

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Luigi Ghirri: The Idea of Building**

October 22 – December 19, 2020

Matthew Marks is pleased to announce **Luigi Ghirri: The Idea of Building**, the next exhibition in his gallery at 526 West 22nd Street. Organized by the artist Matt Connors, the exhibition features twenty-nine vintage prints, as well as a selection of books and ephemera from Ghirri's personal archive.

“To me, as a painter,” Connors writes in an accompanying statement, “the photographs of Luigi Ghirri are built rather than composed, *things* rather than *images*.” The works on view, which span Ghirri's career, highlight the photographer's mission to conflate and confuse the physical world with the world of the image. The exhibition title comes from a text by Paola Ghirri, the photographer's widow, describing Ghirri's fascination with hand-built objects. This fascination shaped not only his approach to printing — each print is unique — but also the subjects he sought out and the way he composed them in pictures.

When Ghirri took a photograph, he often flattened his subject by shooting it head-on. In *Lucerna* (1971), an optician's sign seen against an overcast sky could be mistaken for a fragment cut from a larger portrait. Ghirri's photographs, with their flattened, interlocking elements, feel not so much observed as assembled. Many people, he wrote, “have mistaken these photographs for photomontages.”

In keeping with Ghirri's conceptual approach to photography, he rarely made more than one print of an image. The works in the exhibition, which include well-known photographs and others never shown before, capture different aspects of what he called the “colossal photomontage” that surrounds us: images turned into objects (a painting used as a table in *Modena*, 1978), invisible things made visible (musical notes on a record sleeve in *Modena*, 1979), and readymade collages found in the street (the suburban walls of his *Catalogo* series, 1970–79). When he wrote about his intentions with the *Catalogo* photographs, he could have been describing his entire artistic vision: “to make distinctions and see connections, to reveal relationships between the parts, or to take mechanisms apart.”

Luigi Ghirri (1943–1992) spent his working life in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. He exhibited extensively during his lifetime, but only since his untimely death has his work begun to be more widely appreciated. In 2010 Thomas Demand organized the acclaimed exhibition “La Carte d'Après Nature” around Ghirri's photographs, and Ghirri's work was featured in the Venice Biennale in 2011 and 2013. In 2018 his work was the subject of a full retrospective at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany, which traveled to the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Jeu de Paume in Paris.

**Luigi Ghirri: The Idea of Building** is on view by appointment at 526 West 22nd Street from October 22 to December 19, 2020. To make an appointment, please click [here](#). For additional information, please contact Jacqueline Tran at 212-243-0200 or [jacqueline@matthewmarks.com](mailto:jacqueline@matthewmarks.com).

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### **The Idea of Building**

Matt Connors

Los Angeles, April 2020

To me, as a painter, the photographs of Luigi Ghirri are built rather than composed, *things* rather than *images*. The Italian phrase for taking a photo, *fare una foto*, literally means “to make a photo,” and this feels like some kind of key. Trained as a land surveyor and a draftsman, Ghirri perceived the world — and all of reality — as a terrain, an assembly of signs, symbols, and images, including other photographs. Taking all of this as his raw material, he re-assembled and re-deployed it, reading the physical world but also writing it.

This feel for making, this obsession with building(s), resulted in photographs (unique, modestly scaled prints, often glued to board immediately after printing) that sit in the world as objects, as new things — as constructions. This was a radical proposition in an era when so many photographers saw their medium as purely descriptive.

Ghirri’s works can also seem built out of and into each other, his idea-building moving in a recursive loop rather than simply forward. Careful groupings turn out to be so porous and interdependent that many photographs could fit into more than one category. Ghirri was the son of a carpenter, and his modes of making and thinking were replete with folders, tables, containers, passe-partouts, books, portfolios, boxes, and shelves. The resulting photographs followed suit, their form and content often mirroring, containing, or confusing each other. In *Modena*, 1979, a close-up of a pair of hands (the artist’s own? a found image?) assembling the physical components of a daguerreotype, Ghirri reveals an image as a material construction, caught in the process of its own making. In *Bitonto*, 1990, a sort of *mise en abyme* of builtness, he depicts a temporary wooden stage built into, or maybe grafted onto, a grand theater’s proscenium: image as staged stage.

Ghirri was closely aligned with the Conceptual art practices of his time, but his process of rematerialization presents a different path, a counterpoint to his peers’ strategies of dematerialization, though still aimed squarely at reframing the lived-in world. In his photographs — with their repeated and layered conjurings of built structure, supports and surfaces interacting and swapping places, textiles confounding image with surface, landscapes rhyming with architecture, and music and speech made visible — the immaterial is materialized.