

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

Bill Armstrong

From Sistine Chapel, Gestures – Michelangelo Frescoes; Presences – Quattrocento Frescoes, 2015

The only one to have worked specifically within the Sistine Chapel, Bill Armstrong focused his attention on the faces of the figures in the fifteenth-century frescoes, *Presences*, and on the *Gestures* that animate Michelangelo's Ceiling and *Judgement*. Armstrong's procedure focuses on the theme of fading, of "out of focus", as a stylistic and interpretative register: the figures are isolated and placed on powerful coloured backgrounds, before being photographed again and blurred.

The result is the creation of two series, each consisting of nine images, that are opposed in the contrast between the fifteenth-century faces, with their harmonic fixedness, and the silhouettes of Michelangelo's characters, who seem to almost swim in the space of coloured light. In the first series, the expressions refer to a diversity of attitudes that recall the search for the Renaissance ideal and the possibility of a balance relationship with the surrounding space. The theme chosen in the series from Michelangelo frescoes is instead the fall of man, the "Fall from Grace", in Armstrong's own words. At the centre of the composition there is the figure of Eve who accepts the gift of the apple, while at the top, opening the group, is one of the angels depicted in the upper part of the *Judgement*. All around, the bodies of the fallen souls dance in a rhythm that precipitates, as in Michelangelo's work, from top to bottom.

Born in 1952 in Montreal (Canada), Armstrong lives and works in New York. After studying Art History, he devoted himself to photography. Since 1997 he has been working on the *Infinity* series, which gathers together out of focus photographs taken with the aim set to infinity. With this particular technique the subjects dematerialize, become evanescent, and transform in shape and colour. One of his works was chosen for the cover of Lyle Rexer's book, *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography* (2009). His *Mandala* series was presented at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2008. Armstrong's photographs figure in important public and private collections.

Peter Bialobrzeski

Vatican, 2015

In the *Vatican* series, the gaze of Peter Bialobrzeski focuses on the architectural configuration of the

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different bodies that make up the museum as a whole, through surprising visions exclusively addressed to the outside, enveloping the Vatican City to include some glimpses of Rome. In the morning or dusk light, the “palimpsest” of epochs, forms and functions emerges, powerful and at the same time light, from inside and outside the Vatican walls.

With one exception, the eight photographs present a vision from above. In some cases it is a bird’s eye, almost cartographic and vertiginous vision, taken from the highest railing surrounding the dome of St. Peter’s, or from the top of the Tower of Leo IV in the Vatican Gardens. In other cases it is a more close-up view, with perspective shots but never following a central axis, taken from the corridors of the Egyptian Museum, from the roof of the *Braccio Nuovo* (the New Wing) or from the terraces of the houses in the Borgo. With a calibrated modulation of the aperture, the colours populate the spaces as a constructive element of the images, almost composing real “architectures of architecture”, in a mobile balance between empty and full, near and far, intimacy and distance.

Born in 1961 in Wolfsburg (Germany), Peter Bialobrzski studied Politics and Sociology before becoming a photographer. He travelled to Asia and then studied Photography at the Folkwangschule in Essen and at the LCP in London. His observation of the social and urban space led him to produce deep and original works collected in books such as *Neon Tigers: Photographs of Asian Megacities* (2004), *Case Study Homes* (2010) and *The Raw and the Cooked* (2011). Since 2002 he has been professor of Photography at the Bremen University of the Arts. Notable among the numerous awards he has won is the Erich Salomon from DGPh (2012).

Antonio Biasiucci

Magazzino delle Corazze, 2015

Antonio Biasiucci is the only one of the nine authors to have worked in the storage deposits: the private, almost “secret” place of every museum, by their very nature inaccessible and destined to contain and preserve a less well-known heritage than that exposed to the public, but equally rich and precious. Among the numerous deposits of the Vatican Museums, he chose the *Magazzino delle Corazze*, which gives the series its title: a large circular environment of extraordinary appeal, where classical materials have been kept since the last century: statuettes, heads and fragments. Biasiucci selected about thirty finds, and established an intimate, profound dialogue with each one, in which the light – measured and meditated – functioned as a true communicative channel, as an instrument for extracting the image. The result is an installation, almost a mosaic, in which the combination of the individual “fragments” creates a telling set: memories assembled in the large container of historical memory.

