



BIBLIOTHECA HERTZIANA
MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR ART HISTORY



Massimo Piersanti e gli Incontri Internazionali d'Arte

PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

16.11.2022–10.02.2023

Bibliotheca Hertziana
Via Gregoriana 30, Rome

CURATED BY
MARIA GIOVANNA VIRGA

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IMAGE Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Wall –
Wrapped Roman Wall*, Via Veneto and Villa
Borghese, Rome, Italy, 1973-74 (photo by
Massimo Piersanti).

The photographic exhibition entitled “**Massimo Piersanti e gli Incontri Internazionali d’Arte**” is the result of the extensive project aiming to digitalize part of the personal archive of the photographer **Massimo Piersanti** and the **Incontri Internazionali d’Arte Archive of the MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st Century Art**.

Thanks to his artistic association with Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, a key figure and secretary general of the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, Massimo Piersanti combined his work as a photographer with that of documenting the Association’s activity, becoming one of its main witnesses and most devoted collaborators.

The photographs on display are a selection of the most representative shots of the Roman Association’s intense cultural and exhibitory activity: from 1970 with the ‘Vitalità del Negativo’ (Vitality of the Negative) exhibition to the last events organized before Lonardi Buontempo’s death in 2010. This exhibition project aspires to emphasize the importance of personal archives, such as Piersanti’s, in the understanding of the national art scene especially as his documentation is fundamental to the historical reconstruction of exhibitions and events. They also constitute useful tools for tracing the evolution of the photographic image in Italy, highlighting the unique relationship that arose between photography and the visual arts in the 1970s. The collaboration between the Max Planck Institute for Art History, Massimo Piersanti, and the MAXXI Museum enabled the digitalization of photographs, proofs, negatives, and slides, facilitating the access to these images for researchers and professionals, as well as encouraging their further study and analysis.

Massimo Piersanti (Rome, 1937) trained as a self-taught photographer and began his career as a professional photographer in Rome in 1967. After a brief foray into the world of cinema and theatre, he established himself in the field of commercial photography, for which he produced important advertising campaigns, notably for Alitalia and Valtur. His ductility and technical completeness also allowed him to get closer to architectural photography, leading to his collaboration with Bruno Zevi on the “Comunicare l’Architettura” (Communicating Architecture) project. In 1970, thanks to a meeting with Bruno Corà, he got to know Graziella Lonardi Buontempo and Achille Bonito Oliva, for whom he handled the documentation of the exhibition ‘Vitality of the Negative’, initiated by Ugo Mulas. In 1973, with the exhibition ‘Contemporanea’, he became the official photographer of the Incontri Internazionali d’Arte. Despite moving to Barcelona from 1989 to 1996 - a period in which he mainly collaborated with Fundació Espai Poble Nou and Fundació Antoni Tàpies - he did not fail to keep up with the activities of the ‘Incontri’ during his trips to Italy. Since his return to Rome in the late 1990s, and to this day, he still pursues his work as a photographer, collaborating on important exhibition projects and documenting the ongoing events of the Roman art scene.

ENTRANCE WALL

1. Graziella Lonardi Buontempo sitting on Getulio Alviani’s installation *Rilievo a riflessione con incidenza ortogonale (Reflection relief with orthogonal incidence)* 1969-1970. *Vitalità del negativo nell’arte italiana (Vitality of the Negative in Italian Art 1960-70)* 1960-70, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome 1970-1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

2. Liana Mattacchini, Achille Bonito Oliva, Graziella Lonardi Buontempo and Bruno Corà in their temporary office at Palazzo delle Esposizioni. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

3. Claudio Abate, Gilberto Zorio, Lucio Amelio, Giuseppe Penone, Mimma Pisani, Achille Bonito Oliva, Mimmo Germanà (kneeling) Vettor Pisani, Gino De Dominicis (among the others) at the *7e Biennale de Paris*, Parc Floral, Bois de Vincennes, Paris, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

4. Luciano Fabro, *Concetto spaziale d’après Watteau (Spatial Concept d’après Watteau)*, 1967-71, *Corona di piombo*, 1968-71, *L’Italia d’oro e Alluminio e seta naturale (Piede) (Golden Italy and Aluminium and Natural Silk (feet))*, 1971, alla *7e Biennale de Paris*, Parc Floral, Bois de Vincennes, Paris, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

HERCULES CORRIDOR, FROM THE LEFT

5. Gino De Dominicis, *Immortalità (Immortality)*, 1971. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian Presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

6. Emilio Prini, *Venerdì 3 dicembre 1971, ore 18 (Friday 3rd of December 1971, 6 p.m.)*, 1971. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian Presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

7. Jannis Kounellis, untitled, 1971. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian Presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

8. Mario Diacono e Alighiero Boetti next to his artwork *Dossier postale (Postal Dossier)*, 1969-1970. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian Presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

9. Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi (Turning one’s eyes inside out)*, 1970. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian Presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

