On eleven January 1693 the strongest of the earthquakes of a geo-tectonic nature affected the whole of eastern Sicily, the Val di Noto and part of Val Demone, two of the three areas into which the island had been divided since the time of the Arabs.

It destroyed 60 towns, demolished more than 7,000 churches, 250 convents, 22 collegiate churches and two cathedrals; the victims counted were 60,000.

We are at the end of the seventeenth century, a century of nefarious events, and a catastrophic earthquake of such proportion represented the end of the world for those who suffered it; it was as if the very existence of life had ended, absence of hope pushing back history and society.

In these tragic regressions every initiative was blocked, from the return to reason to the flow of the course of History, but in the case of the 1693 earthquake something extraordinary happened: in a collective rush the rebuilding was immediate, determining the places and modes of building, producing an artistic renewal and an urbanization that centuries later appears to our eyes like an original chapter of history, urbanistic, architectural and social, to be admired today in the Val di Noto.

The latter, from the ruins of the huge cataclysm, revived in a proscenium of villages and towns perching on hills or lying in lowlands that as in a mirage appear in a nonpareil theatricality.

Today Noto, Ragusa, Modica, Scicli, Militello Val di Catania, Palazzolo Acredine, Catania and Syracuse have been made World Heritage [sites] by UNESCO.

Mine is a story in pictures, which I have been continuing for twenty years on this late Baroque culture and on the influence that this had in daily life and in society, in feasts and urban spaces among ephemeral craftsmanship and in all life, a story serving to reveal a moment among the happiest in this part of the world.

Giuseppe Leone, Immaginario barocco (2006)