Born in 1961 in Dragoni (Caserta), he moved to Naples in 1980 and worked on the spaces in the urban suburbs and on personal memory, photographing rites, environments and people of his home town. In 1984 he started a collaboration with the Vesuvian Observatory. In 1987 he met Antonio

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Neiwiller, actor and theatre director, with whom he established a collaborative relationship. Among the awards, the “European Kodak Panorama” (2005), the “Kraszna/Krausz Photography Book Awards” for *Res. Lo stato delle cose*. He has published, among other things, *Magma* (2008), *Vacche* (2000), *Dei pani, dei volti* (2011) and *Codex* (2016).

Alain Fleischer

L'Eternel et l'Infini, 2015

For this project entitled *L'Eternel et l'Infini*, Alain Fleischer, who is accustomed to working in the museum rooms, has moved as a “privileged visitor”, attracted by individual masterpieces and the way they live in space, but also fascinated by the discovery of the relationships that the works have between themselves and with the architectural context that contains them.

The outcome of his “visit” is an astonishing visual itinerary, consisting of eleven large panoramic photographs (one metre high and three wide), accompanying the observer in space and time. The images create entirely new juxtapositions; as narrative “tapes”, they receive and contain the historical stratification and the intrinsic contradictions that characterize this plural museum, restoring a sense of temporal continuity linking the multiple aspects like a red thread.

Born in Paris in 1944, following studies in Literature, Linguistics, Semiology and Anthropology he dedicated himself to cinema, photography, writing and teaching. In his art he develops the visual language of photography with a focus on the pictorial aspect. Winner of the Prix de Rome, on behalf of the French Ministry of Culture he conceived the artistic training centre “*Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains*” which he has directed since 1997. He has published volumes of essays and fiction, and his videos include *L'Art d'exposer* (1984), *Le Louvre imaginaire* (1992) and *Centre Pompidou. L'espace d'une Odyssée* (2007). His retrospectives include those of the CNP (1995) and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (2003).

Francesco Jodice

Spectaculum Spectatoris, 2015

Francesco Jodice questions and works on the role of the visitor, developing since 2011 the project *Spectaculum Spectatoris*, an attempt to build a contemporary atlas, almost an endless portrait of the “museum wanderer”, of which the Vatican project also forms a part. In the Vatican Museums, Jodice chose five different “frames”: the Gregorian Profane Museum, the Gregorian Egyptian Museum, the Simonetti Staircase, the Pio-Clementine Museum and the Hall of the Chariot, transforming the places into genuine photographic sets. He then asked individuals or groups of people to pose, looking at the lens. Casting was carried out among the everyday public: couples, whole families, married couples in wedding dress, art connoisseurs, and religious on an official visit. This gallery of portraits tells of the humanity that inhabits the spaces of the Museums and,

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with its presence and its movement, gives them form and meaning. Reciprocating their direct, frontal glances ignites confidence in the existence of a time necessary for vision: of the work, or of the spectator.

Born in Naples in 1967, he lives and works in Milan. He graduated in Architecture and has worked in the field of art since 1995. His research explores the changes in the social landscape, with attention to the phenomena of urban anthropology and the production of new participation processes. He teaches at the NABA in Milan and at the Scuola Holden in Turin. He has participated in events such as Documenta, the Venice Biennale, the Saõ Paulo Biennial, and the ICP Triennial in New York. His principal projects include the photographic atlas *What We Want* on the evolution of the social landscape; “The Secret Traces”, an archive of urban stalking; and “Citytellers”, a trilogy of films on the new forms of urbanism. *Panorama* (Camera, Turin, 2016) was the first retrospective on his career.

Mimmo Jodice

I volti della memoria, 2015

Mimmo Jodice chose to concentrate on classic works, casting his pure and refined gaze on a series of marble heads on display in the Chiaramonti Gallery, the Pio-Clementine Museum and the Gregorian Profane Museum. His meditated, methodical and sensitive work was carried out during a stroll, or rather a true peripatetic recognition of ancient appeal, through the corridors populated by statues. Taking the gentle time of attention, his look and step approached with lucidity the Roman age works of portraiture. He then took the same care to calibrate the contrasts in the printing phase, carried out personally as always. One by one, he chose the “actors” of the portraits, selecting them as one would human beings: looking them in the eye. These *Volti della Memoria*, “faces of memory” of women, men, melancholic children, who look at us or look next to us, bear witness to that very special anthropological, “magical” capacity of museums, of reactivating the gaze towards the past-present, of being true meeting places.

