



MAZZOLENI

LONDON – TORINO

For Immediate Release

MASSIMO VITALI
Ti ho visto

Mazzoleni, Turin

12 April – 30 June 2022

Private View: Tuesday 12 April, 5pm – 10.30pm

Mazzoleni is pleased to present ***Ti ho visto*** (I Saw You), Massimo Vitali's second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Born in 1944, Vitali receives his first camera as a gift at the age of 12. He starts his career as a photo reporter and continues as a Director of Photography in the film industry. In the early 1990s, he focuses on large formats and "staged" images that do not seek the "decisive moment" but take shape from prolonged waiting periods and an analytical, rational look.

In summer 1994, Vitali takes **his first photograph on the beach** in Marina di Pietrasanta. This marks the beginning of a successful series, which over the decades has consolidated him as one of the leading photographers on the international scene. All the elements that will characterize Vitali's modus operandi in the years to come are in that picture already: the camera tripod – that essentially is the elevated platform on which the artist is standing – is in the water in front of the shoreline, raised above the coast by 5-6 metres. The large-format camera (20x25) – the only one he had left after his equipment was stolen – allows him to record every single detail. A theatrical piece is staged by unwitting actors, immortalized in an endless number of small episodes.

The artist is moved by a sociological intent and a voyeuristic spirit. He identifies the beach as the privileged place to draft a **socio-anthropological manual of Italian identity**. The frontal view and the elevated position – the so-called "prince's point of view" – allow him to capture wide landscape views as well as to delve into the intimacy of human interactions. After hours of patient observation, Vitali chooses the moment in which nothing decisive happens, but multiple micro-stories converge. The cold, whitish light freezes people, things, and places in an immovable space and time. The result is a merciless portrait of everyday life in which the natural element, the public sphere, and the private dimension are intertwined in a crystallized temporal suspension.

Although Vitali's coasts are noisy and colourful puzzles of bathers, swimsuits, deckchairs, and sun loungers, the resulting image reveals his active awareness of **art history**: the descriptive and meticulous realism of the Flemish "ars nova"; the Renaissance perspective; the panoramic scenes of the eighteenth-century landscape painters; as well as some classic iconographies of Italian and European painting, such as the image of the "bather" and the "diver."

Mazzoleni Galleria d'Arte Srl

Piazza Solferino, 2

10121 Torino, IT

04839580018

+39 011 534473

torino@mazzoleniart.com



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The photographer-director's attentive eye identifies in the crowd the modern version of these recognisable figures. Men and women of our time – pale, tanned, tattooed, isolated, or gathered in small groups – are captured with their ordinary bodies whilst unwittingly enjoying their free time in awkward positions, stripping themselves of the daily working life and laying bare. Behind the apparent banality of these scenes lies contemporary society's behavioural phenomenology along with its evolution over time.

Vitali's beaches are often urbanized (Viareggio, Catania) or industrialized coasts, such as **Rosignano Solvey**, a small town in the province of Livorno, Tuscany. The town appears for the first time in Vitali's photographs in 1995 (*Rosignano Fins*). In the foreground are the usual bathers, whilst in the background is the Solvay chemical factory, responsible for pouring sodium bicarbonate and bleaching agents in the environment: this phenomenon has resulted in creating the well-known opalescent waters and white beaches of Rosignano. Vitali returned to the same coast multiple times: in the early 2000s as well as in the summer of 2020, when the artist embarked on a national tour to observe the lifestyle of Italians after three months of lockdown. In these last shots of Rosignano, the theme of environmental pollution is replaced by sociological considerations, such as the beach as a place for social inclusion and the evolution of multiculturalism over the years.

Among **other photographs taken in 2020**, the first images captured on the coasts near his place (*Foce del Serchio Mirage* and *Marina di Massa capannina bianca - Vogue hope*) are far from the exuberant vitality of the previous gatherings of holidaymakers. The desire for freedom mixes with the spectre of a new closure. Along the shoreline a few people timidly move or sunbathe in small and well-distanced groups. The natural landscape acquires airiness despite the minute geometries of the bodies; a wise measure regulates the composition and creates balance between sky, sea, earth, and people.

