



Press Release

Paola Mongelli

“Benin”

Opening Reception: Tuesday 11th January, 2011 from 6.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Exhibition Dates 12th January – 19th February 2011
Location: **VisionQuesT gallery, Piazza Invrea 4r - Genova**
Tel.: +39 0102468771,+39 3397534993
Gallery Hrs. : from Wednesday to Saturday 3.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
and by appointment
Web Site: www.visionquest.it
E-mail information: info@visionquest.it

The photographer will attend the opening reception

Paola Mongelli visits the south of Benin, West Africa, in 2005, driven by her personal desire to get closer to its traditions and in particular to the knowledge of its dances, a passion she has enjoyed for some time. Accompanied by Fatima Paola Casetta, dancer and connoisseur of the culture of this country, she was able to live in close contact with the locals, enjoying the privilege of sharing with them moments of everyday life.

The artistic result of this experience is the series of forty-five black and white images that VisionQuest gallery will present on Tuesday, January 11, 2011 from 6.30 p.m... The images were taken in the cities of Cotonou, Abomey, Ouidah and Porto Novo, in the region of Mono and the villages in the Ganvié area, within a month and a half.

Shot with Kodak T-MAX 100 – 400 film, printed using traditional darkroom processes on carefully selected papers, plus a further manual removal treatments with potassium iron-cyanide, these almost timeless, warm toned, small black and white images are unique pieces, not reproducible.

Soon after the first emotional impact, the beauty, the often brilliant composition, the balance between light and darkness of the scenes and portraits, one realizes that there is something even more precious: a meticulous intervention on the final print. This masterful work on the light and shadows of the details highlights the movements and gestures played in each image and, almost at the same time, brings them back to the re-composition of the image in its entirety. This is definitely Paola Mongelli not only emphasizing her need to be in touch with both her inner dimension and that of her subjects, but the desire to re-live, through these printing processes, the moments of visual rapture.

Egi Volterrani writes in the essay accompanying the exhibition:

A very peculiar artificialness together with significant emotional effects, define the photographic prints of Paola Mongelli; but is not the first observation one makes in front of these images. These, in fact, although uniformed by that artifice that we later discover to be crucial, are for many aspects diverse and eclectic. Though perhaps with some irony, of Africa they reproduce often stereotype and familiar subjects. To name a few examples; consider the photo of the small crowd of children facing the open gate in the

middle of a "deaf" wall, or the one where a group of kids runs toward the camera, or where we see the apparently random, placing together of people in a more or less urban, general context.

Some images are very pleasing because of the beauty of the subject and the clever depiction. This is the case of two workers on a scooter carrying a transparent wrought iron gate or the imposing dancer wearing a dress made with a fabric that contains, printed in large letters, the names of the islands that everyone remembers as the places of the dance: Hawaii, Honolulu, Borneo, Tahiti etc. This image fixes the woman's movement in her lively élan.

The five children who show their foot-ball are surprisingly "posing".

But looking closely at a one photograph (one for all); we realize the Author's precious intervention on every image; the very skilful and carefully executed work in the printing stage. Let us examine for example the photograph showing a mother at the market holding her child: only the mother is focused, the market as a background is rightly out of focus. A strong white obtained by working on the final print, contours the profile of the lower face of the woman, and a small bracelet, rendered bright, brings the child's arm back to be a part of the central focused image.

It is useless to represent this type of examination for the other photographs. The same is true for all: a patient, wise and balanced intervention recurs in each, associated with the careful choice of paper, where the printing, usually soft, may suggest the bistre reproductions.

The overall result is of a pleasant elegance, where the game of the sought after effects tends to disappear in the general image, to reappear at the moment when we pay attention to detail.

Look at the effect of smoke coming from the exhaust pipe of the scooter transporting the gate.

Biographies

Paola Mongelli lives and works in Turin

After her BFA from the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts, she undertakes a personal artistic quest through photography by using traditional black and white film and dark room processes and paying particular attention to the "materiality" of the images, which she personally prints in limited often unique editions.

She portrays a reality charged with affective and emotional values, maintaining a dialogue of empathy, contemplation, reflection on the human condition that is inspired by the relationship between being and the elements of nature in a dimension in which the exploration of the self and the observation of the world will overlap. On the basis of a survey on the themes of emptiness and absence, her research ranges from portraits to images of nature, travel photos, and a recent approach to the theme of roots and family. She has participated in several solo and group exhibitions and her works are part of private collections and foundations and she is currently working with VisionQuest gallery, Genoa. For a couple of years she has been working in universities and private schools conducting laboratories to promote discussions and reflections on the theme of vision in relation to the photographic representation.

Egi Volterrani, Italian architect, translator, designer and intellectual. President of the Teatro Stabile of Turin from 1975 to 1984, is also a painter, printmaker, writer and graphic designer. Has and is working with art, architecture and literature magazines and numerous newspapers. From 1986 he is President of the International Cultural Association "Le Muse" and through this he has organized many Film Festivals (African cinema, Arab and New Zealand cinema) Music Festivals (Mediterranean Africa, Rai di Orano), and Theatre Festivals in many Italian cities with groups from Congo, Angola, Malawi, Madagascar, Nigeria and Tunisia. He has organized many important shows for African editors at the 1989 International Book Fair in Turin and for photographers from Maghreb during the *Biennale of Torino Fotografia* in 1994. In 2006 he formed together with some friends, the international publishing house "Le Nuove Muse", for which he is managing editor and for which he has edited several publications.

VISIONQUEST gallery

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