

An unfinished visual essay based on the affinities arising between the cinematographic work of Michelangelo Antonioni and the photography of Luigi Ghirri through a small selection of pieces from the *Enchanted Mountains* series by the Ferrara-born filmmaker, and the works of Ghirri, in which the author fixes his eye on the representation of mountains.

# Michelangelo Antonioni and Luigi Ghirri

## MOUNT ANALOGUE<sup>1</sup>

15.11.2025 – 15.02.2026



- <sup>1</sup> The title is taken from René Daumal's novel *Mount Analogue: A Tale of Non-Euclidean and Symbolically Authentic Mountaineering Adventures*, which was published in Spanish by Atalanta in 2006. It is an unfinished novel issued in Paris in 1952 that recounts a utopian expedition in search of "a mysterious, inaccessible mountain whose matter has the curious property of curving the space around it". The expedition's beginnings arise from a mix of violence and delicacy that the story's narrator, Theodore—who, according to the book, is at the time the author of a "study of the symbolic significance of the mountain in ancient mythologies"—perceives in the handwriting of a letter he receives from Pierre Sogol, one of the book's protagonists and a mountaineering professor, as stated on a plaque next to the window of his house.

Michelangelo Antonioni

*Montagna incantata* n.176

Ferrara, Archivio Michelangelo Antonioni.

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Moderna e Contemporanea.

Not all exhibitions respond to a desire for knowledge. Some also arise from the pleasure to state a riddle and the need to install oneself happily within it, if possible, or to prowl it, if not.<sup>2</sup> As a general rule, exhibitions that are part of the first group are those organised around a structure whose beginning, middle and end determine access to their contents in the manner of concluded stories, in other words, through reading words strung together by authors to define the territory explored in their stories. The exhibitions belonging to this group are consequently proposals that unfold between an origin and an end, offering little room for manoeuvre to chance, built on limited and very precise theses, in which everything, absolutely everything, has seemingly been designed not to deviate from a pre-established path, remaining faithful to the dictates of some concepts that are perfectly understood by the person who transfers them to an exhibition format. In the eyes of spectators, the exhibitions in this first group usually appear as masterclasses that, in order to be within reach of their wisdom, demonstrate strong argumentative robustness, leaving no room for the unpredictable and making it difficult to question their “truth” in terms other than those used to articulate their theses.

On the other hand, the exhibitions belonging to the second group are freer, more open and spacious proposals. As a general rule, the exhibitions in this group respond to the need to tell stories in a subtler manner, to modulate unfinished stories and to appeal to the insatiable nature of desire, incompleteness and inadequacy. These are exhibitions that do not dictate, that are never satisfied, that are sustained by imperceptible structures, and that are configured by a selection of works whose *raison d'être* is only possibly outlined through words arising from a *querencia*<sup>3</sup> for the inexplicable. These are therefore exhibitions that never give up, that never aspire to reach any conclusions, and that usually reach spectators as organic, unpredictable and enigmatic stories. The exhibitions in this group are proposals in a permanent “desiring” state—awaiting something, one might

<sup>2</sup> To paraphrase Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego in the written introduction to his book dedicated to the pleasure of turning painting into words, *El espacio salvado. Álbum de imágenes*. Ed. Shangrila, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> A metaphysical concept derived from the [Spanish] verb *querer*, meaning to desire and to love.

say—based on syncopated or fragmented structures and configured according to what occurs at the margins, faults and cracks of knowledge that never settles. It is difficult to define exhibitions belonging to this second group. There are no words that can manage to do so.

But they can be prowled.

Here we go.

Michelangelo Antonioni (Ferrara, 1912 – Rome, 2007) and Luigi Ghirri (Scandiano, 1943 – Roncole Verdi, 1992) were two artists born 31 years apart in two cities in the same northern Italian region separated by a road of about 100 kilometres and with an average mountain height of no more than 500 metres. These are two interesting facts not so much from a fascination with cartography, but because of the way they influenced the shaping of two gazes forged on the plains,<sup>4</sup> educated in sight by broad concentrations of alluvium and rivers and that see not a misty area on the horizon, but rather the place where thought and imagination run.

Influenced by a landscape that is anything but earthly, torn between heaven and earth, clouds and water, rock formations and sandstone, fluctuating condensations and vapours, or remaining suspended between reality and fiction, the works for which Michelangelo Antonioni and Luigi Ghirri are known are images that invite you to read them slowly, appealing to contemplation and encouraging reflection on the individual, promoting the critical questioning of his or her relationship with the world. These are two ways of observing and analysing reality that evolve and allow themselves to be felt in both their work, and we propose to explore this based on what they produced primarily during the 1970s,<sup>5</sup> in other words, when Antonioni began to

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, on the Padan Plain, or Po Valley, in northern Italy, where the Emilia-Romagna region is located and where Antonioni and Ghirri are originally from. The Padan Plain—or *Pianura Padana*, taking its name from the Po River, *Padus* in Latin—runs between the Alps, the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea, covering an area of approximately 46,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Although points of connection between Antonioni's and Ghirri's films and photographs can be noted intermittently throughout their entire production, the chronological framework of our exhibition is set around the 1970s. This was the period when Michelangelo Antonioni began to materialise his *Enchanted Mountains* series in photographic form and Luigi Ghirri decided to abandon his career as a quantity surveyor, which he had pursued for the previous decade,

materialise his series of *Enchanted Mountains* and when Ghirri, alerted by the effects of the acceleration of technology, began to consider his work as a sound alternative to the voracity of consumer images.

