

RICCARDO VARINI

About the photographer Riccardo Varini

Riccardo Varini was born in Reggio Emilia (Emilia-Romagna, Italy) in 1957.

A pupil of Luigi Ghirri, Varini took up photography adopting from the very outset a language that drew its inspiration as much from the “master” as from the aesthetic style of *Chiaristi* painters and the school of Guidi and Morandi.

Riccardo Varini's photography works and publications are among the holdings of:

the CSAC (Study Centre and Communication Archive, University of Parma), the Panizzi Photo Library in Reggio Emilia, the MAXXI in Rome, the Public Library in Modena, the Library of Matera, and public and private collections.

His photography

Riccardo Varini started to take photographs in 1979 as a self-taught photographer. From his father - a sensitive and kind person - he inherited a love of nature and of everyday objects, but his passions would begin to transform into an artistic engagement after his encounter with the Master of “concept” photography Luigi Ghirri.

From 1984 he started focussing on art photography, exploring its expressive potential.

In the search for his own personal language, one of Varini's sources of inspiration was the art of painting. In particular, he adopted the use of rarefied colours and made it his own, with images of large, luminous spaces and small details, typical of *Chiaristi* painters.

A focus on paintings was a means to break away from the overcrowded photographs characteristic of American-style images of the 70s, and to steer the aesthetics of his photography towards a sober, timeless dimension.

Varini's rarefied and poetic language, focussing on the interplay between nature and the human spirit, first took shape in his *Silenzi* (Silences), which would emerge as the most significant work in his artistic output. Born out of these cross-influences, the images in *Silenzi* are represented with the aim of fostering meditation rather than capturing spaces of reality.

Varini does not see his work as belonging to the profession of *photographer* in the ordinary sense of the term. The main focus of his interest is above all the poetic dimension and the depiction of atmospheres created by meticulously selected details. In Ghirri's work, Varini is especially drawn to a particular kind of slow photography, which in his own aesthetic style becomes a photography made up of full and empty spaces. He creates his works with images containing the kind of silence that helps to meditate, with scenes enveloped in a dimension of stretched and motionless time which give rise to his reflection on a fast, aseptic and overloaded world. In this way, he takes Ghirri's teachings to extremes. At times he seems to evoke a *Magrittian metaphysical space*, which, blurring into the image, becomes hazy and impalpable.

Varini's photos represent the reality only on the surface, in actual fact they live for the pleasure of vision. They are images constructed through long waits - visions studied for a long time and composed not so much to amaze as to be simply contemplated. Perhaps to express one's own and other people's solitude. They are images with an idea of subtly meditated poetry rather than meditated images. This is why Varini does not put a title to his photographs. He wishes those who admire them to feel free to appropriate to themselves their individual meaning.

In his work for the series *Stanze* (Rooms) Varini's point of departure is once again the pictorial language, and in particular Edward Hopper's empty theatre. While in the light-flooded rooms the evanescence we perceive makes us feel lost in a kind of sacredness of the space, in the other - darker - rooms, the space in the image evokes 17th century Dutch paintings. Thus, the “waits” of Varini's characters are more reminiscent of Rembrandt's or Vermeer's paintings than Hopper's.

But to Varini the physical quality of the room is not important in itself; he is mostly interested in the concept of “threshold”, namely the distance that allows one to contemplate silence and to imagine beyond the walls. This “wait” is also found in his *Notturni* (Night scenes), in each of which it feels as

if something might happen at any moment. We speak about “Rooms”, but the city itself is one huge room. An empty room.

The photos are all printed by Varini himself on cotton paper, and the support he uses is the most effective in making his language sober and without reflections. Varini has transformed a “consumer” colour into a soft colour, which seems to evoke the “high-key” photography of the 1930s.

Since the aesthetics of Varini's photography is rooted in painting, it is no coincidence that, like a painter, he prepares his models, determines the sources of light as if on *a set* and arranges the objects he places on the tables.

“Riccardo Varini, by suggesting the extended duration of the images and the need for a slow gaze, just as slow as the timescales for creating his photographs and for a painting, will increasingly influence the current debate on photography and the idea of a more apparent ‘possible return of photography to its matrix’, namely painting - a matrix from which, ultimately, it has never completely broken away” (A. Quintavalle from the book *Riccardo Varini* edited by A. C. Quintavalle).

