

Arte Regione Umbria

Gabriella Freddo spoke to Lucia Parrella, an Australian-born Italian artist and the initiator of an innovative visual arts program based in northern Umbria.

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Lucia, how would you describe ART INCONTRO UMBRIA?

ART INCONTRO UMBRIA is visual art program combining excursions and workshops based in central Italy. A group of twelve travellers will stay in Montone, a spectacular medieval hilltop town, half way between Rome and Florence and only 43 kilometres from Perugia. Home in Montone is a fourteenth century former convent beautifully restored as self-contained apartments, and also accommodating a fine museum and gallery. In this environment people can develop their skills and creative interests while immersing themselves in the history, landscape and language of central Italy.

But I can't paint, or draw! Can I come or is ART INCONTRO just for artists?

Of course you can come! It's for anyone who has an interest in visual art, craft or design. You don't necessarily have to be practising artist, or have any specific skills or knowledge. People who join ART INCONTRO UMBRIA will be encouraged to develop and follow their own creative pursuits, whatever their level of experience. For some people, it may be a chance to try something new. For others, it may mean an opportunity to find time and inspiration for their own artwork.

So will there be a structured program of workshops?

The art program's very flexible and there are lots of options to tempt and inspire group members. It begins with a bookmaking workshop so everyone can produce a hand made journal or sketch book. Some drawing workshops have also been included in the itinerary to provide an opportunity to share ideas and develop new skills.

The visits to artisan workshops promise to be a highlight of three weeks. There's an enticing range of choices, from printmaking, ceramics, weaving, jewellery design, decorative wrought iron work and furniture restoration. All this is complemented by visits to museums and galleries, and includes opportunities to see contemporary Italian art.

What inspired you to develop ART INCONTRO UMBRIA?

I developed ART INCONTRO UMBRIA because I hadn't been able to find anything like it myself. I was in Italy on a travelling art scholarship in 1997 and found it frustrating that many of the art programs didn't provide opportunities for interaction with Italian artists, craft practitioners or designers. And, the opportunities to see, or hear about contemporary Italian art, craft or design were also hard to find. I was away for an extended period of time, so in the end I did discover many of the things I was seeking which are now part of ART INCONTRO UMBRIA. When I returned to Australia, I found many other people were also looking for creative and affordable options to experience Italian culture first hand. It's always exciting to travel to different places but it can be more enriching to feel a sense of connection with a community. That sense of connection can often come through working in a place and meeting like-minded people. You miss that experience when you are constantly on the move. ART INCONTRO UMBRIA is not like that.

Does ART INCONTRO UMBRIA give people a taste of living in Italy?

Yes, as you say it's a taste because it's only three weeks. However, it does provide a chance to experience the rhythms of Italian life. For example, people will be able to shop locally, cook and entertain friends at home when they feel like it. And we'll often be travelling around by local transport. So there will be opportunities to interact with local people.

What other non-art related activities are included in the tour?

There are day trips to Perugia, Gubbio, Citta' di Castello, Umbertide, Spello, and excursions into southern Tuscany, for example Arezzo and Sansepolcro. These are fascinating historic towns and there's always something interesting going on. For example, in Gubbio we'll go to the Festa Dei Tre Ceri, a colourful festival whose origins are based on an ancient pagan cult. During Spring there are wonderful concerts of both classical and contemporary music in churches and village squares throughout the Upper Tiber Valley. And of course, Perugia is renowned for its traditional pastries, wines and food. The program also provides flexibility for people to go and explore independently.

How can people find out more about ART INCONTRO UMBRIA?

They can simply email me at lucia@artincontro.com.au.