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Forma / Informe

The Non-objective Phase
in Italian Photography 1935-1958

Wunderkammer GAM
24 giugno – 27 settembre 2020
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Mostra a cura di / Exhibition Curated by
Antonella Russo

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Antonella Russo

*Coordinamento catalogo /
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Sarah Elizabeth Cree
Alexandrina Chirila

This exhibition on Italian photography, intended as an exploration of the new paths between form and the "formless" that have challenged representation over the course of little more than two decades, will not fail to astound. Besides, since we are in an art museum, it will inevitably prompt suggestive parallels (and divergences) regarding the painting paradigm before and after the Second World War.

A whole dimension of formal, technical and material research on the laws and tools of photography will resurface; a research that, examined in retrospect, testifies to an exceptional state of results and experimentation competences of Italian photographers over the past century.

Such a reinterpretation in the form of an exhibition on Italian photography has not been undertaken for years, before Antonella Russo's timely proposal: a surprising journey into the experimental history of photographic practice during the truly complex times of the central decades of the twentieth century. A historical dimension that progressed with a background of changing dictatorships, war, civil war, and the rebirth of a nation, this exhibition brings to awareness the signs of a legitimate need for visual and intellectual renewal in a discipline that is ultimately still young and restless, intended to reveal new guidelines for the interpretation of the 'visible'.

Riccardo Passoni
GAM Director

Chronology

Events, Exhibitions and Italian Literature on Photography, 1935–1958

Antonella Russo

1935

Rapino, San Gabriele, Spoltore Pretoro (Abruzzo)

De Antonis began photographing festivals, rituals and popular traditions in the Abruzzo valleys. This was one of the first and most complete ethnographic investigations carried out in Italy.

Milan

Luigi Veronesi worked on his first photograms, which he would continue to produce in various series until the 1980s.

1936

Milan

Ulrico Hoepli Publisher issued *Architettura rurale italiana*, edited by Guarniero Daniel and Giuseppe Pagano for the *Quaderni della Triennale* series, an overview of the architectural and functional forms of Italian rural dwellings from Lombardy to Sicily.

1937

Rome

In September, the Galleria d'Arte Moderna inaugurated the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, a second revised edition of the exhibition of the Decennial of the Fascist Revolution held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni from 1932-1934. This new version of the exhibition bypassed the hyperbolic exhibition design and the 180° installations of the first show, displaying photomontages and photoplastics by Sironi, Nizzoli and Terragni, framed and mounted on walls.

1941

Milan

The Publishing House *Corrente*, founded by Ernesto Trec-

cani, released *Occhio Quadrato*, a collection of twenty-six photographic plates of the Milanese and Venetian urban peripheries by Alberto Lattuada. The book was one of the first examples of Realist and antifascist photographic literature.

Milan

The Bompiani Publishing House released *Americana: raccolta di narratori dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, edited by Elio Vittorini, with reproductions of photographs by Stieglitz, Hine, Evans, Lange and others. The book was censored by the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture. The following year, a re-edited version was published with an introduction by Emilio Cecchi. Paolo Monti cited this work as one of the most impressive early publications on international photography, one which strongly influenced his formation.

1942

Rome

In October, the Galleria d'Arte Moderna inaugurated the third edition of the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, in an even more reduced version with regard to the second, organised partly to counterbalance the cancellation of the E42 World's Fair scheduled to open in Rome the same year.

Bergamo

The Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche published *8 fotografi italiani d'oggi*, with biographies and pictures by Vincenzo Balocchi, Giuseppe Cavalli, Walter Faccini, Mario Finazzi, Alex Franchini Stappo, Ferruccio Leiss, Ermanno Marelli and Federico Vender. It was the first visual synthesis of the concepts that would later be underpinned by the photography group "La Bussola."

1943

Milan

Gruppo Editoriale Domus published *Fotografia. Prima rassegna dell'attività fotografica in Italia*, a photography annual edited by Alfredo Ornano and Albe Steiner, with Italian and German language texts by Alfredo Ornano, Ermanno Scopinich and Federico Patellani, and a cover designed by Luigi Veronesi. It was the first survey "of the art and technique of our photographers". The volume included photographs by Arturo Bragaglia, Vincenzo Balocchi, Luigi Comencini, Mario Finazzi, Elio Luxardo, Carlo Mollino, Marcello Nizzoli, Bruno Munari, Giuseppe Cavalli, Giuseppe Pagano, Domenico Peretti Griva, Enrico Peressutti, Luigi Veronesi and others.

Florence

Publisher Cionini issued *Introduzione per un'estetica della fotografia* by Alex Franchini Stappo and Giuseppe Vannucci Zauli, one of the first texts on the aesthetics of modern photography based on idealistic philosophy.

