Marco Giannotti:
Photography as a Clandestine Element in Painting

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Abstract
The article deals with the relationships between photography and painting in the work of the artist Marco Giannotti, seeking to analyze how his pictorial imagery may have been fostered, based on the images in his black-and-white photograph archives. This approach involves two axes: some of his painting productions, which allude to photographs as references, but clandestinely – that is, without leaving graphic traces in the pictorial compositions; and his photographic production as a work of art, which highlights framings of structural platitudes that formally refer to his paintings.

Palavras-chave: Keywords: Marco Giannotti; photography; painting; archive; platitudes.

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It is either painting that leads me to seek photographic motifs,
or it is photographic motifs that lead me to create pictorial motifs.

Marco Giannotti

The relationship between photography and painting in the work of São Paulo-based artist Marco Giannotti[1] (1966)[2] can be thought of in two dual axes: photography as a premise for pictorial compositions and photographs that resonate with his painter's gaze.

The artist's photo-pictographic notebooks are an important part of his research, as he himself confirms: "Artistic research is done through the notebooks. There is a phrase by Picasso that I really like: *Je suis le cahier* (I am the notebook).[3] Such clarification already shows how

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[1] This article is part of my Doctoral Thesis: *Entre a lente e o pincel: interfaces de linguagens* (Between the lens and the brush: language interfaces). Postgraduate Program in Visual Arts, Arts Institute, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2013.

[2] Having graduated in Social Sciences and completed his postgraduate studies at USP, Marco pursued studies in art history[2] while living in New York for two years, attending classes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and visiting art collections. In 1986, he spent six months attending art history classes at the *Musée du Louvre* in Paris. The artist also attributes his humanistic education to his upbringing with his father, the philosopher José Arthur Giannotti, due to his interest in areas such as philosophy and anthropology. Nowadays, he is a professor at the School of Communications and Arts at the University of São Paulo.

[3] Interview with the author, 06/09/2010.

much his painting is done through the notebooks that house part of his photograph archives and whose images he uses as premises for his pictorial compositions. "Reflecting on the making of or exposing the artist's working documents allows us to understand the creative processes carried out in the closed environment of the studio", says Lioba Reddeker (2004, p. 25). Indeed, this device enriches the artist's imagination.

Some black and white photographic images, enlarged to 10 x 15 cm, are pasted in notebooks. On the same page, the artist always places the same motif, repeated in different angles and framings. The photographs, mostly taken at locations the artist visited during trips, are organized in the notebooks with reference to these places, such as New York, Berlin, Paris, Chelsea, Serra do Mar, and Cubatão, among others. Photographs taken in São Paulo are identified by the name of the building photographed, such as the *Museu Brasileiro de Escultura* (MuBE), or the space within a building, such as the *Terraço Itália*. In other photographs, it is the size of the contact sheet that has been cut out and glued onto the notebook page. The archive also contains several negative strips, in black and white. Like the photographs in the notebooks, the images from the negatives are very similar in framing, as if the artist were using photography as a form of visual training through repetition.

In Giannotti's photographs, one can perceive the formal interest found in his paintings: structural forms, such as window frames, wall planes, glass frames with perspective shots, detail grids of the Eiffel Tower and screens used for land fencing, construction scaffolding, power grid antennas, pipelines, among others. Even when the distant landscape appears in his photographs, it is noticeable that his interest does not lie specifically in that landscape, but in the visual barriers that overlap it, such as a window with curtains, fogged or gridded glass, a diamond-patterned iron fence imposing itself over a pipe or bridge. The windows appear materialized in his documentary photographs as surfaces, not as transparent elements of the three-dimensional. His gaze encounters the surfaces, does not go through the glass, does not seek the infinite, and does not retain interest in the subject beyond the frames.

In many of these photographs serving as work documents, we can observe that the artist takes shots by approaching and moving away from the structures as if using the photographic zoom technique: a shot of a fence taken from a distance and another image of the same fence up close, to the point of blurring the sharpness. Furthermore, in the photographs from his archives, the artist deliberately does not preserve the technical quality of the photographic image upon capture. Many images are blurred, with decentralized framings: "It is necessary to denaturalize; this artificiality of the image is what interests me" (Giannotti, 2010).

In some black and white photographs, the artist made pictorial interventions: "The color on these photographs aims to somewhat disrupt them, to create another temporality. What fascinates me is the temporality of painting. It does not have the immediacy of the photographic

image. It is the opposite of the photographic moment" (Giannotti, 2010). Thus, color imposes itself on the mechanical image, and he tries to rescue the temporality of painting.

Here, the use of painting in photography has no relation to the history of painted photographs, which aimed to correct technical problems or give greater realism, as it was common in the 19th century. On the contrary, Giannotti wants to fade the photographic realism, so highly valued for its attributes of scientificity, designated to photography in its origin. Sometimes, his brushstrokes extend beyond the photograph and reach the page of the notebook.

On the film of the photographic paper, the trajectory of the pictorial expressionist gesture is visible – the brush bristles in red, green, yellow, blue, and purple chromatisms, contrasting with the black and white photograph. The painter's vision supersedes that of the photographer. The colors used are not tests or sketches for pictorial compositions because the artist does not directly transpose these photographs into his paintings. With such a pictophotographic gesture, Giannotti seems to want to diminish the power of presence, of visibility of the photographic image – a presence that will be indirectly placed in his pictorial compositions. Although the chromatisms do not completely nullify the structures of the windows, the colors manage to repel the notion of three-dimensionality, also reduced by the interest in photographing fogged windows, with curtains, or with grids that conceal the exterior volumes of the landscape. All of this constitutes a way of seeing, through the bias of color, an image that was in black and white, reminiscent of the painter's condition. With this procedure, the artist adds color to the structures of the photograph, defining the axis of his poetics: color and structure.

Marco Giannotti, artist's notebooks (image credits: Niura Ribeiro)

For Marco Giannotti, the archive does not represent a source for copying photographic codes into pictorial regimes, but rather serves as a way to nourish his imagination for his painting compositions, as he attests: "I think of photography as something that enriches my visual universe" (Giannotti, 2010). One can think of an ambiguous relationship between photography and Giannotti's pictorial practice: "It is painting that leads me to seek photographic motifs, or it is photographic motifs that lead me to create pictorial motifs" (Giannotti, 2010). Despite the archive being an informational device, the artist does not use photography as a consultation or literal reading protocol every time he creates a pictorial composition, but the structures of photographic images are so deeply internalized in his imagination that they naturally foster his pictorial ideas. With rare exceptions, such as in his early works, where he used fragments of photographic images within the body of the painting, the archive, for Giannotti, does not serve the function of citation for his paintings, as a literal transcription. Photography as a pictorial source occupies a clandestine place in many of his paintings because the codes of mechanical reproducibility are not visible:

> the work refers to the accomplished, the complete, the finished, while the archive refers to the unfinished, the fragmentary, the hidden. In principle, an artist, a writer, is recognized by their work before being recognized by their archives. And he adds: It is necessary to conceive that the archive does not only designate what is not

preserved in the work: its texts, its drafts, its sketches, its leftovers [...]. The archive is also the trace of the work, the movement of the work, its making of, but also everything that surrounds it, that contextualizes it [...]. (Corpet, 2004, p. 41 and 42).

In Giannotti, the complicity with the archives is often not so explicit. The archive does not only designate what the artist preserves in his paintings but also what his imagination filtered from photographic images, more as an allusion than a citation Thus, the use of photographs in his working process remains clandestine to his painting.