Although the work of Antonioni and Ghirri differs in many notable ways, aside from a generational issue, the social context to which they belonged or the visual language with which they expressed their ideas, the subtle analogies that also arise<sup>6</sup> are those that have driven us to conceive our exhibition not so much for the interest that a certain selection of works would arouse from a purely visual perspective, but for the way in which, through some photographic images, we situate ourselves before two unique ways of seeing, observing and relating to oneself, the other and the world. It is an emotional journey through a territory sketched out by Antonioni and Ghirri, filled with signs, signals and gestures emerging from the souls of those who, before *iconifying* their thoughts, felt attracted to the universe of images, became interested in the history of art, scrutinised the metaphysical and abstract dimension of painting and responded to the desire of mapping the territory that witnessed their birth in order to configure, from there, the conceptual core of their cinematographic and photographic projects.<sup>7</sup>

in order to dedicate himself entirely to photography, image analysis and the creation of a new alphabet.

<sup>6</sup> Especially in relation to the attention paid to the everyday, the banal, the unnecessary, the superfluous, what is off-screen, in the background, etc. In particular, everything that serves to make his films or photographs works that reflect on us, recall, evoke and affect us; in short, so that they are stories that speak of us.

<sup>7</sup> Michelangelo Antonioni's introduction to the language of cinema was influenced by the history and life of Ferrara, his hometown. According to the Ferrarese director, it is a city that is simultaneously playful, beautiful and mysterious, extremely pagan, with an important artistic tradition and one of the most vibrant and interesting cities in Europe during the *quattrocento* and *cinquecento*. Antonioni claimed that in Ferrara, one could smell the scent of hemp from the surrounding fields and sense the density of the eternal fogs so characteristic of the Po Plain landscape, dotted with villages of low, colourful houses whose bright materiality Giorgio de Chirico knew how to immortalise so well. Antonioni felt a deep connection to the Po River and, above all, to how the people of Padania, the people of the Po, feel about it. The first film Antonioni shot was a documentary that he began to film during the early months of 1943, based on an idea he developed for his first article in the magazine *Cinema*. Entitled "Per un film sul fiume Po", the article reflected on the

need to capture the moral and psychological essence of a natural environment that has changed from a landscape of things, still and solitary, to a landscape in motion, filled with people and reinvigorated. By pure coincidence, at the time Antonioni began filming this documentary on the Po River—a documentary that would not see the light for several years—Visconti, with whom Antonioni had previously collaborated, was shooting *Ossessione*, an unofficial adaptation of James M. Cain's short story *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a few kilometres away. Although both debutants were driven by the idea of working with direct contact with an everyday, provincial and uncontaminated reality that cinema in the past had neglected, their films did not suffer the same fate. It is said that if Antonioni had worked from a literary source, as Visconti had done, not only would he have had a larger budget, but also the resulting work might have been considered the most worthy manifesto of nascent Italian neorealism. Luigi Ghirri spent his working days for much of the 1960s as a draftsman and surveyor—the profession for which he had trained—and his weekends, especially from the 1970s onwards, embarking on *minimal journeys* around his native region accompanied by his small amateur Canon camera. It was not until 1969, when he was 26, that Ghirri's photographic activity began to take shape, following his encounter with Italian conceptual artists. This was a period of transition—or, as his friend Vittorio Savi later defined it, “partly a betrayal of his vocation as a photographer and partly a preparation”—that culminated in 1973, when the artist within him emerged and he decided to dedicate himself fully to the practice of photography. In the early 1970s, Ghirri began to produce three of his first photographic series, drawing on popular imagination and amateur photography from the optics of art, always complex and experimental: *Paesaggi di cartone* (1970–1973), *Catalogo* (1970–1973) and *Colazione sull'erba* (1971–1974). In these three series, presents perfectly defined territories based on images framed in different, totally unorthodox ways and mainly taken in places very familiar to him, such as the streets of Modena, the nondescript houses built around the city, the type of housing that a surveyor was authorised to build, or, as Ghirri himself stated in an interview, “the houses that make up the street where I live, the streets I walk every day...” in short, spaces that, due to “their anonymity and abandonment, were apparently waiting for someone to give them an identity”. As a self-taught photographer—therefore trained on the margins of academia—Ghirri satisfied his thirst for learning by immersing himself in philosophy, semiotics, literature and art history. The intellectual framework of the project that developed throughout his early photographic experiences materialised in the images he took within a radius of just three kilometres from his place of residence, a bounded territory, a known map. Alongside these series, Ghirri began creating another one of his most iconic works in 1972 without leaving his home. I am referring to *Atlante*, a visual reinterpretation of one of the objects that most of us have or have once had at home (an atlas), whose pages invite us to travel with our imaginations by grouping together inside images from around the world through the names, symbols and colours of their geographical maps. I would like to point out a curious fact—as James Lingwood does in his catalogue essay for Luigi Ghirri's exhibition at MNCARS in Madrid—that at the same time that Ghirri began his photographic career focusing on everyday subjects from our customary field of vision, Georges Perec was writing *Species of Spaces* in Paris, a book published

