

in the heart of modernity we see a real drama of ambiguity. We think of Descartes, but also of Montaigne. On one side, the subject claims its autonomy by speaking in the first person. It is me who speaks, no one else besides me. On the other, the subject claims the right / duty to start the search for knowledge from within itself. It's me talking about me, no one else but me. Primitive subject and object of all knowledge, the inaugural acts of modern thought appear in the form of self-portraits. But what is the purpose of these self-portraits, if not to deny themselves? Descartes' staging is the archetype of this drama of ambiguity. It is necessary to underpin the evidence of his reality. Who tells us that what we see is what is there? Here is the doubt which hungrily insinuates itself into the scene, falsifies it, vanquishes it by removing it from an instinctive sense of truth: the things that are seen and are here, exist.

I have often imagined this scene, so fundamental to philosophy, so foundational to photography. Art of vision, yet visionary art. It is also lost in the ambiguous abodes of the drama of reality and its evidence. Troubled by an excess of the photographed subject's presence who is literally manipulating reality.

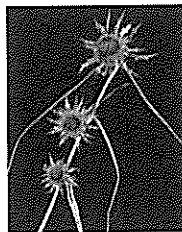
Descartes had found a precarious and disincarnated solution. Open thought, in fact. By doing so, it ends up transforming the person with whom to join thought from the first to the third. It starts with a gray room, warmed by a fire, and ends in the exaltation of thought, the subject without any story to tell. It is no longer me who is talking. And even less so am I talking about myself now. The neutrality of the gaze is what allows me to see the evidence of reality. For this reason, the gaze must be open, distance itself, and elevate itself from what it knows.

Descartes did not imagine that a few centuries after this epistemological act, the elevation of the one who knows with respect to what is given to thought, would be made effective by the technique. It would be the development of aeronautics to turn it into reality. And photography would do more: it would set the instant of bliss of open knowledge beyond itself.

Photographing the world from above. This would be the recapitulative gesture of the whole epistemology of modernity in the end. Moreover, I confess: I also have trepidation of observation from above; when I am in flight my gaze is moved by a strange feeling of fullness, strength, power. I do not see the Colosseum alone, but Rome in its entirety. I take in the morphology of the world, its folds, its extensions, everything that the world does and that which *in* the world is not given to vision. Flying allows me to get out of the confines of what I know and, thus, to really know. As I have this experience, I often think of that wonderful and enigmatic Pauline verse: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly; but then face to face" (1 Cor 13: 12). The photos that capture reality from above have this theological presumption: to cleanse the vision, to anticipate the face to face that the Pauline verse promises at the end of time. A true eschatology of vision: this would be the accomplished destiny of modernity and its overwhelming temptation.

Unless. Unless, as in these photos, what you give to the vision is not given to knowledge. And our open gaze does not see the world as it is, but how it is imagined. So the photographs of this portfolio suggest that open thought might not only be the confirmation of modern thought, but also its radical denial. Because when we see the world from above, it seems to us to be deconstructed and rebuilt under the power of that bizarre and exclusive faculty that is imagination. It is in this way that the morphology of the world becomes, in these pictures, the morphology of daydreams. And even Rome, seen from above, is no longer Rome, but a city of

my imagination. Get rid of the obsession of thinking, to try the inebriation of the imagination. These photos cure our visionary consciousness of Descartes' pain.



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Attilio Scimone

MEMORY OF THE EARTH

Alberto Giovanni Biuso - *Paesaggi intimi (intimate landscapes)*, *Multiverso*, *Silenzi (silences)*, *Still*, *Women in nondescript landscape* are the latest places in Attilio Scimone's journey into silence and space. Steps and paths remain faithful to the *substance and light* which is the title of his research carried out between 1990 and 2010. In the images of those years the light drifted into the substance that had been alive, albeit humble. They were fields of weeds that transcended and transfigured with the touch of the photographer that gave them shape, depth, and substance.

But then the space widened out and the spines of the fields became the artist's scratches on photographic material. Trails, waves, lands, plants, wheat are joined by the touch of dissolution. It is just a matter of time. Time, which Scimone says, is "a circle that ends" but that in the circumference of his being, rising and ending, he collects female figures in the air, humans accompanied by things, the silences of stone and structures of sounds, walls built by history and hills shaped by the evenings.

Between grasses, silences, scratches and waves, finally, we see the beauty. Beauty in essence, the paradigm of beauty, beauty that disturbs us, envelops us, wins us over and makes us happy. The beauty of the woman. *Multiverso* brings them together; these women. It gathers them as they advance sinuously with their heels in the wheat or so elegant they seem to plead their own dignified glory. It gathers them as they pose far from the photographer's gaze and desire, and while surrounded in the archaic black of Sicily, they fill themselves with the places, the film, the cravings and the memory.

Memory, lost time, its remembrance given by seemingly trivial events, from what Proust called *les intermittences du coeur*, the intervals of the mind between instants, in which the power of facts and things seems to fall back intact as it was. There is a bit of Proust in the photography of Scimone. Because Proust, like everyone of his time, lived in black and white. As extraordinary as it seems to us today, in fact, in the first decades of the twentieth century all artistic reproductions were monochromatic. Most of the paintings described by Proust and discussed in his novel, the writer saw them reproduced in black and white images. Yet it was also this difficulty in seeing colour that made the very special way in which Proust speaks of the painters possible and the continuous creation of colours of which the *Recherche* is made up. Black and white becomes in fact the memory that creates the world, its progress; it becomes the spaces, humans. The same thing happens with Scimone.