The photographic structure as a clandestine image in the pictorial

The artist places the beginning of his interest in photography for pictorial use in the year 1991, during a trip with his friend Nelson Brissac to Curitiba. In photographs from 1992, we can already see his interest in structural motifs such as iron frameworks of constructions in images taken in Berlin and a facade of buildings with six windows in Engenho de Piracicaba. Photography began to be materially integrated into his painting, as he states: "I made a photolith of the images, printed them on interlining fabric, and worked on top of them in a series of paintings" (Giannotti, 2010). Images of window frames, printed through silkscreen, are practically covered by layers of paint that almost conceal the technical reproduction in works such as *Garbo* (1993) and *Terraço Itália* (1992). The artist seems to want to work by covering the photographic image of this place, as he himself confirms:

in *Terraço Itália*, there was a Matisse-like plant. I took that image and covered the surface of the canvas, thinking of painting almost like a palimpsest, where you create an overlay of several layers of interlining and apply wax, paraffin, and paint. You unveil these urban landscapes through these layers (Giannotti, 2010).

The painting *Terraço Itália* (1992) contains the plastic motif that will mobilize part of his pictorial production: the windows. The artist says he always has in mind a work by Henri Matisse, *Porte-fenêtre à la Collioure* (1914): "to dissipate the structure of the window in a black background that transforms not into shadow, but into color, and the virtual space of the window is completely subverted" (Giannotti, 1986-2007, p. 5). The iconography of the work *Terraço Itália* comes from a photograph taken by the artist at the location, capturing the geometric structures of window frames with large glass planes and plant leaves in silhouettes. This image is interwoven with pictorial layers, paraffin, and wax.[4] Therefore, there is already an intention

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[4] In the painter's early works, such as the work *Terraço Itália*, from 1992, Giannotti used encaustic. Among the artists participating in *Casa 7*, Marco Giannotti states that he interacted a lot with Rodrigo Andrade, Carlito Carvalhosa, and Fábio Miguez starting from 1987, and even shared a studio with the latter. These artists used encaustic, a material that allows for exploring gradations of texture and luminosity. The *Casa 7* group was also closely connected to his father, the philosopher José Arthur Giannotti. The German painter Anselm Kiefer, during his formative years, also had an influence on Giannotti (interview with the author, 08/09/2010). The artist emerged within a Brazilian and international context of revitalization of painting in the 1980s, such as the Italian Transavantgarde, the German Neo-Expressionisms, and in Brazil, *A Grande Tela*,[4] in the segment of the 18th International Biennial of São Paulo in 1985, curated by Sheila Leirner.

to use photography with a certain distance, so that it does not overlap with the painting, but only blends to the point of making its recognition difficult.

Marco Giannotti, *Terraço Itália* (1992), oil and silkscreen on canvas, 190 x 20 cm; photography as a work document; artist's collection, São Paulo (source: courtesy of the artist)

Marco Giannotti, photograph (source: courtesy of the artist)

In the description of his procedures for another work, like *Janela* (1991), we can perceive the almost hidden use of photography:

> I would take the photographic image, make a photolith, and then make a silkscreen, like Warhol. Still, it is different from that artist because I would fragment the image, and put it on an interlining, but the interlining had a veil, almost like a palimpsest; it is not something you see immediately. It was a very thin canvas. Then I would tear it, burn it, glue it. I sought a kind of fragmentation and, at the same time, remembrance, as if the image remained dispersed, yet I sought the thread of the narrative (Giannotti, 2010).

In describing this procedure, the artist seeks to mitigate the visibility of the presence of photography in his paintings by fragmenting, tearing, and burning parts of the images, by printing them on thin surfaces, such as interlining or rice paper, so that the photographs were interwoven with the paintings like palimpsests. Thus, he uses plastic resources that, in a way, conceal the objectivity of the technical image.

The artist attributes this vision between the two mediums to the particularity of São Paulo's urban situation,[5] which, according to him, determines much of his perception:

> It is no coincidence that I went to *Terraço Itália*, which is one of the few places where you have a view of São Paulo, but even so, this view was so mediated, so fragmented, so full of information, that it seems like the gaze never unfolds towards infinity (Giannotti, 2010).

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[5] Regarding the architecture of São Paulo, during an interview with the author on 06/09/2010, the artist states: "Notice this house of mine: it is all closed off, it turns inward. São Paulo's architecture is never like Le Corbusier's, an open glass box. São Paulo always seeks to establish an inwardness".

Added to such perception is the fact that the artist has been practicing photography since the age of 14[6]. His eye is trained by the mediation of the camera's lens, a gaze accustomed to framing subjects through the "window" of the photographic device. He also mentions that optical devices have always fascinated him and attributes this need to frame a motif even to the fact that he wears glasses, recalling the movie *Windows of the Soul*, which also discusses the issue of framing things in the world.

One of the virtues advocated by defenders of the technical image as early as the 19th century was the ability of the new invention to record the thoroughness of details, as can be seen in Arago's speech at the *Paris Academy of Sciences* in 1939: "the image reproduces itself in its smallest details with incredible accuracy and finesse [...]. Light reproduces the forms and proportions of exterior objects with mathematical precision" (Arago apud Scharf, 2001, p. 28).

We can also recall stereoscopic photography in the 19th century, which, with the help of a device, provided a spatial sensation of the three-dimensionality and volume of objects. It is against this ability to see the volumes and distances of spaces in depth that Marco Giannotti's photographs are set. The artist denies the artificial perspective so dear to the Renaissance, which shaped the world through the illusion of three-dimensionality: "The window should no longer be thought of as the classical and virtual model of perspective, where the canvas appears as a transparent medium." (Giannotti, 1986-2007, p. 6). According to the artist, "In modern art, windows are seen as surfaces, as opaque, and no longer transparent". The São Paulo-based artist is interested in the planarity of the world. His vision is not for the infinite but for the proximity of the subject. It is, therefore, a vision of closeness that characterizes his pictorial aesthetic and can be found in his archives of photographs, which contributed to forming the perception of painting, as mentioned earlier.

As seen in the photographs from his notebooks, the artist seems to be interested in visual barriers that block the view of the external world. He chooses to photograph windows with curtains, fogged or reticulated glass; when a landscape appears, architectural planes are being valued: "It is when we come across a blurred window that we effectively become aware of its objective presence and begin to notice the environment in which we find ourselves", (Giannotti, 1986-2007, p. 7), says the artist. Always photographed from the inside out, in backlighting, the windows are often so darkened that only the planes of light stand out, cut out amid black silhouettes of the frames. His interest, therefore, lies in the structures of the window planes, as evidenced by his statement: "Delaunay says that there is nothing more interesting than windows when they close, because then you see the interiority of the window itself, and the window is the glass, the structure" (Giannotti, 2010).

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[6] At this age, he claims to have lived in New York, from 1980 to 1982, and already owned a camera (interview with the author, 06/09/2010).

The relationship that the São Paulo artist establishes with photography in his paintings is not as a certificate of presence, because he seeks the maximum possible distance from the codes of the technical image. He does not use photography as mimetism: "My relationship with photography has never been one of mimetism. In fact, I have always thought of photography and painting as two means of language that have their particularities" (Giannotti, 2010). He seeks to keep a distance from photographic codes.

Marco Giannotti says he cannot stand to see painters using photography in what he considers an "easy solution":

> The pictorial act becomes a kind of halfway realistic or hyper-realistic interpretation of a photographic image – there must be a great reflection on the specificities of each medium; that is what enriches this tension between photography and painting and feeds both areas. The worst thing is a painter who keeps painting like a photographer and a photographer who keeps photographing like a painter [...]. Hence this idea of continuous fragmentation and reconstruction that I carry out. I never know the final result of the image of a painting (Giannotti, 2011).

