

INTRODUCTION



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An overview of the fifth issue of *Italian Modern Art*, dedicated to Italian sculptor Marino Marini (1901-1980).

The present issue of *Italian Modern Art* is devoted to Marino Marini (1901–1980), the exceptionally gifted artist who alongside Arturo Martini and Giacomo Manzù is credited with revitalizing the Italian figurative sculpture of the first half of the twentieth century. Gathered here are ten essays by both junior and more established scholars that explore Marini’s work from his formative years in Florence to the development of his distinctive artistic language, from his Swiss period during the Second World War to the growing appreciation for his sculpture on a truly international scale from the 1950s

onwards. Marini's legacy remains a largely unexplored field. It is not always easy to assess the impact his work had on artists he knew personally nor on subsequent generations of sculptors; notable exceptions, however, do exist and they allow for more confident investigation. Examples are discussed in this issue and give us a glimpse into the way in which Marini's work was received and appropriated.

The starting point for developing this issue was offered by *Marino Marini: Arcadian Nudes*, the exhibition organized at CIMA for October 17, 2019 to June 13, 2020. Curated by Flavio Fergonzi (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa), the show was the first in the United States of female nude sculptures by Marini and featured some thirty works (in bronze, plaster, terracotta, and wood) made between 1932 and 1949. The exhibition has also provided scholars with the first ever opportunity to thoroughly analyze a visual topic that is equally important but undeniably less explored and more rarely exhibited than Marini's famous Horses and Riders. As the CIMA exhibition made evident, these women encapsulate a key feature in Marini's artistic production: the tension between the art of the past and the art of the present, the dialogue between forms canonized by centuries of visual tradition and the more contemporary works showcased around him. These female bodies encompass a variety of iconographic themes rooted in classical and preclassical antiquity, from Pomona to Venus and the Three Graces, and revisit more modern renditions of Dancers and Young Ladies, as best exemplified in the work of Auguste Rodin, Edgar Degas, and Aristide Maillol. But they were also affected by a dramatic change that can be detected in Marini's style in the 1940s: the expressionistic rendering of surfaces and shapes, with several striking examples among his Pomona as well as in the beautiful 1943 *Susanna* (Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum). These works clearly resonate with the coeval sculptures of European artists such as Germaine Richier, Fritz Wotruba, and Alberto Giacometti.

As is customary at CIMA, a symposium was organized to take place near to the exhibition's end, on April 30, 2020. And so it would have been, had not the COVID-19 pandemic intervened. The pandemic resulted in the exhibition's early closing in March, and forced us to cancel the symposium and slightly delay the publication of the present issue of *Italian Modern Art*. The papers that would have been delivered in person to an audience gathered in the main gallery at CIMA are presented in this issue in written form. We hope they will reach a much larger audience, far beyond New York.

It cannot be denied that researching and writing against the background of the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in has not been without challenge, but we like to think that it was not without meaning either. Some of the essays published here were conceived in the very rooms at CIMA where Marini's sculptures were exhibited; in other cases, the scholars had to drastically change their focus when library resources and archival documents became unattainable almost overnight. That these constraints have been (partially) overcome thanks to the generosity of colleagues, who shared knowledge and provided references and bibliographic material, is the perfect reminder of what the spirit and the best part of scholarly life are about.

The issue that follows further investigates and expands the theme of the CIMA exhibition of Marini's female nudes, and is ideally divided into four thematic sections, each dealing with a particular aspect of Marini's artistic production and his contribution to twentieth-century art. Complementing the essays falling into these sections is a major contribution by the exhibition's curator, **Flavio Fergonzi**. The research he presents here investigates what may be called "the photographic interpretation of a sculpture" – that is, the reproduction of sculptural artworks by means of photography, which, Fergonzi argues, is not merely a mechanical, neutral act but a critical appropriation, entailing choices on the photographer's part (e.g., the angle from which the shot is to be taken, the natural or artificial light to be preferred, the focus on the whole figure or rather on some eloquent detail); these have significant impact on the presentation, and therefore interpretation, of three-dimensional works of art. Fergonzi focuses on a number of sculptures by Marini and two other major Italian sculptors – Arturo Martini and Giacomo Manzù – as photographed and disseminated through journals, magazines, and books in the 1930s to 1950s; the conclusions he comes to, however, reach out to a much larger picture, well beyond the decades and the artists discussed here, making this essay essential reading for anyone interested in the study of sculpture *tout court*.

