

Alberto Burri

(Extracted from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Burri)

Alberto Burri (born March 12, 1915 in Città di Castello, Italy, died February 13, 1995 in Nice, France) was an Italian painter and sculptor.

Alberto Burri was born in Città di Castello, in Umbria in 1915. He earned a medical degree from the University of Perugia specializing in tropical medicine on October 12, 1940, two days after Italy entered World War II, when he was called up as a medic and sent to Libya in March 1943. On May 8, 1944 after the defeat of the Axis forces, his unit was captured in Tunisia, he was interned in Camp Howze prisoner-of-war camp in Gainesville, Texas, where he began to paint. His first paintings were views of the desert he could see from the prison camp and still life's with paints and canvases supplied by the YMCA. He primarily painted "nostalgic Umbrian landscapes and figures", as Milton Gendel described in an *ArtNews* issue published in 1954. He collected old burlap sacks and brought them with him upon his return to Italy and continued to use them in place of canvas. He continued to use burlap, having a supply from the local miller.

After his release in 1946, Burri moved to Rome to pursue a full-time career as painter, despite the disapproval of most his friends and family. He joined his cousin, a musician and sole supporter in his decision, who helped to connect him with the Roman art circles. However he was a very private and solitary artist, working incessantly. He incorporated unusual materials like plastic cements, resin, zinc oxide, pumice and kaolin, tar and PVC adhesives in his paintings, reflect his affinity for science. Although he distanced himself from Arte Informale, the prominent artistic movement in Italy at the time, much of his work was based on Informale aesthetic and ideas, and today he is generally recognized as an Arte Informale artist.

In the mid-1950s, Burri introduced charred wood into his burlap works, followed by scrap iron sheets fixed onto the wood, as well as colored and transparent sheets of plastic. In the 1970s he began his "cracked" paintings, or *cretti*. He created a series of works in the industrial material, Cellotex, from 1979 through the 1990s. In the 1980s, Burri created a form of land art project on the town of Gibellina in Sicily. The town was abandoned following an earthquake in 1968, with the inhabitants being rehoused in a newly built town 18 km away. Burri covered an area of over 120,000 square metres (1,300,000 sq ft), most of the old town, and an area roughly 300 metres by 400 metres with white concrete. He called this the *Grande Cretto*.

Burri was awarded the Italian Order of Merit in 1994. He died, aged 79, in Nice, France. His birthplace of Città di Castello has memorialized him with a large permanent museum of his works.