As indicated by this testimony, the artist uses photographic resources for his paintings but seeks to keep a distance from the "specificities of each medium", hence criticizing paintings with photographic evidence. What the painter desires is to move away from the descriptive sense of the image, from the realism of the photograph configured in the painting.

His paintings can be placed on two axes: those that maintain a relationship with figurative elements, such as the series *Fachadas* (1993), *Templos* (1995), *Cárcere* (1996), and *Cubatão* (1996); and those that mobilize structures and color planes, such as the series *Estruturas Espaciais* (1999), *Estruturas Espaciais II* (2011), *Relevos* (2000), and *Passagens* (2003), among others. However, even in the most figurative ones, there are no direct transpositions of photographic language into his painting.

The *Cubatão* pictorial series (1996) emerged from several photographs taken during a trip with his photographer friend Cássio Vasconcellos to Cubatão, in Serra do Mar, where Giannotti photographed electric light towers. These, when transposed into painting, appear almost like drawings in a landscape of pictorial bands of blues, reds, browns, and whites, which, due to their coloring, can evoke a night situation. From the original black and white photograph, the artist only used the motifs with the towers and the electric power lines, which he multiplied. The figuration of such structures is almost erased by thin lines and the predominance of chromatic bands. There are no signs of photographic character in the painting.

In the *Oleodutos* series, the painter creates a distance from the mimesis of the colored photographic volumes of the pipelines, as by transforming them into painting, he turns them into flat surfaces and completely changes the colors from the source image. Although still recognizable by the preserved pipe connectors, the painter does not make a literal

transposition of the mechanical image into his painting. At no time does he use a projection apparatus for images. Thus, photography serves only to enrich his vocabulary of themes.

Marco Giannotti, *Oleoduto com 4 variações*, 2003, tempera and oil on canvas, 300 x 900 cm; artist's collection, São Paulo (source: courtesy of the artist)
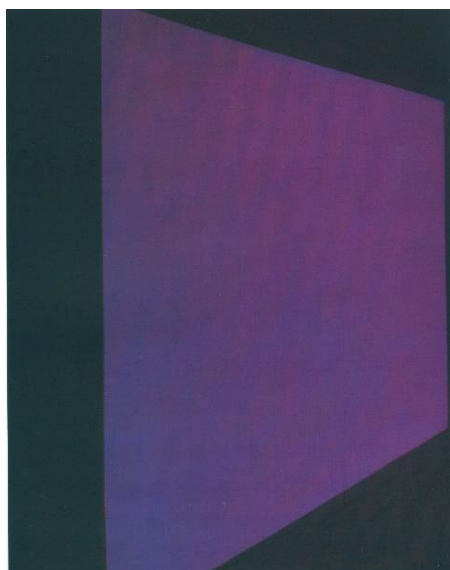

Marco Giannotti, photograph (courtesy of the artist)

Marco Giannotti's admitted admiration for Volpi's painting is evident in the choice of subject for the *Fachadas* series (1993), but unlike the master, it is as if he explodes the facades and transforms them into large color planes, measuring up to 270 x 420 cm. The formats of black and white photographic windows appear transfigured into paintings in this series, but not in a descriptive way, because the artist softens the photographic objectivity with imprecise outlines in the windows and brushstroke marks in the color planes. In the work *Fachada vermelha* (1993), a blue window, slightly off-center, against a red background, creates a pictorial contrast. Two other windows in a latent state, almost invisible, may allude to the latent photographic image during an analog photography development process.

In the work *Sala Vermelha* (1994), for the *Arte/Cidade* project, an entire room of an old building was impregnated with red pigment, and windows were painted on a huge wall of one of the rooms. According to the artist, he was referencing the works *The Red Studio*, by Matisse (1911), and *Desvio para o Vermelho* (1967-1984), by Cildo Meireles. However, we can make another interpretation: although it may not have been the artist's conscious intention, the painting resembles a laboratory room with red light, which is used to prevent the photographic paper from veiling during the development of analog photographs.

The artist's statement, mentioned earlier, regarding the ambiguity of his choices – that is, whether it is painting that leads him to seek photographic motifs or photographic motifs that lead him to choose pictorial ones –, becomes evident when relating a photograph of a window with blinds and paintings and drawings in this series. The horizontal forms and vertical divisions of the blinds are suggestive of pictorial forms. Regardless of knowing what was done first, whether the mechanical image or the pictorial image, what is clear is the dialogue between compositions as subjects and framings, but without the presence of graphic codes from photography. Painting always seems to preserve its space of language specificity as pictorial matter. The artist does not allow graphic syntaxes from photography to share space with his painting. This independence that occurs with the making of pictorial matter in these series also occurs in his abstract paintings.

The painter uses photography as an element that enhances his imagination, but the relationship of the mechanical image with his chromatic abstractions is not visible. Without access to Giannotti's photographic production, it is difficult to infer that his abstract paintings may have had, as an underground visual element, a perception resulting from compositional suggestions of photographic structures. The chromatic planes can be transmutations of large planar spaces of glass windows – at least that is what can be inferred when comparing certain photographs with certain paintings.
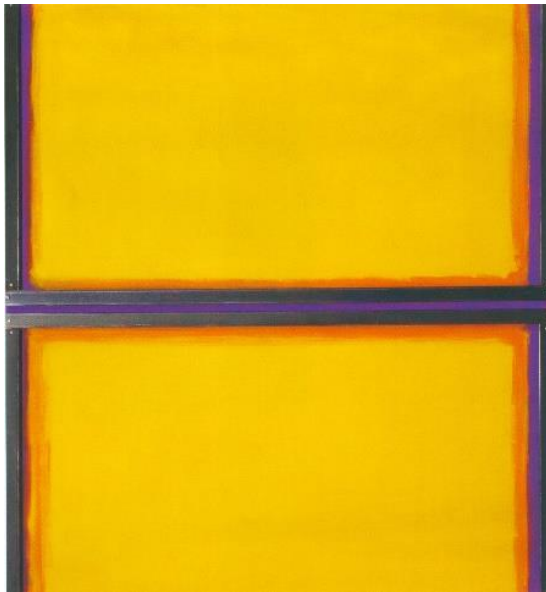
Marco Giannotti,
Passagem em Magenta,
2007, oil on canvas,
250 x 200 cm;
artist's collection,
São Paulo
(source: courtesy
of the artist)

Marco Giannotti, wall
at MuBe, photograph
(source: courtesy of
the artist)

The photograph that the artist took of a wall at MuBE (2002), a project by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, with a strong emphasis on planes, reverberates, for example, in the paintings *Passagem em Magenta* (2007) and *Passagem para o Vermelho* (2006-2007). In these works, the way Giannotti enhances the planes and structures may evoke his long experience with photographic visuality, where the camera viewfinder, just like a window, possibly enabled his gaze for a selective discipline of framing and subject approximations, especially visible when he rescues the ability to amplify fragments in an all-over composition from photography. His paintings suggest a space beyond the canvas.

The planes of certain works in the series *Estruturas Espaciais I* (1999), when compared to the photographic studies in his notebooks, resemble the internal vertical dividers of windows. Therefore, the structuring elements that divide the color surfaces in his paintings may allude to the photographic visuality of windowpanes. The framing and shapes of the chromatic spaces in his abstractions recall the glass spaces, forming planar surfaces, found in his photographic notebooks. If photography provides the structure for such planes, it remains underground, as there is no indication that the painting has a relationship of illusory photographic materiality.

