



## MIT MUSEUM PRESS RELEASE

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**MIT MUSEUM AND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE & PLANNING  
EXHIBIT URBAN PHOTOGRAPHY OF GABRIELE BASILICO  
Urban Renewal in Emilia-Romagna and Bord de mer: The DATAR  
Project**

**February 16 – June 6 at the Compton and Wolk Galleries Cambridge, MA  
(February 2004)**

Two galleries at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology present the first major exhibition in the United States of one of the leading photographers of the contemporary urban landscape. Gabriele Basilico—Photographs, presented by the MIT School of Architecture and Planning and the MIT Museum, is displayed in two components, Urban Renewal in Emilia-Romagna and Bord de mer: The DATAR Project at the Compton and Wolk Galleries, from February 16 through June 6, 2004.

Basilico's work focuses on urban places in transformation: industrial borderlands, modern edge cities, and the boundary zones where old and new merge. His photographs of vacant factories, discarded commercial buildings, and abandoned housing blocks, and the frayed edges of historic centers are works of, in architect Aldo Rossi's words, "morbid beauty."

"Basilico is fascinated by city building and how cities look," states Gary Van Zante. "He creates meditative images of the most common places, discarded places that exemplify the precarious state of modern cities and the failures of planning. The work exhibited at MIT was completed for public planning agencies and entered into the public debate about the future of towns and cities in northern France and Italy. Through this participation in the public planning process, Basilico's photographs had a real impact on the lives of residents."

Urban Renewal in Emilia-Romagna at Compton Gallery documents the industrial archeology of twenty-seven cities of northern Italy. Commissioned by the Emilia-Romagna region in 2001, Basilico's photographs were instruments in a public planning

process that identified disused sites for reinterpretation and reintegration into the city. At Wolk Gallery, *Bord de mer: The DATAR Project* displays Basilico's work for the French regional planning authority in 1984-1985. For DATAR's investigation into geographic identity and regional change, Basilico provided a stunning portrait of the coastal towns and littoral landscape of northern France.

To see a selection of works from both shows, visit [. Related programs are listed below.](#)

Born in Milan in 1944 and trained as an architect, Basilico began photographing the industrial sites of Milan in the 1970s. He has had over fifty one-man exhibitions, including a major retrospective at Turin's Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in 2002, and has participated in more than one hundred group exhibitions. Featured in *Casabella*, *Domus*, *Abitare*, *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* and other journals, his work has been the subject of thirty-five monographs

### **Urban Renewal in Emilia-Romagna at Compton Gallery**

This component of the exhibition presents a selection drawn from more than 700 photographs taken by Basilico for the northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna between April and June 2001. The series chronicles the status of metropolitan areas where urban renewal projects were planned to adapt and redevelop sites that had served as military barracks, factories, hospital, livestock markets, freight stations, and railroad yards. Nearly all located on the fringes of historic centers, the fifty municipalities involved in the conversion projects were in strategic positions to provide the cities with critical services such as universities, museums, parks, car parks, shopping centers, sports facilities, improved vehicle access to city centers, and low income housing.

The photographic campaign surveyed the start-up phase of the Emilia-Romagna urban development project. Going beyond the language of design, economy, and property, Basilico's photographs capture the meaning of the places.

According to Piero Orlandi, city planner. Regione Emilia Romagna, "Basilico analyzes and describes the congestion of twentieth-century cities, together with the refuse. He maintains that from the refuse can come the rebirth of cities. These are certainly not dead photos just because the show places devoid of life and people."

"Collected together these photos produce a sense of richness, of opportunity. We see what this wealth offers to the cities. We feel the fascination that comes with huge transition phases in urban life. Today we can recall the late 1880's, when a united Italy reshaped cities. Convents and palaces were transformed into offices, ministries, and museums. Today an analogous event could happen with the empty urban spaces, the abandoned zones."

### **Bord de mer: The DATAR Project at Wolk Gallery**

An overview of the DATAR project states, "The task is to throw light on the organization and shapes of national ([French] territory at the end of what has been a period of profound change, to give individual expression to the first signs on the horizon of future

shifts in modes of production, urbanization, information, and, lastly, to highlight the components of our national landscape that are dying, disappearing, or just now coming into existence.”

In the introduction to the second printing, eighteen years after the assignment, Basilico discusses his varied approach for this assignment, “Right from the onset in 1978, my professional focus, my domain was architecture and the urban landscape. The DATAR project led me to widen my horizons, introducing me to the natural landscape, leading me to include in my representation of places ever vaster, even more distant spaces. This helped discover new vantage points and find a different, substantially slower, visual rhythm.”

Basilico concludes that the DATAR model “has spread throughout Europe in numerous surveys carried out in various places over the last 15 years. It has made it possible to develop and enrich the dialectical relationship initially instituted between photographic research and public commissions, between artistic disciplines and ‘forward looking’ disciplines such as town planning or regional development.”

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## **Gabriele Basilico – Photographs February 16 – June 6, 2004**

### **Urban Renewal in Emilia-Romagna**

MIT Museum’s Compton Gallery  
77 Massachusetts Ave, Building 10, Room 105  
Weekdays 9:30 – 5 pm  
Sat 12 – 5 pm — special extended hours

### **Bord de mer: The DATAR Project**

Wolk Gallery — MIT School of Architecture  
77 Massachusetts Ave, Building 7, Room 338  
Weekdays 9 – 5 pm  
Sat 12 – 5 pm — special extended hours

- Admission: Free at both galleries
- Wheelchair accessible
- For further information, call 617-627-3518 or visit [web.mit.edu/museum/exhibitions/basilico.html](http://web.mit.edu/museum/exhibitions/basilico.html)

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## **Gabriele Basilico—Photographs: Related Programs**

### **Visions for a New Cultural Landscape**

An international symposium on urban redevelopment, focusing on projects in Emilia-

Romagna, Italy, and the Llogregat River, Catalonia, Spain. Sponsored by the Department of Urban Studies & Planning and the MIT Museum.

- Wednesday, February 18, 2004, 6pm
- MIT, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Building 10, Room 105
- Open to general public; free admission

**Object Lessons: Basilico's Cityscapes**

Curator of Architecture and Design Gary Van Zante discusses the captivating wealth of information and beauty that Basilico's works of industrial archeology impart. A program in the Museum's monthly series of brown bag gallery talks.

- Wednesday, March 17, noon – 1pm
- Compton Gallery, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Building 10, Room 105
- General audience; free admission