

Franco Vimercati

GALLERIA RAFFAELLA CORTESE

This exhibition offers the opportunity to assess the work of Franco Vimercati, one of most compelling figures in Italian conceptual photography. Vimercati's photographs bring us up close to his seemingly weightless subjects, often presented against rich black backgrounds devoid of setting or texture. Yet because these subjects are reiterated

and minimally varied, his work can be defined as a sort of conceptual figuration. The artist's emphasis on seriality and mutation challenges the predominant notion of photography as capturing discrete moments in time. This is a poetics of objects articulated according to metalinguistic coordinates, whose subjects are seemingly indifferent to the gaze of the viewer.

The gallery's three spaces present three crucial moments in Vimercati's creative development. The first space (at via Stradella 4) features works from his first photographic series, "*Sulle Langhe*" (In the Langhe Region), 1973: black-and-white shots that portray the inhabitants of a town in the Piedmont countryside where the artist spent his summer holidays. This rarely exhibited body of work exists somewhat apart from the images for which the photographer is best

known. Its underlying premise was to record and classify human typologies through people's occupations, in homage to the German photographer August Sander. Beginning in the 1920s, Sander compiled a vast photographic atlas of human beings at work—a project that would be characterized as embodying a "new objectivity." The photographs of "*Sulle Langhe*" indicate a rejection of Henri Cartier-Bresson's journalistic aesthetic, which hinges on a decisive and unrepeatable moment and on the rhetorical emphasis of the image. Instead, Vimercati granted both the photographer and the photograph new functions and meanings. From this point on, the artist's work would seek to deconstruct the notion of photography as a reflective device, abandoning the street to concentrate exclusively on the interior of Vimercati's house.

The second portion of the exhibition (at via Stradella 7) shows what can be considered the central core of Vimercati's work: a series depicting a single white ceramic tureen, the artist's sole subject from 1983 to 1992. His photographs from this decade present the tureen positioned centrally against a black background, with variances in focus, framing, rotation, and lighting. Some works are organized in sequences of six images, while others are presented individually. It is a sort of automatic recording, as impersonal as possible.

Vimercati would continue this investigation in the 1990s with a series of "reversed photographs" that constitute the exhibition's third section

(at via Stradella 1). In this body of work, Vimercati depicts a number of pedestrian objects as they appear inside the camera, with a reversed orientation. The neutrality of his subjects allowed the artist to emphasize the mechanisms of the device itself over legibility—sometimes leaving the image out of focus or exposing it through the use of a pinhole camera. Such attempts at neutrality echo the muted still lifes of Giorgio Morandi, one of Vimercati's principal points of reference. Here, the artist shifted his attention to a more explicit analysis of visual perception.

Despite Vimercati's conceptual approach, his works do not demonstrate a spirit of cold analysis. Rather, he gives life to images of extraordinary emotional intensity, suspended in a manner that renders them both familiar and alienating. The photographs serve as metaphors for the passage of time, depicting traces and signs of life: people and objects, their mutable presence dependent on the apparatus that records them.

—Francesca Pola

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.



Franco Vimercati, *Untitled (Grattugia)*, 1997, gelatin silver print, 16 x 12".