

OLIVO BARBIERI. IMMAGINI 1978 - 2014

Over 100 works in the first major Italian retrospective that tells the story of one of Italy's greatest contemporary photographers

A new work, created for MAXXI, enters the Museum's permanent collection

May 29 – November 15, 2015

www.fondazionemaxxi.it

*I have never been interested in photography, I'm interested in images.
I think that my work starts where photography ends.*
(Olivo Barbieri)

Rome, 26 May 2015. He has described Italy's landscape, its provinces and its outskirts, but also the collapse of the legend of modernity, the transformation of China and the globalization of the Far East, the cities of the whole world viewed from above, and the relationship with Nature. Olivo Barbieri (Carpi, 1954) is one of Italy's most important contemporary photographers and from **May 29 to November 15, 2015** MAXXI will hold the first major Italian retrospective of his work entitled **OLIVO BARBIERI. IMMAGINI 1978 – 2014** curated by **Francesca Fabiani**.

The exhibition presents a selection of over 100 works – photographs, films and other materials – which illustrate this photographer's artistic trajectory from the late 1970s to the present, and it is also the chance for the creation of a **new work dedicated to the Adriatic Coast, produced specially for MAXXI**, thanks to **Eni** main partner of the exhibition.

A retrospective that retraces Barbieri's themes and research, underscoring his constant attention to the theme of perception, his capacity to envision and interpret reality. With his photographs this artist casts doubt over the conventional modes of representation, to instead breathe life into new narratives by means of continuous, incessant *perceptive experiments*.

The exhibition is divided into **seven sections** beginning from **VIAGGIO IN ITALIA (1980 – 83)**, a period during which Barbieri dedicated his work to the city and the landscapes in the Italian province, with no folkloristic purpose, but rather to simply remain faithful to the visual given. The works during this phase, which were all made in color, then became part of a pivotal event: the *Viaggio in Italia* exhibition organized by Luigi Ghirri in 1984. Showing their works, besides Barbieri, were some other great Italian authors, including Jodice, Basilico, Guidi. The event is still considered to be a crucial experience for Italian photography.

This section includes the photographs that Barbieri presented for the 1984 exhibition and the ones he took in the three years before that.

The second section is called **IMAGES (1977 – 2007)** and it includes the *Flippers* (1977 – 78) series, which Barbieri first became famous for, and which he exhibited following the invitation he received from Ghirri at the Galleria Civica di Modena.

Images taken inside an abandoned factory, in which the icons of post-Second World War American culture, from the pin-up to science fiction, from cowboys to the Beatles, became the ruins of the very modernity that falls to pieces, just like its myths. It is a series that raises symbolic issues, such as the juxtaposing of the icon and reality, but it also reveals a thinking about the mechanisms of vision.

These reflections also characterize the series dedicated to the paintings housed in the museums: *Paintings (Uffizi)* and *Louvre*, 2002, and *TWIY (Capodimonte)*, 2007, where the use of selective focus offers the shots an unprecedented depth.

The exhibition continues with **ARTIFICIAL ILLUMINATIONS (1982 – 2014)** in which phantasmagorical cities characterized by impossible and almost immaterial colors are the absolute protagonists. These are not post-produced images, but the result of very long exposures to artificial light. As Barbieri says: "There's more time inside these photographs than the time it takes to look at them"; it is through these pictures that the photographer analyzes the potential of the photographic medium and the limits of the human eye.

The fourth section called **CHINA (1989 – 2014)** is dedicated to journey to the Far East that since 1989 has been a constant in Barbieri's life: India, Tibet, Japan, but first and foremost China, characterized by a unprecedented social and urban change. This is a narrative that unfolds over 25 years, from the first urban portraits of the 1990s – which witness the persistence of vernacular elements, of people-oriented architectures – up to the images of the new millennium which testify to the advancement of structure and infrastructures of disturbing proportions.

In the section called **VIRTUAL TRUTHS (1996 – 2002)**, the exhibition tells the story of the earliest experiments with "selective focus," a technique that, thanks to the use of special lenses, allows the photographer to focus only a part of the image, leaving the rest of it out of focus. This technique, which would become a distinguishing feature of Barbieri's work, has allowed him to create a new visual mechanism, redefining the hierarchies among the elements of the visible. And it is thanks to his work that the term "out-of-focus" had become part of the contemporary language of photography.

The sixth part of the exhibition is dedicated to the project called **SITE SPECIFIC_ (2003 – 2013)**, research which has involved flying in a helicopter close to more than 40 cities around the world, from Rome to Shanghai, from Las Vegas to Seville, from Turin to Montreal, from Beijing to Los Angeles, from Amman to New York, from Brasilia to Tel Aviv - all of them cities that at a certain point in their history have undergone sudden and irreversible transformations. Through this project Barbieri changes perspective, he subverts the point of view and, using a wholly museum-related term, that of the site-specific installation for a certain place, he seeks to represent the world as if it were a temporary installation.

The exhibition ends with **PARKS (2006 – 2014)**, a project that is almost the counterpart of *site specific_*, in which the key role is played by the relationship between Man and Nature. The linguistic instruments are the same ones that have been tried and tested over the years: photos taken from a helicopter, selective focus, design, rendering. Neither method nor language change in this constant visual experimentation, poised between the reality and the representation that characterize all of this artist's work.

The exhibition is also enriched by a series of in-depth **Focuses**, dedicated to **documents** and **books**, to the works in **MAXXI's permanent collection** (3 projects for some 35 prints altogether), and to the **videos** that Barbieri has produced over the course of his career. These include the one dedicated to *Shanghai* (2004) made without audio so as to denounce the West's indifference towards one of the fastest social and urban upheavals in history, *Seascape #1 Night/Shenzhen 05*, a mesmerizing black and white film on a mass bathing in the moonlight, and, lastly, *Beijing Sky*, which immerses us in the Chinese visual imaginary.

On the occasion of the exhibition a catalogue will be published by Marsilio

The press pack and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/area-riservata/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

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