The first thematic section of this issue concerns the fascination with the past, in particular with what we may broadly call antiquity, which has long been identified as an element of paramount importance to Marini's artistic identity. **Claudia Daniotti's** essay considers Marini's work as a case study in the reception of antiquity in Italy from the 1920s to the 1940s. By reassessing Marini's interest in what she calls the "non-classical tradition" – that is, the ancient civilizations outside of the established canon of Greco-Roman antiquity, and, above all, Etruscan artworks – Daniotti offers new insights into

Marini's sculpture as it developed in the interwar years. This was a particularly momentous time, Daniotti reminds us, for the study of ancient Etruria, marked as it was by archaeological discoveries, the flourishing of scholarly literature, and the rearrangement of key museum collections that Marini knew well.

Michele Amedei's essay provides a reassessment of the crucial, and as yet little studied, training that Marini had at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence (November 1917 to July 1923). Thanks to a number of unpublished documents held in the academy's historical archives, Amedei is able to shed light on those formative years, when Marini benefited from the guidance and support of prominent teachers such as the painters Augusto Burchi and Galileo Chini, the engraver Celestino Celestini, and, above all, the sculptor Domenico Trentacoste. This multifaceted experience was to leave an indelible mark on Marini's artistic identity, as Amedei conclusively demonstrates. Taking a charming drawing by the painter Gabriele Mucchi as a starting point, **Giorgio Motisi** in his essay combines the focus of the CIMA exhibition with the investigation into portraiture carried out by Marini in the 1930s. This material is discussed in light of the coeval interest in ancient Greco-Roman art, but due emphasis is also given to Marini's ingenuity in reinventing traditional themes and long-established visual formulae, including those dating back to ancient Egypt as much as to Renaissance Italy. It is this ability to look afresh at the past and find ways of reshaping it that makes Marini's sculpture all the more relevant to the changing artistic scene of twentieth-century art.

A pervasive theme in the history of art from its very beginning, the female nude, which became almost exclusively the subject matter of Marini's work from 1932 to 1949, is at the center of our second section. The topic is tackled first by **Gianmarco Russo**, who investigates a select number of sculptures of women made by Marini in the 1930s and 1940s, in which a tension can be perceived between neatly defined volumes and textured surfaces. In addition, Russo's research suggests a new dating for the wooden *Nudo femminile* (Pistoia, Marino Marini Foundation) that was undeniably one of the most remarkable sculptures featured in the CIMA exhibition. Marini's little-known contributions as a sculptor of reliefs, as opposed to sculpture in the round, is the topic examined by **Chiara Pazzaglia**. On the one hand, valuable connections are drawn between the 1940s reliefs featuring female nudes that were displayed at CIMA and the contemporaneous highly dramatic work of the painter Mario Mafai and the sculptor Giacomo Manzù. On the other hand, at the core of Pazzaglia's essay are the official commissions that Marini received in the 1930s for reliefs meant to decorate architectural structures of notable

importance; by relying on archival evidence and surviving preparatory drawings, she reconstructs a notoriously problematic part of Marini's early production, whether left unfinished or destroyed.

The third section, comprising two essays, is about Marini's relationship with the broader international context of the 1940s to the 1950s, when a network of personal contacts, documented travels and longer sojourns, and mutual artistic influence can be pieced together around the figure of Marini. **Nicol Mocchi's** research, which is based upon a wealth of unpublished or little-known archival documents, provides the first thorough investigation into the sculptor's self-imposed exile in Switzerland, where he took refuge from the war in December 1942. Mocchi demonstrates how crucial this period was for Marini. It was not only a particularly prolific moment in his career – as the photograph of his studio that illustrates this journal issue clearly shows, with its dense population of statues – but also the unprecedented occasion for Marini to establish relationships with international artists as well as museum directors, collectors, and art critics who significantly contributed to the knowledge and promotion of his work. This is also the time, as mentioned above, of a radical change of Marini's style and syntax, marked by expressionistic realism, disproportionate shapes, and rough and corroded surfaces. This new language was surely precipitated by the traumatic years of the war, but ought to be read, Mocchi argues, in dialogue with the coeval production of Fritz Wotruba and Germaine Richier, whom Marini befriended in Switzerland. **Olivia Armandroff's** contribution focuses on a friendship Marini made a few years later, with the great American sculptor Alexander Calder. The two met at the beginning of 1950, during Marini's three-month stay in New York. While it remains difficult to get a full sense of their relationship in the present state of research, Armandroff makes a first attempt in this direction, taking into consideration a few unpublished letters and postcards that Marini and Calder exchanged. She explores this surviving evidence so as to offer some preliminary notes on the artists' friendship and mutual connections to art collectors such as Curt Valentin and Peggy Guggenheim.

