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PRESENTS



LE QUATTRO VOLTE

A film by Michelangelo Frammartino

2010, Italy/Germany/Switzerland, 88 min, 1:85:1

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A Lorber Films Release
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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Le Quattro Volte is a poetic vision of the revolving cycles of life and nature and the unbroken traditions of a timeless place, the story of one soul that moves through four successive lives.

An old shepherd lives his last days in a quiet medieval village perched high on the hills of Calabria, at the southernmost tip of Italy. He herds goats under skies that most villagers have deserted long ago. He is sick, and believes to find his medicine in the dust he collects on the church floor, which he drinks in his water every day. A new goat kid is born. We follow its first few tentative steps, its first games, until it gains strength and goes to pasture. Nearby, a majestic fir tree stirs in the mountain breeze and slowly changes through the seasons. The tree now lies on the ground. It has been reduced to its own skeleton, and is transformed into wood coal through the ancestral work of the local coal makers. Our sight gets lost in the ashes' smoke.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In the backcountry of southern Italy's mountainous region of Calabria, an old shepherd leads his flock to pasture along paths in the hills that have fallen into disuse. Every morning, the church housekeeper trades a handful of the church's dust for some of the shepherd's fresh milk. Every evening, the elderly shepherd dissolves the "magic" powder in water and drinks this mixture to remedy his aches and pains. One day, he doesn't show up for their trade. The next day, he dies in his bed as his goats keep vigil over his passing.

A kid takes its first steps, but he is slower than the rest of the flock and falls behind. He falls into a ditch in the middle of the forest. Unable to climb out, he bleats for help, but neither the shepherd nor his dog hear him. The flock leaves the kid in their wake, leaving him to his fate. When he finally emerges from the ditch, he finds that he is alone. He wanders aimlessly until, as night begins to fall, he stumbles onto a majestic fir tree and takes shelter.

The following spring, the village residents come to fell this tree for the annual "Pita" festivities, which have taken place there for centuries. They saw off its branches and carry its stately trunk back to the village, where it is erected in the main square.

Once the village festivities are over, the trunk of the fir tree is sold to coalmen. It is then cut into logs and used to build the hearth and chimney of the charcoal kiln where it will also be burned as fuel. The kiln, which has been covered in straw and clay, is lit and begins to smoke. Once the fire has gone out, this time-old technique, which has been passed down from generation to generation, will have transformed the living, vegetable matter of the wood into an inert, mineral matter which is brittle and crumble easily: charcoal.



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CAST AND CREW

Giuseppe Fuda – The Shepherd
Bruno Timpano – A Coal Maker
Nazareno Timpano – A Coal Maker

Written and Directed by Michelangelo Frammartino
Cinematography by Andrea Locatelli
Editing by Benni Atria & Maurizio Grillo
Production Design by Matthew Broussard
Costume Design by Gabriella Maiolo
Sound by Paolo Benvenuti & Simone Paolo Olivero
Sound Editing & Design by Daniel Iribarren, in collaboration with Benni Atria
Sound Mix by Ansgar Frerich / DIE BASIS Berlin

Produced by Marta Donzelli, Gregorio Paonessa, Susanne Marian,
Philippe Bober, Gabriella Manfrè, Elda Guidinetti & Andres Pfaeffli

Co-Produced by Vivo Film, Essential Filmproduktion, Invisibile Film & Ventura Film

Supported by Ministero per i Beni e per le Attività Culturali - Direzione
Generale Cinema, TorinoFilmLab, Eurimages, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg &
Fondazione Calabria Film Commission - Regione Calabria,
in collaboration with ZDF / Arte, Cinecittà Luce & RSI Televisione Svizzera

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Winner, Europa Cinema Label (Best European Film)
Cannes International Film Festival (Director's Fortnight)

Official Selection
New York Film Festival

Official Selection
Toronto International Film Festival

Official Selection
Telluride Film Festival



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ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Michelangelo Frammartino was born in Milan in 1968. In 1991, he entered the architecture department of the Politecnico di Milano [Milan Polytechnic School], where he developed a passion for the relationship between physical space and images, whether in photography, video, or film, and self-produced a series of short films, video clips and video installations. He teaches film language and scriptwriting at the University of Bergamo, the ENFAP Lombardia and the CINELIFE education center, and he regularly participates in conferences and workshops on the use of technology in the field of art. In 2003, he directed his first feature film *Il Dono (The Gift)*, which received multiple awards at prominent international film festivals. *Le Quattro Volte* is his second feature film.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Calabria is a land that exerts an archaic fascination. It is a repository of ancient traditions. Its coalmen, for instance, have been applying the same methods to the same materials since the dawn of time. The popular knowledge that has survived in this region to this day betrays the influence of the Pythagorean school which was established here. This land has taught me to put man's role into perspective and turn my gaze away from him. Can cinema free itself of the dogma which dictates that human beings should occupy the leading role?

