

# MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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## photograph

| Review | **BY CATHERINE WAGLEY**

### Luigi Ghirri: La Città

Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles



Luigi Ghirri, *Modena*, 1973.  
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Matthew Marks Gallery only began representing the estate of Luigi Ghirri in 2011, the year Thomas Demand curated him into a group show at the gallery. Since then, the Italian photographer, who did the bulk of his work in the 1970s and died just before turning 50 in 1992, has been more widely seen. His work was included in the 54th Venice Biennale and then in a show at the MAXXI Museum in Rome. It's not immediately obvious why it has caught on: He worked in areas trafficked by others who were more widely recognized. His Kodachrome experiments coincided with William Eggleston's; his interest in manmade intrusions into the landscape coincided with the New Topographics photographers' exploration of that issue; and his

photographs of street life and ads and posters recall work Lee Friedlander was making in New York and Daido Moriyama was making in Japan.

But Ghirri's images are less self-conscious than those of his peers, less reverently composed. He was good at making his tastefulness spontaneous. All the images in *La Città*, at Matthew Marks this spring, were small – the largest was about 11 x 7 inches and most were closer to 4 x 6 inches – and they were all unique prints. For most, you had to lean close to see what was going on, like the one of a square of paper laying on the sand containing six small photographs of Charlie Chaplin. In others, the compositions are so nonchalantly conventional that

it makes them better: the bush shaped like a layer cake, for instance, positioned right in the middle of the frame. By centering it, Ghirri underscored its funniness.

A couple of images in the show stood out for being too controlled and prettily composed. One was a photograph of a photograph of a woman wearing a floral wreath, positioned in front of a thin, off-white curtain. The other was a view of water in Arles seen through a paned window, a lighthouse serenely visible through one pane. But these two images only clarify how key that in-the-moment curiosity is to Ghirri's work. His best images make you feel like you're walking through a city with someone intensely smart and skeptical but not at all jaded, who keeps stopping and saying: "Look at that."