

The Happy Magic of Gillian Armitage

La felice magia at the Ricci Foundation in Barga: protagonists Gillian Armitage and her Opera Barga

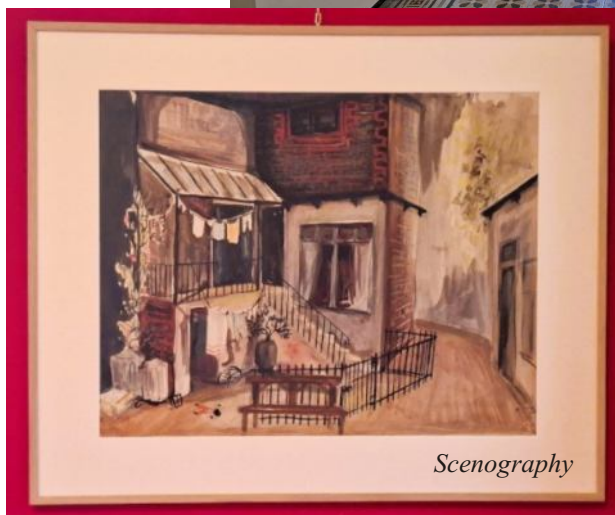
The happy magic. Scenes and costumes by Gillian Armitage from the English Theater to Opera Barga is the exhibition that the Ricci Foundation of Barga has dedicated to one of the protagonists of the city's cultural life who, together with her husband Peter Hunt, was able to create a festival of international scope in a town deeply loved internationally for its beauty.

This documentary exhibition dedicated to Gillian Armitage, curated by Anna Maria Zampolini and organized by Cristiana Ricci, opened on Saturday 6 June 2026 at the Ricci Foundation in Barga (via Roma, 20, Barga - LU) and will remain open until 2 August 2026. It was created by the Ricci Foundation in collaboration with the Hunt family, in the 35th year of this Barga institution.

Gillian Armitage (1928-1995) dedicated her life to the theater in Great Britain and Italy. A tireless artist, in the theater and in private life she performed daily that special magic that transforms creative work into visible happiness. Through testimonies, written sources, films, photographs, drawings, and other artistic artifacts, the exhibition retraces her life, from birth in a wealthy English family to the challenge of training herself artistically and building her own artistic-theatrical path, until her arrival in Barga.

Gillian worked as a set designer in British repertory theater, and here she met her future husband, actor and director Peter Hunt. In the early 1960s, after their marriage and the birth of three children, the careers of Peter and his wife were interrupted by Peter's health problems. The couple decided to move to Italy. They ended up choosing Barga for its pure air and the beauty of its landscapes. Peter Hunt, extroverted, witty, and cultured, was immediately welcomed with spontaneous affection by the small community, while Gillian, with her reserved temperament initially remained in the background. Peter and Gillian were enchanted by the Teatro dei Differenti and realized the little jewel could be enhanced as the venue for a baroque music festival. Thanks to the credibility of Peter Hunt's project, the Teatro dei Differenti's owners sold it to the Town of Barga, to make it available to the entire community.

At the same time, Peter Hunt and Gillian Armitage organized and financed the first international course for opera singers based in Barga. Peter was general director and Gillian designed the sets and costumes. It was she who designed the original logo (graphically revised years later) and the first leaflets, posters, and programmes. So in July 1967, the Festival Opera Barga was born, and it continued until 2022. In July 1970, while the fourth edition of the Festival was in full swing, Peter Hunt suddenly died. Gillian chose to stay in Barga and keep the Festival project alive, taking on the general direction and maintaining the role of set designer and costume designer. Later, her son Nicholas led the festival until its conclusion in 2022, always together with Giancarlo Morganti who was the organizational machine of the festival for its entire duration. Of Gillian's work in this double capacity, what remains above all are set designs, costume studies, models, stage photos, laboratory photos, and two registrations produced by the Festival with the Opera Barga Orchestra in 1979 and 1980.



In this exhibition, around 60 drawings of scenography and studies for costumes can be seen, both from the English theater and the Opera Barga Festival, in particular for the first time linking groups of drawings to specific editions of the Opera Barga Festival (date, title, author, plot, main collaborators on stage and behind the scenes). A series of stage photos and some rare photos of models of the sets (unfortunately these are totally lost) complete the restitution of Gillian's vision of the effect that she intended to achieve

visually, which inevitably vanishes with the end of each theatrical performance. The materials on display come mainly from the Hunt family archive, Festival Opera Barga archive, Opera Barga Fund of the Town Library, Giornale di Barga archive, Rigali Fund of the Ricci Foundation, and from other private archives.

The exhibition has been organized by the Ricci Foundation of Barga with the patronage of the Town of Barga, Barga Equal Opportunity Commission, Province of Lucca, the Barga section of the Istituto Storico Lucchese, Unire Barga, and the support of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Lucca.

La felice magia. Scenes & costumes by Gillian Armitage from English Theatre to Opera Barga

6 June to 2 August 2026

Tuesdays 10am to 1pm,

weekends 11am to 1pm & 5pm to 7pm

Admission is free.

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