Born and educated in dissimilar socio-family contexts, although equally influential in making a decision about a professional future<sup>8</sup> that they would soon abandon as soon as they saw the possibility of devoting themselves to what interested them, Antonioni and Ghirri began to lay the foundations of their

in 1974 that, like Ghirri's photography, reflects a world of commonplaces and everyday experiences for any inhabitant of a Western European city in the 1970s from the optics of curiosity and critical interest in the changing culture of our (his) time. Endless lines of research that, in Perec's book, begin from the individual and move outwards, while in Ghirri's work they run simultaneously in several directions. As the author himself says: "If photography is a journey, it is not so in the classic sense suggested by this word; it is rather an itinerary that is drawn, yet with many diversions and returns, randomness and improvisation, a zigzag line."

- <sup>8</sup> Born, raised and educated in the bourgeois setting of a wealthy, aristocratic agricultural city like Ferrara, Antonioni studied at a technical institute before entering the Faculty of Economics and Commerce at the University of Bologna, attending a few classes in the Faculty of Arts when he could. University life in Bologna held no interest for Antonioni, neither did economics nor finance. He claimed that he felt equal parts joy and sadness when he graduated. While he was completing the education in which his family had invested so much, he was also leaving his youth behind and beginning the struggle to earn a living. After a brief period in Ferrara experimenting with amateur filmmaking based on his experience as a keen cinema-goer, Antonioni moved to Rome in 1942 and there began working in the film industry despite the disapproval of his father—a small, wealthy industrialist from Ferrara—who preferred him to settle there. Contrary to his father's wishes, Antonioni went to Rome with the money he had raised from selling the many tennis trophies he had won during his childhood and youth. Unlike Antonioni's, Ghirri's father was neither bourgeois nor wealthy, but was a carpenter and draftsman from Scandiano, a town quite near Modena, who was unable to afford a university education for his son and prompted him to train as a quantity surveyor, a career path that usually began very early in 1960s Italy. Perhaps encouraged by the prospect of earning a steady income at a time when the country was experiencing significant housing and civil engineering construction activity (between 1950 and 1960), Ghirri most likely made his career choice around the age of fifteen. Although Ghirri was not very interested in the profession of quantity surveyor, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that he was able to dedicate himself entirely to photography. It was then that he came into contact with Italian conceptual artists, participating in their debates, photographically covering their performances and events, and beginning to connect with the world through photography, asking himself many questions about its function and necessity rather than trying to resolve the questions it posed. Adopting the words of Massimo Cacciari, Ghirri maintained that "photography isn't a problem, photography is an enigma, because a problem has a solution, and an enigma is a problem that doesn't have a solution."

respective creative languages by embarking on a path similar to that of Georges Perec in *Species of Spaces*,<sup>9</sup> in other words, beginning from the vital exploration of an intimate, close and familiar space to determine, from this knowledge, the basic lines of the action they were going to undertake on the margins of all orthodoxy, from a very personal conviction, oriented towards investigating the unexpected and understood, from the very outset, as guarantors of the life they wished to live.<sup>10</sup> It was an action that, commencing from visual themes, reflections and projects

<sup>9</sup> Yes, please forgive me. It is not an obsession. It is just that some works are worth pursuing until you see where they can take you. These are works that do not end on the last page. And for me, this book by Perec is one of them. I promise you that I have a few more.

