



UN LUOGO BELLO

For Alessandro Mallamaci, Calabria is “a beautiful place” – a reality he expresses poetically, capturing all the charm of the strength and fragility of the landscapes.

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[THE LEICA CAMERA BLOG](#) > [MADE WITH](#) > [LEICA SL](#)

Alessandro Mallamaci considers that each image should be like a poem: his photographs are like written verses, which he leaves the viewers themselves to interpret. His series speaks of the relationship between people and nature, while also being a declaration of love for his homeland, Calabria.

What do your photographs tell us about the region of Calabria; what are its typical aspects?

I think that you might read something about some main issues like illegal buildings, building speculation, 'Ndrangheta. You might also see a lack of care for the environment and common areas. But, at the same time, you can look at a gorgeous place.

Umberto Zanotti Bianco wrote, “There is no beauty of a territory that has not yet been awakened, no wealth of new worlds barely touched by civilisation worth the charm of this neglected and yet ancient Calabria, with its mute ruins of forgotten cataclysms,

suffocated by ivy and honeysuckle, and which, wherever it cleaves, reveals the marble face of a great but lost civilisation." I am moved every time I read it.

What did you want to show with your pictures?

In this case I started without a precise idea in mind, just for my personal pleasure and my connection with this special place. After a few years, I wondered what I really wanted to tell, and which could have been the best way to represent my landscape. Finally, I decided to get closer and to produce some vertical sections of my landscape, in order to go deeper. If you want to understand *Un luogo bello*, you need to look at the photographs with the right measure of slowness. But at the same time, you can feel free: I experimented so that every person looking at my photographs, could hear different echoes. Everyone could listen to different stories, depending on his or her own background.



Your motifs give the impression that something is either in the making or unwinding – in any case something unfinished.

I simply took pictures of what I have in front of me every day. In general, I try to maintain an ethical and respectful attitude. It's true that looking at our landscape you might feel as though confronted with something suspended or – only in appearance – temporary.

The photographs are also a beautiful expression of the power of nature and, at the same time, of people's use of nature...

I'm very impressed by the power of nature. During an art residency in Iceland, I often thought that my photographs weren't as beautiful as the landscape in front of me. In that case the goal was to create a personal narration of a well known and loved place. The risk of the *cliché* was very high. In general, I'm really interested in investigating the relationship between people and nature.

But the people themselves aren't visible in the pictures?

Looking at the project I think you can read the presence of the people. You don't need to work with portraiture to feel this presence. At the same time I love portraiture, but this work was about my personal relationship with my landscape. I think that in this series there is a special intimacy which is very difficult to obtain with portraiture, if you don't work with the same person for a long time. I'm thinking of the lovely books by Christopher Anderson, dedicated to his family. In documentary and landscape photography, portraits are frequently included, but they often look cold, like distant photos, in my opinion. Perhaps Bryan Schutmaat in *Grays The Mountain Sends* or Alec Soth in *I Know How Furiously Your Heart Is Beating* get the kind of intimacy I am referring to. But I wasn't interested in this kind of result in this case.

