

## A MATTER OF LIGHT *Nine photographers in the Vatican Museums*

Setting the birth of a new collection is indeed one of the best ways for a museum to demonstrate its vitality. An ambitious enterprise especially for the “Museum of Museums”, namely the Museums of the Pope, which over the centuries of their history have repeatedly been faced with expansions and additions of new collections. Doing it today, within an existing structure that is in continuous movement, requires at the same time weighting and sensitivity, awareness of the existing and ability to look into the future.

The project “A Matter of Light” was born with the precise purpose of creating a new collection: the first section of contemporary photography in the Vatican Museums. It represents an excellent example of how it is possible to turn such a delicate and complex occasion into a moment of experimentation and reflection.

Since the beginnings, the aim of the Head of the Contemporary Art Collection, Micol Forti – who started the project and conceived it together with the Editorial Director of Contrastobooks, Alessandra Mauro – was precisely to transform a historical, fully symbolic place of multicultural and universal beauty such as the Vatican Museums, into the object of creative and interpretative work by nine international photographers, diverse from the perspectives of research, education, style and origin.

Structured as a real commission, the project has been envisioned starting from some overarching thematic areas involving a group of “voices” and “eyes” of the international photographic art scene. Through their work, many different issues had the occasion to be enlightened.

All the artworks realized – around 200 – have become part of the Contemporary Art Collection of the Vatican Museums. Their presence confirms the initial mission of the Collection, commissioned by its founder Pope Paul VI Montini in the early seventies of the last century: to maintain a relationship between the Church and modernity, between faith and artistic creativity.

This extraordinary achievement was possible thanks to the support of those who believed in the incredible opportunity for the Vatican Museums to restart the role of promoter: our Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, in particular the Chapter of New York and the Chapter of California. Since 2012, they have sensed the peculiarity of this project and have “adopted” it, followed it and

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encouraged it in its process. To them goes my gratitude and my personal acknowledgement, along with the one of the entire Direction of the Vatican Museums, for the friendship and for the special insight with which they support the many challenges and important initiatives promoted by our Institution.

The figure of Eve, taken from the Original Sin by Michelangelo and reworked with exquisite sensitivity by Bill Armstrong, has been chosen as the symbolic image of the cover of the catalogue, for it sums up the very soul of this enterprise: to keep an active and fertile dialogue between the masterpieces of the past and present, between tradition and modernity, between the artists of the past and those of today.

Barbara Jatta

*Director of the Vatican Museums*

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