1944

Milan

Scheiwiller Publisher released *Occhio Magico N. 1 Immagini di Ridenti* for the series "All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro", comprising of nineteen photographs by Lucio Ridenti and text by Marziano Bernardi in an edition of 500 copies. This was the first in a series of limited-edition miniature photography books.

Rome

The Fratelli Bocca Publisher issued the booklet *Fotorealismo e Fotosurrelismo* with a text by Gianni Boni and reproductions of photograms and photodynamic pictures. It was one of the rare Italian publications on Surrealist photography, almost entirely excluded from the photography of the 1930s and 1940s.

1945

Milan

On the 1st of May, the Giulio Einaudi publishing house issued *Il Politecnico Settimanale di Cultura contemporanea*, an international avant-garde literary weekly edited by Elio Vittorini. It was established as a monthly magazine the following year and played a key role in using photography to underline the essays. Vittorini's *Il Politecnico* was critically

"OCCHIO MAGICO,,

N. 1



GAROTTO - MCMXLIV

Marziano Bernardi, *Occhio Magico N. 1. Immagini di Ridenti*, della serie *All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro*, Milano, Scheiwiller, 1944

attacked by the Communist Party leader Togliatti on account of its intellectualism.

Milan

Scheiwiller Publisher issued *Occhio Magico N. 2, Bimbi e paesi*, eighteen photographs with a text by Enrico Emanuelli in a limited edition of 600 copies.

Scheiwiller Publisher issued *Occhio Magico N. 3, Ritratti Femminili di Federico Vender*, twenty-one photographs by F. Vender with a text by E.F. Scopinich in a limited edition of 600 copies.

Scheiwiller Publisher issued *Occhio Magico N. 4, Ritratti Ambientati*, eighteen photographs by Carlo Mollino with a text by E.F. Scopinich in a limited edition of 600 copies.

1946

Bergamo

The Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche published *Immagini 1*,

1



IMMAGINI

GIUSEPPE CAVALLI

Mario Finazzi, *Immagini 1*, Giuseppe Cavalli, Bergamo, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1946

Giuseppe Cavalli, a series edited by Mario Finazzi. Twenty photographic plates and data sheets, with an unsigned text in Italian, French and Spanish (Giovanni Petronilli).

The Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche published *Immagini 2*, Federico Vender, twenty photographic plates and data sheets with an unsigned text in Italian, French and Spanish. The Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche published *Immagini 3*, *Montagne*, twenty photographic plates by Giulio Cesare, Antonio Piccardi, Carlo Matis, Ada Niggeler, Riccardo Moncalvo and Mario Finazzi, plus technical information, with an unsigned text in Italian, French and Spanish. The circulation of these volumes was part of a visual programme later theorised in the Manifesto issued by the "La Bussola" group.

Turin

Fotografia, an art, science, photographic and cinematic technology monthly magazine was first issued. Edited by Federico Ferrero and Riccardo Perdomi, it was devoted to the promotion of the art and science of photography, however it only ran for two years.

1947

Milan

Ferrania Rivista mensile di fotografia, cinematografia e arti figurative published its first issue. It was edited by Alfredo Ornano, Guido Bezzola and Aristide Bosio, with graphic design by Luigi Veronesi. In 1957, it abandoned figurative art. Between 1947 and 1967, contributors included art historians (including Raffaele De Grada, Raffaele Carrieri, Angelo Dragone and Luigi Carluccio), poets and writers (Salvatore Quasimodo, Leonardo Sinigalli, Alberto Moravia), as well as film historians (Guido Aristarco, Francesco Passinetti, Glauco Viazzi). During the postwar years, the magazine played a key role in disseminating modern Italian photography.

Senigallia

In April, the photographic group "La Bussola" was founded by Giuseppe Cavalli, Mario Finazzi and Federico Vender. Ferruccio Leiss and Luigi Veronesi joined the group soon after, while Vincenzo Balocchi joined the following year, and Fosco Maraini two years later.

Milan

In May, *Ferrania* published the *Manifesto de "La Bussola"*, signed by Cavalli, Finazzi, Leiss, Vender and Veronesi, affirming the aesthetics of the optical image as inspired by Benedetto Croce's idealism. This was the new "credo" of postwar Italian photography, one which greatly inspired emerging Italian photographers.

1948

Venice

On the 1st of January, Gino Bolognini, Giorgio Bresciani, Paolo Monti, and Luciano Scattola founded the photographic group "La Gondola", which played an important role not only in the foundation of the culture of Italian photography, but also in publishing the most sophisticated Italian photography.

