

LANDSCAPEStories

Domingo Milella - Domingo Milella

Gerhard Steidl, 2014

Curated by Valentina Isceri

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In this editing work I was overwhelmed by a seemingly invisible track, actually much defined by a wire that holds a 10-year-long path, a work of photographic images combined together in the first publication by Domingo Milella: a monograph on a photographic journey from his hometown at the outskirts of Bari in southern Italy to Mesopotamia, visiting cities such as Mexico City, Monastir, Cairo, Ankara, Matera, Acitrezza, Massafra, Rhodes. In Milella's photographs there is a lack of myths and postcard landscapes, in favour of the simultaneous permeation of a deconsecrated mythology before it manifests itself. As I have written elsewhere, the urban geographies of these landscapes mark the suspension and the absence that is that vast sense of emptiness intended as the glue between representation / self-representation of the



Tomb of King Midas, Turkey, 2011

photographer and at the same time between the disappearance / emergence of the same with respect to the investigation subject as often it is in the self-timer that lies that possible link between contemplation and photography. Recalling the photo Tomb of King Midas, Turkey 2011, for example, the author has openly filmed himself in the act of photographing on an area of a funeral monument evidently lacking a body, an alliance between the age-old dialectic archaic / digital intended for the peaceful coexistence of the photographic home. Hand-made practicality and digital dimension of the photographs, photographs that live the present of an indefinable time, between memory and symbolism. The images are therefore presented as a very narrow selection of a long and generous journey made by the author, and stand out to our individual vision transfigured into most precious pictorial scenes, cheering us up from the daily need to obtain pleasure to the eye: the communicative functionality is never obliged but found and searched. An even more tantalizing hesitation is given by the double possibility of interpretation of the pictures: on one hand, the historical record with its burden of the past and on

the other the art that blesses Milella in giving us a gift that seems of involuntary reassurance.

INTERVIEW with the author

VI – You are a landscape photographer: you take pictures of cities, monuments of the past, especially places where man has left his passage. What is your relationship with the city of Bari and what have you left us in this regard?

DM – We all seek a home, a sense of home, a sense. The man tries to dwell poetically, said Holderlin. But Holderlin himself said that man is a beggar when he reflects, a God when he dreams. I dream of a journey home perhaps, a place sacred to the heart. Bari for me is a strange, special, unique place, my first love. It is not me speaking of Bari, it is Bari speaking of me. A seaport, a city that thinks it's a metropolis but it's a small corner of the suburbs. My home is in my art, as are my affections, my family, my life, my friends. The cities are a metaphor of our desires, our illusions, our small sizes...

VI – What was your geographic journey? Did you build a mental cartography for these places?

DM – Geography, the writing of the earth, and what does the earth write when it he writes? I would speak firstly of a geography of feelings. We grow up in a family, in a house, the courtyard becomes the first foreign place, the way from house to school the first trip. Then, barely kids with the friends of your own street, you venture into parallel streets: foreign land. At 14 once had a scooter you are able to get out of your neighbourhood, perhaps for a first kiss. Then comes the first trip to Greece with friends. Then you go out to study, and grow up along with a geography that grows like you, in depth, breadth and sophistication. My cartography was very precise, from Bari to New York at just 18. This prompted me to look for a coming back home through photos. Indeed the very photographs of young Gursky, and Struth and the Bechers and Elger Esser allowed me to find a way back to my suburb, in the south, where Düsseldorf and Bari, seen from afar, looked the same. Mexico then taught me an archaic interest, then the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily, Turkey, Basilicata, Egypt and Mesopotamia, a mythical regression to the common water of our history...

VI – Your images rather than having a social matrix are historical – cultural. How does the preference on research sites come out and how exactly do you build, from a formal point of view, the pictures?

DM – I don't know, there is no scientific or philological aspect in my intuitions. I study what I come across to and find what I'm looking for instinctively. The artist is profane, so I don't examine in depth, I feel, listen, meet. I'm interested in the emotional aspect, not notion-driven, in which the metaphor counts more than the content. I imitate, repeat, recover, from ancient and modern sources, postcards, encyclopaedias, textbooks, guidebooks, the art of my colleagues, teachers, friends, ancestors, everything is dialogue, only in reworking I find my voice.