In the last section of this issue, two essays take into account the still underexplored field of Marini's legacy by presenting two notable cases illustrating the reception and appropriation, both direct and indirect, of his art at a wide international scale. **Marta Colombo's** paper assesses Marini's legacy through the eyes of his pupil and successor as chair of sculpture at the Accademia di Brera in Milan, Alik Cavaliere. Relying on Cavaliere's mostly

unpublished journals from the 1960s to the 1980s, Colombo's essay investigates the influence that Marini had on his perceptive student, both on his poetry and syntax – an influence that persisted even after Marini's death. Colombo takes up one of Cavaliere's last works, the *Grande pianta Dafne* (*Big plant Daphne*, 1991), to discuss as a case of assimilation and the resemanticization of a particular aspect of Marini's legacy: his ambiguous and multifarious concept of the "feminine." Outside of Marini's native Italy, a particularly fertile land for Marini's art has long been Iran, as a whole generation of Iranian artists, particularly in the 1950s, traveled to Italy to receive their training in the local academies. Among them was Bahman Mohassess, a leading figure of Iranian art of the second half of the twentieth century, whose sculpture **Mohammadreza Mirzaei** examines in his essay. Like the work of the more famous "father of Iranian modernism" Parviz Tanavoli, Mohassess's sculpture is greatly indebted to Marini's, in ways that, alas, have yet to receive extensive examination. Mirzaei's essay contributes to remedying this lack of scholarly attention and discusses several sculptures made by Mohassess in the 1970s in dialogue with their possible source of inspiration in Marini's oeuvre – interestingly enough, sources that Mirzaei identifies not only among Marini's sculptures but also his comparatively less studied paintings, for instance *Invocation* (1955).

This issue of *Italian Modern Art* will hopefully open up new avenues of research on Marini's life and work, which we attempted to investigate from a range of different perspectives. In line with the CIMA exhibition to which this issue is connected, we placed at the very center of our inquiry Marini's representation of the female nude, rather than his more fashionable Horses and Riders. Bringing Marini back to New York, with a solo show introducing American audiences to such an overlooked part of his production, has been a way of reconnecting the artist with a city that he held dear. When, in 1950, Marini was in New York to open his first solo show at Curt Valentin's Buchholz Gallery, he was not unknown to the general public, for his sculpture had been much praised the year before at the *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* exhibition, held at the Museum of Modern Art and curated by James T. Soby and Alfred H. Barr Jr. At this moment, thanks in part to the network of art dealers, collectors, merchants, and critics he made contact with, Marini established himself as a truly international artist and quickly became, in the United States, one of the most successful and sought-after Italian sculptors. We believe that it is within this larger framework that the art of Marini should be considered and it is in this spirit that we approached the study of his work.

In the months that it took to finalize this issue, difficult as they were because of the COVID-19 pandemic, its editors were reminded time and again of the words that open one of the great masterpieces of twentieth-century Italian literature, Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Written in Florence between December 1943 and July 1944, during the German occupation of the city, the book begins with the disconsolate author describing himself as "closed in one room, in a world apart"; but the way to joy and consolation, he maintains, is open and within reach. It consists in "travel[ing] in my memory to that other world,"¹ the distant world he had known in what seemed another lifetime and could still be willed back, if only by an act of memory, into existence.

It goes without saying that the similarity with Levi stops here, in the closed rooms where we are temporarily confined, surrounded as we are by a world that seems to shrink and feels equally closed. But the "other world" – made of joyful hours spent at CIMA studying Marini's sculptures and animatedly discussing each and every one of them – is still within reach and was very much in our mind as we worked at this issue.

