

Soggetto nomade / *Nomadic Subject*

Female identity through the images of five Italian photographers, 1965-1985

Paola Agosti, Letizia Battaglia, Lisetta Carmi, Elisabetta Catalano, Marialba Russo

curated by Cristiana Perrella and Elena Magini

14.12.2018 – 08.03.2019

Aleksandra Mir. Triumph

curated by Marta Papini

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opening: Thursday December 13, 6.30 pm

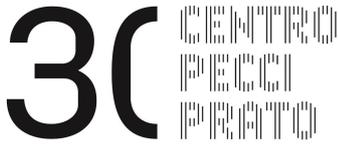
press preview: Thursday December 13, 12.00 pm

Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci

Thursday December 13, at 6.30 pm, the Luigi Pecci Center for Contemporary Art presents **two new episodes in the program of exhibitions** for the winter, offering visitors two projects that combine historical research and support of the most recent experimentation. On the occasion of its 30 years anniversary, the Pecci Center wants to highlight its new direction that pays a more specific attention on the **inclusion of different voices in its collection and exhibition program**.

Nomadic Subject. Female identity through the images of five Italian photographers, 1965-1985, is a group show that comes to terms with the theme of representation of female identity in a period of major social and political transformations in Italy, through the images of **Paola Agosti, Letizia Battaglia, Lisetta Carmi, Elisabetta Catalano and Marialba Russo**. The show brings the works of these five women photographers together for the first time, with over 100 images that document a period of about twenty years.

Triumph, the spectacular installation by **Aleksandra Mir** composed of 2529 trophies, is a monument to the culture of amateur sport and the legacy of Italian pop culture. ***Triumph*** becomes part of the collection of Centro Pecci in the context of the museum's 30th anniversary, and confirms the emphasis on the output and research of important contemporary artists.



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Nomadic Subject brings together in an exhibition, for the first time, the images of five Italian women photographers, from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, to convey different perspectives on the experience, representation and interpretation of female subjectivity in a period of sweeping social change for Italy. Years of transition from radical political engagement to hedonism, years of terrorist violence but also of civil achievements, brought about mostly by women and the struggles of feminism. **A reflection on identity and its representation** that takes its cue from the extraordinary **portraits of the transvestites of Genoa by Lisetta Carmi** (Genoa, 1924), where the female mystique is an aspiration, and interpreted in the images of **actresses, writers and artists by Elisabetta Catalano** (Rome, 1941-2015), the coverage of the **feminist movement by Paola Agosti** (Turin, 1947), **the women and girls of mafia-torn Sicily by Letizia Battaglia** (Palermo, 1935), and **men who take on a female identity for a single day** during the carnival of small towns in Campania, explored by **Marialba Russo** (Naples, 1947).

In Italy the full acceptance of female press photographers, art photographers and artists in the system of art and journalism began in the 1960s, in step with the socio-political changes and multiple demands brought about by feminism. Though belonging to different generations, all the photographers in the show have come to grips with the social transformations in progress in the Italian society, giving rise to very personal reflections on the image of women, and more specifically on **female identity and its encroachments, the sense of otherness seen through a sensibility that has elaborated and absorbed the idea of difference.**

In this period, the medium of photography became the tool par excellence with which to represent a new central role of women's bodies and their transformations, personal experiences and family life, the **relationship between private memory and collective history.** The images in the exhibition share in the representation of a vast and unconventional female universe in the wider sense of the term, where the **body** is not just the object of an external, prevalently male gaze, but become **an active subject, a vehicle with which to express other non-standardized, non-heterocentric values.** The female image is thus the central focus, an image that is amplified, revealed and deconstructed, becoming a vehicle of non-bourgeois values, but also a vivid representation of an inner life that is able to break free of stereotypes. The exhibition presents **over 100 images to document a period of about twenty years:** it bears witness to the rise of new, multiple expressive urges, which though not constituting a "female specificity" offer **a perspective of women on women and their identity.**

The title of the exhibition refers to the ground-breaking anthology of essays by Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (Cambridge: Columbia University Press, 1994), in which the philosopher outlines a new sexual subjectivity that is multiple, multicultural and stratified, like the subjectivity represented in the images of the photographers included in this show.