10. Daniel Buren, *Peinture affichée (Displayed Painting)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1972. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

11. Joseph Beuys, *La rivoluzione siamo noi, Freier Demokratischer Sozialismus Sozialismus (We are the revolution, Free Democratic Socialism)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1972. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

12. View of the exhibition and installation by Piero Sartogo. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

13. Wolf Vostell, *Happening nella città (Happening in the city)*, 1973. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

14. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Wall—Wrapped Roman Wall, Via Veneto and Villa Borghese, Rome, Italy*, 1973-74. Wrapping up Porta Pinciana and a section of the Aurelian Walls. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

15. George Segal, *Girl on a swing*, 1972. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

16. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Wall—Wrapped Roman Wall, Via Veneto and Villa Borghese, Rome, Italy*, 1973-74. Wrapping up Porta Pinciana and a section of the Aurelian Walls. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

17. Mario Merz, *Lo spazio è curvo o diritto? (Is the space curved or straight?)*, 1968/1973. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

18. Joseph Kosuth, *The synopsis of categories*, 1968. *Perimetri (Perimeters)*, Piazza dell’Esquilino, Rome, 1978. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

19. Giulio Paolini, *Partitura (Orfeo) (Score (Orpheus))*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1976. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

20. Maria Nordman’s and Bruno Corà’s intervention in *De Sculptura*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1987. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

21. Giorgio Pagano’s performance in *La tablo del al Unio*, Palazzo Taverna, 1989. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

22. View of Luca Patella’s exhibition, *Den & Duch dis-enameled*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1987. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

23. Untitled performance by Bruce Nauman, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1987. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

24. View of Donna Moylan’s and Vettor Pisani’s exhibition, *In concerto (In concert)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1987. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

DRAWING ROOM, CLOCKWISE

25. Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, Palma Bucarelli and Christa. *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

26. Alternative information center in *Contemporanea*, Villa Borghese Parking Lot, Rome, 1973-1974. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

27. Giorgio Pressburger, *La Torre di Babele (The Tower of Babel)*, 1971. *Informazioni sulla presenza italiana (Information on the Italian presence)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

28. Maurizio Calvesi, Alberto Boatto, Paul Morrissey, Romano Mastromattei, Andy Warhol, Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, Alberto Moravia and Achille Bonito Oliva meeting at the premieres of the films *Women In Revolt and Lamour*, Palazzo Taverna, 1972. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

29. Giulio Paolini, *...Signore e signori (...Ladies and gentlemen)*, 1989-2004. Palazzo Taverna, Biblioteca degli Incontri Internazionali d’Arte “Cielo”, 2004-2006. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

30. View of Anselm Kiefer’s exhibition, *Die Frauen (The Women)*, Académie de France à Rome, 2005. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

31. Alberto Boatto, Maurizio Calvesi, Achille Bonito Oliva and Filiberto Menna during the debate *Esperienza estetica e lavoro critico (Aesthetic Experience and Critical Work)*. Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1971. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

32. Adriano Aprà, Monica Vitti, Alberto Moravia, Patrizia Pistagnesi, Alberto Lattuada, Luciano Salce (among others) during the *Comedy Italian Style 1950-1980* meeting. Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1986. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

33. Daniel Buren, *Peinture affichée (Displayed Painting)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1972. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

34. Daniel Buren, *Peinture affichée (Displayed Painting)*, Palazzo Taverna, Rome, 1972. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

35. Mali Wu, *Time Space III*, 1995. Palazzo Taverna, Biblioteca degli Incontri Internazionali d’Arte “Cielo”, 2001. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

36. Emilio Prini, *Modello ligneo, Roma (Wooden model)*, 2005. *Arte in Memoria 2 (Art in Memory 2)*, Ostia Antica Archaeological Excavations, Synagogue, 2005. Inkjet print, fine art baryta paper, 2022.

37. Video interview Massimo Piersanti, 11.12.2021.

La giusta distanza

Maria Giovanna Virga

If one thing typifies present-day relations between art and photography, it is the unresolved tension between the two introduced by the photography of works of art.

Walter Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*

In recent years, the endeavors of the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte association have been extensively studied and analyzed. In fact, there have been many exhibition projects and publications honoring it. In these instances, archive material played a key role in the preparatory studies and research. Massimo Piersanti's name stands out in the aforementioned documents, as he is the author of the most evocative photographs of the Roman association's life, founded by Graziella Lonardi Buontempo. The images document the organization's programming from 1970 onwards until its demise in 2010. The Incontri space was not only a fruitful context for the artists, curators and critics who experienced it, but also for Piersanti, who was able to experiment and sharpen his skills as a photographer, thanks to his position as a privileged observer of the changes in contemporary art.

