



**Centro Saint-Bénin**  
via Festaz, 27 - Aosta

## **Leonard Freed. Io amo l'Italia/ Leonard Freed. I love Italy** *curated by Enrica Viganò*

21 May - 20 September 2016  
**opening Friday 20 May, 6pm**

*press release, 13.05.2016*

An important *collection* of a **hundred works**, a homage to international art photography, is on display at the **Saint-Bénin Centre of Aosta** from 21 May to 20 September for the exhibition "Leonard Freed. Io amo l'Italia/Leonard Freed. I love Italy".

The event, promoted by the **Department for Education and Culture of the Autonomous Region Valle d'Aosta**, curated by Enrica Viganò and made in cooperation with the Leonard Freed Archive and Admira, offers the public a rich selection of pictures taken by the American photographer - a member of the famous agency **Magnum Photos** - in several cities among which there are Florence, Milan, Naples, Rome and Venice and other small Italian towns, in a period that goes from the mid-Twentieth Century to the beginning of the following century.

The photo shots, which are all black and white, tell about the relationship between Leonard Freed and Italy - a land that he has always deeply loved, that welcomed him in his more than forty-five visits and is an important landmark of his eminent career.

What emerges from his works - full of emotions - is the great strength that can be discerned in the faces and framings: they are realistically portrayed and free of stereotypes, also endowed with great sensitivity and humanity.

His "love story" with Italy, as per his own words, begins between 1952 and 1958, when - moved by an interest in art - he travels for the first time to Europe and discovers a passion for photography.

Having always been attracted by the study of human nature, its behaviours and characteristics, he fell in love with the Italians from the start, as they embody the different kinds of human nature, and he could observe them in *Little Italy*, New York, where he moved in 1954. For this reason landscapes, art, architecture and politics become secondary to represent the background of his very personal analysis of society.

The artistic research of Leonard Freed, **who is sensitive to cultural anthropology and ethnographic research**, derives from the need for rediscovering the meaning of his own origins through the study of traditional communities. The result is his fascination with the life of common people, their warmth and spontaneity, which can be observed in his photos: they eternalize Sicilian workers, people strolling, kids playing or going to school, men and women in their daily routines, soldiers, Venetians and Roman aristocrats.

His cross-referenced analysis of society shows a period of 50 years of history, where if on one side socio-economical changes and differences linked to the passing of time are clear, on the other what is perceived is a gestural consistency that falls outside the passing of time. Manners, expressions and gestures look like they are frozen in a past that becomes present.

Therefore the evocative display of the exhibition offers a very detailed description of the Italian people, where scenes of men pushing wooden carts - carrying fruit in *Little Italy* in New York in the 1950s or hastily transporting a giant fish in the sunny Sicily of the 1970s - alternate with scenes of simple relaxation. This is evident in the photos with people sitting in front of their own homes or in the image of

a man who is offering local produce (*Sicilia/Sicily, 1974*), in accordance to the customs of Mediterranean hospitality.

Works infused with a lively and ironic flavour stand out among others: priests enjoying snowball fights in St. Peter's Square (*Roma, 1958/Rome, 1958*), or three dogs waiting to go into the chemist (*Venezia, 2004/Venice, 2004*) or, more, an animated pan-view photo of a group of teens enjoying the explosion of some firecrackers (*New York, 1955*). The poetical and reflective character, which is also extremely intense, is conveyed by *Napoli, 1956/Naples, 1956*: the portrait of a girl with an eloquent gaze turned to the camera lens over a background of women looking at the horizon. With the same emotional charge there is *Firenze, 1958/Florence, 1958*, even though it lacks straight gazes and expressions: it captures the resting moment of three young soldiers who are sitting on a bridge while the city in the background is slightly engulfed by mist.

Regarding his relationship with photography and his subjects Leonard Freed had a very clear idea of them as he said: "I am like a very curious student who wants to learn. In order to take a photo first you need to form an opinion, you must make a decision. Then, while you are taking the photo, you are immersed in the experience, you become part of what you are shooting. You need to identify yourself with the psychology of whom you are taking a picture, think what he/she thinks, and always be very friendly and neutral". And also: "I want a photo that can be taken out from its context and hang on a wall to be read like a poem".

The exhibition *Leonard Freed. Io amo l'Italia/Leonard Freed. I love Italy* is accompanied by a **volume**, Italian-English, richly illustrated and published by Admira Edizioni.

### **Exhibition details**

**Title** Leonard Freed. Io amo l'Italia/Leonard Freed. I love Italy

**Curated by** Enrica Viganò

**In cooperation with** Leonard Freed Archive, New York and Admira, Milan

**Venue** Centro Saint-Bénin - Via Festaz 27, Aosta

**Dates** 21 May – 20 September 2016

**Opening** Friday 20 May, 6pm

**Opening hours** every day, 9am – 7pm

**Catalogue** Italian/English, published by Admira Edizioni (catalogue price for the exhibition: € 34)

**Entrance** € 6 full price ticket, € 4 reduced price ticket, € 3 for Touring Club Italiano and Alpitur members, free ticket for minors under 18 years old and school groups

Cumulative entrance ticket with the exhibition *Enrico Baj. L'invasione degli ultracorpi*, (11 June - 9 October 2016) at Museo Archeologico Regionale of Aosta: € 10 full price ticket - € 6 reduced price ticket

### **Info to the public**

Regione autonoma Valle d'Aosta - Assessorato Istruzione e Cultura

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