CITATIONS

1. "Ma, chiuso in una stanza, e in un mondo chiuso, mi è grato riandare con la memoria a quell'altro mondo." Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, trans. Frances Frenaye (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 11.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michele Amedei received his Ph.D from the University of Florence, Pisa and Siena in 2018. Michele has always been interested in studying the lively exchanges between international and Italian artists in the nineteenth and the early twentieth Century. His research concerns the presence of U.S painters and sculptors in Florence in the first half of the nineteenth century, which was the focus of his Ph.D dissertation. He is also investigating American artists such as John Singer Sargent. Sargent's friendship with Italian artists including the Piedmontese Alberto Falchetti and the Roman Antonio Mancini was the topic of two articles he published in 'Apollo' (2018) and in the 'Journal of the History of Collections' (2020). Most recently, Michele has directed his attention

towards the presence in Florence of French artists such as Marcellin Desboutin as well as Édouard Manet, with forthcoming articles on the subject that will be published in 'Print Quarterly (expected Spring 2021) and 'Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz' (expected Fall 2021). He is also collaborating on the organization of an exhibition dedicated to the Romantic painter Giuseppe Bezzuoli, scheduled to open at the Galleria degli Uffizi in 2021. Between 2016 and 2017, Michele was the Terra Foundation Pre-Doctoral fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. In September and October of 2017, he additionally received a bimonthly grant from the U.S. Michele Amedei received his Ph.D from the University of Florence, Pisa and Siena in 2018. Michele has always been interested in studying the lively exchanges between international and Italian artists in the nineteenth and the early twentieth Century. His research concerns the presence of U.S painters and sculptors in Florence in the first half of the nineteenth century, which was the focus of his Ph.D dissertation. He is also investigating American artists such as John Singer Sargent. Sargent's friendship with Italian artists including the Piedmontese Alberto Falchetti and the Roman Antonio Mancini was the topic of two articles he published in 'Apollo' (2018) and in the 'Journal of the History of Collections' (2020). Most recently, Michele has directed his attention towards the presence in Florence of French artists such as Marcellin Desboutin as well as Édouard Manet, with forthcoming articles on the subject that will be published in 'Print Quarterly' (expected Spring 2021) and 'Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz' (expected Fall 2021). He is also collaborating on the organization of an exhibition dedicated to the Romantic painter Giuseppe Bezzuoli, scheduled to open at the Galleria degli Uffizi in 2021. Between 2016 and 2017, Michele was the Terra Foundation Pre-Doctoral fellow at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. In September and October of 2017, he additionally received a bimonthly grant from the U.S.Capitol Historical Society, Washington, D.C. to support his Ph.D research. Finally, between March 2018 and January 2020 Michele has been involved as teacher of European and Italian Modern Art by CEAIE (China Education Association for International Exchange) and AAP (Arts Abroad Project) in collaboration with the University of Florence (Department of Architecture).

Claudia Daniotti is an art historian and researcher specializing in Italian Renaissance art with an emphasis on the classical tradition and the transmission of visual motifs from antiquity to present times. She holds a PhD from The Warburg Institute, London, and a BA (Hons) and MA in the History of Art from the Ca' Foscari University, Venice. Currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance, University of Warwick, she was a Visiting and Associate Lecturer in Renaissance and Baroque to Neoclassical Art at Buckingham and Bath Spa Universities (2016–19), a Teaching Assistant at the Warburg Institute (2014), and worked for three years at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art as an Education and Exhibition Assistant (2008–11). Daniotti has published extensively on the classical tradition and fourteenth- to eighteenth-century art. Her first monograph, which considers the reception of the myth of Alexander the Great in Renaissance Italian art, will be published in 2021.

Nicol Maria Mocchi is an art historian specializing in Italian modern and contemporary art. She received her PhD in 2014 from the University of Udine, for her thesis *Fonti visive internazionali per gli artisti italiani negli anni del Simbolismo* (International Visual Sources for Italian artists during Symbolism). Since 2010 she has collaborated with Milan's Superintendence of Fine Arts and with the Archivio dell'Arte Metafisica. Her main research interests are the connections and exchanges between diverse visual cultures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on Swiss-German, Anglo-American, and Italian artists and movements. In 2016 and 2019 she was a fellow at CIMA, researching the reception, visual success, and critical fortunes of Giorgio Morandi's oeuvre in the United States leading up to the 1950s, and of Marino Marini in Switzerland during World War II. Mocchi's book *La cultura dei fratelli de Chirico agli albori dell'arte metafisica, 1909-1911* (The Culture of the de Chirico Brothers at the Dawn of Metaphysical Art) was published in 2017.