His career

Cristina Franzoni, a member of the editorial staff of *Zoom Magazine* - an international photography magazine - was the first to notice Varini as a landscape photographer while he was shooting photos of the Apennines for the Tourist Board of the Reggio Emilia Province, and she encouraged him to exhibit his work in Italy and internationally.

In 2004, the catalogue *Radici* (Roots) was published, with a preface by the writer Alfredo Gianolio, a friend of Zavattini.

In 2006, the first Gallery dedicated exclusively to photography opened in his native city and would soon become the venue of his courses and the meeting place of many photographers.

In 2007, Professor Arturo Carlo Quintavalle invited him to place his works in the archive holdings of the University of Parma's CSAC (Study Centre and Communication Archive), which hosts the works of many important Italian photographers. Quintavalle himself then wrote the introduction to his first book, *Silenzi* (published by Meridiana, 2008), featuring his most important works starting from 1978.

Further important recognitions came after his first solo exhibition staged at the Galleria Parmeggiani in Reggio Emilia, acclaimed by the public and the critics as the best within the Fotografia Europea 2009 festival and now among the holdings of the Panizzi Photo Library. The accompanying catalogue, titled *Eternity* (Electa publishers), also featuring photos by Sudek, Baudrillard, Ghirri, Fontcuberta and Huguier, among others, was edited by Elio Grazioli. Also in 2009, after exhibiting in Arles, he was invited to exhibit in Nantes and Paris.

He was then commissioned by the firm Duccio Grassi Architects to conduct a photographic study of Max Mara's new flagship store in Milan. This was followed up by an exhibition at the Salone del Mobile trade show.

In 2011, he collaborated with Fotografia Europea on the festival's portfolio readings. He then exhibited in the Garden of Ravenna Cathedral for Banca Popolare. In 2012, he was invited to the Einaudi Gallery in Mantua and to the second edition of MIA (Milan Image Art Fair) as a “proposal” put forward by expert critics. One of his photos was selected by *Le Monde* as representative of the MIA Fair, curated by its director Fabio Castelli.

In 2012, a paperback of his photographs entitled *Luoghi Comuni* (Common places) was published, with verses by Pierluigi Tedeschi and edited by Emanuele Ferrari. During that same period he exhibited at the Magazzini del Sale in Cervia and in Rimini with a retrospective curated by Alessandra Bigi Iotti and Giulio Zavatta (art historians). This led to the publication of a catalogue produced in special paper with poems by Sabrina Foschini (*Da Mare a Mare* - From Sea to Sea).

He participated in Photissima (Turin) in 2013 and in the MIA Fair (Milan) in 2013 and 2014.

An anthological exhibition on his “Stanze” was held at the Rocca dei Gonzaga castle in Novellara (Reggio Emilia).

He was invited to Japan to exhibit his works printed on cotton paper, which have a particular resonance with the Eastern tradition.

In 2013, he exhibited in Pietrasanta (Lucca) and at the Ketterer Kunst Gallery in Berlin.

In 2014, he exhibited his work inspired by the painter Edward Hopper and other Flemish painters. During the same period he participated in a symposium on Luigi Ghirri organized by the British School at Rome, and his book *Silenzi* was placed among the holdings of the Library of the MAXXI gallery in Rome.

He was also invited to Montecarlo (Days of Italian Culture), Paris (Fotofewer), Lugano and Parma. In 2015, he brought out his monograph published by Skira and edited by A. C. Quintavalle.

In 2016, after exhibiting his “Silenzi Bianchi” (White silences) in Tokyo and at the Reggia di Colorno (Parma), he ended the year with a major retrospective exhibition of 170 works, organized in collaboration with the Reggio Emilia City Museums and City Council, staged at the Chiostri di San Domenico, also curated by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle with whom Varini has been fortunate enough to collaborate for several years now.

In 2017, he is continuing his photography activities, including through his increasingly popular workshops and seminars on composition, and will be a guest in Germany and Switzerland.

WEBSITE LINK TO HIS WORKS:

PUBLICATIONS:

In addition to those listed above, Riccardo Varini has collaborated with Tony Contiero (a photographer and writer who works with Franco Battiato) on the production of several art photography books, including *Terra di nessuno* (No man's land - 2017).

CONTACT:

Riccardo Varini: mobile: [+ 39 347-8231189](tel:+393478231189)

Email: riccardovarini@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.riccardovarini.it/home.html>