

THE IMAGE OF THE EMPRESENTE. **FOSCO MARAINI**. A RETROSPECTIVE

08.06.2024 - 19.01.2025

Selection of images for the media

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THE BEGINNINGS

01



[Lily of the valley]. Italy. 1930 approx.
Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

Maraini's interest in the minutiae of flora and fauna, likely derived from his naturalistic training, is a consistent theme in his photography. This is not the same as the "macrophotography" exemplified by Roman Vishniac (1897-1990), but rather a nuanced examination, a journey through the tiniest elements of the visible.

02

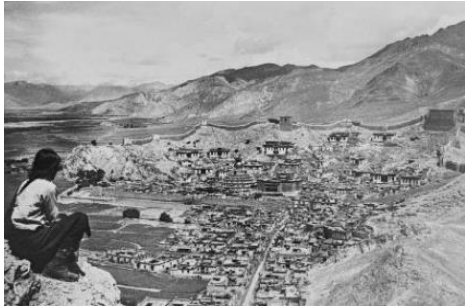


Risk of death!. Italy. Florence. 1928.
Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The work was exhibited at the National Exhibition of Futurist Photography, held at the Permanent Exhibition in Via della Borsa in Trieste in April 1932. It is among the best known of his early photographic activities. The young man climbing the pylon is Bernardo Seeber (1912-2005), one of Fosco Maraini's closest friends and a companion on many of his youthful excursions and climbs.

SECRET TIBET

03



Gyantse. Tibet. Gyantse. 13 April- 5 July 1937.
Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The photograph of Gyantse from one of the surrounding hillocks is already present in the thirty-seven small-format prints that Maraini sent to his wife Topazia Alliata (1913-2015) in Bagheria in August 1937.

04



[Princess Pemá Chöki Namgyal]. India. Sikkim. Nāthū Lā Pass. 27 February-18 May 1948.
Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

Pemà Chöki Namgyal (1925-1969) was the second daughter of Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963), the Chogyal (monarch) of Sikkim from 1914 until his death. Endowed with great beauty and a keen interest in culture and the arts, she met Maraini in 1948 near the Nāthū Lā Pass (4310 m.), on the present-day border between India and China. This is undoubtedly Maraini's most well-known and iconic photograph.

05

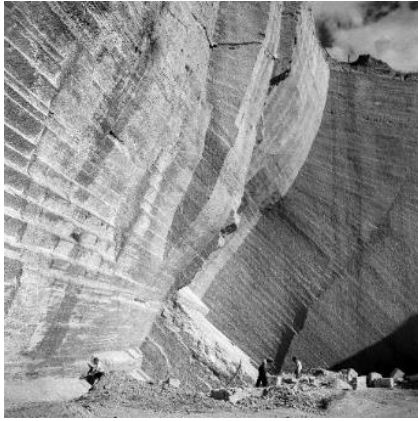


Wandering musician. Tibet. 1937.
Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The series of photographs from which this image is derived is entitled 'Between Sakang and Gyantse: Group of Travelling Dancers' and was taken between 13 April and 25 July 1937.

OUR SOUTH

06



Tuff quarry. Italy. Sicily. Siracusa. 1946-1953.
 Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.
 In Maraini's vision, the great Syracuse tuff quarries emerge from the ground in a manner reminiscent of mountains, their surfaces marked by a dense horizontal web of sculpted lines that give them a resemblance to sails in the wind.

07



[*Laundry Day*]. Italy. Campania. Naples. 1952-1953.
 Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The photographic documentation of working-class neighbourhoods in southern cities, particularly Naples and Palermo, constitutes a genre in its own right within Maraini's portraits in *Our South*. These images frequently adopt a perspective from below, offering a glimpse of the crowded streets that exemplify the typical urban vitality of the ancient capitals, prior to the processes of modernisation that have forever altered their appearance.

LANDING IN GREECE

08

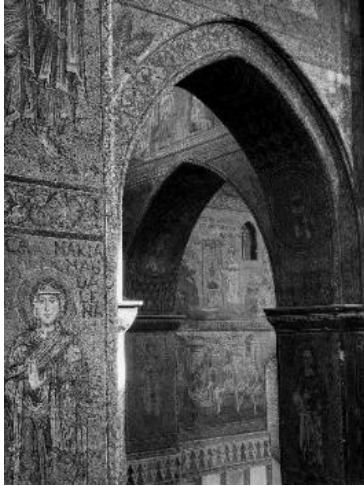


[*New Myths*]. North Greece. June 1951.
 Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The image is characterised by a clear visual contrast. Two Muslim peasant women are depicted observing a billboard advertising the 1948 film *The Walls of Jericho*, directed by John Malcolm Stahl (1886-1950).

