

THE VISIBLE CITIES BY FRANCO DONAGGIO

by Roberto Mutti

Whenever photography deals with the topic of urban landscape, it is as though it would illustrate the town through a detailed realistic description of its street, squares and buildings. The two possible results of this vision are on the one hand, a romantic taste for atmospheres, on the other a deep study of the architectural texture. And yet, cities are far more than what they appear to be, as it is duly stated by the poets who have sung them, by the writers who have set in them their stories, by the painters who have depicted them, by the designers who have imagined them, and sometimes by the inhabitants who have lived them. All this has not passed unnoticed by Franco Donaggio, an artist able to use the flexibility of photography to build a different world, rich in fantasy and charm just like the one cherished by the innovative spirit sprouting from such Historic Avant-garde movements like Futurism, Constructivism and Surrealism. We spot a sense of lightness in the way the Italian photographer faces the confused and noisy reality of a town. And it is thanks to this lightness that he builds structures as articulated and complex as thoughts, daring compositions as dreams. The threads of light create weaves standing out in the sky like hieroglyphics; the traffic-lights seem to multiply their glows with no apparent reason; the chimneys make way for a cyclist silhouette riding forward like an ancient hero. The façade of a house, the shadow of a building, the perplexed look of a statue emerge unexpected because Donaggio transforms them into surfaces, forms and shapes boasting a mysterious fascination: there are men who are motionless as though they were cut from paper and then scattered like puppets inside the scene, and there are some elements (the lamps of street lighting, the manhole covers, the trolley-car rails) which acquire instead a sort of dynamism giving them an interior unexpected liveliness.

The photographer does not indulge in illustrating the city, he rather investigates its deeper character which only the imagination can grasp. It is as though he wished to take us by hand and lead us up to the thresholds of its vision, where the scaffolds of the restoration works happen to be rising up towers, whilst the curtains covering the building facades become screens showing the images of a past which we cannot forget. In fact, as Franco Donaggio underlines in this gorgeous photographic series, in a city there are always the signs of a past time but also the anticipation of what will be.