<sup>10</sup> “Fare un film è per me vivere” (making a film is my way of life). This statement by Antonioni not only gives its title to a compilation of his writings on cinema, but also determined his artistic career from the moment he looked through the lens of a 16mm Bell & Howell camera—this occurred during his youth, when he was trying to make his first documentary in a mental asylum in Ferrara. It was a failed experiment, apparently bearing a close relationship to a quote by Kierkegaard that he was probably able to read during his self-taught phase of immersing himself in philosophy in the search for beauty, the most hidden things or the reasons why great people turn to poetry, convinced that studying was another way to avoid stagnating. The phrase goes like this: “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” If life for Antonioni was synonymous with making films, for Ghirri it was consolidating a photographic project as an inconclusive discursive story—in other words, neither closed nor systematic—fuelled by boundless curiosity and critical interest in the changing culture of his time. Beginning in the late 1960s, with the help of his small camera and following a similar line to Perec’s poetic reflections, Ghirri invited viewers (readers) to comprehend life from its most everyday, banal dimension, observing familiar places and spaces, proposing ways to empathise with the absurdity of immediacy, scrutinising a radius of action of no more than three kilometres, and, during his “minimal adventures”—weekend trips or short holidays in the 1960s while working as a quantity surveyor for a real estate development company in Modena—focusing on the houses on his street, the streets where he walked, or on the spaces whose anonymity and abandonment seemed to be waiting for him to give them an identity, not so much to sublimate them, but to retrieve them from our blindness and imbue them with the meaning that we want to give to them. The journey through images that Ghirri embarked on at the outset of his career in the early 1970s, prompting him to conceptualise his work as a single, total body of work, led him to believe that his future—and, therefore, unrealised—projects could be brought together in a single book that he would title *Atlante*. This is the connotation given to it by the author, in other words, as an archive or a place where everything is contained or, better still, as an image of images open to new configurations through the gradual incorporation of images over the years.



of exquisite and perceptive singularity, would characterise the work of someone who looks at reality head on without underestimating what occurs behind it (Ghirri); of those who position in the foreground what commonly resides in the background (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who defends the need for a cinema that, rather than filtering a thesis, filters poetry (Antonioni); of someone who chooses to work in photography in order to reinforce an amateur's gaze and not a professional's wisdom (Ghirri); of someone who, more than feelings, is interested in the effects of his illness (Antonioni); of someone who does not distinguish between high and low culture (Ghirri); of someone who expresses his difficulty in speaking and confesses that, without cinema, he would not have existed (Antonioni); of someone who renounces technical virtuosity in order to be close to the truth when taking his images (Ghirri); of someone who claims that, when he works, he does so with his belly and not with his brain (Antonioni); of someone who projects and constructs his work as a form of narration with images and not to create singular images (Ghirri); of someone who works with still images as some musicians work with pauses (Antonioni); of someone who is interested in perceiving a place and not in cataloguing, describing or locating it (Ghirri); of someone who makes immobility his hallmark so that, in his films, it seems that everything is moving but nothing is progressing (Antonioni); of someone who includes people in his images not because they are doing something relevant, but because they purely and simply are (Ghirri); of someone who pursues his actors with the camera until they cease to be so and begin to be people (Antonioni); of those who show but, above all, are interested in telling stories (Antonioni and Ghirri); of those who tell them according to a very personal grammar (Antonioni); of those who, in order to do so, invent a visual alphabet as an alternative to traditional photographic genres (Ghirri); of someone who keenly feels the suspended time of, for example, the empty squares of De Chirico (Antonioni); of someone who states that "his room" is the Po Valley (Ghirri); of someone who visits a Mark Rothko exhibition in Rome up to four times—his first retrospective in 1962—experiencing how his admiration for the painter progressively grows to the limits of absolute silence (Antonioni); of those who engage with the universe of abstraction naturally or through a lens, an image

enlargement or blow-up, an alteration of scale, etc. (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who, in order to understand reality, never follows a path between two points, but instead chooses to make a map exploring life in zigzag (Ghirri); of someone who, rather than sticking to a script, continually changes his mind depending on the day he is having, the landscape he has before him, what his instinct dictates... for whatever reasons (Antonioni); of someone who maintains that when we photograph we only see one part of the world while we cancel the other (Ghirri); of someone who decides to fragment action in order to introduce sequences or frames into his films that would seem unnecessary or superfluous to anyone—for example, a gale, some mist, the sea, walls and partitions of different textures, vanishing points to other spaces, details of rocks, etc. (Antonioni); of someone who defends that the fascinating thing about photography is the way in which it relates to the world, always so enigmatic, ambiguous and mysterious (Ghirri); of someone who was said to be a “inner neorealist” because he explored our relationship with ourselves in his films, in other words, our emotions and feelings more than our relationship with others, the environment or the rest of the world (Antonioni); of someone who lets the world come to him and ideas appear, always without expecting anything (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who avoids delirium, arrogance and intellectual extravagances in his films because he believes that images should provide a sense of truth (Antonioni); of someone who, like Perec, understands that the world is a form of writing, a geography of which artists are the authors (Ghirri); of those who, before starting to do anything, cultivated themselves by reading books on art, architecture, design, philosophy, semiotics, etc. (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who, like Giordano Bruno, thinks that: “to think is to speculate with images” (Ghirri); of someone who imbues caesurae with a primordial expressive function, inventing a new, elliptical and apparently unreal time (Antonioni); of someone who learns to value simple, obvious things, to see them again from another perspective (Ghirri); of someone who claims that the birth of a story in cinema is like that of poetry for a poet, that is to say, words, images and concepts first come to mind and then become mixed, with poetry emerging from their distillation (Antonioni); of those who never



Luigi Ghirri  
*Rimini*, 1977  
 Cortesia Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Montagna incantata n.126*  
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Luigi Ghirri  
*Bastia, 1976*  
 Cortesia Eredi di Luigi Ghirri



