

Forty years of Fiumara d’Arte in the Nebrodi

Posted on November 5, 2026 by Peter Srinivasan

TUSA, Sicily — On October 12, 1986, Pietro Consagra’s concrete sculpture *La materia poteva non esserci* (Matter might not have existed) was inaugurated near Tusa as a memorial to Antonio Presti’s father. Forty years on, it anchors Fiumara d’Arte, 12 works in five towns whose care rests on the Region.

The project began with a death. When Presti’s father died suddenly in 1982, Presti left his engineering studies to run the family road-materials firm in Reitano, and commissioned a memorial from Consagra, who answered with an 18-metre work of two slightly inclined concrete slabs, one black and one white, standing in the riverbed.

That memorial grew into an open-air route through Tusa, Motta d’Affermo, Castel di Lucio, Mistretta, and Reitano, villages in the Nebrodi mountains. “These towns were destined to die,” Presti told a parliamentary commission on urban decay on July 15, BlogSicilia reported.

Years in court

Fiumara d’Arte was not always welcome. Five proceedings for unauthorised building froze the project, and in 1993 an appeal court ordered the demolition of Tano Festa’s *Monumento per un poeta morto* (Monument for a dead poet), known as the *Finestra sul mare* (Window on the sea).

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Fiumara d’Arte open-air museum (*Credits: Gariele Argentino*)

The Court of Cassation annulled that order in February 1994. Recognition followed in January 2006, when regional law 6/2006 designated the route a *percorso turistico culturale* (cultural tourism trail).

The route today

Festa’s window, dated 1989, frames the Tyrrhenian at Villa Margi in Reitano, and the foundation is awaiting regional funds for a new restoration this year.

Mauro Staccioli’s *Piramide 38° parallelo* (Pyramid on the 38th parallel), completed in 2010 above Motta d’Affermo, hosts the *Rito della Luce* (Rite of light), held for the 13th time on June 21.

Presti’s art hotel at Castel di Tusa has closed for good, with its artist-designed rooms due to return at Villa Margi from 2027.

Mistretta, the largest town on the route, had 6,195 residents in 1991 and 4,308 at the end of 2024, according to Istat, Italy’s national statistics institute.

Responsibility for inspection, signage, and conservation sits with the Sicily Region, Presti says. For four decades Fiumara d’Arte has rested on one man’s determination, money, and appetite for confrontation.

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Consagra’s title suggested that matter might not have existed. Forty years later the matter is plainly there, standing in riverbeds and on hilltops. The open question is who will care for it once its founder no longer can.

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