

Galleria del Cembalo

Letizia Battaglia, *Vintage Prints*

curated by Alberto Damian and Matteo Sollima

11 February – 9 April 2022

Galleria del Cembalo | Palazzo Borghese, Rome

From 11 February to 9 April 2022, Galleria del Cembalo presents the exhibition “Letizia Battaglia, *Vintage Prints*”.

With forty small-format prints selected by Letizia Battaglia – from her own archive – together with Alberto Damian and Matteo Sollima, curators of the display, the exhibit shows some of the most famous images of the Sicilian photographer. These photo shoots are sometimes followed by a second gaze of the same situation, often printed as unique piece in the darkroom. In a time characterised by large-format images, designed to be set out on the walls, the evocative power of this exhibition is exactly what is hidden in each of the photographs on display: the history of the single piece of paper. In support of the reality of the often dramatic facts witnessed by Letizia’s photographs, the rear side of each print tells another story. Indeed, in addition to the captions written in one go, these stories can be suggested by either the several stamps of the author and those of the agencies that used to give her reports to newspapers and magazines, or by the notes and records for the black and white printing process.

Taken between the 1970s and the early 1990s, most of the photographs record the life in Palermo and its complex reality in those years, from mob killings to precarious conditions of children “at risk”, from poor districts’ life to aristocratic parties. Alongside this main set of photographs, there are some pictures taken abroad, for example in New York (1986), where Letizia received the New York Times Award and where the previous year she also won the W. Eugene Smith Fund Grant – the first European woman to receive that prize. The exhibit also displays a photograph from Arkhangelsk, U.S.S.R, where a group of nurses is concealed behind their masks, a (sadly) contemporary portrait of these days. Finally, some pictures were taken in the psychiatric department of a women’s prison in Madrid in 1987.

Letizia Battaglia says about the first years she was taking pictures for the articles she was writing in Milan: “With the camera I’ve conquered myself and my independence”. Questioned about the days of the brutal murders in Palermo, period of her most intense activity, she states: “I have been living those years with much sorrow and shame, because things that were impossible to imagine were happening.”