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Luigi Ghirri

Press Packet

Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

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apartamento


# The interiors of Luigi Ghirri

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MATT CONNORS & ADELE GHIRRI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIGI GHIRRI



Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

*Modena*, 1977.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

**I'm a painter, but I often look to photography as much as anything for lessons on how to think, how to see, and then, how to make. Last year I was offered a dream opportunity to curate an exhibition from the vast archives of one of my favourite artists, the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri (1943–92). Ghirri was a former cartographer turned photographer/artist, who worked for most of his life in and around his home province of Reggio Emilia, in northern Italy. His work emerged from the world of conceptual artists who were then blossoming in Italy and elsewhere. Like them, Ghirri was interested in reading the world around him as the various signs, ideas, and languages that make it up, but unlike conceptual art's effort to dematerialise, Ghirri's work seems to create new and parallel worlds through his small, subtle, and object-like photographs (all of his photographs are unique/non-editioned). Ghirri's photographs somehow feel like they have rebuilt or rewritten the world that lay in front of his camera. He was almost as interested in painted or photographic images of the world as he was in the material world itself, often using his photos to confuse or combine the two. After conquering an initial terror of the responsibility of creating a new take on the beloved photographer's work, I had an epiphany when I relaxed into the idea of starting just where I was, as a painter, looking at photographs. In January I visited Adele, Ghirri's daughter, at the archive and family home in Roncocesi, and with her help I was able to investigate all of my hunches and ideas about Ghirri's work throughout his long career. Shortly after that, Italy went into lockdown and not much later, so did Los Angeles, where I was spending the winter. Adele and I continued our conversation over the following months and into the summer, picking apart the reasons why a painter might be so obsessed with a photographer.**

**Sunday, August 9, 2020**

**Hi from Los Angeles, where I've been since January. It's so nice to see that you're getting some vacation time; I remember thinking that you had already been locked down in Reggio for so long when the lockdown finally started in LA. My visit to see you and the archive was my last trip abroad before the pandemic. I feel so lucky to have made it in time. Who knows when Americans will be able to visit Europe again, although I'm sure it's very nice without us! I've just finished installing the show remotely—via a model and tiny maquette versions of the photos (it was very fun)—so I've been really thinking about Luigi and his work again. To me the photos are intricate spaces, actual objects themselves, especially because Luigi never editioned them; they're all unique. Choreographing these into the gallery space was a challenge. It felt very much like painting or writing. This feels right. I had started to think of Luigi as a photographer who writes or collages or, actually, who builds, with signs he discovered in the world instead of just encountering or reading those signs and then taking pictures of them, if that makes any sense. I realised when working on the show that the Italian phrase for 'taking a picture' is more like 'making a picture', and that, to me, really sums up what I'm getting at—making versus taking.**

**Then, when doing research, I was so excited to find a text that explained how much Luigi was fascinated with 'the idea of building', which I'm now using as the title of the show. I think the objectness/building idea is such an exciting way to think about Luigi's work. Even when his subject was interiors, it seems like Luigi was building within the found spaces, with and inside other people's stuff (even his own), or putting**

*Untitled*. From the series Fotografie del periodo iniziale, 1971-73.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Ferrara*, 1981.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Parigi*, 1979.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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Above: *Ponza*, 1986.
Next spread: *Villa Pirondini, Correggio*. From the series Paesaggio Italiano, 1990.



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*Reggio Emilia*. From the series Paesaggio Italiano, 1984.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Modena*, 1979.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Firenze*, 1985.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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**the camera in places, in ways that either tangled up layers and objects and dimensions, foreground and background—or separated, called attention to them. Interiors are treated in the same way he treated exteriors or even landscapes or cityscapes.**

**I keep thinking of the fact that you've lived in the same house your whole life. The house really felt like one of Luigi's pictures to me, and the town did for sure, as I'd seen so many of Luigi's pictures of it before I even arrived. Does it ever seem that way to you? I wonder if you see your house or even your town through the filter of Luigi's way of seeing? And, also, I keep thinking of the renovation you're doing now on the interior walls at the house, taking the paint off to reveal the old decorative frescoes. This seems weirdly in keeping with Luigi's ways of seeing and finding, even if it's happening after he's no longer here. In his images of interiors, decorative elements (like the frescoes at your house) are so often used to suggest space or to reveal the fakeness of the spaces being photographed.**

**Thursday, August 20, 2020**

**Saluti from Montebello, a small medieval town on the hills near Rimini. I'm writing from my house, our second home where I spend the summer every year. Only 16 people live here, so life must be very different from LA! The fact that you had to install the show remotely using maquettes of the exhibition space and of the artworks themselves made me think about In Scala, a series that Luigi conceived here, in Rimini, at the theme park Italia in Miniatura—where you can easily walk around miniaturised reproductions of the Italian peninsula with scale models of all the most important landmarks. The San Pietro Basilica in Rome and the Pirelli Tower in Milan are just a short walk away; the Alps, three metres tall, are built in papier-mâché—a smaller representation of the physical world. Luigi said that 'scale indicates difference'. A photographic image, I believe, does the same. The idea of playing with scale in order to point out and question the difference between the physical world and its representation is at the core of his practice.**

**This brings me back to your reading of Luigi's work as a matter of building and making, rather than capturing fleeting moments. As you rightfully pointed out, Luigi did not intend to use photography as a technique for reproducing or witnessing something which is 'already there'; rather, as he wrote, 'there is nothing old under the sun'. He chose the photographic medium as a language through which he could explore and investigate the world he lived in—made of other images, signs, layers, plans, objects—thus building and creating new meanings and narratives.**

**When Luigi conceived a series, an exhibition, or a book, he would directly engage with the material aspects of such a process. He would use small contact prints, mix them, find the right sequence, and glue them on the pages of an album, as if—as you described—he was a writer in the act of choosing the right words to create a sentence. In the end, the way in which you had to install the exhibition at the gallery is not so different from the way Luigi used to think of his work, which is certainly the result of a continuous process of assemblage. This was as important as the final outcome.**

**Perhaps it depends on the fact that Luigi was trained and had worked as a surveyor before starting his artistic research. Working as a surveyor, you have to translate 2D drawings into actual buildings. With photography, in a way, you do the opposite. Yet, in Luigi's pictures of**


*New York*, 1989.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

*Parma*, 1984.
Next spread: *Teatro Valli, Reggio Emilia*. From the series Paesaggio Italiano, 1986.



Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luigi Ghirri." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

*Svizzera*, 1972.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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**interiors, it is possible to perceive how space is constructed, shaped, organised. His education and his knowledge of geometry certainly had an influence on his way of representing and approaching interiors with a camera.**
**Did you know he designed and built a house in Modena for him and his family in the '70s? It looks very different from the one he bought later with my mother, the one where I still live and that you visited while working on the exhibition. I can understand why you felt the same atmosphere you found in his pictures; I think he was fascinated by the typical architecture of the old houses you can find in the northern Italian countryside, and many images of interiors were taken in that type of building. For example, one of the pictures you selected for the show (the one with the recording studio) was taken in Villa Pirondini, and the structure of that villa is almost identical to my house; the light enters in the same way.**
**I am not sure whether I see my house or my town through 'the filter' of Luigi's way of seeing. I grew up there, surrounded by his photos, so for me this is all very natural and spontaneous. If I were looking at the world through that filter I wouldn't be able to tell. I would say his work influenced my way of looking more in terms of attention, attitude, curiosity. To me, Luigi made certain details which are often overlooked naturally visible, like shadows, reflections, symmetries, or connections between space and shapes.**

**Monday, August 24, 2020**
**Hi Adele! What do you mean 16 people live there?! In the town or in the house with you? Is it one of those abandoned medieval towns? The one from the picture you sent of Luigi holding up peace signs with both hands? I looked at the satellite view on Google Maps and now I think you mean 16 people, total. I want to come visit! Was it always so deserted? It's funny that I didn't think of the photos from the Italy in Miniature theme park while I was working with the model for the show; those are some of my favourite pictures of his. Is the theme park still there? It *is* really coincidentally appropriate that I was forced to deal with scale in such a similar way. Also, a lot of the images I chose have lots of nested images inside them, so the tiny versions of them were really complex! I like what you said about photography being a kind of reverse process of the surveying trade that Luigi was trained in. It must have been a little disorienting to switch between transforming two dimensions into three, and then in his off hours reversing the journey, translating, or maybe more like rendering it all right back onto a small piece of paper, almost exactly like a drawing again. It would definitely make for a brain that considers pictures as raw material. I did not know that he designed and built a house, but it really makes sense. Did he ever photograph it?**
**The pictures from Villa Pirondini are also some of my favourites; that room has almost the same frescoes that you are uncovering now at your house. They make the space really strange in the room, almost doubling the space (again, from 2D to 3D and back), and then the room itself is filled with this incredible trail of musical instruments: drums, synthesisers, amps, cords, cables, but with no people, and this incredible oblique light, with a vanishing point out the back door. It really looks like a painting by Puvis de Chavannes or something. I keep seeing paintings in all the photos—because I'm a painter—but I think I can tell that painting was important to Luigi. He frequently focuses**

**on painting or drawing that he found within images of interiors, in addition to the painted façades, carnival rides, close-ups of maps that almost become abstract. He's almost hunting for it. At your house I saw these framed children's posters (I think?) that were hanging opposite each other, one about 'the elements of photography' and the other about 'the elements of painting'. I picked one photo of someone actually painting a landscape, and a lot of the interiors I chose have painting, drawing, or extremely graphic/decorative elements, especially the picture from the big discotheque. Do you think Luigi thought about painting and drawing?**

**Monday, August 31, 2020**
**Hi Matt, in Montebello there are 16 people in total (but there are two restaurants)! And yes, the house is the one that appears in the picture I sent you, with Luigi standing in front of it! In the '90s there was a big group of children and we had so much fun; only one child lives there today. But it doesn't feel like an abandoned village. It at-**

*Italia in Miniatura*, 1977.

**tracts many visitors, the food is excellent, and you can see the whole Adriatic Riviera from the medieval castle. (I have just discovered that Kanye West and Kim Kardashian ate at the local osteria on a quiet evening in October when no one else was around.) You need to come visit sometime soon, so I can take you to Italia in Miniatura, which, of course, is still open to the public.**
**Going back to your questions, Luigi did not photograph the house he designed in Modena, but some of the photos from Identikit were taken there, and all the pictures from Atlante were taken in the basement of that house, in 1973. The frescoes at Villa Pirondini definitely look like the ones I recently discovered at my house! I wonder if Luigi knew they were there, underneath a thin layer of white paint, when he and my mother bought it in the early '90s. As you said, frescoes are a recurring subject in his work. I think that throughout his lifetime, Luigi looked at painting more than he looked at photography. I never had the chance to have a conversation with him about it, and he never openly talked about this, so these are all suggestions. But in his work, in his writings, among the books in his library, I look for traces and hints that can guide me through these sorts of questions. Luigi col-**


*Casa Benati*, 1976.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Mantova*. From the series Paesaggio Italiano, 1985.



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*Studio Aldo Rossi*, 1989-90.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Studio Aldo Rossi*, 1989-90.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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*Villa Pirondini, Correggio*, 1990.

**apartamento - Luigi Ghirri**

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lected many volumes on the history of painting: Italian Renaissance, the Old Masters, Dutch painters, and the artists he loved the most, like Piero della Francesca, Pieter Bruegel, Jan Vermeer, Pieter Jansz Saenredam, just to name a few.

Luigi had a particular interest in painting since he was a kid; he recounted that his parents, who came from a rural background, would save money just to take him and his sister on a day trip to Florence, where they got to see frescoes by Beato Angelico, Ghirlandaio, or Giotto. These first encounters with the Old Masters really struck him and had a great influence on his thought, and it is during these short trips that Luigi started photographing with a small camera. After that, he never stopped enquiring and interrogating himself about the enigmatic aspects of vision, and of images themselves. His endless interest and curiosity in art history shaped his way of looking and his sensibility: images within other images, mise en abymes, frontal views, ambiguous juxtapositions or reflections—these elements are traditionally employed in painting and are all present in Luigi's work.

Left: *Ritratto di Ghirri*. Walter Lotti, 1956. Right: *Ritratto di Walter Lotti*. Luigi Ghirri, 1971.

Besides that, when he was young, he spent a lot of time at the studio of his uncle Walter Iotti, a painter, and he always acknowledged the importance of this relationship in his growth as an artist. Iotti's favourite subject was Scandiano, the small town where Luigi was born. By no coincidence, in the '80s Luigi photographed the same country fair that Uncle Walter painted when Luigi was a child. Those paintings were the door through which Luigi started developing his interest in art, in the 'realm' of images, in any representation of the external world. His research, in this respect, focused on questions of perception, how we organise—or better yet, how we build—the structure of the world through perception and how we translate that by means of a visual language (whether it's painting, drawing, or photography). He was a passionate reader of philosophy, and the writing of authors such as Giordano Bruno, Erwin Panofsky, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, or Walter Benjamin were the most important references in this sense.

I keep wondering what he would think about the proliferation of images we have experienced over the past two decades, the way in which they circulate, and how this is affecting our thoughts and our perception of the world.

Connors, Matt, and Adele Ghirri. "The Interiors of Luīgi Ghirrī." *Apartamento*, no. 26, Autumn/Winter 2020–21, pp. 82–115.

*Fenis*. From the series Paesaggio Italiano, 1981.



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**Tuesday, September 8, 2020**

**Hi Adele, I didn't know about Luigi's painter uncle and this big influence on him. Has anyone ever shown their work together? It's so interesting that he was also very location-focused. It seems like Luigi then took it to the extreme in the Identikit works he created—photographing his own and other people's bookshelves and books to make these portrait/interior/landscape hybrids out of them. I was looking at a picture from this series after you mentioned it, and I think it must be Luigi's own books; the top shelf has so many painting books! (Kandinsky, Klee, Delacroix, Cimabue, Morandi, etc.) The bottom shelf is almost all about music and musicians, which is another real thread that runs through his work. It's something that fascinates me, probably because I'm also very music-focused and am always thinking about how it could come into my own work. I remember when you and I were in Bologna and you told me all about his super close friendship with the Italian singer Lucio Dalla. He writes about music a lot (there's a piece in his book *The Collected Essays* where he talks about hating Prince, which I would like to take issue with!). His images of the band set-up in the Villa Pirondini we were talking about, and all the different record cover art he did, as well as just general pictorial references to music (written music, musical instruments) get at something about his use of the material/objective world to picture the immaterial. It's hard to explain what I mean. It makes me think about your story of him being down in the basement of the house he built, photographing the Atlante series, making extreme close-ups of map pages, and the resulting images being these otherworldly, kind of oceanic or spacey abstractions. From the basement out into space! That kind of encapsulates the magic of his whole practice for me. Hope all's well in Italy. I think maybe you are back in Reggio now?**

**Thursday, September 10, 2020**

**Dear Matt, I am finally back home after my holidays! Yes, Luigi's and Uncle Walter's works were shown together in an exhibition in 1997, and it was accompanied by a small catalogue. In my previous email I forgot to mention Morandi as one of Luigi's dearest artists. The work Luigi did at his studio/house in Bologna at the end of the '80s is also quite representative of what you said in relation to the Identikit series, making a portrait of a person, an artist, only by showing their personal objects, the light, and the atmosphere of their lived, intimate space. Moving to the bottom shelf: music constantly accompanied Luigi through his lifetime, during his work and travels. Luigi, as you probably know, was literally obsessed with Bob Dylan! His love for music led him to the collaborations with several Italian singers and musicians in the '80s, above all Lucio Dalla, with whom he shared a close friendship. He and my mother followed Dalla during his tours in Italy, Paris, and the US. The famous *DallAmeriCaruso* album was recorded during the American tour and the cover artwork was designed by my mother. As well as painting, music informed Luigi's work and poetics more than any other medium. Indeed, he built a large vinyl collection year by year, which now includes thousands of pieces, some of which appear in Identikit. Sometimes, on the bookshelves, among the books and records, we can see other things—like a small globe, dried flowers, postcards, reproductions of paintings, and so on. I recently discovered that Luigi named those arrangements 'nests', which somehow brings me back to the title of the exhibition you have chosen, 'The Idea of Building'. I can't wait for this to happen. My very best, and thank you again for everything!**

*Marina di Ravenna*, 1970.

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British Journal of Photography

# Colour pioneer Luigi Ghirri's The Map and the Territory

Written by Marigold Warner
*Published on 13 February 2019*


Salzburg, 1977 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri

**"There has never been a chance outside of Italy to see a substantial body of his work" - until now, with curator James Lingwood spearheading a major revival of Luigi Ghirri's work**

"My aim is not to make PHOTOGRAPHS, but rather CHARTS and MAPS that might at the same time constitute photographs," writes photographer and prolific writer on his craft, Luigi Ghirri, in his 1973 essay, *Fotografie del periodo iniziale*.

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.

Trained as a surveyor, the iconography of maps and atlases prevail Ghirri's photography. "But what if you map his work?" asks curator James Lingwood. "He was, in a way, mapping the changing topography of modern life in Europe in the 1970s, and also the change in the relationship between people and images."

*The Map and the Territory* – which showed at Germany's prestigious Museum Folkwang last year before moving on to the equally renown Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, and is now opening at Paris' Jeu de Paume – is a large but focused exhibition honing in on the first decade of Ghirri's work. Ghirri captured 1970s Europe in landscapes, people, and still-lifes, but all the images share a soft and lucid elegance. His work is tightly cropped, yet sparse and economical – in contrast with contemporaries such as William Eggleston, says Lingwood. "They have a beautiful sense of space about them," he adds.

Widely credited as the European pioneer of colour photography – which at the time was struggling to find its way into museums and galleries – Ghirri was unphased by the medium's association with tourist snaps. "I take photographs in colour because the real world is in colour, and because colour film has been invented," he wrote.

*Orbetello, 1974 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.


*Engelberg, 1971, Abzug 1979 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

According to Lingwood, curator of the exhibition, Ghirri is "one of the most significant figures in the history of photography in the last 50 years". He has been quietly influential, he adds, but until now, "there has never been a chance outside of Italy to see a substantial body of his work". Now, more than 20 years after his death in 1992, he's gaining wider recognition, championed by artists such as Thomas Demand over the last ten years, and his writings published in English two years ago.

*The Map and the Territory* will subdivide the photographs into the 14 initial groupings from Ghirri's defining exhibition of the 1970s, *Vera Fotografia* (1979) in Parma. "We were very keen to show his work in the particular grouping that he thought about," Lingwood explains. "He thought of these groups being in themselves works, like open works."

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.

To accompany the show Lingwood has compiled a book of the same name, which includes every photograph from the exhibition plus all of Ghirri's writing from the 1970s, and which is published by MACK. "There was no-one else who built a body of work in colour, in such range and depth, in 1970s Europe," says Lingwood.

*Luigi Ghirri, The map and the territory is on show at Jeu de Paume, Paris from 12 February – 20 May 2019 www.jeudepaume.org The accompanying book is published by MACK, priced £40 www.mackbooks.co.uk*

*Brest, 1972 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.


*Modena, 1972 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*


*Modena, 1973, Abzug 1979 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.