Luigi Ghirri  
*Modena*, 1970  
Cortesia Eredi di Luigi Ghirri





Luigi Ghirri  
*Bressanone*, 1979  
 Cortesia Eredi di Luigi Ghirri

Michelangelo Antonioni  
*Montagna incantata n. 171*  
 Ferrara, Archivio Michelangelo Antonioni.  
 © Photography Ferrara, Gallerie d'Arte Moderna  
 e Contemporanea.

understand that their work must solve any enigma<sup>11</sup> (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who always leaves escape routes in his photographs—through light, (de)focusing, some legs, etc.—so that attention is not focused on what is seen in the image but on everything that remains to one side, suggesting or imagining that it can happen (Ghirri); of those who feel more the desire to feel than the desire to know<sup>12</sup> (Antonioni and Ghirri); of someone who did not paint dolls during the happiness of his childhood but portals, capitals, plans of absurd buildings, portraits of his father, his mother, Greta Garbo or Charlie Chaplin and built city neighbourhoods with cardboard that he then painted with bright colours (Antonioni); of someone who renounces a rigid work scheme to open the doors to chance and intuition, making the entirety of his work understandable as a map of thousands of tiny signs relating to each other (Ghirri), etc.

Applying equal parts of touches of reason and intuition with the conviction that the interesting thing about life is not (only) what we have in front of us, but (also) what we observe, question and explain of what we have behind us,<sup>13</sup> the story that Antonioni and Ghirri wrote throughout their lives<sup>14</sup> reflects the evolution of those who rummage through reality so that the viewer<sup>15</sup> can conclude, through his or her experience<sup>16</sup> what they

<sup>11</sup> A word that comes from the Latin *aenigma*, and in turn from the Greek αἰνίγμα *ainigma*. m. Statement with a deliberately concealed meaning so that it is difficult to understand or interpret. Syn.: riddle, puzzle, hieroglyphic, brain-teaser, problem. Reality, event or behaviour that cannot be understood, or that is difficult to understand or interpret. Syn.: mystery, unknown, question, secret, arcane.

<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that the desire to know is an innate desire. Let us recall the phrase with which Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics*: “All men by nature desire to know.”

<sup>13</sup> Or under our feet, to one side, beyond our field of vision, beyond the clouds, etc.

<sup>14</sup> In each film, one always put something of oneself in, little by little. Parts of the stories that have been important for Antonioni's life feature in all of his films. They could thus be rewritten by combining one character's gestures with another's expressions, tastes, thoughts or looks, etc. Antonioni maintained that films, like life, are made by being made.

<sup>15</sup> Although it is not a topic that kept him awake at night, Antonioni believed that the public should be like him, in other words, attentive, unprepared, capable of laughter and emotion.

<sup>16</sup> Ghirri's elliptical narrative, recounted through his images while defining a world outlined by images, also speaks to us of the impossibility of living outside

merely suggest. One always has the feeling of reading an unfinished story when faced with the work of Antonioni and Ghirri.

And I would say that there is much truth in that.

Based on the intellectual foundation of a thought<sup>17</sup> that

of it. Nonetheless, to the extent that, for him, photography is a narrative in a mental sequence, it neither blocks the existence of parallel narratives nor does it prevent their expansion through avenues of escape. For Ghirri, each work defined an elastic space: it is not confined to a measurable entity, but transcends it. These porous boundaries in his work suggest that Umberto Eco's arguments regarding the importance and multiplicity of interpreting a work under the critical gaze of a reader or observer were not overlooked by him. In the chapter of *The Open Work* (1962) in which he expounds his ideas about the visual arts, Eco speaks of the importance of indeterminacy and dynamic constellations in which "structural relationships are not determined univocally, from the start". Antonioni, for his part, tells his stories by using a personal grammar linked more to truth than logic. The Ferrarese filmmaker maintained that just as our daily life—the everyday—is not mechanical, conventional or artificial at all, neither should cinema be. Instead, cinema should reflect the inner rhythm of stories that are told according to their moments of euphoria and disappointment, moments of anguish and exaltation, pleasurable and painful moments. Just as there are moments of pleasure and others of pain in life, there needs to be light-hearted films and others that are painful and bitter.