However, there is a difference. And it is deep, it is big. Scimone

does not look at paintings, does not live in the rarefied light of Paris and the farthest reaches of Europe. Scimone imagines the light of the South, its stones, its dry, arid land. His photographs absorb the mystical and happy despair of lands being burnt for millennia under the Sun, inhabited by mourning and glory, living in servitude and incoercible in anarchy. The nature that the artist brings to life is made of disorder and necessity, of yellow fields and of a sky without peace, of the implacable turquoise that becomes gray with his style and therefore even more burnt. Movement and being human are embedded in his images of loneliness without salvation, of mistrust without a future, of a monadic solidarity that ignores the *communitas*.

This discreet and yet ruthless artist is intimately drawn to the irony that lies at the bottom of death and that in the last stretch of his own struggle he slowly bends towards sleep invoking once again the Mother.

For it is clear that the women of Scimone are the Mother when she was not so, when she was the erotic and silent dream of the earth, when she was a 'lady', and with this one name alone she aroused desire. Women dressed in black. Ancient women in their youth. Women, powerful in their distance.

In these females, in these thorns, in these paths, in these scratches, in these shrubs, in these alone, life is the darkness that makes every light possible, existence is a surrender that does not know defeat.



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Magda
Kuca

THE PATINA
OF MEMORY

Saverio Ciarcia - The images of Magda Kuca, with their dark gray and black tones and dense and partly blurry atmospheres, appear to come directly from the past, from an indefinite elsewhere in time and space, torn from an old album of photographs of a great-great grandmother from the mid-nineteenth century. At that time there was a particular technique used by artists for taking the shot and developing it: a glass pane wet with collodium¹. However, these are actually contemporary images and the effect is at first sight strange, a legitimate doubt: Might it not be a useless display of skills or a futile technological snobbery? No matter how paradoxical it may seem, to try to understand the deep reasons for this radical and apparently risky choice, it is necessary to start from the technical details.

Commercial collodium is 4-5% cellulose nitrate: photography collodium is obtained by the addition of light-sensitive salts. Ether or ethyl alcohol can be used to dilute it: the former hardens the collodium, making it heat-shrinkable, reducing adhesion to the glass which helps to detach the film while the latter increases viscosity, rendering the film more fragile and therefore more difficult to handle, but also more porous, like a sponge. This allows a greater absorption of silver nitrate and hence a more intense reaction with the salts designed to create silver halides that affect

the more filmy negatives by blocking the excessive brightness and reducing or increasing the range of tonality. Alcohol lengthens the collodium film drying time, but too much alcohol contaminates the silver bath. Equally delicate is the use of iodide and bromide mixed with each other and with other halides (ammonium, potassium or cadmium), the proportion of which cannot be determined a priori in the methods but is related to the artist's particular preference and many other factors or circumstances that affect shooting and development. All this demonstrates how complicated the right dosage of the components and the execution times of the process are.

But why does a photographer not yet 25 years old (Magda Kuca was born in Poland in 1993) feel the need to take refuge in the past by patiently, due to the risk and adventure, investigating some of the oldest photographic practices? Why do you ever opt for a much more challenging system than the traditional way of developing a photo in a dark room at a time of overwhelming diffusion of digital imaging and image processing techniques that exalt the extraordinary speed of information dissemination?

The chosen method takes time and accuracy to take just one image: ten minutes to prepare the plate, ten minutes to imprint the image and ten minutes to develop it.

But this is precisely the point: we are faced with a work that requires an artisan approach, very manual, rendered with calm and patience and a precise knowledge of chemicals, which in the end pays for all the effort put in with direct and decisive control in each of its phases. It is an exciting method, because it is risky, based on a mix of experience and luck: you never know whether the resultant photo will be the one you want. But this uncertainty contributes to its charm: Magda, who had originally started with digital photography, is now thinking of recreating the first ever photographic process, the "heliograph" invented in 1826 and not yet well-known.

By using the pane wet with collodium, it is possible to see every detail of the minutest fibers emerging: something that, Magda claims, the digital method cannot capture. And even more so if you use, as she does, a large format camera to focus even more on the particular details. The blur of the background contrasted with the incredible definition of the foreground elements, sculpted with microscopic precision, give the pictures an exceptional depth of field. That is also the technique used by the divine Raffaello to "pierce" the painting, specifically, not by chance, in the portraits. In *La Velata*, the sleeve puff in the foreground with folds enriched by the glow of light and the silver and gold reflections on the precious damask bodice is sharper than the lady's face and gaze, and this gives the painting an extraordinary perspective and spatial depth. Moreover, portraiture is a difficult and complex operation, it is demonstrated by the paintings and sculptures from which the history of art is depicted: the tiniest wrinkle of the face, an imperceptible lip bite, the sweaty edge of a collar, the fine hairs of a beard each bathed in light, all contribute to giving depth and robustness to the mysterious identity of the subjects, to make us guess, but at the same time to hide, their most intimate thoughts. In the photos of Kuca, however, the artist's main interest is not the psychological profile of the individual, but both the anthropological and cultural value which the subjects hold: the grandmother, cut off and impenetrable in the thick fur like an old Indian woman, immovable in her wisdom in front of the strange contraption that forces her into an unnatural pose, without really being able to tell the stories that her distant and absorbing eyes have experienced, the terrible tragedies, calamities and small