Anna Mariani, *Caratacá,* Bahia, 1986, *Pinturas e Platibandas*, photography (source: *Platibandas* book)

Marco Giannotti, *Sem Título*, 1999, *Série Estruturas Espaciais I, t*empera, acrylic, and iron on canvas, 190 x 200 cm; private collection, São Paulo (source: courtesy of the artist)

The geometries of the houses' facades in Anna Mariani's photographs also echo those geometries of the painter's works. When creating *Fachadas*, as the artist informed, he was influenced by the structural planes and colors in Anna Mariani's photographs. When approaching his painting *Sem título* (1999), from the *Estruturas Espaciais I* series, to Mariani's work *Caratacá* (1986), we can see certain structures that interest both artists. This series, like the rest of the artist's works, confirms his intention not to engage in photographic mimetism, as he believes that photography strengthens his visual universe. In his paintings, the photographic device acts as a reference for recording and selecting the framing of spatial

structures, but without resorting to the descriptive function of the technical image. The photographic studies have a similar economy of planes observed in his paintings.

Painting as a "photogram"

In Marco Giannotti's pictorial practice, there is yet another issue that can be considered, even indirectly, in the light of the photographic universe. The series *Contraluz* (2009) has a title reference to how the artist photographed windows or grids in backlight, as we can see in his photographic notebooks. Considering his whole trajectory as a painter, the works of this series are possibly those that most reveal an allusion to photographic nature, since his paintings, as previously noted, do not show photographic evidence. He treats painting with procedures that evoke the experience of developing and printing analog photographic images. For this, he uses the theme of grids.

Although the *Contraluz* series dates back to 2009, the interest in the subject of grids has been around for a long time, at least since the photographs about *Cubatão* (1996) and also in the series about *New York.* It is worth remembering that, in the artist's notebooks, there are several images of photographic framings of the grids of the Eiffel Tower, the Centre Georges Pompidou, bridges in New York, and even a whole series of photographs taken in a junkyard, with various types of grids, as observed. These are always photographed in backlit situations that result in flattened structures in silhouettes. Giannotti considers that these photographs were subsidies to trigger the series of paintings: "Photography gives you encouragement, it is a bridge between you and the real world; painting still has a romantic touch for me, it is still very internalized, an inner experience" (Giannotti, 2010).

The strategy of framing the motif in all-over, as seen in photographs of grids in his notebooks, also echoes in paintings with this theme. We could say that photography determined his pictorial process because initially, the grids appeared in his photographs. Subsequently, the artist began to use real grids as matrices[7] for his paintings.

On large canvases ranging from 80 x 100 cm to 200 x 340 cm, or on papers, a grid is placed as a matrix, in the form of diamonds; then, spray paint is applied, which passes through the gaps in the grid pattern. This results in an impression of the silhouette of the grid pattern, which closely resembles a photogram. Ronaldo Brito (2009) considers this procedure, which can allude to a photogram, similar to a photographic negative.

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[7] Regarding the relationship with the matrix, Giannotti recalls that he did engraving in Sergio Fingermann's studio and, as an engraver, he has a relationship with the matrix and an enchantment with the image that is revealed, as in Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *Blow-Up* (1966). The artist is referring to the scene where the photographer, by increasingly enlarging a photograph taken in a park, discovers that he accidentally photographed a crime scene. It is necessary to remember that, as mentioned earlier, since the age of 14, the artist has had contact with the matrix of the photographic negative.
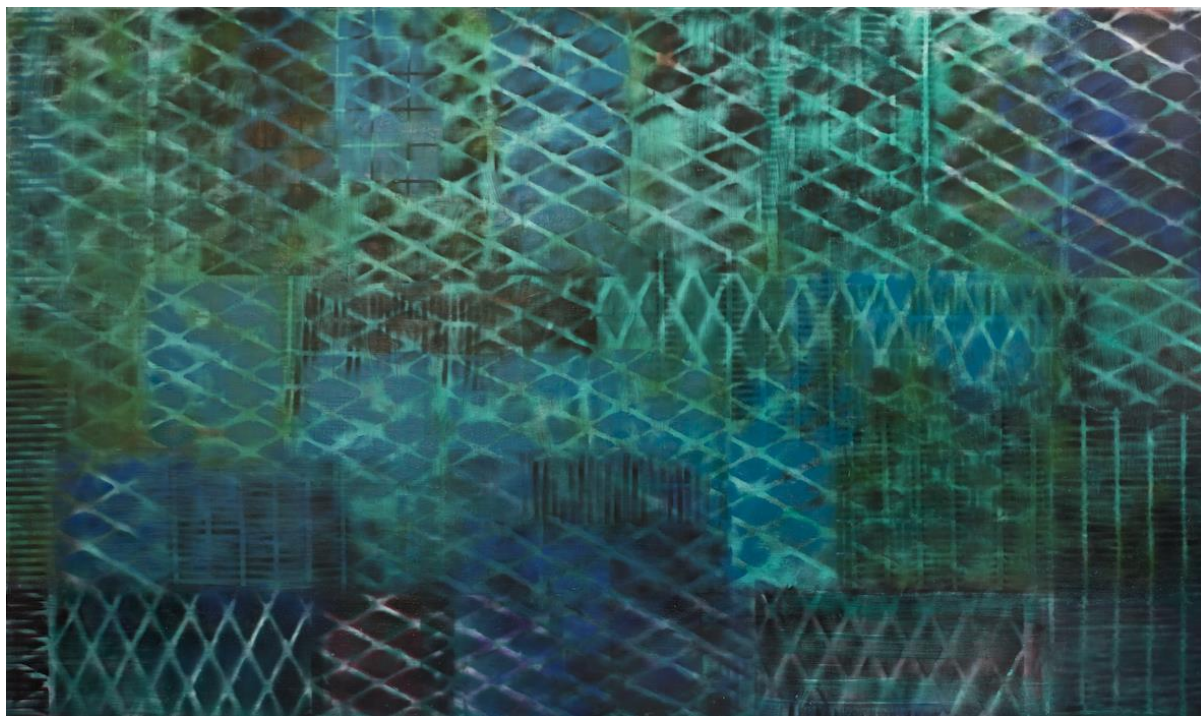
Marco Giannotti, *Contraluz* series, 2009, oil on canvas, 200 x 340 cm;
grid used for the *Contraluz* series, drawing and archive photo (source: courtesy of the artist)

The pictorial procedure of the *Contraluz* series alludes to photographic procedures that originated with the advent of photography: photograms, a technique explored by Christian Schaad, Moholy-Nagy, and Man Ray in the early 20th century. The photogram consists of placing objects directly onto a sensitized surface which, when exposed to light, records their silhouettes on that paper. It is a photograph without a camera. One can even trace back to the 19th century with the earliest photographic experiments. Around 1830, even before discovering how to fix images, a precursor of photography, Nicéphore Niépce, sensitized a support and arranged objects that, when exposed to sunlight, left their silhouette recorded on the sensitive surface.

If, in the photogram, the area surrounding the printed object is obtained by light, which burns the surface where the designs of the silhouettes of the matrix objects are created, in

painting, the paint plays this role; respectively, where the light did not reach the surface or the paint did not reach the support, the lighter areas remain. Immediately after registering the grid on a surface, the artist works on layers of chromaticism.