Paola Agosti. Born in 1947 in Turin, in 1969 she began to work as a freelance photographer, traveling in Europe, South America, the United States and Africa, where she met and made portraits of political leaders, cultural figures and artists of international renown. She has paid particular attention to the faces and issues of the female world. Her investigations of rural poverty in Piedmont, the history of emigration from that region to Argentina, and her photographs of the protagonists of European 20th-century culture, led to the creation of books and exhibitions on these themes. From 1976 to the present she has published countless photography books and shown her images (some of which are included in the permanent collections of various museums) in Italy and abroad. In recent years she has also concentrated on books that focus on family memories, individual stories that become History.

Letizia Battaglia. Born in Palermo in 1935 and is considered one of the world's most important photographers. She is known for her works showing the victims and personalities of the world of organized crime, but she is not only the "photographer of the mafia": she is known as one of the most outstanding figures of contemporary photography, for her works that have been absorbed in the collective imaginary, and for the civil and ethical values she has emphasized through photography. She is actively engaged in various initiatives for the city of Palermo, and since 2017 she has been the director of the Centro Internazionale di Fotografia in that city. Letizia Battaglia was the first European woman to receive the Eugene Smith Grant, in 1985 in New York, the international award created to commemorate the photographer of Life Magazine. Other honors include the Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie (2007) and the Cornell Capa Infinity Award, New York (2009). The New York Times inserted her in a list of eleven exceptional and powerful women in 2017.

Elisabetta Catalano lived and worked in Rome. As an internationally acclaimed portraitist, she bore witness to the lives of artists and personalities of literature, art, entertainment and culture in general, across the history of Italy from the 1970s to the present. Her career began with Vogue Italia, Il Mondo and L'Espresso, extending into the entire Italian and foreign press. In 1971 she worked in New York for Vogue America and in Paris for Vogue France, photographing fashion and entertainment personalities and social life. In the 1970s she decided to concentrate on portraiture and photographed the most important artists of avant-garde movements in her studio in Rome, including Alighiero Boetti, Joseph Beuys, Gilbert & George, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Francesco Clemente, Cesare Tacchi, Jannis Kounellis, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Vettor Pisani and many others.

Lisetta Carmi. Born in Genoa in 1924 to a bourgeois family of Jewish origin, in 1960 Lisetta Carmi abandoned a career as a pianist to work with photography, seeing it as a tool of political engagement and a way to conduct in-depth existential research through perspectives on others. After initial experience at Teatro Duse, in the 1960s and 1970s she produced photographic reports of documentation and social protest, including coverage of the difficult working conditions of the longshoremen of Genoa. She has created photographic narratives that stand out for an ability to get beyond currently accepted viewpoints and to grasp the inner lives of people with particular intensity and drama. From 1958 to 1967 she repeatedly visited Israel, to gain a better understanding of the meaning of belonging to the Jewish people, and in the 1970s she traveled extensively in Afghanistan and India, countries in which she discovered a vision of life more in tune with her own feelings. Her periods in the Orient culminated in the encounter with the Hindu guru Babaji, leading to a second turning point in her life. At Cisternino, in Apulia, she founded an ashram to spread the teachings of the guru and to focus on the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

Marialba Russo. Born in the province of Naples in 1947, has lived in Rome since 1987. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts of Naples and approached photography towards the end of the 1960s, a medium with which she mainly investigated the religious manifestations and folk celebrations of central and southern Italy. Alongside her personal research, she has worked with Vogue Italia and other Italian and foreign publications. In the years to follow Russo took part in various events and initiatives on photography in Europe and the United States, while continuing to collaborate with several Italian universities, teaching courses in photography. In 1989 the Galleria d'Arte Moderna Giorgio Morandi of Bologna held a retrospective of her work, with a catalogue containing a letter by Alberto Moravia. In the 1990s her research shifted towards more intimate, analytical reflections in which landscape becomes a metaphor of an inner temporality. Her two exhibitions *Incantesimo*, at the Museum of Photography of Thessaloniki in 2001, and *Passi* at the Jintai Art Museum of Beijing in 2003, are short sequences offered as previews taken from *Incanto*, the work on which she concentrated for ten years, from 1990 to 2000.