Turin

On 19 December, the *Federazione Italiana Associazioni Fotografiche* was founded. It was led by Italo Bertoglio and directed by Renato Fioravanti. It brought together various Italian photographic groups with the aim of endorsing the production of photography shows and exhibition exchanges among International photographic associations.

Bologna

Nino Migliori produced his first *Ossidazioni*, camera-less photographic works which were consistently rejected by photo-amateur contests held in postwar years.

1949

Rome

In February, Mazzocchi publisher published *Il Mondo settimanale politico, economico, letterario* edited by Mario Panunzio, who was also in charge of its graphic design, while writer Ennio Flaiano served as managing editor, supported by Giulia Massari. The magazine became known for publishing and remunerating the work of amateur photographers making their publishing debut.

Turin

Chiantore Publisher released *Il Messaggio dalla Camera Oscura*, edited by Carlo Mollino. More than 300 reproductions - some in colour, and a few zincographs - by Surrealist artists (Man Ray, Brassai, and others), photo documentarists (Alvarez Bravo and others), amateur photographers, and Mollino himself. The book introduced photography as a medium suitable for the "objective transfiguration of reality".

Milan

Luigi Veronesi showed some of his first "abstract photographs" at the Galleria Il Salto.

1950

Milan

The *Unione fotografica* (Associazione Internazionale Manifestazioni Fotografiche) was formed, founded and directed by Pietro Donzelli with Davide Clari, Pietro De Blasi, Andrea Buranelli, Flavio Gioia, Arrigo Orsi, Alfredo Ornano and Luigi Veronesi. It aimed at "promoting artistic photography exhibitions and shows that would foster photography both in Italy and abroad".

Alberto Mondadori Publishing House published *Epoca. Settimanale politico di grande informazione*, graphic layout by Bruno Munari, which featured photographic reportage by the pioneers of Italian and international photojournalism.

Lucerne

In April, the magazine *Camera* published *Der Kompass*. Gruppo Fotografico 'La Bussola', an unsigned essay in-

cluding works by Ferruccio Leiss, Giuseppe Cavalli, Federico Vender, Mario Finazzi and Luigi Veronesi, which emphasised the creative freedom and technical perfection of the Italian photographers.

Mantua

The first issue of *Diorama* was published. This was a bi-monthly magazine of photo-cinematographic and figurative art, directed by Aldo Lini, edited and designed by Enrico Genovesi. It published early photographs by Branzi, Camisa, Niccolai, Giacomelli that were rejected by other publications. It stopped its activity in 1957.

1951

Milan

The exhibition *Mostra della Fotografia Europea 1951* was inaugurated at the Pinacoteca di Brera. It was organised by Flavio Gioia, curated by Davide Clari, Alfredo Ornano, Arrigo Orsi and Pietro Donzelli, with an exhibition design by Luigi Veronesi. The members of the Honours Committee included Carlo Carrà, Pietro Portaluppi, Francesco Flora, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Orio Vergani and Lamberto Vitali. It displayed 174 works, mostly by amateur photographers from eighteen different countries, as well as established photographers such as Bill Brandt, Edouard Boubat, Otto Steinert and Willy Ronis as well as Fulvio Roiter, Luigi Veronesi and others. This was a crucial event for the recognition of photography as modern art and the first photography show inaugurated in a prestigious Italian institution.

Rome

In April, *Fotografie Astratte di Pasquale De Antonis* opened at the Galleria dell'Obelisco. The exhibition invitation included a text by Corrado Cagli. It was the first solo show devoted to an Italian photographer held at a prestigious Italian and international modern art gallery.

1952

Saarbruecken

In July, *Subjektive Fotografien* opened at the Staatliche Schule für Kunst und Handwerk, organised by Otto Steinert and including works by Giuseppe Cavalli, Arrigo Orsi, Aldo Spadoni and Luigi Veronesi.

Lucerne

In May, the *Mostra mondiale della fotografia* was inaugurat-

ed at the Palazzo Delle Arti e dei Congressi, an exhibition devoted to the history and technique of photography, with sections on history, reportage, and a whole range of photo practices. It included works by Giuseppe Cavalli, Mario Finazzi, Luigi Veronesi, Riccardo Moncalvo, Piero De Biasi, Arrigo Orsi, Davide Clari, the Pedrotti brothers, Bruno Stefani, Gualtiero Castagnoli, Enrico Peressutti, Ada Gazzaniga.

London

In November, *La mostra italiana della fotografia* opened at the Royal Photographic Society. It was organised by FIAF, "La Bussola" and "L'Unione Fotografica," and showed 158 neorealist works by amateur photographers who were members of the three photo groups.

Florence

In May, *Henri Cartier Bresson* was inaugurated at the Galleria La Strozzi, Palazzo Strozzi, curated by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti. It included 215 photographs by the great French photographer. Piergiorgio Branzi, who had just begun photographing, visited the exhibition several times.

