

Roberta Valtorta

ARCHITECTURES AS TOYS

In Claudio Gobbi's photographs architectures appear like toys, as in fairy tales. His interiors present themselves as neatly ordered stages awaiting a story. The emptiness has a special importance here, the necessary precondition for the characters to enter the scene. Objects—a door, a lamp, a staircase, a sofa, a chair, a radiator—are colourful playthings. And the spaces themselves, the walls and ceilings, fully express the sense of delicate fiction that is essential to any game.

Photographically, this effect is obtained through lighting and stage-setting, a slight shift of the furniture, careful choice of perspective and, not least, by a verticalisation of the space. The scene is cropped vertically, as if reflected in a mirror. The close framing never allows us to see the whole room, which may actually not even exist. This is quite in line with the canons of professional interior photography, but the sense of deliberate fiction represents a sort of comment on the genre, of which the images themselves belong. Gobbi's photography is utterly post-modern: aware of the deep ambiguity that the image feeds on, reflective, apparently simple in structure but masterly in execution. A critical reappraisal of well beaten paths, aware that history has already seen everything and indeed, maybe even history doesn't exist anymore.

In the last few years Gobbi has chosen places that are themselves stage sets, and always interiors. His favourite subjects are theatres, Zen gardens and Armenian churches. In each case he superimposes the fiction of photography with the essential fiction of particular interiors, closed spaces, entirely manmade, full of symbolic value: the theatre as the home of representation par excellence, the Zen garden as a refined artifice created by nature but far from natural, the church as the place of faith and, like the theatre, of eternal performance.

In his most recent work Gobbi presents a number of interiors designed by Carlo Mollino, architect, photographer and author of *Il messaggio dalla camera oscura (Message from the Darkroom)*, published in 1949, in which he discusses the nature of photography. The Lutrario ballroom and the Teatro Regio (Royal Theatre) in Turin are ready-made stage sets rich in visions, meticulously reflecting Mollino's singular and characteristic tastes.

Gobbi chooses to show Mollino's interiors in a playful, colourful, and at the same time mysterious, light. The image is clearly defined, but the tight cropping and verticality (a dominant element in his pictures) give it the semblance of an icon.

The author does not set out to pay tribute to Mollino. What seems to guide his work is an urge to playfulness, at the same time showing great respect for technical rigour. The effect is startling: luminous, brightly coloured images of "toy-rooms" apparently outside of time, whose real size is impossible to gauge. These rooms might even be unreal, recreated by the photographer, a method used,

for instance, by Thomas Demand. Something about them reminds us of miniatures, dolls houses, model furniture, the surfaces of the walls, the floors, the objects, spaces rich in pure colours. Gobbi works simultaneously on the size of the photograph and on the size of the objects, provoking reflection, besides offering a perceptive experience, on the idea of representation. His photography thus explores the concept of the image, of appearance, as a separate reality, independent of the world of sense perception. Again, the image as fairy tale. The scene is set for the characters to enter, all we must do is wait.

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