

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

### Luigi Ghirri *Colazione sull'Erba*

Private view: 1 October 6-8pm  
Exhibition dates: 2 October - 16 November 2019

Thomas Dane Gallery  
3 Duke Street, St. James's, SW1Y

'In this series of photographs, I sought to offer an existential portrait, as well as a series of references to the natural world, to home and its contemporary inhabitants.'

- Luigi Ghirri, 'Colazione sull'Erba', *The Complete Essays 1973-1991*

The 1969 Apollo 11 view of Earth had a lasting influence on Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992), who understood the photograph as 'the picture which contained all the pictures of the world: graffiti, frescoes, prints, paintings, writings, photographs, books, films.' On describing what really became the *first* image of the world, Ghirri continued: 'The power of containing everything vanished in front of the impossibility of seeing everything at the same time.' Seeing everything, or rather, seeing the things that others cannot — the poetry in the mundane, the beauty of the arcane — is the gift of some artists. It was one of Ghirri's great talents, through his own inquisitiveness and a love for the ambiguous. One he mastered throughout his photographic oeuvre, and evident in his emblematic series 'Colazione sull'Erba' (1971-1974), on view at Thomas Dane Gallery. The work catalogues and reveals the manicured landscape and the nature of domestic suburbs in his adoptive town of Modena, signalling directions he would pursue in later work.

Ghirri practised as a surveyor for a decade until 1974, where his mathematical attention to architectural detail, indexation, and charting, greatly influenced his burgeoning work as a photographer. Ghirri's practice sits somewhere between documentary photography, formalist approaches and rigorous typology, yet is infused with a great affinity for the esoteric, the poetic and the humorous. For Ghirri, the photographer permeates his or her environment, becoming entangled within the subject and capable of bridging personal and collective history. For instance, in his 1984 essay 'The Open Work', Ghirri wrote of the family album and the atlas: 'I have sought to reconcile this duality, this fracture between inner and outer, between personal history and communication with my fellow man. The two worlds did not have to be separated and the two categories unconnected; instead, there could be found relationships...to achieve, if possible, a magical state of equilibrium.' This equivalency creates the 'open work' for Ghirri, what he called a 'Personal Atlas'.

'Colazione sull'Erba', (luncheon on the grass) is a collection of such personal atlases — of the peculiar and idiosyncratic arrangements and displays in people's courtyards, front porches and windows. The windows are repeated as both formal and allegorical devices. The series sees Ghirri relentlessly photograph the seemingly banal architectural facades and stone surfaces, patios, cacti, and pruned conifers of Modena. Never with cynicism or imperious taste, Ghirri approached this subject with a profound fondness and affinity. The series developed Ghirri's ability for looking at and framing reality as opposed to transforming it. In a sense, the works in 'Colazione sull'Erba' are *rearrangements* of arrangements, *restaging* of stages — even though the formal and photographic process is deceptively simple and frontal. These formal arrangements can be read as characteristic of Ghirri's later work such as his use of a central fixed lens, grid structures, isolation, and repetition.

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Reviewing the suburbs as a ‘*unifying* entity’ as Ghirri wrote, ‘Colazione sull’Erba’ results from the simple miracle of observation. Human domesticity and botanical life intermingle with conditions of representation, the photographs bridging the authentic and mythical renderings of contemporary life. For Ghirri, this reinforced the imperative that ‘we must retain a sense of ambiguity in the everyday, and that we must interpret our daily world with an open mind.’

Luigi Ghirri (1943-1992), lived and worked in Emilia-Romagna, Italy. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Luigi Ghirri: The Map and the Territory*, Museum Folkwang, Essen, travelled to: Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; Jeu de Paume, Paris (2019); *The Landscape of Architecture*, La Triennale di Milano (2018); *Luigi Ghirri – Thinking through images*, MAXXI Museum, Rome (2013); *Luigi Ghirri – Project Prints*, Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2012); Ghirri’s work was featured in the 2011 and the 2013 Venice Biennale.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 12-6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

Instagram: [@thomasdanegallery](https://www.instagram.com/thomasdanegallery)

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