

FRANCESCO FRANCAVIGLIA

MEDITERRANEAN DARKNESS Portraits from the carnage

Photography exhibition edited by Marco Delogu

Introduction by Franca Imbergamo – National Deputy Prosecutor

Texts by:

Pietro Grasso – President of the Senate;

Luisa Morgantini – Former Vice President of the European Parliament;

Salvo Palazzolo – Journalist for La Repubblica;

Lirio Abbate – Journalist for L'Espresso;

Prof. Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo – Human Rights Law Clinic University of Palermo;

Inauguration: Tuesday 21 July, 5.30 p.m.-7.30 p.m.

Opening: 22 July – 20 September 2015

MACRO - Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome | via Nizza 138

Press release

“Mediterranean Darkness” is the title of the photography exhibition to be held at the **MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome** from 22 July to 20 September, 2015.

The works on display are by **Francesco Francaviglia**, one of Italy's most interesting contemporary photographers, who was the winner of the 2014 FIAF award and, in autumn last year, his “The Fasting Women” project became the first solo photography exhibition to be hosted by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Dedicated to the memory of the Mafia massacres of Capaci and Via D'Amelio, “The Fasting Women” was a resounding success with public and critics alike, winning many awards. Francaviglia has followed it up with a new project exclusively for the Macro entitled “Mediterranean Darkness”. It consists of a selection of portraits from his “People of Palestine”, “Migrants” and “The Fasting Women” series, whose faces and the darkness surrounding them recount the numerous contradictions of the

peoples that live around the same sea: that Mediterranean that has become witness to terrible atrocities but is nonetheless a place that cannot be ignored for any possible salvation.

The exhibition will be inaugurated at 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday 21 July, in the presence of the National Deputy Prosecutor **Franca Imbergamo**, who wrote the following words in his introduction to the exhibition: *“There is a solid presence in every photo and it is Justice, sought by all these portrait protagonists, humiliated by those who have forced them to flee or to survive in the hell of territories at war, which is proudly sought by the courageous uprising of the Fasting Women.*

You cannot avoid the recurring theme, Justice and Truth, the questions that every face in these portraits poses and which up until now, have not been completely answered, a failure. But the Justice that has been trampled on is not that of the courts. You are mistaken if you think solving problems that directly affect the survival of democracy and the management of migration of biblical proportions can be delegated to criminal prosecution. Wars, famine, oppression, the mafia, impose cultural choices higher than the physical walls and ideals that policies of repression are erecting.

Despite the terrible threat of Islamic terrorism, or more precisely because of its obscure expansion, it is necessary to reaffirm the primacy of universal human rights so as not to lose against this momentous challenge.

Peace and the recognition of human dignity are the only solutions to this unfortunately difficult situation. The Mediterranean is the birthplace of a great civilization and but also seen it die. Now we have to choose... the portraits of Francesco Francaviglia tell, to those who want to listen, what is at stake and perhaps indicate the only way forward.”

And more **Mustafa Sabbagh**: *“The cognizant faces of the Migrants, the People of Palestine, and the Fasting Women against the Mafia form geographical maps with their wrinkles and scars, their keffiyehs that assert belonging and t-shirts that try to hide it, their closed eyes and proud eyes, their eyes that remember and eyes that wish to forget. ... What I hear in the perpetual motion created by Francesco are silences, hiccups and sobs, electro distortions and ancestral sounds, climaxes surging and ebbing like waves, hypnotic rhythms like military marches and appeasing strings like ancient chants. The Mediterranean contaminates East and West with the same water, and enshrouds them in the same depths; the human miracle is to manage to emerge from the depths, each with their own story to tell, written on their face, born in the sea.”*

The exhibition held at the MACRO Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome, with the patronage of the Rome's Department of Culture and Tourism - the Capitoline Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, and staged by Associazione Officine Blu with the support of Associazione Officine Fotografiche Roma and the IED in Florence, will be accompanied by the publication of a numbered limited edition of a book by **BAM** (Bottega Antonio Manta) entitled **FRANCESCO FRANCAVIGLIA MEDITERRANEAN DARKNESS**, which also includes an inedited FineArt print signed by the author and the QR code to download the original sound project of the event. **Edited by Franca Imbergamo, the book includes texts by Luisa Morgantini former Vice President of the European Parliament, Salvo Palazzolo journalist for La Repubblica, Lirio Abbate journalist for L'Espresso, Prof. Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo lawyer Human Rights Law Clinic University of Palermo, Augusto Pieroni contemporary art critic and historian and the photographer Mustafa Sabbagh.**

The “artist's book” will be available from the MACRO bookshop or online from francescofrancaviglia.com.

