

EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS. ITALY

Iwan Baan, Olivo Barbieri, Gabriele Basilico, Letizia Battaglia, Jordi Bernadó, Alighiero Boetti, Andrea Botto, Silvia Camporesi, Giovanni Chiaramonte, Mario Cresci, Franco Fontana, Gianni Berengo Gardin, Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, Giuseppe Leone, Ugo Mulas, Walter Niedermayr, Massimo Piersanti, Fabio Ponzio, Massimo Vitali

MAXXI is taking its photography collection to India on the occasion of the celebrations for the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and India and the 24th edition of the *Technology Summit* at which Italy is a guest

31 October 2018 – 13 January 2019
Italian Institute of Culture, New Delhi - India

Next stop: Italian Institute of Culture, Mumbai, India, March 2019

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Rome, 30 October 2018. From the metaphysical visions of **Luigi Ghirri** to the crowded beaches of **Massimo Vitali**, from the saturated colours of the landscapes of **Franco Fontana** to the anguished story of an abandoned land by **Letizia Battaglia**, from the elegant and essential architectural visions of **Gabriele Basilico** to the mountains of **Walter Niedermayr**, all this and more can be found in **EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS. ITALY**, a portrait of Italy seen through the eyes of many of the masters of Italian photography, the MAXXI exhibition curated by Margherita Guccione and Simona Antonacci, running from **30 October 2018**, at the **Italian Institute of Culture in New Delhi** on the occasion of the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and India and the 24th edition of the *Technology Summit* at which Italy is a guest nation this year.

The exhibition, promoted by the **Ministry of Economic Development** and with the fundamental support of **SACE SIMEST (Cassa depositi e prestiti Group)**, with its **20 artists** of international renown and the **over 100 photographs** on show, is a reboot of the earlier show *Extraordinary Visions. L'Italia ci guarda*, presented at MAXXI on June 2016, and represents a successful example of that **diplomacy of art and culture** to which MAXXI has always devoted preferential attention.

The works on show, all drawn from the **MAXXI Permanent Collection**, recount the cultural transformations in which Italy has been a protagonist in the most recent decades. Among the photographers involved, many are representatives of the *Italian landscape school* and are joined by members of later generations and others working in different genres ranging from social reportage to artistic and conceptual experimentations. The exhibition opens not with a photographic image, but with a masterpiece by the artist **Alighiero Boetti**, *Mappa*, a tapestry made in 1971 that represents a map of the world in which every country is distinguished by the colours of its national flag. A work that presents a geopolitical reflection on the transformations of the contemporary world and the strength of art, capable of creating dialogues between places and communities distant from one another.

EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS. ITALY is not an illustrated history of Italy, nor is a chronological and descriptive account, but rather a reflection on the appearance and the substance of contemporary Italy that tries to capture the most up-to-date dimension, far from a stereotypical idea of the *Belpaese*.

The exhibition offers a journey via **three thematic paths: CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPES, STATE, CITY, WORK and ART AND CULTURE**, each conceived as an independent visual discourse, a “framing” of converging or diverging points of view.

The section devoted to the **Italian landscape**, celebrated in the *Grand Tours* from the 17th century, describes the relationship between the sublime image constructed over the centuries by the stratification of signs and values on which the gaze of generations of photographers has rested, renewing the poetics of the narration of physical space.

The post-modern contemporary landscape is represented by, among other, the work of masters such as **Luigi Ghirri** with his distancing, metaphysical images, or **Franco Fontana** whose landscapes are harmonious geometries saturated with colour, or again the images of **Letizia Battaglia**, cries of protest for a land wounded by neglect. Alongside them are young artists such as **Silvia Camporesi** with her crumbling historic interiors or the crowded beaches of **Massimo Vitali** and the sublime mountains of **Walter Niedermayr**.

In the part dedicated to **public space** the protagonists are the places of the state institutions and the communities of the citizens, as in the shots by the Spanish photographer **Jordi Bernadó** who investigates the iconic sites of religious, political and cultural power, or of **Olivo Barbieri** who presents the disturbing but alluring image of the progressive urbanization of the Adriatic coastline and those of **Gianni Berengo Gardin** who documents the relationship between infrastructure and work, offering an image of the city as a hotbed of energy.

