

ALBERTO SAVINIO STUDY DAYS

CIMA - CENTER FOR ITALIAN MODERN ART
421 BROOME STREET, 4TH FLOOR, NYC

Serena Alessi • Franco Baldasso • Alice Ensabella • Nicole Gercke •
Lucilla Lijoi • Chiara Mari • Nicol Maria Mocchi • Paola Italia •
Giulia Tulino • Elena Salza • Carlos Segoviano • Martin Weidlich



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FRIDAY, APRIL 27

2pm - 4:30pm

Visual and cultural sources in Savinio's literature: myths and doubles

Chair: Alice Ensabella

Followed by Q&A

Franco Baldasso

Alberto Savinio and the Myth of Babel: Multiplicity, Genealogies and Translation in "Hermaphrodito"
This contribution argues that in his experimental text *Hermaphrodito* (1918), Savinio takes to the extreme Nietzsche's etymological research launched in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Through the autobiographical yet fantastic narrative of his "homecoming" to native Greece during WWI, Savinio represents the impossibility of the founding myth of Western civilization, the original unity that supports all metaphysical systems from Plato onwards. Through the encounter with the ambiguous figure of the hermaphrodite in the book's epilogue, he advocates for the unfeasibility of a unified language before Babel and the fundamental truth this deceptive myth conceals—constitutional ontological multiplicity.

Franco Baldasso is Director of the Italian Program at Bard College, NY, where he is Assistant Professor of Italian Studies. In his research, Baldasso examines the complex relations between Fascism and Modernism, the legacy of political violence in Italy, and finally the idea of the Mediterranean in modern and contemporary aesthetics. He authored a book on Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, *Il cerchio di gesso. Primo Levi narratore e testimone* (Pendragon, 2007). In summer 2017, Baldasso held a CIMA Affiliated Fellowship at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation for his book manuscript provisionally titled *Democracy and Defeat: Literary Dissent during the Transition to Post-Fascism in Italy*.

Nicol Mocchi

The enigma of the double: sources and symbols in Savinio's poetics

This paper will discuss one of the most ambiguous and enigmatic themes within the poetics of Alberto Savinio: that of the double, which continually resurfaces in the author's work, taking on different meanings—from the concept of hermaphroditism to that of half-death, and from those of the mask to the shadow. Through a brief historical-theoretical excursus, the presentation will retrace chronologically the evolution of this fascinating topic in the vast musical, pictorial, literary and theatrical production of the minor of the "Dioscuri."

Nicol Maria Mocchi is an Italian art historian whose research deals with complex relationships and exchanges between diverse visual cultures in 19th- and 20th-century art. Since 2010, she has collaborated with the Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica and with Milan's Department for Archeology, Fine Arts and Landscape. As a 2016 CIMA Fellow, Mocchi worked on the reception, visual success, and critical fortune of Giorgio Morandi's work in the United States, from the 1920s through the 1940s. She is the author of the recently released *The Culture of the de Chirico Brothers at the Dawn of Metaphysical Art* (Scalpendi, 2017).

Nicole Gercke

Savinio's Hybrid Bodies: Incorporating Science and Techne

Savinio's representations of science and technology in his literary works (primarily from the early 1940s) add yet another dimension to his reinterpretations of classical myths and Biblical tropes. By incorporating scientific theories and technological developments, Savinio offers new perspectives for exploring the liminal spaces between human and machine, animate and inanimate, life and death, and changing understandings of the relationships between the body, mind, and soul. Furthermore, his stories of 'mad scientists' warn against the potential dehumanization of individuals in the name of scientific inquiry, and serve as cautionary tales against excessive faith in any one authority.

Nicole Gercke is a Lecturer in Italian Studies in the Department of Classics, Humanities and Italian Studies at University of New Hampshire. She earned her B.A. in Classics from Dartmouth College, her M.A. in Italian Studies from Middlebury College, and her Ph.D. in Italian Studies from Brown University. She was a postdoctoral research fellow at and continues to work with the Italian Studies Department and the Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown University. She has been the recipient of several awards including a fellowship from the University of Bologna to research “Humanism, Neohumanism and Posthumanism in the Media Age.”

