

Houghton, Max, "Speaking the Language of Objects ~ The Unlovely Vistas of Domingo Milella", *Foam International Photography Magazine #12/talent*, Fall 2007, pp. 35-52, multiple illus.

foam
international
photography
magazine

foam # 12/talent, Fall 2007

**Speaking the language of
objects ~
The unlovely vistas of
Domingo Milella**

By Max Houghton

With the precision of a cartographer, Domingo Milella charts our world the way it is: the layers of detritus, the relentless creep of the urban, our fruitless attempts to manage the force of nature. Working solidly with an 8x10 camera in the manner of his visual mentors, from the Bechers, by way of Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, Milella hopes to transcend monocular vision and provide the viewer with an 'objective' view, despite being only too aware of the impossibility of such a feat within a postmodern sensibility.



Unlike most young photographers, Milella does not work in series. Instead, each work is an accretion to a growing corpus, which at its heart is concerned with imparting knowledge or beginning a dialogue with the viewer about contemporary landscapes. The tutelage of Stephen Shore at the School of Visual Arts in New York (Milella graduated in 2005) can be traced from the specifically-chosen foreground to a distant horizon, all the while reading

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and assimilating the mental depth of the image. It is in the selection of the foreground that we find a clue to the work's intention. Take the various jumping off points used to photograph Mexico City – the sea of plastic bottles, the unfinished buildings, the flat roofs, the cemetery more colorful than life itself – Milella speaks the language of objects; their very facticity appears almost comforting to him.

Since his childhood in the southern Italian port of Bari, Milella has been fascinated by the idea of function. The view from the apartments where he grew up became etched in his mind: the buildings like boxes, which implied a mentality, a history, even, of function. The young Milella gazed for hours upon the standardized industrial/post-industrial environment that created the contours of his mental landscape. 'It conflicted with my identity,' he says, 'as an Italian, as a resident of a mixed city. It was as though the Bari landscape has been bleached out of history. There was no evidence of the mixed blood, the layered genetics of the Greeks, the Byzantines, the Spanish, the French. It made me ask a very basic question, one which I am still trying to answer: how is it that we have made our environment and manipulated nature in this way?' His portrait of Ankara, the Turkish capital (but who would think it?), insists upon such questions; its breathtaking functionality everywhere resembling only dysfunction.



In the Mexico City images, we follow Milella to the peripheries of this megacity, as he tracks the rhythm of its growth. The scrubby headland is what's left of 'nature', a spot as

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yet free from flat-roofed houses or brightly colored



washing blowing in the wind, embraced by the weekend leisure-seekers. That the vastness beyond is a shimmering sea of buildings, and not the ocean itself is hard to hold on to. Milella's images do not allow for neat resolution.

Yet despite the unloveliness of the vistas he frames, the feeling Milella has for the landscapes he photographs is far from contemptuous. Tinged with the melancholy resignation of someone who sees only the long view, Milella inhabits a territory that is resolutely anti-Romantic. It is not with awe that he gazes upon the world's megalopolises, but with a certain humility, as he waits for nature to reclaim what we have taken away when our civilization ends. 'It is only for a season,' he says, 'that we hang on to what we pretended to have for a while.'



As we wait for the tourists to populate the carefully laid out tables and chairs in the last image in this portfolio, it seems possible they will come only to admire the tablecloths. Milella captures the pain of forgetfulness that cuts through the landscape like a scar.



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