During a visit to his studio, the artist demonstrated to the author how the procedure is employed to control tones through chromatic erasures when working with tempera paint.[8] In a large all-over painting, with shades of green, blue, and darker tones, the artist runs a sponge wet with water[9] over parts of the composition where he wishes to fade the grid pattern he considers to have an excess of tonality. "I am trying to erase a little more, to think of the figure as a shroud, to have a more organic and less constructive dimension" (Giannotti, 2010). Still according to the painter, in the same interview, this is necessary "because there is always one tone more or one tone less, but you have to be careful because if you erase too much, you fall into a hole". Therefore, sometimes, he also ends up reinforcing chromaticism in some areas with a second coat of paint: "When I need to reveal a little more of the grid underneath, I remove some of the material", explains the artist. (Giannotti, 2010). This is that chromatic matter that had been worked over the grid impression. It is always necessary to find the right measure, as it cannot be too faded or too visible – "It cannot be either one or the other, you have to find the right measure" (Giannotti, 2010). The opacity that does not reveal anything beyond the grid alludes to the photographs of windows with foggy glass from his photographic notebooks, as mentioned earlier.

If, in his paintings, the artist controls the fading of the pictorial tones of the grid shape, in photograms, it is possible to control, through masks, the incidences of different amounts of light, opacities, and transparencies of objects.

By causing certain fades in the sharpness of the chromaticisms and also of the grid pattern on the canvas – or with the eraser, in the case of drawings –, the artist really seems to be bothered by the objectivity of the image. In some works, he overlays layers of impressions of this grid in different directions, multiplying the grid structures, much like in chemical-based photography when photographing the same motif without advancing the film. This resulted in overlays. The artist associates the framings of each module of the grid with viewfinders of certain cameras that have framing marks. If photography does not impose itself in paintings as a certificate of presence, when the artist uses real objects in the *Contraluz* series, the presence of the pattern formed by the grid becomes clear. Giannotti seems to conceive, in his

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[8] The described procedure is only possible with tempera paint, which the artist claims is a hyper-saturated tempera used in cinema (interview with the author, 06/09/2010).

[9] We can observe that while the canvas is moist, the image of the grid is very visible, but when it dries, the color becomes lighter. This resembles the image becoming more visible as the photographic paper comes into contact with the chemicals in the lab.

paintings, an indicative character of the real object of the grid, unlike what he does when he uses photography as a pictorial note, by not leaving photographic evidence.

In other works, sometimes in the same composition, he employs motifs of grids and tree branches, both treated as "pictorial photograms" that create tension, respectively, between geometric and organic forms. The artist explains this association as a way of giving a more organic dimension to the grid structure, "because the excess of geometrization, at some point, starts becoming somewhat tautological" (Giannotti, 2010). The idea for these compositions came when the artist observed that the shadows of dry tree branches were projected onto the ground of his studio courtyard and also formed a grid.

The same procedure used in *Contraluz* was also used for the series of paintings of the *Via Crucis* (2009), exhibited at the São Bento Monastery in São Paulo in 2010. Although the theme refers to figurative paintings of traditional religious scenes, Giannotti's works do not resort to this regime of representation. From the very intersections of the grids, the painter extracts the religious symbol of the cross, which stands out through a change in chromaticism or the dimension of the symbol that crosses the canvas. This element is arranged sometimes on a background of grid-like shapes and sometimes on a background of diamond shapes.

The spatial sense of using grids in Giannotti's works is pointed out by Rosalind Krauss (1996, p. 23): "It is to be flattened, geometrized, ordered, unnatural, anti-mimetic, and anti-real". The grid, according to her, also has a temporal sense, which is the fact of being an emblem of the 20th century, used by artists like Mondrian and others. For Krauss (1996, p. 24), "perspective studies are not really early examples of the grid because perspective is the 'science of the real', and not a way of isolating oneself from it"; unlike perspective, "the grid does not project a space of a room, or a landscape, or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting". In modern art, the grid appears as an element of space fragmentation to reinforce the flat surface condition of a painting or engraving. It is through the distancing of the reality character of the grid and its evidence of highlighting the surface of the work that Krauss does not see perspective as a previous example of the grid in that system of representation initiated in the 15th century. The American author detects a duality in the grid due to its centrifugal or centripetal character. In the centrifugal grid,

> the given artwork presents itself to us as a mere fragment, a tiny scrap, arbitrarily, of an infinitely larger fabric. This way, the grid operates from the artwork outward, compelling our recognition of a world situated beyond the frame (Krauss, 1996, p. 33).

In this centrifugal sense, Giannotti seems to use the grid as part of a larger whole, leading to the idea that the grid can extend infinitely into space, beyond the boundaries of the frame,

in an all-over representation. The artist employs this approach not only in the pictorial series of *Contraluz* and *Via Crucis*.

The photography of pictorial *platitudes* as artwork

The French author Éric de Chassey (2006) investigates certain photographs that make use of the formal *platitudes*[10] resource:

> *platitude* is not an exact concept, but a notion that depends on the reception of those who look at an image. [...] For *platitude* to exist, planarity must subsist in our perception. It is our gaze that sees in *platitude* (Chassey, 2006, p. 8).

The author recalls that

> unlike the painter, the photographer is not compelled to seek representation in the third dimension because his apparatus is already constructed to seek this illusion. The paper, by its nature, is a flat support, but we are accustomed to seeing it in depth, as if the support were transparent. There are also those who voluntarily seek two-dimensionality, suppressing the illusion of depth for the precision of the viewpoint to the plane. László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1947), an artist who triumphed in Germany between 1920 and 1930, used certain formal characteristics, with the so-called *New Vision*, such as "views in *plongée* that radically suppress perspective in favor of a flat geometric organization" (Chassey, 2006, p. 8-13).

Thinking of photography as structure, Marco Giannotti says he is very interested in the photographs of the German couple Bernd and Hilla Becher. These are photographs of industrial landscapes, water tanks, towers, and similar architectural typologies, among others, in which the artists seek to concentrate the focus on the subject, to reveal the structural sense of the forms. Éric de Chassey says that these German artists "used long exposure times (from 10 seconds to one minute) to achieve the highest precision at all points of the image, favoring frontal views in black and white and with uniform lighting" (Chassey, 2006, p.129). They are frontal shots so that it is possible to reach the median level of the photographed object. They seek to "straighten" the perspective and present the lines of the building as orthogonal and parallel to the edges of the photographic print. These buildings are constructed according to principles of strict economy and, therefore, are conducive to photographic flattening. The strict frontality contributes to the *platitudes* of the subject:

> [...] the buildings need to resemble silhouettes. Taking the objects frontally gives them maximum presence and allows you to eliminate the risk of being too subjective. We want to show the object in its readable form (Becher apud Chassey, 2006, p. 131).

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[10] Although the term *platitude* has a pejorative meaning in Portuguese, according to the *Houaiss Dictionary*, its use in this research is not associated with such a meaning. Photographic *platitude* is employed here according to the concept created by the French author Éric de Chassey, who interprets part of the history of photography from this perspective.

It is this frontality that allows for planarity, which is even more evident when the building is endowed with facades of geometric and structural nature. Planarity is also a motif that interests Giannotti. Chassey reminds us that "planarity becomes even more evident when photographs are displayed in a grid format on the walls of exhibition spaces" (Chassey, 2006, p. 136). If there is not such a close relationship between the photographs and the paintings of the São Paulo artist with the iconographic work of the Becher couple, there is an appreciation for the formal issues addressed by these artists.

As observed, Marco Giannotti has always produced photographic notes that suggest composition structures for his paintings. Parallel to his trajectory as a painter, the artist also began to develop photographic work as artwork. One can see how visual resources migrate between his paintings and these photographs.

The artist says he does not like heavy cameras or changing lenses, as photographers who value technical image quality do: "For some, the fetish for the device is so great that they use the machine more than the eye. [...] The machine has to be light and agile, almost as fast as my eye" (Giannotti, 2010). He has no technical knowledge of photography and is not interested in the precision of the image "defined down to the last grain", because his interest is a more plastic one: "I even prefer to cultivate my ignorance", he says, as he focuses on the issues that interest him rather than technical precision. He prefers an image that becomes a "pigmentation support", which is why he prefers inkjet printing, which resembles more of a print. Giannotti claims that he approaches photography from the scale and composition of painting and "looks at photography pictorially" (Giannotti, 2011).