*Lido di Spina, 1974 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

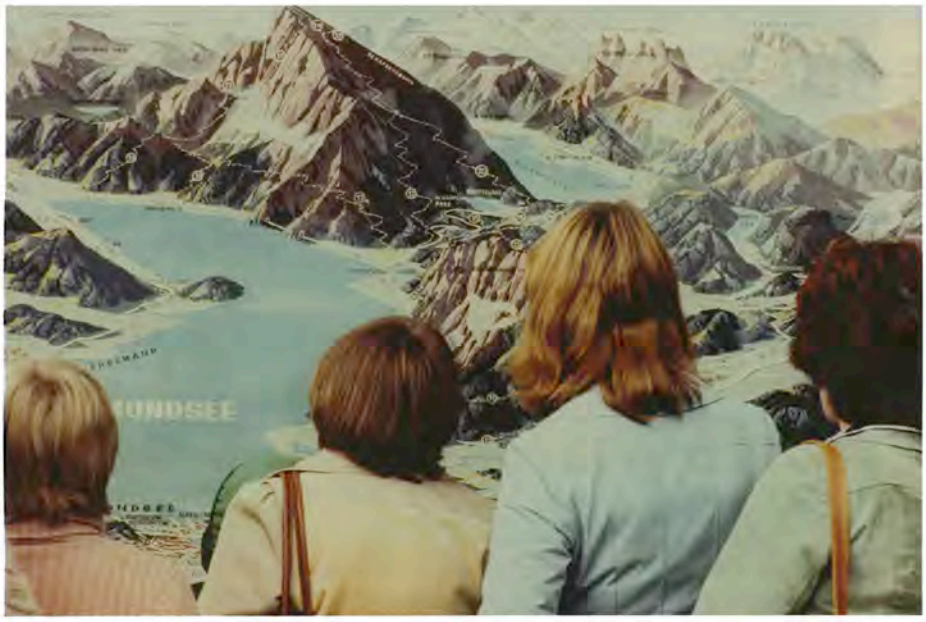
*Rimini, 1977 © Eredi Luigi Ghirri*

Warner, Marigold. "Colour Pioneer Luigi Ghirri's 'The Map and the Territory.'" *British Journal of Photography*, February 13, 2019.

The New York Times Magazine

**On Photography** By Teju Cole

# With his serene pictorial puzzles, the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri revealed the world itself to be a photomontage.



**I look at** Luigi Ghirri's work daily: There's a postcard reproduction of one of his photographs on my fridge. It depicts four women, turned away from us and toward a mountainous landscape. They could be taking in an actual vista — the perspective is correct — but the mountains and their intervening lakes have text superimposed on them, and so we realize the women are standing before an *image* of a landscape, either a poster or a mural. Ghirri took the photograph in Salzburg, Austria, in 1977. I find it reassuring, amusing (that slight stutter in parsing it), simultaneously simple and complex in ways that are difficult to explain.

Luigi Ghirri was one of the outstanding photographers of his generation. His work was largely made in Europe, and most of it focused on a small area of northern Italy, the region of Emilia-Romagna, where he was born and where he died, in 1992, of a heart attack at the too-young age of 49. Today, his work is in a peculiar posthumous phase, both celebrated and elusive. Perhaps no Italian photographer of the 20th century was more influential: There are traces of his gentle, lucid, cerebral style all over contemporary photography. As of a few years ago, I had seen his images in articles and exhibitions, but information about him was hard to come by. I bought several books dedicated to his work that were in Italian, a language I don't read. An English-language collection, published as "It's Beautiful Here, Isn't It . . . ," was in print but scarce.

Ghirri's pictures are calm and mysterious — just a bit out of reach, like his books. His constellation of favored themes is distinct: maps, landscapes, windows, still lifes, interiors, fog, the seaside, the objects in artists' studios, people obscured in some way and many images that test the divide between the world and an image of the world (murals, miniatures, postcards), often bearing an ironic gleam. You feel that in each picture there's more than meets the eye, but the feeling remains unresolved.

Ghirri's work is in full color, like that of William Eggleston, the American photographer with whom he has the strongest kinship and who admires him greatly. But Ghirri does not share Eggleston's intense hues, the angry reds and livid greens that Eggleston hunted down in unspectacular everyday

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subjects. Ghirri's favored palette is pale, soothing, often tending toward pastel, as if the images did not wish to speak too loudly or overassert their presence. Contrary to the current trend in art photography, his pictures are printed small, sometimes no bigger than the size of a snapshot. On a gallery wall, even at such modest scale — or because of the scale — they are remarkably effective. In a group show, they stand out like brilliant individual lines of poetry amid the undifferentiated prose of much larger pictures.

The recent publication of "Luigi Ghirri: The Complete Essays 1973-1991" (Mack) enriches and complicates our sense of Ghirri's achievement. Right from the beginning of his career, he wrote frequently and with great intelligence about his own work and the work of other photographers. "The Complete Essays" comprises 68 texts, most of them brief, in which he presents an allusive, fragmented and recursive account of his photographic philosophy. Some of his arguments can be abstruse, and rarely does he give interpretations of individual pictures. But at several moments, he produces lines of epigrammatic clarity that echo the lucidity of his photographs. "Every part of the landscape, from the roofs of houses to signs on walls, seems to await recognition via his loving eye." The sentence, which appears in an essay on Walker Evans, applies very well to Ghirri himself.

The world, as Ghirri sees it, is full of images, and a picture of the world must also contain many images of images. The pictures he made, haunted by this notion of an all-encompassing view, often seem like fragments of something too complex to assemble into one coherent whole. He writes: "A key element in this work was perhaps the fondness I've always had for places and objects that seem to contain everything: encyclopedias, museums, maps." There is the defamiliarization of scale that comes with such views. Ghirri compares his vision to that in "Gulliver's Travels" or "Alice in Wonderland," an imaginative space in which it's hard to tell what's very large, or what's very small. Curiously, within the dreamlike logic of his pictures, the difference hardly matters. "The world might appear at first through a telescope, and then under a microscope, or perhaps through a set of binoculars that can be used to both to magnify and minimize. In some photographs we can make out the building blocks of fables, the supporting framework and the scaffolding which props up this 'land'; and yet, rather than exposing the tricks or taking away the magic, they contribute to the illusion."

When we see, in a picture by Ghirri, a railing that spells out the word *MARE* ("sea") overlooking the sea, the feeling of being in a fable is intensified, not lessened. The photo contains two islands, one closer to us and seen only in part, the other misty in the far distance. There's a tiny ship, toylike, just under the R in *MARE*. The horizon line is indistinct, evanescent. And in the foreground, the railing, where it curves at the M, has been dinged. These little touches, these grace notes, testify to the intensity of Ghirri's seeing and his love for the muted but multidimensional drama the world contains.

In another photograph, we see the printed image of a ship, torn so that the curve of the rip is like a huge wave that the ship peeks over, and we enter a strange little dream: The ripped paper is both a ship and a photo of a ship. Things in Ghirri's pictures are rarely simply themselves; they look like themselves, or look

Above, from top: "Bastia" (1976); "Grizzana" (1989-1990). Previous page: "Salisburgo" (1977).

**Teju Cole** *is a photographer and novelist and the magazine's photography critic. "Known and Strange Things," a collection of his essays, will be published by Random House in August.*

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like images of themselves, or bear their own names, or are framed like pictures. By this application of some slight conceptual pressure, he helps us realize this is also very much how the world is.

**Intriguing work naturally** summons analogy. In describing the artists who have guided him, Ghirri mentions Evans, but also Louis Daguerre, Diane Arbus, Jorge Luis Borges, Fernando Pessoa, Ry Cooder and Bob Dylan, among many others. I find no mention of the American poet Elizabeth Bishop in Ghirri's essays, but his work speaks to me in a way similar to hers. And if they have a shared language, it is a language Italo Calvino speaks, too. All three create a folkloric atmosphere; all have the gift of working in miniature without being trivial; all engage, very gently, the surreal comedy of the world looked at peculiarly.

Bishop was joyously obsessed with maps, and the four collections of poetry published in her lifetime, not counting "The Complete Poems" (1969), all made territorial allusions: "North and South" (1946), "A Cold Spring" (1955), "Questions of Travel" (1965) and "Geography III" (1976). These titles remind me of the abundance of globes, atlases, maps, monuments, tourist sites, road signs and postcards in Ghirri's work. When I read Bishop's "12 O'Clock News," for instance, in which the objects arrayed on the writer's desk — the gooseneck lamp, the typed sheet, the envelopes, the ink bottle — become stand-ins for a mythical landscape, I can't help thinking of the still lifes of vases, jars and books that Ghirri photographed in the painter Giorgio Morandi's studio. A section of Bishop's poem, marked "typewriter," reads in part as follows:

"The escarpment that rises abruptly from the central plain is in heavy shadow. ... What endless labor those small, peculiarly shaped terraces represent! And yet, on them the welfare of this tiny principality depends."

What Bishop evokes here, and what Ghirri's work confirms, is a sympathy with the lives of objects, the way the little things that surround us vibrate with accreted knowledge, as if they had been taking note of human behavior all along. In one essay, Ghirri writes about Daguerre's ability to "awaken the inanimate world through light." When an artist praises another artist, I pay attention:

**You feel that in each picture there's more than meets the eye, but the feeling remains unresolved.**

It often reveals what the one who praises would wish to be, or already is. Without question, Luigi Ghirri's pictures awaken the inanimate world through light. This is why their magic never palls, and it is why I have kept "Salisburgo, 1977" on my fridge for going on two years now. To "get" Ghirri's photographs, in the sense of untangling the initial confusion about what they depict, does not exhaust their poetry. His photographs play with scale, symmetry, tourism and travel; they betray a love of the land and a wish to care for it; they return us to the schoolroom, restoring the enchantment of knowledge without naïveté; and they somehow cut through the noise of our image-saturated environment to become, as he wrote, "passwords for the ineffable." ◆

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Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

# ARTFORUM

APRIL 2013






Cover: **Luigi Ghirri, *Marina di Ravenna* (detail), 1986**, C-print, 12⅛ x 18⅛". From the series "*Paesaggio Italiano*" (Italian Landscape), 1980–92. (See page 196.)

From top: **Mădălina Dan, *Iluzionistele*, 2009.** Performance view, National Center of Dance Bucharest, February 6, 2009. Mădălina Dan. Photo: Irina Stelea. **David Kakabadze, *Object with Lances and Mirrors* (detail), 1924**, wood, glass, metal, tempera, 29½ x 23¼". **Terrence Malick, *The Tree of Life*, 2011**, 35 mm, 65 mm, and HD video, color, sound, 139 minutes. **Nam June Paik, *TV Crown* (detail), 1965/1999**, manipulated television set, 54 x 26 x 22".

# Luigi Ghirri

PORTFOLIO

Luigi Ghirri, *Engelberg*, 1972. C-print, 4⅛ x 6⅛". From the series "Kodachrome," 1970–78.

**Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri (1943–1992) was once a surveyor, and indeed, his camera combed the landscape like a theodolite, producing pictures that often possess a fathomless depth of field, each glare and hue and nick intact. The image can seem as delicately preserved as an artifact, while auguring a day when *all* images might be rendered in such infinitesimal detail, with infinite information. Ghirri's technical experimentation only heightened this impression, as he worked to develop a specific finish for a matte surface as elusive as it is impenetrable. In anticipation of the major retrospective of his work opening on April 24 at MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, *Artforum* presents two special expositions of Ghirri's ranging path: a synthetic essay by historian MARIA ANTONELLA PELIZZARI, preceded by a suite of never-before-published photographs by the artist—yet another extraordinary secret Luigi Ghirri left to the world.**

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

Luigi **Ghirri**, ***Modena*, 1973**. C-print, 11⅝ x 7⅝". From the series "*Paesaggi di cartone*" (Cardboard Landscapes), 1971–74.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Capri*, 1981**, Cibachrome print, 7 ⅛ x 11". From the series "*Paesaggio Italiano*" (Italian Landscape), 1980–92.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Tra Mantova e Verona* (Between Mantua and Verona), 1988.** Cibachrome print, 4¾ x 7¾". From the series "*Il profilo delle nuvole*" (The Outline of Clouds), 1980–92.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, ca. 1970–72,** C-print, 5⅛ x 7½". From the series "*Fotografie del periodo iniziale*" (Photographs from the Early Period), 1969–72.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, ca. 1970–72.** C-print, 4¾ x 6½". From the series "*Fotografie del periodo iniziale*" (Photographs from the Early Period), 1969–72.

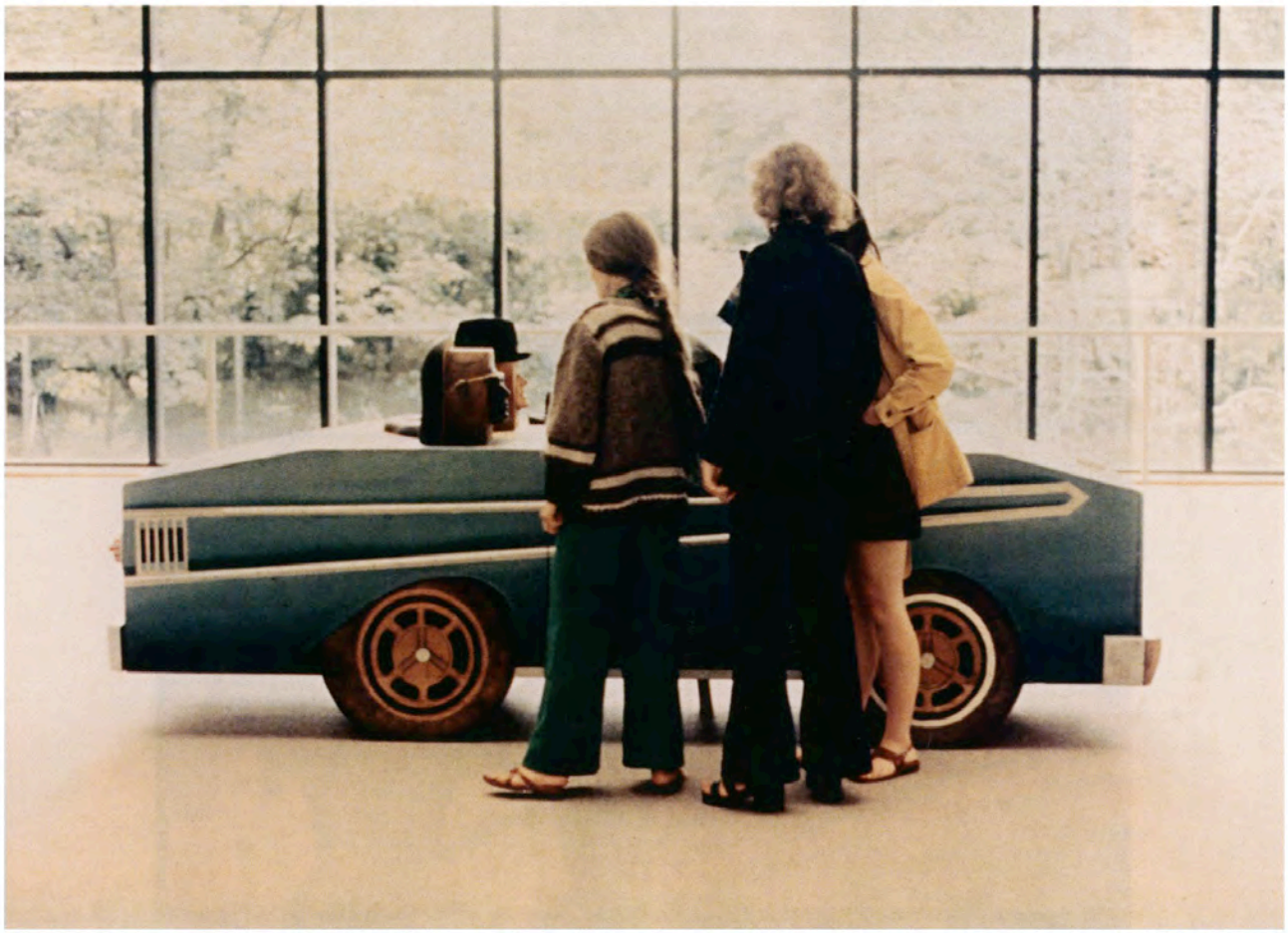
Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Riviera Romagnola*, ca. 1980–84**, C-print, 11¾ x 7⅛". From the series "*Paesaggio Italiano*" (Italian Landscape), 1980–92.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Puglia*, 1986.** C-print, 9¾ x 6½". From the series "*Paesaggio Italiano*" (Italian Landscape), 1980–92.

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.



**Luigi Ghirri, *Olanda* (Holland), 1974,** C-print, 5 x 6⅞". From the series "*Diaframma 11, 1/125, luce naturale*" (F-Stop 11, 1/125, Natural Light), 1970–79.

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**Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, ca. 1971–73.** C-print, 5 x 6 ⅞". From the series "*Paesaggi di cartone*" (Cardboard Landscapes), 1971–74.

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# Between Two Worlds

MARIA ANTONELLA PELIZZARI ON THE ART OF LUIGI GHIRRI

**IMAGINE ENTERING A DARK ROOM** in which the landscape outside appears slowly and upside down. Everything you know becomes strange and intimate, and it takes time to realize that you are immersed in a projection that endows a new sense of being in the world. Flipping the ordinary into the extraordinary, Luigi Ghirri's astonishing small color photographs share a similar effect, if not an actual orientation. Twenty-one years after the artist's premature passing at the age of forty-nine, we are still captivated by his enigmatic vision of routine life.

Living in an Italy overrun by clichéd images of its own heritage, Ghirri sought a new mode of representing the country's landscape through what he called "minimal journeys" within a few miles of his home, focusing on the marginal and minor as sites for discovery of the self. "The subjects of my photographs are those of the everyday," he wrote; "they belong to our customary field of vision: Hence, these are images we are used to enjoying passively. These images are charged with new significance as the camera isolates them from a familiar surrounding, creating a new narrative."[1] Ghirri's records of his neighborhood show a new map of visual puns and uncanny framing that guides the photographer's search for his identity, defined through place. If photography normally functions as a document of the world, through Ghirri's apparatus this duplicity is not a repetition but a making strange, not an orientation but a push to the outer limits, an irruption of the alienation and enchantment experienced by the modern subject.

Ghirri's imagination and intellectual curiosity have had a significant impact on Italian photographers who sought to revisit and reframe their country's storied iconography, and on a younger generation of artists still intent on discerning those historical traces hidden within the normalcy of daily life. Moreover, Ghirri's innovative vision has crossed national borders, impacting a global art world that continues to investigate the ambiguities of the real through photography.

The past few years have seen an escalation of Ghirri projects, ranging from Aperture Gallery's 2008 anthological exhibition "It's Beautiful Here, Isn't It"; the inclusion of Ghirri's photos in the Fifty-Fourth Venice Biennale of 2011; Mack's impeccable reprint of Ghirri's landmark 1978 book, *Kodachrome*; and the current exhibition of its vintage prints at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York to the retrospective at MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, opening this month. And later this year, Ghirri's work will be presented, once again, at the Venice Biennale, where the photographs from "*Viaggio in Italia*" (Voyage in Italy, 1984), Ghirri's ambitious curatorial project, will appropriately reflect the theme of "vice versa," identified by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, curator of the Italian

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pavilion, as a key cipher for interpreting the country's art and culture.