The final section of the exhibition is devoted to the **art, architecture and culture** that have shaped the country, delineating the image that Italy has offered of itself to the world.

This section features, among other works, the portraits of artists by **Ugo Mulas** at the Venice Biennale in 1966, the rigorous, meditated architectural shots of **Gabriele Basilico** and the aerial visions of MAXXI itself by the Dutch photographer **Iwan Baan**, that successfully transmit the building's relationship with the surrounding quarter and its formal referencing of the flow of the Tiber river.

EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS. ITALY composes a poetic yet documentary, social and institutional “atlas” of the Italy of the last 30 years.

With sublime and ordinary landscapes, excellent and everyday architecture, the world of art and the institutions, the exhibition paints a portrait composed of attitudes, customs, identities and fascinating and at times contradictory memories that have profoundly marked and continue to mark the physical body of Italian cities and landscapes.

The press kit and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.maxxi.art/en/area-stampa/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

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Museo nazionale
delle arti del XXI secolo

**Extraordinary Visions. Italy.
Exploring art, architecture and landscape
through MAXXI's Photography Collections**

Luigi Di Maio *Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Social Policies*

The *Extraordinary Visions. Italy* exhibition, which I have the pleasure to present, originated out of a partnership agreement between the Italian Ministry for Economic Development, Simest and the Fondazione MAXXI regarding the implementation of cultural promotion initiatives in India, designed to support Italian exports. India is a country that is experiencing strong economic growth and a market that offers huge potential for Italian businesses. It is no coincidence that the Steering Committee for International Italy identified it as one of the target countries for promotional activities this year. During the year that marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and India, we accepted the invitation from the Indian authorities to take part as a partner country in the 2018 Technology Summit, the most important technology event in southern Asia, organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

This event is one of strategic importance for Italy, acting as an international showcase for Italian areas of technological excellence. It looks set to produce results in terms of industrial, scientific and technological collaboration, as well as representing an opportunity to assess new business opportunities, form partnerships and attract foreign investments in Italy. During this occasion, the Ministry for Economic Development has decided to enhance the Italian contribution with a contemporary art exhibition entitled *Extraordinary Visions. Italy*, held in partnership with the Fondazione MAXXI to represent the various components that characterize Italy's image overseas: a country that creates culture, art and design, but also a commercial partner for innovative and high-quality production. As I see things, these are two sides of the same coin.

The exhibition, which will feature a work by the artist Alighiero Boetti and more than 100 photographs from the permanent collection of the Fondazione MAXXI, will take place alongside Italy's participation in the Technology Summit with a view to extending the dialogue between industry, academia and policy makers regarding scientific and technological innovation to incorporate the cultural aspects of two countries with a great artistic tradition.

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Lorenzo Angeloni Italian Ambassador in India

With *Extraordinary Visions. Italy*, MAXXI is taking images of a contemporary Italy in India at the height of the celebrations to mark the seventieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries. Landscape, Institutions, Culture and Society are the keys to interpreting a journey that explores the territory and only lingers incidentally on places that have always symbolized Italy around the world. Empty spaces alternate with spaces animated by everyday life, from the heart of institutions to rarefied provincial grandeur, in a succession of visions where architecture, art and the splendours of the past are dotted with dreams and expectations on the faces of an Italy that lives out its modernity in work, politics and industry. Human presence, whether direct or mediated by architectural, artistic, agricultural or industrial intervention, dominates nature, although this remains vivid and ready to take back possession of the shared spaces of our country, known throughout the world for its singular elongated shape that recalls a "boot".

It is the Italy portrayed in images by master photographers such as Luigi Ghirri, Letizia Battaglia, Gabriele Basilico, and Gianni Berengo Gardin, to cite just some of the twenty featured artists with more than a hundred artworks that show the country free from gloss and touch-ups, far removed from the stereotypes of mass tourism and closer to the idea of itself, poised between history and post-modernity. In the places of the *res publica*, travel, industrial manufacturing and leisure, we find the environments that form the horizon and give rhythm to the pace of contemporary Italian city life, midway between celebration and criticism.