Photography as an artwork has met the need of the artist to reconnect with reality after an abstract pictorial production: "The big problem with painting is abstraction, which always leads you to a black hole when you find yourself dealing with purely formal issues. It is like going back to talking about the world". And he adds: "Photography brings me back to reality" (Giannotti, 2011).

In 2009, at the *Quadrante* exhibition,[11] the artist exhibited photographic works. Each image is composed by the juxtaposition of four photographs, in which he rescues the structure of window dividers, leaving a blank space between the images. In his photographic notebooks, this same montage sometimes appears. He says: "I always saw my photographs as a notebook. I made a montage like a *cahier*; each image was composed of four images. It was a bit like bringing this notebook universe into photography" (Giannotti, 2010). Just as pictorial motifs originated from photographic notebooks, photographs also emerged as works of art, but these were mediated by his way of composing in painting.

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[11] The exhibition was held at the Centro Cultural Maria Antônia in São Paulo.

Marco Giannotti, *Quadrante Series*, 2009,
photography, 37 x 50 cm each
(source: courtesy of the artist)

Marco Giannotti, photograph
from the artist's archive
(source: courtesy of the artist)

In the *Quadrante* series, there is an incessant pursuit of formal *platitudes* and chromatisms, through backlights that capture silhouettes of objects or shots that flatten the photographed elements: visual barriers, such as grid surfaces and window curtains, adhesive letters on glass, colored planes, images of the sea, beach sand, among others. The result of the images leads one to think of a photographic eye that sees elements of the real world in a very close and flat manner. He manages to extract *platitude* even from volumetric elements.

The grid was already a motif present in his photographs as photographic notes for paintings, but it appeared as a visual barrier in his landscapes. For the *Quadrante* series, the photographs are taken in a junkyard, with close-ups and all-over frames, just like some of his abstract paintings. Giannotti seeks to utilize the entire negative, without cuts, because, according to him, "the framing has to be in the eye" (Giannotti, 2010) – and this eye has been trained by the framings of the photographic apparatus and by pictorial vision. Sometimes, backlit grids, with zones darkened by the absence of light or by the accumulation of textures, collaborate even more to exacerbate the platitude of the images. In others, one can even perceive a certain perspective because the artist's interest lies in capturing chromatisms. Other fence grids with the sea in the background, or goal net grids, are combined with fragments of wall structures and letter graphics.

Contrary to the immense dimensions with which contemporary photography has been working and the equally large sizes of his own paintings, Giannotti's photographs are approximately 36 x 50 cm, which, in the *Quadrante* exhibition, were displayed in showcases. This is partly because the technical equipment he uses only allows for this size. One could think that, in these photographs, he addresses his pictorial issues, such as the flattening of images and chromatisms. Some series of his abstract paintings, such as *Relevos* (2000),

Estruturas Espaciais I (1999) and *II* (2001), *Passagem I* (2003) and *II* (2006), precede his beginning of producing photographs as works of art, and such photographs will be determined by his pictorial and planar eye. "The photograph as a work of art emerges because it has this relationship with painting", says the artist (Giannotti, 2010).

The planar and geometric perception found in *Passagens I* and *II* reverberates in photographs of walls in the *Quadrante* series. Landscape silhouettes, when overlaid by light on these walls, further accentuate the two-dimensionality of the image. If, at times, there is a certain perspective of spaces, it is softened by the darkening of the spaces that the artist photographs. Thus, this vision of *platitudes* is the link that connects his paintings and his photographs, a vision embraced by the artist when he states that "the 3D vision deeply irritates me; I literally like the flat image and the ambiguity. The imagined depth is much more interesting than the one that is ready" (Giannotti, 2010). In this sense, the artist contradicts all the objectives of photography for scientific purposes.

The use of letters as images, and no longer as semantics, appears both in his paintings from 1988-1990 and in his photographs as artwork; the painter attributes it to his friendship with the artist Mira Schendel,[12] who, as is known, used the graphic resource of letters in her compositions. There is no narrative intention – the interest lies in exploring them as graphic elements. According to the artist, "Naturalism ceases to be the paradigm, narrative ceases to be the guiding thread of painting". The artist reinforces the idea that painting should no longer be seen as the Renaissance window open to the world evoking a virtual space, and that getting rid of the naturalism conventions is one way to conceive painting as "a terrain of continuous experimentation" (Giannotti, 1986-2007, p. 6). To mitigate this relationship with reality, he fragments the motifs through framings that further accentuate the two-dimensionality of adhesive letters on glass. Thus, it is through the fragment of reality that structures the photographic series *Chelsea Outside* (2007), in which the framing and cutting of adhesive letters are so close, that they become planar structures, losing their semantic reference. The background, glimpsed through the planes of the letters, becomes blurred, and sometimes, even if the geometry of a building is still visible, the camera seems to have been pressed against the glass to enhance, for example, a red letter that dominates the entire composition, reigniting Giannotti's interest as a painter:

> One of the most fascinating aspects of painting is that it teaches you to look at this more tactile, closer dimension. This tactile issue is a very strong experience of painting. You are constantly dealing with color, pigment, and material (Giannotti, 2010).

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[12] The Giannotti was introduced to Schendel by José Rezende. "We had a very intense relationship", says Giannotti, a communion of issues. One day, she said to me: 'Marco, I could have done this work, not because you were influenced by me, but because we are contemporaries and we experience the same issues'. It was wonderful! I remained close to Mira until the end of her life" (interview with Fernando Augusto on 11/11/2003).

He applies this tactile dimension to photographs as well. In this series, the artist always finds visual barriers that bypass volumetrics, whether they are glass reflections or reticles that flatten the landscape.

If the artist does not preserve a photographic nature in his paintings, his photographs, as artworks, have a pictorial character and some works bear many similarities in the *platitudes* of compositions with his abstract paintings.[13] The blue monochromes from the *Luz+Luz* series (2009) not only intensify the pictorial nature of the photograph but sometimes also destroy the objectivity of the mechanical image through hazy aspects, and blur the horizon line between sky and sea. In other images from this series, the compositional structures resemble his paintings *Relevo em dois azuis*, from 2000, and *Sem Título*, from 1991.
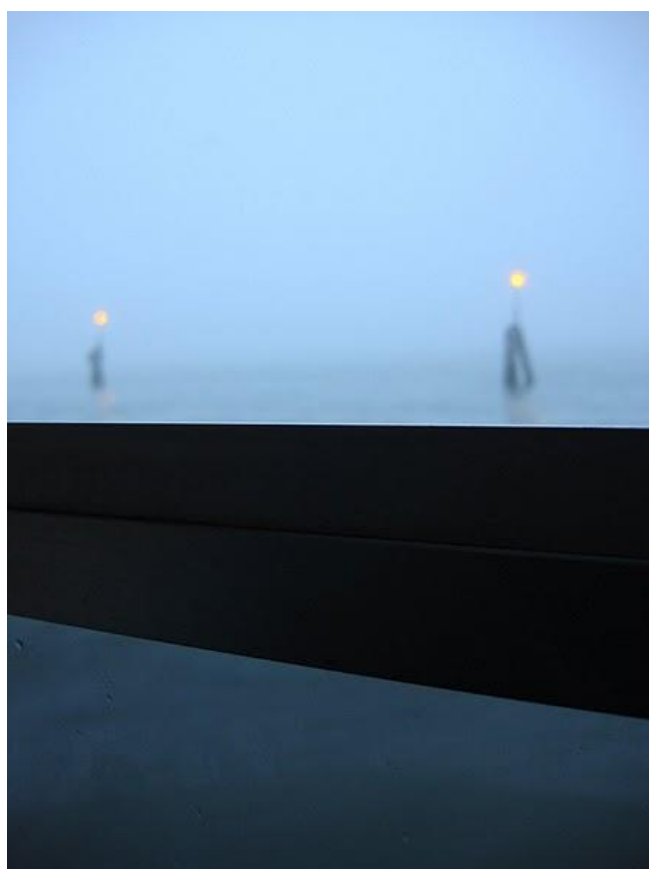

