

## Lumpenfotografie

### Towards a photography without vainglory

*Opening* Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013 from 6 PM  
Piazza dei Martiri 5/2, Bologna

*Opening hours* From 4<sup>th</sup> May to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2013  
Wednesday to Friday: 3PM–7.30PM | Saturday: 9.30AM–13.30PM / 3PM–7.30PM  
All other days and hours by appointment

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#### Press release

*With polite request for publication*

Opening on 4 May at 18.00 at Galleria P420 (Piazza dei Martiri 5/2, Bologna) *Lumpenfotografie. Towards a photography without vainglory* is a group show on the artists **Hans-Peter Feldmann** (Düsseldorf, 1941), **Peter Piller** (Fritzlar, 1968), **Alessandra Spranzi** (Milan, 1962), **Joachim Schmid** (Balingen, 1955) and **Franco Vaccari** (Modena, 1936). Curated by Simone Menegoi, the exhibition brings together authors from different generations who investigate the linguistic codes of photography and its social dimension, making use of the appropriation of images of others and forms of presentation such as the series, the catalogue, the archive.

The term comes from Franco Vaccari, *Lumpenfotografie* (literally “ragged photography”), based on Marx’s famous definition of the *Lumpenproletariat*.

Marx defined “lumpenproletariat” as a social group formed by the “outcasts of all classes”: an underworld that lives by its wits, utterly lacking in class consciousness. Transforming Marx’s socio-political category into an aesthetic distinction, Vaccari has spoken of “lumpenfotografie” with respect to the work of the German artist Joachim Schmid, who for three decades has gathered, selected and exhibited work that is not, and does not claim to be, “art” photography: pictures from newspapers, amateur snapshots, ID photos, pornography, the illustrations in manuals... A motley and anarchical mass, lacking in the aesthetic awareness (and linguistic self-awareness) typical of “art” photography, and therefore constitutes the photographic counterpart of Marx’s “lumpen”.

Vaccari’s formulation suggested the idea of putting together several artists who have made “lumpenfotografie” the object (and often the very material) of their work: Hans-Peter Feldmann, Peter Piller, Alessandra Spranzi, Joachim Schmid and Vaccari himself. Among the exhibited works: the small self-produced publications in which Feldmann, already towards the end of the 1960s, presented selections of banal images, organized by subject; some items from the archives of Piller, an impressive collection of the widest range of types of images found in newspapers; a selection from *Bilder von der Straße* of Schmid, a collection spanning three decades of photographs found by the artist in the street; the prints of the Vendesi series by Spranzi, whose subjects are the technically shoddy images, though at times of unintentional charm, of the objects put up for sale in want-ad magazines; and, finally, some panels from the *Fotomatic d’Italia* series (1972) by Vaccari, on which the Italian artist has gathered and catalogued the ID photos sent to him by people who wanted to participate in a fictitious casting call.

The approach of these artists to their object of study is far from uniform: it wavers between analytical detachment and irony, between the cold, cataloguing methods of Conceptual Art and a perceptible aesthetic attraction. In any case, in these artists we do not seem to see any haughty intellectual disdain for the images they use or for the anonymous photographers who made the pictures. Along different paths, they all seem to have reached the same conclusions of a countryman of Vaccari, the writer Ermanno Cavazzoni: the back cover of one of his books (which the style would lead us to believe was prepared by the author himself) points to “a serene way of writing, without vainglory”, in the awareness that “even intelligence and its pretensions are part of that universal idiocy that accompanies the human race from birth to death and, perhaps, beyond” (*Vite brevi di idioti*, 1994).