

FORMAT 2024

FORMAT International Photography Festival happens every other year in Derby. As a part of FORMAT's off year programme the festival has partnered with LCB Depot to celebrate its 20th anniversary, bringing amazing international photography to Leicester!

Venues across the city are hosting exhibitions from **25th March - 26th April 2024**. Find out more about the exhibition venues and artists involved at <https://lcbdepot.co.uk/event/format24/> or @lcbdepot



No other country but America

Irene Ferri

Print photography

NO OTHER COUNTRY BUT AMERICA

Critical text by Marta Ciccolari Micaldi - Author and journalist specializing in North American culture

There is no other place in the world that has its own dream for sale. There is no Italian dream or Thai dream or Chilean dream: there is only the American dream. And that's it. It is to it that the expectations of the rest of the world and also those of those fortunate enough to have been born into it look; it is to that dream that the gazes and emotions of those who want fulfillment, enthusiasm, peace, a future for their lives often respond. And who, moreover, does not long for all this? America is the promised land of our secular time, it is the flag in whose sacred stars we see a sky of infinite possibilities, in whose sacred stripes we see straight roads and a boundless horizon. We see it until, at some point, a point we cannot foresee or welcome, we see nothing more. And the dream becomes first confusion, then disillusionment, finally - if one is lucky enough not to have in the meantime completely compromised the soul to buy that sinister dream - detachment. And thus, perhaps, salvation.

It happens to everyone today, in different ways and degrees. Especially degrees of sincerity: some insist on never wanting to see reality beyond the dream despite experiencing its irreducible harshness; there are those who for that revelation go so far as to take their own lives.

Ferri's American story of fascination and awareness is told through the photographs of *No Other Country but America*, a project that collects 10 years of observation and experience on the ground and has as its title precisely its urgency, Irene's impulse to go to the United States because it would have been impossible to think of realizing her dream in any other country in the world.

In 2013 Ferri moved to Los Angeles to study Cinematography at the University. It doesn't take long for that fairground that is America at the beginning of every story - color, sweetness, icons, swimming pools, sunsets, movement, roller skates: the first photographs of *No Other Country but America* - to become something else: one morning she gets off the bus at a wrong stop and ends up in Skid Row, the dark side of the dream factory. Tent cities, thousands of homeless people, many in an altered state of mind, filth, violence, oblivion: a spectacle that has nothing Hollywood about it but shares the same mother with Hollywood, like an outcast child. A hypocritical mother whose similarities Ferri also begins to perceive in his fellow students: actors, directors, producers who have come from all over the world and who dream

big but then end up consuming their ambitions in illusion, just like the cigarettes they carelessly extinguish in a cake during a party.

The more time passes, the less for Ferri things stay into place, like an immense plastic swordfish stranded above soda fridges. It's not just the coexistence of the golden dream alongside the humanitarian crisis of those living on the streets, now not at all invisible to her: it's the Los Angeles obsession with fitness, entertainment and little else. It is the drudgery of extremely hard work that is required of anyone living in the city just to be able to live among the palm trees and look at them every morning. It is the sinister confusion of living in a place that is not as it should be.

Ferri has seen what one often does not want to see, and once seen, cannot unsee. That is why *No Other Country but America* begins to change tone and gaze from the central photograph: Psychic is that person you cling to when you no longer have control over your reality. Psychic represents the transition to a shadow that is not necessarily malignant, but a shadow that one has to see, to be in, to live in. America, then, in Ferri's eyes becomes that land blessed with skies, pastel-colored mansions, motels and palm trees that feeds a fierce loneliness and nurtures the desires of many but fails to protect the dignity of all. And that, indeed, sends many in uniform to their deaths. Indeed, when Ferri leaves Los Angeles and begins to visit Texas, Arizona, and the national parks, she encounters flags, flags, and flags: an unbridled patriotism that on the one hand devours the lives of soldiers at the front and on the other confines native people to reservations sustained yes by sublime nature but then, much more concretely, by dilapidated fast food chains and not a single supermarket.

Ferri finally leaves Los Angeles and the United States but, unable to make a final farewell, continues to explore them from other perspectives, to look at them - even - from the distance of her new homes in the world, to try to resolve elsewhere a conflict that she nevertheless still nurtures within herself. For this is the most authentic legacy of the American dream today: to stop believing in it, at some point. And yet continue to relive it. *No Other Country but America* is the best contemporary visual representation of what writer Bret Easton Ellis had called, speaking of Los Angeles and the United States, "gleaming nihilism."

We should discuss this after the selection, based on the print sizes.

Artist Bio

Based in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Irene Ferri is an Italian artist, teacher and entrepreneur.

Ferri graduated in Communication & Media at Iulm University of Milan with a thesis on the work of cinematographers David Lynch, Michel Gondry and Wes Anderson.

In 2013 Ferri moved to Los Angeles to study cinematography at UCLA Extension (University of California Los Angeles), which has had a huge impact on her artistic vision. She designs pictures like still frames from a movie and strongly believes in the contamination of multiple disciplines (cinema, literature, art and music) that all collide in her photographic work.

Ferri has been acknowledged by Nikon Italy and Nikon Europe as one of their best young talents in 2019, 2020 and 2021.

She has taught visual communication, photography and Instagram marketing at IUSVE University of Venice, ACT Creative Tourism Academy, Nikon School and the Order of Journalists of Emilia Romagna. In 2022 Ferri founded her own e-learning company in the Canary Islands, The Arizona Project.

Her work is deeply connected to introspection, mental health, and the exploration of neurodivergency.

Ferri is ADHD and identifies as non-binary (she/her - they/them).

Instagram: [@ire.ferri](https://www.instagram.com/ire.ferri)