Marco Giannotti, *Relevo em dois azuis*, 2000, tempera and acrylic on canvas, 220 x 240 cm; artist's collection, São Paulo
(source: courtesy of the artist)

Marco Giannotti, *Luz + Luz Series*, 2009, photograph, 50 x 37 cm
(source: courtesy of the artist)

In the *Bernini* series (2009), Giannotti treats volumes with appearances of planes through all-over framings of columns, minimizing the notion of volume. This surface, which borders on the pictorial with its peeling and stains, evokes layers of paint like a palimpsest of chromatisms and whites and ochres, and approaches, chromatically and in terms of vertical line structures, his painting *Sem Título* (2009).

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[13] His Master's thesis at USP deals with Goethe's *Theory of Colors*. He wrote a book on Reflections on Color, and in another book, *História da Arte Internacional (*History of International Art), he includes a chapter on the relationship between photography and painting.
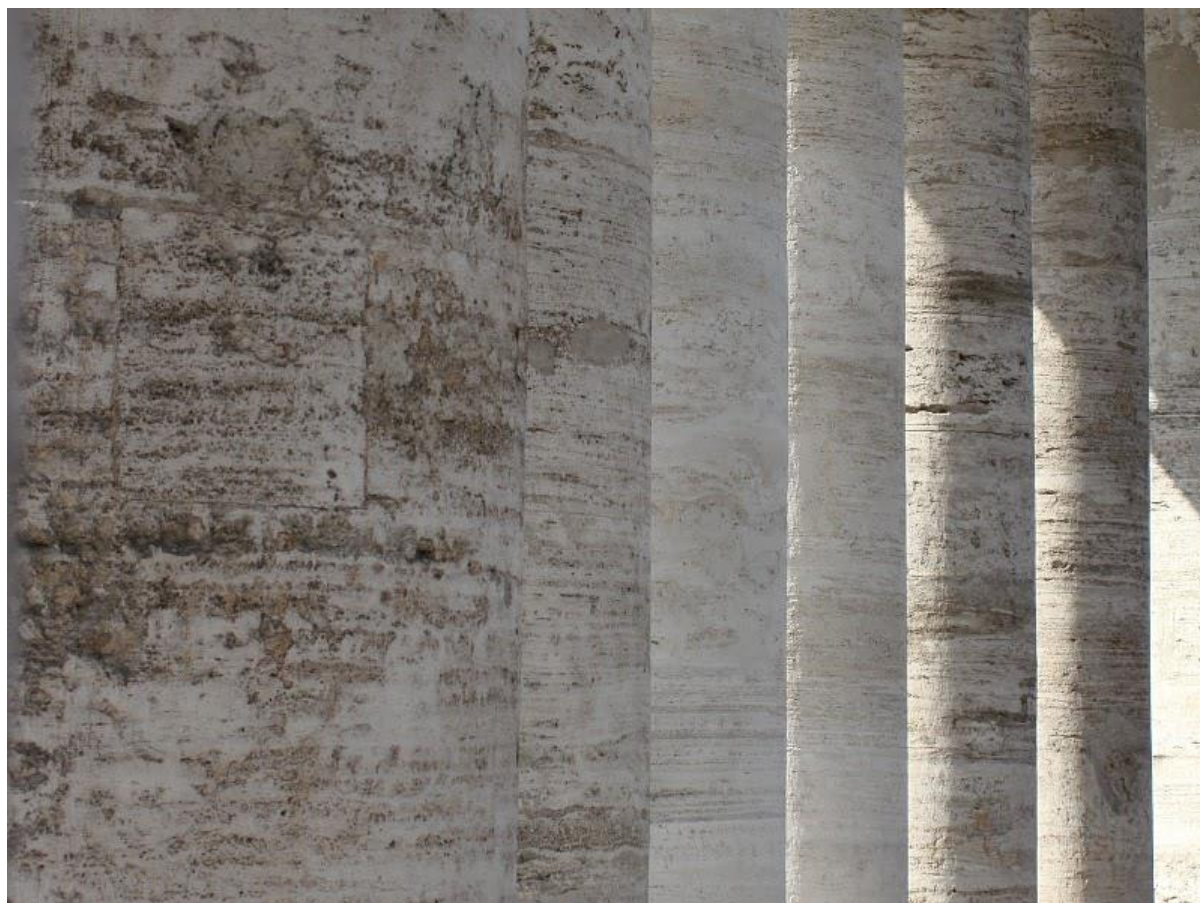
Marco Giannotti, *Bernini* series, 2009, photograph, 37 x 50 cm (source: courtesy of the artist)

Marco Giannotti, *Contraluz* exposition,
2009; oil on canvas, 200 x 145 cm
(source: courtesy of the artist)

In *Orvieto* (2009), also valuing the all-over cut, the surface of the facade of an architectural element with black, gray, and white horizontal stripes can evoke an abstract painting. The stains on the white spaces resemble pictorial layers. The proximity with which the stripes were photographed enhances the image, generating a mixture of planes and volumes. Although it seems like a post-production montage because wide stripes join thinner ones, this did not happen; it is simply the framing angle, which combines the distances from one wall to another of the building.
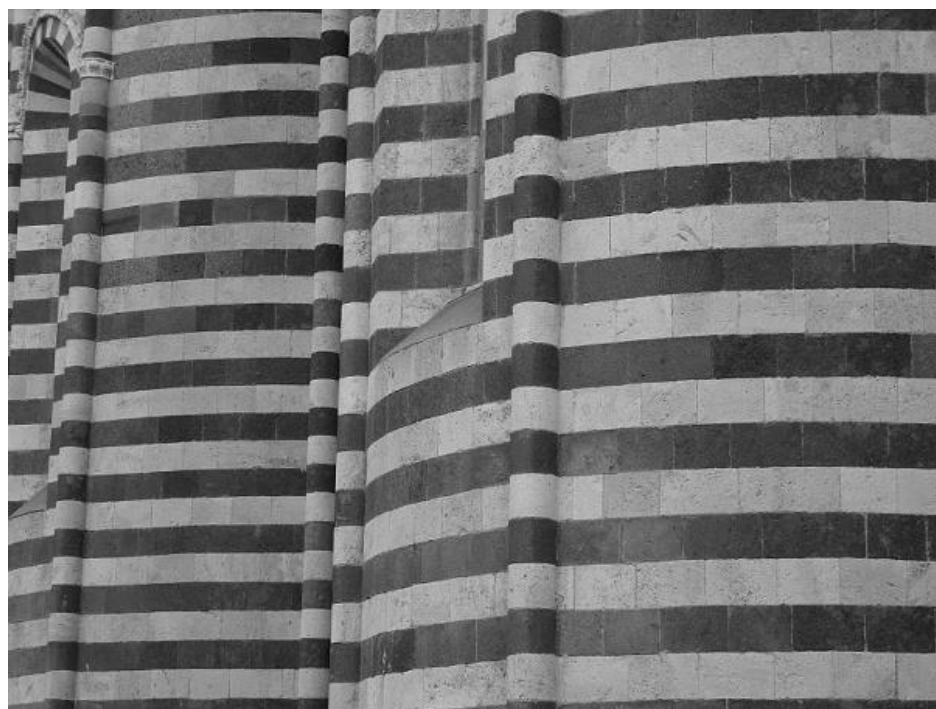
Marco Giannotti, *Orvieto* series, photograph, 37 x 50 cm
(source: courtesy of the artist)

