

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

For Immediate Release

Contacts

Allegra Favila: allegra.favila@nyu.edu
212/998-6789

EXHIBITION EXAMINES CRITICAL ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN ITALIAN NEOREALISM

NeoRealismo: The New Image in Italy, 1932–1960

On view at **New York University's Grey Art Gallery** and **Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò**
September 6–December 8, 2018



Pasquale De Antonis
Rapino, lucky fishing
Abruzzo, 1935
© Archivio De Antonis

NeoRealismo: The New Image in Italy, 1932–1960 poignantly portrays life in Italy through the lens of photography before, during, and after World War II. While neorealism is associated primarily with cinematic and literary depictions of dire postwar conditions, this is the first major museum exhibition to highlight key photographers active at the time. Featuring approximately 175 photographs by over 60 Italian artists, *NeoRealismo* pairs them with the original publications in which they circulated—illustrated magazines, photobooks, and exhibition catalogues. On view at **NYU's Grey Art Gallery** from **September 6 through December 8, 2018**, the show also includes film excerpts by such notable directors as Vittorio De Sica, Roberto Rossellini, and Luchino Visconti, alongside related movie posters.

Neorealism—as both a formal approach and a mindset—reached the height of its popularity in the 1950s. Organized by Admira and curated by Enrica Viganò, *NeoRealismo* is making its American debut at the Grey after traveling in Europe to wide acclaim. A selection of the photographs will also be on view at NYU's Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò. As Viganò observes, “*NeoRealismo* takes a unique approach

to the period between 1932 and 1960 in bringing together various media and materials that have never before been grouped together in the same context.” Grey Art Gallery director Lynn Gumpert adds, “*NeoRealismo* explores how Italian photographers conveyed daily political realities during these three decades, a subject that is particularly resonant today. We are very

pleased to bring this important exhibition to the Grey, which, as a university art museum, consistently draws attention to underrepresented but culturally relevant bodies of work.”

Exhibition

Neorealism inspired diverse approaches to photography. While neorealist prints are most often considered within the postwar period, their impact spans decades. The installation’s first section, **Realism in the Fascist Era**, takes the year 1932—which saw the opening of the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution*—as its point of departure. On display for two years at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, this propagandistic show presented photography as an instrument of mass communication, one that mined its educational and informational potential. Photographic images carried the “proof” of Mussolini’s declarations and testified to the truth of his words. Though it often veiled the differences between information and propaganda, photography provided a language that was accessible to all in the face of widespread illiteracy, regional dialects, and social inequality.

By the end of the war, Italy was in ruins. Despite its material devastation, however, the country experienced a widespread sense of euphoria and rebirth. This feeling of moral redemption underlies what historians have termed “the Italian miracle” of the 1950s and ’60s, and the newfound freedom to reveal the realities of a wounded country re-creating itself gave rise to neorealism. **Poverty and Reconstruction** examines dramatically contradictory depictions of Italy during this period. Photographers such as Tullio Farabola and Stefano Robino captured daily life under these difficult conditions, which nevertheless vibrated with hope and vitality.

With the fall of Fascism, neorealism became the dominant form of expression. Artistic freedom and the need to rebuild a new Italian identity fueled a nationwide fervor for documentation—the testimony of quotidian reality. **Ethnographic Investigation** demonstrates how photography played an essential role in attempts to establish a collective identity in postwar Italy. Now the educational function that had been exploited during the Fascist period was placed at the service of democratization.

After the war, Italian regions remained fragmented, each affected by different economic and social conditions. Figures such as Mario Cattaneo, Franco Pinna, and Arturo Zavattini helped Italy establish a new national identity by photographing the country’s many faces, reaching a high point in the neorealist era. In this heyday of social photojournalism, ambitious reportage projects portrayed many parts of Italy, documenting life as it was lived. Motivated by a desire to convey the realities of Italian experience, photographers with varying degrees of social awareness and political engagement traveled to every corner of the country.



