

## MASI Lugano

Museo d'arte  
della Svizzera italiana,  
Lugano

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# Luigi Ghirri. Viaggi Photographs 1970-1991

8 September 2024 – 26 January 2025

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

LAC venue

Curated by James Lingwood

Exhibition project coordinated by Ludovica Introini

## PRESS RELEASE

Lugano, 5 September 2024

Just over thirty years after his untimely death, MASI Lugano is devoting a major show to the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri (Scandiano, 1943 - Reggio Emilia, 1992). Ghirri was a pioneer whose far-reaching ideas on photography and its role in modern culture remain influential today. The body of work he created in the 1970s and 1980s – a playful and poetic reflection on the medium of photography at a time when it was becoming commonplace in contemporary society – was unrivalled in Europe. The exhibition in MASI explores how important the idea and reality of travel was to Ghirri. A carefully curated selection of around 140 colour photographs, mostly vintage prints from the 1970s and 1980s from the Estate of Luigi Ghirri and the collection of CSAC in Parma, brings together celebrated images alongside lesser known photographs.

From his first projects in the early 1970s Ghirri was inspired by travel, both as a concept and a source of images, from his Sunday outings in the area near his home town of Modena – which he called "minimal adventures" – to his trips to popular tourist destinations. He also explored the idea of travel itself through photographs of maps, atlases, adverts and postcards, as well as of tourists enjoying the view on holiday. His photographs elicit a reflection on how photography increasingly came to frame and condition the experience of place.

## The exhibition

The show in MASI presents a fluid layout of different themes which encourages visitors to take their time and make their own connections between ideas and images. This is something that resonates with Ghirri's approach to photography, which he conceived as a journey that extends beyond the individual image and calls on the viewer to play a critical, interpretative role. Once they have completed their tour, visitors will make their way back through the show, experiencing what Ghirri called the "strange entanglements of the gaze".

From the early photographs he took on brief trips to the towns of the Emilia Romagna region, northern Italy or Switzerland in the 1970s, Luigi Ghirri was attracted to images "found" in everyday settings such as posters and postcards. A selection of these "Paesaggi di Cartone" open the show

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in MASI, highlighting how advertising billboards could transport an exotic waterfall into the Swiss Alps, or an alpine landscape into Reggio Emilia, or a glittering sea view into Modena. These ephemeral landscapes draw attention to the ubiquitous presence of photography in today's world: "Reality is being transformed into a colossal photograph, and the photomontage already exists: it's called the real world," Ghirri wrote in 1979, highlighting, well ahead of his time, how the ubiquity of images was creating a new image world that threatened to give rise to "a strange form of sensory impoverishment".

Alongside his clear-sighted critical gaze, Ghirri was drawn to places which exemplified photography's complex relations with reality, as in the series *In Scala*, taken on various occasions (between 1977 and 1978, and in 1985) in the theme park Italia in Miniatura in Viserba (Rimini). His fascination with duplications and multiplications found the ideal setting here: the Dolomites, the Pirelli Skyscraper and St. Peter's in Rome can all be visited in the course of a brief tour which compresses both history and geography.

A selection of images more explicitly related to travel, feature people on holiday; the view in Hergiswil in Switzerland, a deserted slide and merry-go-round at Lido di Spina, a parasol on the coast at Orbetello, little mirrors to check on one's look in Marina di Ravenna. Very little happens in these images of silent stillness. The photograph of a couple playing tennis on the beach in Île-Rousse in Corsica would be insignificant, were it not for the ball captured right on the horizon, where the sea meets the sky. "What is vital for Ghirri is not a single moment in time, but its distillation" observes the curator James Lingwood.

A section entitled *Travels in the home* includes the series *Atlante* (1973), with close-up views of details from Ghirri's own atlas: the "place" that for him contained all possible journeys. These images are complemented by a selection from *Identikit* (1976-1979), a kind of self-portrait composed of photographs of his bookshelves, showing the spines of his books, along with LPs, maps, postcards, trinkets and souvenirs.

