

THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED SIMONE CASETTA



### I mórt

Quèll che sa i mórt, e i n dì gnént, i sa tótt,  
èrch' quant t si 'd chèsa, da par tè, la nòta,  
pórti, finestri céusi, lòu i è lè,  
che t si ndè lèt, l'è tèrd, t'é smórt la luce,  
t si svégg, te schéur, u t vén ad chi pensir  
ch'i n s pò déi, lòu i è sémpa alè, i t lèz dréinta,  
mo i è bòn, i fa féinta da no èsi.

*Raffaello Baldini*

**The dead.** What the dead know, they never say, but they know everything, / even when you're at home, alone, at night / with the doors and windows closed, they're there, / when you're in bed, it's late, the light's out, / you're awake in the dark, and those thoughts come, / thoughts that can't be spoken, they're always there, they read your innermost thoughts / but they're kind, they pretend they're not there at all. *Raffaello Baldini*

**THOSE WHO HAVE LIVED** SIMONE CASSETTA with a text by John Berger



**My encounter with these people**

Simone Casetta, 2011

My encounter with these people was not intentional. It simply happened and the desire and need to photograph them arose immediately after the encounter. Between me and them there was a photosensitive color film, which I believe is an incomparable means for keeping contact open. Through the reaction of metal salts to light, the photographic film transmits the vibration of the other that we encounter. It is scientifically tested magic, the missing link between inert matter and the photosynthesis of chlorophyll, which was the first mechanism of life.

I found myself among these people because I was taking portraits of the doctors at the Carlo Forlanini hospital in Rome. The attendant who was accompanying me said, "Sir, come and look, we also have a museum...". I was late and in a hurry and I followed him only out of courtesy, but as soon as I entered I exclaimed aloud inside, "They sing!".

I spent eleven days with them, and right from the second day I began to speak to these unborn children, to these new friends. Two youngsters, a boy and a girl, had been placed on two shelves opposite one another for almost a century. Probably they had never met before. It became natural to me to refer to them as "the lovers". Every time I came across them I was amazed at how small they were.

Only once did I move a jar. All the other portraits were taken in the identical position and same light in which I found them.

Of all of them, the one that moved me most was a tiny boy. He stayed in my mind and heart because he resembled my father or, better, he resembled my memory of my father. In particular, the shape of his head, the line of his nape. They were poor people who lived during the Fascist period in Italy, when all it took was a signature from the local authorities to destine a body to an anatomical study. My own study of them confirmed for me once again how easy it is to be welcomed into the house of the poor.

The work needed to prepare the bodies of these people for conservation was carried out by Rudolf between 1930 and 1945. Before then, Rudolf toured fairs and exhibitions with his carriage of monsters. He was employed by Eugenio, the hospital Director, because he had discovered original and extraordinary techniques for dissection and conservation.

When Augusto, who has worked in the art field all his life, saw this photograph, he remarked that the edge of the jar showed the same face of man in two distant periods: on the right, the features typical of Renaissance painting, and on the left, the face of what we imagine will be the face of man in the future.

I have had the opportunity to observe the reactions of people as they look at these photographs. They are extremely varied, from refusal to immediate love, with all the possibilities in between.

Cornelia refused to go beyond the second photograph, saying, "I, as a mother, cannot look at these children." I, on the other hand, as a father, immediately felt a great love for all of them, as though they were my own children.

The photographs had very long exposure times, from a few minutes to more than half an hour. For them it was less than an instant; for me, it was a contraction of time and the days ended quickly. Unexpectedly, at a certain point, it was already time to leave.







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«This elegant, silent, and still work by Simone Casetta is distinguished by  
contrasts, and untainted by voyeurism or provocation.  
It has the same delicate, subdued refinement as these mute individuals in their  
jars. It is impossible not to see in it the striking portrait of his photographic vision.»  
*Henri Peyre*

**With a text by John Berger**