Le Quattro Volte encourages us to liberate our perspective. It urges the viewer to seek out the invisible connection which breathes life into everything that surrounds us. The film starts in a traditional way: by placing its focus on man. It then diverts the viewer's attention to man's surroundings: the objects that are usually a part of the scenery. The human being is removed and made to blend in with the background, and what was in the background is brought to the foreground, thereby giving way to a pleasant surprise: the animal, vegetable and mineral realms are granted as much dignity as the human one.

I believe that cinema is a tool which, more than any other form of expression, can highlight the connection between these realms. Finding this connection has been a cinematic adventure. When I watch a movie, I often have the impression that that which has been captured on film goes far beyond what the camera has recorded, as if the picture were a form of access to the invisible.



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A CONVERSATION WITH MICHELANGELO FRAMMARTINO

ON GENEALOGY

I shot my first feature film, *Il Dono*, in Calabria in 2003. Since then, I have often travelled to this region in the south of Italy, which I am very attached to and where my family is originally from, in order to present that film. On those occasions, my friends recommended I visit certain places in the Calabrian backcountry that I knew nothing about, despite having travelled to this area throughout my childhood. One such place was located in the Serre, the mountainous area in the province of Vibo Valentia, which is home to communities of shepherds and coalmen. Charcoal is produced there using a technique which has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries. I was fascinated by what I saw and immediately felt the impulse to make a film there, though I didn't yet know what that film would be.

Spending time with Calabrian shepherds gave me the opportunity to observe animals up close. I am intrigued by the animal world. Their unawareness of the camera naturally led me to accomplish something I had always aspired to in my filmmaking: transcending the boundary between documentary and fiction. A friend of mine, Gigi Briglia, who later worked as a stills photographer on the film, spoke to me about the "Pita" festivities. This tradition, which dates back to the presence of the Lombard people in the region, takes place annually in the village of Alessandria del Carretto. The inhabitants leave the village and head for the forests where they look for a big fir tree, cut it down and haul it back to the village. Thus, without any deliberate action on my part, the four realms had fallen into my lap: the shepherds represented the human realm; the goats, the animal realm; the tree, the vegetable realm; and the charcoal, despite its being derived from vegetable matter, was in fact transformed by the coalmen into mineral matter. This reminded me of a sentence that has been attributed to Pythagoras, which I paraphrase here: "Each of us has four lives inside us which fit into one another. Man is mineral because his skeleton is made of salt; man is also vegetable because his blood flows like sap; he is animal in as much he is endowed with motility and knowledge of the outside world. Finally, man is human because he has the gifts of will and reason. Thus, we must know ourselves four times."

Pythagoras lived in Croton in present-day Calabria during the 6th century BC. His school taught the doctrine of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls. Legend has it that Pythagoras used to teach to his students from behind a curtain. Seated before this screen, not unlike in a modern-day movie theatre, for five years his students would listen to their teacher's voice and discover the hidden meaning of things, the meaning that lies beyond the veil that conceals them. This veil may cloud our gaze, but it also helps us understand that meaning is not perceived through sight, because it is made of number, soul and idea. Ultimately it is made of dust and luminous particles, like the ones we see in the projector's beam when we turn around in movie theatres. The deep-seated animistic beliefs that have survived in this land to this day are secretly and instinctively steeped in his thought. According to Whitehead, Pythagoras was the first real philosopher. His influence is echoed everywhere from Plato's doctrine of ideas, Kepler's system of celestial spheres and Galileo's geometric theology to Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return and Einstein's physics. Pythagoras' knowledge of eastern philosophy led to his belief in metempsychosis and in the reincarnation of souls. He claimed to have lived past lives as an animal and as a plant and stated that the meaning of his own existence and that of others consisted in the eternal return to nature's cycle.



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Calabria is permeated by a sense of this cycle; anyone who goes there can feel it firsthand, whether they have read Nietzsche or not. In Calabria, nature is not hierarchical. All beings have a soul. You can see it when you look into an animal's eyes. You can hear it in the sound made by charcoal, which sings as if it had its own voice. You can see it in the tall fir tree swaying on the peak of Mount Pollino, summoning us all to its side. Though I never thought I would be drawn to this particular subject, it slowly took hold of me. I gave in to the force of this film the way one would surrender when faced with evidence of an enigma. This film was given to me as a gift; I did not will it through my own pre-existing idea. Thus, I am not the creator of this film in the usual sense. I was simply the intermediary between matter and form in a process which might be likened to the one used by Giuseppe Penone, an artist who sculpts the shape of trees into wood, making life and form emerge from deep within matter, which are the logs he sculpts. This is done by renouncing the idea of control.

