

Pierre André Podbielski: "Bringing the message of the photographs to life"

By Marie-Astrid Roy | Petit Journal, Milano



Photo : Pierre André Podbielski, fondateur de la galerie Podbielski Contemporary (Milan)

Meeting with Pierre André Podbielski, passionate collector and founder of the [Podbielski Contemporary](#) gallery in Milan. Nestled in a courtyard in Via Vincenzo Monti in the heart of the city, the gallery, dedicated to contemporary photography, appears to be a seductive showcase, as much for its intimate and welcoming space as for the beauty of the works on display.

A true European, you chose Milan to live 40 years ago, and you became a gallery owner 20 years ago. What is your background, until the birth of Podbielski Contemporary?

Born to a German father and a Polish mother who grew up in Austria, I am steeped in multiculturalism and speak fluent English, French, German and Italian. I am indeed above all European. Beyond my origins, I have strong links with France: a former student of French high schools (I passed my baccalaureate at the French high school in Rome), I then studied at the Beaux-Arts in Paris where I graduated in architecture. But I have been living in Milan for 40 years, where I started working as an architect and where I started my family. Then I left architecture to open my own gallery dedicated to photography, my lifelong passion.

How did your gallery come about?

I first participated in a project with the Rubin contemporary art gallery, where I was a partner for 10 years. Then I had an opportunity in Berlin - a metropolis for everything that swarms around the art world - where I launched my gallery Podbielski Contemporary in 2011. But after 7 years of moving back and forth between Berlin and Milan (where my family lived), I realised that Milan had taken off in the meantime, thanks to the 2015 Expo but not only. I discovered this space in Via Vincenzo Monti, which was an extraordinary coup de coeur, a wonderful opportunity to open my Milanese gallery. It's also an opportunity, because there are few photography galleries in Milan.

What is the concept of Podbielski Contemporary?

The gallery has an international vocation, with the ambitious project of telling what is happening in the world today. To sum up Podbielski Contemporary's identity, I would say that it is a cosmopolitan gallery because of who we are, and political and geopolitical because of what we have to say. The gallery supports young talents but also established photographic artists from Europe, Israel, Iran, Syria... We also have a strong presence of women artists, I am proud of that!

Each photograph conveys a message or an idea, denounces a situation, defends a cause... We have to find the balance between what is important to communicate and the beauty of course, because the photo has to be saleable.

How do you select a new photographer? And what ambition drives your choices?

The selection reinforces the positioning and identity of the gallery, and is always based on the quality of a high expertise. Sometimes it is the artist himself who presents himself, like Giulio Di Sturco who had a fascinating project on India, and more particularly on the devastation of the Ganges. We organised an exhibition at the Stelline Foundation in Milan in 2020. Sometimes artists are discovered at fairs, like the French photographer Thomas Jorion in Paris.

The ambition is then to support the artists as much as possible, to share and bring the message delivered by their photographs to the widest possible audience. This is done through exhibitions and fairs.

What is the dynamic of your gallery to share your artists with the public?

We hold four to five exhibitions a year. We also develop meetings with the artist, the public likes to exchange a lot. The most beautiful part of our work is to be able to talk about it.

What do you think photography brings to the viewer?

Photography is visually appealing. It offers a generous view to the public by bearing witness to today's world. It transmits a sensitivity, it seduces by the beauty of a landscape, the expression of a face... Especially since we are probably less conditioned when we observe a photograph than a painting, we feel freer. And when you start to open your eyes, it's a passion.