Aleksandra Mir. Triumph

curated by **Marta Papini**

14.12.2018 – 31.03.2019

For its 30th anniversary, the Luigi Pecci Center for Contemporary Art presents a new entry in its collection: the monumental installation ***Triumph*** by **Aleksandra Mir**, shown for the first time in Italy. *Triumph*, completed in 2009 and exhibited that same year at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, and in 2012 at the South London Gallery in London, is a **spectacular installation** by Aleksandra Mir composed of **2.529 trophies** collected by the artist across the span of a year in Sicily, in the city of Palermo and its vicinity.

The cups in the installation, dated from the 1940s onward, were gathered by means of an advertisement in *Il Giornale di Sicilia* in which the artist offered the symbolic sum of five euros for each trophy. The outcome of the initiative is **an enormous, sparkling collection of keepsakes whose individual stories have been lost: a monument to youth and bygone glories, to the culture of amateur sport and the legacy of Italian popular history.**

Produced on an industrial scale, the trophies are objects of little intrinsic value, but of great emotional value for those who won them in the context of competition and raised them to the Gods, re-enacting a falsely believed ancient ritual, the product of modern sports culture appropriating the Church's silver chalices. The **striking contradiction between mass production and the nostalgic fetishism** of the individual trophy culminates, long after the moment of glory has passed and the trophy has collected dust in the winners garage for many years, in the **cathartic gesture of giving the memento of victory to the artist**, as if to break free of a burden.

Sweat and effort, joy and deep sentiment, applause and celebration, reflected on the surface of these trophies, become faint, distant echoes in the exhibition, cumulatively conveyed by piles of inert metal, plastic and marble. *Triumph* is a true **memento mori**, a **visual document of the transient nature of success** and the need of all human beings, at some point in their lives, to come to terms with the past, abandoning the illusion of eternal youth.

With the presentation of *Triumph* by Aleksandra Mir, Centro Pecci continues to exhibit large immersive and engaging installations, in a new focus on the output of important contemporary artists.

Aleksandra Mir

Born in Lubin, Poland, 1967. A Swedish and American citizen, based in London. She lived in Palermo from 2005 to 2010. Most of the work of Aleksandra Mir involves friends, acquaintances and passers-by in playful disruptions of social norms. The artist has unleashed a caustic critique of mass tourism in works like *Life is Sweet in Sweden* (1995), supported and promoted female bands in *New York Feminism* (1996), and documented women's reaction to cat whistles in Copenhagen's central square in *Pick Up (Oh Baby)* (1996). One of her best-known works, *First Woman on the Moon*, stages a female moon landing on a deserted beach in the Netherlands (1999). Her solo shows include: New Museum's Window on Broadway, New York (1997); Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (2004); PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2004); The Power Plant, Toronto (2006); Kunsthau Zurich, (2006); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2009); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2011); M-Museum, Leuven (2013); Drawing Room, London (2014); Tate Liverpool and Modern Art Oxford, (2017). The work of Aleksandra Mir has also been featured in important group shows, such as: Whitney Biennial, New York (2004); "The Shapes of Space" at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007); Sydney Biennial (2004); Venice Biennale (2009); Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre (2014); "The Artist is Present" at Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2018).

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Opening hours: every day 10am-8pm, Friday and Saturday 10am-11pm, closed on Monday

www.centropecci.it

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#AleksandraMir #Triumph @retrospectivepress

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Nomadic Subject

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Nomadic Subject. Female identity through the images of five Italian photographers, 1965-1985, deals with the theme of representation of female identity in a period of major social and political transformations in Italy, through the images of Paola Agosti, Letizia Battaglia, Lisetta Carmi, Elisabetta Catalano and Marialba Russo. The title of the exhibition refers to the ground-breaking anthology of essays by Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (Cambridge: Columbia University Press, 1994), in which the philosopher outlines a new sexual subjectivity that is multiple, multicultural and stratified, which somehow seems to be foreshadowed by the subjects, themes and “femininities” represented by the five photographers.

