

It all begins with the death of a friend: a special person who for many years drew a group of young people into an artistic utopia – illusory, perhaps – that became a way of life. The sudden absence of Mauro – and, with him, his visionary dreams – forces these people, no longer all so young, to look back decades at a bygone era. For many, this era seems very distant, while for others, it's an eternal present. Regardless, they're all forced to face the collection of memories left behind for them by their friend: his images, in which they themselves feature, and that utopian space, *Il Palazzo* – a condo in the centre of Rome where their dreams and experiences had no boundaries. They all lived there, loving and inventing themselves and their world. Is that what creativity means?

As Federica Di Giacomo explores this moment of transition, she grasps its implications and conflicts while also remaining close to the open poetics that defined the project and that still inform many of the choices made by those who moved in its circle. To do so, she places herself on an edge, somewhere between observer and participant. She belongs to this universe – but in her film, her friends become characters. Thanks to this gap, they can fall into dialogue with the past, openly and sincerely discussing their current states of mind.

Di Giacomo's cinema finds correspondence with reality in its staging: here, 'truth' is produced through these apparently very private stories that ultimately narrate a fragile condition that is very much of our time. The missing friend's point of view meets that of the director, and both transform from people into actors. This relationship of gazes oscillates between the incompleteness of the artistic gesture and the state of being in the world, leaving the characters the freedom to shamelessly ask unspoken questions about friendship and love, whilst painfully assessing their choices.

For Di Giacomo, filming is never reproducing what exists but, rather, it is venturing: leading us through the less noticeable dynamics that a situation can contain. This applies equally to the occupied properties featured in *Housing* (2009), and to the intertwining of religion and superstition in *Deliver Us* (2016). Her research produces a constant melee between cinema and reality that pushes the images beyond themselves, disrupting genres, practices, and habits of vision to convey the epiphany of a surprise.

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