

Massimo Vitali at Marianne Boesky - New York, New York - review of exhibitions - Brief Article

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Before he began showing his photo works in the early '90s, Massimo Vitali worked for many years as a photojournalist and cinematographer. This background perhaps sheds some light on his esthetic. In his first U.S. solo, the Italian artist showed five large color works (including one diptych) that present sweeping views of Italian beaches. Yet his aren't exactly glamorous tourist shots: he selects crowded, run-of-the-mill beaches, most of which look like they're getting pushed into the sea by nearby industrialization and development.

Shot from an 18-foot tripod that Vitali plants several yards out in the water, the photos have a voyeuristic quality. Some show people lying sardine-like, shoulder to shoulder on their towels, with umbrellas and beach paraphernalia squeezed in among them. In other shots, people are slightly more spread out. The compositions vary according to Vitali's perspective--straight on or angled so that the beach stretches to the horizon. In one work, the beach fills most of the frame while the pale grayish-blue water merely borders the composition across the bottom. In others, the sea slices through the image diagonally, the densely populated beach on one side contrasting with the scattered bathers in the opaque blue water on the other.

Although the subjects typically become part of an anonymous, teeming mass of humanity, unfortunate individuals captured at less than flattering angles and moments sometimes stand out from the crowd. In one scene a throng of people have their heads tilted back, hands shading their eyes, as if watching an air show. One man in the foreground, however, looks back at the camera. His gaze gives you that uneasy feeling of being caught staring.