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INFO

MACRO

via Nizza 138, Roma
Opening hours: Tuesday-Sunday 10.30 a.m.-7.30 p.m.

INFO: 060608

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Francesco Francaviglia's latest collection is called Mediterranean Darkness and by just glancing at the sequence of portraits of Migrants, People of Palestine, Fasting Women against the Mafia, as you walk past, you understand what it means.

With his unique style of photographer and portraitist, Francaviglia has, through some of the most symbolic events of Mediterranean people in modern history immortalised the obscurity of our times. From mafia executions, to wars and famines that cross the lives of its inhabitants, the Mediterranean is being exposed more and more as a sea of contradictions, of slaughtered human beings and quashed hopes.

Photography has an immense, vast evocative power.

Francaviglia uses his faces to tell stories and succeeds admirably as with this collection, primarily a testimony with a remarkable understanding of pain and humanity.

The Mediterranean has always been a crossroads full of challenges in its history and today it is the backdrop of a biblical Migration, an escape for survival that in many, too many, cases becomes impossible due to the scandalously inadequate policies of richer and more fortunate countries.

It is becoming a path that denies the way to safety, an unreachable destination created by the fears of short-sighted people who cannot meet the challenge of history.

The Mediterranean has borne, among many other tragedies, the endless war between Jews and Palestinians, a metaphor of all the cruelty of which has generated the end of reason.

And on the shores of an island, a symbol of the same sea, Sicily, the story of a cancer, a terrible war, the mafia, which challenges democracy with massacres... But conscience has rebelled, the courage of Fasting Women in that terrible summer of 1992, after the Capaci and Via D'Amelio massacres, who took to the streets demanding dignity for an entire nation.

There is a solid presence in every photo and it is Justice, sought by all these portrait protagonists, humiliated by those who have forced them to flee or to survive in the hell of territories at war, which is proudly sought by the courageous uprising of the Fasting Women.

You cannot avoid the recurring theme, Justice and Truth, the questions that every face in these portraits poses and which up until now, have not been completely answered, a failure.

But the Justice that has been trampled on is not that of the courts.

You are mistaken if you think solving problems that directly affect the survival of democracy and the management of migration of biblical proportions can be delegated to criminal prosecution.

Wars, famine, oppression, the mafia, impose cultural choices higher than the physical walls and ideals that policies of repression are erecting.

Despite the terrible threat of Islamic terrorism, or more precisely because of its obscure expansion, it is necessary to reaffirm the primacy of universal human rights so as not to lose against this momentous challenge.

Peace and the recognition of human dignity are the only solutions to this unfortunately difficult situation.

The Mediterranean is the birthplace of a great civilization and but also seen it die. Now we have to choose... the portraits of Francesco Francaviglia tell, to those who want to listen, what is at stake and perhaps indicate the only way forward.

Rome, June 2015

Franca Imbergamo

Investigating man is like diving into the depths of the sea, where everything is blurred and you can't breathe. You need a lens in order to bring things into focus and through which to investigate. Mediterranean Darkness is a perpetual motion of eyes emerging from the blackness, which burn just like salt. All surfaced from the depths, all lapped by the Mediterranean, all generously looking into the lens with open faces, presenting us their tragedy.

Metonymy in pictures, a face for a story. Freedom for freedom, the Mediterranean transforms its depths into a backdrop, its perpetual motion into a stage, into Jean Genet's theatre, whose "stage is a clandestine place, close to death, where every freedom is granted." The freedom granted by the Mediterranean is that of dying to self, to one's past as thick as blood, in order to embrace a present constituted by water, confiding in a future to be written on land. Being free playing a new life, bravely aware that "it is necessary to live tragedy, not to stage it."

The cognizant faces of the Migrants, the People of Palestine, and the Fasting Women against the Mafia form geographical maps with their wrinkles and scars, their keffiyehs that assert belonging and t-shirts that try to hide it, their closed eyes and proud eyes, their eyes that remember and eyes that wish to forget.

