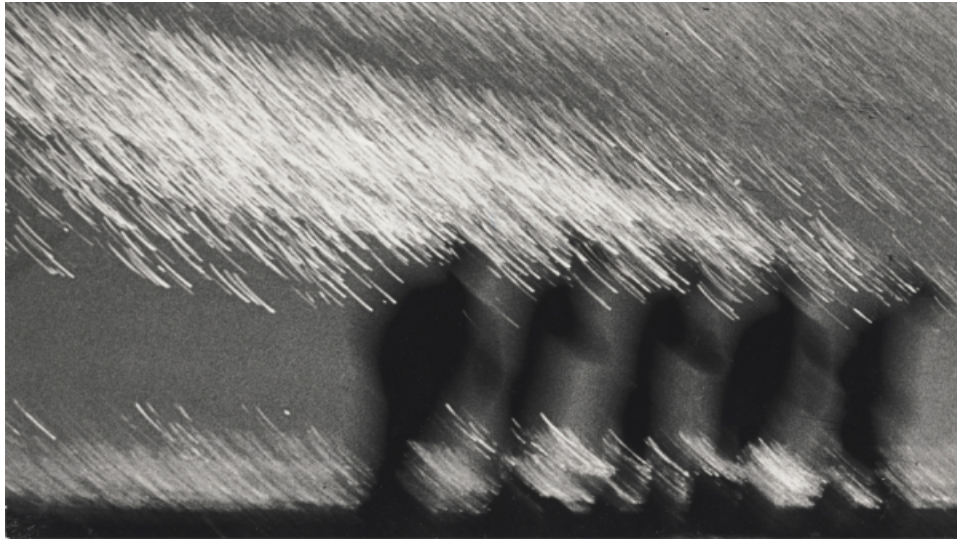


New Getty Exhibitions Explore Modern and Contemporary Landscape Photography

Mario Giacomelli: Figure|Ground and The Expanded Landscape



Le mie Marche, 1970s - 1980s. Mario Giacomelli (Italian, 1925 - 2000). Gelatin silver print 19.7 × 28.1 cm (7 3/4 × 11 1/16 in.) The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Daniel Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser Mario Giacomelli Archive © Rita and Simone 2016.179.53

LOS ANGELES – Known for his gritty, black-and-white images, Mario Giacomelli is recognized as one of the foremost Italian photographers of the 20th century. Drawn from the Getty Museum’s deep holdings, the exhibition *Mario Giacomelli: Figure|Ground* features 91 photographs that showcase the raw expressiveness of the artist’s style, which echoed many of the concerns of postwar Neorealist film and Existentialist literature.

The exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Daniel Greenberg (1941-2021) and was made possible through generous gifts from him and his wife, Susan Steinhauser. As photography collectors for more than two decades and founding members of the Getty Museum Photographs Council, Greenberg and Steinhauser have been generous donors to the Getty. All of the photographs in this exhibition were donated by Greenberg and Steinhauser or purchased in part with funds they provided.

A companion exhibition, *The Expanded Landscape*, presents photographs by 17 contemporary artists guided by aesthetic impulses similar to those of Giacomelli. Both exhibitions will be on view at the Getty Center Museum from June 29 through October 10, 2021.

“After the Museum’s yearlong closure, we are particularly pleased to be able to reopen the Center for Photographs at the Getty Center with two important exhibitions that highlight the Museum’s extensive collections,” says Timothy Potts, Maria Hummer-Tuttle and Robert Tuttle Director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. “We are especially pleased to honor the extraordinary contributions of Dan Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser, whose gifts of works by Giacomelli are the basis of the first monographic exhibition of the artist in a U.S. museum in 35 years. The exhibition and its catalogue are testament both to their passion as collectors and their generosity as benefactors to the Getty Museum over many years.”

Mario Giacomelli: Figure|Ground

Born into poverty, Mario Giacomelli (1925-2000) lived his entire life in Senigallia, a town on the Adriatic coast in Italy's Marche region. He lost his father at an early age and took up poetry and painting before apprenticing as a printmaker, which became his livelihood. After purchasing his first camera in 1953, Giacomelli quickly gained recognition for his unique approach to photographing people, landscapes, and people in the landscape. Although photography was initially relegated to Sundays, when his printshop was closed, and to his immediate surroundings in the Marche, he became one of Italy's most prominent practitioners.

