



Arte, Cultura e Design

## E.A. KAHANE: framing the unseen stories of Italy's Mille Miglia

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By Thomas Pigeon

In the heart of Brescia, Italy, where the cobblestone streets echo with the roar of engines of cars of *the historic Mille Miglia* each spring, a different kind of story was quietly unfolding—one that had nothing to do with celebrity drivers, gleaming Ferraris, or checkered flags. Instead, this was a story of grease-stained hands, sleepless nights, and the unsung heroes of the Mille Miglia: *HEART OF THE RACE, Master Mechanics of the Mille Miglia*, told by **E.A. KAHANE**.

I first met the vivacious and visionary photographer Elizabeth Kahane—known as the artist E.A. KAHANE—over an Aperol Spritz in Brescia's stunning Piazza Duomo. Introduced by our mutual friend, the irrepressible Maggie Carvalho. Our conversation

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ear—and my heart—was her next project: an homage to the mechanics who make the race possible.



This year, her dream became reality with *HEART OF THE RACE, Master Mechanics Of The Mille Miglia*, a breathtaking photographic exhibition capturing the grit, grace, and quiet heroism of those too often overlooked. In oversized prints, Elizabeth tells the story of the men and women who labor through the night while the drivers rest—wielding wrenches and welding torches to keep the storied cars alive for the next day's race. I had the privilege of attending the exhibit in Brescia, where the mechanics and their families gathered to see themselves, many for the first time, immortalized as the true stars of the Mille Miglia. There were tears. There was laughter. There was pride so palpable it filled the room like electricity.



## A life behind the lens.

Elizabeth's love affair with photography began long before Brescia, long before the Mille Miglia. "I've been a photographer for as long as I can remember, I got my first Pentax camera when I was 17 and I still have it today" she recalls. Growing up on Long Island, she fell under the spell of Manhattan's art scene, eventually carving out a career in fashion before real estate offered her financial security. Yet photography was always her first love.





stepping into your passion in the second half of life."

## The Mille Miglia obsession

Her introduction to the Mille Miglia was serendipitous. Her husband Bill, a lifelong car enthusiast, finally seized the chance to drive in the historic race with their son Harry navigating. Elizabeth, naturally, followed along with her camera. What began as a family adventure became an artistic awakening. "I didn't just photograph Bill and my son," she explains. "I photographed everything—the spectators, the chaos, the beauty of the towns we passed through."

One evening, while dining in Milan midway through the race, inspiration struck. "It was when I drove in the race myself in 2023, as navigator, with an all women's team (as Cultural Ambassadors for Italy representing Brescia and Bergamo in a 1934 Fiat 508 C Balilla Coppa d'Oro), that it occurred to me the true stars of the race are mechanics...no mechanics, no race." This was the moment *HEART OF THE RACE, Master Mechanics of the Mille Miglia* was born.

## Making the vision real

Turning inspiration into reality, however, required relentless determination. Elizabeth returned to Italy, secured permissions from the 1000 Miglia SRL, assembled a world-class team from both New York and Italy, and, crucially, self-funded the project. "I didn't ask for money," she says. "I asked for access, credentials, and support. That's all I needed."

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Drawing inspiration from iconic photographer Irving Penn's *Small Trades* series, Elizabeth set out to create formal portraits of the mechanics—many taken in makeshift roadside studios during the race itself. "People thought I was crazy," she laughs. "But I was determined. I couldn't miss the moment."

The result was a sprawling, immersive installation featuring 156 works across multiple locations in Brescia: intimate portraits, atmospheric action shots, and behind-the-scenes glimpses of mechanics toiling by lamplight while others slept.

## The gift of recognition

hardworking mechanics their moment of fame on life's podium. The traditional racing trophy was absent, but it would have been redundant; the magic in the room—fueled by pride, acknowledgment, and joy—was the first prize that evening. I recall glancing over at Elizabeth several times during that night, a soft kind expression had settled on her face, I read it as satisfaction that she had done something meaningful, something so very unexpected.



Her humanity and caring are impossible for her to conceal. "One of the mechanics I had photographed who was part of the exhibit, Giuseppe Pesce, had passed away. His family came to the opening. His wife and children were there, they were crying when they saw his portrait, they were so pleased to see him there and know he was part of it" – Elizabeth Kahane.

Her favorite image? A shot of a Bugatti team frantically welding a broken chassis back together—an image that not only captures the sheer grit of the mechanics but later became a treasured possession of the very navigator who once scowled at her intrusion.

work behind the scenes, whose professionalism ensures the smooth running of these extraordinary masterpieces of mechanics and design, Elizabeth, with her passion, curiosity, and humanity, has captured one of the aspects of Brescia that we most identify with: the silent and tireless industriousness that produces and makes things happen. In this case, the most beautiful race in the world."



## A practice of storytelling

For Elizabeth, photography has always been about storytelling. Whether through her earlier work with special needs children—a deeply personal series inspired by her mother—or her installations blending photography with immersive environments, her art seeks to give voice to the unseen and the overlooked.

"I don't just take a photo," she says. "I tell a story. I want people to feel what I feel." That ethos is at the heart of *THE HEART OF THE RACE*, and it's what makes her work



With offers now pouring in—from potential exhibits in the U.S. to a possible collaboration with the legendary Le Mans—Elizabeth's journey is far from over. A forthcoming book, slated for release to coincide with the Mille Miglia's 100th anniversary in 2027, will further cement her place as not just a photographer, but a storyteller and a humanist.

"Our job as creators is to make the work," she reflects. "What happens after—that's up to the world. But the work, the story—that's ours to tell."

E.A. KAHANE has made the invisible visible. And in doing so, she's gifted us all a story we didn't know we needed but will never forget. – VV

Italian art

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Marg Carvalho

July 25, 2025 at 4:30 pm

Fabulous article Thomas

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