

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**BACAS - [Borghi Antichi Cultura Arti e Scienze](#)** - in collaboration with the **[Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#)** - is thrilled to present an evening with **Domenico “Mimmo” Lucano**, former mayor of **Riace**, a hill-top town overlooking the Ionian sea in the southern Italian region of Calabria, which became the epicenter of the European migrant battle between open and closed ports.

This is Mr. Lucano’s first trip to the US to share his story with many who have followed it for several years on this side of the ocean. The event will be held on November 26th, at 6:30pm at the **[Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#)**, in Italian while simultaneously translated into English. The event, two days before the Thanksgiving celebration, acquires strong symbolic meaning given that this American holiday celebrates the welcoming (\*accoglienza) of the newly arrived European migrants - the pilgrims - by the indigenous people.

Pietro Costa, Founder and Executive Creative Director of BACAS, travelled to Riace this past September, to meet the former mayor at the first press conference on his return to Riace after the lifting of the exile order imposed on him by former Italian minister of the interior Salvini.

After attending the emotional two-hours long press conference, Costa extended the invitation to Lucano to come to New York, given the extensive community of immigrants from Southern Italy that lives here. Costa recounts: *Domenico (Mimmo) Lucano, gave me the impression that I was before the humblest of “giants” as I handed him a Brooklyn New York cap. Mimmo (as he likes to be called), through instinct and an open heart, made a ripple from the small, hard to reach town, on the west coast of the Calabrian hills in Italy, that has ringed out globally. We all need to do whatever is in our power to perpetuate this type of humanity.* Costa continues: *We could not have found a better partner and venue for this event than the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, New York University and its very supportive director Stefano Albertini.*

This will be an evening dedicated to the Italian word “**accoglienza**”, directly translated into English as *hospitality*, but with a larger, more encompassing meaning in this time, when large numbers of displaced people are moving to find safety and refuge from the fallout of wars and economic terrorism in Africa, the middle East, South Asia, Central and South America. **Teresa Fiore** - Inserra Endowed Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies at Montclair University - will also join the discussion.

For Lucano, the model of “**accoglienza**” in his town is a form of adaptive reuse of homes left abandoned by the decades old exodus of its residents, who themselves migrated elsewhere, seeking work and better opportunities for themselves and their children. “*We simply give them these homes*” stated Lucano about his resolve to provide a logical and organic response to a pressing demand not only for houses but a sustainable future. This practice has attracted to Riace people from 20 different countries, as murals in the town depict. And as a village, Riace is not a refugee center, where people languish waiting for a decision. A village is above all homes built around shops, schools, churches, businesses and thrives if people can work. The trauma of migration in Calabria is transformed and healed in this manner.

In a recent interview for RAI television, Lucano was asked “*How do you reconcile accoglienza with needing to protect borders?*” Lucano answered: “*It’s not possible*” and went on to quote the [Missionary Alex Zanotelli](#), whose goals are to promote social harmony and equality, and who accompanied a group of migrants to Riace years ago: “*You don’t need to ask where these people come from. Just think that they were brought here by the wind.*” And we all know that the wind has no borders.

In 2016, Domenico “Mimmo” Lucano was named by Forbes as one of the top 50 most influential people in the world, in the company of major industry, cultural and political leaders, and Pope Francis. To this he responded - “*I hope that this gratifying event will be positive for Riace itself and for all Calabria, and help create the possibility for recognition of the needs of the world's forgotten, whom we stubbornly insist on representing.*”

Today, the legacy of **accoglienza**, which was created in Riace by Mr. Lucano, is under threat of being erased by conservative political forces and local church leaders. Even the billboards once proudly welcoming visitors to **Riace, Paese dell’Accoglienza** have been removed and replaced by images of patron saints.

\***accoglienza** - the friendly and generous reception of guests, visitors, or strangers. To be welcoming and inclusive to others, especially those in need of home and place.

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