The aim is to use captivating images to take the Indian public on a journey to the heart of Italy today: an honest, real and magical journey, which offers an all-round view of the Belpaese, from creative wonders to neglect, from solidarity to crime, featuring visions shared by all of humanity involved in globalization. It therefore paints a picture of a more intimate and closer Italy, an Italy that is immortalized and, above all, an Italy that looks to the future. And indeed, it is to the future that relations between Italy and India are looking. The motto chosen for the seventieth anniversary, "Celebrating the Future", seeks to promote our common interest in strengthening bilateral collaboration in all sectors, including politics, economics, science and culture. We also want to introduce another Italy with this exhibition, exploring its strengths and the challenges it faces, which are the challenges of contemporary society, thereby completing the picture painted by postcards in the collective imagination with frames captured from the present day.

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Giovanna Melandri, *President Fondazione MAXXI*

The natural and urban landscape. The mark left by architecture on a city's horizon. The value of art and culture within a community's journey. *Extraordinary Visions. Italy* is a wall painting in the form of a collective photographic composition. It is an exhibition developed to tell the story, at other latitudes, of the unmistakable web woven by history in the heart of the Mediterranean and the ideas it is still able to convey beyond geographical, political and spiritual boundaries, thanks to the vision of great masters of photography.

This album features sublime touches of beauty and crisis reports, as well as containing challenges shared by all societies. It explores the past, present and future of Italy, offering the chance to breathe in its wonderful places and uncovering hidden talents in the over 100 original images selected by Margherita Guccione, Director of MAXXI Architettura, in order to "export" one of the recent exhibitions held at our museum, which was deemed to be the most suitable for painting a universal picture of the value and meaning of photography in the study and planning of a new regional "aesthetic".

However, *Extraordinary Visions. Italy* also includes a non-photographic work: Alighiero Boetti's *Mappa*. This masterpiece mirrors and records the changing contemporary world and art as a driving force for meetings between different and remote peoples, traditions and regimes.

Having grown out of the highly successful exhibition that celebrated 70 years of the Italian Republic in 2016, *Extraordinary Visions. Italy* represents a happy stage within the *art and culture-based diplomacy* on which MAXXI has always focused. Now, as it arrives in India, a country that plays a crucial role in the essential dialogue between East and West, between Asia and Europe, our journey of artistic and civilian research and comparison culminates by offering the two opposite sides of the world an opportunity to improve their reciprocal knowledge of one another and mark out new lines of creative development. Italy's changes, contradictions and areas of excellence demand closer ties with India. And I believe that this is also true for India with Italy.

It is based on this firm conviction that I have every faith in the exhibition to be staged over the course of several months in 2018 and 2019, in India. The support offered to MAXXI by two Italian ministers (Economic Development and Foreign Affairs and Cooperation) and our diplomatic and cultural organizations provides tangible proof of the key role MAXXI – National Museum of 21st Century Arts is perceived to play on the global art scene by national institutions and banks.

**Extraordinary Visions. Italy.
Exploring art, architecture and landscape
through MAXXI's Photography Collections**

Margherita Guccione *Director MAXXI Architettura*

Extraordinary Visions. Italy is an exhibition that takes a look at the image of contemporary Italy, seeking to grasp its most contemporary dimension, far-removed from the stereotyped ideal of the Belpaese. This is a dimension marked by behaviours, customs, identities and memories that make a deep, ongoing impression on the physical aspect of Italian cities and landscapes. More than 100 original photographs tell the story of the cultural transformations that have affected Italy over recent decades. This is not an illustrated story or a chronological and descriptive account, but a zig-zagging journey that investigates the appearance and substance of a land, observing both sublime and ordinary landscapes, fine architecture and the art world, places of power and those of everyday life. In other words, it explores the contradictions and qualities that connote the current identity of a country subject to constant movement and freeflowing change.

