

Luca Gilli***Make the Ordinary Extraordinary***

Excerpt from the interview by Rebecca Delmenico for ArtsLife (2025)

Partial excerpt 1/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

FROM SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO PHOTOGRAPHY: An Artistic Journey Inspired by Nature

RD: When did you begin to dedicate yourself to photography and when did you decide to embark on this path?

LG: I began to practice photography more systematically in the late 1980s, initially to document aspects of the scientific research I was conducting in nature and in the laboratory on behalf of the University of Parma and other institutions. During the following years, I experienced an increasingly 'creative digression', both in nature and elsewhere - always firmly rooted in reality, yet with more than one branch reaching towards abstraction and a certain sense of transfiguration, which has always fascinated me.

RD: A strong bond with nature shapes this extraordinary journey beyond appearances. Could you tell me more about the relationship with nature in your pictures?

LG: I think it was already clear from the first answer that nature has always been at the center of my life: a sacred and universal mother, unparalleled and fascinating, to be loved and respected, a presence in which one can continually reflect oneself, lose and rediscover oneself, and from which one can learn without interruption. [...] It seems to me that my perception of nature, wherever it manifests itself, is reflected in every subject I photograph.

Partial excerpt 2/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

FROM SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO PHOTOGRAPHY: An Artistic Journey Inspired by Nature

RD: What kind of camera do you prefer to shoot with?

LG: I am not an equipment fetishist, but I can tell you that during my more naturalistic/documentary period of the 90s I worked with color slide films mainly in 24x36 mm format. Later, I spent several years focusing primarily on black-and-white analog photography, using a 6x7cm reflex and a 10x12cm optical bench (folding), personally printing each negative in the darkroom.

When I returned to color, the 24x36 mm reflex also reappeared - but this time in digital form and accompanied by a few, very few, lenses. Over time, I have convinced myself to use an increasingly agile and lightweight equipment, while still practicing a slow and meditative photography. Equipment and procedures are always a valid means to establish the certain right distance between the photographer and his subject. They are useful tools for analysis and real-time verification; however, especially during the shooting phase, as far as I'm concerned, they should not require too much energy or attention. For the past few years, I have been pairing my reflex with a medium format mirrorless, which has been performing quite well.

Partial excerpt 3/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A NEED TO ENCOUNTER REALITY: One's Own and the World's

RD: What does photography mean to you?

LG: It is both a physical and mental need, as well as a profound responsibility. It is a love relationship with reality and with life in all its forms. Through photography, I seek encounters, relationships, and a direct exposure to the world. I try to explore the contemporary complexity with a certain 'heuristic simplicity', especially within the ordinary, in order to arrive at syntheses that are both poetic and documentary - images that resonate with me and are, to some extent, accessible, engaging and meaningful within broader and general contexts.

Virtual practices and the so-called artificial intelligence are increasingly saturating our lives with their comfort, charm and innovative power. At the same time, I believe that we need to restore healthy, tangible physical experiences to the centre of our daily life - without slowing down or neglecting the development and potential of new technologies.

RD: You tend to choose neutral spaces, construction sites, places undergoing renovation, or places that are not clearly defined, ancient buildings. What fascinates you so much about them?

LG: In its essence, a construction site - especially if experienced from the inside - is always the same everywhere: a space in rapid transformation, chaotic, frenetic, noisy and extremely overloaded, just like our time and our lives.

To act photographically within the torn and often unrepresentable intimacy of these places in the making—overwhelmed by the anxiety of completion and the urge to quickly hide the less “acceptable” traces of their possible past—was, at least initially, also a response to my need to engage with spaces that, at their origin, lacked the harmony and enchantment I have always found in nature, even in its most brutal manifestations.

Partial excerpt 4/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A NEED TO ENCOUNTER REALITY: One's Own and the World's

RD: Your images are calm, silent, they make the ordinary extraordinary, how do you come to this result?

LG: The mental and operational procedures that generate photographs and projects remain, in many aspects, a great mystery. I could say that they are simply inherent to me, they come together within me. First of all, I believe I obtain those qualities you mention through a mental and sensory process: by allowing myself to be fully permeated by relationships with a strong predisposition towards synesthetic involvement, and by remaining sheltered from any kind of judgment.

