

Photographic Project by Academy Alumni for a New Museum in Tuscany



Roccalbegna (1296), a Sienese-founded town on the slopes of the Monte Amiata. Credit: Alex MacLean

Alex MacLean (FAAR'04 in Landscape Architecture) and **David Friedman** (FAAR'89 in History of Art, RAAR'04) met at the Academy in 2004. Alex is an architect, pilot, and aerial photographer and David an architectural historian. They discovered a mutual interest in planned towns and led a number of van trips around Lazio that year. Oriolo Romano, San Martino al Cimino, S. Gregorio da Sassola, Zagarolo, Pratica, and Sabaudia were some of their destinations.

In 2009 and 2010 MacLean and Friedman have been collaborating on a photographic campaign for the Comune of San Giovanni for a museum about medieval founded towns, of which San Giovanni is a particularly fine example. The new Museum is being installed in the fourteenth century building that stands in the middle of the town's main square. Built as the residence of the Florentine official that oversaw the town for the city from its foundation in 1299, it has been the seat of government in San Giovanni until a few years ago when the mayor and the administration moved to more modern quarters at the edge of town. A comprehensive restoration by the architectural firm of **Guicciardini and Magni** (who also designed the recently reopened Museum of Science in Florence) has adapted the building to its new function.

The museum program is being prepared by Friedman and **Paolo Pirillo**, professor of medieval history at the University of Bologna. It will tell the story of the new urbanism promoted by the communes of Italy in the late Middle Ages, of which the founded towns are the most comprehensive examples. This is the period when governments first established control over the physical space of the city and created the network of public streets and squares that have ever since been the backbone of the urban experience.

Towns were founded *ex novo* all across Europe in this period. The Florentine towns are not the first to be built but their plans are the most rational and elegant. They were founded to relocate people from the villages where they had lived as subjects of the feudal

nobility and to secure them for Florence. In the process the towns became the provincial capitals of an early modern territorial state.

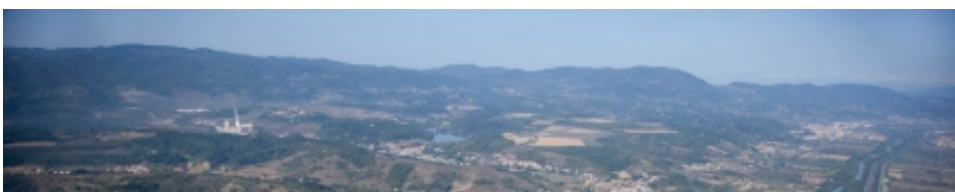


Credit: Alex MacLean

Above is San Giovanni Valdarno. The town hall/museum is the building at the center of the square. Directly behind it is the earliest church on the site. It accommodates a parish moved here from one of the relocated villages. At the upper right is the oratory that grew up around a miracle working image painted on one of the town gates. At the other end of the square is the church sponsored by the Florentine government, dedicated to San Giovanni (the patron of the town and the city), which is the site of the inauguration of the Florentine official. The town's main street (recognizable by the greater size of the buildings) passes directly in front of the town hall, at right angles to the axis of the square.

Urban design is one aspect of the new museum at San Giovanni, the development of a cohesive community at the new town site is the other. Medieval images of cities, passages from contemporary documents, a staging of the debate in the Florentine town council about the new town strategy, a collection of objects connected to life in the town in its early years are planned for installation.

Alex MacLean's photographs will introduce the new towns in the first large room of the museum. They show the topographic setting of the settlements, the fabric of the medieval town—including both street plans and pre-modern buildings—and the modern development. The images are taken from low levels and at moments early and late in the day when light models contours and adds warmth. They are very subjective images that, like all of MacLean's photographs, examine the way that humans have inhabited the natural environment.





Credit: Alex MacLean

Above, San Giovanni Valdarno. The floor of the Arno valley had become habitable on a while before the foundation of San Giovanni (1299). The villages from which population was pulled sat in the hills to the west of the town. The new town pushes up against those hills, retreating as far as possible from the flood prone river. The Florence-Arezzo rail line passes immediately adjacent to the western wall of the town. The early twentieth century steel mills are visible along the track, on the north side of town. Twentieth century expansion occupies the area between the historic center and the river.

More photographs of the towns are visible at www.landslides.com. Look for the folder "Italian New Towns".