

# BERNARDUCCI.MEISEL.GALLERY

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## **RAPHAELLA SPENCE**

### *SAINTS & SINNERS*

3 MARCH – 2 APRIL 2016

Bernarducci Meisel Gallery is pleased to present *Saints and Sinners*, an exhibition of recent work by British-born Photorealist painter, Raphaella Spence. This will be the first showing of the artist's depictions of 18th century Italian 'field churches' (Saints) together with her earlier cityscapes of 'The Strip' in Las Vegas, Nevada (Sinners). In addition, there will be paintings of the one of the holiest cities, *Rome*.

Spence is best known for her precise and evocative renderings of European cities. This past year she has been exploring the tactile and visceral beauty of small, derelict chapels that pepper the Italian landscape. Her much awaited solo exhibition includes these new works alongside earlier night scenes of the unsentimental temples of gambling that populate the Las Vegas Strip. The subjects of these paintings, while polar opposite in their intent, have long and storied histories that reveal the irony in which they coincide.

Field churches were modest structures designed by and built for field workers, homesteaders, grape pickers, harvesters of wheat, farm hands and their families to worship on Sundays as most farms were a long way from town where the central churches were located. *Chiesa Di San Martino* (2015) is a modern portrayal of an 18th century chapel located in the tiny village of Petrero in the province of Umbria where the artist lives and works. This beautiful stone chapel is still called San Martino and is situated on the property of the Dutchess Consolazione on the left side of the road Duesanti-Petrero. Originally part of the Abby of Sassovivo, in 1711 it became part of the Church of Santa Maria Della Consolazione in Todi. The inside of the church is plastered with weathered frescos while the outside is stone with embrasure windows and a ceramic tile roof typical of the period. It has a plain wooden door with a double raised arch sitting on a Romanesque architrave. The artist captures the serenity of this rambling sanctuary which is surrounded by a tempestuous sky and a well-worn terra firma path leading to the entrance.

The Vegas Strip on the other hand has been a favorite subject of the artist since her visit to the United States in 2006. Overwhelmed by its opulence, Spence has tried to capture Las Vegas as it is perceived – an internationally renowned major resort city known primarily for twenty-four hour a day gambling, decadent nightlife and overall conspicuous consumption. *The Strip* (2013) depicts the city from an aerial view which is consistent with the work she has been doing for the past ten years, creating a vertiginous atmosphere and rakish angles versus the centered, calm and modest composition of the field churches.

Born in London in 1978, Raphaella Spence carries with her a distinguished artistic heritage. Both her father and grandfather were well-known British architects who influenced her interest in artistic precision, attention to detail, emotional understanding of beauty and her innate artistic gift. Her work has been featured in notable museum exhibitions such as *50 Years of Photorealism: 1962-2012* which was on view at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid, Spain), Saarländmuseum (Saarbrücken, Germany), The Birmingham Gallery of Art (Great Britain), Museo de Bellas Arte (Bilbao, Spain). The exhibition continues to travel throughout Eastern Europe and the Netherlands. The first presentation of her work in a major museum exhibition was *Iperrealisti* at the Museo Chiostro del Bramante (Rome, Italy). In the United States, Spence's paintings were included in *Photorealism Revisited*, a survey that traveled to the Oklahoma City Art Museum (Oklahoma City, OK) and the Butler Institute of Art (Youngstown, OH) in 2013.

Frank Bernarducci and Louis K. Meisel founded Bernarducci Meisel Gallery in 2000. The gallery is well known for a commitment to established and developing realist artists. The Gallery is located at 37 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues on the third floor.

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