Serena Alessi (CIMA Fellow)

Mothers, Models and Other Myths in Savinio's Theater

This paper explores Alberto Savinio's treatment of female mythological characters by contrasting these figures as they appear in the theater works *La morte di Niobe* (1925), *Capitano Ulisse* (1934), and *Alceste di Samuele* (1949) with select artworks by the Italian author. Through examining the symbolic categories behind the characters of Niobe, Penelope, and Alcestis—such as those of ‘mother’, ‘heroine’ and ‘wife’—this paper will shed light on the sense and the scope of Savinio's de-heroization of myths, underscoring how his production recast female characters into new, ironic, and un-heroic forms and meanings.

Serena Alessi is an Italian Studies scholar whose research interests include contemporary Italian literature, feminism, and postcolonial studies. In 2015 she received her Ph.D. from Royal Holloway University of London, where she also taught Italian language and culture. Her dissertation focused on the myth of Penelope in the Italian literary tradition. Alessi subsequently held postdoctoral fellowships at The British School at Rome (2016-17) and at the Fondazione Cini in Venice (2017). Alessi is a contributor to the RaiUno TV Program *Mille e un libro* and to the literary blog criticaletteraria.org.

5pm - 6pm

Prosecco aperitivo reception

6pm - 7:30pm

Keynote lecture

Paola Italia

A "creative power-station": A journey into Savinio's laboratory through manuscripts, papers, and drafts

Wanderer of the imagination, alchemist of the word, unable to give expression to his extraordinary creativity through one single art, Alberto Savinio left in his papers a precious testimony to his phenomenal intellect. On the centennial of *Hermaphrodito* (Florence, 1918), Paola Italia takes CIMA's audience on an exclusive journey into Savinio's creative process: she will open the doors of the writer's archive, preserved in Historical Contemporary Archive “A. Bonsanti” at the Vieusseux Archive in Florence, and share excerpts from his manuscripts, papers, and book drafts, providing insight into not only Savinio's working methods but also the secrets of his creativity.

Paola Italia is Associate Professor of Italian Literature and Philology at the University of Bologna. Her research is devoted to 19th- and 20th-century Italian literature language and philology, including modern authors methods of writing and editing. Italia earned her Ph.D. in 1998 from the University of Pisa with her dissertation on Alberto Savinio's early works (*Il Pellegrino appassionato*), and has expanded scholarship on the author through subsequent publications. Celebrated for her texts on writers including Leopardi, Manzoni, Bassani, Gadda, Manganelli, Italia has also been recognized for her teaching at the Universities of Maganza, Siena and Rome La Sapienza.

SATURDAY, APRIL 28

10:30am - 11:00am

Registration and exhibition viewing

11:00am - 12:30pm

Savinio the artist and his relationship with the international avant-garde

Chair: Elena Salza

Followed by Q&A

Alice Ensabella (CIMA Fellow)

“Retourner le rêve à la manière d’une chaussette que l’on retire”: Alberto Savinio and French Surrealism

Although Savinio defined himself as a non-Surrealist painter and the artist’s relationship with French Surrealism has, in part, already been studied, this paper aims shed new light on Savinio’s relationship with the French movement during his second Parisian period (1926-1933). This relationship will be analyzed both in terms of the artist’s participation in Surrealist group initiatives and shared stylistic influences, focusing in particular on works from the same period by René Magritte and Max Ernst. Additionally, as the Surrealists were also collectors, this presentation will address Savinio’s reception within the Surrealist group—both as a painter and as a writer.

Alice Ensabella received her Ph.D. in Contemporary Art History from the University La Sapienza of Rome, in partnership with the University of Grenoble, in 2017. She has collaborated with the Archivio dell’Arte Metafisica in Milan since 2012, and with the Magnani Rocca Foundation in Parma since 2013. Between 2016 and 2017, Ensabella taught Contemporary Art History at the University of Grenoble, and she is a current member of the International Network for Young Scholars - Forum of Art and Market (Technische Universität, Berlin). Her research is concentrated on the interwar Parisian art market, with a specific focus on early Surrealist art.

