

ITALIAN EARTH
Paladino, Leoncillo, Chia, Matta

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*The exhibition that inaugurates the new year at **Galleria d'Arte Maggiore** in Bologna reveals the original concept of **Franco and Roberta Calarota** to explore in a diverse but organized way the theme of "Earth". This apparently simple word, "Earth", assumes an almost magical dimension, within a dense web of references made up of geographical considerations (being obvious the "Italian" one) which overlay more complex reflections on how the tangible body of art may express itself in complete independence of the support used. The artists selected to illustrate this intriguing play of cross-references are: **Mimmo Paladino**, whose sculptures and paintings exhibited here span from the 1980s to the present day; **Leoncillo**, whose contribution to Art Informel is given particular attention; **Sandro Chia**, represented here by works never before seen by the Italian public. The exhibition is completed by a selection of works by **Roberto Sebastian Matta** in coloured earth and hessian.*

"Italian Earth" is a title that deliberately plays on ambiguity and the possibility of multiple readings. Even at a purely literal level it offers a double meaning. According to the emphasis placed in the title – on either "Italian" or "Earth" – the exhibition becomes a homage to the material which, as a solid element, emerges from the surface of a canvas. Or the very structure of the work enter into a geographical universe and a more subtle significance in which the techniques and the materials alone no longer define an exhibition. This may therefore only fully reveal itself at a more complex level of interpretation. The exhibition comprises not only sculptures but canvases and mixed works on paper, which nevertheless share a common tendency towards a concrete and tactile dimension: an explicit and intrinsic tendency in the case of ceramic which becomes sculpture. More subtly and conceptually expressed in the canvases is the longing for three-dimensionality with a earthy coloured palette. This is a tribute to our country – even in the case of Chilean-born Matta, who chose to work and live in Italy for much of his life.

Mimmo Paladino is a nomadic artist who travels across the territories of art in time and space with the greatest technical and creative freedom. Deeply committed to the search for the historic roots and traditions of his homeland (the South of Italy, a place full of magic and mystery where the his roots are entwined with myths), Paladino creates works with a strong archaic character, expressed in symbols from Greco-Roman, Etruscan and early Christian civilizations and often inspired by mythological themes. Paladino's consummate experimentation with multiple artistic techniques has led him to create in the last two decades works that surpass the limits of objects to become installations, architectures or veritable urban interventions: all diverse expressions of the artist's creativity.

The emphasis of the exhibition shifts more distinctly towards the theme of "Earth" with an artist who has chosen ceramic as his medium: **Leoncillo**. His artistic development has been inseparably linked to the use of the medium from early expressionist works to those connected with the language of *Arte Informale*, represented in this exhibition by "Taglio rosso" (Red Cut), 1963. Of equal interest are his mixed techniques on paper, to which a section of the exhibition is devoted. These "drawings" are first and foremost matter torn from chaos, formed through obsessive work, a struggle to transform paper, cardboard, earth and ink into something else. They thus become the perfect counterbalance to the 'cuts' in the sculptures, so rich in colour and plasticity, even in the blood like droplets which emerge as if from earth's wounds, red, lacquered and bright.

With **Sandro Chia** our attention turns to the *Transavanguardia* movement already explored with Paladino. Chia's work exerts a fascination in its mix of fantasy and feeling, poetry and irony. His art is strongly linked to Italy: we find its origins and artistic history, revisited with an entirely new personality in works which continually reveal themselves to have a double valence, as both pictorial substance and mental

form. "Italian Earth" is thus essentially cultural memory, in an iconographic universe nourished by the ancient and modern world and inspired by a wide artistic field with irony and lightness of touch. Once again we find ourselves in front of works unafraid to confront the languages of multiple media, from painting to sculpture, mosaic to ceramic.

"I can say that "matter" is a marvellous thing, once called "divine nature". [...] To enter into matter is to enter into an ocean." It is thus that the exhibition concludes with a more dreamlike and mysterious kind of "Earth". These words were pronounced **Roberto Sebastian Matta**, a key figure of the Surrealist movement and master for a generation of younger American artists who would become the protagonists of Abstract Expressionism, including Jackson Pollock and Arshile Gorky. That Matta opened up a new way of interpreting space and matter was understood by Marcel Duchamp, who in 1946 wrote that the Chilean artist had discovered previously unexplored areas of space. It is certainly not easy to explain that unknown region that Matta translated into images and that is therefore no longer virgin territory. But the domains of art know no geographical limits and no maps are needed to enter into them. The space that Matta offers us is actually pure conjecture of the imagination. The exhibition includes works in which this relationship with matter becomes more visceral: coloured earths, works on hessian and sculptures.

This is an exhibition that goes beyond merely geographical considerations, that does not limit itself to one technique or material, instead evoking a much wider and unexpected dimension of "Italian Earth".

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