The art scene of the 1960s and 1970s encapsulates the political and social ferment of that period, as its protagonists researched and elaborated new expressive codes capable of challenging established modes and contexts. These experimentations are materialized through the creation of often ephemeral works of art, the staging of performative actions, the increasing use of alternative spaces for the organization of exhibitions and events, the production of documentation material and the direct involvement of the public in the enjoyment of the works. The photographers active in this timeframe are not excluded from this process of experimentation; on the contrary, they become an important reference for artists and practitioners, to whom they delegate the creation of images capable of recording the changes taking place. Photography thus provides art with a lasting image of itself.

Massimo Piersanti established himself as a professional photographer in Rome in the late 1960s, after a long period spent in Naples and abroad. Despite his self-taught training, he became part of the Roman environment as a result of his natural curiosity, which allowed him to take his first steps in the world of cinema and theatre. Thereafter, he started collaborating with important advertising agencies, which commissioned him to engage in prestigious photographic campaigns, such as those for Alitalia and Valtur. In those years, agency work allowed him to travel extensively, to have the necessary resources to use avant-garde equipment, both in the studio and outdoors, but above all it guaranteed him the freedom to choose the subjects he wanted to devote his free time to.

Thus, in 1970, he began to collaborate with Graziella Lonardi Buontempo and Achille Bonito Oliva. Introduced to him by art critic Bruno Corà during the exhibition *Vitalità del negativo nell'arte italiana 1960/1970* at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, they delegated to him the task of documenting the exhibition, which Ugo Mulas had already started photographing. This was his first-time approaching artworks as a photographer, and more specifically, exposing himself to the contemporary art world. Due to this experience, he decided to continue following the program of the Incontri until he became their official photographer in 1971, following the 7th Paris Biennale. From this moment on, his gaze was entrusted with the task of representing the identity, outlining the atmospheres, and conveying the creative ferment of the association.

The years between 1971 and the organization of the exhibition *Contemporanea* in 1973 are the most stimulating for Piersanti's photographic production within the Incontri. He himself took an active part in the experiments that photography was carrying out at a time of greater proximity and contamination with the visual arts. Piersanti came to codify his own personal response to the aesthetic and artistic changes, sometimes forcing the means that technology offered at that time (there was no time for long exposures, the light was never optimal, the equipment always had to be light...) and, above all, reinterpreting his own technical knowledge related to traditional photographic genres.

These aspects emerge with vividness especially in the performance shots, in which one perceives a mixture of tension and astonishment - probably dictated by not receiving instructions or not being informed in advance of what was going to happen -, which is manifested through the choice of often adopting an accidental, rarely centered cut. The lack of distinction between what is the scene and what is on stage leads him to include the audience in the photographic field, in order to re-establish the space of the action. This remaining close to the event, in contrast to traditional theatre photography, becomes Piersanti's stylistic signature, whose gaze is superimposed on that of the spectator.

The photographer's positioning in relation to the space and the audience can perhaps be summed up in his search for a 'right distance'. Not simply to be understood as the ability to read the space, but also as the awareness of what must be included in the image in order to understand what is being recorded. Moreover, while never being directly visible, Piersanti manages to leave a trace of himself in the arrangement of the people or the context around him that define his presence. A borderline case is represented by the photo chosen as the poster for the exhibition at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, in which Piersanti's shadow, projected onto the canvas of Christo's work, reveals his physical presence extending beyond his role as a photographer.

Thus, spatiality assumes the value of a narrative device, as the temporal dimension does. A characteristic that becomes more apparent in the photographs dedicated to Christo's work and that is best expressed by the inclusion of the surrounding urban landscape. His intuition of photographing the work from the terrace of the Hotel Flora, next to Porta Pinciana, undoubtedly derives from his experience for the Alitalia campaigns, in which the search for a privileged point of view was indispensable to contextualize the scene. This was Piersanti's first approach to architectural photography, which would become more evident in the shots he took for Bruno Zevi's publication *Venti Monumenti Italiani* in 1984.

When Piersanti moved to Milan in 1977, the documentation of Incontri's activities began to be more irregular, becoming increasingly sporadic from 1989 to 1996, when he moved to Spain and began working with *Fundació Espai Poblenu* and *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*. During this time, at the peak of his career, he decided to devote himself exclusively to the reproduction of works of art and art documentation photography. When he returned to Italy, however, he did not miss the opportunity to follow the events of the Incontri, although he preferred to record more static exhibitions and installations, which allowed him to use the view camera and have total control over the composition of the image.

Piersanti's archive can therefore be a valuable tool for investigating multiple themes, highlighting the interdisciplinary character of his materials. These are fundamental not only to retrace the history of the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, but also to reflect on the relationship between art and photography, the production and fruition of images, and cultural phenomena. Re-reading these materials today and reconstructing the author's intentions, it is possible to undertake a critical-interpretative discourse capable of going beyond a purely historiographic or documentary reading. In fact, Massimo Piersanti's archive does not only draw attention to the work of art and its photographic reproduction but raises interesting questions related to the very concept of image understood as a "visual text", to be read and interpreted