A naked child allows herself to be washed in a tub, a woman's furrowed face carries the hint of a smile, a portrait as a memory within a portrait as a testimony, a young man with a bullet worn as a pendant and a groove in his chest that housed a bullet; as in Francisco de Zurbarán's art, they are martyrs trapped in the same waters, in the same darkness of an uncalibrated light, which illuminates all their humanity, and thus all their sanctity. However, while the eyes in Zurbarán's paintings are cast upwards, in Francesco Francaviglia's narrow portraits they are directed at the lens, embracing, inviting, understanding, refusing, accusing. The Native Americans feared photography for they were afraid it could steal their soul. But the Native Americans didn't have the Mediterranean.

I don't believe in so-called "social art" – if it's art it needs no adjectives to disguise or reveal it – but what I see in Mediterranean Darkness is man, and man is what I believe in. What I hear in the perpetual motion created by Francesco are silences, hiccups and sobs, electro distortions and ancestral sounds, climaxes surging and ebbing like waves, hypnotic rhythms like military marches and appeasing strings like ancient chants. The Mediterranean contaminates East and West with the same water, and enshrouds them in the same depths; the human miracle is to manage to emerge from the depths, each with their own story to tell, written on their face, born in the sea.

Mustafa Sabbagh

Excerpt from **Pietro Grasso**, President of the Senate, about The Fasting Women:

"These portraits by Francesco Francaviglia testify to the strength of these women, their dignity and their beauty. Twenty-two years have elapsed, but nothing of the fibre and courage of those days has been even slightly tarnished by time.

They are faces that it is wonderful to see again, eyes that challenge silence and fear.

Only those whose conscience is certain that they have done everything possible to break the code of silence, only those who feel that they have made their contribution, great or small, to the quest for truth and justice, to educating the younger generation to be responsible, to the spread of legality as a shared culture, will be able to look at these photos without having to avert their eyes."

Excerpt from **Luisa Morgantini**, Former Vice President of the European Parliament, about Mediterranean Darkness:

"It is not into a "Mediterranean Darkness" that Francesco Francaviglia drags us with his portraits. They help us break this image, they show a light in the gaze of these victims of darkness that make the Mediterranean hell: the Mafia, poverty, oppression, daily violence, exploitation, military aggression. A hell from which these faces and bodies portray salvation and express their dignity, offering a world of humanity."

Excerpt from **Salvo Palazzolo**, journalist for La Repubblica, about The Fasting Women:

"I rediscovered the stories that I'd forgotten in the eyes of the women of the fast, although I'd reported them at the time. And so I want to rediscover those newspaper pages, and also the notes in my reporter's pad, because I don't want to forget again. On the contrary, I'd like to start seeking the faces of the men and women who occupied the streets of Palermo during those days of 1992. There's an idea about the city's tomorrow in the stories of each of them. It's time to return to recounting these ideas of tomorrow, without fear."

Excerpt from **Lirio Abbate**, journalist for L'Espresso, about Mediterranean Darkness:

"Assisting immigrants in Italy is a huge business and easily penetrable because it is often managed without European tenders but with simple market research.

For this reason we must consider "mafia Capitale" to be both right-wing and left-wing, and at the same time betrays both the values of the right and of the left. Those who ignore the rules of competition and free market, those who use discounts and amnesties to continue to violate the law, as did Buzzi and Carminati, are the negation of the economic and social values of the right. On the other hand, those who use the disadvantages of immigrants, nomads and the homeless to inflate their own wallets betray, in the worst possible way, the values of the left."

Excerpt from **Prof. Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo**, lawyer Human Rights Law Clinic University of Palermo, about Mediterranean Darkness:

"They forget that most people who land in Italy are asylum seekers, war refugees, displaced from destroyed cities, victims of the most terrible horrors of civil war and ethnic or religious persecution. No one is able to open humanitarian corridors to legally bring these people out of Libya. There is certainly no contribution towards the pacification of Libya from the European Union or Italy. ... The Mediterranean and peace in Europe cannot be defended with military missions. We need a political solution for the conflict, the opportunity of legal entry for those who are forced to leave their homelands through war, dictatorship or environmental devastation."

Excerpt from **Augusto Pieroni**, contemporary art critic and historian, about Mediterranean Darkness:

"... how can such a terrible drama lie behind and within such a lovable face, such a maternal gaze, or such an open expression? The photograph forces us to guess, creating a deep, dense spectacle that reveals little on the surface – drowning all the babble in darkness – but keeps the truth of each subject constantly available. The truth is that we are capable of everything: caresses and screams, agitation and melody, insult and beauty, drama and humanity. The sole truth is that it is up to us to choose and Francesco Francaviglia's Mediterranean Darkness reminds of this, like the obsessive warning of morality, like an unanswerable question: «whom do you love most?»"