<sup>17</sup> In Ghirri's case, his thinking was articulated through his passion for art, architecture, design, Italian visual poetry, the voracious reading of literature, philosophy and art history, as well as what he acquired from his encounters in Modena with conceptual artists such as Franco Guerzoni, Carlo Cremaschi, Claudio Parmiggiani, Giuliano della Casa, Franco Vaccari and the art historian Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, engaged in conceptual research and debates surrounding the dematerialisation of art and the importance of the project and photographic documentation. An example of the cultural reach of Ghirri's thought can be seen in *Identikit* (1976-1979), a brilliant self-portrait of the artist in absentia through his books, records, postcards, old photos and objects of affection. Objects that Ghirri would distribute throughout his library and later photographed as still lifes of his private life. In Antonioni's case, his thinking was shaped by his fascination with the universe of images, which he approached as a young man, learning from what he saw and read in painting books. In addition to art, from Piero della Francesca to Mario Schifano, which offered Antonioni compelling visual and conceptual arguments to shape his gaze, Antonioni felt a great attraction to architecture—his other great passion—wrote for specialised film magazines and was a voracious reader interested in poetry, novels and essays. Antonioni's literary loves included William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence—he claimed his was the first novel he had ever read—Erik Ibsen, Luigi Pirandello, André Gide—he knew him by heart, even translating him into Italian—Paul Morand, Gertrude Stein, Jean-Paul Sartre, James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé o Françoise Sagan. Part of Antonioni's circle of friends, Sagan claimed that what she valued in Antonioni's films was "the black and white, the lifeless landscapes, the averted faces, everything that is said



crystallises into a work through the use of an experimental, unconventional language<sup>18</sup> arising from the reflections, themes and questions that occupied Antonioni and Ghirri and the way in which they conceived their works, questioning what surrounds and affects them<sup>19</sup> in a way that is inseparable from life,<sup>20</sup> this is how the emotional map of our exhibition is outlined, understood from its inception as a research work and, consequently, as a speculative project.

Borrowing from the title of René Daumal's<sup>21</sup> most cele-

without speaking, everything that happens behind the scenes, everything that only Antonioni knows how to capture in his films. His films are like a painting."

<sup>18</sup> Characterised in Ghirri, for example, by the frontal nature of his shots and rejection of any types of cuts or losses; the balance, stillness and apparent simplicity of his images; the absence of any type of technical virtuosity, the lack of interest in seeking his own personal style; the focus on analysing everyday themes, on all that happens when nothing seems to be happening; the consolidation of a body of work in the form of unfinished series; the use of colour because, as the author stated, life is not in black and white; the way of understanding that photography excludes the rest of the world to reveal only a small part; the ability to grasp what happens outside of a project, beyond what is planned, etc. Evident in Antonioni, for example, in his filmmaking method, which is based on the correlation between cinema, painting, photography and literature; the importance of superfluous and marginal moments in his films, charged with meaning and ambivalence to real time; his attention to truth rather than verisimilitude; his way of observing reality; the way he went from a detail to the whole; his use of colour, so characteristic of contemporary society, which he translates into a very particular register of emotional colours as a form of resistance to the superficial use of colour; the grey tones and overcast skies that are so characteristic of his films; the way in which he portrayed the bourgeoisie and, from there, approached the feelings of the individual he pursues to exhaustion. With regards to all of this, Antonioni stated the following: "When all has been said, when the main scene is over, there are less important moments; and to me, it seems worthwhile to show the character right in these moments, from the back or the front, focusing on a gesture, on an attitude, because they serve to clarify everything that has happened, as well as what is left of it inside the character."

<sup>19</sup> This hinders respect for Antonioni's early work and coats Ghirri's with a conceptual sheen that distances it excessively from the (real, documentary) sphere from which it originated and was nourished.

<sup>20</sup> "Fare un film è per me vivere" (making a film is my way of life) was something that Antonioni would say on more than one occasion.

<sup>21</sup> Born in Boulzicourt (France) on 16 March 1908 and died in Paris on 21 May 1944 due to tuberculosis, which was probably the result of premature consumption of tetrachloride, René Daumal was a writer, essayist, translator and poet whose thirty-six years of life were spent exploring the underworld of esotericism, the symbolist imagination, group experiences with dreams, forays into the beyond, suicide attempts and the feeling that he did not belong in this

brated novel<sup>22</sup> and the spirit of embarking on an adventure with neither the prescription of an ending nor the desire to reach it, the path we wish to follow begins, without considering which direction to take or fearing whether we will get lost or not.

*Mount Analogue*, our exhibition, is a kind of unfinished visual essay<sup>23</sup> launched to explore the infinite number of affinities<sup>24</sup> that exist between the work of Michelangelo Antonioni and that of Luigi Ghirri, based on no more than 40 images in which both artists represented reality not in terms of what it shows, we see or identify, but rather how much it can evoke by accessing it through other eyes, through another gaze. It is a journey through the rugged terrain of a premonition born of intuition, occurring around the idea of a mountain<sup>25</sup> and one that, taking a break in the exhibition space, remains in a state of waiting with the aim of figuring out which direction to take, assessing whether to continue in the same way or indeed, on the contrary, to conclude this voyage that began a few years ago.

“And why mountains?” a visitor asked Antonioni during the opening of his *Enchanted Mountains* exhibition in Venice<sup>26</sup>

world, about which he wrote, at the age of fifteen: “I began to have doubts, to question the basis of everything. Without giving up my naturally healthy liking for nature, the open air, etc., I began to perform all kinds of experiments ‘in order to see’. Along with a few friends (some of the brightest pupils in the *lycée* but all a little wild) I tried alcohol, tobacco, night life, etc. I tried knocking myself out [...] in order to study just how consciousness disappears and what power I had over it.” Until the day of his death, Daumal’s life unfolded amid delirious experiences, flirtations with Surrealism, the self-study of Sanskrit, poetry and a turbulent state of mind due to a succession of illnesses.

