

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE

## GABRIELE BASILICO

### RITRATTI DI ARCHITETTURA

La bella architettura tra attonite sospensioni e stupite fissità

### PORTRAITS OF ARCHITECTURE

The beauty of architecture from astonished pauses to transfixed amazement

Curated by Francesco Moschini

Coordinated by Valentina Ricciuti and Gabriel Vaduva

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April – Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Open daily 4pm-8pm, including Saturday and Sunday

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April sees the opening at A.A.M. Architettura Arte Moderna, and as part of the gallery's PHOTOGRAPHY & ARCHITECTURE section, of the solo exhibition **dedicated to Gabriele Basilico and the evolution of his poetic journey, in particular to his re-reading of the great masters of architecture. Entitled: Ritratti di architettura. Le belle architetture tra attonite sospensioni e stupite fissità** [Portraits of Architecture. The beauty of architecture from astonished pauses to transfixed amazement], **the exhibition presents approximately 100 VINTAGE photographs, taken from the late 1970s onwards.**

**Almost thirty years after Gabriele Basilico's first one-man show in Rome, which took place at A.A.M. Architettura Arte Moderna in February 1981, and was dedicated to his Portraits of the Factory**, celebrating the metaphysical eeriness of the industrial area of urban Milan, the sense of this new initiative is to be found at the intersection of three different episodes in the photographer's artistic journey, re-proposed in chronological sequence in order to pay homage to the extraordinary thematic coherence and to the rigorously consistent "way of seeing" to which he has accustomed us.

From the images, in a "precious" edition of 1985, of the Milanese architecture of the twenty-year period from 1919 to 1939, so well investigated at the time by Fulvio Irace and Vittorio Gregotti, to the works of, among others, **Giovanni Muzio, Aldo Andreani, Gio Ponti and Piero Portaluppi**, and those of the resolute activity of "reconstruction" described by Alberto Savinio, via his extraordinary re-interpretations of the architecture of figures such as **Giuseppe Vaccaro, Giuseppe Terragni, Franco Albini and Luigi Moretti**, and of the architects of the Reconstruction up to and including the "dashing Cavaliers" of the 1970s like **Vittorio Gregotti, Carlo Aymonino, Giancarlo de Carlo and Aldo Rossi**, to then arrive at his more recent glances at the following generation of architects, up to the "discretion" of the Portuguese school. Distant from one another in time, but rendered simultaneous and comparable in terms of their aesthetic effect by the paradoxical absence of man from the architecture and the city, these poetic moments contribute to the construction of an ideal, Bachelardian, "landscape of the memory".

In his recourse to a simultaneous vision of the various layers of construction that define the character of places, Basilico seems to interiorise the specific processes that have shaped their identity, and then to arrange fragments that are authentic and at the same time allusive within the neutral field of the frame.

Gabriele Basilico's photographs respond to the resonance of the characteristics that architecture helps to create, and which, particularly in the case of Milan, form part of a discourse that is harmonious in its tones, all helping to define a tight rhythm, a moderation, that counters the dispersion and the dilation of distances resulting from the flatness of Lombardy's land. His photographs create a dialogue with the city that is so essential and intimate as to suggest an attitude that owes more to the empathetic than to the aesthetic, but which then combines the two within the photographic image in a moment of civil cohesion.

The small prints selected for the exhibition place re-interpretations of some of the architectural icons of the second half of the twentieth century alongside the twentieth century of De Finetti and the assertiveness with which its walls colonise the territory, but also Rationalism, which demands that the elegance of the elements of the structure and of the “language” group themselves together on the façade, suspended ambiguously between the desire for “inside” and that for “outside” and elevating the load-bearing function of the framework to architectonic motif.

Celebrating the solid masses of **Giovanni Muzio**, but also the insistent pursuit of *chiaroscuro* contrast so dear to **Luigi Moretti**, and **Aldo Rossi's** elementariness or **Alvaro Siza's** sophisticated exercises in form, the images find themselves in the intrinsically duplicate and often contradictory condition of being portraits of architecture, superimposing the autographic code of the representation and the implicit code of the subject represented.

And it is precisely in the realisation of this semantic multiplication that Gabriele Basilico's cool “Dorian Grays” seem to support the idea that the only true meaning possible for “the beauty of architecture” lies in the message which only the image can convey.

Gabriele Basilico's background as architect means that, with his work, he considers himself to be involved in architectural criticism and design, whilst at the same time his work clearly reveals a desire to narrate the story of the city in that borderline place in which the most important styles and historical monuments encounter its architecture's secondary episodes. Gabriele Basilico's city is a city formed of many solitudes and of strong contrasts, exalted by the “monumentality” of its architectonic presences. The ancient and the contemporary are laid before us as contiguous and contrasting expressions of the metropolitan space, a space caught in a tension that seems to flow beyond the limits of the image. In these images the harmony that characterised the “catalogue” of the industrial archaeology of the Milanese suburbs, re-lived in a Heideggerian sense, is combined with an ironic detachment that shows History's continuity manifested in monumental presences and, by the very same logic, in road signs and cars. The Sironi of urban landscapes, the un-resigned poet of the metropolis, which we still find in the Milanese peripheries of Basilico, is transformed into the Baudelairian *flâneur*, into the man who crosses the city gleaning its intermittent signs as he goes, those emblematic places in which the monumental is married with the everyday. In this sense no “catalogue” can catch the contradictoriness of metropolitan life, on one hand the description, for example, of certain archaeological sites of extraordinary beauty, experienced in their isolation, and, on the other, the violent dissonances produced by the collision of irreconcilable worlds. Yet, with Gabriele Basilico the photographer, the artist, becomes philosopher: there is an Apollonian distance from which these “fragments” are contemplated in the “perception that there exists no future, there exists no progress”, in the reading, in the end, of the modern space as the labyrinthine space of the metropolis (F.Rella).

Each of his “descriptions” can be read as a subjective poetry that redesigns the image of the city starting not with the sites of a tourist or propagandist iconography, but through its diverse interpretations, underlining their true aspects, selecting the images that are, in any event, real. In fact we have only apparently witnessed the narration of an identical city, not simply because the city is the location for numerous narratives, but also because it becomes, in its revisiting by artists, the place in which we recognise and rediscover other cities. But in these visions even that which is most characteristic, like architecture, and distinguishes one city from another, loses its own unmistakable identity in the complexity of the themes for which it offers the backdrop, or within which it is placed, as protagonist. So although Gabriele Basilico exalts architecture as the subject of his compositions, it nevertheless finds itself speaking of something other, of the possible dimensions of living, at times regularly drawn back into the labyrinth of the metropolis, at times frozen at a metaphysical distance. Once the mystical experience is over, having fully played its part, “it leaves the subject with eyes open to the city and to the routes it has travelled” (F. Rella). In the theme of the city and of its living, architecture and photography encounter one another and find that they speak the same language.

**Inauguration: Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009, 6.00pm to midnight**  
**As part of the **FREAKY FRIDAY** initiative organised by**  
**Roma. The Road to Contemporary Art 2ND - 5TH APRIL 2009**

**The exhibition then continues as part of**  
**Fotografia - Festival Internazionale di Roma, 2009**