

Gallery

“Viva L’Italia” honors Italian culture and heritage in NoHo

BY SOPHIA LOUISA LEE

NoHo Gallery LA’s latest art exhibit, “Viva L’Italia,” celebrated October’s Italian Heritage Month with challenging and insightful pieces. Featuring the work of Lola Scarpitta – among a slew of other talented Italian and Italian-American artists – the exhibition presents a varied blend of media, styles and backgrounds.

“The Italian persona is diverse and each artist in this exhibit demonstrates a unique art perspective using different mediums and portraying varying subject matter, creating their own traditions,” said gallery director and curator Daniel DeBevoise.

Scarpitta, for one, is offering a series of oil paintings that “represents the ‘political realism’ of Italian art,” DeBevoise noted. “She has created her own signature style using political irony as her subject matter.”

This irony proves magnetic to viewers. Prime examples include “Baghdad BBQ,” wherein a young boy wears a gas mask while barbecuing, framed by several oil fires in the distance; or “Blue Jay Day,” where a pretty young girl happily holds a blue bird while facing what appears to be her home burning to the ground.

Many of the third-generation artist’s paintings – most notably her “Che Guevara” series – challenge the viewer.

The “Execution of Che” is a large work depicting the revolutionary standing proud as a firing squad shoots at him. The bullets seem to pass him by. Behind the executioners stands a man in a business suit, wearing glasses and holding a rifle as if his shot will be the fatal one. Guevara’s facial expression is one of certain invincibility.

Another portrait of the revolutionary leader, called “Red Che,” finds Scarpitta’s subject smoking a cigar. He appears to be caught off guard, exuding a sense of vulnerability.

“The series of Che Guevara paintings came from my trip to Paris where I met the photojournalists who traveled with Che during the revolution,” Scarpitta explained. “These men showed me the many sides of the Latin American icon through their photos and stories. I felt that Che’s image had become too commercialized and sanitized. All the posters, T-shirts and other mass marketing images cheapened the true nature of what Guevara was and continues to be to so many.

“Another point of view was needed. I used the work of the great masters of the past to my inspiration. I looked to Manet’s ‘Execution of Emperor Maximilian’ for ‘Execution of Che’ to continue the tradition of Goya’s anti-brutality masterpiece, ‘May 3, 1808.’ I feel that Che Guevara belongs to the classical world of historical

painting in order to be shown as important to our times as he is,” said Scarpitta.

Born in Rome, Scarpitta’s grandfather, Salvatore Scarpitta Sr., and father, Salvatore Scarpitta Jr., had been firmly entrenched in the global art world since the early 1920s. Salvatore Jr., a painter now living in New York, has been represented since 1959 by the world’s foremost modern art dealer, Leo Castelli, alongside such icons as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

Another artist taking part in the exhibit is Flavio Tiberti, a photojournalist and photographer residing in Turin, Italy. His photographs, much like Scarpitta’s paintings, aim to capture the essence of the moment.

“Old Friends” depicts a group of working men sitting together on a bench, warmed by the comfort of friendship. “The Game of Time” shows two aged men – one sitting, one squatting – playing checkers on the street.

Margaret Malandruccolo, another Italian photographer with work on display, lives in Los Angeles. Her photograph of a row of mailboxes on a dirt road below a blue sky is most captivating. With such vibrant and crisp colors, it’s almost as if the viewer could step into the photograph.

Liana Tumino’s traditional landscape fresco paintings pay tribute to Italian Heritage Month, but the artist is also showing a more contemporary series using expressionistic figures in an Italian setting. “Puppy Love,” “Chianti Bar,” and “Doggy Bag” are fun examples.

Italian artist Michele Castagretti is displaying a series of large portraits of beautiful women, using photography, paints and mixed media. Ilona Battaglia Aguayo’s black and white paintings of couples standing intertwined are compelling. Francesco Modigo’s passionately red painting, “The Art of Music,” is reminiscent of a Miro painting.

Vanessa Martinelli, an art instructor at The Lankershim Arts Building, is offering some beautiful pieces on exhibit. Her most powerful is “Emergence,” a large, colorful painting of faceless bodies dancing, springing forth from a checkered floor.

Both DeBevoise himself and Domenico Foschi have also captured the beauty and essence of Italy through the lens – DeBevoise in the present tense, and Foschi in a more dreamlike past. ✨

Viva L’Italia runs through November 11. NoHo Gallery LA is located at 5108 Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood. More information can be found at www.nohogalleryla.com.

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