

## ***Rolf Julius, a Room of Stillness in the mountains***

The stone cabin is located near Villanova, in Upper Val Pellice, shortly after entering the path leading to the Prà basin. Seen from the outside, it looks like a typical local house, entirely made of stone, including the roof. In fact, it was a military station – now obviously dismantled for 70 years – one of the many built on both sides of the Alps near the border between Italy and France. It must have been used as a defense post against any attacks by the French army, and inside it, everything was built of reinforced concrete, with very thick walls, so the space is small. There are three openings, without any sort of glass or frame: a door, a side window (from where you can see Villanova), and a larger one from which a heavy cannon or machine gun could shoot. This latter opening faces the valley where the path runs along the right orographic side of the Pellice stream, which can be heard everywhere very well, despite the fact that a view of it is often covered by plants (and it is impossible to see it from the stone cabin, especially in summer).

The idea Rolf Julius (a German artist who passed away in 2011) had of setting up a 'room of stillness' inside a military building that had been conceived for warfare might seem bizarre, or in any case, forced. But this is not the reason that induced me to choose it for this purpose, although I liked the thought of its transformation from military use to temporary (and comfortable) refuge for wayfarers. Now, when it appears to anyone who climbs the path, the cabin is an image of quiet and protection, thanks to its shape and position, a bit off the path, from which it is separated by a clearing. Upon entering it, you feel really protected, thanks to the almost unchanging penumbra inside, and on the hottest days in summer, there is a pleasant coolness there (then if it rains, you can take shelter there while waiting for it to stop). When the sunlight is stronger, standing inside and looking out through one of the openings while listening to the rustling of the leaves and the singing of birds or certain insects provides a sense of peace and well-being. And the feeling you have is that of a communion with the surrounding nature that is even more intense than what one might perceive standing outdoors.

These are somewhat the same reasons that Julius listed in 1987 in his short text on 'rooms of stillness', and which convinced me to turn that small stone house into one of them, for just three days (during *La collera delle lumache/The Snails' Wrath* festival) in July 2016, by setting up two of his small, very discrete and almost invisible sound works. And I am equally convinced that he would have liked to go in there, after having seen it while coming up the path, and stay there for a while.

Carlo Fossati, November 2016

*The work of Rolf Julius is a rare example of greatness – in terms of aesthetic quality and poetic value – obtained, however, with modest means, (in fact, he humbly defined his work small music). His approach was one that was often visually unpretentious, using mostly found objects and materials, with decentralized interventions that the viewer often notices only upon taking a closer look, mainly thanks to the low sound volume of his installations.*

(translated by Laura Culver)