Born in 1934 in Naples, in 1970 he became the first professor of Photography in the Academies of Fine Arts. In 1980 he published *Vedute di Napoli*. His work on the Mediterranean dates from 1995. Attention to space and personal and collective memory is the main feature of much of his extraordinary production, which includes *Eden* (1997), *Perdersi a guardare* (2007), *Pompei* (2010), and *Gli occhi del Louvre* (2011). Jodice has received awards such as the Feltrinelli Prize of the Accademia dei Lincei (2003), an honorary degree from the Federico II University of Naples (2006), and in 2011 the French title of “Chevalier de l'Ordre des Art et des Lettres” (2011). In 2016 the Museo MADRE in Naples dedicated a major retrospective to him, “Attesa 1960-2016”.

Rinko Kawauchi

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Echo, 2016

The Japanese Rinko Kawauchi focused on spatial and temporal intervals, empty corners, transit points, cracks on walls and behind works, the traces left by visitors, the colourful swirl of the crowd observed from afar. Her visions, which she encloses under the title of the *Echo* series, construct the stages of an anomalous itinerary. The usual subjects are subjected to a sort of sublimation process, which transforms them and returns them to the eye of the observer in distilled form, stripped of the waste of habit. Thanks to the gaze of Rinko Kawauchi, the Vatican Museums become sources of unexpected suggestions and unprecedented visual stories, transforming once more into a place of silence and contemplation, which every museum should be to enable the infinite levels of interpretation to be enjoyed.

Born in 1972 in Shiga (Japan), Rinko Kawauchi lives and works in Tokyo. In 2001 she published three books: *Utatane*, *Hanabi* and *Hanako*, which caused a sensation in the world of Japanese photography. Her unique approach, aimed at “portraying the senses”, and her attention to the details of everyday life, the cycle of life and its transitory nature, has inspired the admiration of art lovers all over the world.

In 2002, she won the “Kimura Ihei” award and in 2009 the “Annual Infinity Award” of the ICP in the Art category. Her works include *Aila*, *The Eyes*, *The Ears* and *Illuminance*.

Martin Parr

Vatican Museums, 2015

For the *Vatican Museums* project, Martin Parr worked in two different periods of the year 2015, in the adjacent areas at the entrance of the Vatican Museums and internally, in the exhibition spaces, building a chromatically bright, ironic and profound photographic fresco of the population that gravitates inside and outside the walls of the smallest state in the world. The phenomenon of mass tourism seems to overturn every space, opening up to the different interpretations of the concepts of perception, movement, temporality and everyday life. A multiethnic and varied community emerges from Parr’s work, which confronts the Museums as the real destination of a pilgrimage, and passes through them giving life to a sample of attitudes and gestures, sometimes in resonance with the masterpieces that surround them.

Born in 1952 in Epsom (Surrey, UK), Martin Parr studied Photography at Manchester Polytechnic. After heated debates due to the provocative style of his photography, in 1994 he became a member of Magnum Photos, of which he was president from 2013 to 2017. His work has been shown in a series of exhibitions in several museums such as the Tate Modern in London, which recently acquired his important collection of photographic books. He is also a lecturer and curator of books and exhibitions, contributing to the 2004 Arles Festival, the 2010 Brighton Biennial and the *Strange*

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and Familiar exhibition held in the Barbican in London. In 2017 he founded the *Martin Parr Foundation* in Bristol.

Massimo Siragusa

Spazio e Materia, 2015

For this project Massimo Siragusa created a sequence of images entitled *Spazio e Materia* of great scenographic impact. Chromatically refined as watercolours, they give an account of the majesty and harmony of a series of rooms and hub environments of the Vatican Museums, especially in the area housing the collections of classical antiquity. Through a disorienting work with light, the spaces appear to be large containers uprooted by historical time and real life, which link the works and centuries together. Frames that are only apparently stable make manifest the “personality” of the individual places, magically united by an atmosphere of enchantment.

Born in Catania in 1958, Massimo Siragusa lives in Rome, where he teaches Photography. In his photographic surveys he has often shown interest in current events, social emergencies and changes in the landscape, both urban and rural, in a series of in-depth and extensive works. He has published in important magazines, both Italian and foreign, and has been responsible for numerous institutional campaigns. He has received several awards, including three Sony Awards and four World Press Photo awards. His publications include: *Il Vaticano*, *Il Cerchio Magico*, *Credi* and *Teatro d'Italia*. Since 2017 he has directed the Plenum Gallery artistic space in Catania.

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