

MODERN PAINTERS

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Review

Massimo Vitali

Bonni Benrubi Gallery

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Since 1994, Massimo Vitali has chronicled the beaches of the world, creating seductive, luscious, Becher-school scale photographs, which both document people at play and reveal how fashion, economy and class are often manifest in ways of leisure.

In the six works at Benrubi - five of beaches and one of a ski lodge - colour is bleached from sand, sea, snow and landscape to render them large, almost uniform expanses against which the colours of clothing, the variety of skin tones, and the animated gestures of those depicted stand out. In *Piombino Jump, Italy* (1999), the composition is anchored by the figure of a man flipping over a breaking wave. *Madima Wave #2* (2005), in which sun worshippers throng a stone jetty, plays tan skin against grey rock. The colours in *Amadores* (2004) - acid blues, yellows and greens - read almost as abstract marks against a whitish expanse of beach.

Staring at the different bodies and losing oneself in the dreamy depictions of warm places is seductively fascinating, but Vitali's images also reveal much about how and where people will congregate to



enjoy the sun and sea. In *Piombino...*, the beach is by a large factory or power-generation plant with huge smokestacks. *Madima Ragnodoro (Diptych)* (2005) shows one of those overcrowded beach clubs at which Asian and North African immigrants flog cheap clothes, sunglasses and trinkets to working-class Europeans. In *Papeete Beach Regatta* (2004), young people on package holidays, sitting mainly in single-sex groups, crowd a huge beach covered in contiguous lounge chairs. In *Amadores*, or lovers, almost everyone is paired: two women in the foreground; two young men grasping each other's hands in a spirited



gesture of camaraderie while talking to a third; a mother and father with a baby; two middle-aged men, one pushing a stroller and one carrying a tote. Even people in the water are talking in pairs. Are they lovers in the sense of sexually active couples, or just people who care enough about each other to vacation together? Or is the point that we are social animals for whom company and intimacy enhance the quality of our lives? JM

Above
Massimo Vitali *Madima Ragnodoro (Diptych)*, 2005, chromogenic prints mounted to dibond Plexiglas, aluminum braces on verso, 218 x 178 cm each
COURTESY BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY, NEW YORK

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