Such an investigation of reality was also at the core of a recent group exhibition that showcased a wide selection of Ghirri's prints: Thomas Demand's spectacular curatorial project "*La Carte d'après nature*," at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in 2010 and at Matthew Marks, New York, in 2011. Under a title inspired by René Magritte, Demand brought together prominent artists who explored the surreal nature of culture. In mixing Ghirri's photographs with such works as Tacita Dean's videos and Martin Boyce's overarching architecture, he suggested their currency. Could the photographer's doubled vision inspire contemporary viewers to rethink the significance of the banal and unsettle our image-saturated present?

**GHIRRI WAS BORN IN SCANDIANO**, in Emilia-Romagna, northern Italy, in 1943. He lived in this region his entire life, witnessing postwar recovery, the boost of the "economic miracle," the terrorism and societal breakdown accompanying the period between the late 1960s and early '80s known as the *Anni di piombo* (Years of Lead), and the sudden change from an agrarian culture to a postindustrial economy—a shift particularly felt along the flat, wide plains of the Po River. He alternated between city and country life, working as a land surveyor in Modena, and fine-tuning a precise yet imaginative understanding of spatial relationships through his professional expertise. Ghirri was also a daydreamer and a voracious reader, a visionary who rarely cleaned his glasses.

He would travel—quite literally—across the pages of an atlas, taking photographs of maps, words, and symbols and blowing them up into an impossible cartography. "*Atlante*" (Atlas), 1973, Ghirri's most daring and abstract series, reflected his awareness of the opacity of the world, and the consequent challenge of description. He was, in this regard, attuned to the writing of Italo Calvino, who aimed to "give speech to that which has no language"[2] and devised strategies to remove the clutter from our quotidian inertia. Like Calvino's fictional protagonists (Marcovaldo, Marco Polo in *Invisible Cities*, Cosimo in *The Baron in the Trees*), Ghirri was drawn to imagine an alternative world: a new city under the snow, the cracks of nature inside urban walls, a fantastic kingdom lit up at night. His last home, on an abandoned farming estate in Roncocesi, Reggio Emilia, exemplified such a place: a microcosm where, in the final years of his life, Ghirri envisioned projects that put photography at the center of a social and cultural renewal.[3]

For Ghirri, the act of taking pictures was organically linked to his awareness of being in the world;


Opposite page: **Luigi Ghirri, *Ile Rousse*, 1976**, C-print, 9½ x 14⅛". From the series "Kodachrome," 1970–78.

Above: **Luigi Ghirri, *Fidenza*, ca. 1985–86**, C-print, 7⅛ x 9⅞". From the series "*Esplorazioni sulla Via Emilia*" (Explorations on the Via Emilia), 1983–86, and "*Il profilo delle nuvole*" (The Outline of Clouds), 1980–92.

Below: **Luigi Ghirri, *Bonn*, 1973**, C-print, 5⅛ x 7½". From the series "*Colazione sull'erba*" (Luncheon on the Grass), 1972–74.

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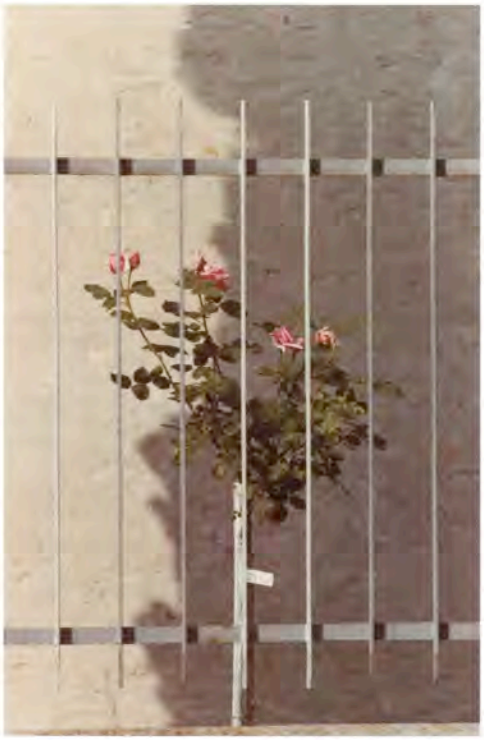

**Ghirri was a daydreamer and a voracious reader, a visionary who rarely cleaned his glasses.**

Left: **Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, 1973.** C-print, 6⅞ x 4¼". From the series "*Colazione sull'erba*" (Luncheon on the Grass), 1972–74.

Right: **Luigi Ghirri, *Marina di Ravenna*, 1972.** C-print, 11⅜ x 7½". From the series "Kodachrome," 1970–78.

Ghirri's sense of region and location was thus directly connected to vision. He detected what he termed an increasing social "disaffection" that separated the individual from the environment, and he saw this alienation as part of our culture's inability to see and represent place.[4] And yet his native landscape held a rich creative energy—as demonstrated by Visconti's and Fellini's Neorealist films staged in the rural flatland of this region (*Ossessione* [1943] and *La strada* [1954], respectively) and by Antonioni's first color film, *Red Desert* (1964), which tracked the existential desolation of contemporary industrial culture. These films opened Ghirri's eye to new possibilities of representation, just as he was first engaging with the art world.

In the late '60s, with the ascendancy of Arte Povera and the circle of Germano Celant, Ghirri became close with another group of artists in Modena—Franco Guerzoni, Carlo Cremaschi, Claudio Parmiggiani, and Giuliano Della Casa—whose Conceptual practice reflected a similar zeitgeist but who focused on much smaller-scale projects, bound to a local context. Ghirri's early photography, de-skilled and mostly black-and-white, perceived small temporal shifts and sudden disruptions of the ordinary, as he recorded performances, objects, and temporary installations. As he explained, "The most important lesson I received from Conceptual art consisted in the recording of simple and obvious things, and viewing them under a whole new light."[5] Branching into the world of graphic arts, where he would meet designer Paola Borgonzoni, his future wife, Ghirri also engaged in the creation of artists' books.[6] He designed the dust jacket of Guerzoni's *Rolleiflex* (1975) and, with Borgonzoni and a photographer friend, Giovanni Chiaramonte, launched Punto e Virgola, a short-lived publishing house (1977–79) dedicated to the circulation of new projects in photography.

Just as Ghirri began working with the Modena Conceptual group, photography in Italy was at a turning point. Walter Benjamin's writings on photography had come to prominence after their translation in 1966, and Umberto Eco's semiotics of the image had contributed to a wider discussion of the medium, no longer written off as direct mimesis. Photographers left behind their documentary practice to explore the camera's technological conventions, turning toward the kinds of investigations of apparatus and context apparent in Conceptual practices elsewhere, from the work of Jan Dibbets to that of Douglas Huebler. Ugo Mulas, for example, shifted gears with his "*Verifiche*" (Verifications), 1971–72, which analyzed photography through such signifiers as light, frame, time, optics, enlargement, and caption; Mario Cresci, who later became a close friend of Ghirri's, paid homage to Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (Artist's Shit), 1961, with an installation in 1969 that included scraps of film inside cylindrical canisters; at the 1972 Venice Biennale, Franco Vaccari placed a photo mat on the floor in a large room with empty walls and invited visitors to attach a "photographic trace" of their "fleeting visit."

Vaccari, also based in Modena, was struck by the deadpan quality of Ghirri's early work—its unsentimental, nonsensational, and nonprescribed quality—and gave him his first small show, in 1972. In the catalogue, Vaccari pointed out the ways in which these photographs departed radically from trite postwar reportage that still imagined Italy as somehow both folkloric and melancholic; there were no southern widows dressed in black, no glorified ruins from ancient history or remote little towns immersed in timeless atmospheres.[7] The friendship between the two artists was sealed; seven years later, Ghirri published Vaccari's *Fotografia e inconscio tecnologico* (Photography and the Technological Unconscious), a study that focused on the camera's automatic

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mechanism as a way to free the artist from cultural conditioning and subjectivity. Ghirri absorbed these theories into his own practice, with the goal of unhinging visual habit. He would later describe this process as "forgetting about oneself . . . not as an act of reproduction of the world, but as a way of showing one's own relationship with the world in a less schematic, regulated, or preordered manner."[8]

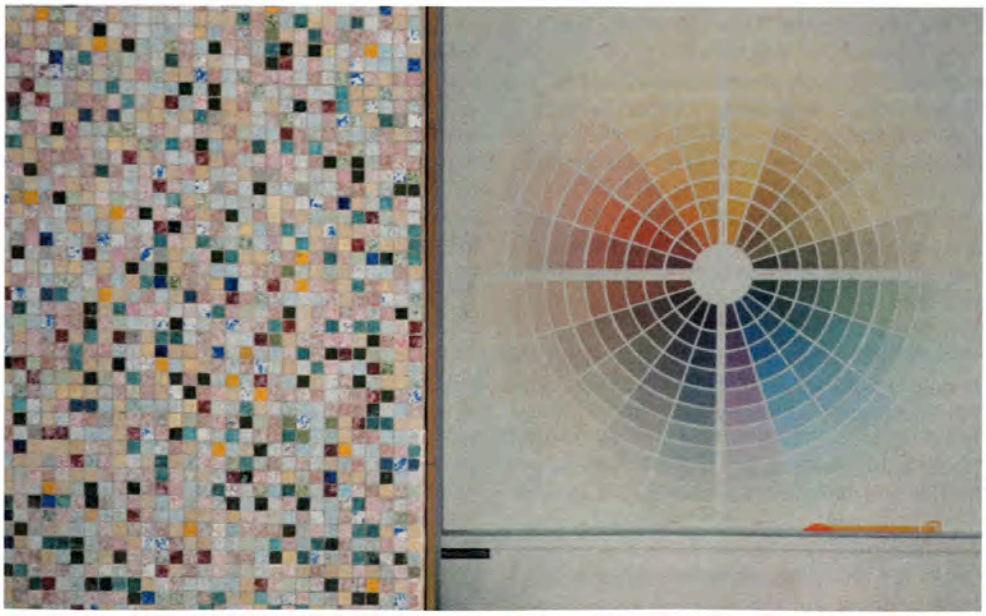
***KODACHROME***, Ghirri's first prominent photobook, published in 1978 by Punto e Virgola, exemplifies the artist's inventive framing and poetic sequencing. The metalanguage of *Kodachrome* is conveyed in its title, not only in its signification of the trademark of color photography but also in its allusion to Ghirri's preference for the snapshot as a democratic form, shared and understood by most people. The book thus harked back to the radical choice made by William Eggleston and others who pioneered "lowly" color photography in the '60s. But *Kodachrome* does not simply explore the populist immediacy of the genre; it also slows down and attenuates our experience of color photography and its commercially determined range. More so than black-and-white, color allowed Ghirri to foreground the act of seeing and its conceptual framing; as he stated, "The formal artistic gesture is already expressed in the act of taking the photograph," thus announcing his departure from an academic tradition of artistic photography that privileged the final print.[9]

*Kodachrome* distills a series of thematic projects, shot with a 35-mm camera over a period of eight years, intuitively rearranged into a new ensemble of ninety-two pictures. Ghirri frames the world as representation in a crescendo of ready-made installations, kitsch backdrops, Pop ads, commercial and tourist simulacra, and textured patterns that resemble photomontages, estranged and out of context. (The series thus anticipates strategies of mediation and appropriation prominently explored in the following decade; recognizing this prescience, Charles Traub, then director of Light Gallery in New York, gave him a show in 1980.)

In *Kodachrome*'s preface, Ghirri explains that for him, photography is a means to knowledge. In 1969, the entire planet looked in awe at the first picture of Earth taken from *Apollo 11* on its flight to the moon: an image that contained all images ever produced by humans, a "total hieroglyph," as he defines it, which left an overwhelming surfeit of information. Therefore, he continues, "the meaning that I try to give to my work is that of the verification of how it is still possible to wish to face the way of knowledge, to make it possible at last to tell the real identity of man, of things, of life, from the image of man, of things, of life."[10]

Above: **Luigi Ghirri, *Bologna*, ca. 1989–90**, C-print, 11¾ x 15¾". From the series "Atelier Giorgio Morandi," 1989–90.

Below: **Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, 1972**, C-print, 4¾ x 6¾". From the series "*Catalogo*" (Catalogue), 1970–79.



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Above, left: **Luigi Ghirri, *Bastia*, 1976**, C-print, 13⅛ x 7½". From the series "Kodachrome," 1970–78.

Above: **Luigi Ghirri, *Verso Lagosanto*, 1989**, C-print, 5½ x 10¼". From the series "*Il profilo delle nuvole*" (The Outline of Clouds), 1980–92.

**Ghirri will return, over and over, to the double sides of the Italian landscape: the historic building and the contemporary billboard, the scenic landscape and the familiar playground.**

The book's first image—a meditative view of electrical wires crossing a few clouds in the sky—exemplifies a subject that would continue to inspire Ghirri: the fantastic shape of clouds and the narrative possibility suggested by their contours. The lines drawn by the wires resemble those of a musical staff or a composition book, implying a witty understanding of the photographic process as a way to allow the natural (if man-made) elements of the landscape to "write" the image. The sequence flows from a serene contemplation of blue skies and solitary sandy beaches with a single red slide, a wind-whipped umbrella, to enigmatic mirror reflections at a campground, progressively building to a visual tour de force that questions what is real and what is represented, what is life-size and what is miniature, what is upright and what is upside down.

These ambiguous flip sides, as I call them, both disquieting and fun, recur in many individual series thematically organized by Ghirri prior to *Kodachrome*. In addition to "*Atlante*," "*Paesaggi di cartone*" (Cardboard Landscapes), 1971–74, collected in a little book of the same title in 1974, shows a contemporary landscape camouflaged by advertising found on public walls; "*Il Paese dei balocchi*" (Toyland), 1972–79, is an entertaining exploration of the simulated worlds of amusement parks, wax museums, and dioramas, which Ghirri began photographing before Hiroshi Sugimoto's well-known "Dioramas" series from 1976; "Still Life," 1975–81, is a study of found images, flea-market objects, and paintings layered against colorful backdrops, ominous shadows, and flashes of light (such combinations will inform the more complex compositions that Ghirri created with the Polaroid 20 x 24 camera, on the invitation to work in Amsterdam's Polaroid studio in 1980–81); "*Diaframma 11, 1/125, luce naturale*" (F-Stop 11, 1/125, Natural Light), 1970–79, combines portraits of people seen from behind, captured in the act of looking at posters or canvases, as if flattened and lost inside these surfaces (these precede Martin Parr's voyeuristic shots of passersby, as well as Thomas Struth's attentive observation of museumgoers); "*Colazione sull'erba*" (Luncheon on the Grass), 1972–74, whose title alludes to Manet's paradoxical painting, is a group of pictures taken on the periphery of Modena, where nature is a gentle and ironic presence patched in among ordinary dwellings, as when an artificial flock of swallows decorates a patio wall.

With its rigorously frontal compositions, "*Colazione sull'erba*" reveals a deep affinity with Ghirri's favorite photographer, Walker Evans.[11] Ghirri probably became familiar with the work of Evans through John Szarkowski's 1971 monograph and a series of exhibitions in Italy on American photography, fostered by a collaboration between the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and art historian Arturo Carlo Quintavalle at the University of Parma. (Significantly, Quintavalle also organized the first major Ghirri exhibition in Parma, in 1979.) Ghirri found a special alchemy in Evans's knowledge of light and framing, his capacity to allow things to reveal themselves spontaneously; Ghirri then translated these qualities into his own clever equivalences and "tender" records of the vernacular.[12]

The artist was also drawn to Evans's sensitivity to personal artifacts as signifiers of individual stories. Ghirri's series "Identikit," 1976–79, is an intimate survey of his own library—with LPs, postcards, and collected souvenirs hanging on his home's walls—a self-portrait sketched through the objects of affection. He revisited this subject with a small Polaroid camera (which he used between 1979 and 1983) and later expanded his repertoire, in 1989–90, as he immersed himself in Giorgio Morandi's studio and Aldo Rossi's living space, identifying meaningful clues (drawings, books, a twin bed) that portrayed the artists through invisible gestures.

If Evans was an important reference for Ghirri's intimate portrayals of domestic interiors, Ed Ruscha inspired other projects in which seriality and repeti-

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.


Left: **Luigi Ghirri, *Engelberg*, 1972.** Cibachrome print, 10⅛ x 8⅛". From the series "*Paesaggi di cartone*" (Cardboard Landscapes), 1971–74.

Above: **Luigi Ghirri, *Versailles*, 1985.** C-print, 7⅛ x 9⅛". From the series "Versailles," 1985.

tion introduce new models of representing the landscape. "Km 0,250," 1973, a series also made into an accordion book stretching just over eight feet, shows a strip of billboards, photographed at the same distance, lined up one after the other in taxonomic order; "*Catalogo*," 1970–79, a collection of deadpan images, organized by surface and pattern (shades, tiles, pebbles, tesserae), resembles a purchase catalogue; "*Infinito*," 1974—an abstract mosaic of images of the sky, recorded day by day for an entire year—experiments with the technical limitations of the camera to frame time and space.

Ultimately, then, there is another way one might consider the title of *Kodachrome* registering in this critical decade, particularly as its color is more saturated than in any of his later work: as Ghirri's response to Pop art, recuperated through Eco's analysis of the language of publicity and Gillo Dorfles's timely survey *Kitsch: The World as Bad Taste* (1968). The world of *Kodachrome* is bright and often jarring (as in the signs of consumer goods, from a Coca-Cola flag to a Sprite billboard), and photography appears itself as a commodity (see, for example, the photograph of a postcard rack full of sunset photographs, or the last image in the book, showing a bizarre camera, like a Claes Oldenburg sculpture, centered in the middle of traffic).

Ghirri's amusing and disorienting comments on tourist kitsch (an Eiffel Tower model held by a boy as if it were some kind of special relic) recur during this decade and are epitomized by the series "*In Scala*" (In Scale), 1977–78, in which he journeys to a miniature Italy set up in Rimini. The sparse visitors, walking among stereotypical buildings and alpine peaks, enhance the absurd quality of this Lilliputian landscape, which has become a toy world. Committed to investigate this country's dialectical manifestations, Ghirri will return, over and over, to the double sides of the Italian landscape: the historic building and the contemporary billboard, the scenic landscape and the familiar playground. The series "Italia Ailati," 1971–79, is precisely about this research, as its title—which flips the country's name, "Italia," backward—suggests.

