community and the word “watchdog” popped up. So I thought of Otto as a dog who watches for the safety of his community and Ottowatch was born!”

This is definitely a work of fiction but it is given a touch of truth by the use of real life events: indeed the issues Otto has to deal with are real: “A group of dogs is sent to the public library to make sure a rally is under control,” Natasha continues “the rally really did take place, as well as other events mentioned in the story such as the opening of the [Z hotel](#) [5] and TV shows been shot at [Silvercup Studios](#) [6].”

The readers' reaction has been very positive, they have embraced the story and the character. Some liked it so much that they even stole the books from the gallery!



Links

- [1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/mg56721313685715jpg>
- [2] <http://www.55mercergallery.com>
- [3] <http://www.queenscouncilarts.org>
- [4] <http://ottowatch.blogspot.com/>
- [5] <http://zhotelny.com>
- [6] <http://www.silvercupstudios.com>