



Mario Schifano
True Love, 1965
enamel and graphite on canvas
80 x 80 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Fondazione Marconi, Milan
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HOMAGE TO MARIO SCHIFANO

At the start it was *True Love*

Inauguration: 29 November 2018 from 18.00 to 21.00
from 30 November 2018 to 9 March 2019
Tuesday - Saturday, 10-13 / 15-19
Free entrance

*...A brilliant volcano, a liar, handsome, antisocial,
generous, unfaithful, elegant, frenetic, voracious,
a raconteur, insatiable, reckless,
an unbridled madman who wanted everything...*
Giorgio Marconi, 2004

“Dear Mario: work, unplug the phone and forget all the troubles of this world. Best regards.”

This letter, dated 29 September 1965 and addressed to Mario Schifano, was signed by Giorgio Marconi on the eve of the inaugural exhibition in his first exhibition space.

True Love was the first painting the Roman artist showed at Studio Marconi in November that same year, alongside works by Valerio Adami, Lucio Del Pezzo and Emilio Tadini.

True Love was also the title of Schifano's first solo exhibition, again at Marconi's, just a month later in December 1965.

This exhibition was soon followed by others: *Inventario con anima e senza anima* (November 1966), *Tuttstelle* (October 1967), *Compagni, compagni* (December 1968) and *Paesaggi TV* (December 1970).

It is precisely to this period of Mario Schifano's career that Fondazione Marconi has turned its attention, offering a tribute to the artist twenty years after his death while also retracing the early stages of his collaboration with Studio Marconi.

After an initial apprenticeship in Informalism, Schifano's painting emerged in the early 1960s. The first exhibition of his work was in 1959 at Galleria La Salita in Rome, in a group show that included Festa, Angeli, Lo Savio and Uncini. In the exhibition catalogue, Cesare Vivaldi commented: “Mario Schifano is perhaps the most genuine painting talent to appear in Rome since Burri.”

It was the period of his monochromes: highly original paintings in one or two colours that seemed to evoke the *zero degree* of painting and the arrival at a point of no return.

But that was only a starting point, since as early as 1962 his works became populated with fragments of images and signals from the metropolitan landscape, which shortly made way for new kinds of painting that included images of streets, accidents, nature *en plein air*, “anaemic landscapes”, “details” and “trees”.

It was during this period that Giorgio Marconi got to know Schifano, having seen his work at Plinio De Martini's Galleria la Tartaruga and at Mara Coccia's. Marconi bought his first Schifano paintings at Federico Quadrani's Galleria Odyssea, where he also had the opportunity to meet the artist in person.

In the latter half of 1963 Marconi and Schifano established their first collaborative agreements, which in the spring of the following year were formalised in an exclusive contract.

Captivated by his paintings, Marconi called him “a brilliant volcano” and considered him one of the greatest Italian painters of his day.

The partnership between the two ended in 1970, but Marconi's interest in Schifano continued. He organised exhibitions of his work in 1974, 1990 and 2002, as well as two more recent shows held in 2005 and 2006, entitled respectively *Schifano 1960-1964. From the Monochromes to the Streets*, and *Schifano 1964-1970: From Landscape to TV*, each accompanied by an important catalogue published by Skira.

This current exhibition aims to reconstruct the exhibitions that took place between 1965 and 1970, beginning on the ground floor with *Vero amore* (1965), where the main image is of a leafy, robust and vigorous tree, repeated innumerable times in various versions. This is followed by *Inventario con anima e senza anima* (1966), in which Schifano presented the cycle *Futurismo rivisitato*, based on the well-known photograph of the Futurist group taken in Paris in 1912, and *Tuttstelle* (1967), in which spray-painted stars evoke childhood memories, and Schifano began his use of transparent or coloured Perspex sheets to create original veiling effects. Following these is an entire room dedicated to large masterpieces, while the first floor hosts the series *Compagni, compagni* (1968), inspired by the political events of the day and based on a photograph of Chinese workers or students bearing a hammer and sickle, which Schifano



Untitled (Mario Schifano portrayed in his studio by Claudio Abate), 1966
silver salt print, 40 x 30 cm

transformed into a media icon. The itinerary ends on the second floor with *Paesaggi TV* (1970), in which images taken from the television screen have been isolated from their context, elaborated with touches of nitroaniline colour and displayed on emulsified canvas, paper or film.

