

## *Tamen Simul #2*

by Francesco Zanot

Carlo Valsecchi's work is a unique blend of science, sci-fi and dream. His images seem to be both documentary evidence and frames from a film, set in the near and undefined future. He combines the mesmeric moods of the book *Evidence* (the photographic masterpiece by Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan) with the timeless spaces conjured by de Chirico and the stunning sets of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which not accidentally alternates cold spaceship interiors with burning desert dust.

It is not clear what is happening in the places where these photographs were taken; nor what occurred before the photographer arrived. What is that hole that appears to swallow up everything around it and to float in a pure white field? And what are those geometric forms halfway between a video game of the last century and an Agnes Martin painting? From which point of view did the photographer shoot the image that shows the earth burning and opening up beneath a cloud of smoke? Perhaps it would not be that important to ask these questions if the overriding feeling was not one of finding ourselves on the verge of collapse (*Armageddon*) or, conversely, of a major reconfiguration. Even in the midst of suspended time (there is no trace of any event, no decisive moment), these photographs give us the sensation that we are looking at something essential, indispensable, absolute. Each of Carlo Valsecchi's images works individually, independently of all the others. In this respect, his photography is closer to painting: there is neither narrative, nor sequence in the traditional sense, but a constellation of works conceived as stand-alone pieces, which invite us to contemplate them, to question ourselves, and eventually to lose ourselves. Carmelo Bene called this *abandonment*: "No matter how hard a spectator tries, they should never be able to describe what they heard, nor to define the feelings by which they were possessed during their abandonment to the theatrical event." All we have to do is substitute the word *theatrical* with *gallery*. The *Tamen Simul #2* exhibition is divided into three sequential parts - an introduction and two gallery rooms. Three periods. The itinerary begins with images that draw inspiration from the vast technical field, then gradually shifts to an industrial and technological context, to finally focus on the environment. The transition from artificial to natural is seamless. The leap is made without any sharp distinction between the two. No split, no break. Valsecchi's universe is one of a kind: expansive and muted. Profound. Profoundly silent. The artist moves through the genres of photography and art as if they had never existed. He dances on their body. Here the terms architecture, still-life and landscape lose all their specific meanings. Photographs taken inside state-of-the-art production plants cohabit with images of machinery, empty rooms, volcanoes, earth, water, mud. The vast gap separating these subjects is closed by the mysterious and enigmatic mood that holds them together. Philosophy, mathematics, dazzling light: in Valsecchi's hands the abysses of knowledge possess a surprising brilliance.

Thus, photography becomes an essential tool for reflecting on the relationship between reality and abstraction. Here, two apparently opposing notions become closely related. Moreover, we find ourselves in a historic moment in which this language is gradually moving away from the idea of truth and increasingly establishing itself as an alternative to it. Photography as interpretation, reconstruction and trigger of possible worlds. What makes Valsecchi's work particularly meaningful is the fact that it unleashes this linguistic and semantic storm without the help of any technological upgrades. No massive digital manipulation, no AI, no generative image software. The camera (*camera obscura*) alone is enough to undermine our certainties about the world, the way we perceive it, and the strategies we have developed to know it. In Valsecchi's images, even the difference between infinitely small and infinitely large is diminished. The camera is used equally as a microscope and a telescope. It is a challenge to optics and perspective: infinitesimal particles of matter become lands to conquer or geometric dwellings sculpted in dust. Mounds of earth are transformed into mountains to be climbed. Valsecchi's photographs chart imaginary places mixed with others that are familiar landmarks on our regular maps. This original topography is an invitation to discover a world in which there seemed to be nothing more to discover, because every adventure had already been accomplished. New sublime.

The term *sublime* is key in describing Valsecchi's work and (re)framing the works brought together in this show. Whatever the subject, the scale, the place in which they are located, in Europe or on another continent, on top of a mountain or in the middle of the ocean, these images are simultaneously a source of attraction and disorientation, pleasure and apprehension. It is a question of intensity, of breaking down borders, of crossing the threshold of the ordinary. Utilizing a medium that promises clarity, Valsecchi constantly confronts us with something that cannot be deciphered immediately, leaving us bewildered. It is not a question of contemplation, but of momentarily losing our bearings. These images make us aware of the limits of our perception.

While photography usually instils certainties and provides a measure, here it is completely the opposite. Photography as experience. Photography that must not only be seen, but also lived.