



Facing America:
Mario Schifano, 1960-65

EXHIBITION SCHEDULED FOR 2021
AT THE CENTER FOR ITALIAN MODERN ART (CIMA)

CIMA TO PRESENT FIRST INSTITUTIONAL US EXHIBITION OF
MULTIFACETED ARTIST AND PROLIFIC PAINTER

MARIO SCHIFANO

JANUARY 26, 2021-NOVEMBER 13, 2021



Leonardo, 1963

Enamel on paper laid down on two attached canvases

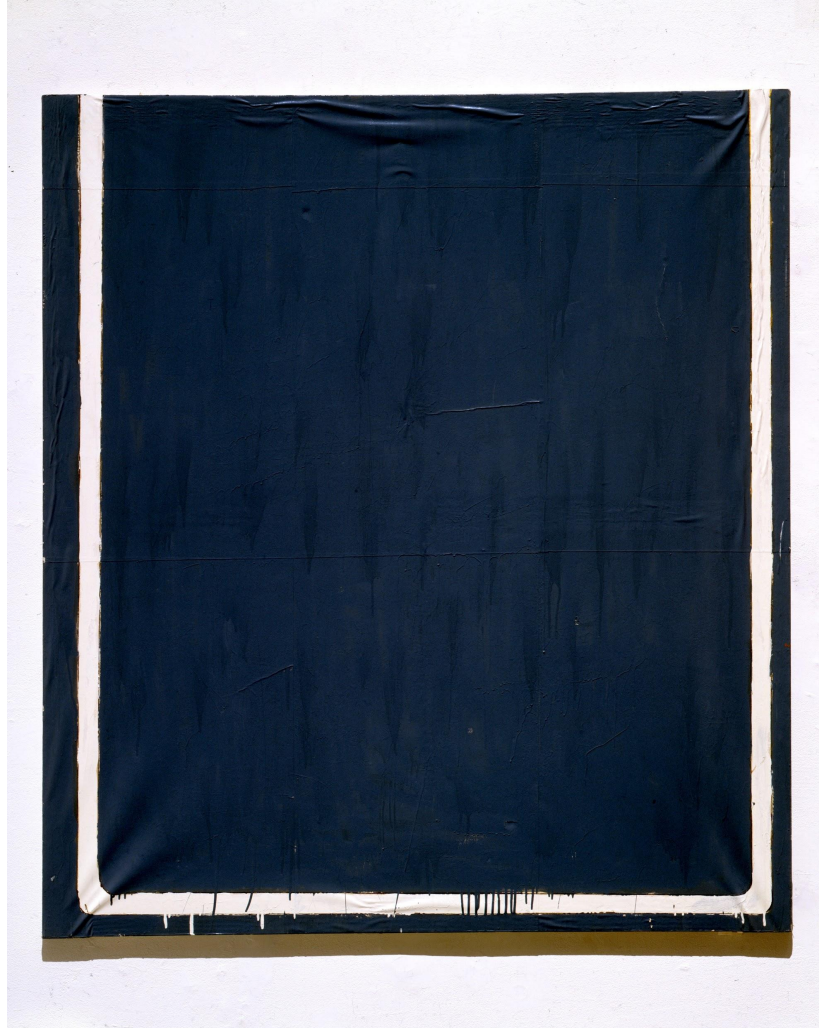
78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in, Private collection

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New York, NY — The Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) has confirmed its 2020-21 show: the first U.S. institutional exhibition of painter Mario Schifano (1934-1998), exploring the artist's work from 1960 to 1965 together with art by his American contemporaries. A leading figure of Italian postwar and contemporary art, Schifano redefined painting through his multifaceted practice, as he marked the transition from postwar abstraction to the new figuration of the 1960s. Reassessing the tenets of painting and exploring multiple media, Schifano elaborated a radical visual vocabulary as early as at the beginning of the 1960s. His practice was prescient: his work pre-dates international Pop art and is comparable to the revolution Andy Warhol carried out in the United States during the same years.

Sponsored by Rome's Archivio Mario Schifano, Italy's Ministry of Art and Culture (MiBACT), and the Embassy of Italy in Washington DC, the exhibition comprises works in various media. Focusing on the artist's connections to the New York art scene, it surveys his development from the so-called monochromes of the early 1960s to the figurative practice he evolved between 1962 and 1965, when he incorporated a distinctive Pop imagery into his work. Schifano was fascinated by the influence of American culture and life on postwar Italy, especially the popular and youth culture imported from the United States, as some titles of his "monochromes" attest.

