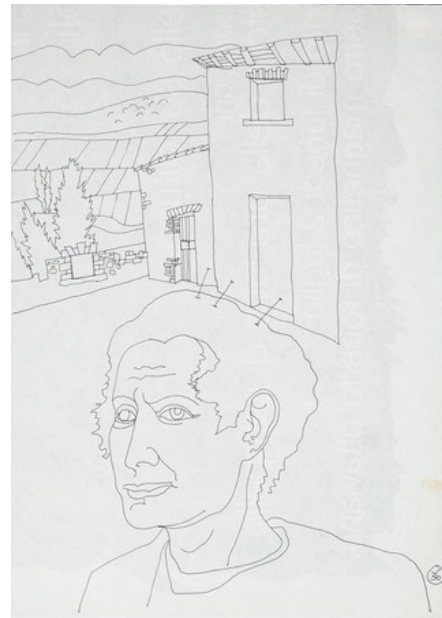


AFRANIO METELLI

Odyssey & Odes: Works on Paper

4 April — 4 May, 2014



PRESS RELEASE:

Schema Projects is pleased to present a selection of works on paper by the Italian artist Afranio Metelli (1924-2011). Selected from 5 decades of Metelli's production, these works wander in and out of contemporary currents, picking up here and dropped there, their thread. Just as the work embraces and retreats with the outside world, so did this essentially Umbrian artist, who left his home region to travel to France, Mexico and the United States at moments of important artistic foment: to Rome, during the post Fascist years of the "Informal" movement, to France and Picasso's ceramic studio at Vaullauris, to Mexico in the heyday of the great 20C muralists, to LA at the birth of Pop Art. He absorbed all these bright artistic movements into his own personal mix. Neither did he neglect the great local artisanal workshops having first studied after graduating from the Academia in Perugia, in Gualdo Tadino, a town know since the 14C for it's superb ceramic works in lusterware . His early work here was an important influence throughout his life.

Metelli's work often reflected his interest in styles and modes of other artists. He loved to experiment with different techniques as in his spray series, his odes to Klee or the torn paper/collage works that resemble Rotelli. At other times he turned to more classic heroes, such as Caravaggio, Velazquez and Antonello da Messina. He took up abstraction or discarded it at will. There was a surrealist thread that wove its way through his work that animated and gave mystery to his own brand of figuration. In another series, he celebrated iron tools, lovingly and realistically rendered symbols of a slowly dying lifestyle as Italian life shifted away from the agregrian to new modern modes of industry and technology.

Afranio had a great love of boxing and did countless drawings of boxers in an array of states and poses. He was an avid collector of sewing machines, (probably an influence from his fathers shoemaking shop) and was a regular presence aside his wife Ann's flea market table on the monthly antique circuit in Pissignano. Love and lore were

continuously stitched together in his work, always authentic, his studio a rich and wonderful place to visit, each nook and cranny filled with various treats. One could never pigeon hole this artist: he remained a bit of an enigma and in this and so many other ways, he defied definition yet never managed to allude his fans, which included a host of local, national and international artists and visitors who gathered in this rich and beautiful area of the world.

While Afranio may not have been considered an important artist on the world art stage, he was one who felt deeply and directly, who created with an unblocked heart. His work left its mark on the territory of his birth and stands as a monument to a way of life that was profoundly tied to the earth and to the act of making.

Mary Judge
Director Schema Projects

Afranio Metelli (Campello sul Clitunno/PG/Italy 1924 – 2011)

Afranio Metelli was born in the family castle of Pissignano, Campello sul Clitunno, in the Umbria region Italy, in 1924. His father was a shoemaker and his mother worked at home and tended the olives. He graduated from the Fine Arts Academy in Perugia where he studied with the Futurist painter, Gerardo Dottori. but he yearned for more diverse experiences which he carried out in travels and his artwork, over the next 2 decades.

In 1951 Metelli moved to nearby Gualdo Tadino where he worked as a decorator in the well-known Santarelli ceramics plant. He remained there until 1952 when he moved to the Côte d'Azur, attracted as he was by the centre in Vallauris where Pablo Picasso had decided to settle and set up his own ceramics works. Here, Metelli was welcomed into the entourage of the artist from Malaga and while working in the ceramics factory run by the Calabrian Francesco Caleca, he participated in the *Exposition des céramiques à Vallauris*. His experience in Vallauris was particularly important as he felt it validated his work. It was here also that he found Picasso's influence which was destined to leave indelible traces in his future works.

He returned to Italy in the late 50's and experienced a difficult period in Rome, during the controversial "abstract-figurative" years, a period of isolation after Fascist rule. Metelli briefly attended the German Academy Villa Massimo in conjunction with another important Italian artist, Leoncillo. It should be noted that Metelli, did not experience the period of the "Informal" but instead choose to travel around the world in search of experience and inspiration. In 1957 he had a one-man show in Munich, followed in 1959-60 by participation in the VIII edition of the Rome Quadriennale. That summer, he taught at the Art Workshop run by Edna Lewis in Positano where he was Angelo Savelli's assistant.

His style up until this point was figurative but also contained elements of abstraction which became more dominant beginning in 1960 when he began experimenting with various techniques, forms and materials, such as dripping, collage and décollage. The *Luce nera* series belongs to this phase, documented in 1962 by the exhibition at the gallery Numero run by Fiamma Vigo in Rome.

In 1962, he left Italy once again, this time for Mexico City, where he worked at the Museo Nacional de Antropología. Here he had a show at the Galleria Souza, which allowed him to enter into the circle of Mexican artist active at that moment. He exhibited his work at the Souza gallery and was commissioned by the National Museum of Anthropology to reproduce images of the ancient Mayan civilisation. During his Mexican trip he managed to make several acquaintances among the young emerging artists whose inquisitive forays into seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish art resonated with his own. Diego Rivera was still a looming presence during this time.

In 1964 Metelli moved to Los Angeles, CA, where he became a part of the group of young artists showing their work with Margo Levin. During an exhibition at the Orlando Gallery in Encino, Metelli's painting was defined as 'anachronistic', confirming the artist's great passion for the classics. This passion would remain with him and characterize the works presented in 1968 at the Numero gallery of a 'pop' matrix. In 1971, he returned to Italy, (living in LA had become too dangerous for his young family) and he dedicated the rest of his life to various projects. In 2008, the art curator and critic Giovanni Carandente organized a show in the Spoleto Contemporary Art Museum, comprehensive of the artist's life work.

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