The choice of such different artists, ranging from photojournalism to anthropological portraiture, documents a sort of polyphony of the photographic discourse that can be perceived in the output of the Italian women artists over the two decades taken into consideration, while at the same time emphasizing the multiplicity through which the issue of female identity is expressed in the society and lifestyles of the time.

The over 100 photographs in *Nomadic Subject* constitute a heterogeneous selection of images made from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, and share in the representation of a vast, unconventional female universe, in its many facets, conveyed by a multiplicity of forms and languages.

Paola Agosti

Paola Agosti (Turin, 1947) began working as an autodidact in 1968 in Rome, and soon became a renowned photojournalist. Starting in the 1970s she has addressed timely themes, from the protests of students and workers to the end of fascisms in Europe, the construction of democracies in South America to the women's movement in Italy. Agosti pays close attention to the image of women, narrating female reality in all its forms, from industrial to rural settings, collaborating for almost 20 years with the magazine *Noi donne* published by UDI (Unione donne in Italia).

As she recalls it, the experience of *Noi donne* was of great, groundbreaking importance, in spite of its precarious nature: **“I got to know a certain aspect of Italy that was not always openly feminist, but made of women who had worked in the rice fields, taken part in the resistance, and had been the first to work in the big factories of the north: an entire, extraordinary female humanity”**.

In Agosti's production the witnessing of the Italian feminist movements is of fundamental importance, the marches, the struggles for self-determination, the demands for women's rights that set the tone of the life of the country in the mid-1970s. This research converged in the book *Riprendiamoci la vita: immagini del movimento delle donne* (1976).

The selected images document years of ferment that shook Italian society to its foundations, an extremely fertile period bearing radical, revolutionary messages. The women depicted by Agosti take part in demonstrations and human circles, assemble and discuss shared issues, and are shown working in counseling centers and community spaces. The pictures capture the various forms of protest, the rage and moments of conflict, but also and above all the energy, determination and participation of the female collectivity in that precise historical moment. For Paola Agosti, the photographs take on the function of documents: **“I have always identified with the struggles of women, but what interested me most was to bear witness, and this is what my shots do today”**.

Letizia Battaglia

Letizia Battaglia (Palermo, 1935), a pioneer of Italian photojournalism, has generated a polyphonic narrative path in her work, capable of representing the various moments of Italian society, with a particular focus on the Sicilian context. Her civil commitment has moved forward over the years in an intense activity that includes and goes beyond photography, shifting into politics, publishing, social activism, theater and cinema.

Battaglia began her career in adulthood, without specific technical training, but already her first images reveal an instinct and a sensibility that allow her to immediately enter situations, also thanks to a compositional geometry that underlines the relationship with the subject.

Letizia Battaglia is known for her work as the “photographer of the mafia,” yet her pictures of current events are but a part of an investigation she has conducted over the years: heterogeneous documentation that illustrates the impact of the mafia on Sicilian society, from environmental decay to unemployment, from bourgeois salons to the condition of women: **“I have realized that my best photographs are always of women or girls. In the past, at the sites of violent events, crime scenes or arrests, I always looked for ‘the little girl’ [...] I have understood that I am looking for something in these girls that was broken inside me at that age, and therefore for me photographing is not an intellectual operation, but often a way to delve into myself”**.

Through empathy with the subject, Battaglia has shown the contradictions and wounds of Palermo, but also the female energies, perceived as a possible factor of collective redemption. Her portrait gallery of women – girls, women in the working-class districts of Palermo, patients in psychiatric hospitals, representatives of aristocratic Palermo – conveys a dialectic relationship between the photographer’s inner self and that of the female subjects, a bond of proximity that springs from mutual recognition and reflection.

