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Metropolitan still lives

The "Atlas" exhibition presents Marco Petrus' latest urban visions in what is almost a *journal intime* of the *Novecento* movement and contemporary times, featuring both architectural details and large-scale compositions.

Art / Francesca Acerboni

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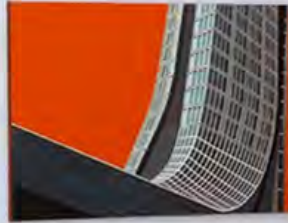
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The visions that Marco Petrus has been cementing on canvas for more than 20 years are practically metropolitan still lifes. His is a painstaking, silent, profound and tireless study of cities. He explores and photographs architecture then draws it and transposes it onto canvas without frills or human presences, like a self-contained, almost abstract and timeless, organism.



↑ View of the exhibition "Marco Petrus – Atlas" at the Milan Triennale



Almost is the key word because Petrus' pictures feature the silent but *alive* architecture of the Italian *Novecento* movement, monumental architecture packed with contrasts, projections and shadows – congenial to his pictorial vision. We see the Milan of the 1920s and 1940s but not only: Trieste, Marseille, Berlin, London, New York, Helsinki and Paris also appear and the gaze extends to and dwells on contemporary times.



↑ View of the exhibition "Marco Petrus – Atlas" at the Milan Triennale

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Petrus never considers it essential to physically identify a place or a time in history. He does not seek an obsessive parallel with reality. He strives, instead, to uncover a sense of the city, a platonic ideal of ethic and beauty that was often (but not only) outstandingly expressed by the *Novecento* movement. Milan remains his favourite city, a familiar city where he lives, observes the urban environment and where he started to paint. It is the city that, especially in his early days, prompted comparisons with Sironi and De Chirico.



↑ View of the exhibition "Marco Petrus – Atlas" at the Milan Triennale



The architecture of Portaluppi, Muzio, Terragni, Ponti, Lancia, Andreani and Moretti emerge glorified and immortalised by an analytical but poetic gaze. “The standard perspective angle is unreal, – Petrus explains – the normal view of a city is that of the pedestrian, looking upwards.” So, Petrus’ brush paints the sky: a geometric form shaped by the buildings and in which the nuances of the early years have permanently given way to areas charged with colour, sometimes a deep blue, sometimes pink or orange.

The “Atlas” exhibition at the Milan Triennale, for which it was especially designed, really is a *journal intime*, an inner journey that does not stop at the theatrical set of the first buildings, those that he himself describes as “postcard views”, but continues to experiment with new, more mature and complex urban visions. The need to dwell on a single building, delve into its solids and voids, study the masses and projections and work on vertiginous angles prompted the series on the Torre Velasca – an iconic building embodying decades of Milanese history in its critical success and controversy. Petrus gives us an unprecedented interpretation of it frozen in time, monumental and calm.



↑ View of the exhibition "Marco Petrus – Atlas" at the Milan Triennale



Over the years, Petrus has increasingly shifted his focus to architectural detail, as if he were looking at the buildings through a very personal magnifying glass: the repeated modules of a structural grid, the round development of some of Guido Canella's balconies, a close-up of a curved Zaha Hadid façade and the patters of pure colours in Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. After years of painting with oils, he has returned to charcoal drawings, making the black shading on the facades even deeper and blurring the clear-cut silhouette of the Tour Méditerranée in Marseille with a grease pencil. Shifting scale with natural ease, Petrus then works on two levels, portraying the whole building and its details, often picked out and recomposed in a multiple and serial vision.



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The metropolitan atlas in the exhibition begins on a large wall conceived as a gallery of Petrus' work. All the artist's types and angles are set against an oxide red backdrop – a distinctive cipher of his work that can be seen on the bases and edges of his canvases: the upward-looking views, the architectural montages, the back-to-front views of buildings (the so-called Upside Downs) and the jumbled up and imaginary compositions of overlapping buildings forming a sort of urban collage. Opposite is the panoramic series in a new 100x200 cm format, adopted for the first time, of the newest buildings: the new Palazzo della Regione, the Unicredit tower in Milan and Zaha Hadid's building in Marseille. All follow the thread of a pictorial story that could almost be a film. "I do not really want to convey the identity of one city rather than another – says Petrus – but to seek an artistic identity. I look to architecture as a model that will inspire me." The architecture that simply and genuinely gives Petrus "an excuse to paint."

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↑ View of the exhibition "Marco Petrus – Atlas" at the Milan Triennale

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Until 2 June 2014
Marco Petrus. Atlas
Triennale di Milano
viale Alemagna 6, Milan

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