

Remembering Salvatore Scarpitta

Paula Seegy Gallery is excited to announce the opening of the exhibition "Remembering Salvatore Scarpitta", a retrospective dedicated to the works of the renowned artist **Salvatore Scarpitta**, curated by Luigi Sansone. **The exhibition will be open to the public from June 6 to July 4, 2024**, and will feature a selection of 27 works (some not for sale), which illustrate the artist's artistic journey and his deep passion for the world of car racing.

Born in New York in 1919, Scarpitta was a prominent figure in the 20th-century art scene. His career was marked by continuous innovation and experimentation, ranging from his iconic "bands" to dynamic racing car sculptures, exploring the tension between movement and material, tradition and modernity.

Luigi Sansone recounts: "I met Salvatore Scarpitta in Baltimore, Maryland, in the summer of 1985, to organize his solo exhibition at the Pavilion of Contemporary Art (PAC) in Milan. A fraternal friendship was immediately born and lasted until his passing in New York on April 10, 2007. His profound humanity—he was a staunch advocate for human rights—generosity, and nonconformity accompanied him throughout his life."

This exhibition aims to pay homage to the artist, known for his highly original compositions with bandages, first exhibited in 1958 at the La Tartaruga Gallery in Rome and later in New York at the Leo Castelli Gallery. These works were immediately recognized as innovative and distinctive from the abstract trends of the time.

Scarpitta is also known for his racing cars, which he put on the track for over twenty years on circuits in Maryland and Pennsylvania. His passion for cars began in the 1930s, attending races at the Legion Ascot Speedway in Los Angeles. These experiences profoundly influenced his life and art, as he himself recounted: "I admired the race car drivers and the races of that time. The first time I painted, it was the numbers that my racing friends allowed me to draw on their shiny, multicolored cars."

In the summer of 1985, after months of work, Scarpitta realized one of his youthful dreams in his Baltimore studio-garage: the construction of a functioning racing car, the "Sal Scarpitta Special", capable of competing on dirt tracks. In the 1960s, he had already created and exhibited some racing cars at the Leo Castelli Gallery, but none of them were actually ready to race on the track.

The works featured in this exhibition document the connection with this reality, a meeting point between art and life that represents the core of his artistic and existential thought: "For art to be true and effective, it must arise from the artist's total experience."

In the competition of the racing circuits, Scarpitta finds new energies and experiences that, filtered through his artistic sensibility, transform into unique works. Among these are the offset folder "Incident at Rimini" from 1980, the ten digital photographic prints on metalkodak paper mounted on aluminum "Sal is Racer" from 2006, which depict video frames from his videos directed in collaboration with Joan Bankemper: "Sal is Racer" (1984, 20"), "Potato Masher" (1984, 15"), and "Message to Leo" (1987, 15"). The exhibition also features the lithograph "Auto Sprint n. 59" from 1993, printed in 240 copies on the occasion of the XLV Venice Biennale,

sculptures in wood and patinated bronze, and drawings of portraits of drivers and car accidents.

Notes

1 - From an autobiographical note by Salvatore Scarpitta, in "Scarpitta", exhibition catalog, Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1956

2 - J. Scalzo, "Rajo e Salvatore", in "Circle Track", June 1989, p. 12

Biographical Notes

Salvatore Scarpitta (New York 1919-2007) arrived in Italy from Los Angeles in 1936 to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. He returned permanently to the United States in December 1958. His first solo exhibitions took place in Rome: Galleria Chiurazzi (1949), Galleria Il Pincio (1951), Galleria La Tartaruga (1955, 1957, 1958), and in Milan at Galleria del Naviglio (1956) and Galleria dell'Ariete (1964). In his solo exhibition in 1958 at Galleria La Tartaruga, Scarpitta presented a series of works that would make him famous and form the basis of his subsequent work: the "bandaged" paintings. The following year, he exhibited his bandaged paintings at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. This exhibition marked the beginning of a fruitful friendship and working relationship between Leo Castelli and Scarpitta, documented by the long series of solo and group exhibitions that Scarpitta would participate in over the following decades. As the artist himself recalls, his first encounter with Castelli happened in Rome: "I first met Castelli in Italy in 1957; he came to my studio in Rome introduced by an Italian painter, Piero Dorazio. He was looking for young artists to include in his new gallery in New York City. Our long friendship began this way. I had wanted to return home to the United States for some time, but I knew that only my work, my sole resource, could bring me there, so I watched Leo with apprehension as he roamed through the chaos of my studio. Somewhere among the rolled and tied canvases, he found what he was looking for. With the help of Ileana Sonnabend and Frederick Kiesler, my first New York exhibition at Castelli's was organized for January 1959. Returning home after an absence of twelve years was wonderful, as it threw me headlong into the great arena that New York represents for any artist. I was imbued with the spirit of beginnings, and here a new life began for me, and since then, I have exhibited with Leo." (1)

In 1961, Scarpitta held an exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, where he displayed not only his "bands" but also a series of "X-frames," conceived as modular pieces that could be arranged in various configurations. These works foreshadowed the minimalist art movement that would soon dominate the international scene. In 1964, during his solo exhibition at Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan, he showcased works created between 1958 and 1963. Among these were pieces where the artist incorporated fragments, seat belts, or car parts into the canvas, connecting to his experience and passion for car racing, which were crucial in his life and art.

In 2005, the Fondazione Mazzotta in Milan presented the general catalog of his works, curated by Luigi Sansone (Mazzotta Publisher).

Among his numerous solo exhibitions in the United States and Europe, notable ones include: Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1963; Galerie Aujourd'hui – Musée des Beaux Arts, Brussels, 1964; Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan, 1964; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1977; Venice Biennale, 1972; Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, 1985; Galleria Niccoli, Parma, 1990; Venice Biennale, 1993; Civica Galleria Renato Guttuso, Bagheria, 1999; Art Car Museum,

Houston, 2001; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, 2011; Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, 2012; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., 2014; Luxembourg & Dayan Gallery, New York, 2016; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri, 2018; Studio A Invernizzi, Milan, 2021; Galleria Mattia De Luca, Rome, 2024.

Notes

1 - This testimony by Salvatore Scarpitta was first published in "Castelli and His Artists – Twenty-Five Years," catalog, Aspen Center for the Visual Arts, Aspen, Colorado, 1982.

Exhibition Details:

Title: "Remembering Salvatore Scarpitta"

Curated by: Luigi Sansone

Location: PAULA SEEKY GALLERY - Via San Maurilio, 14 - Milan

Dates: June 6 - July 4, 2024

Opening: Thursday, June 6, 6:00 PM - Curator in attendance

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 12:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Free admission

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