

artist diary



Alessandro Vicario, Untitled, from the series *Landscapes of Absence*. In the Tracks of Lalla Romano, Milan, 2003. C-print, 72x57 cm. Limited edition of five prints.

ph.-t: Alessandro Vicario*

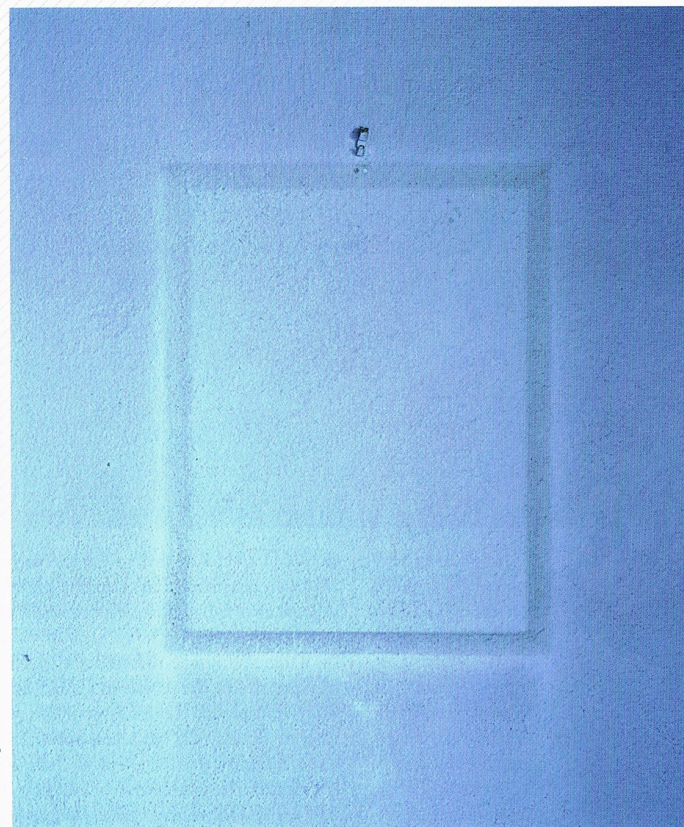
Memories and Images

Photographic Education

I began taking pictures as a child, while still in primary school. My father Ennio, a professional photographer, instilled in me an interest in photography. He taught me the necessary techniques. My first camera was a Rollei with a ground glass viewfinder. I still have it. It brings back memories that have the richness and immediacy of childhood - the fascinating discovery of a magical technique. Photography is alchemy, mystery, contemplation. For many years, I only took black-and-white pictures. I used Ilford Fp4 films, or Hp5 for low-light scenes. This wasn't by choice - black-and-white film was all my father

would give me. Sometimes I asked him for colour film, as I'd seen my classmates using it, especially on school trips, but he seldom granted my wish. Later, I grew to appreciate the immeasurable benefit I'd gained by the long, yet carefree and playful, training in black-and-white photography. I'm still convinced that, in order to learn to take pictures, one should begin with black-and-white film. Only upon mastery of composition, understanding of shapes, geometry, light and shade, should one move on to colour film and/or colour digital photography. In this sense, I have rather traditional ideas, and I've stayed true to my own roots.

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Alessandro Vicario, Bedroom Wall With the Mark Left By My Grandfather's Photo portrait, from the series *Domestic Fragments Between Memory and Oblivion*, Milan, 1999. Lambda print, 73x58 cm. Limited edition of five prints.

Memories in Colour

My father and I would go together and take landscape pictures, in cities, the countryside, but especially in the suburbs. He would use his large- and medium-format cameras, and I would accompany him with my light Rollei. Our shooting adventures were then followed by the alchemy of the dark room, where the images we had recorded on film - known to me as the mysterious latent image - took shape and turned into negative images. Finally, those negatives were turned into positive images on paper via the photographic printing process.

From the very beginning, it was mostly details that caught my attention. One can see this in the pictures I took as a child. Sometimes I tried to fulfil my longing for colour by using coloured felt-tip pens on prints - I was again imitating my father, who sometimes used this technique. The focus on detail

and colour is still a permanent feature of my work.

My Selection for the "Image in Progress" Artist Diary Now to the present: For "Artist Diary", I chose some of the works that the Milanese gallery Made4Art had shown at the fourth Step09 Milan Art Fair, which took place at the Fabbbrica del Vapore from February 22 - 24, 2013.

"Bedroom Wall With the Mark Left By My Grandfather's Photographic Portrait" belongs to the series "Domestic Fragments Between Memory and Oblivion", one of my first research works, dated 1999. This is my favourite work. In my opinion, it is also my best. And, given that it is one of my earliest photographs, I don't know if I should feel proud of this or worried about it! The efficacy of an image, or of an entire project, depends mostly on how good the initial idea was, and on the inspiration level during its conception and creation. That said, success also relies

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Alessandro Vicario at the age of eight, photographed by his father Ennio, Milan, 1977.

Alessandro Vicario, Self-Portrait As a Child, Milan, 1977. Silver gelatin print on fibre-based paper with direct colour manipulation with coloured felt-tip pens. 10x13 cm.



probably the most creative act of the whole process - and at that of shooting - the most technical step.

"Domestic Fragments Between Memory and Oblivion" is my most intimate work. In January, 1999, my deeply beloved paternal grandmother, Jole, passed away. The flat where she had lived for more than fifty years was cleared out, so that it could be sold. The resulting emptiness, apart from exposing things that had previously been hidden, had filled itself with absence. The lack of furniture brought back to light traces charged with memory. For more than a week, I worked through those empty, silent rooms, with an old Linhof Technicardan (a large-format camera for 10x12cm plates). I observed, recalled, waited for, or re-created, the light I wanted, and then I took pictures. The resulting work is immersed in the time deposited on the house's walls and inside us - the time of gaze and memory, the time of oblivion. Immaterial dimen-

sions of experience that reveal themselves through material, tangible traces, that the photographic representation transfigures, transforms into signs.