The exhibition is a poetic and yet documentary, social and institutional "atlas" of the Italy of the last 30 years. It opens with a masterpiece by Alighiero Boetti: his *Mappa*, an emblem of the constant dialogue between Asia and Europe, providing a geopolitical reflection on the transformations of the contemporary world and the power of art, able to establish dialogue between distant places and cultures.

All the works are from the MAXXI collections, which explains the selection of featured photographers and images: they include projects commissioned by MAXXI Architettura from 2003 onwards, with photographic campaigns aimed at documenting architecture and the changing landscape, such as *Italian Atlas*, *Sguardi Contemporanei* and *Cantiere d'Autore*, the project that made it possible to record the construction of the museum between 2004 and 2010 through the eyes of major Italian and international photographers, and also the works acquired by MAXXI Arte, which brings together some of the most important artistic research of recent decades, and photographs from the Archivio Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, donated to MAXXI by Gabriella Lonardi Buontempo in 2012.

The photographers include numerous representatives of the "Italian landscape school", as well as photographers from later generations and those working in different areas, from social reporting to artistic and conceptual experimentation. The diverse identity of contemporary Italy is charted along three freely flowing lines that, by comparing sometimes overlapping and sometimes diverging viewpoints, encourage us to move away from the visual habit of the contemporary world in order to grasp the infinite shades of the present, poised between memory and actuality.

The first section looks at the landscape. Celebrated by the Grand Tour since the 17th century, the Italian landscape conveys a sublime physicality, layered with signs and values, sedimented in the collective imagination and often taken for granted. Generations of photographers have focused on the relationship between this image and the postmodern contemporary landscapes that have redesigned the outskirts of Italian cities, updating the way in which the physical space is narrated.

Luigi Ghirri's research, which involved the early and original use of colour film, focused on the "landscape 3 km from home," that of the "lesser" Italy far-removed from the picture postcard image. His research was groundbreaking, paving the way for ordinary and extraordinary visions: the Jonica main road is travelled by Mario Cresci, visiting common places and more unusual settings, Giovanni Chiaramonte depicts the historic stratification of sites in Calabria and Sicily, while Fontana offers an alienating and emotionally involving interpretation of the landscape through the formal harmony of his images. Sicily ("In Sicily lies the key to everything," wrote Goethe) sums up contradictions and strong points that apply to the entire peninsula: the evocative images of a sublime, powerful and mythical landscape, described by Giuseppe Leone, encounter the photographs with which Letizia Battaglia denounces neglect and ecological and aesthetic destruction. To these views we can add the precariously balanced places portrayed by Andrea Botto and the ruined historic buildings captured by Silvia Camporesi, in which the artist re-appropriates the spaces by painting over the photographic prints. Massimo Vitali's exploration of mass tourism, Walter Niedermayr's sublime mountain landscapes and Fabio Ponzio's account of the Adriatic Coast from Trieste to Rimini, highlight different aspects of the delicate relationship between humans and their surroundings. The section dedicated to public space in cities — the historical centres and large contemporary urban agglomerations — reveals places where state institutions and local communities meet and build new visions.

The Spanish artist Jordi Bernadó explores the way in which the "body" of institutions takes shape, selecting iconic places of religious, political and cultural power, while Olivo Barbieri offers a disturbing yet attractive

image of the urbanization of the Adriatic Coast in *La città perfetta* ("The Perfect City"). The contemporary urban dimension, redesigned by the post-industrial economic model, is represented in an exemplary fashion by the city of Genoa: Gianni Berengo Gardin documents the relationship between the infrastructures and human work, producing an image of the city as a hotbed of energy. The third section is devoted to art, architecture and culture, whose creative energies have forged the country's identity, outlining the image of itself that Italy presents to the world.

The 1960s "art scene" with artists such as Max Ernst, Alberto Burri and Emilio Vedova, was depicted by Ugo Mulas during the 1966 Venice Biennale. His pictures establish a dialogue with those by Massimo Piersanti devoted to *Contemporanea*, an exhibition that marked the explosion of avant-garde practices in the 1970s Rome.