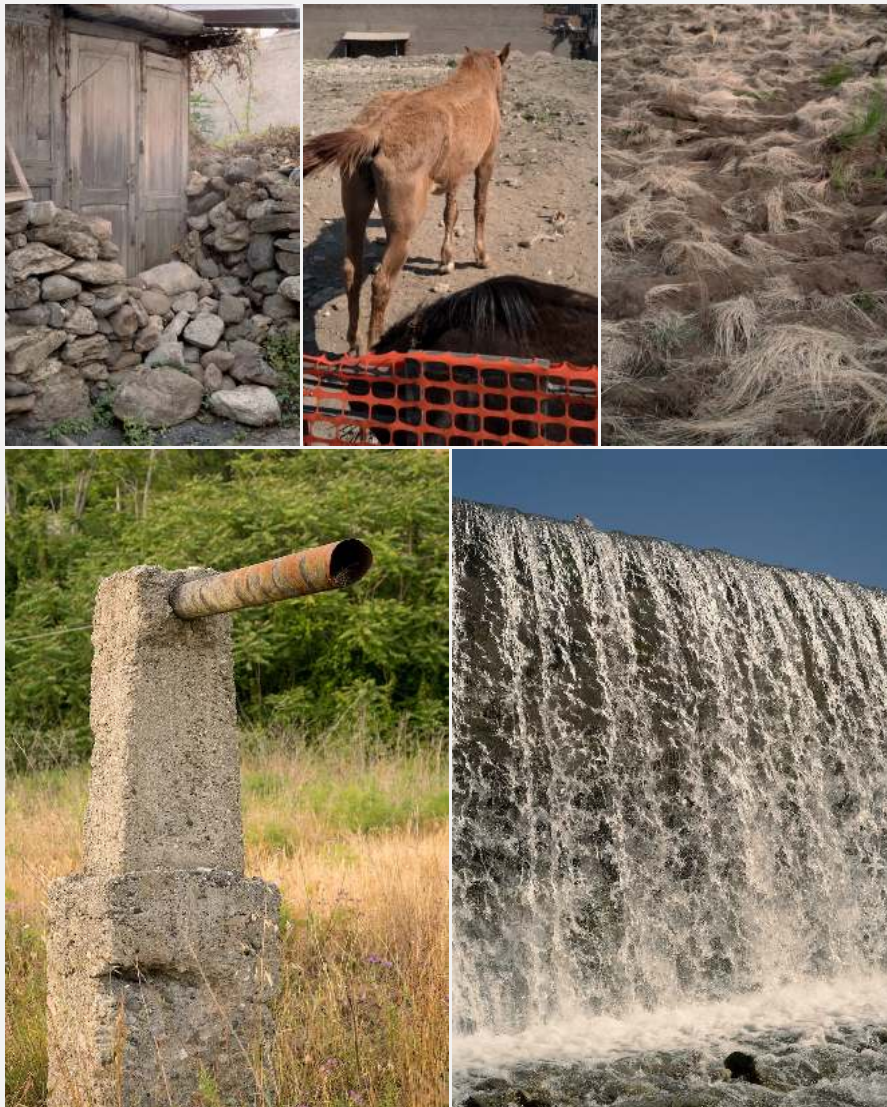


To what extent are composition, light, colour and shadow important to you in your photographic process? What do you pay particular attention to?

I'm sure you know the book *The Nature of Photographs* by Stephen Shore. In this book, Shore analyses every single aspect that composes a photograph. I use this method in a workshop of mine, in which students are invited to focus and train on many different angles. First, they have to work with geometry, in another exercise they play with light, and afterwards with colours, with space, with time, etc. After a dozen different exercises, they develop a focus on all these different topics, and they can put the pieces together and improve their comprehension and photographic practice, as a result.

What exactly does your photographic approach look like?

I don't know. I don't think I have a single approach. I prefer to choose my approach depending on the project I'm working on. I think that maintaining the same approach could be a way to become recognisable, and to better sell yourself and your artwork. Often this is the result of a trend and therefore it's not motivated by a real need. So, we are often faced with beautiful empty photographs. Wonderful exercises in style without any honesty. I want to answer you with my manifesto: I love photographs that ask questions rather than offer answers.



Is your project also a kind of declaration of love to your homeland?

I'll answer you with a few words that Giovanna Calvenzi wrote about me in the epilogue to my book: "[...]He's neither trying to denounce nor seeking an objective viewpoint. He selects his framing not to judge but to seek empathy, perhaps even in an exercise of *pietas* which transforms the persistence of malaise into a kind of land art. He builds a sequence of images of details and wider visions which, page after page, guides us through a land we do not know, which is his alone[...]."

Alessandro Mallamaci's interest in the visual arts, communication and photography, began in 1996. Until 2008, he worked as an ambassador and educator, collaborating with esteemed brands like EIZO, Leica and Fujifilm. More recently, he had the privilege of lecturing at Columbia College in Chicago, USA. He currently teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia. The artistic projects and books he has designed have received awards and graced exhibitions, art fairs and galleries across China, France, Iceland, Italy, the UK and the USA; his photographs have been published in various magazines and books. *Un Luogo Bello* will be published by **Gente di Fotografia** and it will be available from November 2024. Find out more about his photography on his **website** and **Instagram channel**.



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