

ITALY

Inconceivable

By Marika Tombolillo



Naples, Italy. MADRE Museum.
Reproductive Agents exhibition.
Artwork by Tabita Rezaire. The
exhibition investigates new
forms of reproduction that are
challenging social norms and
altering commonly accepted
notions related to conception,
pregnancy and birth.



Inconceivable

Over the past two decades, infertility has increased exponentially; according to the latest WHO report, this phenomenon affects one in six people worldwide. "Inconceivable" is a long-term photography project that invites us to reflect on how environmental pollution affects the survival of the human species: it's a different way of looking at the problem of low birth rates, which mainly affect countries like Italy, where deaths exceed births. In recent years, many studies have identified seminal fluid as a health risk indicator related to the environmental context in which people live and work. In Western countries from 1940 to 2011, the number of spermatozoa decreased dramatically from 113 million to 47 million per milliliter. In addition, the journal Human Reproduction Update revealed for the first time a global decline in fertility among men. A team of scientists led by Hagai Levine, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, collected data

from around the world between 1973 and 2018 and observed a generalized decline in sperm concentration. The data – which also included information collected in Africa, Asia and South America – confirmed a 61.3% reduction in the total number of sperm per ejaculation, with the decline accelerating over the past 20 years. The phenomenon of a decline in sperm count, and the reduction of overall quality in general with alterations of up to 35% of DNA, is even more evident and therefore more worrying in geographic areas with high environmental pollution. This is shown by data on healthy young men with similar lifestyles collected as part of the "EcoFoodFertility" human semen biomonitoring project. Several other studies indicate that damage from environmental contaminants is passed down to offspring from generation to generation, with further possible reductions in semen quality – putting the entire human species at serious risk.



Brescia, Italy. An old class photo. In Italy, schools are emptying due to the plummeting birth rate; by September 2023, there will be an estimated 130,000 fewer students and 5,000 fewer classes.



Latina, Italy. Samoa, 21, and her 1-year-old son Gianmaria. A woman's fertility is highest between the ages of 20 and 30, then undergoes a significant decline. In the face of this finding, the scientific community calls for the development of policies that incentivize parenting in the most appropriate age groups.

Caserta, Italy. Caserta Hospital's birth ward. In Italy, births have decreased by 176,410 (-30.6%) since 2008.



Rome, Italy. Inside the Nike medical center in Rome, a couple waits their turn to be examined by doctors who have been treating them for months to help them become parents soon.





Rome, Italy. Botanical garden. Stick insect eggs. Many fertility studies investigate the stick insect's ability to reproduce by parthenogenesis. In biology, parthenogenesis is a form of asexual reproduction in which the gamete (egg cell) develops without fertilization by spermatozoa.



Naples, Italy. Inside the Villa Bianca fertility clinic in Naples. A sample of semen collected a few hours earlier and ready for insemination, treated in appropriate culture media that enhance its fertilizing potential.



Acerra, Italy. Disused crib abandoned in the trash along a roadside.



Rome, Italy. Palazzo Bonaparte – It Looks Alive! Exhibition. Adult diapers outsell baby diapers: it's happening in Japan, an increasingly long-lived and aging country, but it's the fate that awaits Italy as well, where 21% of the population is over 65 (that number will rise to 35% by 2030) and where the birth rate is among the lowest in the world.



Taranto, Italy. Despite the fact that we have now surpassed 8 billion human beings, it is the opinion of many economists that overpopulation is less of a danger than falling birth rates and the depopulation of the nations that will follow.

Naples, Italy. Villa Bianca, Center for medically assisted reproduction (MAR). A patient is waiting after having an intrauterine insemination (first level insemination). She is on her third attempt; the previous ones have all failed.





Rome, Italy. Inside the Nike medical center in Rome, one of the rooms where a hysteroscopy is performed.



Naples, Italy. In classical Christian iconography, the Madonna is never depicted with a baby bump. Statuette imported from China.



Rome, Italy. Palazzo Bonaparte – It Looks Alive! Exhibition. Several studies have shown that infertility is experienced with anxiety, especially by men. Fertility is often confused with sexuality and virility, and in some cases the diagnosis of male infertility is kept hidden.



Brescia, Italy. Brescian nightlife venue. Recent studies have shown that lifestyles among the very young are causing damage to the genetic material contained in spermatozoa. Among the factors most responsible for this situation are high levels of stress.

Rome, Italy. Inside the Nike medical center in Rome. During a follow-up visit to a medically assisted reproduction (MAR) center in Rome, a patient has just picked up the results of her tests following a first-level insemination.





Naples, Italy. Basilica of St. Mary Frances of the Five Wounds, the shrine where the "Chair Of Fertility" is located.



Latina, Italy. Matilde, a newcomer to her family.



Rome, Italy. Data show that most reproductive problems are not discovered until later in life, when the situation has become chronic. In recent years, more and more doctors are recommending prevention and screening from a young age.



Naples, Italy. MADRE Museum - Reproductive Agents exhibition. Epigenetics in heterologous fertilization – the phenomenon that explains why many children still resemble their parents despite not sharing a genetic heritage with them – is now a topic of research by the scientific community.



Rome, Italy. Inside the Nike medical center in Rome, a patient named Alessandra waits to be examined.

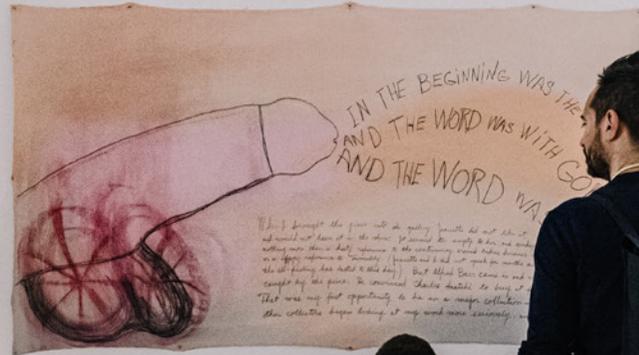


Acerra, Italy. An abandoned couch in front of a landfill.



Naples, Italy. Villa Bianca Medically Assisted Reproduction Center, a patient at the center who learned four years ago of his reduced sperm capacity and motility. Today the couple is waiting for a visit with the gynecologist, who will make them parents for the second time through heterologous fertilization.

Naples, Italy. MADRE Museum - Reproductive Agents exhibition. A father and son visit the exhibition on new forms of reproduction: more and more parents are finding it useful to tell their MAR-born child about his or her origins, supported by psychologists who say this helps build identity.



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