The quality architecture that dots the Italian countryside and cities, portrayed by great photographers, also helps to create an unexpected and extraordinary visual landscape. The interest in the shape of the city and architecture, always expressed by Gabriele Basilico, is translated by Luigi Moretti's stringent and meditated photographs of the Casa Balilla; advanced engineering projects, such as Pier Luigi Nervi's Palazzetto dello Sport, are portrayed as abstractions by Barbieri, while Guido Guidi rests his political gaze upon Carlo Scarpa's construction for the Brion Tomb, interpreting it as a theatrical wing onto which moving light and the passage of time are projected.

With the construction of the National Museum of 21st Century Arts, contemporary culture — expressed by the architectural excellence of Zaha Hadid's design, portrayed here by Iwan Baan — redesigns the landscape of the historical city, projecting Italy and its image from a fully contemporary perspective.

EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS. ITALY
30 ottobre 2018 – 13 gennaio 2019
Italian Cultural Centre New Delhi – India

ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

The documentary character of the work of Dutch photographer **Iwan Baan** (b. Amsterdam, 1975), together with his ability to convey the cultural and social components that mark the architectural space, led him to collaborate with leading international architects.

In his aerial photographs taken in 2010, Baan reveals certain qualities of Zaha Hadid's MAXXI design: the innovative nature of the structure on several superimposed levels, the contrasting dialogue with the grid-like layout of the Flaminio neighbourhood, the way the shape of the building echoes the course of the River Tiber. With the construction of the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, contemporary culture – expressed by the architectural excellence of Zaha Hadid's design – redesigns the landscape of the historical city in a fully contemporary perspective.

Olivo Barbieri (b. Carpi, Modena 1954) forms part of the generation of landscape photographers who came together in 1984 as part of the *Viaggio in Italia* project. His research began in the late 1970s, with the exploration of the Italian province. In 2003 he launched the *site specific* project, focusing on more than forty cities around the world, filmed from above from a helicopter: from Europe to Asia and South America, Barbieri not only explores the form of the city, but also the experience of vision.

The series on display is centred around one of the masterpieces of Italian architecture, the Palazzetto dello Sport in Rome, designed by Pier Luigi Nervi and Annibale Vitellozzi between 1958 and 1960 to host a number of events during the seventeenth Olympic Games. Barbieri uses the selective focusing technique in these images, adopted since the 1990s to evoke the process of vision by focusing on just a single point of the image. Rarefied to the limits of abstraction, the photographs highlight the hexagonal design of the roof, which is the result of the highly experimental construction technique developed by Nervi's team.

La città perfetta is a new chapter of *site specific*, portraying a very particular section of Italy: the uninterrupted conurbation that stretches along the Adriatic coast, from Romagna to the southernmost part of Abruzzo. Rich of history, geography, economy, tourism, beauty and horror, the Adriatic city conveys the complexities and contradictions of contemporary urbanism. Barbieri arranges the tesserae of a clear and yet incomprehensible spatial mosaic in random order, encompassing all the positive and negative forces of our landscape.

One of the world's leading photographers, **Gabriele Basilico** (Milan, 1944–2013) graduated in architecture before devoting himself to photography in the late 1960s. His research focuses on the transformations of the post-industrial landscape and on the identity of the contemporary city. For Basilico, the slow observation times of photography are a means for re-educating people to look at places with sensitivity and meditation.

During the exhibition devoted to Luigi Moretti in 2010, Basilico produced a series of photographs of the Roman architect's buildings. In the images of Casa Balilla, a 1930s masterpiece in the Trastevere district of Rome, Basilico highlights the sculptural value and monumental tension of Moretti's structure. His pictures, with their stringent compositions, illustrate his interest in architectural form and representation.

A visual witness to Italy's social and political situation, particularly events involving the mafia, **Letizia Battaglia** (b. Palermo, 1935) is acknowledged as one of the most important photojournalists, not just because of her images that occupy a permanent place in the collective imagination, but also because of the civil and ethical significance of her work. As a photographer, director, publisher and environmentalist, Letizia Battaglia has contributed to a number of different causes: from feminism to environmental issues, prisoners' rights and the mentally disabled.

