

## Istvan Balogh - Brief Article - Critical Essay

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In 1999, Swiss photographer Istvan Balogh produced a series called „Citta“ (City): thirty photographs, all vertically oriented and of the same size, affixed to aluminum. The pictures had been taken in and around a university housing complex in Rome--a true city within a city. Close-ups of students going about their everyday activities and shots of architectural details from facades and interiors alternate with broader views of the setting and its inhabitants. As with his previous presentations of this series, Balogh here extended his dialogue with architecture to the exhibition space itself: A large band ran the entire length of the walls, its salmon hue evoking a color typical of the facades of southern Europe; above this line were ten photographs, unevenly spaced and fastened to the wall like marble plaques. Their hanging underscored the play of architecture within architecture. To the right of the entrance was an image of another doorway: Two men enter a building, the Clinica Ortopedica e Traumatologica. Facing the gallery door was a photograph showing a large window through which the visitor seemed to be pitched into the campus park.

The series explores the theme of the individual--alone or in a group--in the city. The latter is embodied by its architecture, so easily datable from the ,30s. Woven together just beneath the surface of these images are traces of past, present, and future. The past is that of Italy itself as embodied in its architecture, the present is the daily life of today's Roman youth, the future is the unknown for which the educational process should be preparing them. We glimpse a multitude of individual paths and also what unites them--personal circumstances along with broad historical forces. As ever, Balogh's subject is the „framework of life“ (following the general title of one of his first series, „Cadre de Vie,“ 1991-92)--the way environment and history weigh on the individual, inflecting his or her development, and, conversely, the way life's variety, the multiplicity of experiences, insinuates itself into collectively shared conditions.

In Balogh's images, there is no question of closure, but rather of the

passage between the interiors and exteriors of places--and of the passage between inner life and public space as well. The university, as a place for intellectual formation through concrete activity (we see the students reading and working on computers), serves Balogh's project well. His images cultivate duality. A door suggests what is behind it, a view through an open window necessarily implies the space situated in front of it. Thus the gaze makes its way, entranced and guided by the reflections on panes of glass, floods of light coming through windows, rays of sunlight and projections of shadows. In these rigorously constructed spaces, furthermore, borders and thresholds are of the essence: A young girl, on the verge of adulthood, is seated on a windowsill, a gray area between inside and outside, light and shadow; she feels at once close because her pose is familiar to us and distant because she seems so studied.

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