As the weeks go by, the shots testify to an easing of tension in people's behaviour. A more light-hearted attitude resonates along the banks of the river Chidro (*Chidro Esse*) and a glorious "italianity" explodes in the rocky Manarola. The photographer's vigilant eye maintains the usual detachment when immortalising a kaleidoscope of trivial, detailed worlds that require an equally observant viewer.

The **exhibition** opens with the first photograph of 1994, which is directly related to the most recent shots. Covering three decades of activity, the works on display range from historical (*Viareggio Red Fins*, 1995) and iconic photographs (*Carcavelos Pier Paddle*, 2016) to urban landscapes (*Friche de la Belle de Mai on Air*, 2017) and natural, untouched sceneries (*Ponta dos Mosteiros Dark*, 2018).

The **natural element** acts as a counterpart to the universal human theatre and directs the narrative composition in works such as *Desiata Shoe* (2017) or *Firiplaka Red Yellow Diptych* (2011), where the monumental and pictorial immensity of the red-yellow rock dominates the scene. Vitali observes it from the water and investigates its roughness and chromatic variations. The barely distinguishable, accidental human silhouettes emphasize nature's majesty.

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In Vitali's work, gatherings and crowds alternate with empty spaces, solitudes follow multitudes, becoming the raw material to be shaped by the artist. His gaze creates stories, elaborates them, observes them, records them, eventually sharing his voyeuristic gaze with the viewer: the privilege of seeing without being seen.

The exhibition is accompanied by *Leporello. No Country for Old Men*, a “non-book” edited in 2020 that brings together post-lockdown pictures in a long, accordion-pleated strip of paper. The publication is available in 200 copies.

MASSIMO VITALI

Massimo Vitali was born in Como, Italy, in 1944. He moved to London after high-school, where he studied Photography at the London College of Printing. In the early Sixties he started working as a photojournalist, collaborating with many magazines and agencies in Italy and Europe. It was during this time that he met Simon Guttman, the founder of the agency Report, who was to become fundamental in Massimo's growth as a “Concerned Photographer”.

At the beginning of the Eighties, he began working as a cinematographer for television and cinema. However, his relationship with the still camera never ceased, and he eventually turned his attention back to “photography as a means for artistic research”. He began his series of Italian beach panoramas in 1995. He lives and works in Lucca, Italy.

MAZZOLENI

Mazzoleni was founded in Turin in 1986 by Giovanni and Anna Pia Mazzoleni, as a natural evolution of their private collection started in the 1950s. The historic Turin space, which occupies two floors of Palazzo Panizza, overlooking the city-centre Piazza Solferino, has since 2014 been flanked by the London gallery in Mayfair. Over the past three decades Mazzoleni has organised solo and group exhibitions of more than 200 prominent Italian and international artists from across the 20th century with an exhibition programme focused on museum-calibre Italian art from the post-war period and recently the contemporary panorama, working in close collaboration with artists' estates and foundations. All exhibitions are accompanied by fully illustrated monographs, with authoritative critical texts.

Under the leadership of Davide and Luigi Mazzoleni, in recent years Mazzoleni has intensified its international activities, participating in numerous art fairs, including Art Basel (Basel, Miami and Hong Kong), Artissima (Turin), FIAC (Paris), Frieze Masters (London), miart (Milan), and TEFAF (Maastricht and New York).

NOTES TO EDITORS

MASSIMO VITALI. Ti ho visto

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Dates: 12 April – 30 June 2022 | Private View: Tuesday 12 April 2022, 5pm – 10.30pm

Address: Mazzoleni, Piazza Solferino, 2 – 10121 Torino

T: (+39) 011.534473 | E: torino@mazzoleniart.com

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday: 10am – 1pm / 3.30 – 7pm

Sunday and Monday: by appointment.

For further information:

Alessia Maiuri | E: amaiuri@mazzoleniart.com | M. (+39)339.8251601

For Press enquiries:

Lucile Brun | E: lucile@mazzoleniart.com | M. (+39)340.0664675

www.mazzoleniart.com

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