

MEFITE

Avellino, August, 2005

For the past few months I've been working on the concept of death and its relation to beauty. Salvatore tells me about a place. We go there together.

It's not an easy place to find. The road signs are clearly ambiguous. We ask around.

We know we're close when a strong, pungent odor hits the air. A clearing in the green woods offers an unexpected scene. Signs with skulls and crossbones are posted randomly around a fenced-off area: Risk of Death! The vapors rising out of the ground are lethal.

Mefite is the geographical name of the small valley.

Mefitis is a goddess of Sannite origin worshipped here since the 6th Century BCE, the guardian at the doors of Underworld.

She's also the patron of shepherds and farmers, both terrifying and benevolent at the same time.

Mefitis divides *what stands above* from *what lies below*, but the two mingle, sliding back and forth.

Mefitis is doorway, passage, and transformation.

The mud pond hisses uninterruptedly as gases rise to the surface in a hypnotize flow of bursting bubbles.

The burbling is actually loud and it's hard to breathe. We have to keep stepping back. They've told us that death comes quickly here.

We climb back up the hillside, then down again.

Mefitis lets herself be known a bit at a time, ravishing and gruesome.

We've got to keep any eye on each other, Salvatore and I. We're both captivated by the place. We call out when the other wanders too far away; every movement is tiring. Even my little video camera weighs a ton.

We mustn't sit down because the concentration of gas is even higher near the ground. We've also got to remember which way the wind is blowing.

The flux of earth and water seems to be the only source of motion here.

But it isn't: around us, animals come into view, one by one, dead animals that blend in with the colors of the dirt and rocks.

In their stillness we discover movement..

We're on the brink ourselves.

I'm sure we'll come back.

Mefitis is opposites and their reunion.