

From CITIES 7 magazine - roughly translated from the Italian by Diana Cheren Nygren

### **When the trees are gone**

Diana Cheren Nygren

Initially it seems like the viewer is wondering before a mirage. Then, it is revealed that it is a carefully processed collage. The series *When the trees are gone*, by the American photographer Diana Cheren Nygren, opens up to us a curious succession of urban landscape views. What are people in bathing suits doing, silhouetted against a skyline of American skyscrapers?

The answer is contained in both the meaning and necessity of this work, emphasized by Diana's passion for landscape photography, which she includes in the category of portraits. According to Diana, in fact, urban spaces too have their own character, sufficiently distinct and defined as to constitute archetypes which reveal their true condition. Accustomed to contemplating the quiet and spare landscapes of Cape Cod from her childhood, instructed by her parents to marvel at nature, the artist applies the same sensibility to street photography and portraiture, and this is probably what makes the series highly realistic and balanced.

At a time like now, in which the natural environment is constantly threatened by climate change, Diana tries to imagine what might happen if plant life should fail in large cities, already densely built; if those trees which lend the project its title actually disappeared: the seas would probably lick at the buildings, the rooftops of skyscrapers would be transformed into swimming pools, and many urban elements would find new locations and new uses. Without any more green space and natural oases, continually replaced by new buildings, people would use these new spaces as places for social gathering, relaxation, leisure, all with the same impassive attitude that gives these "non-places" a delicate Kafkaesque quality. In fact, given the physical and psychological inertia of their inhabitants, it is easy to forget what created these new panoramas, and to concentrate instead on superficial examination: bathers in swampy waters, or immersed in swimming pools created between rooftops, old service distributors, and industrial areas, individuals taking selfies or walking along the roofs with deck chairs and beach towels in hand, in search of an elusive comfort. In so much as they have adapted to their new condition, we can see a sense of frustration and lack of relief in their posture, and recognize their precariousness within these new scenarios: like the perpetual crawl of the eternal conflict between man and environment which Diana confronts, we are faced with a presentiment that the artist unconsciously conjures. She is a wonderful dreamer. And with this surreal and visionary work, she makes us spectators to her desire for redemption from the continuous imbalance to which our planet is irrevocably subjected.

So I would like to close with a quote from Thomas Edward Lawrence: "All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was a vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible."

Like Diana, we too want to believe in the dream, the possibility of rebalancing our ecosystem, and trusting in the persuasive power of art and its undeniable power to teach respect and beauty.

*Irene Vitrano*