Schifano's work from 1960-62 caught the eye of the powerful dealer Ileana Sonnabend—whose gallery in Paris was, at the time, the gateway for the new American avant-garde in Europe—and she organized an exhibition of his paintings at her gallery in 1963. Thanks to the collaboration with the Sonnabend Collection Foundation, masterpieces included in that show will be displayed at CIMA, alongside works by American artists in Sonnabend's stable, such as Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, whose practices were of major interest to Schifano.



A de Chirico (To de Chirico), 1962

Enamel on paper laid down on canvas, 66 7/8 x 59 in

The Sonnabend Collection and Antonio Homem

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The dialogue between the works on view will evidence how Schifano's radical early paintings are on par with those of notable contemporary American artists. In this respect, his progression from monochrome to figuration was even more significant and will be closely examined in the exhibition. Before giving him a show in her gallery, Sonnabend had a Schifano painting included in the pivotal exhibition *The New Realists*, organized at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1962. This was the artist's first exposure in the US, although he did not travel to New York on that occasion. Schifano sent a painting from the series *Propaganda*, which integrated references to reality by incorporating the logos of American companies such as Coca-Cola and Esso. Schifano began the *Propaganda* series at the very start of 1962, a few months after Warhol first portrayed the Coca-Cola bottle in 1961. Schifano could not have known about Warhol's work at the time. *Propaganda* attests to

Schifano's originality, especially when considered alongside the international tendencies defining art in the 1960s.

The series' powerful title, *Propaganda* (two major versions will be on view at CIMA), hints at the incipient sense of disillusionment that the artist was experiencing when delving into the American culture as he could access from Italy. After turning to figuration and leaving Sonnabend's gallery, the artist finally traveled to New York and resided in the city from December 1963 to July 1964. Schifano had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1964 at the Odyssia Gallery, which *The New York Times* reviewed positively. Nonetheless, his stay in the city coincided with a growing disappointment regarding the US. The evocative photographs he took in New York convey this increasing feeling of solitude and disenchantment. A comprehensive selection of these, shown for the first time in the US, will be on view at CIMA.

Despite visiting studios and meeting artist contemporaries, including Johns and Warhol, Schifano was closer to poet Frank O'Hara and, through him, became acquainted with an avant-garde multidisciplinary network of writers, poets, artists, musicians, and critics—from poets Allen Ginsberg and Bill Berkson to jazz musicians Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus.

Schifano maintained a connection to Anglo-American counterculture and emerging trends, ranging from 1960s rock and progressive music to experiential cinema. These manifested in his relationship and collaborations with the Rolling Stones, as well as the film he made, *Round Trip*, a rare documentary shot in New York in 1964. The film will be presented at CIMA, its first screening in the US, and represents an early example of Schifano's interest in experimental time-based media. Conversely, the paintings created after his return to Italy reflect a newfound awareness of New York's complex cultural scene. They express a reaffirmation of his own independence and his cultural roots in Italy in opposition to the American myths he now perceived were false. Imbued with growing political references, these new works comprise a distinctive repertoire of images, which are indebted to the multifaceted experiences and the incredible evolution of the artist's life and art in the early 1960s.



En plein air, 1963

Enamel on paper laid down on two attached canvases. 63 x 63 in,

Private collection, Monaco

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Through a selection of approximately thirty key works, this exhibition argues for Schifano's role as a pivotal figure who bridged Italian and international modern and contemporary art.

On view from January 26 to June 5, 2021, the exhibition is curated by Francesco Guzzetti, PhD, the 2019-20 Postdoctoral Fellow at the Morgan Library and Museum's Drawing Institute and former CIMA Fellow (2014-15).

This groundbreaking exhibition will be held at CIMA (421 Broome Street, 4th floor, New York, New York, 10013) and is open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays by appointment.

The best way to experience CIMA is through a fellow-guided tour. An intimate conversation with a scholar-in-residence encourages visitors to forge deeper connections with the artworks on view. Fellow-led guided tours will take place on Friday and Saturdays at 11am and 2pm ET and there will also be virtual fellow-guided tours. See below.

