

In 'Swan Song,' a ballet troupe faces racism and sexism.

An East German assassin takes pride in her work.



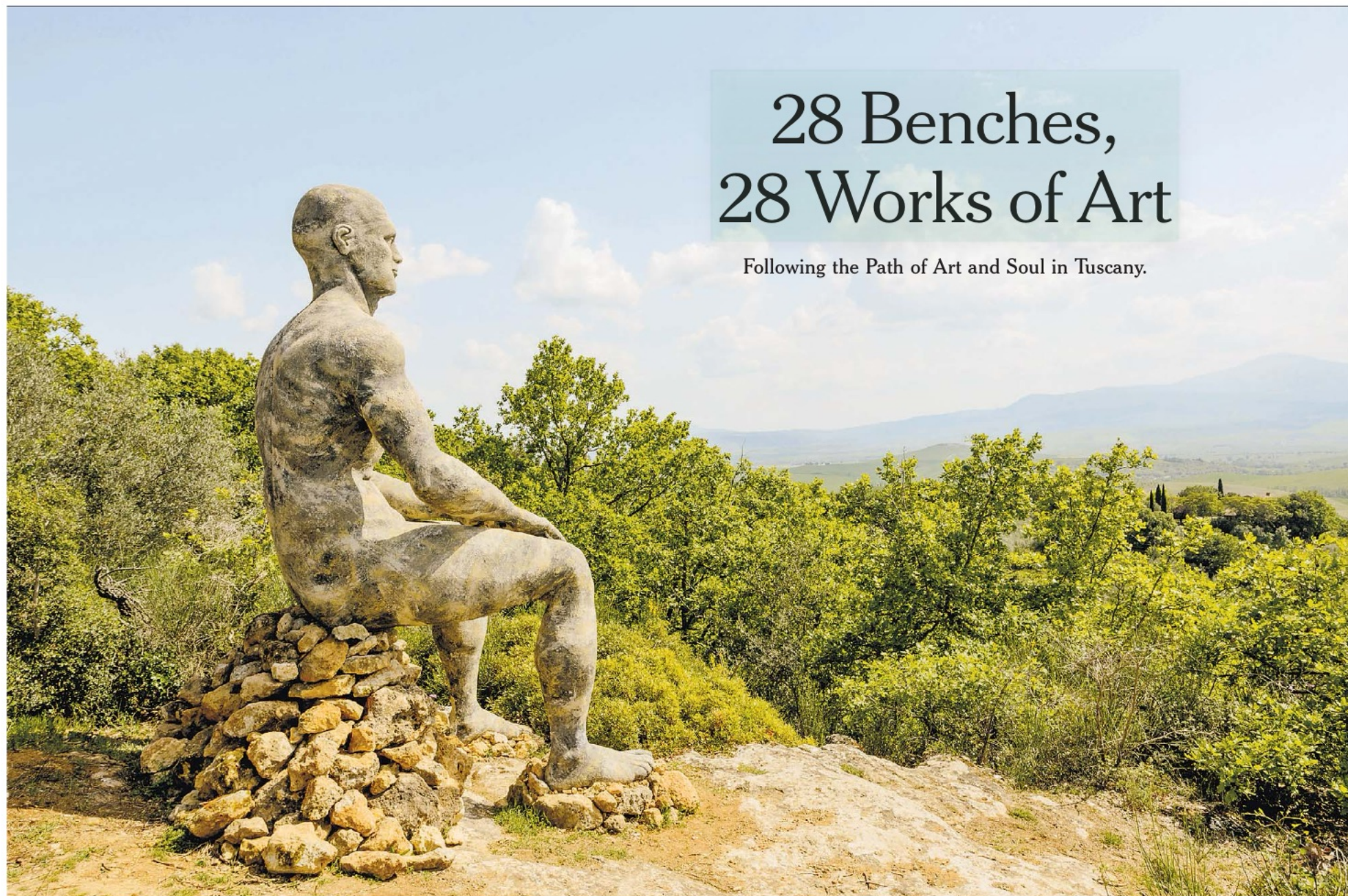
Taking on white-centric American plays and looming fascism.

Arts

The New York Times

28 Benches, 28 Works of Art

Following the Path of Art and Soul in Tuscany.



EMANUELE CAMERINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

By ONDINE COHANE

PIENZA, ITALY — In Tuscany, the Val d'Orcia, with its rolling fields and untouched landscape beneath the dormant Monte Amiata volcano, seems created for photo ops. Within it, this town is one of the finest examples of Renaissance architecture, designed by Bernardo Gambarelli, better known as Bernardo Rossellino, in white travertine marble and surrounded by palazzi which he also built.

