

OCCHI SULLA CITTÀ
by Cynthia Penna

Drawing inspiration from Francesco Rosi's movie titled *Hands Over the City* - but without its socio-political implications - this project aims to create a sincere, non-stereotypical dialogue with the city. It seeks only to *tell a story*. To tell the story of Naples, or rather, to *observe* it from the outside as one does with works of art: without touching them, with reverence, yet resisting the temptation to glorify them. To *savor* the city slowly, tasting it as one might an irresistible dessert - a delicate *sfogliatella*.

There is a reason why this story of Naples is told through the eyes of ten foreign photographers. It is not a quest for answers, but for a fresh vision - a gaze free from sentimentalism, from love and hate. A gaze that explores the city with detachment and clarity, perhaps allowing us to see it more authentically than ever before; a gaze that reveals secrets and doubts we've never fully been able to grasp.

To "understand" Naples is to take a leap into the darkness of nothingness mixed with the abundance of everything; a leap of faith toward unconditional acceptance, one that does not exclude bitter, genuine critique. And so, all the "damned souls" who were born and raised here, those who are irreversibly drawn to and repelled by it, may embark on a journey of visions that replace unanswerable questions with compelling mysteries - visions that reveal the heaviness of what is usually hidden in plain sight.

Different visual and cultural modes of communication prompt an awareness of one's personal and collective belonging. The photographers' lenses act as amplifiers, revealing the city's flaws and virtues alike, and magnifying the expressive potential of everyday life - life that becomes a trace of universal meaning. Through multiple external narratives - visual and linguistic - this project promotes a perception of the city freed from prejudice and cliché, encouraging a renewed understanding and a fresh "appropriation" of Naples by those who live it every day.

This is also a contemporary story of the city - a rewriting that transcends the usual binary between danger and beauty, between the charming allure of its landscape and its darker sides of violence. Naples is not merely a city; it is a world in itself. A world much like the one depicted in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's magnificent painting *The Tower of Babel* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1563), where we seem to glimpse one city enveloped within another, coiled like a spiral - a majestic architecture both protective and crushing. Naples contains within itself hundreds, even thousands of other cities: layered, intersecting, tangled.

It is a contemporary Babel made of shared and embraced multiculturalism - of languages and dialects historically overlapped and interwoven. A city shaped like the many of Italo Calvino's imagined cities, where individual stories intertwine with collective history, giving rise to new stories, again and again, until the end of time. This rich mix of races, genders, languages, religions, and cultures gives birth to a unique creativity - one that grows from the historical sedimentation of these layers, continuing to define life in the city today.

Reducing Naples to a set of clichés is an easy way to take its soul, to freeze it in a grid that prevents it from looking to the future. Conformity, stagnation, ignorance, superficiality, and a shallow attachment to the past are all aspects of a stereotyped "Neapolitan identity" that do not truly belong to it. Freed from this cage of cliché, Naples can finally reveal its true values of historical continuity, resilience, and transformation

emerging on the international stage as a city in constant cultural evolution, open to change, and forward-looking.

The *Eyes on the City* project was conceived as a new relationship between image and imagination - a renewed dialogue between visual representation and the interpretation of the image itself. The

photographs presented in this volume are, at times, stylistically provocative, playing with bold overlays that challenge and overcome the stereotypical constructs often projected onto the city by collective imagination.

In some works, its architecture and landscape are disrupted through new angles of perception. The recognizability of familiar places is altered, sometimes even lost - transforming them into a space that floats between the known and the unknown. The viewer is left to wonder what truth lies in what they are seeing.

That sense of disorientation - of being momentarily lost - serves the artists' purpose: to make visible the threads of historical continuity between past and present, and the cultural stratification that forms the city's very fabric. Like the weave of a textile, a new image of Naples unfolds before us - a new "weft" to be explored, revealing meaningful and profound aspects of the city's true face: its trades, its spiritual and emotional core, the essence that makes it unique and unrepeatable.

The artists have transformed the city's vision through overlays and juxtapositions - placing familiar elements in unfamiliar contexts. From this emerges a new visual language around what Naples is and represents, inviting us to re-examine the already-seen with a fresh gaze and renewed awareness. This language opens the door to the wonder of new discoveries - made through a revitalized spirit and an awakened consciousness of what is offered to our view.

An *epiphany* unfolds - of a city revealing itself, image by image, in a wholly new light. The exploration of its urban fabric - of art, history, people, ancient trades, the present moment, and invention - offers a new understanding of Naples itself.

This is an iconic journey that swims against the current, seeking a new image of Naples that explores its everyday way of life - becoming a new story of the city, a new narrative, an elegy, a language, a poem... a new and unprecedented condition of reality.



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