

## 'FOR AN IDEA OF LANDSCAPE'<sup>1</sup> and the legacy of Luigi Ghirri

A friend in Italy recently told me of a retrospective exhibition of the photographic work of Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992) in Parma. Having lived in the UK for four decades I had truly forgotten about Ghirri and the fact that he was one of the most important Italian visual artists of recent art. My friend said how much his thinking and photography reminded her of my work, of my approach to landscape representation. This set me thinking and I wondered....

A surveyor by training Ghirri drew his inspiration from many art forms: architecture, literature, cinema, music but working exclusively with the medium of photography.

What I find most interesting is that in his work he confronted directly the matter of landscape portraiture. With his writings and in his photographic work, Ghirri questioned the grand art practices of the time focusing instead on the mundane and the minute; concentrating on the 'everyday'. He focused insistently on the exploration of a places, especially marginal places as the 'unaccounted-for-in between'<sup>2</sup> by the Po Valley landscapes where he lived, using the landscape as a metaphor which could have been anywhere, making it an anonymous landscape.

I can identify with this approach and know that landscape representation is a complex notion to grasp. Landscape is a living entity, but its representation is 'a way of seeing' and it starts from within oneself. Landscape is both the land (a place that we move through or look at) and the means by which stories can be told, shaping ways of seeing places, histories and the world.

The real-world scenario reacts and interacts with our way of seeing the landscape, as if 'awaiting a new vocabulary', a transformation so that it no longer remains a place without history or geography.'<sup>3</sup> (Ghirri 1986) It is fluid and full of complexities.



Fig. 1, Low hanging fruit, 2022.



Fig. 2, Ghirri, Marina di Ravenna The outline of Clouds, 1986.

In some photographs Ghirri used screens to delineate the landscape and emphasize its double nature. He believed that screens create a distance but also propose meaningful relationships.

I think of landscape in those terms also as I am trying to present my own vision and the interface between the here and there, presence and absence. My natural world is represented in the screens, which depict nature while obfuscating the overall landscape.

The landscapes I think of with my screens, which I paint, draw or print, belong to my vision and disclose mysterious possibilities.

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Ghirri, *The complete Essays, 1973-1991*, MACK, 2021 for this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Marina Spunta and Jacopo Benci, *Luigi Ghirri and the Photography of Place*, Italian Modernities Vol.27 (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Ghirri, 1986.