<sup>22</sup> That is, *Mount Analogue: A Tale of Non-Euclidean and Symbolically Authentic Mountaineering Adventures*. Ed. Atalanta, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> In other words, unfinished, incomplete, in a permanent state of “desiring” and formed by the margins, faults and cracks of a disjointed discourse, doomed to never settle.

<sup>24</sup> Of a formal and conceptual order.

<sup>25</sup> “I love mountains, so probably my choice was instinctive,” Antonioni once replied when asked if his “mountains” had appeared by chance when enlarging an image.

<sup>26</sup> The exhibition in question was titled *Le montagne incantate*, and it ran at the Correr Museum in Venice as part of the 1983 Art Biennale, under the auspices of Maurizio Calvesi, director of the art section, and Gian Luigi Rondi, director of the film section. It was therefore a proposal that crossed the boundaries of both disciplines from its very conception. That same year, Antonioni was awarded the Golden Lion for the 1983-1986 quadrennium in recognition of a career that honoured not only Italian cinema, but also his research and pursuit of his own style on an international level.

"And why not?" Antonioni replied.

"Aren't you afraid of running out painting only mountains?" the visitor persisted.

"They're imaginary mountains, so they'll never run out."

First shown in 1983, the series of *Enchanted Mountains* that Antonioni began to work on after the Italian premiere of four of his most famous films<sup>27</sup> is a work born of chance, one whose reason for existence is resolved in a photographic medium. Although several explanations have been offered regarding the origin of this unexpected series, Antonioni maintained that it stemmed from a portrait he made during his youth that he tore up into pieces because he was dissatisfied with the results. This is a natural reaction; while anyone would have ended up discarding its fragments,<sup>28</sup> the filmmaker took it further when he saw a mountain had emerged from the map that had been created from the accumulation of tiny shapes, colours and textures, and this was soon confirmed when, with the help of a lens, he enlarged the random overlap of some of those fragments.

After his trilogy of incommunicability<sup>29</sup> Antonioni devoted his time to producing *Il deserto rosso*,<sup>30</sup> his first colour film,<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> I am referring to *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse* (1962) and *Il deserto rosso* (1964).

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps to avoid wasting a second on the thought of a supposed failure.

<sup>29</sup> This definition, which includes the three black-and-white films released by Antonioni between 1960 and 1962—in other words, *L'avventura*, *La notte* and *L'eclisse*—did not meet with the Italian director's approval. According to him, there was strictly no "trilogy of incommunicability", but rather four films shot one after the other, devoted to exploring different types of existential crisis. Based on this clarification, the four films could eventually be grouped under the same umbrella: the aforementioned three and *Il deserto rosso*, his first colour film, released in 1964.

<sup>30</sup> Although it is claimed that he approached this film as a painter paints a picture—in other words, inventing colour schemes rather than photographing natural colours—Antonioni maintained that the curious thing about his pictorial experience is that he never felt like a painter, but rather like a filmmaker who painted.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Rothko and Michelangelo Antonioni admired each other. In a letter that the filmmaker sent to the painter in 1962, on the occasion of his retrospective in Rome, the director wrote: "in these pictures that seem to be made of nothing, that is, made only of colour, I discover something new, one glimpses all that is behind colour, endowing it with meaning, drama, in short, poetry. These pictures are gorgeous, Mr Rothko, and for that matter it is undisputable that this is the furthest limit painting can reach today." For his part, Rothko always maintained that *La notte*—the Antonioni film that premiered in the United

starring the incomparable Monica Vitti in the role of the wife of a petrochemical engineer who, as the result of a car accident, suffers a severe mental trauma that leads to hallucinations, states of mental alienation and the inability to communicate with the people around her. The protagonist's sense of loneliness in a world dehumanised by our techno-industrial actions is something that Antonioni conveys to perfection after working with colour to find the perfect combination of evocative and mysterious chromatic ranges. It is a process of searching and creating that involved an endless number of colour tests,<sup>32</sup> and new paper maps soon emerged from their discarded results that were as or more evocative as those he saw the first time. The colour maps from which his *Enchanted Mountains* emerged.<sup>33</sup>

States in 1962—was not a black-and-white film, but rather a colour film. He attributed its chromatic quality to the infinite number of nuances Antonioni had captured by exhaustively pushing and transcending the limits of black and white.

<sup>32</sup> This somehow represented an opportunity for Antonioni to return to his youthful passion for painting.