THE HUMAN ASPECT

Naturally, I involved the local residents in the making of this film. The main character in the first episode is a shepherd. From then on, the humans are relegated to the background, to the point of being camouflaged with the scenery. That's why I decided to have the coalmen, who appear in the last episode, wear clothes that were the same color as the charcoal kiln. That way, the only human being that really appears in the film is the old shepherd — and even this figure blends in with his surroundings.

Shepherds are often the object of the villagers' suspicions. In ancient times, they didn't have the right to act as witnesses; they were considered too close to the animal world for their word to be trusted. The shepherd character in my film is a solitary figure who follows along his paths and repeatedly crosses the threshold of the village gate so as to immerse himself in nature. His sole contact with the community takes place because of a belief which was once quite common in the Calabrian backcountry and which has almost disappeared altogether: it was believed that the dust from church floors had therapeutic properties. Not only was it administered to sick men and animals, it was also used to fertilize soil. This elderly shepherd is one of the few people who still believe in the magic powers of this dust. He gets his supply from the church housekeeper, in exchange for a bottle of milk. At night, he dissolves it in water and drinks the solution as if it were medicine. The interesting thing about this trade is that their transactions have an air of secrecy to them. Both the shepherd and the housekeeper know that this pagan ritual is not well looked-upon in this Christian environment.

TRANSMIGRATION

One evening, the old shepherd runs out of his "magic" powder and tries to obtain some in vain. He returns home discouraged and helpless, and goes to bed. The next morning, we discover that he has died in his sleep. The old shepherd's death corresponds to the end of the first episode and start of the second one. His flock has gathered at his bedside to hold a vigil. The last being the shepherd lays his eyes on before departing from the world of the living is one of his goats.

Thus, the second episode begins with the transmigration of his soul. In fact, it opens with the birth of a kid, a real and moving event that I was fortunate enough to capture live. The story continues as the kid, who is just learning to stand on its legs, gets left behind by the flock. He gets lost in the forest and seeks shelter from a tree. The second episode finishes the same way the first one did,



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through transmigration. The tall fir tree (a rare species in Calabria) encountered by the kid becomes the main character in the third episode, when the “Pita” festivities take place.

The cult of the tree is another pagan tradition that has survived in this Christian community. Every year, the parish priest of Alessandria del Carretto attempts to assimilate this tradition into the Christian rite, to no avail. In the past, they used to hoist goats high up onto the tree and shoot at them from the ground to kill them. Blood would spray everywhere and fall onto the participants of this intense and colorful fertility rite. At the end of the festivities, the tree is sold to the coalmen from the Serre mountain range, who we already caught a glimpse of in the prologue. Sound is used to evoke their presence throughout the film in the form of discreetly recurring audio reminders.

The fourth and last part starts here. The trunk is cut into large logs which are hauled to the coalmen’s worksite. Their job will be to transform this living, vegetable material into mineral matter. The slow process of mutating the form and state of matter is, in my opinion, one of the film’s most intense moments. This tree’s story seems to illustrate the concept which is at the crux of Mario Merz’ sculpture: it is the triumph of matter over object, which does not die, but is rather continually transformed.

These four sections have not been intercut with titles in the hope that this film’s profound unity may speak louder than its partitions. Its unity is due to the presence of an invisible protagonist: a spirit which inhabits all four of these matter-bodies and, by passing from state to state and from realm to realm, seals the entire film together.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

One of the fundamental themes in this film is the relationship between character and setting. In our culture, man is at the centre of the universe and all other beings are relegated to the background. This fact is more evident in film than in any other discipline. In fact, its technical language is completely structured around the presence of the human figure in the frame. A close-up is a face. An extreme close-up frames eyes, nose and mouth. An American shot frames the body from the knees up. Even a long shot is defined by the miniscule presence of a man in a landscape. Everything is defined by his presence. I was interested in finding a more balanced relationship between the human figure and vegetation, as well as with other objects and presences.

At the beginning of the first episode, the shepherd takes centre stage while the animals occupy the background. At one point, the foreground and background merge and the animals become the main characters. The passages from one episode to the next are preceded by moments in which beings, which had until then been relegated to the background, start to detach from the scenery and move towards the foreground, either sonically or visually. I have tried to avoid having characters enter or exit from the sides of the frame. I wanted them appear directly from the centre of the shot: men come and go through doorways, the kid appears from his mother’s womb, the old shepherd and his flock are eclipsed from view behind a hill. I like the idea of the picture giving birth to characters, just like the Lumière brothers’ forty-five second film *Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory*. It’s a way of attenuating the separation between exterior and interior, between on-camera and off-camera, and of standing in a space whose boundaries cease to define the meaning of what we see.



