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A REVIEW OF THE CENTER FOR ITALIAN MODERN ART'S 2020 INSTALLATION



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New York City is known for its abundance of art institutions, namely the larger and more well-known museums like the MET, the Guggenheim, and the MoMA. However, the richness of the city lies in the quality and quantity of smaller art centers that reside in the diverse cultural sects of each borough. In downtown SOHO, near little Italy, the Center for Italian Modern Art has been instrumental in showcasing Italian art and culture since 2013. The non-profit organization even offers its visitors free guided tours in English or Italian, providing a fully immersive experience!

I had the opportunity to visit the Center for Italian Modern Art (the CIMA) with my Italian Language & Literature class during the first half of the Spring Semester. Once we entered their lofted installation space in downtown Manhattan, the staff at the CIMA warmly welcomed us Italian-style: into the kitchen and served traditional espresso. The Membership and Communications Manager, Giulia Nicita, was more than happy to provide a history of the CIMA's achievements and their mission as a cultural and research center. While most of the discussion was in Italian, I was still able to appreciate the artwork regardless of my intermediate proficiency in the language. We were also given a guided tour in Italian by one of the fellows at the CIMA, Michele Amedei.

Their annual installation for 2020 is "Marino Marini: Arcadian Nudes."

The exhibition includes a series of free-standing female nude sculptures by Italian artist Marino Marini. His nudes, sculpted from terra cotta or bronze, are inspired by archaic sculpture, specifically Etruscan art. While each of the "Nudi Femminili" (female nudes) are generally posed in different positions, their bodily proportions and overall structures remain consistent. Their whole bodies are seamlessly curved, their hips and stomach protrude outwards to create a pear shape, and their legs are significantly slimmer than their thighs and overall torso. Most of their legs are pressed up against each other, creating a column-like structure to support the thicker middle section of the body. Their breasts are full and are separated naturally. This emphasis on the specific bodily structures that make the figures female expresses the sculpture's femininity and fertility. To further emphasize this message of female fertility, Marini seems to have left the sculptures' faces unfinished compared to the rest of their bodies. For example,



Marini's "Danzatrice" (Dancer) has minimal facial features drawing the viewer's eye to the more highly finished body (Fig. 1). Furthermore, most of his nudes do not even include a head or other extremities. Marini's archaic influence can be seen in his "Venere" (Venus) sculpture (Fig. 2). In this piece, he chooses to focus more on the torso, excluding the figure's upper extremities. My observation here is that Marini's focus on the body instead of the face is a way for him to represent femininity as a collective idea rather than for the sculptures to identify a specific person.



Figure 1: Marino Marini, "Venere" (Venus), 1945. terracotta.

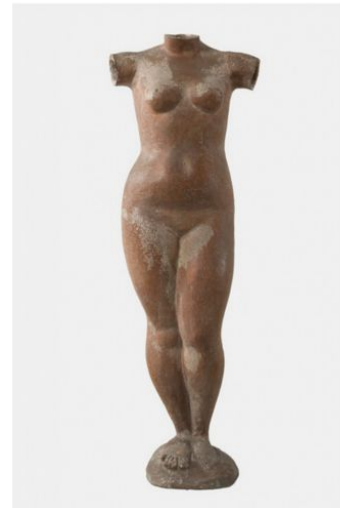


Figure 2: Marino Marini, "Danzatrice" ("Dancer"), 1948, cast 1949, bronze.

Typically when we hear Italian art, we first think of the Italian Renaissance, which exemplified hyperrealism. Michelangelo focused on the definition of idealized male musculature, as seen in many of his works, for example, the "David" (Fig. 3). Leonardo Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man" transforms the proportions of the human body into calculated perfection (Fig. 4). Raphael also depicted the realistic bodies of the "Three Graces" emphasizing their natural yet balanced curves (Fig. 5). However, Marini's figures are far from the expectations of the Renaissance viewer. The sculptures are not meant to represent an idealized female nude, but rather a body that represents an idea.



Figure 5: Raphael, "The Three Graces", 1503-1508, oil on panel.



Figure 3: Michelangelo, "David", 1501-1504, marble.

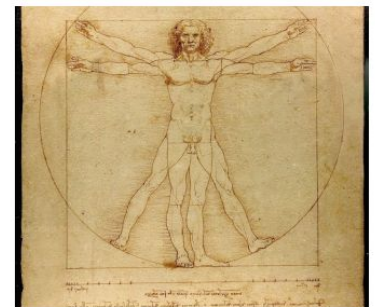


Figure 4: Leonardo Da Vinci, "Vitruvian Man", circa 1492, pen, ink and wash on paper.

Why is it essential for Marini to sculpt figures in this style? Refreshingly, Marini's renderings of the female nude do not intend to provoke eroticism, but instead embody an appreciation for motherhood. Marini's nudi femminili present the bare female body not to showcase idealized structures, but to represent the fruitful gift that women give to society. In a world of photoshop and plastic surgery, Marini's sculptures from the 1940s are particularly relevant for the 21st-century viewer to be able to question his or her ideas of the idealized body.

Image Sources

Cover Image: Installation view of Marino Marini: Arcadian Nudes. Shot by Dario Lasagni.

Figure 1: Marino Marini, "Danzatrice" ("Dancer," 1948, cast 1949), bronze, 69 1/2 x 23 x 11 inches; James Thrall Soby Bequest, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

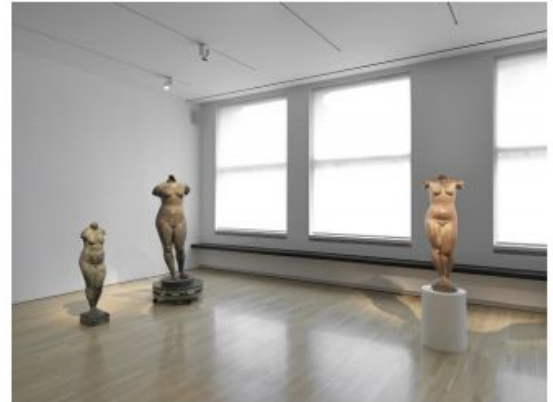
Figure 2: Marino Marini, "Venere," 1945, terracotta, h. 113 cm. Private Collection. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome

Figure 3: Michelangelo's David, poss. by Yajir Haklaj, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo%27s_David-Galleria_dell%27Accademia.jpg

Figure 4: Leonardo Da Vinci, "Vitruvian Man", poss. by Luc Viatour, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Da_Vinci_Vitruve_Luc_Viatour.jpg

Figure 5: Raphael, "The Three Graces", poss. by Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rapha%C3%ABl_-_Les_Trois_Gr%C3%A2ces_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Final Image: © Dario Lasagni / Installation views of 'Marino Marini: Arcadian Nudes,' on view at the Center for Italian Modern Art from October 17, 2019 through June 13, 2020.



Shot by Dario Lasagni