Lucania

During summer, Ernesto De Martino travelled to Lucania to start off a series of ethnographic expeditions. He was assisted by Arturo Zavattini, who shot images of rural work, and, in October, by Franco Pinna, who covered funeral rituals in various villages in the hinterland.

1953

Milan

The Bompiani Publishing House released *Conversazione in Sicilia*, the seventh edition of Elio Vittorini's novel, an example of cultural anti-fascism. The book included 188 images: 169 photographs by Luigi Crocenzi, seven photographic reproductions of images by Giacomo Pozzi Bellini, and twelve copies of postcards selected by the author. It is considered the first Italian photo novel.

Florence

The *Mostra della Fotografia italiana* was inaugurated at the Galleria Vigna Nuova, curated by Giuseppe Cavalli, Francesco Giovannini and Paolo Monti. It showed sixty new works by forty-five artists, including Balocchi, Branzi, Finazzi, Bonzuan, De Biasi, Del Tin, Donzelli and Roiter, who represented the new trends in Italian photography. In his

review of the exhibition, Paolo Monti nominated Piergiorgio Branzi (who displayed *Libeccciata*) as one of the most promising young photographers. The catalogue published by "Il Progresso Fotografico" included an introduction by Giuseppe Cavalli along with selected photographs.

New York

In May, *Post War European Photography* opened at the Museum of Modern Art. It was curated by Edward Steichen who selected more than 300 photographs by seventy-eight artists from eleven countries. The Italian photographers included in the show were Piero Di Biasi, Giuseppe Cavalli, Davide Clari, Pietro Donzelli, Federico Vender and Luigi Veronesi.

Milan

Fotografi italiani, from the series *I Quaderni dell'Unione fotografica*, was published in Italian, French and German by A. Salto Publisher. With the cover designed by Luigi Veronesi, it comprised of sixty-seven photographs by Balocchi, Branzi, Cavalli, De Biasi, Grignani, Ferroni, Monti among others and a preface signed by members of the Unione fotografica. In its introduction, Franco Russoli, head of artistic and historical heritage state department, described photography as a "poetic document", one able to record external facts and "movements of the spirit", and recognised its "aesthetic awareness".

Senigallia

The Associazione nazionale "Misa" was formed. Founded by Giuseppe Cavalli and Vincenzo Balocchi, it endorsed the work of talented young photographers. Its first members included Piergiorgio Branzi, Paolo Bocci, Alfredo Camisa, Mario Giacomelli and Ferruccio Ferroni, who were later joined by Luciano Ferri, Alfredo Camisa, Giovanni Salani, Giuseppe Moeder and Giulio Parmiani. Nino Migliori, one of the first photographers invited, did not participate in the group's meetings, although he did not decline the invitation.

Antwerp

Paolo Monti published "Le Groupe 'La Gondola' de Venise" in *Photorama* magazine, stressing the group's pro-European stance and openness to the most updated international photography trends.

Venice

In September, the *1ma mostra scambio di fotografia* opened at Ca' Giustinian in collaboration with the Club Photographique

de Paris. Sixty-two works were displayed by members of the Club Photographique and those of "La Gondola."

Lausanne

Gilde du Livre published *Venise à fleur d'eau*, seventy-five photographs by Fulvio Roiter with an introduction by Jules Lecomte, texts by Dominique Aury and Fulvio Roiter, and excerpts from poems and short stories by various writers, in an edition of 15,000. It was the first big international publishing success by an Italian photographer.

1954-1955

Saarbruecken

From November 1954 to January 1955, *Subjektive Fotografie 2* was displayed at the Staatliche Schule für Kunst und Handwerk. It included works by Italian photographers Fulvio Roiter and Mario de Biasi.

Venice

In June the *II Mostra Internazionale di Fotografia* was inaugurated at Ca' Giustinian. It showed works by members of the group "La Gondola," Daniel Masclet, Otto Steinert, Martin Coppins, students from the Staatliche Schule fuer Kunst und Handwerk in Saarbruecken, and members of the Brooklyn Camera Club, Brooklyn, New York.

Milan

Cinema nuovo published *I fotodocumentari di Cinema Nuovo* with an introduction by Cesare Zavattini, which included fifteen among the best photo-documentaries, by Carlo Cisventi, Franco Pinna, Chiara Samugheo, Enzo Sellerio and others. The magazine *Cinema Nuovo*, founded in 1952 and aiming to revive Neo-Realism and Neo-Realist culture, became known in the photographic community for publishing "photo-documentaries", a story accompanied by photographs, issued on a regular basis between 1954 and 1956.