Scouring Palermo's east coast, assigned to her as part of MAXXI's *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ project, she captured places distinguished by evident signs of decay, producing very direct images with a high level of formal consistency: a decay that reflects the moral and civil situation and can only be inverted through widespread civil engagement.

Jordi Bernadó (b. Lleida, Spain, 1966) is a Catalan artist who uses video and photography to explore the contradictions and ambiguities that characterize the contemporary landscape.

Involved by MAXXI in the *Italian Atlas* project, Bernadò portrayed three Roman sites representative of political or religious power, the present or past: the Pantheon, home to the Roman gods, which has become a universal architectural archetype; Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, particularly the cabinet housing the portrait of Pope Innocent X painted by Diego Velázquez in 1650, and the hall where the Cabinet meets in Palazzo Chigi, the home of the Italian Government.

His photographs show the places in a state of suspension and ambiguity, summing up the subtle relationships in play between the architectural space, the exercise of power and its representation.

Alighiero Boetti (Turin, 1940 – Rome, 1994) made his debut in 1967 with the group of artists of the *Arte Povera* movement. Towards the end of the Sixties, however, he left the group to devote himself to an original research of a conceptual type. His artistic production is characterized by the versatility of the techniques and the languages used, with particular attention to the concept of time and the role of the artist's ideation in the realization of the work of art.

Boetti's interest in cartographic representations dates back to 1967, but it was in 1971 when he made his first trip to Afghanistan that fascinated by the local artisan tradition, he made the first Map. The work, embroidered on canvas by Afghan women, is a world map in which each State is represented with the colors and motifs of its flag. The Maps will return along the entire artistic path of Boetti.

The work of **Andrea Botto** (b. Rapallo, 1973), characterized by a blend of different styles of contemporary art, focuses on the way in which photography "stages" reality and represents the world. He uses images as a tool for conveying the complexity of reality, uncovering different meanings and layers: "I'm very interested in all those situations where reality and appearance become blurred."

For the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰⁷ *Landscape at Risk* project, the artist chose to photograph places that, despite being marked by humankind, still preserved some original features, together with other locations where nature reigned supreme. The images and long captions are closely connected: the latter provide the key to understanding the complexity of the places and their history, highlighting their inherent precariousness. Ultimately, this comparison reveals the ambiguous status of the image when it comes to providing us with an objective representation of reality.

After graduating in Philosophy, **Silvia Camporesi** (b. Forlì, 1973) devoted herself to photography and film. She started to produce images, mostly self-portraits, at the start of the new millennium, interpreting novels, and mythological and religious texts in a very intimate and personal fashion. From 2012 onwards, the human figure tends to disappear from her works, which are now dominated by the landscape.

Atlas Italiae is a personal atlas of the Italy that is disappearing: palaces, prisons, factories and entire abandoned villages become places of memory and emotive paths. The project is not intended to be a documentary, but rather a process of personalizing and appropriating the visited places. Camporesi uses a technique that involves printing the images in black and white and then colouring them by hand in soft pastels that are easy to blend.

A photographer, writer, critic, publisher and teacher, **Giovanni Chiaramonte** (b. Varese, 1948) is one of the masters of Italian landscape photography. He began his career in the late 1960s, exploring the relationship between space and human identity. His images revolve around the concept of observing as an "emotional" experience, which explores the relationship between reality and state of mind: the image gives a visible form to something intangible and infinite.

Taken for the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ project, his photographs focus on a number of places in Calabria and Sicily. "Perhaps frightened by the depth and complexity of historical sedimentation, the present and future truly seem to have fled from these places.... In Gela as well as Athens, in Palermo as well as dusty Istanbul, the forms of Modernity, incapable of facing so much depth and so much complexity, emerge as ephemeral and foreign, often quickly ending up as ridiculous ruins, formless and inglorious wreckage."

Ever since the start of his career, inspired by conceptual art, **Mario Cresci** (b. Chiavari, 1942) has produced work ranging from drawing to photography and installations. Through experimental research involving the medium, Cresci has investigated the ambiguity of visual processes and the perceptive experience as a whole, developing a critical discourse on photography and on its potential as an authentic "language". With his participated and interdisciplinary operations of the 1970s, Cresci also explored the role of the artist within a social dimension.