Giacomelli's use of flash, grainy film, and high-contrast paper resulted in bold, geometric compositions with deep blacks and glowing whites. He most frequently focused his camera on the people, landscapes, and seascapes of the Marche. He often spent several years exploring a photographic idea, expanding and reinterpreting it, or repurposing an image made for one series for inclusion in another. By applying titles derived from poetry, he transformed familiar subjects into meditations on the themes of time, memory, and existence.

Among Giacomelli's earliest photographs are portraits of family and friends. His first, sustained body of work was *Hospice*, which he began in 1954 and later titled *Death Will Come and It Will Have Your Eyes*, after a poem by the writer Cesare Pavese. Depicting residents of the home for the elderly in Senigallia and made with flash, the images are characterized by their unflinching scrutiny of individuals living out their last days. Additional early series on view include *Scanno* (1957-59) and *Young Priests* (1961-63), both of which further demonstrate Giacomelli's ability to describe people in a specific time and place. In both series, figures clothed in black are set against stark white backgrounds. While there is an underlying sense of furtiveness or foreboding in the *Scanno* images, the *Young Priests* series, which Giacomelli later titled *I Have No Hands That Caress My Face*, is uncharacteristically light-hearted. Another series, *The Good Earth*, follows a farming family going about daily life, planting and harvesting crops and tending to livestock in the countryside surrounding Senigallia; the intermingling of generations suggests the cyclical nature of existence.

Landscapes feature prominently in Giacomelli's engagement with photography from the beginning. The exhibition features several early works dating from the 1950s, as well as signature series, such as *Metamorphosis of the Land* (1958-80) and *Awareness of Nature* (1976-80). Both series portray fields and small farms in the Marche region, many of which he revisited as seasons changed and crops were rotated. Giacomelli wanted to show how modernized cultivation practices were overtaxing the land and changing the landscape. He often photographed from a low or an elevated vantage point—including from a plane—to eliminate the horizon and create disorienting patchworks of geometric shapes or pulsating configurations of plowed furrows.

In his later years, Giacomelli created several series that intersperse landscapes with figure studies. He often merged the two genres in double exposures or by experimenting with slow shutter speeds and moving his camera during exposure to blur the lines between figure and ground. Several of these series were inspired by poems, both as composed by himself or by others. Giacomelli reflects on the interconnectedness of space, time, and being, in these works, which have a metaphysical quality. *I Would Like to Tell This Memory* is one of his last bodies of work. Incorporating various props, such as a mannequin, a stuffed dog, and stuffed birds, the images in the series suggest that the artist is reflecting on the inevitability of his own mortality.

The Expanded Landscape

Drawn entirely from the Museum's collection, *The Expanded Landscape* presents 17 artists working

between 1990 and today whose work creates a dialogue with recurring themes and techniques in the photographs of Mario Giacomelli. Availing themselves of advancements in photographic technologies and materials and working on a much larger scale, these artists expand on some of Giacomelli's practice and push the genre of landscape photography in new directions.

The works on view similarly privilege the expressive, graphic power of the landscape and a deeply personal relationship with a particular place. They depict the land or sea, are realized in black and white or in color, and have been taken from an aerial perspective or made in direct contact with nature. Some express environmental concerns overtly, others more implicitly. Several are the result of experimental techniques employed in the darkroom or on the computer.

Among the contemporary artists featured are Virginia Beahan and Laura McPhee, Hai Bo, Gregory Crewdson, and Richard Misrach. Many of the works were acquired by donation and many are on view in the Getty Museum galleries for the first time.

"It is exciting to present this collection of Mario Giacomelli photographs assembled by Dan Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser over a period of almost twenty years," says Virginia Heckert, curator of photographs at the Museum and curator of both exhibitions. "Not only does the exhibition introduce a new audience to Giacomelli's work, but it does so through the eyes of the collectors, who were drawn to his expressive portrayals of people and the land. *The Expanded Landscape* complements this overview of this important Italian photographer by showing how contemporary artists use photographic technologies available today to address a similar respect, love, or concern for the land. The dialog between the two exhibitions underscores both continuity and change in photographic traditions."

Mario Giacomelli: Figure|Ground and *The Expanded Landscape* will be on view June 29 through October 10, 2021 at the Getty Center Museum.

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