Lisetta Carmi

For Lisetta Carmi (Genoa, 1924), photography is a tool of knowledge of the world and also of self-examination, as she reminds us: **“photography has been useful to me to understand who I was and who are the others”**. After an early stage as a pianist, at the start of the 1960s Carmi abandoned music to concentrate completely on photography, seen as the possibility of granting visibility to society’s outcasts, the poor, the different, opening up to them and understanding

them. *I Travestiti* (“the transvestites”) series, presented in 1972 in a book that was controversial at the time, is a body of work that began on New Year’s Eve of 1965. Carmi explains that she was invited by her friend Mauro Gasperini to a party at the home of some transvestites, on one of the narrow streets in the historical center of Genoa, her native city: after that encounter, she spent about six years photographing the people she met there, living side by side with them. The shots were an opportunity for reflection on the essence of female identity and on her own identity as well: **“I too, at the time, was nagged by problems – perhaps on an unconscious level – of male or female identity. Today I understand that it was not so much about acceptance of a ‘state’ as about the rejection of a ‘role’”**.

The femininity represented by the transvestites is desired and asserted, deeply displayed, with courage and a provocative attitude. Her pictures, besides acting as a tool of witnessing and social documentation, constitute an indictment of petit bourgeois hypocrisy, a reflection on the fluidity of gender and the interpenetration between male and female. For Carmi, in fact, **“no obligatory behaviors can exist except in an authoritarian tradition that is imposed on us since childhood”**.

Elisabetta Catalano

Elisabetta Catalano (Rome, 1941-2015) is considered an outstanding witness to the lives of artists and personalities of literature, art, entertainment and cultural in general, crossing the history of Italy from the 1970s to the present. Her debut as a photographer happened almost by chance on the set of Federico Fellini’s masterpiece *8½*; her early experiences were as in fashion photography for periodicals, including *Vogue*, *L’Espresso* and *Il Mondo*, alongside work with the most important artists of the avant-garde movements.

Catalano’s portraits, mostly in indoor settings, stand out for the extreme construction of the image, linking back to the great portraiture tradition of the 1500s: the framing is often in the foreground, from the waist up, with a monochrome background; when there is an opening towards the outdoor setting, it becomes another psychological aspect of the portrait.

For Catalano, the portrait reveals the social and moral identity of the subject, and her photographs set out to grasp the essential character of the person: **“I have always had a passion for capturing the most photogenic moment of a person, which is actually simply the moment of greatest inner openness, without defenses, in front of the camera.”** Her vision is not a detached, sociological perspective on human types, but the search for a pose capable of capturing the authenticity of the subject and the spirit of the time. Catalano made many portraits of women, a gallery that intercepts many different aspects of femininity: from the brandished, iconic sensuality of movie stars to the intellectual rigor of writers and artists, with whom she shared the sensibility and participation in the creative process. The women photographed by Catalano present a constructed image of themselves, the result of personal choices that feed on the values of the time and its fashions. They are fluid images that encapsulate the range of physiognomic and psychological expressions of the subjects, to convey the many, varied female identities of the time.

Marialba Russo

Marialba Russo (Naples, 1947) approached photography towards the end of the 1960s, working in different contexts on different themes, from social research on southern Italy, investigating religious rituals and folk celebrations, to more conceptual works.

The *Travestimento* series is the outcome of a project done from 1975 to 1980 in Campania, in the provinces of Avellino, Benevento, Naples and Salerno, containing 34 photographs that depict the culture of cross-dressing typical of carnivals in southern Italy. Stepping back from the character of social documentation, *Travestimento* operates between social anthropology and art: Russo creates head shots of men dressed and made up like women, a ritual in which the population reverses roles, freeing itself from the usual everyday rules.

Russo recalls the genesis of the project: ***“Travestimento began in a very particular way; I suddenly noticed these people who dressed as members of the opposite sex, for one day... it is research based on the representation of the carnival, and at carnival time all possible distortions can coexist. I was struck by the sensation I felt when I saw these men dressed as women, who imperceptibly took on a female condition, becoming women in the true sense of the term, in their language and manners. I have tried to make this imperceptible change visible in the series.”***

The action represented, a sort of profane masquerade, is rooted in ancient and transcultural rites which had the purpose of reconnecting opposite poles, in an ideal attempt to get beyond sexual gender.

The faces, framed in close-ups, eliminating the surrounding context, allow the photographer to concentrate on the disguise and the mask assumed, the makeup, the facial features and the particular psychological condition of the subjects. In these photographs the male-female polarities have nothing to do with sexuality, but with myth, the sacred and the magical, embodied by the ideal pursuit of a-sexuality and androgyny.