This summer, a new path leads from Pien-

za's main piazza to the countryside, a walk of a little less than two miles. Along its length they'll find 28 benches made of travertine marble created by well-known artists. Each bench is both a place to rest and take in the sweeping views of the Italian countryside, and a work of art shaped by the maker's hand: One suggests a throne, another carries an image of a face, another has the tactile surface of a beach stone.

The route, Il Sentiero dell'Arte e dell'Anima, or the Path of Art and Soul, was unveiled in March, with contributions by re-

The "Guardiano della Valle," a 13-foot-tall sculpture, overlooks the countryside near the end of the Sentiero dell'Arte e dell'Anima, or the Path of Art and Soul, in Pienza, Italy.

nowned Italian artists like Giò Pomodoro, Sandro Chia and Mauro Berrettini, and international standouts like Matthew Spender, Justin Peyser and Jean-Paul Philippe.

The benches are a gift from Fondazione FUR, the foundation created by the Swiss art collector Urs Rechsteiner, who has had a second home in the area for 30 years, the Villa Santa Maria. There, Mr. Rechsteiner created a garden for artworks, and in the process "fell in love" with a bench from the artist Riccardo Grazi. "It ignited a vision of

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ESTHER ZUCKERMAN | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

In These Buddy Romps, Women of a Certain Age

Star-studded, goofy comedies that make fun of getting older are a growing genre.

THERE ARE TWO NEW FILMS this year in which Academy Award-nominated actresses in their 70s whip out tiny sex toys. In "Summer Camp," Kathy Bates offers up wee vibrators to Alfre Woodard and Diane Keaton. In "The Fabulous Four," it's Bette Midler giving Susan Sarandon a kegel ball

JESSE GREEN | THEATER REVIEW





PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMANUELE CAMERINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

28 Benches, And as Many Works of Art

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a series of benches from various international artists to lead through the landscape providing places to meditate and take stock," he said.

In an almost fairy-tale twist, 20 years ago, Mr. Grazzi, along with the artists Mauro Berrettini and Pietro Cascella had a similar vision, and had commissioned a series of benches, but had never been able to install them. They had been sitting in a warehouse. "Mauro Berrettini brought them to my attention," said Mr. Rechsteiner. "But they seemed specifically created for this area."

Travertine benches have long been built into Pienza. They sit in the main square where families can chat while their kids play, and along the path that leads to the town's cemetery where older residents sit in the sun and rest on their daily walks.

"It took us about two years to formulate the route and get the permissions," said Giampietro Colombini, the former vice mayor of Pienza. "The foundation reached out with the idea and I instantly thought that instead of envisioning it as an exhibition, to conceive it as a walk that would lead from the Duomo to a farmhouse that's in almost an unvisited spot."

The path gives the town's residents a dose of contemporary art and encourages visitors to explore outside the confines of the city walls, relieving some of the crowding.

The route leads out of Piazza Pio II, named for the 15th-century pope who was born in Pienza. Here, a bench by Giò Pomodoro provides the opportunity to look back into the square or through the Porta al Santo, one of Pienza's main archways, toward the countryside. The path then passes into the newly reopened Orti Piccolomini garden (once the orchards of Pio II's family) before leading down the Via dell' Addobbo and then the Via delle Fonti where women used to wash clothes in a huge marble communal basin.

From there it leads down to the Pieve of Corsignano, the town's first church and a more secluded refuge than the more visited cathedral; the pagan carvings inside include a mermaid with a split tail and a wolf licking the ear of a fiddler.

Finally, there's a beautiful climb from the Pieve, around private vineyards and the woods of Porciano, past a former watchtower, and onto a small trail which passes two farmhouses, Il Pino and Il Sasso.

Placing the 28 benches was a massive undertaking — some weigh more than 6,600 pounds — with special vehicles needed to carry them. One of the most striking works is the "Guardiano della Valle," or "Guardian of the Valley," a 13-foot-tall sculptural figure conceived by Lorenzo Nisi and realized by Antonio Borrelli and the studio of Corto Circuito. The "Guardian" overlooks the countryside near the end of the path, and is "meant to transmit strength, courage and protection," said Maria Cava, the installation curator.



Top, from left: This bench on the Sentiero dell'Arte e dell'Anima was designed by Jacopo Cascella; the path leads out of town through the Porta al Santo toward the Val d'Orcia; a bench made by Matthew Spender. Left, Mino Trafeli's artwork recalls the horns of Tuscan cattle.