**THROUGHOUT THE '80S**, Ghirri's photographs increasingly became invested in the idea of the journey as an adventure of the mind and of the eye to redefine the Italian landscape. Ghirri was not alone in his analysis of a country whose terrain, since the '50s, had been disfigured through accelerating real estate development and the growth of a chaotic infrastructure and its consequent sprawl. Orchestrated by Ghirri, "*Viaggio in Italia*" constituted the collective research of twenty photographers—an impressive realization of the communality of these issues, as much as proof of a new trend in Italian photography. Working in dialogue with architects, urban planners, economists, and writers, photographers became the visual interpreters of a landscape otherwise perceived as superfluous and nondescript.[13] "*Viaggio in Italia*" epitomized the kind of teamwork Ghirri would continue to seek out in such projects as "*Esplorazioni sulla Via Emilia*" (Explorations on the Via Emilia), 1983–86, a study of the territorial shifts across a road built by the Romans; "*Il profilo delle nuvole*" (The Outline of Clouds), 1980–92, a journey localized in the Po valley, where Ghirri and Gianni Celati collaborated on a photo-essay; and "*Paesaggio Italiano*" (Italian Landscape), 1980–92, a portfolio of his research on landscape, strung together with text from architects, architectural historians, and singer-songwriter Lucio Dalla.

Ghirri's vision expanded as he began to use medium-format cameras, conveying more directly the experience of his body in space. Recuperating earlier explorations of scale, Ghirri touched on metaphysical questions about one's existence within an infinite landscape. In a short essay from 1986–87, "The Little Man on the Brink of the Ravine,"[14] Ghirri reflects on his childhood, when *continued on page 280*

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

PELIZZARI/GHIRRI continued from page 211

he observed nineteenth-century photographs that included a lonely figure as a unit of measure of the sublime's large vistas. The "little man," he writes, appeared as a reassuring presence in those photographs, a guarantor of visual comprehension of one's monumental surroundings, and a silent companion for the artist. Ghirri describes his incapacity, as a photographer, to find that man, that anchoring subject position, and his immediate and sudden awareness that landscapes have become "uninhabitable." His mature work sprang from this anguish and longing, as he sought a way to express what it means to "inhabit" a place. (The songs of Bob Dylan, his favorite musician, accompanied his journeys through a world both intimate and sublime.) The landscape is experienced as if a threshold, and Ghirri devised numerous strategies that allowed him to cross this boundary.

One such tactic was to unfix description, to break through the barrier between what we see and where we stand. This led him to the question of whether one can convey temporal duration in photography, an inquiry that echoes Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the "time-image" in opposition to the "movement-image" in film. Ghirri, for example, describes his fascination with a sequence from *La strada* where sound combined with the cinematic progression of the picture contributes to a vivid sensorial image of landscape. How, he asks, can photography achieve this effect?[15] In order to create the multisensory, temporal impression of film, he calibrated light and color, privileging atmospheric conditions that render the world fuzzy and uncertain. This explains the incredible signature of Ghirri's photographs: at once precisely focused and preternaturally lit, so that fields glow in fog, and skies dissolve into puddles and cement.

Color printing also breached this boundary. From the beginning, Ghirri worked with a local lab technician, Arrigo Ghi, but it was in the '80s that the artist developed a more attentive palette that privileged color not only as a democratic process (as in *Kodachrome*) but also as an expressive tool that allowed the spectator to move across and beyond the flat appearance of the image, to become immersed, so to speak, in its space. He brought lightness to his subjects, avoiding saturation and experimenting with a range of photographic papers and exposure times that enhanced the muted colors and matte finish that are so characteristic of his prints.

Ghirri's personal understanding of color as a distinct mode of defining experience was filtered through the multiple journeys he made for commissions: in Capri, Naples, and the region of Puglia, where he discovered a bright and glowing Mediterranean light, reflected onto local dwellings and monumental sites; at Versailles, where he filtered its geometries and wide-open spaces, channeling the startling clarity of Eugène Atget's famous series there; and in his own region, where he shot parochial buildings as they turned into castles in the magic hour, vast rural plains with their furrowed one-point perspective, and empty roadside gas stations.

The resulting photographs are epiphanies. They demonstrate what it means to exist at a certain time and in a certain place. Sublime views of historic piazzas alternate with soccer players running in a field lit up at night. Ghirri's images return our gazes to family albums, where we find our aunt and uncle who crossed the Alpine plateau; they invite us to open a gate and walk toward the infinite; they help us retrace the mysterious memories of our childhoods, which are themselves flip sides of reality. These impressions are so vivid and astonishing in their simplicity that we now witness similar images as Ghirri-like or Ghirriesque.

**MIGHT THIS EXPLAIN** the artist's current revival? Demand, in his provocative curatorial spin, hinted at the secret nature of Ghirri's camera, shuttling between image and reality, making the discarded worthy, even valuable. One can perhaps elaborate on this. It seems clear that the reasons we are so captivated by this work lie not only in the ambiguity but also in the intimate clarity Ghirri's visions brings forth. I am reminded here of Alec Soth's pondering over Erik Kessels's installation of every photograph uploaded to Flickr over a twenty-four-hour period (the artist's pick in *Artforum*'s December 2012 issue) and of Joachim Schmid's print-on-demand books selectively drawn from various public online archives, for which the artist culls from today's digital clutter with the precise intention of creating a visual "ecology" (in Schmid's wording).

Sadly, Ghirri did not live long enough to address the digital revolution, but he thought about these issues:

> The ultimate role of photography as a contemporary language of visual communication consists of its capacity to slow down our fast and chaotic way of reading images. . . . It is as if it were possible, for once, to read a newspaper article without someone constantly turning the pages for us. Photography elicits a slowness of vision that I find extremely important, when we consider how technology has sped up perception in recent years.[16]

I like to think of these small color photographs as moments of awakening, when we begin to understand what lies between the world and its representation. Ghirri's intense vision unlocked a code, by which we now know what it means to inhabit a place. □

"Luigi Ghirri: Pensare per immagini," *organized by Francesca Fabiani, Laura Gasparini, and Giuliano Sergio, will be on view at MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome from Apr. 24 through Oct. 27; travels to the Instituto Moreira Salles in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Nov. 2013 and Feb. 2014, respectively.*

MARIA ANTONELLA PELIZZARI IS PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AT HUNTER COLLEGE AND THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)

NOTES

All translations the author's.

1. Luigi Ghirri, "Paesaggi di cartone," in *Niente di antico sotto il sole. Scritti e immagini per un'autobiografia*, ed. Paolo Costantini and Giovanni Chiaramonte (Turin: SEI, 1997), 17.

2. Italo Calvino, "Multiplicity," in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 124.

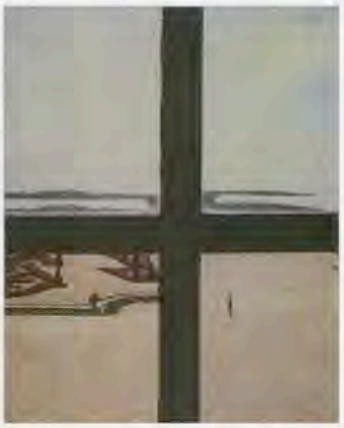
3. See Laura Gasparini, Adele Ghirri, and Quentin Bajac, *Un'idea e un progetto. Luigi Ghirri e l'attvità curatoriale* (Reggio Emilia, Italy: Biblioteca Panizzi, 2012). This publication explains the history of the collaboration between Ghirri and the Biblioteca Panizzi, which led to the important gift of

Pelizzari, Maria Antonella. "Between Two Worlds." *Artforum* 51, no. 8, April 2013, cover, pp. 196–211, 280.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2013

# Art in Review



ESTATE OF LUIGI GHIRRI/
MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
"Versailles," by Luigi Ghirri.

## Luigi Ghirri

'Kodachrome'

*Matthew Marks*
*526 West 22nd Street, Chelsea*
*Through April 20*

You could see the photographer Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992) as Italy's answer to Joel Sternfeld or William Eggleston. His photos from the 1970s, taken in and around his home region, Emilia-Romagna, flirt with the amateur aesthetic of the tourist color snapshot, much as Mr. Eggleston's pictures of the American South did, or Mr. Sternfeld's of his cross-country trips. But they have a dreamier quality and a more persistent sense of artifice; they're connected to Italian painters like Morandi and De Chirico or, as the artist Thomas Demand has suggested, to Magritte.

Mr. Demand used photographs by Mr. Ghirri to haunting effect in his Magritte-inspired 2010 group show at Matthew Marks, "La Carte d'Après Nature"; now the gallery is showing selections from Mr. Ghirri's 1978 book, "Kodachrome" (just reissued by Mack). His photography looks almost as surreal as it did in Mr. Demand's show, despite a more straightforward presentation.

Images of beaches and hillside lookouts that at first seem to be ordinary vacation shots gradually reveal an eerie obsession with symmetry. Elsewhere, ocean vistas and Alpine landscapes turn out to be restaurant murals, billboards or postcards, oddly cropped by Mr. Ghirri and mostly ignored by bored diners or pedestrians. The persistent erosion of "real" surfaces and experiences is even more pronounced in the book, in which Mr. Ghirri writes of a "labyrinth, the walls of which are ever more illusory . . . to the point at which we might merge with them."

*KAREN ROSENBERG*

Rosenberg, Karen. "Luigi Ghirri." *The New York Times,* March 29, 2013, p. C24.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

**ON PHOTOGRAPHY** | By William Meyers

## Luigi Ghirri: Kodachrome

◆ **Matthew Marks Gallery**
526 W. 22nd St., (212) 243-0200
Through April 20

In 1978, Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992) self-published "Kodachrome," a book that challenged the common understanding of what a color photograph could or ought to be. A facsimile edition of the volume was published last November, and now 25 vintage "Kodachrome" prints are on display at Matthew Marks.

"Modena" (1975) shows Mr. Ghirri's temerity: The upper 60% is a solid blue, apparently a painted surface, with light coming from the left, and "OASI" in uppercase but small-size letters in the upper middle. The bottom 40% is divided into three sections, each a slightly different yellow, with a diminutive fly and its shadow in the lower left-hand quadrant. In black and white, this image would be simply indecipherable; in Mr. Ghirri's color, it is puzzling but provocative and amusing.

Many of Mr. Ghirri's photographs include other images—photographs, posters, murals, postcards—or similar postmodernist tropes. They also have affinities with Minimalist and Pop art, but whereas most work in those genres is simple-minded, nihilistic and lacking in affect, his are witty, subtle, stimulating and—most important—charming. "Riva di Tures" (1977) is a picture of an Alpine valley in the Tyrol fit for a commercial calendar, except that a contrail runs across the clear mountain air. The bored couple sitting at a restaurant table in "Bologna" (1973) are not by the sea, but only in front of a wall painted with enormous rolling waves and passing sailboats. The red, furled beach umbrella in "Marina di Ravenna" (1972) is set off against the yellow sand and pale blue sky, and animated by its tassels blowing in the wind.

Meyers, William. "Luigi Ghirri: Kodachrome." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 23, 2013, p. A20.

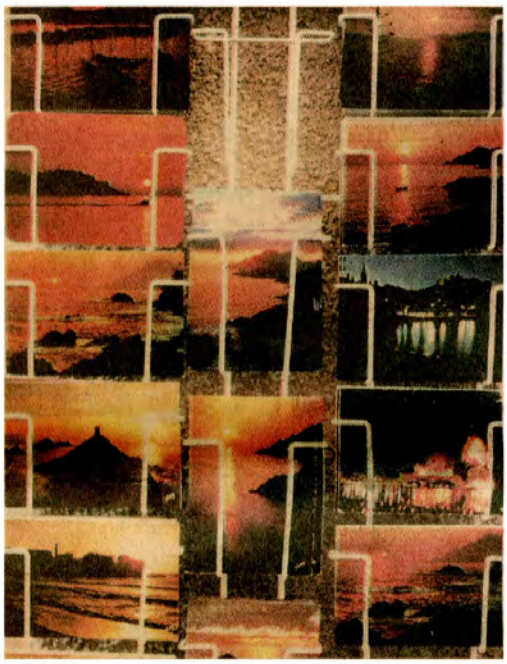
MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

THE NEW YORKER


*"Engelberg" (1972), by Luigi Ghirri, at the Matthew Marks gallery.*

"Luigi Ghirri." *The New Yorker*, March 25, 2013, p. 18.

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER



*Calvi* (1976) by Luigi Ghirri.

# LUIGI GHIRRI

## *'Kodachrome'*
## MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Born in 1942, Luigi Ghirri lived for most of his life in northern Italy, worked as a land surveyor, and had just one solo show in New York before his death in 1992. The modestly scaled photographs he created suggest a once-in-a-generation eye and an unusually agile mind. Relatively obscure in the international art world during his lifetime, he has recently been rediscovered by artists and critics.

The 25 color photos from the 1970s at Marks are casual, elegant, surreal depictions of life in Italy and the surrounding countries that Ghirri collected in his 1978 self-published book *Kodachrome*. He catches a couple walking in front of the snow-dusted peaks of Engelberg, Switzerland, just as a crane behind them lowers a giant billboard of waterfalls—an ad for Sprite. The image does both Brassaï and Weegee proud. In another, a young man examines an Eiffel Tower souvenir in Paris. The curve of his face rhymes with the slope of the monument.

Ghirri was Eggleston with a drier sense of humor. He had an acute sense for atmosphere—hazy whites and golds suffuse his vistas—that recalls Atget's Parisian street scenes. With photos like a 1976 shot in Corsica that shows a postcard rack filled with images of sunsets, he presaged later appropriation artists' use of existing imagery.

There is a quiet comedy in his close-up of a sunbather reclining in front of a cruise ship that turns out to be an optical illusion: he appears to have it made by cutting a wavy line along the bottom of a picture of a cruise ship—note the thin shorn edge—and placing it in front of bare skin. It was Photoshop done by hand.

Ghirri favored places other photographers would be likelier to avoid, like the space been two landscape paintings or a window overlooking the gardens of Versailles in which the images of a woman and the greenery surrounding her are fractured and repeated. Homing in on the kinds of moments we're programmed to ignore, he revealed the strangeness and sublimity in the stuff of everyday life.

*(Through April 20, 2013)* —A.R.

Russeth, Andrew. "Luigi Ghirri: Kodachrome." *The New York Observer,* April 2, 2013, p. B17.

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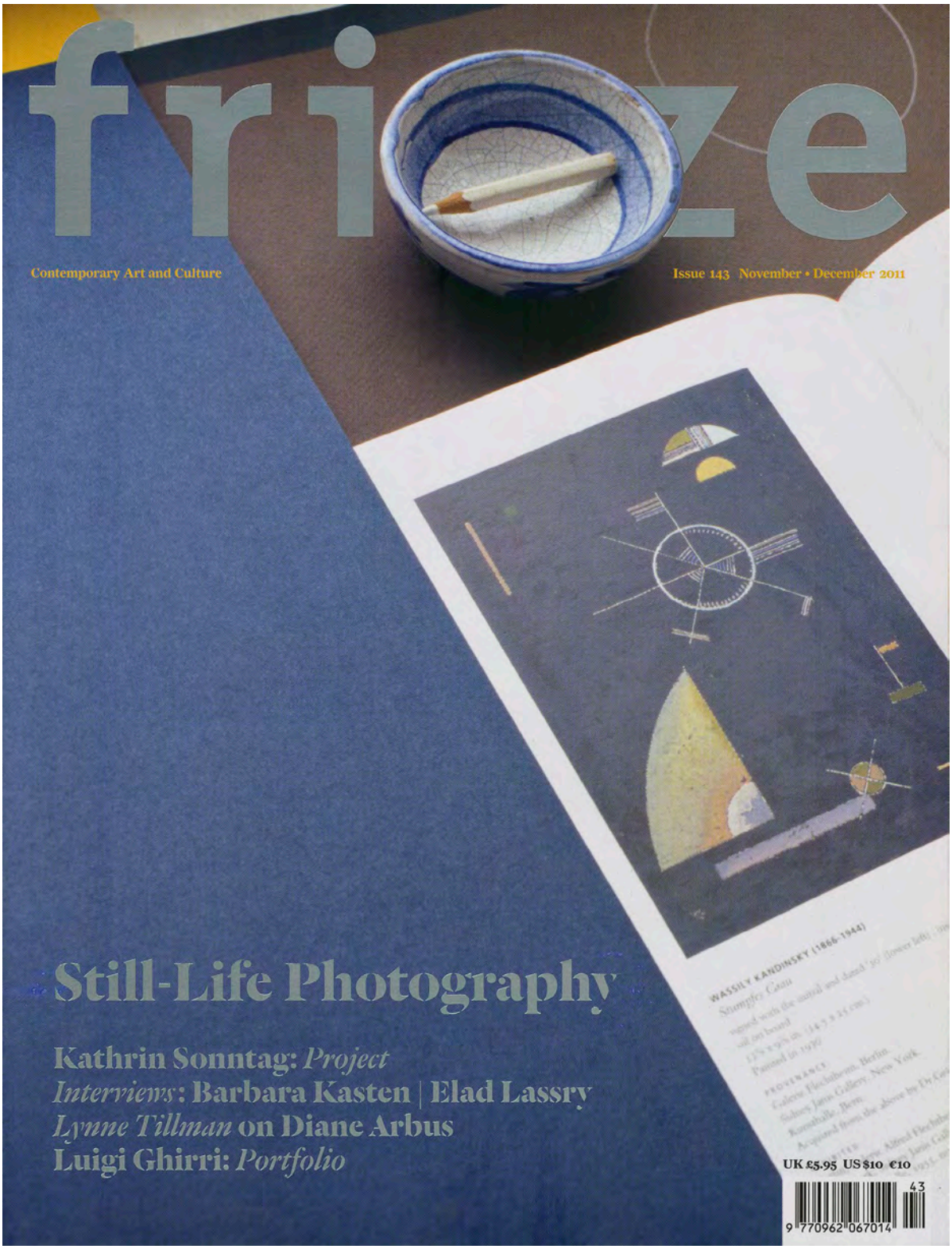



Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

November • December 2011
Still-Life Photography

# Middle



**Luigi Ghirri**
***Roncocesi***
1992
Unprinted colour negative
6×7 cm
(the last photograph taken by the artist)

Courtesy: the Estate of Luigi Ghirri

Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

***Correggio – Villa Pirondini***
1990
From the series
**'I luoghi della musica'**
(Places of Music)
C-type print
8×10 cm

***Irsina (Matera)***
1987
From the series
**'Paesaggio italiano'**
(Italian Landscape)
C-type print
12×24 cm

***Capri***
1981
From the series
**'Paesaggio italiano'**
(Italian Landscape)
C-type print
12×24 cm

When the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri died unexpectedly at his home in Reggio Emilia in 1992, he had been working on two projects: a series of still lifes, and a series depicting the decaying houses of the Po Valley in the northern Italian province where he had lived most of his life. The last exposed frame on Ghirri's roll of film – showing a tributary of the Po River receding into a distant misty horizon – summarizes his lifelong attempt, in his own words, 'to be able to finally distinguish the precise identity of man, things, life from the image of man, things and life'.[1]

Ghirri's photographs are often likened to memories or poems, but for me they are most like photographs. His images heavily bear the marks of the medium's capabilities and shortcomings: its rendering of three-dimensional or 'real' information onto a single flat surface; its deletion of the space around its frame; its reduction of a vast landscape to the size of a postcard. And especially now, in their faded and ageing present state, Ghirri's prints from the 1970s and '80s signal themselves as relics of the first wave of the then-new colour photography, carrying with them both prescience and nostalgia. Their dry humour and deadpan, often ironic, compositions and style remind us of better-known practitioners of the period, but they also speak in a photographic language – one that seeks to highlight the medium's specific qualities – that feels just as relevant today.

