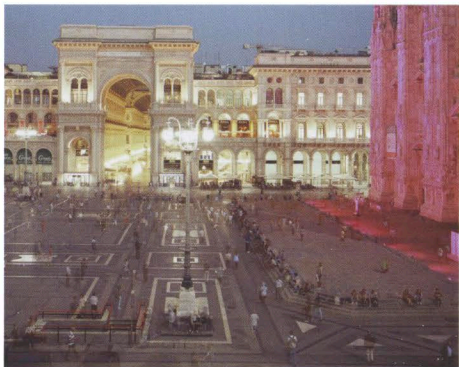


MILAN

Paola Di Bello

GALLERIA BIANCONI

Paola Di Bello's most recent show in Milan consisted of two series of photographs: one recent, "*Ora e qui, Milano*" (Now and Here, Milan), 2016, and one spanning the past decade and a half, "*Rear Window*," 2000–16, created in New York. In both cases, images of the city, of urban landscapes, are shot from inside various apartments, looking out at streets and buildings, and in the case of Milan focusing on the Piazza



Paola Di Bello, *Ora e qui, Milano, #5.2* (Now and Here, Milan, #5.2), 2016. C-print, approx. 24 × 30". From the series "*Ora e qui, Milano*," 2016.

del Duomo and the immediately adjacent streets. In both series, the views afford perfectly objective, realistic glimpses of the metropolises. What we see, however, looks far from real. While the artist leverages the specificity of her medium to present recognizable views of urban spaces, they feel alien because of her use of light, which always appears artificial and strange, with chromatic effects that at first seem inexplicable. But the explanation is simple enough: To make each image, she photographed a single subject from the same position twice, once during daytime and once at night, superimposing the views on a single plate.

Her intention is to bring out the unfamiliar—in the sense of Freud's *unheimlich*, or "uncanny"—that lies at the very heart of what is familiar.

In the accompanying catalogue essay, Raffaella Perna correctly observes that this procedure goes beyond the snapshot nature of the conventional photograph and introduces a sense of *duration*, of the passage of time, into the reproduced image, representing the coexistence of multiple moments and the consequent possibility of perceiving the effects of these moments in relationship with spaces.

The results are striking, particularly in the shots of the Piazza del Duomo and the surrounding streets of Milan, an urban center always full of both locals and tourists visiting the cathedral. Indeed, the throngs of people seem like ghosts; their bodies look transparent and blend with each other and with the piazza's cobblestones, the Duomo's front steps, and the base of a streetlamp on which some sit. Meanwhile, the long, luminous wakes left by car headlights shot at night end up looking incongruous beneath the daytime sky. In what is perhaps the most spectacular image, *Ora e qui, Milano, #5.2*, 2016, we see the parvis of the darkened Duomo; the right side of the cathedral's facade is struck by a strong red light, and the buildings opposite are gaudily illuminated, with truly surreal results.

The images of New York, made four years earlier, show not people but rather views of squares, streets, rooftops, and building facades, with sometimes vertiginous effects, as in *Rear Window, New York, Casa di Lynne est* (Rear Window, New York, Lynne's House East), 2012. The luminous distortion is not as strong as in the views of Milan, except in *Rear Window, New York*, 2000, a video that cyclically superimposes three different moments of the same street view, although we see windows illuminated in the middle of the day rather than at night. The works are all titled *Rear Window*, like Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 film, because the camera is aimed toward the windows of the houses opposite, performing a voyeuristic intrusion that sometimes reveals parts of their interiors. But the artist's intention is subtler, more hidden—and, precisely for this reason, also disturbing.

These recent series were accompanied by two works from the series "*Oxidations*," 1984–92, Polaroids that Di Bello left unfixed and consequently exposed to the progressive effects of oxidation. A view of France's famous Rouen Cathedral (*Series #1 [Cattedrale di Rouen]*, 1991) and a horse-and-rider sequence by Eadweard Muybridge (*Il circolo virtuoso* [The Virtuoso Circle], 1992)—darkened to the point of disappearing—pay outright homage to the pioneers of photography, while also providing concrete verifications of their language.

—Giorgio Verzotti

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.