<sup>33</sup> While some argue that Antonioni's *Enchanted Mountains* straddle the line between painting and cinema, Giulio Carlo Argan maintained that, as they visualise a duration or span of time rather than representing a space, they are more cinematic than pictorial. This historian stated that they lack the objectual two-dimensionality of a painting and instead have the fluctuation and luminescence of a screen. In any case, he added that they complemented his films perfectly and confirmed the figurative nature of a creator of atmospheres devoted to exploring space, seeking new, mysterious formal and tonal evocations. All of Antonioni's *Enchanted Mountains* are based on a master painting created primarily using the technique of collage, as well as watercolour, ink and pastels. These tiny sketches are still in the final stage, awaiting the technical process of image enlargement—the blow-up—to give them the texture, colour, tonality and dimension that Antonioni wanted to give them. The *Enchanted Mountains* are more than clones, they are replica images and in the alchemical process to which they are subjected between the matrix and the final photograph—the unique original work—one perceives the scope of the visual culture of someone who knows, like Antonioni, of the existence of 16th-century painters who enlarged small pieces of rock to paint mountains; the feeling of sublime solitude evoked by certain Romantic painters through their work; the visionary poetics of the Japanese, giving space to the beyond by fusing the fixed form of mountains with the transient, undulating zones of clouds and sea; the *Texturologies* created by Jean Dubuffet from 1945 onwards; the distant and solitary painting of Henri Matisse; the way in which the painter's life fills the voids of Giorgio Morandi's still lifes (according to Cocteau); the sensorial experience through Rothko's colour and abstraction, etc. Although Antonioni's *Enchanted Mountains* represent a compact, two-dimensional photographic universe in themselves, filled with imaginary

As opposed to the formal, conceptual and emotional unity of this series of mountains by Antonioni, arising from a combination of a manual, technical process and the act of chance, Luigi Ghirri's mountains do not form any structural block but rather appear intermittently in many of the series he produced since the beginning of his photographic career.

Just as we see in the Ferrarese filmmaker's gaze, Luigi Ghirri's gaze, (also) trained in the expanse of a plain, may have led him to transcend the image of the mountains he would see in order to capture, in their multiple possibilities, the idea they conveyed to him on a more conceptual level. Maintaining that photography should be understood as a space of observation, the mountains that Luigi Ghirri would photograph from the beginning of his career,<sup>34</sup> rather than representing reality, are mount analogues that he employs to reverse the idea of man as the entity of measure,<sup>35</sup> questioning the viewer's gaze by placing him or her before macroscopic and microscopic images<sup>36</sup> unsettling our visual perception by adding elements to the images that are not characteristic of the environments they depict, or reminding us that the photographic image, as a synthesis of the

mountains analogous to each other and therefore never the same, the filmmaker's gaze with regards to colour, material and organic, evocative and indefinite forms is something that can be felt behind the countless (enchanted?) frames he inserted into his films, referring the viewer to humid, formless, nebulous, dry and arid universes whose connecting link is that they remain or are seen according to a form of vision that, unlike the totalising gaze of perspective, offers another way of comprehending the landscape. Rather than observing from a central gallery, the enchanted frames that Antonioni inserted into his films respond to a desire to capture and reproduce the emotional intensity of an instant, whether it is of light, the announcement of a change in climate, the steps that determine the rhythm and continuity of a sequence, in short, the instant in which time remains suspended.

<sup>34</sup> In the early 1970s, specifically 1973.

<sup>35</sup> Especially in his series *In Scala* (1977-1978), capturing the visitors to a Rimini theme park moving, like modern Gullivers, between iconic Italian monuments crammed together. By simultaneously appealing to both macroscale and microscale concepts, leading to a profoundly estranging effect in the viewer, Ghirri proposes a journey into our inner selves in order to become aware of the images that we may accumulate when we climb a mountain, and to see beyond once we reach its peak. Even if the mountain is made of papier-mâché.

<sup>36</sup> This is especially evident in the photographic series *Atlante* (1973), consisting of the blow-up technique to enlarge certain pages of an atlas so that the real image and the symbolism of the information are brought to the point of abstraction.

static nature of painting and the dynamism of cinema, is a plea in favour of slowing down movement by inviting contemplation.

While the idea of mountains prowling Antonioni involves sublimating a standardisation of their representation in an analogous manner, according to a typology determined and nuanced by the effects of colour, textures and shapes that evoke a beyond through mist and the abstraction of some enigmatic atmospheres, the idea of mountains referred to by Ghirri stems from the mastery of a kaleidoscopic gaze whose relationship with reality is not so much dependent on what we see and allows us to order, catalogue and rationalise the world, but rather on the essence of what we see, progressively nourishing our desire to imagine possible worlds.

This is the essence that gives meaning to our exhibition: travelling somewhere with the idea of a mountain in our thoughts about which we only know what René Daumal describes to us in his *Mount Analogue*:

That it is a mysterious, inaccessible mountain.

That its matter possesses the curious property of curving the space around it.

That it is located in an unmanifested space.

And that its location requires, first of all, that two people come together, because by being two, the *impossible* becomes *possible*.

Hence the encounter between Michelangelo Antonioni and Luigi Ghirri.

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