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Mario Schifano TUTTO on paper...
Curated by Alberto Salvadori
Opening: Thursday, 21 September 2023, 6pm-9pm
22 September – 4 November 2023
Tuesday – Saturday; 11am – 6pm

Fondazione Marconi and Gió Marconi are pleased to announce *Mario Schifano TUTTO nelle carte...* [TUTTO on Paper...], a major retrospective curated by Alberto Salvadori, with the support of the Archivio Mario Schifano.

The exhibition aims to shed light on Mario Schifano's extensive and varied production of works on paper throughout the 1960s. It features a selection of works on paper that retraces the best-known cycles that the artist was concurrently also creating on canvas, beginning with the *Monocromi* and ending with the *Compagni compagni* series.

Mario Schifano's work and personal journey were intense and never separate. His works on paper represent an important and extensive production. The selection on display at the gallery demonstrates that throughout the decade of the 1960s, for Mario Schifano art was everything, TUTTO: art that evolves and revolves around the subject, reality, and a new mindful consciousness in relation to the city, human space, life and emotions. In the same manner as his paintings, Schifano's works on paper provide vivid evidence of how everything influenced his way of seeing and thinking: films, signage, advertising, politics, his personal love stories and friendships. Schifano instinctively understood that art is life and vice versa. Right from the start he differentiated himself from the American phenomena of pop art and new dada, and from everyone else for the rest of his career. His artworks on paper are the geographical map of his way of thinking and his practice.

Works on paper occupy an important place in Schifano's oeuvre and are essential to a comparative interpretation of his entire production, both in terms of their relationship with the paintings and their expressive language.

From the early years of the monochromes which contain and re-elaborate street art and the language of pop culture - pop, not in terms of pop art, but rather as the popular language of sign painters - up until the emulsion canvases, paper was always present as the constant for any idea that intersected the moment. In Schifano's world, images can no longer be analyzed and interpreted in a familiar way. The traditional relationships of composition vanish, leaving room for myriad possibilities, which the artist selects and uses as an inevitable step in his process. Whatever is taken for granted in pictorial or photographic terms evaporates in Schifano's work: he confronts us with a new way of looking at reality and invention, which in his work becomes manipulation through painting, regardless of the support.

Schifano's work during the 1960s compels us to analyze the functions and use of social roles and cultural and political contexts. It also raises the question about the new fields of creation. His work is a philosophical exercise linked to the experience of life; a call for the analysis of real and widespread behavioral modes as an antithesis to elitist or specialistic ones.

In his work - which is ultimately biographical - Schifano seemingly plays with centralising, authoritarian connotations, only to suddenly reveal the contrary: an open, voluntary and participatory system of art.

Ontology is opposed to use, authorship to accessibility and participation, appropriation to adoption, and creativity to the attribution of meaning. Everything is there to be selected and shared. From an archive in the making, composed of the bulk of painted and drawn papers and the claim of totality, one moves to the next phase of pictorial collation which is an exercise in distinguishing, rummaging, selecting and recycling. Schifano is empirical and experimental; he craves for the world that presents itself before him and transforms everything into pure painting. It does not have to be on canvas, it can also be on paper.

Biographical notes

Born in 1934 in Homs, Libya, Mario Schifano moved to Rome immediately after the Second World War. After abandoning his studies, he worked as an assistant to his father, who was an archaeologist and restorer at the Villa Giulia Etruscan Museum.

He began to paint informalist canvases, which he showed in his first solo exhibition at Galleria Appia Antica in Rome. In 1960, he took part in the group exhibition *5 pittori - Roma '60* together with fellow artists Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Francesco Lo Savio and Giuseppe Uncini.

His prodigious talent was at its height in the 1960s, a decade in which he experimented extensively with different media and techniques, traversing a wide spectrum of styles. Throughout that decade, Schifano worked on various thematic cycles, the most prominent being his *Paesaggi anemici*, *Tutte Stelle* and *Compagni Compagni*. In 1959, he began to work on a new series of enamel paintings on canvas-backed paper. For these works, the artist used industrial enamels with a glossy, covering effect, letting the colour drip freely and unevenly onto the rough surface. The surface of these paintings, reminiscent of photographic plates with their bright colours and absence of tonalities, were sometimes interrupted by letters or numbers. Schifano's idea was to create a billboard painting, a screen onto which something new could be displayed. Those early monochromes further evolved into his iconic Coca Cola and Esso paintings, which illustrated Schifano's take on the aesthetics of international Pop Art. After having seen his monochromes in 1960, Ileana Sonnabend asked Schifano to exhibit his works in her gallery in Paris. Two years later, Schifano was one of the few European artists included in the *New Realists* exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. In that groundbreaking international survey of contemporary art, Schifano's works were featured alongside those of Warhol, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg and Klein.

He exhibited at the 1964 Venice Biennale, and the following year took part in the inaugural exhibition at Studio Marconi where he was to become one of the gallery's core artists.

In addition to several new series like *Ossigeno Ossigeno* and *Oasi*, he also created avant-garde films, such as *Anna Carini vista in agosto dalle farfalle*. After his political and civil commitment during the years of protest in the late 1960s, Schifano began experimenting with transferring television images onto emulsified canvas, then colouring them with industrial enamel paint. Those works would become part of his extensive series *Paesaggi TV*.

In 1972 Schifano exhibited at the X Rome Quadriennale and the following year he was part of the exhibition *Contemporanea*, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva in the Villa Borghese parking lot. In 1974 a vast retrospective exhibition was held at the University of Parma, where more than a hundred works retraced his artistic career.

During these years he turned his attention towards art history, creating new cycles such as *Quadri equestri*, *Architettura*, *Naturale sconosciuto* and *Reperti*.

Schifano returned to the Venice Biennale three more times - in 1978, 1982 and in 1984.

His work was also included in major exhibitions dedicated to contemporary Italian art, including *Identité italienne*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1981; *Italian Art of the XX century*, Royal Academy, London, 1989; and *The Italian Metamorphosis 1943-1968*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994 (which subsequently travelled to the Milan Triennale and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg).

Mario Schifano died in Rome in 1998.

A survey exhibition of Schifano's oeuvre is currently on view at Magazzino Italian Art in Cold Springs.

Major retrospectives include: Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome (2001); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (2008-2009); Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan, and Musée d'Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne (2008-2009); Castello Pasquini, Livorno (2013); Luxembourg & Dayan, London and New York (2014); Complesso Museale Palazzo Ducale, Mantua (2017); the Mayor Gallery, London (2018); and CIMA, New York (2021).

Most recent group shows include *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Gallery, London (2016); *Arte ribelle*, Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan (2017); *Nascita di una nazione*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (2018); *I sei anni di Marcello Rumma 1965-1970*, Museo Madre, Naples (2019); *A. B.O. THEATRON L'Arte o la vita*, Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2021); *Vita nuova*, MAMAC, Nice (2022); *La luce del nero*, Fondazione Burri, Città di Castello (2022).

In the past 20 years several exhibitions have been realized at the Fondazione Marconi in Milan: *Schifano 1960-1964. Dal monocromo alla strada* (2005); *Schifano 1964-1970. Dal paesaggio alla TV* (2006); *Grande angolo per uomini, manifesti e paesaggi* (2013); *Mario Schifano. Qualcos'altro* (2020).

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