Carlos Segoviano

Alberto Savinio: A bridge between Metaphysical Painting and Mexican modern art

In 1993, alongside the first exhibition in Mexico of works by Giorgio de Chirico, a parallel exhibition entitled “Metaphysics Iconography in Mexico” explored the connections between Metaphysical Painting and Mexican modern art. Omitted from this survey was the significant relationship between Alberto Savinio and the Mexican artist Marius de Zayas—both artists were not only considered part of Apollinaire’s creative circle but also collaborated together on projects for international magazines such as *291*. This presentation investigates the reception of Alberto Savinio’s painting and art criticism in Mexico, specifically his connection with the artists de Zayas, Siqueiros y Antonio Ruiz, and El Corcito.

Carlos Segoviano is a Ph.D. student in art history at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. His research deals with the Metaphysical school, Surrealism, Futurism, and the Mexican muralist movement, with special emphasis on Frida Kahlo, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Antonio Berni, and Emilio Baz. Segoviano’s research has taken him to Los Angeles, where he has contributed to the rescue of David Alfaro Siqueiros’ 1932 mural “America Tropical,” as well as Buenos Aires, where he has studied the 1933 mural “Plastic Exercise,” created by Siqueiros, Berni, Spilimbergo, and Castagnino. Alongside his research, Segoviano has a column in the digital magazine *Augur*.

12:30pm - 2pm

Lunch

2pm - 3:30pm

Savinio and art criticism and Savinio as critic: Ritorno all'ordine, Romanticism and Fantastic Art

Chair: Serena Alessi

Lucilla Lijoi

Alberto Savinio and the "years of consent": The experience of "Colonna" (1933-1934)

This presentation considers the significant role Alberto Savinio played in the production and promotion of Italian culture during the early 1930s, focusing specifically on Savinio's founding and directing of the monthly review *Colonna. Periodico di civiltà italiana*. Although *Colonna* folded after only five issues, during its run the periodical served as a vehicle for Savinio to actively contribute to the revival of Italian culture as well as the movement around the "uomo nuovo italiano", which was promoted by Fascism in the so-called "years of consent".

Lucilla Lijoi is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Classical and Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Geona. She is currently writing her dissertation on Alberto Savinio's literary and journalistic activity in the years 1933-1943 under supervisor Franco Contorbia. In 2014, Lijoi obtained her M.A. in Modern and Contemporary Italian literature with a thesis on Savinio's relationship to the classical world.

Martin Weidlich

Drammaticità di Leopardi (1938): A stage on Savinio's route to a more "romantic" Italy

The paper deals with Alberto Savinio's 1938 conference "Drammaticità di Leopardi," presupposing the nineteenth-century poet as one of his important sources. Tracking a hidden self-portrait in Savinio's homage to Giacomo Leopardi, we encounter the problem of identity and the question of cultural belonging. This key issue seems to unite Savinio with Leopardi: both are considered as outsiders within their culture, a status that appears to be globally connected with their modernity. Thus, dealing with Savinio and Leopardi promises to provide further understanding of "anti-modern" Italian culture from its margins.

Martin Weidlich earned his master's degree in Romanic literature and German as a foreign language, as well as a Ph.D. for his dissertation about Alberto Savinio (published 2006), from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. Since 1997, Weidlich has been teaching German language to foreign students, providing instruction at all academic and professional levels. In 2013, in response to considerable demand among international scholars, he created the *Dr. Martin Weidlich, Lektorat - Korrekturen* editorial office in Munich, offering linguistic revision of various types of texts. In addition to these activities, Martin Weidlich works as an essayist, translator, philologist, and researcher.