In the photographs taken on the SS 106 Jonica road for the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ project, it is evident that, while conceiving photography as a creative act that finds justification within itself, Cresci does not avoid taking on the everyday landscape: "Like homeopathic treatments, it is photography that can trigger a new awareness, to decongest the gaze after having caused the congestion."

Franco Fontana (b. Modena, 1933) started his career in the late Sixties as an amateur photographer: we can already observe the expressive codes that would bring him international renown in the years that followed, such as the study of space, the paced composition, and the transformation of landscapes into abstract works through the juxtaposition of planes of light.

The works appear to be extraordinary visions of Italian landscapes. "The photographer who wants to interpret rather than offer a picture-postcard illustration of a landscape, a city, a person must create an atmosphere, something magical, and so he turns to colour to sublimate the photographed object, but above all to transform it into a subject that must live of its own light, arousing emotions and sentiments."

One of the greatest photographers of the 20th century, **Gianni Berengo Gardin** (b. Santa Margherita Ligure, 1930) has explored a wide variety of issues during his long career, including social questions, private themes, news and travel, producing a unique account — in terms of focus and sensitivity — of sixty years of Italian life. Despite his interest in architecture and the landscape, Berengo Gardin has always seen the latter as a setting for human activity.

Genoa, the city portrayed by the photographer for the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ project, is seemingly free from human subjects, and yet they are implied in the hustle and bustle of the port activity, the tightly packed buildings, the heavily trafficked motorway and the spectacular demolition of silos. Berengo Gardin revives the image of the city as a living and continuously evolving organism.

A theorist, publisher, curator and cultural advocate, as well as a photographer, **Luigi Ghirri** (Scandiano, Reggio Emilia, 1943 – Roncole Verdi, Reggio Emilia, 1992) was one of the most influential contemporary artists, able to reinterpret the use of photography and look at the landscape in a new way. His exploration of the "real" landscape reached its peak in 1984 with the *Viaggio in Italia* project: a collective experience that laid the foundations for an "Italian landscape school".

Ghirri's research, which involved the early and original use of colour film, focused on "the landscape three kilometres from home", that "lesser" Italy, far from the postcard image that Ghirri recreated with his lyrical gaze from the 1970s onwards. In fact, for him photography was a tool for observing places and establishing a profound relationship with them, grasping their innermost being, far removed from stereotypes.

Guido Guidi (b. Cesena, 1941) is one of the greatest Italian landscape photographers. Ever since the start of his career, he has focused on the vernacular, "ordinary" landscape, particularly places in the province of Emilia Romagna where he grew up. An intellect and scholar, Guidi flanks his work as a photographer with teaching. His erudite speculation on the language of images has shaped a poetics of vision that considers photography to be a tool for "knowing how to see."

The series on display is devoted to the Brion family tomb in San Vito di Altivole, in Veneto, designed by Carlo Scarpa in the late 1960s. Guidi interprets the architecture of the Venetian master as a "machine through which to watch time": like the wings of a stage its walls embrace the passage of light and the projection and movement of the shadows over the course of the day, recording the passage of time and the seasons.

Considered one of the most original interpreters on the international scene, from the Sixties **Mimmo Jodice** (b. Naples, 1934) worked proactively in the phase of experimental photographic language, often overturning its rules, and then focused on various fields of research: social issues, anthropological investigation, the revisitation of everyday places, reflections on classicism, the Mediterranean and its myths, the urban landscape and architecture.

Jodice participated in *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ with a project on the port area of Genoa, examining the clearway that crosses the city like a backbone. The work is composed of a narrative sequence: the images engage with the observer as if this were a journey in which the city, the port and the sea quickly move past, captured only in rapid fragments that are even less defined because the pictures are out of focus.

