



A Journey in Form Through Lightness, Grace, and Irony

Ilaria Costa (June 08, 2008)

The Inaugural American Exhibit for Florentine Artist Paolo Staccioli. The show will run at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York (IIC) until June 30. Organized in collaboration with the American gallery Kiesendahl + Calhoun Fine Arts Ltd. and the Florentine gallery Paradigma, Staccioli's bronzes will also be on display in the wonderful sculpture garden LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton

On Wednesday evening at the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#), [1] the opening of Florentine artist Paolo Staccioli's first American solo exhibit took place. The show will run at the Institute until June 30. In line with the new synergistic spirit that the director of the IIC, Renato Miracco, hopes to imprint on the politics of the Institute, the exhibition was organized in collaboration with the American gallery Kiesendahl + Calhoun Fine Arts Ltd. and the Florentine gallery Paradigma. At the same time, several of Staccioli's bronzes will also be on display in the wonderful sculpture garden LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton.

In his opening address, the director of the IIC warmly thanked Paolo Staccioli who generously donated one of his famous warrior sculptures to the IIC's permanent collection.

The exhibition's title, "Journey in Form: Luminous Ceramics of Paolo Staccioli," immediately suggests a metaphorical artistic journey through the joyful, graceful, and ironic shapes in ceramic created by the Florentine artist. Visitors can admire a well-edited selection of ceramic figures of travelers, warriors, horses, busts, and decorated vases. These all demonstrate Staccioli's extraordinary technical ability, and with a disarming modesty, they declare that he is more craftsman than artist.

Considered to be one of the most talented ceramicists and sculptors in Italy, Staccioli is relatively unknown to the American public, although he has exhibited his work in many institutions all over the world – in Europe, Japan, Brazil, Russia, and China.

The city of Florence inducted Staccioli into a select group of outstanding artists in 2005-2006 with a monograph exhibit at the [Porcelain Museum in the Pitti Palace](#) [2] followed by another exhibit at the Archeological Museum of Fiesole in 2007.

Born in Scandicci, Florence in 1943, Staccioli tells us that he began his artistic career at a very young age and that he is self-taught. At only thirteen years old, he left school to completely dedicate himself to painting but in the 1980's, he decided to abandon painting in order to make his subjects come to life in ceramic. At this point in his life he began the intense and continuous search to create and mold new figures; although they take on different forms, specific images repeatedly appear in

his iconography.

The figure of a horse, especially a rocking horse, is central to his artistic production and connected to a vivid memory from his childhood. The image, as Staccioli tells us with contagious emotion, emerged from his memory as a child when he happened to see a photograph of his father, sitting on his grandmother's knee, who was holding a small wooden pony in his hand.

The artist – then child – looking at the photograph of his father-child, remembers that he was fully aware that his father was about to lose his mother because of the Spanish influenza epidemic that tormented Florence in 1918. The image of the horse was indelibly imprinted in his mind and has remained with him since then. In his creations, the image evokes the contrast between the innocence of childhood and the inevitable experience of loss.

The artist takes us on a journey through his work with the ability of a skilled leader and the freshness of a spirited child. He shows us the subjects that are dearest to him and that represent the dominant theme of the exhibit. He indicates the way in which the warriors, travelers, and more recently, the cardinals, create a perfect osmosis between the pictorial and sculptural surfaces. In his artist bio, he tells us that his first pivotal experiences with ceramics were in bas relief terracotta and the experimentation with glass enamels through the process of heating to reduce oxygen. This technique was later refined in the Faenza workshop under the expert guidance of craftsman Umberto Santandrea.

During our animated chat, sparkling with his strong Tuscan accent, Staccioli confessed that he was inspired by the old masters of the Renaissance and that he has always had a sort of passion/obsession for *The Battle of St. Roman* by Paolo Uccello. He has remained fond of this work since childhood because of its formal and compositional qualities as well as its expressive energy from the surrealistic tones.

The influence of ancient art in Staccioli's creations is tangible in its constant connection with tradition, freely reinterpreted through associations and contemporary influences and arriving at truly expressive and original forms. Staccioli builds his fantastic world immersed in a dreamlike space beginning with classical pottery fragments and the Etruscans, his own studies of Leonardo and paintings by the old masters, and are matched with his own personal life experiences.

The combination of vitality, creativity, and technical curiosity are at the base of the artistic and cultural path that allowed him to discover the expressive potential of ceramics and to give into nature and the malleability of matter. Paralleling his use of traditional forms, he fragments, distorts, studies, molds, cuts, and finally arranges the figures in an intimate space.

These aspects are summarized in the elegant catalog curated by art critic Elisa Gradi, in which one reads: "Staccioli creates an extensive number of figures inspired by the reality that surrounds him. Through the use of his unlimited creative ability, these figures become authentic icons.... In this manner, the travelers become archetypes of a civilization which migrates through an endless journey.... They are real men and women from cities, compelled to wait indefinitely for trains and subways that perpetually run late...motionless, empty, absorbed in the thoughts that help them



tolerate the wait.”

At the conclusion of our walk through the exhibit, we spontaneously think of three key words to consider while we admire the ceramics of the Florentine master: lightness, grace, and irony... you will notice immediately that there are none better to exemplify the authenticity of “quality.”

(Translated by Giulia Prestia)

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