Though he exhibited extensively in Italy and abroad while he was still alive, achieving recognition as an artist, writer, teacher and curator, Ghirri's legacy has been somewhat scattered since his death, and his work has remained largely unknown outside of Italy. The past few years have seen a resurgence of interest in his practice, thanks to a significant exhibition and subsequent catalogue published by Aperture in New York (2008–9) and solo exhibitions this year at galleries in Berlin, London, Brescia and Zurich. A selection of his prints were brought together in a 2010–11 group show curated by Thomas Demand at the Nouveau musée national de Monaco and Matthew Marks Gallery in New York; some of his photographs are included in 'ILLUMInations' at the 54th Venice Biennale; and an exhibition curated by Elena Re will be held at the Castello di Rivoli in Turin next year. But the relatively small collection of prints gathered in these exhibitions belies Ghirri's prolific output. Of the dozens of publications of his photographs and writings (many of them issued by the small art press he ran with his wife, Paola Ghirri, between 1977 and 1980), nearly all of them are now out of print, and only one has been translated into English. Since his death, there has not been a comprehensive retrospective of his work in any major institution.

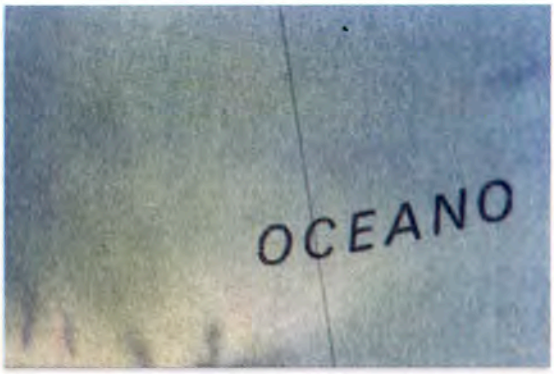
Correggio – Villa Pirondini courtesy: Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia. Mummery + Schnelle, London, and the Estate of Luigi Ghirri • Irsina (Matera)

Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

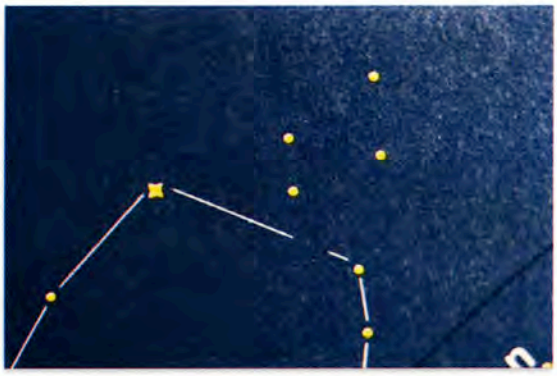
When he died in 1992, Italian photographer **Luigi Ghirri** left behind a body of work characterized by its intimacy, humour and focus on both the world he lived in and the role of images within it *by Christy Lange*

# All Other Images

Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.





And it may prove challenging to do so. Throughout his life, Ghirri conceived of his work in series, primarily for publications rather than for exhibitions. When he did print his works for display, he did so in a modest scale, usually no larger than a postcard. Some series he carried on for decades, constantly reshuffling and reorganizing them for books and exhibitions. His photographic pursuit was both a monumental task and a modest attempt: sustained series such as 'Italia ailati' (Italy on the Margins, 1971–79) and 'Paesaggio italiano' (Italian Landscape, 1980–92) reflect an almost anthropological urge to research and survey his surroundings. But even within them, there is always a tendency toward a more subjective, spontaneous type of recording, captured in the single, often witty images that offer themselves up like ironic observations or quizzical statements: an orphaned potted cactus, two postcards sitting in a rack, a window closed off by a broken shutter, or a crumpled piece of gift-wrap depicting a starry night.

In the introduction he wrote for his catalogue *Kodachrome* in 1978, Ghirri framed the dilemma he returned to again and again: namely, that the world had already been completely and thoroughly mapped and represented. Ghirri described the profound impression left on him by seeing the photograph of Earth taken from the Apollo spacecraft in 1969: 'It was not only the image of the entire world, but the image that contained *all other images*

**Ghirri's approach, which he termed 'sentimental geography' or 'indefinite cartography', was less matter-of-fact than it was punctuated and infused with irony, wit and the use of visual puns.**

of the world.'[2] This sense that the whole visible world – quite literally, the surface of the Earth and all the things within it – had already been rendered and described, consumed Ghirri for the rest of his life, but it did not limit him. Within that image of the Earth seen from space 'the space between the infinitely small and the infinitely large was filled by the infinitely complex: man and his life, nature'.[3] And it was that infinitely complex part of the world that Ghirri set out to document.

In the early years of his career, Ghirri moved to Modena, a small city between Bologna and Parma, where his photography was informed by both his day job as a surveyor and by the circle of conceptual artists he met there. His 1973 series 'Atlante' (Atlas) characterizes the more rigorously conceptual aspects of his early practice and suggests he was working through the condition that 'the only possible journey now seems to be within the sphere of signs and images'.[4] In 'Atlante', Ghirri photographed close-ups of the pages of his own atlas at home. The names and symbols inscribed on the maps – the word 'Desert' typed in block capitals over a speckled field of pointillist brownish dots, or the smattering of tiny pine trees used to symbolize a forest – show us how far removed these cartographic representations fall from the landscapes they represent.

In the other bodies of work he began in the 1970s, including 'Paesaggi di cartone' (Cardboard Landscapes, 1971–74) and 'Still-Life' (1978–81), Ghirri combined his conceptual concerns with a more observational, almost anthropological, approach to surveying his immediate surroundings. Though he was developing his practice far from the New Topographics in the US, his impulse to survey the land emerged in tandem with the burgeoning movement. Indeed, his writings and works from the period reveal the impact of being exposed to a historical show of the American Works Progress Administration photographers in 1975, and to work by Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander and William Eggleston. In a similar spirit, Ghirri's images saw the ordinary surfaces of the contemporary vernacular – street corners, petrol stations, billboards, posters, shop windows – as worthy of artistic scrutiny. But Ghirri's approach, which he termed 'sentimental geography' or 'indefinite cartography',[5] was less matter-of-fact than it was punctuated and infused with irony, wit and the use of visual puns. His images represent the chance meeting of the past with the present, as if he intended to preserve the precise look of a Total petrol station in *Carpi* (1973) or a gelateria in Parma (*Parma*, 1984) for posterity.

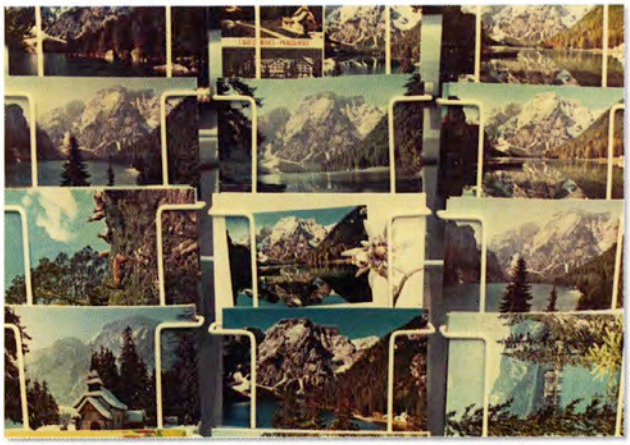
In surveying his surroundings, Ghirri concentrated almost exclusively on the local, making the majority of his work in the Po Valley. 'I love minimal Sunday journeys,' he wrote, 'no further than three kilometres from my house.'[6] What he encountered in that radius had little in common with the more clichéd or majestic landscapes of Italy. Rather than stunning coastlines or mountain views, the main features of Reggio Emilia are its flat, two-lane roads running through nondescript, industrial towns and fields dotted with decaying silos and barns. Ghirri saw in the area a kind of melancholy:

Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

**Left:**
***Ferrara***
1981
From the series
**'Topographie–Iconographie'**
(Topography–Iconography)
C-type print
24×16 cm

**Below:**
***Reggio Emilia***
1973
C-type print
12×18 cm

**Bottom:**
***Lago di Braies***
1978
From the series
**'Topographie–Iconographie'**
(Topography–Iconography)
C-type print
15×23 cm

**Opposite page:**
***Modena***
1973/2011
From the series
**'Atlante'**
(Atlas)
Lambda prints
Each 30×40 cm

**Above top:**
***Modena***
1983
C-type print
12×6 cm

**Above middle:**
***Cervia***
1989
From the series
**'Paesaggio italiano'**
(Italian Landscape)
6×9 cm

**Above:**
***Rimini***
1977
C-type print
13×17 cm



Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

**Clockwise from top left:**
***Rimini***
1977
From the series
**'In Scala'**
(In Scale)
C-type print
10×15 cm

***Modena***
1973
From the series
**'Colazione sull'erba'**
(Lunch on the Grass)
C-type print
27×18 cm

***Milano – Studio di Aldo Rossi***
1989–90
From the series
**'Studio di Aldo Rossi'**
8×10 cm

***Paris***
1976
From the series
**'Kodachrome'**
C-type print
10×12 cm

**Ghirri didn't only represent the landscape itself, but also the landscape as it had *already* been represented.**

'Melancholy is the road sign for an effaced geography, it is the feeling of distance that separates us from a potential simple world [...] Because the horizon nearly always mingles earth and sky, because the countryside also inhabits city and villages, because streets seem always to head toward the same point – and thus to nowhere.'[7] Ghirri identified the slightly confined feeling of driving through this landscape, where the horizon line seems to stretch endlessly in front of you, with few details to punctuate it. In the many photographs he took of those roads, the landscape does not open up so much as appear strangely hemmed in, even miniaturized, confined to the small frame of the picture. A recurring motif is the crumbling or weathered roadside gateways to country farms, signalling the entrance to an estate that appears minute in the distance, if it appears at all.

Ghirri didn't only represent the landscape itself, but also the landscape as it had *already* been represented, having passed through, as he called it, 'all representations and cultural models that are known and given to us as definite and decisive'.[8] We see it, through his lens, on billboards, in postcards, painted in murals or pictured in advertisements. Knowing that signs and images of nature could not be extracted from nature itself, Ghirri often pictured the real landscape and its simulation flattened into a single, surreal photographic amalgam. Nowhere is this attraction more apparent than in his series 'In scala' (In Scale, 1977–78), taken in the Italian coastal town of Rimini. Though the city boasts a popular beach, Ghirri turned his camera inland, to the local theme park, Italia in Miniatura, which featured 1:25 and 1:50 scale models of Italian landmarks, from Michelangelo's house in Rome to St. Mark's Square in Venice. Ghirri found as many views to photograph here as a tourist would at the landmarks themselves. He photographed the model-Mont Blanc, built of plaster and painted white to simulate a snow-capped summit, from several different angles – against the sky, so it appeared almost real, and then again with tourists walking its concrete paths and gripping its metal guardrails, towering over it. This miniaturized, thoroughly manufactured landscape was yet another typical 'Italian landscape', which Ghirri treated as no more or less 'real' than if he were photographing Mont Blanc or St. Mark's itself. This series complicates the reading of his other works, because after seeing them it's hard not to read his full-scale landscapes – such as the panoramic view of medieval buildings of *Irsina (Matera)* (1987) – as miniatures or simulacra.

Ghirri concerned himself not with extracting the purity from these Italian vistas but with picturing them as he saw them, intersecting and colliding with everyday representations, symbols and images. For him, even the cheapest and most ubiquitous imagery of the world could be re-presented in photographs. He deepened and complicated this interest by working as a commercial photographer throughout his career. In the 1980s he completed commissions for the tourism board of Naples, photographed Versailles for the French Ministry of Culture, and documented stage productions

Milano – Studio di Aldo Rossi courtesy: Mummery + Schnelle, London, Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, and the Estate of Luigi Ghirri • All other images this page

Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

for the municipal theatre of Reggio Emilia. He was also hired to photograph campaigns for Ferrari, Bulgari and a ceramic tile company. Likewise, his artistic compositions often consciously co-opt the language of advertising and marketing by isolating a single subject or placing it at the dead centre of the frame. They also have something of the 'de-skilling' employed by conceptual photographers: at times he bisected the frame completely with a tree trunk or a column, and he often used blatantly symmetrical compositions, like identical trees framing a closed doorway, paired street lamps or umbrellas on the beach.

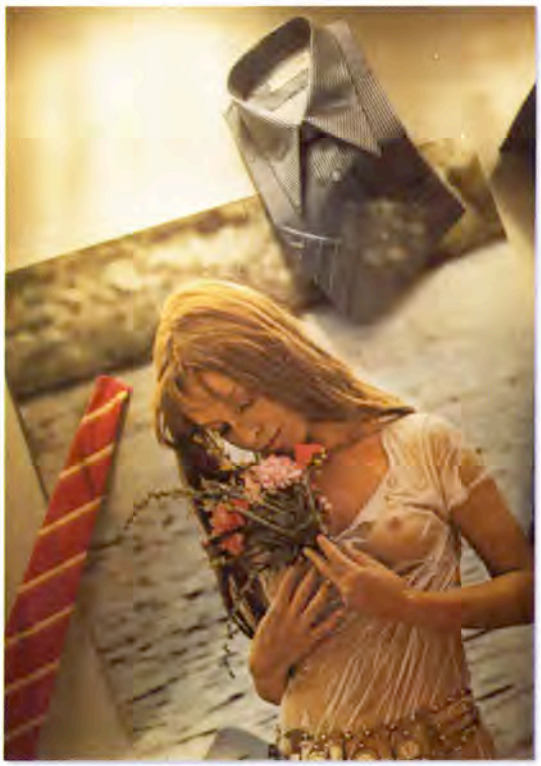
Ghirri's images of Italy's most beloved historical sites, museums and tourist destinations reveal the inevitable slippage or sense of melancholy that arises in the gap between our imaginings of a place and the look of it once we get there. He shot the deserted alleys and canals of Venice in the early morning, so they seem as ordinary as any urban streets, and the anonymous corners and pavements of Rome by night, devoid of any landmarks. In the faded palazzo in *Emilio Romagna* (1985) we don't see nostalgic traces of frescoes or crumbling ornamentation – instead, its rooms are simply empty and the walls blank. Any landscape was already a representation: 'This "New World" has become a simulacrum of itself,' Ghirri wrote in a 1983 essay about the work of William Eggleston, 'and appearances increasingly become opaque windows of unexpected solidity and depth.'[9] Perhaps that's why he rarely photographed people – because the gap between an image of someone and the person himself was too large. As Ghirri put it: 'Any photographed human being is always a photograph.'[10] Instead, human figures in his photographs almost always function to disrupt or confuse the scale of the landscape behind or in front of them. Often they turn out to be cardboard cutouts, as in the man in his underwear behind a shop window in *Rotterdam* (1973), or, if they are real, we only see the backs of their heads, like the four figures in *Salisburgo* (Salzburg, 1977), who are shown studying a map of the Austrian Alps as if they were gazing at the view itself. Ghirri himself is rarely present in any image, apart from his appearance in a reflection in a shop window (*Paris*, 1976), and another time as a shadow on an empty dirt road (*Castellina in Chianti*, 1988).

As much as his writings implied that the world had been exhausted by representations of it, Ghirri's deep and far-reaching body of work suggests the opposite: the overwhelming sense when looking at his images is that he always saw the possibilities for photographing the world, in all its remarkable and unremarkable aspects. Even the most generic view or clichéd reproduction was worthy of a second glance or a sustained look. When he wrote in 1973 that 'the only possible journey now seems to be within the sphere of signs and images', he did not see this as something to lament, but rather as the opportunity for endless possibilities of re-presenting that journey. Looking at his archive of images, what makes many of them so resonant, even moving, is that they never aimed to capture the sublime. Instead, whether they show us a view of the sea seen from the island of Capri or a bucolic park in Ravenna, they hint at the possibility of something sublime, while at the same time reflecting the doubt that a photograph could ever truly describe it. In his iconic image *Alpe di Suisi* (1979), an elderly couple, hand-in-hand, walks through what would seem to be an idyllic Alpine meadow on a perfectly clear day, but something is disorientating: the muted colours of the blue sky and the distance of the grey mountains make it look like the couple is walking toward a painted backdrop. As with so many of Ghirri's views, the image never shows us the sublime itself, but rather suggest its existence, just out of view, at the end of a road or over the horizon, somewhere beyond the picture's frame. ●

*Luigi Ghirri (1943–92) lived most of his life in Reggio Emilia, Italy. His photographs are included in 'ILLUMInations' at the 54th Venice Biennale until 27 November. This year, there have been solo exhibitions of his work at: Mummery + Schnelle, London, UK (toured from Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, Italy); and Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich, Switzerland (toured from RECEPTION, Berlin, Germany). Ghirri was included in the group show 'La Carte d'après Nature', curated by Thomas Demand, at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, USA (toured from the Nouveau musée national de Monaco, 2010). The exhibition 'Luigi Ghirri – Project Prints', curated by Elena Re, will open at the Castello di Rivoli in Turin, Italy, on 3 February 2012.*

*Christy Lange is associate editor of* frieze *and is based in Berlin, Germany.*

1 Luigi Ghirri, 'Selected Writings', *It's beautiful here, isn't it... Photographs by Luigi Ghirri*, ed. Paola Ghirri, Aperture Foundation, New York, 2008, p. 112
2 Ibid, p. 111
3 Ibid, p. 111
4 Luigi Ghirri, *Atlante* (Atlas), Charta, Milan, 1999
5 Luigi Ghirri, *Paesaggio italiano / Italian Landscape*, Electa, Milan, 1989
6 Luigi Ghirri, *Niente di antico sotto il sole – scritti e immagini per un'autobiografia* (There's Nothing Old Under the Sun – Writings and Images for an Autobiography), eds. Paolo Costantino and Giovanni Chiaramonte, SEI, Turin, 1997, p. 17
7 Luigi Ghirri, 'Un cancello sul fiume' (A Gate over the River), published in the exhibition catalogue for the Milan Triennale, eds. Vittoro Magnano Lampugnani and Vittoria Savi, Electa, Milan, 1988, pp. 87–94
8 Ghirri, *It's beautiful here, isn't it...*, Op Cit., p. 111
9 Ibid, p. 116
10 Ghirri, *Niente di antico sotto il sole – scritti e immagini per un'autobiografia*, Op Cit., p. 62



**Top:**
***Modena***
1970
From the series
**'Fotografie del periodo iniziale'**
(Photographs from the Early Period)
C-type print
22×15 cm

**Above:**
***Modena***
1973
C-type print
13×9 cm



Lange, Christy. "All Other Images: The Legacy of the Late Italian Photographer Luigi Ghirri." *Frieze*, no. 143, November/December 2011, pp. 120–25.

photograph

Review | BY CATHERINE WAGLEY

# Luigi Ghirri: La Città

Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles

Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, 1973.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Matthew Marks Gallery only began representing the estate of Luigi Ghirri in 2011, the year Thomas Demand curated him into a group show at the gallery. Since then, the Italian photographer, who did the bulk of his work in the 1970s and died just before turning 50 in 1992, has been more widely seen. His work was included in the 54th Venice Biennale and then in a show at the MAXXI Museum in Rome. It's not immediately obvious why it has caught on: He worked in areas trafficked by others who were more widely recognized. His Kodachrome experiments coincided with William Eggleston's; his interest in manmade intrusions into the landscape coincided with the New Topographics photographers' exploration of that issue; and his photographs of street life and ads and posters recall work Lee Friedlander was making in New York and Daido Moriyama was making in Japan.