THE MOSAICS OF MONREALE

09



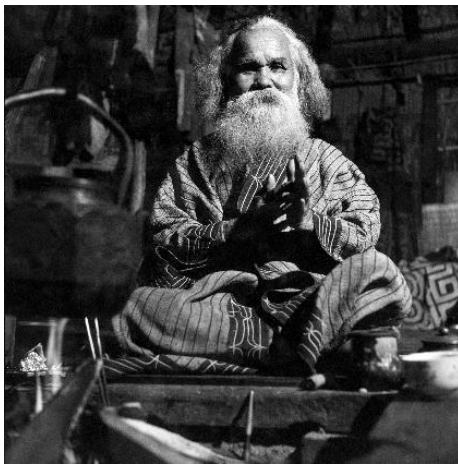
Two arcades. Italy. Palermo. Cathedral of Monreale. 1951.

Copyright: © 2024 Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome.

In contrast to the “anatomical” decomposition of subjects required by Kitzinger, Maraini restores the integration between architectural design and decoration that creates the “impressive scenography” of Monreale. This integration is particularly evident in the image of Mary Magdalene in the foreground on the left and the point of light in the window at the top right, which merge with the photographer's perspective to create a plot of great visual poignancy.

A CITLUVIT LANDS IN HOKKAIDŌ

10



Greetings the guest. Japan. Hokkaidō. Shiraoi. 1953-1954.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

As Maraini writes, Ushungesh is the chief of Shiraoi, a village along the sea where few Ainu remain. Maraini has known Ushungesh for over twenty years and considers him a reliable and honourable friend. He is a skilled hunter and a traditional bear hunter, one of the last ekashi who preserves the ancestral heritage of their traditions. Here, he is seated at the hearth and greets his guest in the Ainu way, by bringing his hands together. The name Ushungesh is derived from the Ainu words ush (lit. 'to enter the sea'), un (lit. 'at, by') and gesh (lit. 'shore').

11



Children run onto the Lake Kutcharo. Japan. Hokkaidō. 1953-1954.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The image of the two Ainu children running towards the photographer can be considered an exemplar of the "empresente" photography theorised by Maraini. It is a moment among a thousand that has been "captured" by the photographer's eye to fully express his vision of the world.

ETERNAL JAPAN

12



The struggle against nothingness. Japan. Tokyo. Ueno Park, 1963.

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The photograph, which depicts the acrobatic exercise of a fireman during the New Year festivities, is undoubtedly influenced by images created by photographers associated with the Yokohama School between 1860 and 1910.

13



[Thirst for knowledge]. Japan. 1953-1963.

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The photograph of a child who, like an adult, flips through a newspaper displayed for sale on the street, is an example of the ironic treatment of the world of childhood that is typical of this genre.

14



[Ready to get off]. Japan. Tohoku. 1963.

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Maraini's photograph successfully captures the moment of anxious anticipation of the girl, formally dressed in a kimono, as she prepares to disembark from the train at a small station in Tohoku. The image has been cropped in a square format in order to provide a visual analogy with the other works in the section.

15



Mother Shining Knowledge. Japan. Kyoto. Gioji Temple. 1954.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The ideographic space theorised by Maraini is exemplified in the portrait of the abbess of the temple of Gioji. The print has been slightly trimmed while retaining the original square format.

THE FISHERWOMEN OF HÈKURA

16



[Down, definitely fall]. Japan. Island of Hèkura. 1954.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The image of the fisherwoman swimming vertically towards the bottom is not only relevant for its composition, but also for its ability, theorised by Maraini in one of her 1950 writings, to represent the landscape in which the viewer is immersed in a subtly unreal, dreamlike environment. The image depicts a world where cliffs covered in seaweed extend towards the blue of the seabed, while dark ravines full of primordial fears are skimmed across. We are situated at a considerable distance from the world of the sky, mountains and sun. Here, the boundaries of possibility and uncertainty are extended”.

