Nella Città Nuda, Stories of Humanity in the NYC Subway

Natasha Lardera (February 13, 2014)



In Antonio Monda's latest book, La Città Nuda, the author made a selection of some of the hundreds of photographs he took with his iPhone on the City's subway and wrote a short story for each one of them. Each story is a tale of humanity that captures the soul of the author himself.

How many times a day do you find yourself in the subway? Going to work, returning home, going to your yoga class or to that new restaurant that Time Out has just reviewed. You are standing squished between a bunch of strangers and look around or you just sit down and lose yourself in the latest thriller by your favorite author.

“The subway car is a very democratic place. When you're in the subway there is no distinction between you and the others, we're a all the same,” author Gay Talese told the audience of Casa

Italiana Zerilli Marimo' who had gathered to see the presentation of author Antonio Monda's latest book, published by Rizzoli, Nella Citta' Nuda, Le Mille Anime di New York (In the Naked City, the Thousand Souls of New York).

Why was he talking about the subway car? Because Monda's book is “a collection of pictures he has taken with his iPhone while riding the subway from the Upper West Side, where he lives, to the West Village, where he works (at NYU) and back,” Stefano Albertini explained at the beginning of the presentation. “When he first started taking these photographs of fellow travelers he was posting them on facebook and I told him that one day someone would find him out and beat him up... while luckily that did not happen and now this book is the result of that experiment.”

In Nella Citta' Nuda “Antonio made a selection of some of the hundreds of photographs he took and wrote a short story for each one of them. The result is a sort of Spoon River Anthology of living people, those we rub elbows with everyday in the subway,” Albertini said before introducing the panel of authors eager to ask Monda some questions. In addition to the aforementioned Talese, the presentation was attended by author Colum McCann and writer for The New Yorker, Judith Thurman.

To sum things up we can say that all their questions brought us the following as a long, complete answer:“The book features fifty stories and each one of them incorporates my beliefs and my obsessions,” Monda declared. We are talking about moral, ethical, social, religious and even cinema-related issues. Abortion, for example, is addressed in two, opposing, points of view, one for it, the other against it. There are prayers, as the prayer of a homosexual guy who wants to love his man in the eyes of God.

“You can never see the faces of the people portrayed in the pictures, they cannot be recognized. Their faces are blurry, out of focus and many are shot from the back. Since I was a child in Rome, I would get on the subway, look at the people around me and chose someone and make up their story. I have never stopped doing that,” Monda added.

And so we meet “Nymph,” one of the many characters of the book, an older woman, really well dressed, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer. Monda read her story, in Italian as the book still needs to come out in English, a story that could even belong to your grandmother. Nymph, this is the nickname her deceased husband gave her, doesn't even know where she's going, but she's in that car. and as it is taking her to some unknown location, it is making her travel through time in her head, with her thoughts and memories... and someone with such romantic and lovely memories can really be someone condemned to forget them all?

“When working on the book at times I would get inspiration from the photograph and write the person's story, others I already had a story I wanted to tell and I looked for the best person to incarnate it. I even picked a couple of real life events.”

Lena il Mostro (Lena the Monster), for example, is based on a New York City piece of news: the “Killer Nanny,” by the name of Yoselin Ortega, the nanny accused of butchering the two children in her care back in October 2012. “I tell the story from her point of view,” Monda explained. Good that the woman portrayed in the picture cannot be recognized as been picked to portray a crazy killer might just not be the best feeling in the world.

“As I was reaching my goal of 50 pictures/stories I realized that the overall tone of the book was rather bleak, so it was time to add some light to it and write some stories that are more funny and relaxed than others. No matter what their tone is, these stories are all part of me, a reflection of my nakedness, as I present to you all my obsessions. But I am not the only one to be “naked” here, they're naked too, as they are presented in all their humanity. ”

To read more about the book >> [2]

in-nyc-subway

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