



Massimo Vitali: Short Stories, Mazzoleni, London (copyright Massimo Vitali)

THE GOOD LIFE / global artscapes series

SPRING 2021, ARCH 3308/6308/4408/6408

Visiting Critic, ALESSANDRA CIANCHETTA

Curated by Ralph Rugoff, the 58th Venice Art Biennale (2019) was titled “May you live interesting times”. We do indeed live at a pivotal time when geopolitical shifts, global political unrest and uncertainty, unprecedented migrations and diasporas, climate crises, and a looming recession are all colliding. In such complex and menacing times, as Rugoff put it, oversimplification, populism, and fear might prevail. In such complex and menacing times, oversimplification, populism, fear, and a semi-permanent state of exception, to put it with philosopher Giorgio Agamben, or with controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt, Ausnahmezustand, might prevail. A state in which law is suspended for an indefinite time but not abrogated. If the power of law is to distinguish political beings, citizens from « bare bodies » (zoe) I, recent events sadly show the notion is too often overlooked. One of the roles of contemporary art is to provide and expose a critical understanding of the multi-layered and intricate context we live in. Over half a century earlier, the major non-commercial art event in the world, the Kassel based ‘Documenta’ established as its primary motif the notion of “Zusammenbruch und Wiederaufbau” (collapse and recovery) by healing the traumas of WWII – and war at large – through art. Inspired by the Armory Show in New York, Documenta’s first artistic director, Arnold Bode wrote that the aim of the event would be “to reveal the roots of contemporary art in all areas”, including – importantly - non-western ones. This design seminar will examine such precedents and focus on the role of art as a tool for revealing complexities and contradictions and, ultimately, healing. The seminar will consider a series of conceptual bodies of works by a diverse range of contemporary artists and cultural theorists whose focus is primarily connected to specific and timely geopolitical and socio-economic conditions worldwide. The ongoing pandemics exposes the crucial need to access to nature, landscapes, health, (decent) housing, civil rights, shelter, safety, in short, to the, the Good Life, meant as a political project. If crises are opportunities to discern and, examine, what is The Good Life now and in the next decade? The starting point will be the work of contemporary artists such as, among others, French-Algerian Kader Attia focusing on issues of postcolonialism and trauma recovery through the notion of “Repair”, South African Zanele Muholi focusing primarily on gender, race, and sexuality or else Mexican Teresa Margolles, focusing on issues of violence, memory and the collective ordeals of Northern Mexican social experience. Such works and questions will then connect us to a broader territory and specific geographic sites and conditions.