

PRESS RELEASE

TOTI SCIALOJA
IMPRONTE
works 1957-1963

in collaboration with Fondazione Toti Scialoja
curated by Giuseppe Appella

Verona, Galleria dello Scudo
December 16, 2023 – March 30, 2024
vernissage: Saturday, December 16, 2023, 7.00 p.m.
opening hours: Monday - Saturday 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m./ 3.30 - 7.30 p.m.



Toti Scialoja, Roma 1961. (Photo by Giordano Falzoni).

As from December 16, Galleria dello Scudo will host an exhibition dedicated to Toti Scialoja, and more precisely to the best-known season of his expressive research, i.e. the one of the *Impronte* [imprints] created between 1957 and 1963.

With a selection of thirty paintings from Fondazione Toti Scialoja, the exhibition documents the period in which the artist, returning from New York where he went in 1956 for a stay of a few months spent experimenting with absolute freedom of gesture, matured a radical change: he abandoned traditional painting to paint with papers soaked in colour, and then placed his *impronta* on the canvas, while at the same time relying on that blind automatism, as if to discover the most intimate reasons of the soul.

"Freed from that 'veiled and smoky' touch that he carried with himself from the 6th Roman Quadrennial in 1955 and opening up to brighter visions as in the three works presented at the 28th Venice Biennale in 1956, the artist does not adhere to a formal system, but is confronted with images emerging to consciousness from the unknown", as Giuseppe Appella, curator of the exhibition, stated.

The exhibitions in New York at Catherine Viviano Gallery in October 1956, then in Rome at Galleria La Tartaruga with Afro and Burri in February 1957 and, three months later, at Galleria Schneider present works whose titles (*Interruzione, Sovrapposto, Irritazione*) hint at the process of approaching a free and happy painting, far from the imaginary museum created in over twenty years of disciplined commitment to art, poetry and criticism. The first to notice this was a poet, Murilo Mendes, in a letter to Scialoja dated May 21, 1957: "A sensation of strength and spatial grandeur emanates from your paintings: for you, colour is also space."

In this space, thanks to the solitude of Procida which brought to the foreground that movement experienced since the first expressionist passions, the released forces are capable, through progressive impulses, of establishing direct contact between the artist and the canvas, of communicating emotions.

The exhibition opens with *Il sette di settembre*, 1957, one of the first paintings created with the "stamping" technique. Every intervention on the canvas nailed to the ground is now superseded by a new procedure: "Filling a sheet of paper with colour, turning it over onto the canvas and stamping it by clapping it hard with my hands was the solution which apparently abolished my 'choice' and entrusted my intervention on the surface solely to a 'fatality'", the artist recalls in a testimony reported in the catalogue of the anthology at Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna in Rome in 1991.



Il sette di settembre, 1957
oil and vinyl paint on hemp canvas, 142 x 282 cm



Ininterrotto, 1958
vinyl paint and sand on hemp canvas,
114 x 146,1 cm



Sabato sera, 1958
vinyl paint, pigment and sand on
hemp canvas, 199,5 x 142,5 cm



Due orizzonti n. 2, 1959
vinyl paint, pigment, sand
and marble dust on hemp
canvas, 174 x 114 cm

"The image is transmitted as a whole and at the same time. The immediacy and incorrigibility of the image arise from the contemporaneity of every point on the surface with any other point at the same moment of being transmitted. Stamping is like reproducing from within a flash of light that illuminates all the things in the image together... The contact with the matter... occurs through your physical pressure, your bodily weight: which is total but at the same time blind" (from *Giornale di Pittura*, Rome, December 1957).

Large canvases from 1958, such as *Ininterrotto* or *Sabato sera*, are the prelude to the next turning point, when his *impronte* become serial as in *Due orizzonti n. 2*, 1959. "The 'repetition' – the 'form-imprint' that repeats itself on the painted page, remembering what has been and predicting what will be, in a rhythmic flow of time – is now the privileged path for Scialoja towards the truth of painting; and the transition from existentialism and the voluntarism of the gesture to the clarity of phenomenological thought comes true..." (Fabrizio D'Amico, 1999).

The exhibition continues with *Dal teatro*, belonging to the series of 1960 canvases, many of which were created in the months Scialoja spent in New York, in a loft in Greenwich Village. The paintings created during his second stay in the United States, from March to September, mark a departure from his previous work, in the sense of monumentality and essentiality. They are clearly the result of sensitivity and training rooted in a land different from that overseas, far from an open adherence to American experiences, and therefore governed, on the contrary, by a severe but irrepressible urgency for a completely European "form".

Between 1961 and 1964 Scialoja lived in Paris, where he worked intensely in a studio on rue de la Tombe Issoire. The canvases of that period are characterized by the use of anti-canonical materials such as rope, gauze and lace, as in *Issoire argento*, 1961, and in *Corda bianca*, 1963. The rope, in particular, isolates contiguous but distinct fields on the canvas, in in which the imprint is inscribed to visualize a temporal and rhythmic process, evident in the alternation of full and empty, of scansion and pause, of presence and absence. Merleau-Ponty's lectures at the Sorbonne are the counterpart to the irrationalism experienced in New York.



Dal teatro, 1960
vinyl paint, pigment and sand on cotton canvas,
199,5 x 230,5 cm

Giuseppe Appella maintains that "there is nothing arbitrary or gratuitous in this expressive freedom born from an intensity of feeling and confirmed, day after day, by the meditations collected in *Giornale di Pittura* and in the letters to Gabriella Drudi from New York and Paris, precisely between 1957 and 1963. Abandonment and instinct (*Il sette di settembre*, 1957), the desire to communicate in depth and frenzy (*Acceso n. 2*, 1958), the search for perfection and dismay (*Greenwich bianco*, 1960), hope and delirium (*Issoire argento*, 1961), passion and firmness (*Corda bianca*, 1963) alternate unstopably in a reality extracted from chaos and channelled into the flow of the universe (*Ripetizione con fiori*, 1963)".



Issoire argento, 1961
vinyl paint, pigment, gauze, sand and rope on canvas,
106,5 x 206,2 cm



Corda bianca, 1963
vinyl paint, pigment, paper, gauze, lace, rope and
sand on hemp canvas. 140 x 235,5 cm

The exhibition, organized in collaboration with Fondazione Toti Scialoja, renews Galleria dello Scudo interest in the artist, after the exhibition of 1999-2000 winter focused on his pictorial research post 1955, and the show between December 2006 and February 2007 dedicated to the 1983-1997 season. On the occasion of the exhibition now scheduled in Verona, there will be the presentation of the *Catalogo generale dei dipinti e delle sculture 1940-1998*, edited by Giuseppe Appella and published by Silvana Editoriale. These initiatives, after the release of *Giornale di pittura* with Quodlibet in 2022 and the collection of contributions by various authors with Electa in 2023, reaffirm the centrality of the figure of Scialoja in the artistic panorama of the post-World War II period.