

Work, Memory, and Photography: In Triggiano (BA), Elton Gllava's multi-site exhibition exposes the Brutality of the Bulqizë Mines

PRESS KIT:

<https://www.fondazionepasqualebattista.it/home-elton-gllava/mostra-elton-gllava/>

Press tour: Saturday 27th september at 11 – from via Carroccio

From September 27, 2025, to January 10, 2026, the alleys of Triggiano's historic center (BA) will host *The Litany of Chromium | Litania e Kromit*, a widespread photographic exhibition by Albanian photographer Elton Gllava, curated by Manuela De Leonardis and with artistic direction by Annalisa Zito (Pasquale Battista Foundation). This powerful exhibition focuses on the theme of labour, weaving together art, memory, and social awareness.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT – Through emotionally charged black-and-white images, the artist portrays the reality of Bulqizë, a mining town in northern Albania and a symbol of ongoing human rights violations at the heart of Europe. It is a raw but necessary account rooted in the history of the Balkan country: during the communist dictatorship, political dissidents were deported and forced into hard labour in Bulqizë's chromium mines, near the border with North Macedonia.

AN URBAN EXHIBITION – Promoted by the Pasquale Battista Foundation and part of the *Capaci di Legalità* program in memory of police officer Rocco Dicillo, a mafia victim, the exhibition winds its way through the streets of Triggiano, transforming the historic center into an open-air museum. From Via Garibaldi to Largo Mercato, from Via del Castello to Via Carroccio, the black-and-white photographs merge with the urban architecture to make visible what often remains hidden.

"Elton Gllava's photographs restore dignity to their subjects and spark deep reflection on human rights and the extreme working conditions that still persist in Europe today," says artistic director Annalisa Zito. The curatorial vision embraces the concept of public art as a tool for urban regeneration and collective memory activation.

PHOTOGRAPHY – The project began in 2013, when Elton Gllava—who had moved to Italy in the 1990s—returned to Albania to better understand his homeland. Armed with his Hasselblad and free of preconceptions, he began documenting the daily life and grueling work of the miners. Year after year, he returned to Bulqizë, driven by the need to tell a truth too often forgotten.

"A job that takes but gives nothing back," writes curator De Leonardis, "and yet, as the miners often say: hadn't it been for the chromium, the crows would have sung." This phrase became the title of one of Gllava's most acclaimed photographic projects, winner of the FotoLeggendo Festival 2016, and featured in the trilingual book *Bulqizë* (Postcart, 2019).

AN ARTISTIC COMMITMENT – The exhibition is sponsored by the Consulate General of the Republic of Albania, the Apulia Region, the Metropolitan City of Bari, the Municipality of Triggiano, the Academy of Fine Arts of Bari, and the Polytechnic University of Bari, with main sponsorship from Levigas Luce e Gas - Gruppo Augusta Ratio.

The opening will take place on Saturday, September 27 at 7:00 PM in Largo Mercato, with a public event featuring the photographer, the curator, and the Albanian consul Arjan Vasjari, moderated by journalist Maria Grazia Lombardi (TG Rai Puglia).

Following the success of previous exhibitions such as *Memoria senza indulgenza* by Tony Gentile, *Nur/Luce* by Maïmouna Guerresi, and *Per tutta la vita/Para toda la vida* by Silvia Levenson, the collaboration between the Pasquale Battista Foundation, the Municipality of Triggiano, and curator

Manuela De Leonardis is further strengthened in a shared commitment to art that goes beyond aesthetics, becoming voice, protest, and collective conscience. With *The Litany of Chromium*, Triggiano welcomes and offers the public a powerful testimony that transcends walls and touches the soul.

Elton Gllava (Vlora, Albania 1974, lives and works in Rome). In 1992, as the communist regime collapsed and borders opened, he seized the opportunity to explore another world. Like thousands of Albanians, he made his way to Italy. In 2007, he chose to pursue photography, enrolling at the Roman School of Photography, where he graduated in 2009. Over the years, he attended photojournalism/reportage masterclasses and workshops with photo editor Christian Caujolle (2011), photographers and visual artists such as Lina Pallotta (2010), Morten Andersen (2012), Yolanda Cuomo (2017), and Johannes Schwartz (2017). In 2012, he was an artist-in-residence at ISSP in Riga (Latvia), and in 2019 at the Art House School in Shkodër (Albania). In 2016, he won the FotoLeggendo Festival, came second at UmbriaWorldFest, received an honorable mention at MIFA 2016, was a finalist at Renaissance Photography 2016, and was selected for the Istanbul Photo Book Festival. In 2021, his film *Albanian Cinema Paradiso* (2019), produced in collaboration with AQSHF—Albanian National Film Archive, won the Best Research Award at the Protopost - Communist Film Festival. His photographic style focuses on both social and authorial reportage, with a strong interest in intimate aspects. He has published the photobooks *Bulqizë* (Postcart Edizioni, 2019) and *Blanco* (Origini Edizioni, 2019).

Recent exhibitions include:

- 2021 – *Albania Cinema Paradiso*, Tirana International Film Festival, Tirana, Albania;
- *Bulqizë*, Daegu Photo Biennale, Daegu, South Korea;
- 2020 – *Bulqizë*, Albanian Film Festival, Casa del Cinema, Rome;
- *Albania Cinema Paradiso*, Albanian Film Festival, Casa del Cinema, Rome;
- 2019 – *Albania Cinema Paradiso*, National Museum of Photography “Marubi,” Shkodër, Albania (curated by Francois Cheval);
- *Bulqizë*, Art House, Shkodër, Albania (curated by Francois Cheval);
- *Albania Cinema Paradiso*, Cortona on the Move, Cortona (curated by Liza Faktor);
- 2018 – *Bulqizë*, Cultura Mondo, Associazione Crocevia, Lecce;
- 2017 – *Where the Crows Would Have Sung*, Castelnuovo Fotografia, Castelnuovo Di Porto, Rome, and Pelanda, Museo Macro Testaccio, Rome (curated by Sara Palmieri and Lina Pallotta).

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