But Ghirri's images are less self-conscious than those of his peers, less reverently composed. He was good at making his tastefulness spontaneous. All the images in *La Città*, at Matthew Marks this spring, were small – the largest was about 11 x 7 inches and most were closer to 4 x 6 inches – and they were all unique prints. For most, you had to lean close to see what was going on, like the one of a square of paper laying on the sand contaning six small photographs of Charlie Chaplin. In others, the compositions are so nonchalantly conventional that it makes them better: the bush shaped like a layer cake, for instance, positioned right in the middle of the frame. By centering it, Ghirri underscored its funniness.

A couple of images in the show stood out for being too controlled and prettily composed. One was a photograph of a photograph of a woman wearing a floral wreath, positioned in front of a thin, off-white curtain. The other was a view of water in Arles seen through a paned window, a lighthouse serenely visible through one pane. But these two images only clarify how key that in-the-moment curiosity is to Ghirri's work. His best images make you feel like you're walking through a city with someone intensely smart and skeptical but not at all jaded, who keeps stopping and saying: "Look at that."

Wagley, Catherine. "Luigi Ghirri: La Città." *Photograph Magazine*, July 2014, p. 50.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

# Luigi Ghirri

**MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 526 WEST 22ND STREET**

**526 West 22nd Street**
**March 6, 2013–April 20, 2013**

**Luigi Ghirri, *Chartres*, 1977,** vintage c-print 5 x 7 3/4".

Luigi Ghirri was fascinated by the implications of the photograph's two-dimensionality—its capacity for narrowness and opacity. None of the twenty-five vintage photographs shown here (all part of Ghirri's self-published *Kodachrome*, 1978) contain much that could be called reportage, or even a "decisive moment." Flatness is the focus. In *Ile Rousse*, 1976, a coastline dotted with sailboats is bisected by a wooden column streaked with shadows captive from another color space. This formal arrangement causes perspective to seem ambiguous, creating two foreign senses of a place—mundane and faintly surreal—that float over each other. Ghirri had a special ability to collapse the hierarchal distinction between subjects: As spatial relation dissolves, so does its perceived importance. Objects, people, and figures of light coexist in a space that lacks foreground or background, gently unseating the viewer's sense that the photographs depict some actual space. The frequent appearance of pictures within his pictures—cardboard figures, painted logos, bits of postcards—deflates the distance between real and fake.

The press release describes Ghirri's photos as "deadpan," and "reflecting a dry wit"—but this can be misleading. It's true that they are often wry, such as *Egmond Am Zee*, 1977 (from the complete series, not on view here), which shows a blue sky upstaged by a flag bearing the logo of Coca-Cola. But more often than not, his works are coolly disorienting—in *Riva di Tures*, 1977, a jet streak forms the top border of a pyramid defined by the two mountain peaks below it, with the enclosed sky's outline implying another peak. But the show ends with a self-aware one-liner: *Chartres*, 1977, is divided between a window with a half-unspooled bamboo shade and a wall on which there is painted a 35-mm canister partly pulled out, which reads FILM.

— *Zachary Sachs*

Sachs, Zachary. "Critics' Picks: Luigi Ghirri." *Artforum,* April 2013.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTLOG

# LUIGI GHIRRI'S CLEVER DREAMSCAPES

March 5th, 2013

Luigi Ghirri's work perfectly straddles the line between postcard and surrealist photography. The photos are gorgeous visions of Italian landscapes: proto-Instagram, they are almost unrealistically scenic. Yet they are also deceptively wry, needing further inspection to catch the deadpan humor.

Ghirri plays with spacial and tonal relationships: illuminating a photograph with a stoplight, juxtaposing a 50-foot pair of legs with teeny carnival patrons, and framing a grid of postcards that mirror his own subject matter. His photographs are highly constructed, ironic glimpses into society and the connection between people and their surroundings.

*Kodachrome will be on view at Matthew Marks Gallery from March 6 through April 20.*

"Luigi Ghirri's Clever Dreamscapes." *Artlog,* March 5, 2013.

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# KODACHROME
January 3rd, 2013

A pivotal photobook of the late 20th century, Luigi Ghirri's Kodachrome was originally published in 1978 and is key to the history of European and color photography. While Ghirri's work has received renewed attention over the past several years, the witty, urbane and humanistic photographs of Ghirri have largely been underappreciated outside his native Italy until now. Most recently, the photographer and artist Thomas Demand has championed his work and included Ghirri in his excellent exhibition La Carte d'apres Nature. Aperture's recent publication, It's Beautiful Here, Isn't It, was another welcome corrective. Long out-of-print, the new edition of Kodachrome will hopefully help restore and cement Ghirri's stature as a vital photographer of the 20th century.*

Ghirri's life was tragically cut shot when he died at the age of 49 in 1992. Well-respected in his native Italy, Ghirri not only built an impressive body of work, but also helped champion his colleagues and fellow Italian photographers. Punto e virgola, Ghirri's publishing house, had a short run, but published Kodachrome, a few theo-

Bell, Adam. "Book Reviews: Kodachrome." *Photo-Eye,* January 3, 2013.

retical and academic books, a handful of books by Italian photographers like Franco Fontana and Roberto Salbitani, as well as monographs on other European and American photographers such as Dennis Stock and Robert Doisneau. Kodachrome was Ghirri's first monograph and collected images from his archive dating from 1971-78. This new reprint retains the design, size and modest paperback format of the first edition. The book includes Ghirri's original statement along with a short text by the architect Piero Berengo Gardin. Aside from a new essay by Francesco Zanot, which is included in a pamphlet insert that also contains French and German translations of all the book's texts, and new scans of Ghirri's slides, the book is unchanged.

The subjects of Ghirri's images are prosaic and drawn from the Italian landscape he inhabited and called home. His subjects include the beach, the blue sky of the Italian countryside, mirrors, windows, tourist sites, trompe-l'œil murals, parks and signs. However, the work's seemingly humble origins, modest size and muted colors belie their witty conceptual core. Through clever juxtapositions and visual puns, Ghirri's images constantly toys with the tension between reality and its representation. His work, in this book especially, is about the nature of pictures, seeing and the way we construct, imagine and view the world through and with images. As Francesco Zanot writes in the book's new essay, "his works are powerful devices for the re-education of the gaze." Never simple documents, the images frequent inclusion of signs, murals and photographs draws close attention to the constructive act of photographing. The photographs reveal their creation while at the same time toying with their artifice and the world they depict.

Photography and art history is filled with neglected figures – artists whose work either came too soon, too late or fell on deaf ears. In an essay written in remembrance of Ghirri by his friend and photographer Charles Traub, Traub reflected on Ghirri's work and legacy. As Traub notes, "Ghirri's work stands significantly besides his better know American contemporaries, such as Stephen Shore, William Eggleston and Robert Adams." Traub goes on to write that "perhaps during the decade and a half when Ghirri worked, curatorial interests favored the detached dispassionate, cool eye rather than favoring wit…[His] concerns were post-modern before those words were bandied about in photographic circles."† Although Ghirri was not unrecognized in his lifetime, he was clearly out of step with prevailing American tastes and did not receive the attention her deserved. As this reprint demonstrates, his work not only continues to speak powerfully to the present, but more importantly, it also rejoices in the simple pleasures of seeing photographically.

Bell, Adam. "Book Reviews: Kodachrome." *Photo-Eye,* January 3, 2013.

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# KALEIDOSCOPE

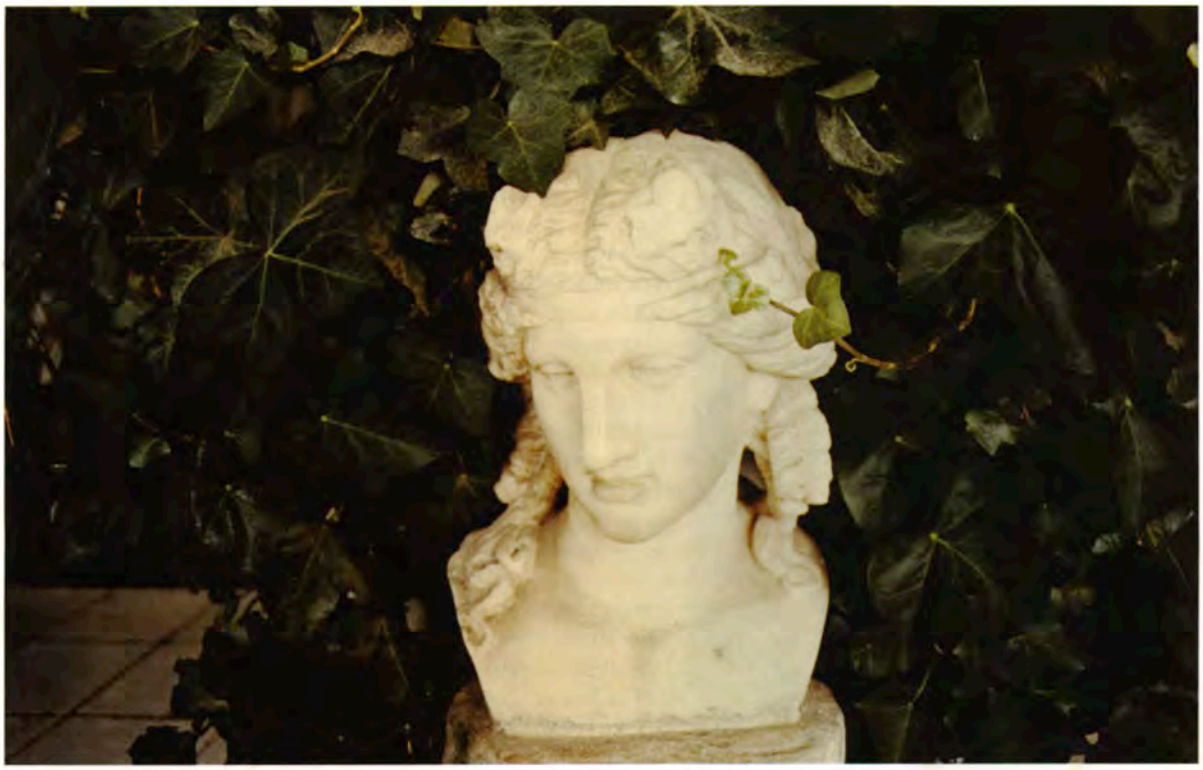
REGULARS

## SOUVENIR D'ITALIE Luca Cerizza

analyzes the

160

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.



Luigi Ghirri, *Capri*, from the series "Paesaggio italiano," 198

# anti-rhetorical gaze of LUIGI GHIRRI

Beyond amateur photography and photojournalism, a unique photographic oeuvre combines Pop and conceptual art influences into asentimental journey through the Italian landscape.

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.

Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*,
from the series "Still life," 1978

Writing about Luigi Ghirri means writing not only about the Italian landscape, the preferred theme of his work, but also about a widespread model of Italian visual culture that approaches itself and the world in relation to questions of a social and political order.

Born in 1943 in the small town of Fellegara (Reggio Emilia), Ghirri's interest in photography developed relatively late, after a period of technical studies. He was able to avoid the two most common directions taken by photographers in Italy: the aesthetic drift of amateur photography and the sociological and political investigations of photojournalism. Other references contributed to his identity, combining humanist sentiment with a scientific gaze. Certain early photographs made in 1970 reflect Ghirri's literary background in a taste for narration that pays close attention to the details of a minor, possibly poetic reality. His passion for both historical and contemporary art led to a rigorous attitude of thinking through images that went beyond the mere pictorial interpretation of the photograph. In the early phase of his career that I will discuss here, which spanned the 1970s, Pop and conceptual art provided Ghirri the most timely tools with which to look at reality, mainly through the genre of landscape.

A "pop" vision of the landscape is evident in some of Ghirri's earliest works, especially in the series *Paesaggi di cartone* (Cardboard Landscapes, 1971-74) and *Km. 0,250* (1973). In the 1970s and 1980s, Ghirri took photographs especially while traveling, however his selective gaze produced a unity to the pictures he captured. Thus the images he seeks in Switzerland, France or Holland are not that different from the ones he finds close to home.[1] Traces of American Pop imagery emerge in Ghirri's photographs from both Lucerne and Modena: gaudy pencils, white and red stars printed on paper, the gigantic open legs of a skater at the entrance to an amusement park. Continental distances are erased in the continuity of an Americanized landscape that Ghirri has interpreted not only through his admiration for Walker Evans, but also through an ideal relationship between American "on the road" mythology and the tales of his native plains.

The influence of Pop revealed itself in Ghirri's focus on the world of merchandise, advertising and entertainment, and in his recurring allusion to reality mediated by the image. Yet for Ghirri, these subjects are steeped more in the melancholy of memory than the optimism of consumption. Ghirri works by subtraction rather than accumulation: in the midst of the flow of merchandise he narrows in on a few details—products and advertising images—bringing out their lyrical qualities. The garments photographed in the shop windows of Modena or Lucerne are the targets of an indifferent, phlegmatic gaze. Images of Charlie Chaplin and nude women appear on little scraps of paper found on a beach, faded relics of some bygone spectacle.[2]

Ghirri's viewpoint on Italian cultural history, however, avoids both rhetorical paeans and aesthetic polish. While in Paris, Ghirri photographed, from behind, a young man who reminds us of Jimi Hendrix clutching a souvenir of the Eiffel Tower, an almost surreal combination. In other photographs, the Italian art cities are similarly seen through their reduction to objects meant to be consumed by tourists. Not only are the monuments and landscapes translated into kitschy trinkets, the entire boot of Italy becomes a big toy in the series *In scala* (1977–78). The series, which features the "Miniature Italy" theme park in Rimini, plays with photography's potential to create illusions. It sums up many of the impulses that drive Ghirri's work in this period:

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.

a focus on the Italian natural and cultural landscape, the irony of an anti-rhetorical gaze that is, however, never cynical, a discourse on the relationships between reality and fiction through the mediation of two levels of reproduction (physical scale and photographic replication).

While in *In Scala*, the Italian landscape is narrated through its historical and cultural dimension, in other projects like *Vedute* (Views, 1970–79), *Colazione sull'erba* (Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, 1972–74) and *Italia ailati* (1971–79) Ghirri looks at places without apparent historical and aesthetic connotations, concentrating on details of a minor, marginal Italy ("ailati" is not just Italia written backwards; it is a pun that can also be translated as "at the edges"). Beaches during the off-season, cloudy skies, deserted countryside, coastal horizons: Ghirri's provinces are made of empty spaces, details suspended in melancholy immobility, where history and drama seem to have no place. Shaped by a form of abstraction and a slow quality, here his gaze is the heir to a long figurative tradition that runs from Metaphysical painting to the cinema of Antonioni (*Red Desert*, 1964, for example). The plains of Emilia-Romagna, from the countryside to the sea, constitute a state of mind where the course of events is halted in a questioning gaze: the alternative side of the region's automotive production, led by Ferrari.

On the other hand, Conceptual art's influence is evident in his approach to working in thematic series and in the recurrence of subjects and atmospheres that often take the final form of a publication.[3] This influence becomes clear in the metalinguistic allusion to the photographic medium and to the act of seeing, as well as in the constant reference to the language and enjoyment of visual art.[4] The work of mediation done by certain artists on the Modena scene was fundamental to this influence: Franco Guerzoni, Claudio Parmiggiani and above all Franco Vaccari can be cited among those who helped Ghirri to define his position with respect to the debates concerning the possibilities of photography in the context of contemporary art.[5] Without reaching the level of depersonalization urged by Vaccari, who leaves the making of images to the viewers themselves in the various installations of *Esposizione in tempo reale* (1972), for Ghirri photography is a medium used by both the minimal and conceptual avant-gardes to get away from cumbersome subjectivity: to observe means to train for the possibility of losing oneself. In this sense, the most extreme points in Ghirri's oeuvre occur in certain series based on the application of self-imposed rules that guide the choice of subjects and the way the shots are taken, reducing the possible choices left up to the photographer. In *Catalogo* (Catalogue, 1971–72), Ghirri looks for geometric and decorative motifs on the facades of houses and shops in Modena. In *Km 0.250*, he photographs the advertisements on the wall of Modena's former automotive racetrack, in the same way, on a scale of 1:1 (1973). In *Week End-Atlante* (1973), he reproduces the pages of a geographical atlas, zooming in to the point of complete abstraction and loss of information, voiding the signs. In *Infinito* (1974), he gathers, in random order, 365 images of the sky on two large panels, like a calendar without any logic. Finally, throughout the 1970s, he photographs different images of geometric and perspective grids, another motif in minimal and conceptual work, clearly alluding to the modes of production of images, and the relationship between reality and its reproduction.

Yet the use of serial and automatic procedures, conducted through the application of rules, does not eliminate that sentimental,

Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, from the series "Colazione sull'erba," 1973

Luigi Ghirri, *Napoli*,
from the series "Paesaggio italiano," detail, 1980

melancholy matrix, or that affectionate curiosity, that are the recurring qualities of his way of looking at the world. While *Catalogo* is like the *Homes For America* of the Po River valley, the serial repetition of *Km 0,250* concludes on a sympathetic, ironic note with a photograph of an advertising poster that states, "Vivo il mio tempo. Mi informo" (I live my time. I get informed), while the analytical process applied in *Week End* springs from the emotional thrust of an imaginary voyage on the surfaces of a geographical atlas, a childhood fantasy. Ghirri's scientific gaze, developed through a passion for Dutch seventeenth-century painting and its way of describing and measuring the world through technical means, as well as his focus on geography and place names, are always driven by sympathy for their subjects.

The influence of conceptual art also arises in the intention already evident in his earliest works to avoid the imposition of an authoritative viewpoint; instead, Ghirri attempts to let reality—rather than the ego—do the talking. This implies, as he puts it, the "possibility of a surprise within the everyday dimension (...), the possibility of starting with the simplest, most obvious things, to see them in a new light."[6] Ghirri, in short, thinks of photography not so much in the automatic, impersonal sense of Vaccari and other more analytical conceptual artists. Rather, he seems to pursue an interpretation of the medium based on the concepts of "imprint" and "clue" derived from the reflections of Ronald Barthes and Michel Foucault on photography. To photograph, then, does not mean seeking a total image, conveying the decisive, revelatory moment through a unique, unveiling image. More modestly, it means gathering and selecting among apparently minor details taken through a curious observation of the world. The sum of these moments, the progression of images imprinted on the film almost "without effort," constitutes the possibility of a nearly unintentional anthropology. In this sense, Ghirri's oeuvre is part of that series of different interpretations Italian art has continued to produce with respect to American and British conceptual and minimal art, grafting onto their forms a more precise focus on the conditions of time, place and history, as well as a dose of emotional overtones not found in the original points of reference.