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One image prevails over the others. It appears repeatedly and sets the stage for the film's most complex events. It is a shot of St. Anthony's Gate, the secondary entrance to the village of Caulonia which opens onto the countryside and is primarily used by the villagers. I filmed it in one single long take using a very short focal length, a 16mm lens. This made panning problematic because the camera's rotational movement went beyond 180°. After numerous trials, it took us two days to successfully complete the filming of this scene. In this scene, there is a house. Before being covered in concrete, it was made of unpolished stone, the same material the gate is made of. As we later discover, this is the shepherd's home, but this fact is not nearly as significant as its position: it is on the boundary between the village and the surrounding countryside. Like the shepherd, it belongs to the community and yet is also extraneous to it. It is too close to town for the animals to like it and too marked by the presence of animals to be integrated into the village.

SOUND

My goal was to use the soundtrack to reinforce the idea of these four lives fitting into one another. At the mixing stage, I added sound elements that would tie together different moments from the film. I wanted the viewer to be given the impression that the sound was coming from behind the picture, like in the Pythagorean lectures in which the teacher taught from behind a curtain. Sound is the repository of the picture's profoundest meaning, its secrets and everything that is concealed behind the screen.

THE LAND

Calabria is a place of great wonder. However, it is also marked by strong contradictions. This was often the topic of discussion while having dinner in the evening with the crew, a team of professionals who had experience on film sets in various places around the world. More than once, after days of filming in the hills of the Serre range, I heard them comment that they had never seen such beautiful landscapes. Filming there seemed rather natural to me. This was doubtless due to my personal background; though I was born and raised in Milan, I am of Calabrian origin.

But that was not the only reason. In my work as a filmmaker and in my aesthetic research in general, I am drawn to a certain type of image I like to call "aporetic," which comes from the Greek word *aporia*, literally meaning "which is impossible to pass through" — and by extension, indicating doubt. In Tarkovsky's work, for instance, there are interiors in which it rains, which undermines the "interiority" of those spaces. Calabria is rife with aporetic places. Contrary to Milan, where the boundaries between private and public spaces are always well defined, the front door to Calabrian homes are always left open. In a sense then, we can say that these spaces are osmotic. In fact, it is not uncommon for a shepherd to bring his goats into his home to milk them. Professions which have disappeared elsewhere still survive in Calabria today, though here too they are in decline. The coalmen I filmed will be the last generation to practice this ancient trade.

Le Quattro Volte is, in this sense, a depiction of a land that straddles the confines between present and past, between modern and ancient beliefs, between village and countryside. The characters in this story are like cinematic ghosts crossing the bridge towards their own disappearance. These confines are at once tangible and metaphysical. The village of Caulonia is perched high in the hills and is circumscribed by its walls. Shepherds often live in proximity to the gates in the village walls. They live within the walls, but their animals are kept just outside. But shepherds are also considered intermediaries between the human and divine realms — at least that's how the literary



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tradition would have it. According to the Gospel, they were the first to know about the birth of Christ.

Le Quattro Volte does not make any direct references to other films. However, my filmmaking is often inspired by cinema's great auteurs. The first one that comes to mind is Béla Tarr; the presence of animals is crucial to his cinema. In my view, *Damnation* is the story of a man who turns into a dog. I also think a lot about Bresson and his *Au Hasard Balthazar*. I often look to those filmmakers whose professional backgrounds were not rooted in the film industry. I admire Michael Snow and his film *La Région Centrale*. Another notable influence is Samuel Beckett, who only ever wrote one film, a short film entitled *Film*, which was shot by Alain Schneider in 1965. Both these films experiment with points of view in which man is not the central figure and in which only machines and recording equipment are used to "see." I have made monumental examples, but do not wish to compare myself to them. My work is rather artisanal in nature. I do not use these auteurs as intellectual references, but rather turn to them for help in overcoming certain difficulties, such as the obstacle of the white page – an issue which is as pertinent to literature as it is to architecture.

