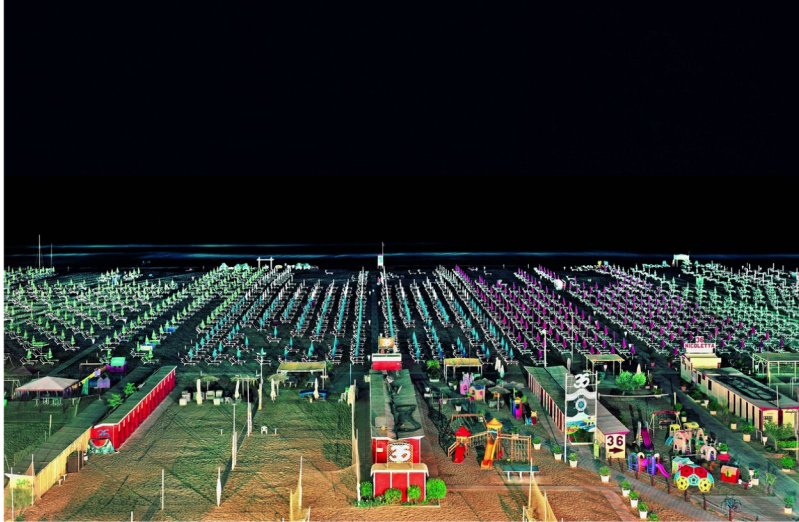


Photo-Op: Armies of the Night

A photographic review of Alfred Seiland's "Imperium Romanum."

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HATJE CANTZ

When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in the early days of 49 B.C., it was for the city of Ariminum that he was heading. It became the first fallen domino in his march toward confrontation with Rome, conquest of Italy and, indirectly, the creation of an imperial dynasty. Today, Ariminum is Rimini, Italians' favorite resort on the Adriatic, and Caesar's massed legionaries have a witty echo in the ranks of umbrellas in

Alfred Seiland's panorama of the seafront by night (above). Rimini's downtown preserves much of the ancient street plan, but tourists largely neglect history lessons for sunbathing on the nine miles of nearby beach. Mr. Seiland's *'Imperium Romanum'* (Hatje Cantz, 143 pages, \$45) finds half-observed traces of history throughout the territory ruled by Rome, from Syria to the Scottish border. A blankly overcast shot from Burgundy, France, shows a huge Roman amphitheater abutting a soccer pitch like overflow seating; no fences separate its grass-covered terraces from the field. On Mount Lebanon, two stubby stone columns—remnants of a fourth-century church built by Constantine—vie with bristling communications towers a few yards away. Mount Vesuvius, seen across the Gulf of Naples, all but disappears into a wash of pastel mist, upstaged by the creamy yellow of the balcony where the photographer is perched. A fire-red extinguisher blends into the bright colors of restored frescoes in an ancient villa. With such use of layering and scale, Mr. Seiland gives his photos a soft-edged wonder that makes them far more than jokes about how the present differs from the past. What gives the most pause are unexpected continuities, as in a scene from the West Bank. Blue plastic patio chairs in the foreground dwarf a few broken columns set in some scraggly turf. Beyond them, a shepherd drives his flock, across a dusty parking lot. —*The Editors*