FAR FROM WATERLOO: STUART ARENDS AND LA STANZA DEL AMORE

BY DIANE ARMITAGE WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANNE STAVELEY

WHY would a contemporary artist with an international career live in the middle of nowhere, in Willard, New Mexico? The artist in question, Stuart Arends, as a joke, greets one of his visitors to Willard in Italian, saying that he hopes she will be entertained. Speaking Italian may seem odd in front of the Willard Cantina, but it’s not so strange when Arends is in Italy on one of his frequent trips there for an exhibition. Or perhaps the artist’s signature painted objects or his aluminum wedges are scheduled for a show in Germany or Switzerland. When he is back in the desert, though, Arends lives off the grid in a house he built. And there the artist is surrounded by the silence of his own ninety acres plus the thousands of others that don’t belong to him. That land comes with the aridity of a high and dry life with little rainfall and virtually no snowfall, and in the far distance are the Manzano Mountains off to the northwest with the occasional line of a freight train passing slowly on its way to or from West Texas; the train looks like a long, shiny snake moving slowly on the horizon.