INHABITING THE PICTURE

I was passionate about pictures and drawing while growing up. I am a trained architect. These disciplines converge in video installations, which require a conception of both the cinematic and architectural spaces, of the images and of the architectural context in which these images will be seen. Installations perhaps represent my first cogitations on the image and on what remains extraneous to it. I focused primarily on interactive installations, works in which the viewer's participation was instrumental to its completion. Narration cannot exist if the viewer does not actively take part and interact with the images. My goal is to carry this experience over into my filmmaking. *Le Quattro Volte* is an incomplete work in the sense that each of its four parts is separated from the others by a void, an interval which the viewer must rush into and fill using his own imagination. This empty space is an invitation and an opportunity for viewers to assume creative responsibilities and take charge of completing the film. The audience's interpretation gives the film its shape and makes it live.



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CALABRIA AT THE CROSSROADS

Founded in ancient times as Bruttium, this region of Southern Italy — situated at the toe of the Italian peninsula below Naples — is a place traversed by contradictions. Calabria is the poorest region in Italy and one of the most destitute in Europe. It is also a place where tradition and generosity radiate from the land and the people. During the 6th and 5th centuries BC, the now Calabrian cities of Rhegion, Sybaris, Kroton, and Locri were among the most important cities of Magna Graecia, the settlements created by Greeks who brought Hellenic culture to Southern Italy. Conquered by the Romans in the 3rd century BC, Calabria became a fertile breadbasket for the Roman Empire. The consequences of Roman domination were dire, and opened the path to a decline that continued through the centuries, during the dark times of the Byzantine and Norman eras and up until the restoration under the Bourbon dynasty. Finally, with Italian unification in 1861, Calabria began to face a long, never-ending process of integration with the rest of the country. The population, in search of more prosperous lands, began to desert the region. From 1880 to 1925, 10 people out of every thousand left Calabria every year, never to return. Another wave of emigration began after the Second World War, when an estimated 2.3 million migrants left Calabria. In the 20th century, Calabria was the main source of the growing Italian Diaspora spreading across Europe, Australia, and the Americas.

Throughout its long history, Calabria has seemed to continuously confront the same difficult choice, divided between an almost natural vocation to be closed within itself and the unavoidable need to open up to the rest of the world. Calabria today is still fighting against enduring problems including economic backwardness, unemployment and the pervading presence of the 'Ndrangheta, one of the most violent and powerful crime organizations in the world. However, the region cannot be reduced to the pervading clichés about Southern Italy. While the biggest cities are home to prestigious universities, museums and live a vivacious cultural life, Calabria's small towns offer a rare window into the past in a changing and modernizing Europe. Beneath this difficulty lies the strong identity of the people that live with these issues day in and day out, people for whom community and pride compensate for the material wealth that is lacking. While globalization continues to impose uniformity and a culture of mass consumption on many parts of the world, Calabria maintains a deep connection to its roots and protects its heritage of traditions, identity and culture that remains an integral part of its present day life. Calabria is a land where extreme hardship, untouched natural beauty, and ancestral traditions continue to coexist — where the march of history is merely a distant echo lost amidst the hills and the trees, and the ties that bind people to their homeland remain what is most important.



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WOOD COAL IN CALABRIA

Coal was once the main source of energy used for heating homes and cooking, especially in coastal cities that didn't have access to lumber. The 1950s and 60s ushered in widespread use of natural gas, which was cheaper and cleaner than coal, and a consequent significant drop in the demand for coal. Today, coal is still used to heat homes which are not equipped with radiators, especially in the mountains. In the city and countryside, charcoal is used to fuel the cookouts of middle-class families. Though its production is still necessary, it is increasingly problematic.

Most of Calabria's forests are owned and operated by the state. The latter authorises the exploitation of public resources in exchange for payment. entrepreneurs buy concessions which they then split up and parcel out to the coalmen in the region. A contract is signed stipulating how much charcoal the coalman must produce and the price he will receive for it. He is not permitted to sell the wood to third parties, nor can he burn the charcoal he has produced in his own fireplace. The contract obliges him to cut down all the trees in the parcel he has been assigned and to pay a fine if he fails to meet the stipulated deadline. The end result is deforestation. Though the woods used to stretch all the way down to the foot of these hills, they have now receded up into the most inaccessible areas of the mountains.

The coalmen call their parcel "ppoiata." This word from the Calabrian dialect derives from the verb "to lay" and was originally used to indicate the rocky, impenetrable areas where wild birds built their nests. This word encapsulates the tribulations of the coalmen, whose task becomes more difficult and more dangerous with every passing year. They lead the lives of beasts of burden, working anywhere between 12 and 18 hours a day, depending on the season. The entire family, from grandparents down to children, does their part to try and earn their keep. The coal-producing families visit the concession site. They study the wood and survey the "ppoiata." They listen to the businessman as he lists his conditions. They discuss and observe. They reply that the price is lower than the year before, and yet the wood is harder to cut and transport — but they have no choice. In the end, they must accept his conditions.

