

Liminal

I don't know how many of you saw Giuseppe Ripa's *Moondance* exhibition at the Leica Gallery in New York last year. And I don't know how many of you read, in the catalogue published for the event, what I wrote, in the essay titled *Genius Loci*, on his artistic output.

I'm saying this because I wish to emphasize that his latest work is intimately tied to his previous one, of which it is an extreme and logical consequence.

Giuseppe is known to always try to impress *upon* and *in* the photo a mood rather than an image.

It's true. This is a trend in modern photography, which is no longer documentary but emotional, though his willingness and stubbornness go well beyond what we might consider a mainstream fashion.

By borrowing the title of a famous essay by Ernst Cassirer, I'd say that his course as an artist over these last years may be redefined as the "*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.*"

Over the past years, his attention to forms—fading, complex, or composed—is surely a constant in his compositions and production. His view as a photographer gives the images their own orientation and their own unity, which exists beyond the bodies, even in the presence of a very accentuated fading of forms.

Moreover, his emphasis on details renders the perspective a "seeing through": in fact, in Ripa's photos the displayed detail—blurred or "negative" developed—becomes a channel for a broadened view that includes the final vanishing point, the "beyond."

The impersonality, the annulment of a conscious "I" seem to be fundamental criteria, there where the work is poised between the abstract form and the figurative form.

The form is ideal, independent of any explicit meaning, seized in a condition without any subjective or temporal interference, even though it seems to derive from a temporal contingency.

Oftentimes, what remains of memory is the indistinguishable, a slow wave that drags with it the entire mood of a season, but no longer its conformations, and not even the shadow of a shadow. Instead, only the infinite "negative" of those recollected forms rather than the limited and indefinite "positive."

Ripa is often able to look at the world from a distance, reminding us that in order to reach the foundations of things we need to penetrate their darkness!

Heraclitus once said that "*truth equals depth*": in fact, the dimension of depth is the only one capable of unveiling what is hidden, the true nature of things.

This procedure, brought to extreme consequences, becomes particularly arduous with regard to image enjoyment and communication.

The reader must simply let himself be guided, without any block of recognition, without any desire to lead the image to a known fact, carrying out an act of faith in the course the artist pushes him to undertake.

Many of Ripa's photos thus become pure "traveling" forms, silhouettes in motion, as if we were given the possibility to see, or at times vaguely remember but NEVER actually grasp the image.

We are at the limit in defining Pure Forms or, better yet, Symbolic Forms (going back to the opening quote in Cassirer's essay), "*through which a particular spiritual content is connected to a concrete sensible sign that is intimately identified with it.*"

Form (in the broadest sense of the term) that is skillfully reproduced with different techniques and modalities; a form—revealed at times, sought out at others—must not be considered a container, but rather a symbolic expression that changes in our memory and imaginary.

In fact, if art is mainly form, it is, above all, understanding of forms: without it the deepest aspects of reality would be inaccessible to us because art entails a process where reality is intensified.

The intrinsic formal relationship is not between the image and reproduced things but between the images and visual emotion grasped in its entirety.

Here we're dealing with a work dedicated to motion, to dissolving the pre-existing image (not as adhering

to fashion but instead as an investigation if we look at Giuseppe's works over these past years), but also a work centered on a study of light that has always been the main principle of the photographer's Mission. The artistic composition that derives, brought to *light* (just consider the long and laborious camera obscura), must not be considered a mere exteriority: it has "*the genius of impropriety*," it changes constantly, is born by transformation or prepares another one even if it is photographed, "fixed" in one of its changing and ephemeral phases.

After various encounters and chats with the artist and while this work was being planned, we discovered this book could be considered a diary, the travel notes of an Italian wandering around the world, and a sort of tribute to the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, which we celebrate this year. An uncommon tribute in a year oftentimes replete with rhetoric, but, knowing Ripa, totally spontaneous and sincere.

Emotional, not concise, travel notes, a journey of the mind outside Italy, teeming with impressions, evanescent ones like memory itself, but printed on glossy paper. A journey into a multi-dimensional and multi-emotional space that hosts those who observe and comprehend, there where *form* has finally broken free from constraints and what remains are only fragments of reality imbued with sensations.

This observation necessarily leads us to think about what the next stage in Ripa's course as an artist will be. In my opinion, a sort of new, indistinct abstract minimalism is already in the air.

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Renato Miracco is the author of many books and scholarly articles, and he has served as a contributing editor for a range of catalogues, magazines and academic publications.

He has worked as an advisor to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Art Media Society in Brussels, and as a curator of the Estorick Collection in London (*Italian Abstraction 1910-1960; Piety and Pragmatism; Spiritualism in Futurist Art*) and the Metropolitan Museum in New York (*Giorgio Morandi*). In 2005 he was a guest curator of Italian modern art at the Tate Modern in London (*Beyond Painting: Burri, Fontana, Manzoni*). Since August 2006 he has been an advisor to the Scientific Committee of the Chamber of Deputies in Rome, Italy. In November 2007 he became director of the Italian Cultural Institute of New York. He has curated numerous other exhibitions, and was director of the *Quaderni dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di New York* series. In 2010 he became a cultural attaché at the Italian Embassy in Washington.