Venice

The *Fotografia italiana 1955* exhibition opened. It was curated by Gino Oliva, and presented photographs by Alfredo Camisa, Antonio Migliori and Mario Giacomelli, among others. In his preface to the catalogue, published in Italian and English, Paolo Monti summarised the activity of Italian photographic associations and defended the "alleged formalism" of "La Bussola" from those "who were confusing the truth of art with the rough rhetoric of *verismo*," arguing that the group had made an important contribution in

spreading awareness of the aesthetic capacity of the photographic medium in Italy.

New York

In January, *The Family of Man* opened at the Museum of Modern Art. It was the first global photography exhibition aiming at "launching a message of peace and celebrating all of humanity". Its 503 photographs were selected by Edward Steichen, head of the museum's photography department. Four years later, a revised version of the show was exhibited in Italy, at the Triennale di Milano, Palazzo Madama, Turin and Palazzo Venezia, Rome.

Turin

The Einaudi Publishing House released *Un Paese*, 105 pages and eighty-eight photographs printed by rotogravure by Paul Strand, with a text and commentary on the images by Cesare Zavattini. It is considered the first photo book published in Italy and a prestigious literary work.

Spilimbergo

In December, the "Gruppo friuliano per una nuova Fotografia" was founded to promote Realist photography. Its founding members included Aldo Beltrame, Gianni Borghesan, Toni del Tin, Fulvio Roiter and Italo Zannier.

Lausanne

Publisher Clairefontaine issued *Ombrie. Terre de Saint François*, fifty photographs by Fulvio Roiter, text by Pierre Jaquet and excerpts from *Cantico delle Creature*; which won the *Prix Nadar*.

1956

Venice

At the end of June, the *III Mostra internazionale di Fotografia* opened at the Ca' Giustinian. It included photographs by Brett Weston, Erich Angenendt, Toni Schneiders, André Thévenet, Georges Viollon, Piergiorgio Branzi, Alfredo Camisa, Mario De Biasi, Toni del Tin, Mario Giacomelli, Paolo Monti, Fulvio Roiter, Luigi Veronesi, and students from the Guilford School of Art, among others.

Milan

In August, Luigi Veronesi's theoretical essay "*Il fotogramma*" was published by *Ferrania* magazine. It stated that "the photogram is not a true photograph but a medium to record a form, [...] the photogram was invented by God when he

created light, things and their shadows. Later, men learned how to capture them on photographic paper.” In September, the *Mostra di fotografie di Henri Cartier Bresson* was inaugurated at the Palazzo Della Società per le Belle Arti ed Esposizione Permanente. It included 340 images taken between the 1930s and the mid 1950s.

Fermo

Luigi Crocenzi founded the “Centro per una Cultura Fotografica”, to popularise the study of photography and promote realist photographic literature, such as the photo essay and photo book.

1957

Lucania

Ernesto De Martino’s second ethnographic expedition was underway to document the ritual of the family funerary lamentation, shot by Franco Pinna.

Venice

By the end of April, the *I Mostra Internazionale Biennale di Fotografia* opened at the Sala Napoleonica and Ca’ Giustinian. It was organised in collaboration with the international photographic magazine *Camera*, the photo group “La Gondola”, Venice, and the “Centro per la Cultura nella Fotografia”, Fermo. It showed the work of major Italian photographers, and photographers from France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and China, alongside *Magnum* and *Vogue* photographers. The catalogue included texts by Luigi Crocenzi and Paolo Monti. It was the first international photography exhibition that, much like the Venice Biennale, aimed at turning into a major international event.

Rome

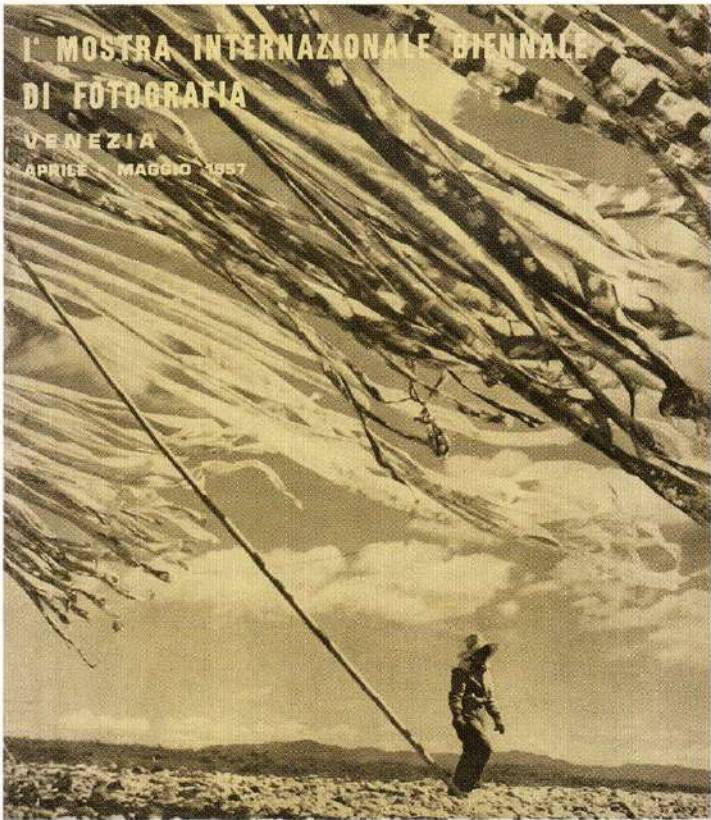
In January, the *Fotografie di Antonis* exhibition opened at the Galleria L’Obelisco. The exhibition brochure included a text by Leonardo Sinisgalli.