The image showing the backrest of the white chair on white tiles is taken from the series **"Landscapes of Absence. In the tracks of Lalla Romano"** from 2003. Here, too, the subjects of the pictures were interior details: the Milanese apartment of writer Lalla Romano. I took pictures there shortly after her death. The apartment still looked the way she had left it. Unlike my Grandmother Jole's, Romano's home was crammed with objects: furniture, books, paintings, papers, photographs, personal belongings. It was hard to find an empty space. But that was exactly what I'd chosen to do, inspired by one of the most typical cyphers of her prose. Romano herself, introducing her novel *Nei mari estremi*, observes: "To me, writing has always meant picking out from the thick, elaborate fabric of life, just some image, from the world's noise, just some note - and surrounding them with silence". These words struck me, because what I do with photography is really nothing more than isolate a few details from the complex fabric of the world, and surround them with empty spaces, with silence.

"Viktoria, 02/10/2009, 11:00 a.m." is part of a series entitled "Orizzonti" (Horizons), a project I began in 2006 and continued until 2011. Although I've neglected it since then, it's still unfinished, a work in progress. I hope to pick it up again soon -

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Alessandro Vicario, Untitled, Milan, 1977. Silver gelatin print on fibre-based paper with direct colour manipulation with coloured felt-tip pens. 10x13 cm.

not just with still images, but also with moving ones. We'll see. It's a silent, contemplative kind of work. Perhaps more than other works of mine, it defies any attempt at verbal rationalisation. "Horizons" is, for me, a way to get visually closer to the dimension of beyond, of the unreachable. The horizon line represents this limit: we move towards it, yet it keeps getting further away. It is impossible to reach. It is a symbol of human tension towards the infinite, the eternal, the absolute - a tension that is dramatic and destined not to be fulfilled, a contrast to our mortal condition and our knowledge of our own mortality. Images, though, must go beyond verbal explanations. Explanations can be misleading. For example, one could believe that this project had been borne of an abstract idea, and then translated into images. But that's not the case. On the contrary - and this is true for all my works so far - the idea for a project always springs from a visual intuition.

"Mühlenstrasse (East Side Gallery), 11/11/2009, 11:42 a.m." is taken from "Along the Wall. Berlin 2009". It is one of my most recent works - carried out through 2009, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall - it was exhibited at the Mudima Foundation in Milan in 2010, twenty years after German reunification. The exhibition, curated by Giovanni Pelloso and Roberta Valtorta, was accompanied by a catalogue, published by Silvana Editoriale. The whole work played with the contrast between the still-

ness of the Wall's remains, always sharp in the background, and the evanescence of human shapes, always caught in their movement. In contrast to portrait painters who claim to be able to grasp the essence of a model's soul, I believe that the complexity of the individual tends to be elusive. At least, that is my feeling. In her essay published in the catalogue, Roberta Valtorta hit the mark when she wrote that my blurred images "have an existential, psychological, even sociological value. They express a tremor, an instability; they show the attempt of the contemporary human being to get in touch with the world he lives in, to understand what changes faster - the places around him or his own life?"

Now It's Video Time

During the last few years, I haven't developed any new work. At the moment, most of my time and energy are devoted to studying cinematography. Since presenting my first video installation, as part of the exhibition at the Mudima Foundation, I'm increasingly oriented towards combining still and moving images. My last work from 2011 is also a video installation. I will start working again soon, but I don't know exactly when. I've been mulling over some new ideas, but it's too early to talk about them now.

[translation by Elena Polenghi and Ginger L. Brown]

Alessandro Vicario

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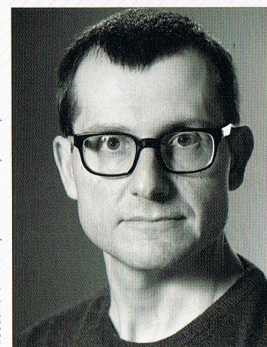
Alessandro Vicario, Mühlenstrasse (East Side Gallery), 11/11/2009, 11:42 am. (from the series Along the Wall, Berlin 2009). True giclée print, 80x53 cm. Limited edition of six prints + 2 AP.

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Alessandro Vicario, Viktoria, 02/10/2009, 11:00 am., from the series Horizons, Viktoria (Germany, 2009). True giclée print, 60x60 cm. Limited edition of four prints.

Alessandro Vicario, Self-Portrait, Milan, 2013.



**Alessandro Vicario was born in Modena in 1968. He has been practising the art of photography from an early age. He grew up and studied in Milan, where he still resides. In 1998, he completed his professional training at the Istituto Italiano di Fotografia di Milano, on a scholarship. He has been teaching at the institute since 2005. Born from a longing for knowledge and proximity, his images often look like finds rescued from destruction or oblivion, where the object, reproduced without artifice, becomes a presence rich in references. Since 2000, his works have been shown in*

several exhibitions, in public spaces and galleries. Some of his works belong to prestigious private and museum collections such as those of Alinari 24 ORE (Florence), Museum Villa dei Cedri (Bellinzona), Mudima Foundation (Milan), Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo Foundation, Centro de Fotografia Isla de Tenerife (Sta. Cruz de Tenerife). His work has been published in several books and in seven monographs. The most recent among them is Along the Wall, Berlin 2009, edited by G. Pelloso and R. Valtorta, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo, 2010.

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