

# L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

## Collezione Ettore Molinario : Dialogues #42 : Eadweard Muybridge / Barbara Morgan

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Ettore Molinario

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This is the 42nd dialogue of the **Collezione Ettore Molinario**. A new dialogue centred on a theme that's very important to my collection: dance, or more precisely, the body transforming and liberating itself through movement. Two masters dance together here: **Barbara Morgan**, who captured Martha Graham, and **Eadweard Muybridge**, in a plate from *Animal Locomotion*. As if to say: we are animals, and we are artists. An extraordinary waltz.

**Ettore Molinario**

Just before offering herself to Barbara Morgan's lens, Martha Graham had contracted – her back curved like a bow, her face pressed to her chest, her torso angled toward the ground, her body bent, her lungs slowly emptying. Then, suddenly, that same body stretched out, releasing energy, blossoming – her skirt turning into a sculpture of wind. Her chin lifted, becoming another *mons Venus*, reversed, almost a tribute to the geometric eroticism of Man Ray, and a precursor to that of Robert Mapplethorpe. Contraction and release, folding and explosion: these are words, experiences, emotions through which I've shaped my own feelings. When I came across this striking image of Martha Graham, chosen instinctively for its rarity and dramatic power, even more so than the iconic *The Kick*, I realized I had found a kindred spirit in the extraordinary American dancer. I'd even say an accomplice, someone who helped me reflect on the presence of dance, its necessary presence, in my collection. Dance as movement, « because movement never lies » said Martha Graham, who perhaps also drew on the teachings of her father, an alienist, a forerunner of the modern psychiatrist and a scholar of the relationship between movement and the psyche. But dance does not speak truth only when it mirrors life. It tells the truth when it allows life to « use our body, and sometimes this experience is pleasant, other times frightening, but always inevitable » continued the great American choreographer. To use the body to tell one's story, to reveal oneself, to transcend codes... how modern.

In the late 1920s, Martha Graham debuted with an all-female company, and only in 1938 did she begin to welcome male dancers. Her goal was to reclaim the female body as an artistic medium – “powerful and autonomous” – and to develop a method that originates from the womb. “A moving from the vagina,” Graham said. From that epicentre, with a spasm, an internal whiplash, energy radiates outward to every part of the body. I like to emphasize this female centrality, this carnality of womanhood, rooted in the earth and spiraling upward from there. A woman who sometimes falls, as in Barbara Morgan's portrait, not by chance taken from the ballet *War Theme*, which echoes Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier*, and rises again, rotating her torso and head as if to follow every star in the sky.

The revolution of the 20th century is a woman like this: her task is to free us all, women and men alike. And then another great “American” photographer comes to mind, though English by birth, Eadweard Muybridge. A revolutionary, yes, but still rooted in the 19th century and its positivism, breaking movement down moment by moment in search of a hidden truth and beauty too fast for the naked eye to perceive. Muybridge places time under a microscope; Graham hides it within her body. And when Martha dances, it is that distant darkness, sometimes graceful, sometimes terrifying, that comes to light.

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