

## PREFACE

FRANCO CARLISI

From July to August, Gino's truck contends with dust and a tangle of weeds for a small rectangle near the Juno roundabout. Every now and then I stop there to buy watermelons. Not because they are better than elsewhere but to try to hear, in the roar of the incessantly passing cars, the uncertain noise of the wind whipping between the columns of the temple to the goddess of fertility that rise nearly on the top of the hill. Only that way I am able to combine the immediate pleasure of a fresh slice of watermelon with the pathetic pride of being born close to so much beauty. In fact, I think that being grateful for the extraordinary inheritance received from Greek and Roman ancestors implies an assumption of responsibility towards the world and future generations which we, careless, shy away from too often. It seems that in 1965 Ruggero Orlando, the commentator in the Giro d'Italia stopping in Agrigento, defined it as a symbol of an ancient civilization and modern barbarism, referring to the urban development of the city without any consistency with its own history. A completely different view is expressed by an American friend of mine, a credible exponent of the entertainment civilization, who argues that The Valley of the Temples in Agrigento should be considered as an incomplete work of art and as such it should be completed by rebuilding it entirely. Supported by 2500 years of history, I took the liberty of objecting with due caution that even if each temple was reduced to a work of art, nevertheless, outside the show, there would be no need to rebuild it. Exactly like for unfinished works of art. A work of art is always open, borrowing from Umberto Eco, in the sense that it is always open to countless interpretations even within the boundaries of the time canons and artistic genius. The openness is in fact given by the completeness of the work. It is completed for the artist, or it is completed for the observer. Even when we are faced with an unfinished work of art, the greatness of the author defines it and makes it magnificent in itself: it is the Unfinished. In fact, it is precisely because it has not been concluded that the artist cloaks himself in legend and in a further story that embellishes his existence since the immortality of his genius will always be traced back to his mortal being. The genius is still among us - immortal -, but through that incompleteness we remember that it was like us – mortal. But an unfinished work of art tells us even more: it tells us about the creative process, the authorial gesture's desire that wants to reach the essence, the genius' vitality that struggles with the indolence of illness, the mystery of a mind who does not notice the created beauty and abandons it, a contradictory era, like all eras, which establishes the canons but does not recognize the masterpieces. No unfinished work of art is minor, precisely because it is more open than a finished work of art. To fully understand the wonder that such incompleteness causes, it is enough to dwell on the discomfort that instead produces another type of unfinished works: infrastructural, building, urban ones. Sicily boasts the ungrateful record: the highest number at national level. Here the work does not tell us about the extraordinary nature of man, but - like a two-faced herm - it presents us with the other side: his ineptitude. Here's the thing: genius or ineptitude are behind incompleteness. Wonder versus horror. The environment pays the heaviest price, but the impiety of this inefficiency also affects the citizen who finds himself daily undergoing the visual setback that reminds him of the havoc produced. Or maybe not. Like thousands of motorists who cross the Juno roundabout without looking up at the temples, other indifferent countless spectators pretend that Italy is the corner of paradise in which they reside and get used to the ugliness they no longer notice. Just as we no longer see the path we take automatically every morning, in the same way an unfinished work runs the risk of becoming invisible.

Massimo Cristaldi wants to prevent this from happening or, rather, he wants to stop indifference, he wants to make manifest what is hidden from addicted eyes. It is a form of denunciation for those responsible who, too often, have no name in Italy. But it is also a form of pity for those innocent monsters and for that compassionate and angry observer. Cristaldi's images are, in fact, beautiful. It is not a paradox.

Massimo searches, as a great author, for beauty where it is least likely to manifest itself: in ugliness.

Ugliness here is something other than the awfulness that could still have to do with art. Through his gaze, Cristaldi forces it to the scandal of evidence and pushes us to an emotion that we project into the unfinished building. We vivify it. Thus, we feel in his grey squalor its deep sadness, the misery of its birth, the insensitive indifference of its creators, the agony of a death that never comes, the suffering torture of a birth that never took place. It is there, like a wounded and dying animal and no one seems to notice it. Nobody rushes to its rescue, nobody despairs. Alone. There is no vainglory in its being, there is no arrogance, there is no vanity. Its submissiveness disturbs and affects. Its awkward clutter annoys, hinders, and disturbs. In other words, in front of Massimo Cristaldi's images we have the same reactions that we have in front of a reportage on human misery.

His photographs involve us aesthetically but Cristaldi seems to believe that this is not enough and so he forces us constantly to face a visual clash with the scandal of certain dishonesty. He fosters the anger towards those who have allowed such a mess and grudge against a country that seems to have a blindfold. There is no possibility of avoiding such emotions and feelings, because, through the images in this book, the unfinished is always there in its sad infinite end to drag us into a whirlwind of anger, cruelty, compassion, barbarism.

Never indulgence.

And even when we have turned away, Suspended will continue to gnaw at our conscience and, in the words of André Breton, to slam like a door whose key has been lost.