Lucania

A new ethnographic expedition led by Ernesto De Martino documented ancient magic rituals in Basilicata, including the *maciari* practices photographed by Ando Gilardi.

Milan

In July, Standard Edizioni published the Italian edition of *Popular Photography*, the most circulated photography magazine internationally. The aim of the magazine was to “put professional



I Mostra Internazionale Biennale di Fotografia, copertina catalogo della mostra, Venezia, 1957
© Circolo fotografico “La Gondola”

and amateur photographers in direct contact with the American photography world and report on photographic production in foreign countries, Japan in particular”. The first issue included *Un maestro italiano Paolo Monti*, which introduced Monti as “one of the main protagonists of Italian photography today”.

Milan

In July, *Un secolo di Fotografia della collezione Gernsheim* opened at the 11th Triennale, showing the Alison and Helmut Gernsheim collection, which included a special section on early Italian photography. The catalogue was edited by Lamberto Vitali. It was one of Italy’s first exhibitions on the world history of photography.

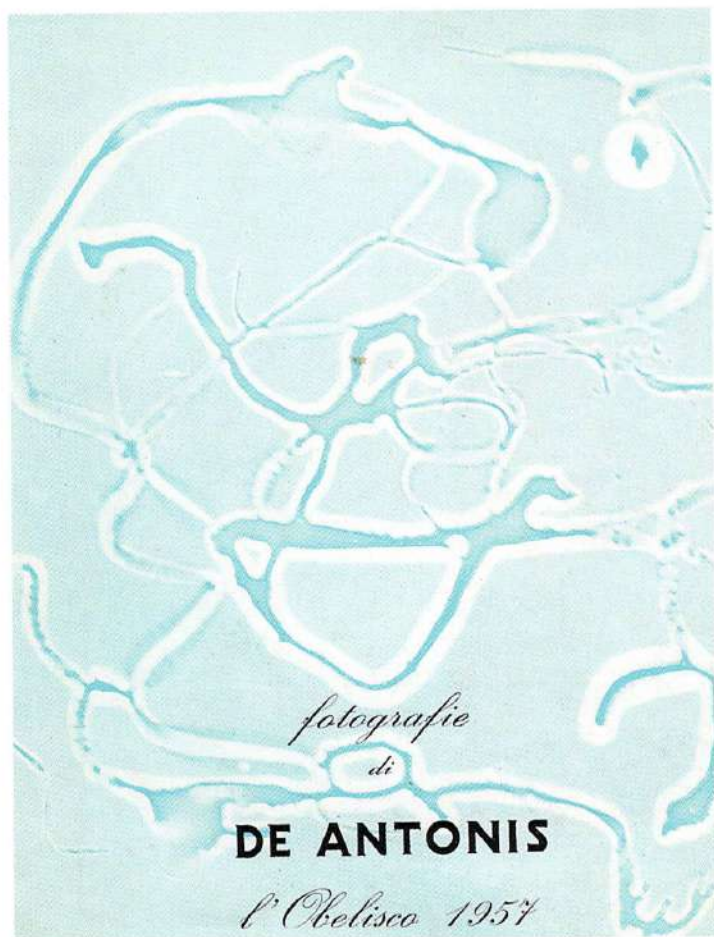
Rochester

In December, *Photographs by Paolo Monti* opened at the George Eastman House.

1958

Milan

In August, the magazine *Ferrania* published *Fotografie*



Fotografie di Antonis, pieghevole della mostra, Roma, Galleria dell'Obelisco, 1957



Mario Finazzi, *8 fotografi italiani d'oggi*, Bergamo, Istituto d'Arti Grafiche, 1942. Copertina

astratte di Nino Migliori by critic Giuseppe Turrone, who argued that the old distinctions between photography and art were invalidated by Migliori's new photographic practices. In September, *Popular Photography* published *Esperimenti di fotografia astratta di Franco Grignani*, a short critical essay by Gillo Dorfles in which he underlined the innovative quality of the photographer's work had made it possible to visualise and capture the elusive nature of vision.

