

Rossella Biscotti

(Molfetta, 1978)

Rossella Biscotti's research is deeply rooted in the great events of contemporary history. From her addressing collective traumas come her videos, installations, sculptural works, books and performances that bring to light details overlooked or intentionally removed from the official narratives. Through her scrupulous field investigation, Biscotti brings together archive materials, recordings and testimonies, while seeking out direct contact with the people and places of the events, showing how the past is never over, but how instead it may open up to new interpretations.

On the occasions of an artist's residency in New York at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, she undertook a long research project that would lead her to produce a publication, two sculptures and the film in the collection: *The Undercover Man* (2008). The whole project revolves around the figure of Joseph D. Pistone, an ex-FBI special agent who operated undercover between 1976 and 1981, managing to work his way into the Bonanno family, among the most powerful in the New York mafia. Going by the name of Donnie Brasco – known to the public at large for the film of the same name starring Johnny Depp – Pistone managed to gather overwhelming evidence which led to the arrest and condemnation of more than one hundred mafia members.

Biscotti draws on these events and on the man's formidable memory, capable of remembering the tiniest of details even a long time afterwards, to put together a feature-length film in black and white, of which the suspended atmospheres re-evoked American noirs of the 1940s. The dialogues between her and the ex-special agent alternate with the audios of the original recordings and footage from FBI surveillance cameras, details of the gaze and the hands of Pistone and close-up shots of a number of objects from the set, such as the clock and an old tape recorder. Through the story of a man who for years hid his true identity and who in front of the television cameras interprets the character of himself, Biscotti blurs the levels even further, without stating where the testimony ends and the performance takes over.

The publication produced at the same time as the film pays homage to all the stages of research and is structured in such a way as to gather a huge variety of documents which – without the filter of interpretation – leave space to each of us in which to reconstruct the entire story. The volume also features the ongoing correspondence and bureaucratic procedures needed to request access to the original accounts, old newspaper articles, the maps and photographs with notes penned by the ex-agent, the receipts for the books that Biscotti used in the groundwork for the project, and lastly a number of images and the transcription of the dialogues in *Undercover Man*.

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