Here are all the different ways to view *Facing America: Mario Schifano, 1960-65*:

In-Person Tours: \$15 /visitor (free for CIMA members)

CIMA's signature fellow-guided tours are conducted in a spacious and meditative SoHo loft. Tours are by appointment only at 11am and 2pm on Fridays. No more than 8 visitors are permitted on a tour.

Open Hours: \$10/visitor (free for CIMA members)

Visitors to CIMA's open hours can experience the exhibition on their own between on Saturdays by appointment only. Visits are timed, and no more than 12 visitors are permitted per hour.

NEW: Virtual Fellow-Guided Tours: \$10/visitor

For its 2021 season CIMA will offer live online discussions led by a fellow-in-residence. These presentations, enjoyed from the safety of your own home, reimagine CIMA's signature visits. Tours are 45-minutes, maximum 20 people per group, and available on Sundays at 11am. Visitors will receive a private Zoom link to access their tour 24 hours prior to the event.

For information and reservations, visit <http://www.italianmodernart.org>.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, including color reproductions of all the works on view, as well as an introduction by Francesco Guzzetti and a biographical essay by CIMA fellows.

ABOUT CIMA

Founded in 2013, CIMA is a public non-profit dedicated to presenting modern and contemporary Italian art to international audiences. Through critically acclaimed exhibitions—many of them bringing work to US audiences for the first time—along with a wide variety of public programs and substantial support for new scholarship awarded through its international fellowship program, CIMA situates Italian modern art in an expansive historic and cultural context, illuminating its continuing relevance to contemporary culture and serving as an incubator of curatorial ideas for larger cultural institutions.

CIMA works to add new voices to scholarship on modern Italian art with annual fellowships that open fresh perspectives and new avenues of research. A visit begins with a complimentary espresso, followed by an informal exhibition tour with one of the resident fellows. Visitors are welcome to linger for additional viewing and conversation.



ABOUT ARCHIVIO MARIO SCHIFANO

Archivio Mario Schifano was created in 2003 by his heirs, with the collaboration of scholars chosen for their in-depth knowledge of the artist's work and connected to him throughout his life. The Archivio owns impressive documentation and resources, almost all totally digitized, and has produced the most important exhibitions and publications of recent years on the artist. Archivio Mario Schifano holds the copyrights of the films and artworks. For further information, please see the Archivio's website: www.marioschifano.it.

ARCHIVIO **MARIO** SCHIFANO



ABOUT MARIO SCHIFANO

Born in Homs, Libya on September 20, 1934, Mario Schifano emigrated with his family to Italy at a young age. From the beginning of the 1960s, he was immediately recognized as a leading figure in Italian postwar and contemporary art. He is best known for his so-called “monochromes” and his distinctive figurative works, often made with a special collage technique combining wrapping paper and industrial pigments, such as enamel. His work often mixed references to high and low culture, popular icons, and art history and featured well-known brand logos and recurring motifs in the spirit of Pop art. American artist Ed Ruscha recalled being associated with the Pop artists in the 1960s and noted that “Mario Schifano painted in that vein too. I felt like we had a common interest in popular culture, which means ordinary things.” Constantly adapting to contemporary culture, Schifano worked in numerous media, shifting between film, music, and photography—often combining more than one in his work. Until his death in Rome on January 26, 1998, aged 63, across the trajectory of his life as an artist, Schifano’s work always resonated with major political, social, and cultural issues of his time.



Mario Schifano, New York, 1963

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ABOUT FRANCESCO GUZZETTI

Francesco Guzzetti, PhD, holds a doctoral degree in History of Modern and Contemporary Art from the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. His field of expertise is postwar and contemporary Italian art, with special focus on its connections with international Pop, Postminimalist, and Conceptual art in the 1960s and the 1970s. Francesco's research has been supported by various pre and post-doctoral fellowships and grants by institutions such as CUNY Graduate Center and the Center for Italian Modern Art in New York; Centre Pompidou in Paris; Harvard University; and Magazzino Italian Art Foundation in Cold Spring, New York. More recently, he was the 2019–20 Postdoctoral Fellow at the Drawing Institute at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York. He has curated exhibitions and published essays on numerous subjects in the history of modern and contemporary art. He is the author of the book *Ennio Morlotti e l'arte a Milano 1937-1953* (Milan: Scalpendi Editore, 2020) and is

currently working on a publication about the connections between American and Italian art in the early 1970s.

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