I conceive my photographic practice as a kind of meditation, an exercise - almost a ritual - which, unstable on the threshold between nature and artifice, has been methodically renewed over the years as a possible systemic, homeopathic remedy against the loss of self and of the other. It is a practice that grants access to deep states of presence - both to oneself and the world. Furthermore, I have always personally carried out all the operations that lead from the shot to the finished image, in order to deepen the exchange and intimacy with each photographs and with the projects they form. Only at the end of this slow, close engagement the photographs and projects truly align with me—at least for that moment

RD: Why did you choose not to include people in the images?

LG: I can say that this absence is not meant as a rejection of the body or of people—God forbid! On the contrary, I see it as a paradoxical expression of extreme interest and “respect” for both. That said, it does not always seem necessary to include people in order to reflect deeply on ourselves, on our lives, and on our world—even on our own bodies. Too often, the presence of humans ends up shaping and dominating the form and meaning of an image, or at least steering it

immediately in directions somewhat different from those I have, so far, tried to explore and engage with more personally.

Having said all that, I do not rule out anything for the future—even with regard to portrait and the use of people. Change and contradiction are important, and they are always just around the corner, even for a photographer.

Partial excerpt 5/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

SHEDDING LIGHT BEYOND THE THRESHOLD OF APPEARANCE

RD: Could we say that your work is a pursuit of the essence of things?

LG: Answering this question is, at least for me, complicated, because I still do not know what the essence of things is—although, in its vagueness, it is a notion that has always both fascinated and challenged me.

In general, I am interested in a photography that notices the thing itself, that is not entirely submissive to contingency and the fleeting moment, and that seeks to reclaim, through the photographer and the processes of photography, the potential for wonder and attentive listening. It is a practice that aims to shake off the excesses of protagonism and spectacle, except for a few isolated coup de théâtre, always compelling and useful for engaging potential viewers.

I am also drawn to photographs that take their time, gathering themselves intimately on the “back of things ... glimpsed beyond their surface,” attending both to the visible, which portrays, and the invisible, which is contained within it. Such work attempts to tune in to what it excludes, as well as to the kind of ‘background radiation’ that, I like to think, permeates objects, situations, and even photography itself—a sort of collective, underlying, archetypal sense and memory.

It is likely that all of this relates, at least from the perspective of my own disposition, to a search for some essence in the things and places I photograph.

RD: Your images occupy real spaces, yet they seem somewhat out of reality, almost metaphysical. Is that an effect you aim for?

LG: It is not an effect that I deliberately seek—certainly not through any artificial Photoshop ‘make-up.’ Rather, it is something that, when it occurs, unfolds gradually through my experience of practicing, feeling, and thinking photography, emerging as an expressive synthesis of everything I have been describing. For me, a meaningful adherence to reality—at least as much as photography allows—remains a necessary, living, and tangible premise.

Partial excerpt 6/6 from Rebecca Delmenico's interview for ArtsLife (2025)

SHEDDING LIGHT BEYOND THE THRESHOLD OF APPEARANCE

RD: Could you tell me about the role of light in your works and color, in particular white?

LG: I practiced analog black-and-white photography for years, exploring all its magnificent darkroom procedures. At a certain point, however, I returned to color—which, in fact, I had already extensively used during my more “naturalistic” early years.

Color is the physical energy I need, and it is also a true force capable of transforming the things of the world, including ourselves. Nature resides in the colors that are contained in light—indeed, they are light itself—which in turn forms the basis of our relationship with the world and serves as a maternal presence in photography: a changing and inherently ambiguous mother, just as reality, relationships, people, and even the photographic medium itself are.

Through a “slow,” “dense,” and diffuse light—where shadows dissolve and are often composed of many whites—I seek suspended atmospheres, moments of waiting, capable, at least in my intention, of moving attention and thought from the known to the unknown, from the certain to the

ambiguous, to the possible, from the obvious to the poetic, and from objects to the relationships between objects. My goal is to encourage the viewer to consider objects, places, and situations not only as they are, but also as potential nodes of phenomena and processes in the making, including those of the imagination.

Within all of this, white is the added value that transcends the simple sum of colors. It is the generative void, the very possibility for fullness; it is, so to speak, the space of encounter between the individual, reality, and memory. I would say that it represents the very possibility of encounter and relationship.

At first, working with white was somewhat challenging. As Quentin Bajac also notes in the opening essay on my “Blank” project, in the history of photography, white has not been especially popular—certainly far less so than black, which, in many ways, is more accessible and malleable.

RD: Do you identify with your images, with their expressive mode?

LG: Whether or not one identifies with what they do, or with the results they achieve, is always something dynamic and fickle—subject to all the tests and transformations of time.