Throughout the 1980s, Ghirri travelled around most of Italy, sometimes working for tourist boards and the Italian Touring Club. In this period, the switch to a medium-format camera brought more depth and clarity, as well as brighter colours, to his photographs, though he continued to frame his views in the same calm, measured way. Destined for a broad audience, these commissions see Ghirri exploring stereotypical views as well as more unusual images, as can be seen in the book *Capri* (1983), where Ghirri presents multiple shots of a much-loved tourist attraction, the Faraglioni. From classic views to images in which the rocky stacks are fragmented in mirrors, to reproductions on a map painted on ceramic tiles, the various ways in which Ghirri frames this landmark reveal his subtle subverting of the genre. "While Ghirri's 'travel' photographs, might sometimes resemble holiday snaps, there is always something different about them. He does not set out to capture a series of memorable moments, or highlight the beauty or significance of a place, but rather to reflect on a culture defined and shaped by images and their creation," concludes James Lingwood.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue printed in two separate editions (Italian and English) with texts by Tobia Bezzola, James Lingwood and Maria Antonella Pelizzari, published by MACK.

## **Press contacts**

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Press office  
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## **Exhibition venues**

**LAC**  
Piazza Bernardino Luini 6  
CH – 6900 Lugano

**Palazzo Reali**  
Via Canova 10  
CH – 6900 Lugano

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PER IL  
POLO CULTURALE**

## Press images

01.

Luigi Ghirri

*Rimini*

1977

Lambda print , new print (2022)

Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Eredi di Luigi Ghirri. © Eredi di

Luigi Ghirri.



02.

Luigi Ghirri

*Alpe di Siusi*

1979

C-print, new print (2001)

Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Eredi di Luigi Ghirri. © Eredi di

Luigi Ghirri.



03.

Luigi Ghirri

*Marina di Ravenna*

1986

C-print, vintage print

Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Eredi di Luigi Ghirri. © Eredi di

Luigi Ghirri.



04.

Luigi Ghirri

*Rifugio Grosté*

1983

Lambda print, new print (2013)

Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Eredi di Luigi Ghirri. © Eredi di

Luigi Ghirri.



05.

Luigi Ghirri

*Scandiano, presso la Rocca di Boiardo*

1985

C-print, vintage print

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano.

Collezione Città di Lugano

Photo credits: Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano. Collezione Città di Lugano.



06.

Luigi Ghirri

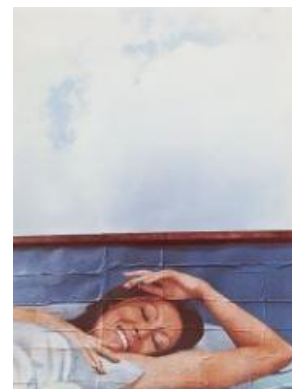
*Modena*

1973

C-print, vintage print

Collection Massimo Orsini, Mutina for Art

Photo credits: Massimo Orsini, Private Collection



07.

Luigi Ghirri

*Versailles*

1985

C-print, vintage print

Collection Massimo Orsini, Mutina for Art

Photo credits: Massimo Orsini, Private  
Collection.



08.

Luigi Ghirri

*Capri*

1981

C-print, new print (2008)

Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Courtesy Eredi di Luigi Ghirri. © Eredi di  
Luigi Ghirri.



09.

Luigi Ghirri

*Marina di Ravenna*

1972

C-print, vintage print

CSAC, Università di Parma

Photo credits: CSAC, Università di Parma.

© Eredi di Luigi Ghirri



10.

Luigi Ghirri

*Arles*

1979

C-print, vintage print

Collection Massimo Orsini, Mutina for Art

Photo credits: Massimo Orsini, Private  
Collection.



11.

Luigi Ghirri

*Lago Maggiore*

1984

Cibachrome print, new print (1990-1991)

CSAC, Università di Parma

Photo credits: CSAC, Università di Parma



12.

Installation view,

“Luigi Ghirri: Viaggi. Photographs 1970–  
1991”. MASI Lugano, Switzerland.

Photograph by Gabriele Spalluto

© Eredi di Luigi Ghirri





13.

Installation view,

"Luigi Ghirri: Viaggi. Photographs 1970–  
1991". MASI Lugano, Switzerland.

Photograph by Gabriele Spalluto

© Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