For over fifty years, **Giuseppe Leone** (b. Ragusa, 1936) has illustrated Sicily through pictures of people, places, celebrations, landscapes and architecture, almost always in black and white. As a narrator, he has

shared the profound experience of this land with authors who, like him and Leonardo Sciascia, have captured its beauty and contradictions, never falling into the trap of stereotyping.

The pictures in the series on the Strait of Messina taken for the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰³ exhibition at MAXXI have ancient iconographic origins and speak of a land that, despite everything, seems to withstand all attempts to change it: "Powerful underground energies stretch, strain and bend tectonic masses, making them collide.... The fate of this place is uncertain. Another myth has been generated, a myth in step with the times."

Ugo Mulas (Pozzolengo, 1928 – Milan, 1973) began his career in the early 1950s, drawing close to Milanese artistic circles. Over the following decade, he documented the Italian and international art scene, before carrying out one of the most influential conceptual experiments on photographic language with his *Verifiche* (1973), just before his death.

His photographic records of the openings of the Venice Biennale, from 1954 to 1972, establish a common theme within his research devoted to art. Mulas focused particularly on the preparation and set-up of the works on display, and on the openings, deemed to be a setting for staging parties and where creative energy finds fulfilment. Constructed as acts of art criticism, his images reflect theories that saw art as an event of collective representation, marking the start of the more strictly conceptual phase of his work.

The work of **Walter Niedermayr** (b. Bolzano, 1952) reflects on the one-sided relationship between nature and man. Ever since the Nineties, his research has analysed the landscape from a distance, both physical and mental, adopting a contemplative approach that explores unstable aspects.

The images of the Dolomites focus on the romantic idea of a cosmos where man is a guest, a tiny entity poised on the threshold between presence and insignificance. Niedermayr seems to observe man under cold neon light. This results in a twofold interpretation: the photographer seems to suggest that, even if he is perfectly equipped, man remains an intimately fragile individual compared to nature, while at the same time, despite his minuscule stature, he is responsible for the inexorable plundering of the landscape, taken over by mass tourism.

Massimo Piersanti (b. Rome, 1939) started out as a photographer in the late 1960s, when he focused on filming architecture, an experience that led him to develop a particular sensitivity for atmospheres and situations. From the 1970s onwards, he was the official photographer for the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, the cultural association at the centre of Rome's avant-garde art movements.

The photographs on display form part of the collection of images produced during the major *Contemporanea* (1973–74) exhibition. Curated by the critic Achille Bonito Oliva, the exhibition was held in the car park of Villa Borghese in Rome, designed by the architect Luigi Moretti. The photographs on show document two different moments of the event. Those taken inside focus on the installation by Piero Sartogo, which establishes a direct dialogue with the works; those taken outside record one of the most famous artistic events: Christo and Jeanne Claude's intervention on Porta Pinciana.

The work of **Fabio Ponzio** (b. Milan, 1959) is closely entwined with the theme of travel. Setting out from Istanbul in 1987, Ponzio explored the roads of Europe for twenty years, all the way to its borders with Asia, giving shape to a vast reportage.

The works on display form part of a series commissioned by MAXXI and devoted to the subject of tourism consumption of the local area. His black and white reportage explores the Adriatic Coast from Trieste to Rimini, capturing the ambiguity and potential offered by the joint presence of natural and artificial elements. On the one hand the series documents how humans have abused the landscape, while on the other Ponzio's "humanist" photography highlights the possibilities for a positive relationship with the natural environment, still able to offer opportunities for carefreeness and sharing.

The photography of **Massimo Vitali** (b. Como, 1944) is characterized by images of public spaces, such as swimming pools, parks, night clubs and, first and foremost, beaches, all packed with large crowds of people in casual situations. His obsessive reiteration of the same subjects and places highlights the progressive loss of individual personality, the paradox of a culture increasingly based on imitation and conformism.

In 2007 MAXXI invited Vitali to take part in the *Italian Atlas*⁰⁰⁷. He developed the theme in terms of abusive tourism, with images taken in Sicily at the height of the summer season. The landscape is certainly suffering here, assailed by disrespectful crowds. However, when all is said and done, humanity seems to be the real loser, with its need for a piece of sea, a tan and a holiday.

