

# BREAKING THE BOX

*A celebration of Italian contemporary art in SoHo.*

by Linda Sheridan photography by Alexa Hoyer



**LAURA MATTIOLI**, founder and President of the Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) in SoHo, was born into the world of art collecting.

When she was an infant, her father, renowned art collector Gianni Mattioli as well as a personal friend of Italian futurist painter/sculptor Fortunato Depero, would sometimes open his home in Milan on Sundays for visitors to come and see his pieces. In 1948, he served as a consultant for a 20th-century modern Italian art show at MoMA.

By the early 80s, Mattioli took responsibility for her father's collection, considered to be one of the most important aggregations of Italian avant-garde and modern art. She is the main lender to institutions throughout the world, including the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy.

"Italian artists in the 20th century, starting with the futurists, have to face the need to be contemporary in a world that is completely different — for technology, interest, also views of art... they have to find a way to be contemporary, but not forget their tradition. This is a problem that all artists in the world must face today. In the old days, politicians used art for power. Now, it's Twitter."

While Italy has long been heralded for its excellence in fashion and design, not enough is known about the significant role it plays in modern and contemporary art. It seemed only fitting that Laura would eventually begin a foundation in New York, one of the epicenters of the art world. CIMA, which opened in 2014, is a nonprofit exhibition and research center. Each year, CIMA receives applications from around the world and selects four artists for a six-month residential fellowship. "If we don't have a high standard of quality in what we show and what we propose, it's not easy to exist in a town such as New York," says Mattioli. CIMA is a member of the SoHo Arts Network in New York as well as the prestigious Association of Research Institutes in Art History (ARIAH).

Perhaps in a nod to her father, CIMA has the intimacy of a home — it even has a kitchen area where visitors can grab a coffee. Mattioli herself lives below the center in an elegant space also filled with paintings and sculptures from around the world, including Brooklyn sculptor Barry X Ball, British artist Tacita Dean, and others.

Now at CIMA through Nov. 13 is **Facing America: Mario Schifano, 1960-1965**. A self-taught artist from Rome, Schifano was a leading figure in Italian postwar art as well as a pioneer of Italian Pop Art. The exhibition focuses on Schifano's earlier years, including his first visit to New York in 1963 and his immersion into the New York art scene, surveying how his style developed beginning with his so-called "monochromes" of the early 1960s. The exhibit also includes a beautiful series of collaborative efforts with artists Andy Warhol and writer-poet Frank O'Hara, both close friends of Schifano.

Schifano's time in New York saw his work evolve into a more Pop style, with paintings of televisions, dense with layers of newspaper and enamel; pieces reminiscent of road signs; and the application of consumerist messaging as propaganda, such as through his *Koka Kola* satire piece. The exhibit is curated by former CIMA fellow Francesco Guzzetti, PhD.

"He really became a part of this underground milieu," says Mattioli. Schifano also began tinkering with films and the music scene, befriending jazz pianist Thelonious Monk. He even started a band, The Stars of Mario Schifano.

In late October and November, CIMA will have special events in conjunction with the exhibit, including a weeklong symposium, jazz concerts, and more.

Next up at CIMA in the new year will be **Staging Injustice. Italian Art. 1880-1917**, featuring 15 artists including painters Angelo Morbelli, Emilio Longoni, Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, sculptor Medardo Rosso, among others.

"Art makes you curious," says Mattioli. "It offers a fresh point of view. Many times, we put things into boxes," she continues. "We want to break open the box."

For more information, visit [italianmodernart.org](http://italianmodernart.org). **DT**