

**Cities of New York**  
**by Mariateresa Cerretelli**

“Oh My God!” The most chilling scream ever heard spreads like a mantra of terror, chained to images of destruction and death, tears and blood flowing relentlessly on television screens. That tragic September 11, 2001 when at 8:45, New York time, a Boeing 767 of the American Airlines crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Center – heart of the financial world. Unthinkable and unbelievable to the eyes of the world. But the attack is dreadfully real and does not end there. Twenty minutes pass and a second plane hits the south tower. There’s sheer panic, people escape from the smoke and terror while the two totems, symbols of a robust and thriving Manhattan, collapse and crumble to dust leaving just a few fragile fragments, skeletal and useless frameworks of an urban landscape razed to the ground.

America is deeply shaken, the country’s pride annihilated. Terror! Devastation! Catastrophe! Disaster! – just to quote the headlines. “Another Pearl Harbour that will forever remain tainted with infamy” states Dan Rather, CBS anchorman. (1)

Ten years on and the memory of those days is still very much alive and only artistic creativity, with its multiple languages, expressive and profound, can tell the story: sharp and clear, a path of light and shadow, the past and present of New York.

The two skyscrapers in the middle of Wall Street crumble frame after frame, rising pillars of fire and rolling clouds of smoke chasing the terrified crowd. The violence of those dramatic moments in central Manhattan bursts out with a deafening silence from the superb photographic sequence by Allan Tannenbaum, a great New York reporter. Part of a large collection of Ground Zero icons, Tannenbaum’s images are a grim testimony to history.

The same vibrant force is found in the pictorial language of Susan Crile where the transience and fragility of an economic empire – envisaged in the two gigantic structures stretching out skyward and made evident in the tragic frames broadcasted by the TV – are reflected in her abstract and spectral pastel drawings.

Michael Ackerman studies the shrine of those reported missing in a face to face with the endless archives of photos and portraits of the Missing at the World Trade Center – holy

paper memos stuck on the wall, hanging on a thread of hope of finding them alive. But little by little, battered by wind and rain, they fade and become blurry.

The artist fixes them with his Polaroid almost as if to shoulder the burden of preserving in a memorable sequence the precious humanity of the victims of September 11.

The American people have drawn new strength from Ground Zero and, step by step, have charted the long path of rebirth, never to forget. The agony, the pain, the suffering and the loss of September 2001 seek salvation in the comforting rhythm of years, while in the wasteland of Wall Street new structures sweep away emptiness and fear.

Such is the central theme of *Rebirth*, the moving documentary film produced by CBS Entertainment with soundtrack by Philip Glass, presented at the Sundance Festival and received with a standing ovation.

And again, we have an unaware and peaceful 2001 when Moreno Gentili illustrates his tale of the Big Apple and catches the spectacular and violent drama of the giant city born out of water. His narrative rises and falls into a photographic vortex where your eyes become lost in a scenario without rules. And today more than ever, his powerful image – with the black disturbing shadows of the twin towers projected over the city prior to that unhappy September 11 – is a scream of silence foreshadowing, unwittingly and effectively, pain and madness.

But New York is also the muse and example of eternal contemporary life with its captivating attractions, sought after for its multifarious facets, inexhaustible source of creative stimuli, photographic stories, films and videos.

Gabriele Basilico measures the city's asphalt jungle and its forest of tightly packed skyscrapers and, with his trained eye in search of the authentic personality of cities around the world each so different from the other, directs your gaze beyond, higher, offering with his photograph the vast urban landscape of the Big Apple, engaged in its unmistakable skyline.

There are no barriers nor limits in Luciano Bobba's New York. The lens focused on the shining surfaces of billboards becomes the perfect observatory to catch scenarios of everyday life and create a set of overlapping scenes. A story within the story. A chance for eyes to begin a virtual journey, without even being aware of it, deep into the soul of the city inhabited by a multitude of ghostly figures.

For Angelo Bucarelli the starting point is a photograph of the Twin Towers taken in the second half of the 90s that today, after September 11, proves unexpectedly dramatic. The artist enlarges the image and transforms it into a big memory box, a vivid journey with many everyday objects in use in the Twin Towers when they were throbbing with life. The shape of the work and the list of the little objects remind one of Boltanski, to quote Bucarelli who is aware that in all of his works he pays tribute to art professionals related to his development.

Giusy Caltagirone follows the beauty and charm of the music that pervades the American city in each and every corner. Her eyes chase after faces, instruments, gestures against the backdrop of the great avenues and through the streets, spontaneously led by the city's pace to compose a score conceived and directed through her camera lens.

Gabriele Croppi suspends one of the noisiest cities in the world in an unreal silence: black and white images, profound and contrasting, packed with stories and metaphysical poetry. He is not spell bound by the city's architectural charm and does not focus on the hectic activity of the noisy city crowd, but paints perfect and enigmatic landscapes, imbued with symbolism, sophisticated and clever, and animated by unnamed characters, ghosts of a contemporary reality.

Olimpia Ferrari filters her memories and feelings in the sanctity of New York churches. Everything around us, keenly observed through the lens, takes us back to personal memories, careful attention to architectural landscapes and interior spaces can bring back to mind, like a flashback, our deepest thoughts touching the most sensitive chords of our emotions.

Franco Fontana plays with the American light, that extraordinary light that sculpts the body of buildings and billboards and enhances the street theater of everyday living. It's a spectacular scene, crossed by strips, lines and streaks of color both vertical and horizontal, ever different at any moment of the day, the metaphor of a society where man loses himself in the greatness of the urban landscape.

Struck by the majesty and power of the city, Maurizio Galimberti looks up and, in a flash, fixes the parameters, the rhythms and the poetry of his tale in Polaroid. In his mosaics he breaks down and reassembles the verticality of the buildings and skyscrapers, captures the most intense colors translating them into photographs with chromatic density and creates new geometry soaring and dancing between shining buildings, bridges, roads, clouds and

clear skies. And Jay One's video. The well-known graffiti artist draws with his graphic style the profile of an underground city, the absolute kingdom of Hip-Hop rhythms and mural writings. A homage to the pioneers of street art with a story that takes place in the streets of New York.

**NOTE : (1) "Diplopia. The photographic image in the era of global media. Essay on 11 September 2001" by Clément Chéroux, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi.**