

The Icon Lives!

What is an icon? Is it a lazy, overused word? Or does it sum up the unique ability to transcend time and become immortalised in visual culture? Are there other words that can be used instead? Is it 'really cool'... awesome?

In the hall of our old house hangs a framed representation of Kraczyna's Barga, the houses perched on the high hill hugged by the stone wall, with the Duomo and its accompanying cypresses at the very top. This is indeed sewn into the visual culture of Bargighiani, both those living in Barga and those visiting for a short time...

While Nick himself is now no longer on this planet (sadly he died suddenly on 1 February 2026), his image lives forever in our hearts. While he was still alive I wrote a *Grapevine* piece (April 2019) about him and his 'obsession' (his word) with the labyrinth, which he talked so movingly about. He sent me a print of two entwined lovers emerging out of the labyrinth and thanked me for 'your wonderful words about me and the labyrinth'.

Labyrinths are symbols that frequently appear in human history. If you take a different path, you end up in a new place. Their roots can be traced back to Greek mythology and paganism. For Nick they were a part of a recurring dream, based on Auden's poem *The Musee de Beaux Arts* and Breughel's painting *The Fall of Icarus*. Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky.

We were lucky indeed that after a lifetime of peripatetic wanderings, following his Russian origins (his full name is Swietlan Nicholas Kraczyna), Nick 'falling out of the sky' came to Barga and had a studio on one of the vertiginous hills that lead down to 'new' Barga. Here he taught generations of students how to etch and paint, using 19th century equipment which carried on working well in the 21st century. Our former neighbour Fiona Moscardini recalls that he was friends with her parents and knew Fiona herself as a baby. While she didn't have many occasions to chat with him, she visited his exhibition (as did we) in 2013. Each student has their own vivid memory of Nick, our own 'icon', whose works are in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, among other prestigious places.



In 2013, the Comune of Barga honoured Barga (or we might say he honoured them) with a triple exhibition of images of the town that he had drawn, etched, and painted since 1973. Fiona says, *there was a wonderful video which explained the complicated procedure he used for his prints. I told him so when I next met him, as he was going down the terribly steep via di Borgo with his Nordic walking sticks. I did love his artwork and took a couple of pictures of my favourites....* Such a prolific life. Truly a 'major' minor artist', who donated his artworks to the Fondazione Pascoli. As his student Maya said, *he had a great artistic friendship with Barga for over 50 years. For her, his studio was an anchor; a home, the beating-heart centre of the town.*

I'll be forever grateful for the gift of Barga. We will each have our treasured memories – exhibitions which spoke to us, in so many ways. I recall how Nick had his

own table reserved each night at the Osteria close to the serving hatch. You could stop by to say hi. He would reply politely but then made it clear he liked being 'alone'....

– by Judith Edwards
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After his marriage to the inspired and gifted puppeteer Amy Luckenbach ended with her death, he continued to work at Syracuse University in Florence, where he met Sylvia, whom he subsequently married. When he visited our house for a meal (what a privilege for us) he gave us a huge, heavy book of Amy Luckenbach's work. We had to leave it there because of the weight, hoping the current owners appreciate it (see *This Old House in Grapevine*, March 2019). He and Sylvia had a lot of fun, she recalls.

