

SERENA BACCAGLINI

MICHEL COMTE

**“THE BEST IMAGE OF THE SOUL IS THE
HUMAN BODY”**



Michel Comte, one of the most prolific and unique photographers in the world, has for decades portrayed the world's greatest protagonists of the arts, music, current events, fashion and culture, as well as the humblest and poorest people on earth, all with a restless curiosity, but also with subtlety, humor and intelligence. The eye of Comte's camera gives us a hint of what, if such a thing were possible, an x-ray of the human soul would be like.

The Viennese philosopher Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* maintained that there is no better image of the soul than the human body, and it is in this sense that Comte's images are so effective, often showing an intensity all their own: one needs only look with flowing emotions at the extraordinary portrait of Louise Bourgeois to capture a humanity, a light that only an artist of that depth can communicate, and that only a very talented photographer knows how to freeze forever.

I was recently near Comte in the enchanting city of Prague. Watching how he views and portrays the world through his camera is a moving experience. With a speed that is all his own, the great photographer of faces manages to convey an inexhaustible passion, I would even call it a mystery, because only a true talent could allow the viewer to not only understand, but to "feel" the image. As I was watching him, it occurred to me that Comte cannot help but feel love for the subjects of his portraits: he could not photograph them like this if he didn't love them or didn't sense their allure, and perhaps he had already created that portrait a thousand times within himself... in the end, a great photographer must also be a great psychologist, just like Cecil Beaton, Cartier-Bresson.

His photos show us bodies and familiar faces, but they never stop on the too easily desirable surfaces of the skin, they push us further: we feel the poetry of their vision, the narrative of a high-class portraitist for whom words never manage to give a sense of that which the photographer manages to freeze with his lens, and here those images become unique icons, just like the human beings that they depict.

This important exhibition in Milan, presenting hundreds of photographs chosen from among the most significant works of the great photographer's thirty-year career, turns the spotlight on his ability to capture a piece of history in our time, to impose his own world view, which in turn becomes our own and which brings us to relive moments of unique expression and spontaneity paired with others of undisputed esthetic and formal quality.