The surfaces of subjects with pictorial aspects characterize another photographic series, *Travessia* (2009)[14], by the yellowish lights, chromatic spots on the stone, and textures of sand and water, reminiscent of pictorial matters. The artist's focus on platitudes leads him to introduce an element of two-dimensionality, as he does in this series, by photographing shadow projections of figures on volumetric and textured surfaces. His interest in shadows is natural because it is a plastic element of flat representation. A reflection on shadows appears in a text he wrote about Andy Warhol's work *Shadows*, where Giannotti also refers to the passage from Plato's Republic that describes the allegory of the cave.[15] It is not entirely unlikely that the artist puts the audience in a position to relieve the situation of Plato's cave prisoners because, in one

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[14] The name *Travessia* is simply because the artist crosses a river to take the photographs.

[15] The men chained inside a cave, with no access to the outside world, could only see shadows projected on the wall, according to his article "Andy Warhol e a sombra da Imagem" (Andy Warhol and the Shadow of Image) (Giannotti, 2004).

of the images, a shadow is projected onto a rock that may evoke a cave wall. This piece can prompt a reflection on the image. The question about the reality and representation of the image can be pondered through the photographic series *Travessia* concerning photography.

By photographing a reality, which is the landscape, and an appearance of reality, which is the silhouettes projected onto the landscape, one can think, in a metaphorical sense, that the artist is making a commentary on the condition of photography, which captures an appearance of reality and is not reality itself, as the discourse of early photographers led people to believe – they were interested in the success of the invention, believing that photography would replace this reality. Thus, this series can be a metaphor to say that photography, especially analog, captures a trace of a filtered reality, evidently, by its representation codes. It is worth remembering that what is real for the prisoners in Plato's cave is the projected shadow of another reality. Thus, Giannotti might propose a reflection on what constitutes the photographic image, on the illusion that it is capable of replacing reality, and inquire what knowledge this photography is capable of revealing about the world. The *Travessia* series can be a call to reflect on the production of images that aim to duplicate reality. Among all means of representation, photography is perhaps the most adept at duplicating deceptive appearances of reality. The artwork can, therefore, make a crossing from the real world to the world of appearances.

Some of the issues explored by Marco Giannotti's photographs find echoes in certain modernist photographs. The exploration of *platitudes*, compositional structures, and fragments of motifs in all-over, can be found both in international and Brazilian modernist photography. Modernist photography in Brazil extensively explored the *platitudes* of forms, whether through the valorization of shadows and image overlays or through unusual framings, with shots from above and vice versa.

Marco Giannotti acknowledges a relationship between some photographs of grids and the works of Geraldo de Barros. As is known, Barros participated in the *Ruptura* group (1952), as well as the 1st and 2nd International Biennials of São Paulo (1951 and 1953) during the peak of debates and implementation of abstractions in Brazil. Thus, he is an artist who identified with geometric abstractions in his production, both in painting and photography. As Paulo Herkenhoff (2006, pp. 147, 149) states, his photography "is governed by a statute of rupture [...] it operates the fissure in the block of mechanical *verismo* prevailing in photography. [...] Geraldo de Barros's 'abstraction' is an opposition to realistic photography". Since the late 1940s, with *Fotoformas* (1949-1950),[16] Barros was already working with mechanical imagery, and photography was the "experience introduced into his constructive reasoning, anticipating his concretist painting"

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[16] He held an exhibition of *Fotoformas* at MASP in 1950; "the photographs had a constructive character, even though no one knew what concretism was at that time". From the 1950s onwards, he abandoned photography to follow concretism (Costa; Rodrigues, 1995, pp. 52-53).

(Herkenhoff, 2006, p. 156). With the *Fotoformas* series, he develops his abstract photographs, resulting from his interest in Paul Klee. The artist deprives his photographs of the illusion of three-dimensionality by concealing the volumes of facades and roofs. Giannotti has this *platitude* in common with the painter of the Ruptura group. Marco Giannotti states that his photographs taken in a junkyard, which integrate the *Quadrante* series, dialogue with certain photographs of his fellow countryman. These are photographs of metal structures on the roof of Estação da Luz, in São Paulo, made by Barros with the superimposition of shots on the same negative. Giannotti and Barros have in common this preference for certain geometric motifs, grids, and facades in photography, and geometric abstraction in paintings.

These treatments of *platitudes* are also found in *Sol Nascente* (1963) by the Brazilian Gaspar Gasparin, who produced flattenings through the contrast of lights and shadows, with planes bordering on abstraction. In addition to Barros, other pioneers of Brazilian modern photography, such as José Yalenti and Thomas Farkas, were also interested in subverting the purposes of recording volumetric dimensions of subjects through photography. Yalenti explored the potential of backlighting in photography and incorporated the geometrization of architectural motifs, emphasizing lines and planes in *Embarque* (1945). In Farkas's photographs, similarly, the image captured in backlight was worked on, with the addition of rhythms, textures, unusual angles, and geometries in *Barragem de usina* (1951) and *Textura* (1949). Although Farkas and Yalenti are not abstract, they worked with a language that dialogues with a formal economy of subjects.

Other examples of innovation in modernist photography related to the flattening of volumes of photographed motifs can be found in various works: the unusual angle taken from above a square in *Divergentes* (1955) and *Composição II* (1954) by Ademar Manarini; the architectural geometries of *Propaganda do Céu* (1957) by Claudio Pugliese; the abstract geometries of lights in *Escada em branco* (1957) by Eduardo Enfelt; the emphasis on geometric line structures drawn in the darkened space in *Composição óbvia* (1935) by José Oiticica Filho; the back of a traffic sign in *Impacto* (1957) by Eduardo Salvatore, among other photographs.

Thus, even when dealing with figurative subjects, modernist photography seeks to highlight a more abstract vision of motifs, either by privileging unusual framings and angles or by considering geometric structures of the compositions and backlights that flatten surfaces. Modern photography "transformed the use of perspective [...], having to fight against the representation of perspective [...], and its quest for autonomy led it to the limits of abstractionism". Thus, the "dynamic of figurativism/abstractionism was typical of modern production", as noted by Helouise Costa and Renato Rodrigues (1995, pp. 92-93).

It is through the ambiguity between abstraction and figuration, between *platitudes* and volumetrics, that Giannotti's photographs can be likened to the images produced by Brazilian modern photographers. For the latter, discovering an abstracting vision of figurative subjects

represented a quest to introduce a new perspective to photography within a more traditional context prevalent at the time; in Marco Giannotti, there is no such concern because the contemporary situation no longer demands visions of ruptures. For Giannotti, using a plastic vocabulary linked to abstractions is directly related to his abstract painting and his planar perception, as discussed earlier. What exists in the artist's pictorial and photographic practices is his vision of opposing the objectivity of the realistic image, a vision of depth and perspective.

When examining Marco Giannotti's artistic practices, we can say that the artist treats his photographs pictorially but does not treat painting photographically in the sense discussed here in the analysis of his works. Thus, his pictorial plastic results do not reveal the use of photography, so it remains clandestine, but his photographs are imbued with pictorial evidence.

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