



Fotografia Europea 2012

7th Festival

opening days

11th – 13th may 2011

Common life

images for the community of citizens

We usually think of the community as a concept capable of expressing the idea of belonging to a particular identity, capable of excluding and including at the same time. We thus forget how the term “community” expresses exactly the opposite because it points to above all that which is “common”, that which belongs to everyone and which is not immediately or specifically traceable to criteria of identity. Far from suggesting a sense of possession, “community” refers to something which has directly to do with life, the life of all people, because it is everyone’s life – common life.

If we refer to the Latin term *communitas*, as Roberto Esposito has done, we find that it lends further support to these interpretations. Built into the etymological structure of the term is in fact the word *munus*, which refers to both an *officium* and a *donum*, thus implying a duty or an office that is not exclusively related to the undertaking of a task but also becomes the expression of a gift. It is an ethical standard that is not applied in practice through the assumption of predetermined values but is called upon to take part in life, prior to any other value it might aspire to be identified with. Life is in fact everyone’s property, a common asset that can only be lived out and not used to reap benefits from.

The paramount duty-gift is participation, feeling part of a community – first and foremost part of the community closest to us, that of one’s own city, i.e. the common space we share with others.

Citizenship means being “already” citizens from the very moment one lives in common within the space offered by the city.

In the second year of **Fotografia Europea** we had already begun to study the city and the peculiarities of the European city. On this side of flows, movements and networks, the city to us was the place to start from in order to rebuild an awareness that transcends any roots. It was a quest for real openness



to foreigners, not as a donation, but as a recognition of them as a constituent part of every common identity – a “mixophilia” as described by Zygmunt Bauman. Perhaps this is how the city becomes the place, the dimension as well as the metaphor of the *status* of those who inhabit it, of those who live in it, prior to any citizen rights. While common life takes place at a later stage, ontologically it actually comes before any birthright.

In such difficult times as we are now experiencing we should in fact go back to rethinking about the foundations and the urgent matters of civil life. Harsh conflicts are currently taking place over these issues, from the local to the global level, from the moral to the political level. Art and culture cannot stand by and watch, nor, on the other hand, can they let themselves be reduced to mere illustration of so-called more “tangible” issues. Faced with these debacles, photography is once again strategically placed: as the image of reality, it is factual, documentary, informative, and at the same time it is more than this, it is interpretation, vision, and can even propose ideas and play an active role.

Photography is proving to be the civil medium par excellence, a tool of expression that is in everybody’s hands yet partial and particular at the same time. Photography and citizens are at once tools and effective realities, brought together by a sense of belonging meant as participation. This term, it can be noted, derives from “part”, and this is indeed the heart of the matter. What is the part in relation to the whole? How does the part belong to the whole? How does it participate in it? Ultimately, photography itself has shown us the margins of our vision, the angle from which every image represents reality as a whole, hence its intrinsic nature as being only a part. Yet photography is not selective, it takes everything in, it seizes the moment and chance events, which is what constitutes the inevitable in life, life’s normality, its tangible nature which no other art had ever revealed to us in such a direct and effective way. “Common” life means this as well, real life, the reality of life.

So, can we now go back to working on such “tangible” issues as those of citizenship and participation without being didactic and instructive? Can photography have something of its own to say about this too? This is the challenge of this year’s festival, ideally placed thanks to the continuity it provides to the reflection upon the city and on the idea of ‘Italianness’ which characterized last year’s event, and adds a further element to the reflection on the role of photography.