The exhibition not only intends to pay homage to the artist, but also to celebrate his collaboration with the historic Milan gallery, which at the time had just begun to operate. The public will therefore be able to see (or see again) works that were presented in Milan in those years (often for the first time), and which still form an integral part of the Marconi collection.

The exhibition itinerary is completed by an extensive selection of repertory materials, including publications, photographs and writings.

Biographical notes

Born in Homs, Libya, in 1934, Mario Schifano moved to Rome in the immediate post-war period. Abandoning his studies, he worked as an assistant to his father, an archaeologist and restorer at the National Etruscan Museum housed in Villa Giulia in Rome.

Schifano's exhibited his initial Informal style painting at his first solo exhibition, held at the Galleria Appia Antica in Rome. Later, with Angeli, Festa, Lo Savio and Uncini, he took part in the group show *5 pittori - Roma '60*, curated by Pierre Restany, which led the critics to take an interest in his painting. Abandoning Informal Art, he began to create monochrome works using a single shade of industrial enamel paint on wrapping paper glued to the canvas.

In 1961 he won the Lissone Prize for young contemporary painters and held a new solo show at Galleria La Salita in Rome. After a trip to the United States where he took part in the exhibition *The New Realism* at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, he began to introduce fragments of urban iconography into his paintings. His work took the form of thematic cycles, from *Paesaggi anemici* to the 1966 series *Futurismo rivisitato*, dedicated to art history. He exhibited at the 1964 Venice Biennale and the following year took part in the inaugural exhibition at Studio Marconi, becoming one of the gallery's most representative artists. In addition to the new series *Ossigeno*, *Oasi* and *Compagni Compagni*, he also created avant-garde films such as *Anna Carini vista in agosto dalle farfalle*, which he showed at Studio Marconi in 1967.

After his political and civil commitment during the protest years, from 1970 he began to experiment with television images painted on emulsified canvas, adding colour in the form of industrial enamel paint. Many solo shows followed, and in 1972 he exhibited at the X Rome Quadriennale. The following year he took part in *Contemporanea*, an exhibition curated by Achille Bonito Oliva in the Villa Borghese parking lot. In 1974 a vast retrospective of his work was held at Parma University, where over a hundred paintings retraced his artistic career.

In this period he revisited art history, creating new cycles inspired by the masterpieces of the historic avant-gardes, among them *Quadri equestri*, *Architettura*, *Naturale sconosciuto* and *Reperti*. As well as organising numerous solo exhibitions in Italy and abroad, he also took part in several editions of the Venice Biennale. 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; *The Italian Metamorphosis 1943-1968*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994, (which then transferred to the Milan Triennale and the Wolfsburg Kunstmuseum).

Schifano died in Rome in 1998.

The many exhibitions dedicated to his work include extensive retrospectives held at the following venues: 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 Métropole (2008-2009); Castello Pasquini, Livorno (2013); the Luxembourg & Dayan Gallery, London and New York (2014); Complesso Museale Palazzo Ducale, Mantua (2017); and the Mayor Gallery, London (2018). Two other important exhibitions were organised by the Marconi Foundation: *Schifano 1960-1964. Dal monocromo alla strada* (2005), and *Schifano 1964-1970. Dal paesaggio alla TV* (2006). Last of all was *Grande angolo per uomini, manifesti e paesaggi* (2013), held to coincide with the publication of an homonymous book by the Mario Schifano Archive. His work has also appeared in recent major group exhibitions, including *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Gallery, London (2016); *Arte ribelle*, Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan, curated by M. Meneguzzo (2017); and *Nascita di una nazione*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, curated by L.M. Barbero (2018).

Fondazione Marconi

Via Tadino 15
20124 Milan
T + 39 02 29 419 232
F + 39 02 29 417 278v
info@fondazionemarconi.org
www.fondazionemarconi.org

Press Office

Cristina Pariset
T + 39 02 4812584
F + 39 02 4812486
C + 39 348 5109589
cristina.pariset@libero.it

press kit: <https://fileshare.fondazionemarconi.org/index.php/s/FAHXcypEYj3tKj5>