

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

by Margherita Remotti (english translation by Jackie Madden)

Almost all the cities Claudio Gobbi photographs look alike. Whether it be Milan, Paris, Barcelona, Prague, Copenhagen, Berlin or Warsaw, in the cities he has portrayed we still feel the subterranean spirit of Old Europe alive and kicking. It could be a theatre that signed the times, like the Volksbühne in the German city, or some apparently faceless recreation club in Milan, they are all strictly photographed when they are not in use, but all the same important cultural places that are still strongly patronized and active. In fact the photographer has no interest in social reportage or in the documentation of current trends as costume phenomena, but rather in the documentation of the existence of these places, above all, just the way they are in their persistence. A kind of resistance against the progress at all costs, against the contemporary homologation of aesthetics that wants everything plated by a layer of shiny minimal-chic expressions inclined towards luxury. No, Gobbi's pictures brings history, culture and aesthetics back to the eye, not only of our memories, but of a past that lives on. His critical eye has never accepted modernity without remorse or limits, thus he spontaneously began to create an archive of living and functional heritages of the personality of Old Europe.

Around five years ago, in fact, Claudio Gobbi gave up his studies in Diplomacy to devote his activity to a different form of conversing on cultural heritage and set out on his personal journey around European capitals, to preserve an aesthetic patrimony that reminds us of the way we were and of what we still can be. His mission however, is not a fight at all costs, because this would make it risk becoming simply conservational, rather than a highly diplomatic operation rich with elegant ethical and aesthetic suggestions. His photographs, well balanced, lucid portraits of interiors, are capable of grasping, through skilful shots, the spirit and atmosphere of both days gone by and those of today, immortalizing them in the present day, without nostalgia. They are an invitation above all to never abandon our cultural and historical roots, even more than our external values.

His photos are like anamorphic portraits of an experience, which is precisely that of anybody that lives and knows dear Old Europe. Gobbi is capable of unveiling and bring back into the light, unexpectedly living corners in places that we no longer bother visit. He surprises us with details that we so very often consider run of the mill, like a part of a story that has already seen its day. However, once re-discovered, our mind games spring from the past and bring us back to a present that is still sustainable. So, while the photographer continues his personal diplomatic mission of conversing with our fundamental personalities, its up to us to implement the images he metaphorically evokes and

just like a jig-saw puzzle, piece by piece, reconstruct a portrait of a continent with a deeply rooted and solid identity, as if it were the portrait of an elegant, independent woman, still capable of demonstrating her own culture and values without clamour, by simply showing the best side of herself.