

## ***Giotto – The Story of Salvation***

### **Cracking the Giotto Code**

This time New York-based documentary filmmaker Eugene Starky offers us a trip to the so-called Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy. The temple is so named because it stands since the thirteenth century on the ruins of the Roman gladiator arena. Although rough on the outside, the church architecture opens to the dazzling beauty and truth of the European Middle Ages. The grotto allows us to visualize the sacrifice Jesus Christ suffered to redeem the sins of humanity.

The sky is nowhere as intensely blue as it is here. But these are not heavens in the Byzantine fashion, but the sky at your fingertips, flying through the openwork of Mediterranean architecture. Suffice to say that the interior seems to be drifting majestically, amidst infinity in myriad shades of blue.

Against its refreshing background Giotto, the first painter of the early Renaissance, painted for three years the life of Mary and Jesus on a scale like none before him. He depicted canonical priests, peddlers of the markets, hungry pilgrims, so that through the features of their faces, as in a mirror of the human heart, he could inscribe the message of the importance of the inscrutable vocation. Such truth and authenticity are carried in the faces, gestures, and silhouettes on Giotto's frescoes.

Giotto had his feet planted firmly on a worldly ground, and from hence, carried by the Italian gesticulating crowds following the Savior, watched His fate and Cross.

In the altar's Last Judgment, the painter depicts the Inferno as enormous, an incredible river of blood, with pitchforks and horns, Satan and the damned in flames, tortures, whirls and depths. The river flows from the wounds of the Crucifixion, demonstrating how death cleanses the body of the Earth's venom, bile and poisons, before it can return whence it came. And this seems to be the message behind the titular film code: affirming death, that of diseases and on the battlefield, both treacherous and heroic, cruel and agonizing tortures, in its indispensable function for the salvation of the soul.

The azure depths of the universe tempt one in a cosmic escapade with confidence, curiosity and gratitude for the entirety of God's Creation. The gestures of the Apostles, the crowd, the Holy Family, priests, angels and Jesus, their faces full of hope and despair, in the joys of the wedding, the concentration of mourning and fear. The content is at once timeless and transient, if it were not for those halos, which light up the blue, clear expanses of Giotto's frescoes as a mirror of the invisible but ever-present Sun, and make of the story the central act in the history of humanity.

This film tell the story of salvation in a simple and moving language, shredding light on the complex philosophical and theological path which is hidden under the fascinating Giotto's pictures and the wondrous symphony of their colors. from this new perspective, Giotto's frescos become the way for seizing the profound meaning of the sacred; an itinerary of beauty along which we are guided by the sensitive, touching direction of Eugene Starky. The music was provided by Claudia Caffagni. The ancient music ensemble La Reverdie gave an excellent musical background, perfectly complementing

the story told by Giuliano Pisani and Giotto's painting itself.

Jacek Gulla

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