In Ghirri's work, the twofold character of this attitude reveals its full, beautiful and yet ambiguous complexity. While his focus on a marginal landscape and a "minor" history can be a tool of an anti-rhetorical, critical attitude towards the real, the melancholy poetics of his photography seem to represent a form of acceptance, a fundamentally

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.

Luigi Ghirri, *Egmond am see*, 1980
Courtesy of Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.

contemplative way of looking at the world. Hence the "slowed down" observation of the landscape and history, the suspension in an almost metaphysical atmosphere, which in the 1980s are also expressed in Ghirri's tributes to figures like Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Morandi, seem to elude social and political analysis to move toward an interpretation of reality that relies on rigid givens not likely to be subject to change.

Until the end of his short life in 1992, Ghirri would continue to photograph the Italian natural and cultural landscape in its state of melancholy suspension, excluding its current events, drama, chaos, violence. When his gaze does encounter death, it is a silent, slow form of decay. It would be interesting to know how he would look at that same landscape today, increasingly plagued by neglect and speculation, floods, tremors and landslides that are not only physical in nature.

1 "This is why I love travels in the atlas, and this is why I like minimum Sunday outings even better, within a range of three kilometers from my home"; Ghirri wrote this in reference to the series *Paesaggi di cartone*. Massimo Mussini, "*Luigi Ghirri*. Attraverso la fotografia," in Luigi Ghirri (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2001), 45.

2 This, after all, was the early 1970s when Italy was in the economic slump that followed the optimism of its boom years, and when the hope for political change that thrived in '68 had shifted into escalating disappointment and public and private violence.

3 As the artist himself stated in 1982, "When I photograph I think more about the book than the exhibition." Cited in Mussini, op. cit., 46.

4 Mussini, the first photography scholar to concentrate on Ghirri's work, talks about Ghirri's "short and direct experience in the field of conceptual art, substantially marginally but intelligently exploited," and his relationship with conceptual art, which began in 1969. Ibid., 14.

5 Perhaps less direct but equally important is the influence of an artist like Giulio Paolini, who combined the analysis of sight and historical-artistic memories in an enigmatic, suspended gaze.

6 *Luigi Ghirri*, cited in Laura Gasparini, "Profilo Biografico," in Luigi Ghirri, Op. cit., 61.

All images courtesy of Paola Ghirri and Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia


### About the Artist

**LUIGI GHIRRI (1943–1992) was an Italian photographer. Born in Scandiano, Ghirri began taking photographs in 1970, mostly working in a milieu of conceptual artists. From 1983 he focused primarily on photographing architecture and the Italian landscape. He worked for the Architectural Section of the third Venice Biennale of Architecture in 1985, which was directed by Aldo Rossi, and the Milan Triennale in 1988. Ghirri exhibited throughout Europe, with solo shows in Geneva, Amsterdam, Arles, and Cologne, as well as at the Light Gallery, New York. His work is in numerous collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; and Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.**

### Current & Forthcoming

**A solo exhibition of LUIGI GHIRRI featuring 200 project prints, maquettes and documents will be on view at Castello di Rivoli from January 27 to March 10, 2012. A catalogue published by JRP | Ringier will accompany the exhibition.**

### About the Author

**LUCA CERIZZA is a curator, writer, and art historian currently based in Berlin. Cerizza teaches at the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti – NABA, Milan. Among his latest curatorial projects: "Scène Ouverte," Centre Culturel Français, Milan, 2011, "Alighiero e Boetti Day" (a 12-hours event dedicated to the seminal Italian artist, co-curated with Massimiliano Gioni and Francesco Manacorda) Turin, May 28th, 2011; and a solo show by Marcello Maloberti (co-curated with Pierre Bal-Blanc) CAC Bretigny and Nuit Blanche, Paris, 2011. His essay "The continuous line of Carlo Mollino" has been included in the catalogue on the Italian architect accompanying the show at Haus der Kunst, Munich.**

Cerizza, Luca. "Souvenir D'Italie." *Kaleidoscope*, no. 13, Winter 2011/12, pp. 160–67.

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

# "La Carte d'après nature"

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

In his preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth announces the necessity for a new kind of poetry. He resolves to "choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect." More than two centuries later, his then-revolutionary literary objective resonates throughout "*La Carte d'après nature*," an expansive group exhibition curated by Thomas Demand. The artist derives the title from an art journal published sporadically by René Magritte between 1951 and 1965 that usually consisted of a mere postcard, which he addressed to friends and fellow artists. On one of the postcards, Magritte wrote *Quel sens donnez-vous au mot poésie?* (What meaning do you give to the word poetry?) I think a lot of people—smart, cultivated artistic types no less than philistines—regard poetry as pretty *retardataire* these days; the beauty of Demand's show is that he obviously doesn't. The coloring of imagination rendering ordinary things astonishing suffuses the whole of it.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Rimini*, 1977**, color photograph, 5⅞ x 4". From "*La Carte d'après Nature*."

Rimanelli, David. "La Carte d'Après Nature." *Artforum* 50, no. 3, November 2011, p. 268.

Demand's exhibition—a reconfigured version of one by the same title at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in 2010—is a brilliant work of time travel, representing Magritte's own time, with the painter's *L'Univers démasqué* (The Universe Unmasked), 1932, for example, and a 1925 photograph of models attired in Sonia Delaunay's dresses, striking poses before the cubistic trees; looking back to photography by August Kotzsch (ca. 1860s–70s) and a dazzlingly mysterious 1911 autochrome by Léon Gimpel; and reaching forward, through divagating paths, to Sigmar Polke, Ger van Elk, and especially the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri. "Contemporary art" is amply represented, with works by, among others, Rodney Graham, Tacita Dean, Martin Boyce (who designed the exhibition's brilliantly convoluted layout), Henrik Håkansson, Saâdane Afif—and *Fridge*, 2011, commissioned by Demand from Kudjoe Affutu, a professional Ghanaian coffin maker (yes, it's a freestanding functional coffin in the form of a refrigerator). If this list of names seems random, well, at first it is. This show requires a patient, inquisitive viewer, one willing to live for a while in doubt and confusion while moving hesitantly *and* breathlessly through its complex installation, coming upon one gorgeous, weird, difficult, sometimes just plain opaque artwork after another; there's no gestalt look that you simply "get." For example, Dean's 16-mm film *Pie*, 2003, a rear-screen projection of twittering magpies nestling in desiccated branches, is juxtaposed with Håkansson's *New York*, 2011, his recording of birds in Central Park, played over and over again on a turntable. Graham's *Phonokinetoscope*, 2001, was installed in an area toward the rear of the gallery, yet long before one encountered the full piece, one could hear quite clearly the Syd Barrett–y/Pink Floyd–y song that Graham wrote, sang, and recorded as its phono component, evoking beforehand a druggy, zoned-out, (sur)-natural haze: chirping birds on LSD.

Magritte provides the foundational conceit for this show, but the selection of photographs by the comparatively obscure Ghirri is so replete (forty photographs), it stands to reason that he should be regarded as a figure informing Demand's thought processes to a degree that is almost as imposing as that of the Surrealist superstar. Ghirri's characteristically faded palette renders many of his works ready-made *old* photos. Time is out of joint, but so too are nature and culture, as Ghirri revels in images of dislocation and in photographs that often appear to mimic the processes of collage. In the postcardlike *Bari*, 1982, for instance, a blatantly artificial, almost cutout palm tree stands in a bleak "dirtscape" of derelict construction. A series of photographs titled "Rimini," 1977, picturing a faux-mountain theme park, further demonstrates Ghirri's predilection for the absurd amid the mundane, a Surrealism of bizarre built environments and unnatural nature.

Throughout "*La Carte d'après nature*," the Wordsworthian colorings of the imagination are shot through with tenebrous shades, as in Magritte's own "dry" paintings, which insistently proffer a strong undercurrent of negation and refusal, rather than the "standard" Surrealist celebratory liberation of words and images from sense. (This is *not* a pipe; the *treachery* of images.) The poetic feeling that pervades Demand's *Wunderkammer* is one of melancholia.

—*David Rimanelli*

Rimanelli, David. "La Carte d'Après Nature." *Artforum* 50, no. 3, November 2011, p. 268.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

October 6, 2011

HUFF POST ARTS

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

**Catherine Spaeth**
*Art critic*

# Artificial Coolness and Similitude: Thomas Demand's *La Carte D'Apres Nature* at Matthew Marks and Peter Eleey's September 11 at PS1

Posted: 10/6/11 12:49 PM ET

Magritte's painting, "Perspective II, Manet's Balcony," depicts coffins in the place of figures, a motif played out several times in Magritte's appropriations of art history. While this painting is not in the current exhibition of Thomas Demand's *La Carte d'Apres Nature* at Matthew Marks, in his catalog essay Demand mentions Magritte's coffins in reference to Kudjoe Affutu's "Fridge," a fantasy coffin commissioned from the Ghana artist by Thomas Demand. Demand explains that refrigerators are for artificial coolness, for keeping things fresh, and his own fascination with the serial murderer Jeffrey Dahmer is fully in play. Affutu's "Fridge" will appear later in this essay. For now, here is Kudjoe Affutu's "Pompidou," pictured below.

*Kudjoe Affutu, Pompidou, 2010. Exhibited in Saâdane Afif's exhibition "Anthologie de l'humour noir" in the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Found here.*

This thought about the commissioned refrigerator coffin as an artificial coolness is relevant when considering Demand's role as curator. For Thomas Demand to curate a show there is the expectation that the artist will strongly express his own work through it -- a stickler for detail and consistency, his name before a title doesn't seem to allow for anything else. And Demand is quite frank that he has "taken many liberties where a professional curator might be accused of infringing on artistic self-determination." What follows are some thoughts as to what is at stake in the liberties taken in the context of *La Carte d'Apres Nature* and how they might inform our understanding of a similar taking of liberties in the exhibit September 11 at PS1, curated by Peter Eleey and beyond the pale of conventional standards.

There is strong recent history in the reception of Magritte. Among many other artists, Demand was involved in the 2007 exhibit Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Of the artists, John Baldessari was most involved and designed the installation for the exhibit. Baldessari's own contribution was a photograph of a man standing before a palm tree, with the word "WRONG" below the image. Evident in Baldessari's work is a play upon Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe*, and the fascination that this work has held for artists, a fascination nourished even further by the publication of Foucault's essays on Magritte's paintings. This engagement with the work of Magritte in 2007 had some impact on Baldessari's 2010 exhibit *Pure Beauty*, for which this installation was produced.

With G. Roger Denson's wonderful essay in mind and as an elaboration upon it, "The World as Mind in Thomas Demand's La Carte d'Apres Nature," I take it as given that Thomas Demand's curation is in some interest with John Baldessari's response to the work of Magritte. Thomas Demand is participating in a rather large conversation that exists in the present context, and it is from this fact that we get to the point where one might say, as Denson does, that, "It is perfectly in keeping with the original Surrealists for Demand to blur the boundary between his own identity and art and the identities and art of the artists he includes in his show, both living and dead." Just how this becomes Thomas Demand's own maneuver is the thing.

Thomas Demand was given an opportunity to surround himself with those he can identify as philosophical friends, and understands that this gathering carries the force of his expression. Perhaps for this reason, the work by Magritte, for which the show is named, is the series of slight publications -- at times no more than a postcard -- that Magritte solicited the work of others for and sent to his friends.

It is in taking this situation of friendships and affinities seriously to heart that, arguably, the exhibit can be said to put into action the difference between similitude and resemblance that Foucault saw in Magritte:

> To me it appears that Magritte disassociated similitude from resemblance, and brought the former into play against the latter. Resemblance has a "model," an original element that organizes and heirarchizes the increasingly less faithful copies that can be struck from it. Resemblance presupposes a primary

reference that prescribes and classes. The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as another, that obey no hierarchy but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences. Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar.*

It should also be noted that Thomas Demand is by far the photographer most known for the purging of chance from the scene of photography. Knowing this, it seems that from Rene Magritte there is the full permission to enter a shared world of intuitive deliberations upon one's craft and to loosely hold associations between one form and another without losing one's focus on and investment in them.

Hinging on difference does not seem to be the point. This is a shared endeavor that plows through concepts of self, nature, mind, culture and technology, and sustains the gathering hold of thought and world as it does so. In this more intuitive space of deliberation "problematic" operations of thought -- such as contradiction -- that would interrupt an otherwise more secured knowledge of resemblances simply don't apply.

*Luigi Ghirri, Parma. 1985, Cibachrome, 15 3/4 x 20 1/8 inches; 40 x 51 cm, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, Copyright Estate of Luigi Ghirri*

Spaeth, Catherine. "Artificial Coolness and Similitude..." *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2011.

The above photograph of hat trees by Luigi Ghirri is one incident in an arrangement of photographs depicting trees -- alone on a wall, its hold as a resemblance to Magritte would become emblematic. However, in *La Carte d'Apres Nature* the majority of the exhibition walls are punctuated by the photographs of Luigi Ghirri, the deceased photographer whose 40 photographs effectively serve as a pendant to Magritte's Surrealist paintings. Ghirri himself investigated the relationships between painting and the photograph, spending time in Giorgio Morandi's studio to photograph still life arrangements.

In his essay, Demand explains that he selected Ghirri's photographs on the basis of Ghirri's concern with how the photograph reaches beyond simply capturing what is before it, and especially enjoyed that in Ghirri's body of work, from photograph to photograph, there is an extended relationship. He elaborates that, unlike Magritte's, there seems to be an emotional tone running through Ghirri's body of work that has nearly the consistency of a radio playing in the background.

*Luigi Ghirri, Salisburgo, 1977, C-print, 5 7/8 x 9 inches; 15 x 23 cm, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, Copyright Estate of Luigi Ghirri.*

Thomas Demand's own listed work in this exhibit is the wallpaper extending across the full left wall and around the back, continuously extending through five separate rooms and to support Magritte alone. It is a giant red curtain, and the invisibility of "what is behind" hands itself over to our thought.

The folds of the curtains are such that the stage could be on this side or the other -- the stage and the audience, a work and the world, are switching places at our feet. To borrow a phrase from Magritte in his response to Foucault: "... it evokes the reality of a world that experience and reason treat in confused manner." Yet unlike Magritte's use of a curtain, cut by the silhouette or opening to a scene, Thomas Demand's curtain is the unbroken skin of a photographic print.

Spaeth, Catherine. "Artificial Coolness and Similitude..." *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2011.

Another curatorial touch is that in Demand's framing of each of the photographs in the exhibit white matting slopes inward from the inner frame to the picture's edge. This passe-partout is the result of scoring on the verso, an action that has its own purchase when from the studio of Thomas Demand.

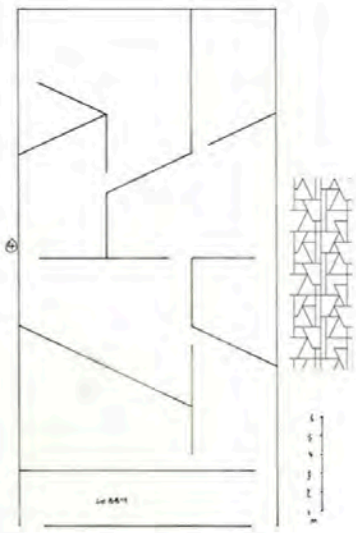
*Detail of William Kissiloff, Model of William Kissiloff's Pulp and Paper Pavilion Expo'67, 2011, Pulp and paper, 12 1/2 x 43 1/4 x 35 1/2 inches, 32 x 110 x 90 cm*
*© William Kissiloff, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery*

As in Thomas Demand's own work, trees do figure large -- just by the door is William Kissiloff's model for the Canadian Pulp and Paper Pavilion of Expo, 1967, buildings in the form of standing trees. Whether it is Sigmar Polke's photographic essay on the palm tree or Chris Garofalo's porcelain specimens of imagined plant life, the consistency and pleasure in intuitive deliberations is what takes hold in this exhibit.

This is perhaps most discrete in the work of Martin Boyce. The installation walls of *La Carte d'Apres Nature* are built upon a plan by Martin Boyce, a plan in turn based upon the motif that has driven Boyce's work -- repeated variations on the abstract cubist trees designed by French twins Joel and Jan Martel. A certain mute consciousness of artifice and exhibition is expressed here, as the concrete trees were initially exhibited outside at the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris in 1925.

For the original installation of *La Carte d'Apres Nature*, the inaugural show of the Villa Paloma in Monaco, Martin Boyce exhibited a piece outside of the Villa Paloma. At Matthew Marks, forms generated from the cubist tree are laid horizontally and absorbed by the interior, cutting up the gallery box in a series of angles with clean beveled edges and an occasional pair of green glass windows opening room to room, "Through the Trees."

Spaeth, Catherine. "Artificial Coolness and Similitude..." *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2011.



*Martin Boyce, Drawing from a Floorplan, 2011, Ink and assemblage on tracing paper, 11 3/4 x 8 3/8 inches; 30 x 21 cm, © Martin Boyce, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery*

Becky Beasley's photographs from the series P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. are of Eadweard Muybridge's garden in England as it presently appears. Known for his photographic motions studies, in America Muybridge murdered his wife's lover and got off with justifiable homicide, and in England he himself died in his garden while digging ponds in the shape of the Great Lakes. Beasley stood in the place of the missing Great Lakes and photographed a panoramic series, banal and devoid, that is never identified or exhibited as a panoramic view. At the center of 360 degrees then, the viewing subject is sliced and vanished. It is before Beasley's photographs that Demand placed "Fridge."

*Installation view of La Carte d'après Nature, at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. Kudjoe Affutu, Fridge, 2010, hardwood, paint and rattan, and Becky Beasley, selected photographs from P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A., 2010, Ink on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Baryta 315 gsm paper using archival inks.*

Spaeth, Catherine. "Artificial Coolness and Similitude..." *Huffington Post,* October 6, 2011.

ARTNEWS

UP NOW

# 'La Carte D'Après Nature'

**Matthew Marks**

***Through October 8***

This intriguing, subtle, and eccentric group exhibition, curated by artist Thomas Demand, includes three paintings by René Magritte plus a host of strange little photographs by Luigi Ghirri (1943–92), an influential Italian photographer featured at this year's Venice Biennale who is barely known in the United States. Also included here are William Kissiloff's maquette for a forestlike café installation for Montreal's Expo 67, a pair of Cubist "trees" by Jan and Joël Martel for the 1925 Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs, and Ghanaian casket artist Kudjoe Affutu's wooden coffin in the form of a refrigerator. Scottish artist Martin Boyce designed the installation's blue gel windows as well as the maze that divides the gallery into nine areas. Two of the spaces hold films: Rodney Graham's account of his stoned bicycle ride through the Tiergarten in Berlin in 2001 and Tacita Dean's meditation on magpies.

The exhibition, first shown at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, reveals itself gradually as birdsong fills the gallery. Images of topiary, foliage, birds, mountains, and clouds might seem odd choices from a curator best known as a photo-artist who makes airless pictures of paper models of interiors. But then, this exhibition is really about unnaturalness and the constructed landscape. Its title, after all, was borrowed from Magritte.