Between January and August, Mario Carrieri photographed Milan "within the city confines". He took 3,500 shots and selected 134 of them to compose ten different scenes. The following year he produced the amazing *Milano, Italia* published by C.M. Lerici Publisher.

1959

Venice

In October, the *Ila mostra Biennale Internazionale di Fotografia* opened at the Sala Napoleonica and Ca' Giustinian. The exhibition included 650 photographs by sixty American and

Japanese photographers, works from *Life* and *Vogue* photographers, Japanese Realist photographers, and a solo show devoted to Margaret Bourke White.

Calabria-Puglia

The final ethnographic expedition led by Ernesto De Martino and photographer Franco Pinna documented old rural rituals along with the entire healing dance cycle of tarantism. These images are still of paradigmatic importance for studies on anthropological photography today.

Sesto San Giovanni

In October, the Primo Convegno Nazionale di Fotografia was held at the Biblioteca Civica in connection with the photography exhibition of the same title, which proposed an inquiry into the work of prominent photographers working in Italy at that time. In addition to members of the various photographic associations, it showed works by Branzi, Grignani, Migliori, Monti and the very young Aldo Ballo, Mario Carrieri, Cesare Colombo, Ando Gilardi and Ugo Mulas. Almost all

Bologna

Nino Migliori produced his first *Ossidazioni*, camera-less photographic works which were consistently rejected by photo-amateur contests held in postwar years.

1949

Rome

In February, Mazzocchi publisher published *Il Mondo settimanale politico, economico, letterario* edited by Mario Panunzio, who was also in charge of its graphic design, while writer Ennio Flaiano served as managing editor, supported by Giulia Massari. The magazine became known for publishing and remunerating the work of amateur photographers making their publishing debut.

Turin

Chiantore Publisher released *Il Messaggio dalla Camera Oscura*, edited by Carlo Mollino. More than 300 reproductions - some in colour, and a few zincographs - by Surrealist artists (Man Ray, Brassai, and others), photo documentarists (Alvarez Bravo and others), amateur photographers, and Mollino himself. The book introduced photography as a medium suitable for the "objective transfiguration of reality".

Milan

Luigi Veronesi showed some of his first "abstract photographs" at the Galleria Il Salto.

1950

Milan

The *Unione fotografica* (Associazione Internazionale Manifestazioni Fotografiche) was formed, founded and directed by Pietro Donzelli with Davide Clari, Pietro De Blasi, Andrea Buranelli, Flavio Gioia, Arrigo Orsi, Alfredo Ornano and Luigi Veronesi. It aimed at "promoting artistic photography exhibitions and shows that would foster photography both in Italy and abroad".

Alberto Mondadori Publishing House published *Epoca. Settimanale politico di grande informazione*, graphic layout by Bruno Munari, which featured photographic reportage by the pioneers of Italian and international photojournalism.

Lucerne

In April, the magazine *Camera* published *Der Kompass*. Gruppo Fotografico 'La Bussola', an unsigned essay in-

cluding works by Ferruccio Leiss, Giuseppe Cavalli, Federico Vender, Mario Finazzi and Luigi Veronesi, which emphasised the creative freedom and technical perfection of the Italian photographers.

Mantua

The first issue of *Diorama* was published. This was a bi-monthly magazine of photo-cinematographic and figurative art, directed by Aldo Lini, edited and designed by Enrico Genovesi. It published early photographs by Branzi, Camisa, Niccolai, Giacomelli that were rejected by other publications. It stopped its activity in 1957.

1951

Milan

The exhibition *Mostra della Fotografia Europea 1951* was inaugurated at the Pinacoteca di Brera. It was organised by Flavio Gioia, curated by Davide Clari, Alfredo Ornano, Arrigo Orsi and Pietro Donzelli, with an exhibition design by Luigi Veronesi. The members of the Honours Committee included Carlo Carrà, Pietro Portaluppi, Francesco Flora, Leonardo Sinigalli, Orio Vergani and Lamberto Vitali. It displayed 174 works, mostly by amateur photographers from eighteen different countries, as well as established photographers such as Bill Brandt, Edouard Boubat, Otto Steinert and Willy Ronis as well as Fulvio Roiter, Luigi Veronesi and others. This was a crucial event for the recognition of photography as modern art and the first photography show inaugurated in a prestigious Italian institution.

Rome

In April, *Fotografie Astratte di Pasquale De Antonis* opened at the Galleria dell'Obelisco. The exhibition invitation included a text by Corrado Cagli. It was the first solo show devoted to an Italian photographer held at a prestigious Italian and international modern art gallery.

