

Letizia Battaglia: Life, Love and Death in Sicily 9 October 2024 – 23 February 2025

"Photography changes nothing. Violence continues, poverty continues. Children are still being killed in stupid wars." – Letizia Battaglia

This Autumn, The Photographers' Gallery presents **Letizia Battaglia: Life, Love and Death in Sicily**, on show from **9 October 2024 – 23 February 2025**.

Letizia Battaglia (1935-2022) was one of Italy's most important social documentary photographers. She documented everyday life, alongside the brutal reality of the Mafia and their victims in Sicily. Her images are some of the best-known records of life in the shadow of the Mafia. Not only a photographer, she was also a civil rights activist, journalist, publisher, film director, environmentalist, politician, photo museum director, and is a key figure in Sicilian contemporary history.

Letizia Battaglia: Life, Love and Death in Sicily is a powerful overview of Battaglia's extraordinary photographic work, from 1971 to 2021. Renowned for capturing some of the most poignant, poetic and dramatic moments in Sicilian history, Battaglia's work extends beyond her homeland. This exhibition showcases a broader spectrum of her photography by intertwining her career with her personal life to emphasise Battaglia's sensitivity and humanity.

Born in Palermo, Sicily, Battaglia began her career in journalism in 1969. Entirely self-taught, she first took photographs to better sell her writing and gradually discovered her passion for photography. Battaglia's strong desire for justice, independence and change fuelled her work.

During the 70s and 80s, she was a permanent presence in Palermo, courageously photographing victims of Mafia murders, the fierce in-fighting between rival gangs and their attacks on civil society. She also documented police officers, judges and prominent establishment figures to symbolise the fight against the Mafia, corruption, violence and organised crime. Her work disproved the myth that the Mafia only killed each other and was critical in providing links between corrupt politicians and the Mafiosi.

She received many death threats because of her work. In 2017, she said: "You no longer knew who your friends or enemies were. You left the house in the morning and didn't know if you would come back in the evening."

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Battaglia mainly photographed in black and white. She also captured daily life: women and children in their neighbourhoods and streets, showing the wealth of the area and at the same time the misery of a city almost abandoned to its fate. Her pictures capture the poverty on the streets as well as the life of the upper classes, religious processions, festivals, funerals and much more.

Describing her photography of families and children living in the neighbourhoods of Palermo, she said "I searched for their dream, to find love, adventures, peace, freedom, beauty, a fantastic future. In them I find myself as a child."

As the photo director at *L'Ora*, the daily newspaper in Palermo, she was at almost every

major crime scene in the city until shortly before the newspaper was closed in 1990. She took around 600,000 pictures as part of her reportage for the newspaper.

She later described her process: "I was with my bare hands, except for my camera, against them with all their weapons. I took photos of everything. Suddenly I had an archive of blood. An archive of pain, despair, terror, drug-addicted youths, young widows, trials and arrests".

The exhibition is a diverse and extensive representation of Battaglia's work. The images of Palermo's alleyways, districts and neighbourhoods tell different stories of everyday life that sensitively depict personal and interpersonal relationships.

Letizia Battaglia: Life, Love and Death in Sicily invites visitors to explore Battaglia's artistic journey, revealing the heart and humanity within her powerful work.

The exhibition brings together vintage and new prints, archive materials and contact sheets, books, magazines and film.

Letizia Battaglia: Life, Love and Death in Sicily is curated by Paolo Falcone, in collaboration with the Letizia Battaglia Archive and Fondazione Falcone for the Arts.

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For general information and enquiries about The Photographers' Gallery, including the archive, Print Sales Gallery, or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk

Notes for Editors

****Content warning: please note this exhibition contains images depicting violence****

Letizia Battaglia

Letizia Battaglia was born in Palermo, Sicily in 1935. Later she lived in northern Italy and returned to Sicily in 1974.

She wanted to be a journalist. But when she picked up a camera at 40, her focus changed. She once told *The Guardian* "I thought 'with this in my hand, I can take on the world.'" She worked tirelessly through the 1970s and 1980s documenting the brutal realities of everyday life in Sicily. She received regular death threats from the Mafia as she documented them and their victims.

Battaglia stopped taking photographs for a few years when she entered the world of politics. From 1985 to 1991, she sat on the Palermo City Council for the Green Party, and from 1991 to 1996 she was a deputy for The Network in the Sicilian Regional Assembly. She also ran a publishing house, Edizioni della Battaglia, and was co-founder of the monthly magazine *Mezzocielo*, a magazine for women. She campaigned for women's rights and the rights of prisoners.

Battaglia's photos were published worldwide in magazines and newspapers. She won numerous awards, including the W. Eugene Smith Grant for Humanistic Photography and the Cornell Capa Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography. She participated in important international exhibitions worldwide, including Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Palais de Tokio, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Biennale of Istanbul; Palazzo Grassi, Fondation Pinault,

Venice; Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo - MAXXI, Rome and Instituto Moreira Salles and Rio de Janeiro/Sao Paulo Casa dei Tre Oci.

She travelled extensively, alone or with her long-time partner Franco Zecchin and other photographers such as Josef Koudelka, and created photo reportages on countries including Greenland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Scandinavia, Africa and the USA.

On her death in Sicily in 2022, Leoluca Orlando, the mayor of Palermo and her friend said "Palermo has lost an extraordinary woman...She was an extraordinary person who made visible what was invisible."

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, events and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and café – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter.

Find out more at: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor information – The Photographers' Gallery

Mon – Weds 10am – 6pm

Thurs & Fri 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 5pm)

Sat 10am – 6pm

Sun 11am- 6pm

Tickets - your ticket covers entry to all exhibitions on the day of your visit

£10 / £7 concessions (members go free)

Advance online booking: £8.50 / £6 concessions

Also on show at The Photographers' Gallery from 9 October 2024 – 23 February 2025:

[Deborah Turbeville](#) and [Ten.8 - the archive](#).

In Soho Photography Quarter, [Sian Davey - The Garden](#) is on show until November 2024, free.

The Photographers' Gallery

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