**Luigi Ghirri, *Bari*, 1982, C-print, 4" x 5⅞". Matthew Marks.**

For Demand, this is a highly personal show in which everything, and everyone—from Magritte (who made the treachery of images explicit with his picture of a pipe) to Ghirri (who titled a 1970 series "Cardboard Landscapes")—fits together like an ingenious jigsaw puzzle. As for the soundtrack, those trilling birdcalls were recorded in Central Park by Swedish artist Henrik Håkansson. The stacks of vinyl records are free for the taking, though old record players are obsolete—but that, too, is part of the point. So is Christy Lange's essay from the Monaco catalogue, which gathers together all the stray pieces of the puzzle, and is aptly titled "This Is Not a Landscape."

***—Kim Levin***

Levin, Kim. "La Carte d'Après Nature." *ARTnews*, October 2011, p. 102.

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW EXHIBITION REVIEWS
OCTOBER 2011

Left, Luigi Ghirri: Ferrara, 1981, C-print, 9½ by 6¼ inches; far left, René Magritte's The Universe Unmasked, 1932, oil on canvas, 36¼ by 28 ¾ inches, on wallpaper designed by Thomas Demand; in "La Carte d'Après Nature," at Matthew Marks.

## "LA CARTE D'APRÈS NATURE"
## MATTHEW MARKS

The fertile gap between reality and its representation is the focus of this thoughtful and ingeniously constructed group exhibition, curated by Thomas Demand. The show takes as its starting point the work of René Magritte, specifically Magritte's explorations of the disjuncture between a visual or linguistic sign and the actuality it describes. A recurring theme is nature's appearance in culture, as anything from a potted plant to a painted cloud to a cement mountain.

The exhibition (which originated at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco) is titled after a magazine—sometimes a booklet, usually just a postcard—that Magritte produced from 1951 to 1964. In it, he presented synchronous ideas and images from disparate sources. In a similar fashion, Demand here teases out connections and resonances among artworks—including sculpture, painting, photographs and films—by 18 artists from the last 150 years.

In addition to three paintings by Magritte, the show includes a single piece by Demand himself—the wallpaper that serves as their backdrop. This wallpaper is printed with the image of a red curtain, which at first appears to be a picture of the real thing. Like all of Demand's images, however, it is in fact a photograph of a paper model, as can be seen from the small dents and creases in the curtain's folds.

Of the remaining artists in the exhibition, a refreshing number are European and African artists whose work is underknown in this country. The most notable of these is the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992), whose color photographs, while reminiscent of those by American contemporaries William Eggleston and Stephen Shore, are both less hard-boiled and more playfully conceptual.

Ghirri made a specialty of photographing places such as botanic gardens, amusement parks and tourist attractions where representations of nature collide with nature itself. Several dozen of his pictures are the sturdy underpinning of the show, and the motifs he returned to again and again—the mountain, the cloud, the palm tree; nature bounded, abstracted or displaced—are echoed in works by such artists as Tacita Dean, Rodney Graham and Sigmar Polke.

The slurring, substitution or reversal of ideas or images—the means by which Ghirri's "impossible landscapes" (as he called them), Demand's simulated realities and Magritte's Surrealist vistas all render the everyday unfamiliar—is likewise employed in nearly every work in the exhibition. Ghanaian artist Kudjoe Affutu creates a fantasy coffin in the shape of a refrigerator. Becky Beasley transposes the geographic coordinates of Eadweard Muybridge's famous 360-degree panorama of San Francisco onto her own photographs of Muybridge's garden in England. Saâdane Afif uses topographic model-making techniques to render a patch of ocean.

The disorienting effect produced in works by these and other artists in the show is underscored by the exhibition's maze-like layout, based on a drawing by Martin Boyce. But even as it loops back on itself both physically and conceptually, the show nevertheless feels surprisingly spacious, its lively mix of art affirming the usefulness of the simulacrum as a way to generate meaning, to express sensation, to tease, bewilder and liberate.

*—Anne Doran*

Doran, Anne. "La Carte d'Après Nature." *Art in America*, October 9, 2011.

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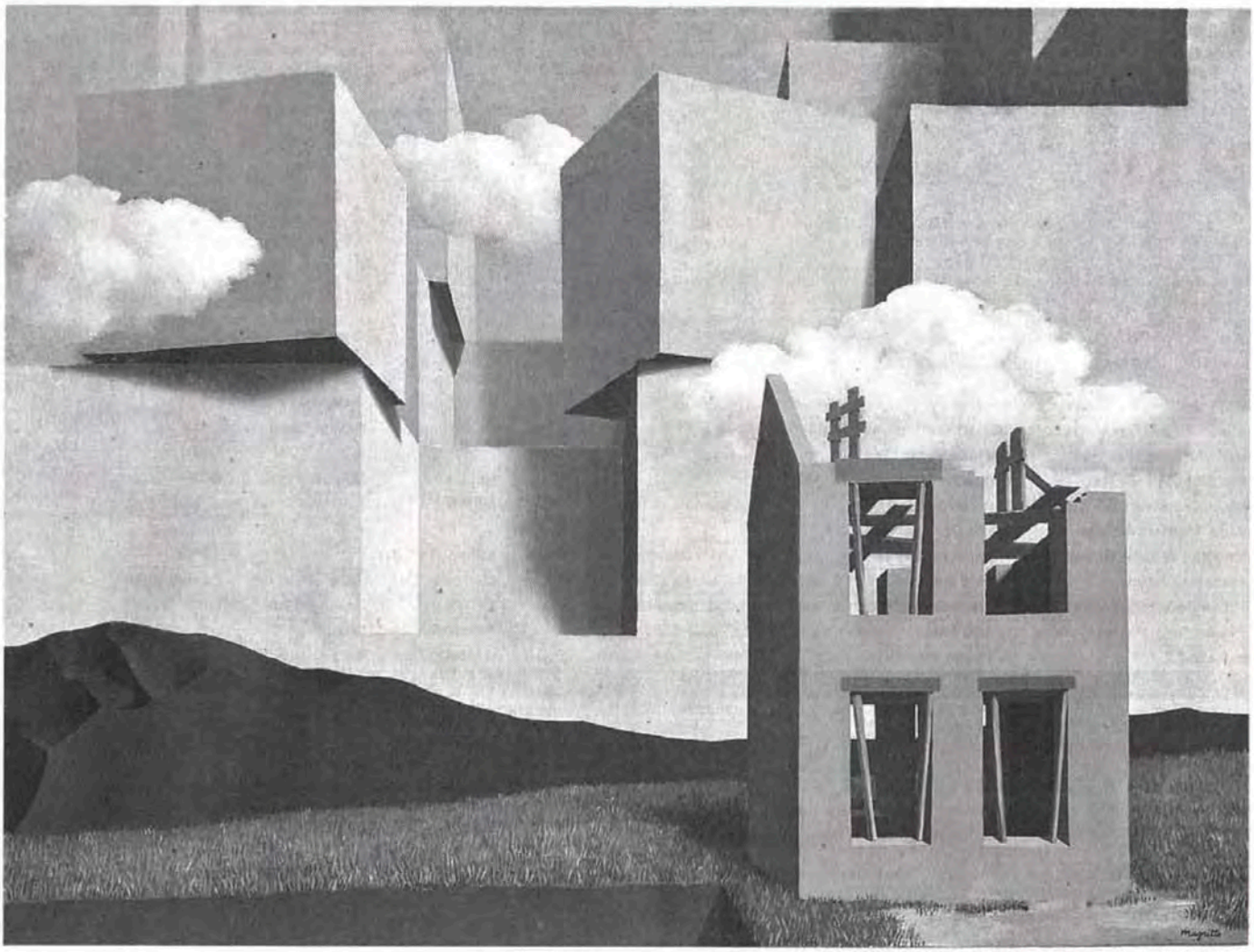
The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2011





★ **'LA CARTE D'APRÈS NATURE'** (through Oct. 8) Using the Belgian painter René Magritte as a kind of divining rod, this show finds surrealism in some unlikely places. Among the objects on view are three paintings by Magritte, including the 1932 "Univers Démasqué" ("The Universe Unmasked"), above; 19th-century landscape photographs by the German artist August Kotzsch; 1970s shots of parkgoing tourists by the Italian artist Luigi Ghirri; and an architectural model from the 1967 Montreal Expo. Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, (212) 243-0200, matthewmarks.com. (Karen Rosenberg)

Rosenberg, Karen. "La Carte d'Après Nature." *The New York Times*, September 2, 2011, p. C17.

The New York Times

# Out-Magritting Magritte, or at Least Coming Close

ESATE OF LUIGI GHIRRI, COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

"La Carte d'Après Nature" at the Matthew Marks Gallery in Chelsea is the kind of magical, intuitive show that could only have been devised by an artist. Using the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte as a kind of divining rod, it finds surrealism in some unlikely places.

KAREN ROSENBERG

ART REVIEW

Its curator, Thomas Demand, is well versed in the uncanny; his best-known works are photographs of paper reconstructions of historical landscapes and interiors photographed to look just enough — but not too much — like the real thing.

You won't see any of his art here, except for a wall-size photograph of red curtains that cuts through the maze of an installation and makes a striking backdrop for the show's three Magrittes. But you'll come to know Mr. Demand intimately through the pieces he's chosen.

Among them are 19th-century landscape photographs by the German artist August Kotzsch, 1970s shots of parkgoing tourists by the Italian artist Luigi Ghirri, and an architectural model from the 1967 Montreal Expo. And that's just a sample of the older work; on the contemporary end are memorable sculptures by the emerging artists Becky Beasley, Saâdane Afif and Kudjoe Affutu, as well as a film installation in which the artist Rodney Graham bikes through a German park while taking LSD.

The Matthew Marks exhibition is a version of one Mr. Demand organized last year for the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco. It features different paintings by Magritte and has been updated with a New York-specific work: a recording of bird sounds made in the Central Park Ramble by the Swedish artist Henrik Hakansson.

Also specific to New York is the layout, based on a drawing by the artist Martin Boyce, that creates intrigue and maximizes serendipity with triangular niches and wall cutouts. It also forces you to double back

Rosenberg, Karen. "Out-Magritting Magritte, or at Least Coming Close." *The New York Times,* August 12, 2011, p. C24.

## La Carte d'Après Nature

*Matthew Marks Gallery*

through certain galleries, further intensifying the Magrittean sensation of déjà vu.

What is it about Magritte, anyway, that entices artists to play curator? Mr. Demand's homage inevitably brings to mind John Baldessari's 2006-7 show for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images."

But where Mr. Baldessari paid tribute to the puckishness of Magritte, Mr. Demand appreciates his more arcane, cryptic side. In his catalog essay Mr. Demand calls Magritte "probably the artist whose works children most often first perceive as art, and whose omnipresence in the museum shops of the world has almost obscured the unique nature of his pictures."

TACITA DEAN. COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Above, "Swiss Alps" (1979) by the Italian artist Luigi Ghirri, who sometimes used wholly artificial Italian landscapes. Left, "Pie" (2003), one of Tacita Dean's meditative works.

He has named his show after a strange little journal Magritte published during the 1950s and early '60s. It took the form of postcards mailed to fellow artists and writers, and included drawings, snippets of poetry and short stories (including a Surrealist take on pulp fiction, "Nat Pinkerton," that's reproduced in the catalog).

The Magrittes (two from the Menil Collection, one from a private collection in Italy) may get top billing in Mr. Demand's "Carte," but the photographs of Mr. Ghirri, 60 in all, drive this show. Their views of truncated, mediated and sometimes wholly artificial Italian landscapes give credence to the idea that, as Mr. Ghirri put it, "photography is already surreal."

In his images foregrounds of real vegetation give way to crudely painted backdrops. Potted plants stand in for trees, lawn ornaments for classical statuary. In a wonderful series taken in the Rimini theme park, "Italia in

Rosenberg, Karen. "Out-Magritting Magritte, or at Least Coming Close." *The New York Times,* August 12, 2011, p. C24.

Miniatura," Mr. Ghirri gleefully skewers the sublime, showing tourists wandering among, and looming over, the park's miniaturized mountains.

His photographs are very much at home next to two Magritte paintings, "In the Airy Glades" (1965), with its nested steles set against fluffy white clouds, and "The Universe Unmasked" (1932), of a roofless house open to an eerily architectonic sky.

And sometimes they look more Magrittean than the Magrittes, as in an image of bowler hats on display in a Parma shop window. Photographed from the inside of the store, they appear to hover

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## An exhibition that ponders an artist's arcane, cryptic side.

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over the plaza outside.

Mr. Demand's film choices are just as inspired, ranging from Tacita Dean's meditative sequences of pears fermenting in a glass jar and magpies rustling bare tree branches, to Ger Van Elk's wonderfully perverse "Well-Shaven Cactus." Best of all is Mr. Graham's "Phonokinetoscope," a drug-enabled idyll that's accessible to the sober; its Syd Barrett-inspired soundtrack echoes through the galleries.

But it's the mix of work in "La Carte d'Après Nature," more than any individual piece, that's truly eye opening. In one gallery Chris Garofalo's recent glazed-porcelain sculptures of invented botanical specimens cross-pollinate with a cubist tree designed in 1925 by the brothers Jan and Joel Martel. In another, Kotzsch's photographs of cellar doors become portals to the underworld when shown alongside an object commissioned, for this show, from Mr. Affutu, a Ghanaian coffin maker.

Along the way you may find yourself asking: What does all of this have to do with Magritte? But just as he tells us "This Is Not a Pipe," Mr. Demand quietly puts forth the idea of landscape as the ultimate "treachery of image."

Rosenberg, Karen. "Out-Magritting Magritte, or at Least Coming Close." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2011, p. C24.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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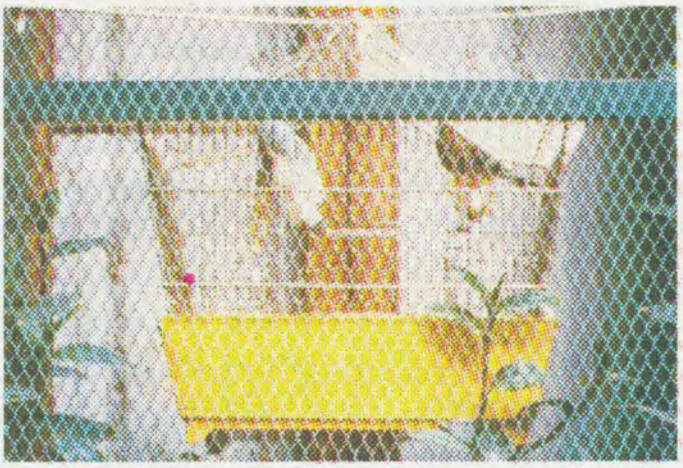

**SURREALISM IN THE REAL WORLD**
*Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, through Oct. 8*
German sculptor-photographer Thomas Demand curated "La Carte d'Après Nature" (roughly, "The Postcard of Nature"), including three rare works of Surrealist René Magritte and the dreamlike "Modena" (above), a 1972 work by photographer Luigi Ghirri.



"Surrealism in the Real World." *The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2011, p. C14.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

# With a Magritte-Inspired Show, Thomas Demand Tries Curating

By Andrew Russeth 7/19 3:13pm

Luigi Ghirri's Modena (1972) photograph. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, © Estate of Luigi Ghirri

While most New York galleries have inaugurated their summer shows by now, the Matthew Marks Gallery is coming late out of the gate tonight, unveiling a group show called *La Carte d'après Nature* that was curated by the Berlin-based photographer Thomas Demand, who shows at the gallery.

*La Carte*, which takes its name from the title of a journal that Belgian Surrealist René Magritte published from 1951 to 1965, includes a clutch of artists with little previous New York exposure, like the French artist Saâdane Afif, the Dutch experimenter Ger van Elk, and the Ghanaian sculptor Kudjoe Affutu, whose work often takes the form of coffin sculptures. There are also dozens of photographs by the deceased Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri and films by British superstars Tacita Dean and Rodney Graham.

Even in a summer of unusual group shows, the design of *La Carte* sounds peculiar, sporting wallpaper by Mr. Demand and walls based on a labyrinthine drawing by the Glasgow-based artist Martin Boyce. "I wanted there to be the feeling of something strange," Mr. Demand said in a telephone interview, explaining the layout of the show. "By the time you reach the third gallery, I want you to think, 'I am walking in a drawing.'"

None of the work in the show is for sale, a stipulation that came from the Brussels-based René Magritte Foundation, which helped organized the exhibition when it appeared at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco last year. Three Magrittes are included in the show: two on loan from Houston's Menil Collection and one, on loan from a private collection, that Mr. Demand noted has not been shown publicly since 1932, the year the artist painted it.

Mr. Demand spoke enthusiastically about his show, but, when asked by *The Observer* if he was would consider undertaking curatorial work as a second career, the artist didn't pause. "I'm just an amateur," he said firmly.

Russeth, Andrew. "With a Magritte-Inspired Show, Thomas Demand Tries Curating." *The New York Observer*, July 19, 2011.

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2011

# Inside Art

*Carol Vogel*

## An Artist Shows His Train of Thought

It has become something of an annual tradition at the Matthew Marks Gallery to invite one of its artists to organize a summer exhibition, and this year it is Thomas Demand. He has taken over the gallery's West 22nd Street space in Chelsea, reconfiguring it with an installation of labyrinthine walls based on a drawing by the artist Martin Boyce and presenting a show opening Tuesday called "La Carte d'Après Nature."

The title is taken from the name of an art journal published sporadically by Magritte between 1951 and 1965. It consisted mainly of simple postcards by friends as well as his own work.

"Like Magritte this show is a train of thought, a very open concept,'' Mr. Demand, a German, said in a telephone interview from his studio in Los Angeles.

The exhibition originated at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, when the director, Marie-Claude Beaud, asked Mr. Demand to organize a show to inaugurate the space, which sits high above the city next to a botanical garden.

The New York version, like the Monaco one, consists of various artists, some living, others dead, starting with the classically Surrealist paintings of Magritte and including about 50 works by the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri, who died in 1992. The exhibition will showcase some unusual objects, too, including a wood coffin — a sculpture in the shape of a refrigerator — by Kudjoe Affutu, a 25-year-old artist from Ghana.

The over-arching theme of the show is the notion of reality versus illusion, with a focus on nature.

MENIL COLLECTION, HOUSTON, C. HERSCOVICI, LONDON/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK

Magritte's "In the Airy Glades" (1965) will be at the Matthew Marks Gallery in a show organized by Thomas Demand.

In Monaco two paintings by Magritte were borrowed from European institutions. But since the loans for these works could not be extended, Mr. Demand borrowed two others from the Menil Collection in Houston. To best show them off, he designed wallpaper that resembles a red curtain, against which the Magritte paintings will hang. "They have very elaborate gilt frames and would get lost against a white wall,'' Mr. Demand said.

The show travels through 150 years. "It's fascinating how similar motifs and starting points conceived during different times form a good dialogue," Mr. Demand said. "Much of the art relates to each other without realizing it."

Vogel, Carol. "An Artist Shows His Train of Thought." *The New York Times,* July 15, 2011, p. C22.