Giulia Tulino (CIMA Fellow)

Towards a new reading of fantastic art and post metafisica: surrealism between Rome and New York, 1943/1946

This paper explores the establishment and reception of Italian "fantastic" art. Together with Raffaele Carrieri, Alberto Savinio first coined this term in 1940 to describe artists drawing inspiration from ancient Greek and Mediterranean (rather than Romantic) artistic traditions. "Fantastic" art arrived in New York via Italian Peace Corps volunteer Peter Lindamood. Between 1945 and 1946, Lindamood promoted the term "fantastic Italian art" in American magazines as well as spaces such as the Hugo and Julien Levy galleries. The culmination of this public recognition was MoMA's 1949 exhibition "Twentieth Century Italian Art," which included a section of so-called "Fantasts."

Giulia Tulino received her Ph.D. in contemporary art history from La Sapienza, University of Rome, in 2017 for her dissertation, *La galleria dell'Obelisco e il surrealismo a Roma 1940-1960*, and has published two additional essays about the gallery. While at La Sapienza, Tulino acted as assistant professor for academic activities. As an independent curator, she has worked for both private galleries and public

institutions including the MLAC, University Museum of Contemporary Art. Since 2015, Tulino has been curator of the Jacorossi Collection, Rome, which holds over three thousand art works of Italian contemporary art. She is also currently curator at MUSIA, Rome.

3:30pm - 4pm
Coffee break

4pm - 5pm
Savinio's production and legacy in post-World War II context

Chair: Giulia Tulino

Chiara Mari

Alberto Savinio's life and work on television: programmes by the Italian public broadcaster Rai between the late-1970s and early-1980s

The late-1970s were an important time for the critical reappraisal of Alberto Savinio's work and its disclosure to a wider, non-specialist audience. The Italian public broadcaster Rai closely followed this rediscovery from the start, documenting it in its cultural programs. At the same time, Rai offered its own narration of Savinio's life and work, thanks to original research by its authors. This paper investigates the ways in which Rai addressed Savinio's life and work in its broadcasts, with a particular focus on the docudrama *Alberto Savinio, il polipragmon* (1978). Directed by Anna Zanolini, the docudrama is the first TV biography of Savinio and a significant example of a wider reflection on the possibilities of 'translating' a body of work or an artist biography for the small screen.

Chiara Mari is a historian of modern and contemporary art who received her Ph.D. from Cattolica University of Milan in 2015 for her dissertation, *Artists and Rai 1968-1975. Italian public television as a space of artistic intervention*. In 2015, she held a fellowship at the Contemporary Art Museum, Zagreb, where she conducted research on New Tendencies and experimental film. In 2015-2016 she was adjunct professor at Cattolica University, Brescia. She is currently post-doctoral researcher at Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. Her most recent curatorial project—a cycle of screenings entitled *The artwork in the television mirror*—was held at Fondazione Ragghianti, Lucca, in October 2017.

Elena Salza (CIMA Fellow)

Argonauts, Hermaphrodites, and Other Post-Modernist Myths: Alberto Savinio's Reappraisal in the 1970s and '80s

This paper will foster a new understanding of the renewed interest in and appreciation of Savinio's work by Italian artists of the 1970s and '80s. It will retrace Savinio's rediscovery—the terms and modalities of the reception of his visual and literary imagery—by placing Savinio's reappraisal in the range of those practices where the dialogue between artistic languages represented a stimulating perspective to the "restaging" of the artist/writer's multi-faceted activity. The study will investigate the framework of a growing critical attention given to certain artistic positions that underscore a deep investment into otherness and symbolism, mysticism and the metaphysical.

Elena Salza is a doctoral candidate in History of the Arts at Ca' Foscari University, Venice. Her dissertation focuses on the development of Italian art from the 1960s to the '80s examined through the lens of Mario Diacono's activity. She investigates the cultural exchanges between Italy and the United States by studying the role that pre-World War II avant-gardes played in fostering artistic experimentation during those decades. Salza has studied and worked at institutions including Roma Tre University, the Vatican Library's School, Fondazione Alighiero e Boetti, the Getty Research Institute, and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

5pm - 5:30pm
Concluding Roundtable with All Speakers