1952

Saarbruecken

In July, *Subjektive Fotografie* opened at the Staatliche Schule für Kunst und Handwerk, organised by Otto Steinert and including works by Giuseppe Cavalli, Arrigo Orsi, Aldo Spadoni and Luigi Veronesi.

Lucerne

In May, the *Mostra mondiale della fotografia* was inaugurat-

talks given by lecturers at this convention raised the issue of how Italian culture could have embraced photography.

Milan

Schwarz Publisher released *Nuova Fotografia Italiana*, edited by Giuseppe Turrone, with a stunning layout by Enrico Genovesi, and published by Arturo Schwarz. Today, the book is still a fundamental reference source for the history of modern Italian photography.

The Garzanti Publishing House released *Storia della fotografia dalle origini a oggi* by Peter Pollack. This expanded Italian edition translated from English included the chapter *Fotografia italiana dell'Ottocento* by Lamberto Vitali. The final chapter of the book, *Il giro del mondo in cinquanta fotografie*, published works by Franco Grignani, Giacomo Pozzi-Bellini, Paolo Monti, Ugo Mulas, Fulvio Roiter and Toni Del Tin. This book is one of the first important acknowledgements of the importance of Italian historical photography.

Formless Form

Antonella Russo

An Introduction

The post World War II era was marked by an urgency to explore new modes of revitalising Italian photography, the main dilemma being how to respond to the issue of giving “shape to the idea of change”, as Brecht put it.

Formless Form delves into the yet to be explored transitional period from objective to non-representational photography, from the abstract to the *Informel* (or Formless) image, retracing the variety of creative solutions employed to establish a form of photography that would claim a status and integrity of its own among the visual arts in Italy.

Rather than just identifying a group of exponents of a photographic avant-garde, the exhibition presents a selection of works by authors across several generations and with differing cultural backgrounds, unanimous in their shared devotion towards the dissemination of a new photographic awareness. In most instances, these photographers worked on their own, carrying out their optical experiments privately and often in an incohesive manner, some of their most innovative images surfacing in photographic series that are, for the most part, little known and unacknowledged nowadays.

Formless Form can be described as “a journey to the end of form” in the context of postwar Italian photography, it identifies and defines that “entropic” trend, the drive towards formal dispersion at the heart of Italian formalist photography, as well as the uncertainty that inhabits figuration and pulls all form towards formlessness. At the same time, it highlights the resilience of some degree of figuration at the centre of formal dissipation, comparable to the eternal struggle between light and shadow, brightness and darkness.

Such a tendency towards formal dispersion appears as a threat that weighs upon the image, it does not define the *oeuvre* of a single photographer nor a group of pictures, but emerges instead, as we shall see, in the works of those photographers who strived most to establish a formally defined photographic image.

The exhibition seeks to assure the centrality of the analytical phase of Italian photography, one which marked the beginning of modern optical practices, and examines its main features and specificities in an attempt to bring into relevance a theme vastly overlooked by the available photographic literature.

Several generations of photography historians were taught to consider Italian postwar photography as divided into two distinct and opposing factions: Formalist versus Neo-Realist.¹

This narrative, according to which the Italian photography of the 1940s and 50s was dominated by a clear opposition between photographers drawn to Benedetto Croce's idealistic and alleged elitist formalism, and those engaged in documentary, content-based political photography, was largely based on a schematism derived from Italian art history manuals and, more precisely, the assessment of Giulio Carlo Argan. According to Argan, postwar Italy was marked by a process of radicalisation between two opposing trends, that of Formalist artists and that of Realists, which began in 1948 with the dramatic dissolution of the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*, following the political election defeat of the *Fronte Democratico Popolare*.²

This rigid dichotomy, first questioned a decade ago,³ has eclipsed a considerable proportion of the non-objective photographic production that began in the postwar period and later led to the conceptual experimentalism of the second half of the century.

Soon after the war ended, a number of photographers from different generations – often not directly acquainted, but associated by their insight into artistic and intellectual scenes – worked and referenced the cities that became symbols of the postwar Reconstruction, such as Rome, Milan, Venice, Florence, and devoted themselves to moulding an aesthetic dimension of Italian photography. What further united them was a shared concern of giving shape to the most current optical image and insuring its cultural dignity.⁴

Metaphysics of Form

One wonders which photographers and images the well-known ideologist of postwar Italian photography Giuseppe Cavalli (1904–1961) had in mind when, while devising the new laws of photographic Beauty for the “*La Bussola*” Manifesto, condemned a photography of “documentary reportage that makes the claim of being artistic.”⁵ The identity of those photographers and their images remain undetermined.