17



[*Pause above a rock*]. Japan. Island of Hèkura. 1954.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

In *The island of fisherwomen* (1960, p. 79), Maraini posits “that the Ama produce a distinctive hissing sound (amabui) when emerging from the sea, grasping the boat’s broadside to steady themselves. Each dive may last in excess of a minute. Following approximately twenty dives (equivalent to one hour of work), the Ama return to the boat and rest for about half an hour”.

KARAKORUM AND OTHER MOUNTAINS

18



[*In the crevasse*]. Pakistan. Hindu-Kush – 18 June-25 September 1959

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The snow bridge over which the three Italian mountaineers climb serves to heighten the sense of depth of the bell-shaped crevasse that opens at their feet into a dark, seemingly endless chasm.

19



The Dukadak Pass. Pakistan. Hindu-Kush – 18 June-25 September 1959.

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The technique of photographing individuals observing a distant landscape from behind was successfully experimented by Maraini from his early photographic days and has been used not only in alpine photography, but also in less extreme contexts. The greatest merit of such framing probably lies in the spatial involvement conveyed to the reader of the image.

20



[*Carrier in the Ice*]. Pakistan. Karakorum. Baltoro Glacier. June 1958.

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The optimal asymmetrical frame, which encompasses Gasherbrum I, was captured from a cave situated in the high glacier of Gasherbrum South. This image has been humanised and imbued with narrative dimension through the introduction of a foreground portrait of the Walser mountaineer Giuseppe Oberto (1923-2018), the last of the protagonists of the 1958 expedition to disappear.

Dinner at the Big Frost. Pakistan. Pakistan.

Hindu-Kush. 18 June-25 September 1959.

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The aesthetic attention that characterises the line of Chitral bearers along the ascent towards the Dukadak pass leads Maraini's photograph to transcend the documentary intent altogether, configuring itself within the sphere of art photography.

21



THE LAST PAGANS

22



Kafir little girl. Pakistan. Hindu-Kush. Chitral. September 1959.

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The traditional costume of Kalash women, which was worn from childhood onwards throughout their lives, comprised a tunic of brown, foot-length sheep's wool and a hood made of a strip of sheep's wool, the same colour as the tunic. The hood was decorated with onions and bits of metal, medals and jingling trinkets; a coloured wool pom-pom was sewn onto the top.

THE ROCKS OF JERUSALEM

23



[Crush barriers and war rubble]. Israel. Jerusalem. Autumn 1967.

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Maraini's stylistic signature is evident in the unexpected perspective of the Jerusalem walls, which, in a context reminiscent of a 19th century postcard, appears to convey the tumultuous history of the city. As Maraini notes, "destroyed, rebuilt, shattered and recomposed so many times that, if we could see a film of frames taken one a year and re-photographed at normal speed, the spectacle would be like an epileptic jolt. In this tumultuous vortex, the final atoms are the stones.

These rocks, which are golden-blond in colour, appear to be imbued with light and solar warmth".

LETTERS FROM ASIA

24



The face of the bodhisattva devoured by the forest. Cambodia. Angkor - 1-4 November 1962

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

The image depicts the face of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, which has been devoured by the forest at the entrance of the small temple of Ta Som in Angkor (late 12th century). The huge canopy of lianas no longer exists today, having been removed by a massive restoration of the architectural complex. The shot forms part of a series of photographs with a similar subject.

THE CLOUDS

25



[Mackerel Sky]. Italy. Sicily. Trapani. 1946-1953.
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The pleasing visual interplay between the clouds and the sheep, distinguished by their white fleece, is here tempered by the presence of a six-bladed windmill, constructed in the sixteenth century to grind salt or pump seawater.

26



[The Cloud Genius]. Italy. Sicily. Cefalù. 1946-1953.

Copyright: Photograph by Fosco Maraini / Property Gabinetto Vieusseux © 2024 Archivi Alinari.

To the left of the two figures climbing the Caldura Tower, a small-bodied genius with a large head, a prominent nose and an open mouth appears to be sketched in the 'fleeting moment' captured against the light by Maraini's camera.

THE COLOURS OF FIRE

27



[Fire clouds]. Italy. Lombardy. Sesto San Giovanni. Stabilimento "Unione" - March 1956.
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The cooling operations of the flows occasionally result in distinctive lighting effects, such as the cascade of lapilli generated by the fire cloud photographed by Maraini.