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BEAUTY THROUGH THE LENS

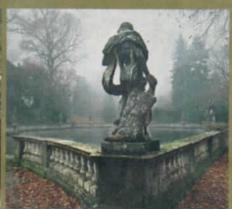
The gardens and villas of Tuscany, as pictured by Massimo Listri

Story by CAMILLA RUSSELL









hotography is a means of capturing reality on film. By using sunlight and shadow to create perspective, you can transform a single photograph of an ordinary scene into an artistic portrait. Italian photographer Massimo Listri's year foray into pastoral aesthetics has garnered him a lowing as an artist who photographs interiors and adscapes, and each of his photos demonstrates the mbiosis of light and dark.

An acknowledged specialist in photographing architure and interiors, he recently visited Bangkok to paripate in Bella Italia, the Italian Festival organised by the abassy of Italy and the Italian Trade Commission, to but his photographs of gardens and villas in Toscana Tuscany), northwestern Italy. Although he is a frequent weller to Thailand, photographing both the country dishomes, this is Listri's first public exhibition in this untry.

The exhibition, Gardens of Tuscany: A Collection of nures of the Most Beautiful Gardens and Villas of Tuscany, being held at Siam Paragon, from Monday, June 18, to y 1, and is one of many artistic events being held as part the festival.

"I specialise in architectural structures and interior sign," he explained in a mixture of English and Italian, h the aid of an interpreter.

The landscape is as valuable as the architecture of a liding, because a garden can be seen as an extension the architecture itself."

He is internationally renowned for his intimate photos the interiors of historic palaces and gardens, and has blished more than 35 books, including *Palazzo Pisani retta* (1998), *Palazzo Dario* (1984) and *Cashemire* (1986). Is also a permanent fixture in publications including thitectural Digest, Connaissance des Arts, Beaux Arts, a Decor, Le Figaro Magazine and the New York Times gazine.

The exhibition examines the history of Italian landscape ign from the Renaissance, baroque, Romantic and itemporary periods as exemplified by gardens and is throughout Tuscany. Each century shows the evolving eraction between nature and people, and concludes in the 20th century, where designs were inspired by a aesthetics.

istri chose all of the gardens photographed for the

exhibition, touring Tuscany to locate and document each era. He emphasized that he strove to find an equilibrium between the balance of light and depth to illustrate the importance of perspective in each photograph.

"I am trying to research the best that nature and architecture can offer," he explained. "Each garden has excellent composition and balance, but you have to capture them at the best moment, when the light is perfect that

He noted that Tuscany was the inspiration for the rest of Europe at the beginning of the Renaissance, so the gardens created were used as examples for the rest of the world's landscape designs. This was a time of artists and architects including Brunelleschi, Donatello and Giambologna, but the origins of Italian landscape design can be found in the remnants of Villanovan villages, Neolithic discoveries, Etruscan settlements and burial grounds, and the grandeur of ancient Rome. All of these pivotal moments in history demonstrate the ever-changing identity of Tuscany through each period's aesthetics, and shows how man has undergone a series of transformations, simultaneously harmonising with and dominating his natural environment.

"Photography is a combination of perspective and light, and the eye," he explained. "I think that you can find beauty everywhere in the world. I have worked all over Europe, and Cambodia and Thailand. I have worked everywhere."

Listri confessed that he only takes one photo per scene, because it is the light and depth he is searching for, rather than taking numerous pictures to single out a perfect moment. "I only take one photograph. I don't use Polaroids either. When I took pictures of Versailles in Paris I took over 300 separate shots!" he explained.

Inspired by many in the artistic arena, Listri acknowledged he studies the techniques painters use to mimic sunlight on canvas. He named Russian abstract expressionist Wassily Kandinsky as one of the individuals who have inspired him throughout his career.

"My main inspiration comes from wanting to understand the beauty that can be found in paintings. I not only like ancient art, but contemporary art, too," he said. Another pivotal role model is the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, who Listri collaborated with on a book when he was 22. "I worked on a big coffee table book with him," he said.

Listri's introduction to art was through his father, who



Italian photographer Massimo Listri.

was a well-known literary critic in Florence when Listri was a young child. Always surrounded by artistic and creative people, Listri was influenced by the many colourful figures who passed through his house during his youth. It was also his father who introduced him to photography.

"I am a self-taught photographer," he said. "My first camera was a gift from my father when I was 15. At 16, I was already working for an Italian art ma weekly magazine about lifestyle and cul

The digital camera revolution may b Listri is aware of the technical developm however, he admits that he prefers to rem

"I began with black and white portrait photography," he said. "Nowadays the makes everyone want to be a photograph don't have the training. It's thought to strange photographs that they will have as they are convenient to use."

Returning to the importance of light photograph. Listri acknowledged that he dynamics and properties of sunlight to imp graphic technique.

His advice for aspiring photographers is study art history from around the world, insight into the many techniques of repr in a creative manner. "This includes sculptu too," he said. "Paintings let you study light and elegance. These are all important in too.

"As a photographer it's very important light and depth, because they give balance Now it's very easy to take a photo of a med make it look better with a computer," he

"The big challenge nowadays is to do thelp of a computer. It's not easy when yo just using film to achieve beauty."

Similar to a Renaissance man in the taking pleasure in naturalistic surroundin that nature is not something to be feared graphs reveal the age-old Italian philosop the centre of the universe and the universe by using light and shadow in the Tuscar villas he has photographed, Listri is ultiman in harmony with nature.

'Gardens in Tuscany: A Collection of Pictures o Beautiful Gardens and Villas of Tuscany', the e Massimo Listri's photos, is at Siam Paragon fro July 1.

For more information, contact the Italian Emba 02-285-4090—3 ext 149, email ufficiocultural @esteri.it, or visit www.italianfestival2007.co