

PAULA SEEGY

GALLERY

NIVOLA, SAVELLI, SCARPITTA: AN INTERNATIONAL TRIO

Curated by Luigi Sansone

May 22 - June 28, 2025
Opening: Thursday May 22, at 6 PM

From May 22 to June 28, the Paula Seegy Gallery presents “NIVOLA, SAVELLI, SCARPITTA: AN INTERNATIONAL TRIO”, a collective exhibition curated by art historian Luigi Sansone. Featuring works by Costantino Nivola, Angelo Savelli, and Salvatore Scarpitta, the exhibition traces three distinct artistic paths developed across Italy and the United States, actively engaging with the evolving postwar dialogue between the modern art scenes of Europe and America.

As the curator notes, the end of World War II brought about a profound international shift: with borders opening and a growing spirit of renewal, artistic ideas began to circulate freely across continents. In this climate, Nivola, Savelli, and Scarpitta played key roles in building cultural bridges between Italy and the U.S., acting as both participants in and promoters of this exchange. Through their collaborations, travels, exhibitions, and friendships, they helped introduce Italian artists to American audiences and vice versa, becoming central figures in the interaction of two different worlds.

The exhibition brings together a selection of works that reflect each artist’s distinct approach within this shared context. Nivola is represented by terracotta sculptures, abstract drawings, and metal works that speak to his dialogue with architecture, light, and landscape. As the curator highlights, Nivola’s works ‘reveal an intense connection with space, the material, and the light, often translating the concepts of modern architecture into forms and structures that are both organic and dynamic.’ Savelli’s evolution from early abstraction to his renowned “white” period is evident in the selection of works on view. These canvases, painted only in white, reflect his pursuit of purity and reveal his transcendent vision. Scarpitta, in turn, is represented by one of his early works on shaped canvas from 1957, collage and works on canvas with bitumen and oil from the 80s. These works demonstrate his unique blend of painting and object-making — shaped by both his Italian training and New York’s innovative energy. The surfaces are crossed with rips, weaves, resistance: a compressed and restrained energy that also finds form in the traces of works such as *Untitled* (kite for invasion), one of the very few surviving elements of an installation presented in 1961 at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles and later dismantled by the artist.

In the exhibition “NIVOLA, SAVELLI, SCARPITTA: AN INTERNATIONAL TRIO” at Paula Seegy Gallery, the works of Nivola, Savelli, and Scarpitta converge to showcase their unique yet interconnected journeys — continuing to resonate through experiments in form, material, and concept, and leaving a lasting impression on the viewer.

Biographical Notes

Costantino Nivola was born in Nuoro, Sardinia in 1911. After graduating from the Istituto Superiore Industrie Artistiche in Monza and working as art director for Olivetti in Milan, Nivola moved to New York in 1939. He became part of the postwar American art scene, formed friendships with de Kooning, Kline, Vicente, Sterne, Léger, Calder, and Steinberg, as well as Le Corbusier, with whom he developed a lasting collaboration. He was involved in the activities of The Club alongside Pavia, Motherwell, de Kooning, Noguchi, Spaventa, and Leo Castelli, and participated in the influential 9th Street Art Exhibition in 1951. He contributed to the magazine *It Is. A Magazine for Abstract Art*, founded and directed by Philip Pavia. His first sculpture exhibition took place in 1950 at Tibor de Nagy Gallery. He created large sand-cast bas-reliefs, including the Olivetti showroom mural in New York (1954) and the Hartford Insurance Company façade in Connecticut (1957–58). Despite his long residence in America, he remained connected to Italy through projects like the

renovation of Piazza Sebastiano Satta in Nuoro, the graffito and fresco façade of the Sa Itria Church in Orani, and exhibitions at Galleria del Milione (1959) and Galleria dell’Ariete (1962) in Milan. His work reflects themes of daily life and leisure, the circular nature of life, and Sardinian identity, with series such as *Madri*, *Vedove*, and *Sardinian Workers*. For Nivola, sculpture was inseparable from nature and light.

Born in New York in 1919, Salvatore Scarpitta moved to Italy in 1936 to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome. During WWII, as an American and anti-fascist, he was interned, escaped to the mountains, and later served in the U.S. Navy and as an interpreter for the American army. After briefly returning to California in 1946, he went back to Italy, where he remained until his permanent move to New York in 1958. His first solo exhibitions took place in Rome at Galleria Chiurazzi (1949); Galleria Il Pincio and Galleria La Tartaruga (1955, 1957, and 1958); and in Milan at Galleria del Naviglio (1956) and Galleria dell’Ariete (1964). In 1958 at La Tartaruga, he showed his first “bandaged paintings”—works made from cotton strips soaked in resin and adhesives—that marked the beginning of a long collaboration with Leo Castelli, starting with a 1959 show in New York. In the 1960s, at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, Scarpitta exhibited a series of X Frames—modular works that anticipated minimalist tendencies. In 1964, at the Galleria dell’Ariete, he presented works incorporating racing car parts, reflecting his deep passion for auto racing. In 1986, he even raced his own hand-built sprint car, the *Sal Scarpitta Special*. From the 1970s onward, he focused on building sleds—sculptural vehicles made from mixed materials and resin-wrapped strips—considered among the most poetic expressions of his vision. Known for his invention and painterly depth, Scarpitta was described by Piero Dorazio as “one of the true protagonists” of his generation.

Angelo Savelli was born on October 30, 1911, in Pizzo Calabro (CZ). He attended the Artistic Lyceum and the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. In 1945, he joined the Art Club alongside artists such as Severini, Montanarini, Tamburi, and others. Later, Turcato, Consagra, Corpora, Mafai, Perilli, and his dear friend Piero Dorazio also joined the group. He participated in several exhibitions at the Rome Quadriennale and various Venice Biennales, where he received the Grand Prize for graphics in 1964. In 1953, he married the American journalist Elizabeth Fisher, with whom, in 1954, he permanently moved to New York. In 1958, he exhibited at the Leo Castelli gallery in New York. From 1960, he taught at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and later at Columbia University in New York. In 1979, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship from the Guggenheim Museum in New York, allowing him an extended stay in Europe. He exhibited in 1984 at the P.A.C. in Milan. In 1988, the Rai in New York broadcast a documentary about his life. In 1991, a Center for Contemporary Art in Lamezia Terme was dedicated to him, where he exhibited multiple times. He participated in the XLVI Venice Biennale. He passed away at the Boldeniga Castle in Brescia on April 27, 1995.

Details:

Title: NIVOLA, SAVELLI, SCARPITTA: AN INTERNATIONAL TRIO

Venue: Paula Seegy Gallery, Via San Maurizio 14 - 20123 Milan

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 12 PM – 7 PM

Opening Day: Thursday May 22 , at 6 PM

Free Admission

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