



0148 Dalmine, Bergamo, IT, 2002

Preface

The Musée de l'Elysée has been following the development of Carlo Valsecchi's work with great interest for the past decade. The Italian photographer's work first came to our attention via *Porto Vado*, a publication which featured a body of imagery focused on a bustling Italian port, with its vast array of vessels, cranes, tubes, cables, stacked products, and the like. The photographs seemed to hover between genres. There was a documentary aspect, but the level of cool abstraction meant that the pictures could not be simply labeled "documentary photographs." There was something of the "still life" in them, but their rootedness in industrial space also made that term a misnomer. In addition, the photographs would qualify for a serious exhibition of architectural photography, or industrial photography, though, here again, the level of abstraction brought to bear on the subject matter would make the fit uneasy. For Valsecchi used long time exposures to efface all human presence, and lend a ghostly abstraction to the pictures. Overall, *Porto Vado* demonstrated a finely attuned eye and an exquisite color sensibility. The photographer's palette is one of softness and restraint, evoking watercolors. Curators often use the shorthand "painterly" to label work of such nuance, but in Valsecchi's case, the term should not detract from what is essentially a *photographic* vision.

This publication was followed by *#0148 Dalmine, IT: Nascita di un terminalizzatore*, in which the photographer addressed the environment of a waste-treatment plant. *#0148* was as visually exciting as the previous book. It was thus on the basis of these two publications that the decision was taken to offer Carlo Valsecchi a mid-career retrospective exhibition. For the past two years, the staff of the museum, led by curator Nathalie Herschdorfer, has been working with the photographer on the selection for the exhibition and this publication. Valsecchi is a prolific photographer, and although we have tried to cover all aspects of his work to date, it was a difficult task to reduce a number of bodies of work, each vast in scope, to the more than one hundred plates shown here. Nevertheless, we believe we have covered the terrain.

Lovers of fine art photography, amateur or professional, are quick to see the influence of the "German School" in Valsecchi's work, particularly that of Andreas Gursky. Others have noted similarities with Edward Burynsky. There are, indeed, common elements, as well as more influences: the early twentieth-century industrial work of Albert Renger-Patzsch, and

Werner Mantz, for example, or, from more or less the same period, the "painterly" abstraction of the American painter/photographer Charles Sheeler. Valsecchi is a sophisticated artist, well aware of historical precedent, and fully conscious of the work of artists with parallel interests. He has, however, forged his own path, at the heart of which there is a spiritual and intellectual engagement with our industrial world (which includes the vast tracts of South American agribusiness). In an interview with writer Javier Barreiro Cavestany, Valsecchi speaks of the mystery and infinite sense of possibility industrial spaces suggest to him: "The power of a mill lies in the fact that, though a single place, it contains all other places.... The first time I entered a steel mill I had the feeling of total freedom, like being at home. This is true for all the industrial sites I have worked in. I don't know how to explain it. They are places that belong to me, and I belong to them." In *Lumen*, Carlo Valsecchi shares this sense of belonging with us.

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