Mario Cattaneo
From the series **Alleys in Naples**
Naples, 1951-1958
© The Heirs of Mario Cattaneo

An increase in printed media outlets spurred a variety of photographic approaches and transformed the photographer’s role. Newspapers, which previously had hired freelance photographers, began to incorporate them into editorial teams, promoting their work and viewing it as part of their distinct branding. **Photojournalism and the Illustrated Press** focuses on this

golden age, when photographic narratives came to resemble cinematography, with spreads covering numerous pages and major reportage released in episodes, special inserts, and supplements. Despite their dramatically different perspectives, these print-media photographers—including Carlo Cisventi, Tino Petrelli, Marisa Rastellini—are linked by their interest in realism and their rejection of the artificial.

The exhibition's final section, **From Art to Document**, features works by photographers such as Pietro Donzelli and Giuseppe Bruno, who were engaged in heated discussions about neorealism's legacy. Between 1943 and 1960, photo clubs provided meeting places where artists debated the creative value of photography and its future. Two opposing schools of thought arose. For some, neorealism represented a rigid restriction of expression that stifled the photographer's creative potential. Others felt that unless photography retained a strong connection with real life and was informed by a sense of civic engagement, it risked becoming a formal exercise. These two camps became entrenched over time, resulting in extended arguments and hardened divisions. Nevertheless, their debates laid the foundations for the future of photographic criticism in Italy.

NeoRealismo's presentation at the Grey Art Gallery and Casa Italiana Zerilli-Merrimò (which will feature works by the photographers along with film posters) has inspired related exhibitions across New York City. The Howard Greenberg Gallery has organized *The New Beginning for Italian Photography, 1945–1965* from September 13–November 10 while the Metropolitan Museum of Art is featuring a selection of postwar images from the permanent collection in the Johnson Galleries from September 18, 2018–January 15, 2019. Also on view is *Nuova Fotografia Italiana* at the Keith de Lellis Gallery from September 5–November 3, 2018.

Exhibition Catalogue

NeoRealismo will be accompanied by a 352-page publication that includes 218 illustrations. Translated into English for the Grey's presentation, this publication includes a new foreword by renowned film director Martin Scorsese, who is a lifelong fan of Italian neorealism. Additional contributors include Gian Piero Brunetta, professor, History and Criticism of Cinema, Università degli Studi di Padova; Bruno Falcetto, professor, Department of Literature, Philosophy, and Linguistics, Università degli Studi di Milano; Giuseppe Pinna, art historian; and Enrica Viganò, curator and founder of Admira. Published by DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel, the catalogue presents various perspectives by acclaimed scholars on a previously underexplored area.

Sponsorship

NeoRealismo: The New Image in Italy, 1932–1960 is organized by Admira, Milan, and curated by Enrica Viganò. The presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is made possible in part by support from the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, New York University; Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York; and Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York. Additional support is provided by the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Gallery

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on studying art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

About Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, home of the Department of Italian Studies at New York University, intends to spread Italian culture outside of its national boundaries, and considers Italian culture an integral and necessary part of universal culture. The programs of Casa Italiana deal with literature, cinema, and political and social reflection, all topics upon which Italy has for centuries founded its reputation and international prestige. Seeking to link the discourse on modernity to that of tradition, Casa has demonstrated itself to be open to the discussion of economic, ethical, and juridical themes.

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò involves itself with prominent Italian artists, scholars, and politicians, whose presence constantly engages new points of discussion, opening and encouraging dialog with Americans on Italian life and culture. Casa Italiana collaborates with Italian centers and institutes, and the other analogous institutions within NYU, that have the common objective of deepening and extending Americans' understanding of foreign cultures.

General Information

Grey Art Gallery, New York University
100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212/998-6780, Fax: 212/995-4024
E-mail: greyartgallery@nyu.edu, Website: greyartgallery.nyu.edu

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, New York University
24 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011
Tel: 212/998-8739, Fax: 212/995-4012
E-mail: casa.italiana@nyu.edu, Website: casaitaliananyu.org

Hours

Grey Art Gallery:
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm
OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm
Saturday: 11 am–5 pm
Sunday, Monday, and major holidays: Closed

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò:
Monday–Friday: 10 am–6 pm

Admission

Grey Art Gallery:
Suggested donation: \$5; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge

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