

Mimmo Paladino

21.05.2024

05.07.2024

“Can the ancient be painted in a single image? The ancient runs quickly over the pure surface of cathedrals. What dazzles resists the injustice that measures and governs the tesserae of ‘realism’.”

-Mimmo Paladino, 2012

MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to announce a solo exhibition by the Italian Maestro Mimmo Paladino. This momentous occasion marks Paladino’s return to Asia after his inaugural exhibition at Beijing’s National Gallery of Fine Arts in 1994. Exactly three decades later, Paladino presents a selection of his most recent works at our Hong Kong gallery.

Paladino, a multifaceted artist fascinated by the ancient and the ancestral, finds his muse in what defines Italian culture. Its influence shaped his artistic practice: "I come from an inland culture, a solid culture. Coastal backgrounds are more winding and redundant, full of opposite and different influences. The countryside is rife with legends, cults of the dead, witches and fairies, a sense of the pagan mystery, both religious and spiritual typical of the south."

Born in Paduli, in Campania in southern Italy, in 1948, Paladino defies categorisation. He is an artist who fearlessly explores diverse mediums - whether as a master engraver and printmaker, a photographer, a sculptor, a painter, an actor, or even a film director.

As the pioneering Italian contemporary artist to exhibit in China back in 1994, exhibiting his terracotta elms and masks against the historic backdrop of the Forbidden City and Great Wall, Paladino returns to Asia with a series of works spanning 2022 to 2024. He describes this exhibition as "a pre-concert exercise, playing on various keyboards some tunes already known and some experimental ones, making a small, veiled homage to the country that’s hosting me."

Continuing on this musical association, Paladino created a series of works titled *Dance Chinoise*, a title that draws inspiration from Claude Debussy, known for his deep affinity with Asian culture, as well as Tchaikovsky’s Suite 6 of the Nutcracker - aptly named “Chinese Dance”. Yet, for the Italian artist, titles are not descriptors but echoes of the literature

he consumes, the music he absorbs, and the myths and folklore ingrained in his upbringing.

Infused with echoes of Etruscan, Egyptian, and primitive art, reinterpreted through a contemporary lens, as well as an animistic vibe gleaned from his journeys through Brazil, Paladino’s works transcend mere realism. His figures serve as vessels of symbolism, reverentially intertwining ancestral traces and symbolic motifs. Paladino’s creations exude a vibrancy of form and colour, evoking what he describes as an "archaeology of memory" - a fusion of past and present. Each composition unfurls with a delicate complexity, portraying simple elements like faces, crosses, hands, or branches, each carrying the ethereal essence of human presence.

In his series *Aurea Aetas*, Paladino delves into a contemporary exploration of a religious painting tradition hailing from the 13th and 14th centuries. During this pre-perspective era, sacred art often took the form of gold-ground panel paintings. Yet, rather than resurrecting this tradition, Paladino boldly reinterprets it through a modern perspective. On wooden panels, he inscribes reiterated and stylised heads, isolated hands, and enigmatic symbols, crafting a visual language that feels simultaneously universal and deeply intimate.

Ultimately, Paladino blends tradition and personal recollections, past and present times. His creations hover delicately between abstraction and figuration, drawing inspiration from archaic rituals and alchemical practices, coaxing them to unveil the essence of contemporary existence.

Mimmo Paladino

Mimmo Paladino (born in Paduli, in 1948) began his artistic journey in the late 1960s, characterised by an openness to various artistic mediums – initially focusing on photography and drawing, then expanding to include performance art and theatre. In addition to painting, printmaking, and sculpture, Paladino collaborated with prominent designers and architects such as Ettore Sottsass, the Memphis Group, Mario Botta, and Renzo Piano.

Paladino played a crucial role in bridging the allegories that shaped Southern Italy with a multitude of artistic languages to give rise to a new, eclectic and pioneering approach to art making. In the 1970s, he challenged the avant-garde art system, expanding the possibilities of artistic expression across disciplines. He was a prominent figure in the Transavanguardia movement theorised by the art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, alongside artists like Sandro Chia, Clemente, Cucchi, and Nicola De Maria. Paladino gained international recognition in the 1980s, exhibiting in significant museums and events such as the Venice Biennale and Documenta.

In the following years, Paladino continued experimenting, engaging with urban spaces and creating impactful installations. His exhibitions in Beijing, Florence's Forte Belvedere, and other European and American cities, along with public installations like the "Montagna di sale" in Naples and the "Montagna blu" in Solopaca in the province of Benevento, displayed the grandeur of his oeuvre and artistic language.

Paladino's work is held in major public collections, including the Los Angeles County Art Museum; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Berlin Neue Galerie; Australian National Gallery, Canberra; Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and Setegaya Museum, Tokyo.