VI – The continuous technological changes make easier the use of devices and improve their performance in terms of accuracy and speed of shooting. According to you does this jump forward exploit photography or, on the contrary, does it generate a solid attention to handicraft production, made possible, however, due to the medium's simplicity?

DM – I don't know Valentina, everything changes, I don't want to be ideological, I think there is also beauty in this sense of the transient. Everything changes, do you choose the gesture? Or are you chosen by your own language, your own age!? The other night I listened to David Foster Wallace in an old interview that really struck me, "Why – he asks – should we live things when we can just look at them" (on a screen)?! especially at minutes 29-30, his voice comes to us from afar, sharp on the present...
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DljS4K2mQKY>

VI – Domingo Milella's works are highly esteemed. You are represented in Italy and abroad by Grimaldi Gavin and Tracy Williams. What is exactly the art's state of health in Italy? Can you give us an overview on the Italian market towards the foreign one?

DM – Valentina you know, I don't deal with the market, I just know that today I couldn't afford some of my works. Italy, Italy, how much beauty, intelligence and history, but just look at the tragic architecture of the past 50 years to understand the narrow-minded nature, with no sense of community, of tomorrow, unfortunately. The country has been marred, not cured, not loved.

VI – Many authors of your generation are published by foreign publishers. Why isn't there in Italy this attention? How was the agreement with Gerhard Steidl born?

DM – If I had understood how these mechanisms work, I'd have a studio in Bari, I'd work with a gallery in Milan, and would publish my books in Verona. Perhaps I'm too narrow-minded myself and distrust my fellow countrymen!? My special relationship both authorial and cultural with Germany has several ramifications. I met Gerhard Steidl almost ten years ago. Working with him is a unique experience, going to Gottingen, staying there overnight. Everything is supposed to make you just focus on your book. It's the only publisher who designs, produces and prints his books in the same building. But Steidl's key is time, much time, for every detail, every paper type, every size, cover, picture, sky, time, years I would say in my case... but what's photography if not time?

VI – Does the link with the galleries allow you a margin of action on the sale of your works? Who are today's buyers?

DM – From this point of view I like the relational part of the job. I have great relationships with many of my collectors, with some of them I have also travelled and made projects together. I must say that I've been very lucky from this point of view, I've had educated and enthusiastic buyers, collections in which I could only dream of being included, by the side of my great heroes. Other young people, also my peers with whom I grew up together...

VI – You are about to introduce to us your newest and unpublished work. Basically exclusive. Why did you choose to make images and produce new ones? Politically, what is the artist for today?

DM – In this most recent work, I decided to look at pictures and signs of vanished people and cultures, old enough to be foreign to us and often not decoded. It all seems so transient and confused in 2014. I think that these almost unreadable cultures have left us strong poetic gestures. They chose beautiful places where where they left their traces. Names of names, king of kings, sons of gods, sons of sons of kings, fathers, mothers, grandparents, and children's children, sons of kings and divinities. Eventually even the Hittite scriptures, lost and almost

incomprehensible today in the mountains and in the stone, speak of human life, of 'love and surviving. That's what moves me: poetry and life.

PS

I would like to end this conversation with two images of other artists, between sacred and profane.

I am very fascinated by the period in which Richter decides, in the 70s, to paint only in gray. I visited a few days ago a room with six of these paintings at the Beyeler Foundation in Basel. Their silence was amazing, of a huge kindness and demand for listening. A form of total elegance, solitude and thought. A few days later at Brera, in Milan, I went back to visit this Piety by Giovanni Bellini, where in a gray and dead light, almost of an impossible twilight, it reads on the parapet of the representation a complex Latin phrase that struck me very much for poetry and strength:

HAEC FERRE QUUM GEMITUS IURGENTIA LUMINA PROMANT BELLINI
POTERAT FLERE IOANNIS OPUS

While the eyes full of tears almost uttered groans, this work of Giovanni Bellini could cry.

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[Giovanni-Bellini-Pietà_\(1465\)](#)