

# B E N R U B I G A L L E R Y

## VALERIO SPADA: *In Italia*

October 10- December 21, 2024



Benrubi Gallery is pleased to present "In Italia" a solo exhibition of new work by **Valerio Spada**. Valerio Spada's profound social documentary work examined the shifting landscapes and cultural transformations of Italy since his milestone work "Gomorrhah Girl" to "I am nothing" with the precious support of the Guggenheim Foundation now to his new book "Santa Maria del Fiore". "In Italia" moves in the nuanced changes brought about by socio-economic shifts and over-tourism in one of the most sought after travel destinations in the world.

Inspired by Physics Nobel laureate Giorgio Parisi's insights into the socio-economic dynamics of historic city centers, Spada's work delves deep into the cascading effects of depopulation of historic city centers. As Parisi emphasizes, "In large cities, schools in the historic center risk closing because there are not enough students attending, which then tends to amplify the desertification by the residents of the center. Because there are few inhabitants, schools close, and young couples do not move there because there are no schools. And we need schools to talk about imagination, curiosity, the desire to learn, gender equality, the future, but also about the historic center and the need to save it from a fate as "trolleyland", being only a crowd of trolleys arriving and departing, so it remains, as Parisi says, a vital, hospitable place, rich in humanity. For this, schools are essential, as well as bookstores, theaters, and cultural places that give meaning to the community. That is why the schools in the center must be strengthened and helped to grow."

From 2019 to 2024 Spada observed the most crowded place in Italy, concentrating his work in Florence most visited spot, Piazza Santa Maria del Fiore, meticulously as Parisi studied the sophisticated flight pattern of starlings, as a study on complex systems proving an illuminating way to understand how we move and live in the world, capturing the emptiness of once-vibrant neighborhoods now deserted as local families move away, and schools shut down. We can find kids rushing out of school not even noticing the gigantic Duomo behind them, but few amongst them just stop, turn around, and even if they see it everyday on their walk to school, they are staring at it and decide to use their phone to take a picture, as thousands of tourists will do. The images of the Duomo stands amidst a sea of visitors juxtapose with 5am scenes of the piazza, Santa Maria del Fiore, transitioning back to a state of calm as tourists are sleeping in their airbnbs or left already, leaving the city for few hours highlighting the cyclical nature of the piazza's life and the stark contrast between its historical significance and current transient usage. The swarming of people in the square of Florence evokes the idea of a wimmelbüch, a children's book filled with intricate scenes bustling with activity. Just as a wimmelbüch invites readers to explore its myriad figures and stories, Spada's photographs compel viewers to navigate the dense, teeming spaces of Italy, revealing the layers of interaction and life within the crowd.

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In one of the exhibition's most evocative images, "Gaiola, 2023 - Diptych" Spada captures a tender moment between two men hiding away from the beach riding on two different kayaks, once they met again around the corner kissing each other away from prying eyes. This photograph not only reflects the quiet yet profound social changes in Italy but also the personal freedoms that still grapple with societal norms and prejudices. It is a testament to Spada's ability to encapsulate intimate human experiences within broader social contexts.

Through "In Italia," Spada paints a comprehensive portrait of Italy in transition. His work transcends mere documentation, instead offering a profound exploration of the socio-economic forces at play. The exhibition challenges viewers to reconsider their perceptions of Italy, balancing its romanticized image with the stark realities of modern life. As Spada continues to live between New York and Sicily, his art remains a crucial voice in contemporary photography, illuminating the often unseen struggles and evolving social landscapes within Italian society.

**Valerio Spada** lives between New York and Milan. His work is exhibited, collected, and published internationally. On September 2011, Time magazine announced his first self-published book *Gomorra Girl* to win the Grand Prize PBN Photography Book Now 2011 as Best Book of the Year, nominated by a panel of eleven international judges, among them Darius Himes, Steve McCurry, and Gerry Badger. *Gomorra Girl* was nominated in various Best Book of the Year 2011 Lists, Joerg Colberg (USA), Rob Honstra (Holland), Marc Feustel (Eyecurious, France), Photo Eye with four nominations by John Gossage, Horacio Fernandez, Darius Himes, and Gerry Badger. He has been nominated as Best Artist of the year 2011 by Mr. Ulrich Pollman, Director of the Münchner StadtMuseum in Munich, Germany, for the Albert Renger-Patzsch Award 2012. In 2012 Jim Goldberg and Kummer & Hermann nominated *Gomorra Girl* as Best Book of the Year at Photo Book Award 2012 Kassel at Le Bal, Paris. His work won the Festival della Fotografia in Rome 2011 as best project and was exhibited at MACRO, Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome, Italy. Valerio Spada's work is in various privates and Permanent Collections, George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester (NY), Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (OH), ICP International Center of Photography, New York (NY), Lightwork, Syracuse (NY), among others.

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