

GENIUS LOCI

Already the fragrant grass is withered,
but her lover has not come yet.
A letter home cannot be sent,
for the autumn wild geese have turned back south once again.
Wei Chuang

I do not know why, but these verses remind me of our Giuseppe Ripa, who is now exhibiting his work at the prestigious American seat, thanks to a historic agreement between Leica Gallery and the Italian Cultural Institute of New York, which I direct.

Maybe it is because I have in mind Ripa's books *Anima Mundi*, *Tibet*, and *Memories of Stone*, which evoke spirituality, the historic and collective memory of man, or maybe, it is because the more I see Ripa's artistic output (I'm thinking of *Lightly* or *Aquarium*), the more I believe he is not a photographer (he will not love this phrase, I know!), in the usual sense of the word.

Ripa tries to show atmospheres rather than images in his photographs. Close your eyes and you will see that, after leafing through one of his books, you will keep having the sense of time and its flow, which is a particular characteristic of his photographs.

In fact, if it is true that it is the man who transforms the landscape into an aesthetic idea, it is also true that each age and each nation seems to have produced its own landscape culturally and spiritually.

The landscape, not seen as a combination of disconnected elements (trees, rocks, fields, mountains, cities, bridges, railways)—reproduced more or less accurately—but as an emotional whole.

Usually, we behave like an artist, watching and selecting it, with an inherent creative attitude: the landscape is, therefore, understood and interpreted according to our imagination and selection.

Many times, this process is associated with a feeling, which makes us perceive the transformation of Nature—in the broadest sense, as even houses, factories, roads, and stairs are our Urban Nature—into landscape.

Therefore, we can say that photography (a certain kind of photography) shows—through countless plays of shapes—the truth of an aesthetic feeling common to everyone, something that can change from being ephemeral to eternal.

Etymologically, the Greeks did not have a single word for landscape, but used different expressions and terms, revealing a deep love for Nature in relation to the *genius loci*: each place, each site was then the subject of a cult or a memory.

The new work by Ripa—the selection presented at the Gallery today, and in general, in his latest photo book—reveals the protean soul of the places that he chooses, perceives, conveys on printed paper, and gives us with total transparency and devotion.

This is an Urban Nature that each of us has seen and experienced in our everyday lives.

It is Nature perceived as a whole and from different angles. The details defined by Ripa are examples of his photographic language: they are places (even a grate, a corridor . . .

are places) where emotions are most condensed, where the traces of our hidden energy are enclosed. If you do not think of geometric images (do not, go beyond!), you will see that the photographs exude memories.

Memories that instantly become landscapes emotionally experienced by the observer and created to lead us to contemplation.

We should not give this word a passive meaning but a fully active one, as the contemplative spirit makes us perceive and explore dark existences in history and culture as well as discover and appreciate what could be our daily legacy.

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