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Faceless Gazes. Rhetoric and Politics of the Google Street View

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FILIPPO FIMIANI

Faceless Gazes

Rhetoric and Politics of the Google Street View

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Potentialities of attention and distraction with respect to images are critically reprised by Neapolitan artist Domenico Antonio Mancini. In *Landscapes* (2019), Google Street View addresses painted on canvases take the place of outlying areas of Italian cities, and of canonical oil ‘vedute’ paintings, obliging the viewer to switch from aesthetic absorption to a multitasking, reflexive attention enabled by the tools of mobile devices and the operative agency between the displayed and depicted images. Attracted by the ephemeral, geo-localized vistas displayed on their smartphones, spectator-users must deal with the dynamism of the on-line GSV images: rhetorical and predictable, though, at the same time, and perhaps unintentionally, serendipitous and figural.

Keywords: Contemporary City Landscape, Google Street View, Mobile Visual Culture, Rhetoric, Attention, Serendipity.

THE EDGE OF THE TOWN SEES YOU WITH HATRED. This phrase, in bright red neon, was the focal point of *Landscapes*, the art exhibit by Domenico Antonio Mancini held at the Lia Rumma Gallery of Naples from May 3 to June 23, 2019. The press release notes that the phrase, “spotted by the artist on a wall in downtown Milan”, is meant to be “the underlying statement of the exhibition, not merely a slogan”¹.

To understand the exhibition layout, visitors may have searched for the original graffito on Google, but that meant Googling on their phones the addresses painted by Mancini on the white canvases in the mechanically precise, non-authorial black of the Helvetica light font. Only after transcribing the addresses without the slightest error, could they finally view the landscapes after which the exhibition is named: scenes of the outskirts of the cities of Naples, Catania, Palermo, Rome and Milan.

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¹ <https://www.liarumma.it/mostre/landscapes-2019-lia-rumma-naples>.