

Renato Miracco on Stella and Italian Art in the U.S. Museums

I. A. (November 28, 2011)



Interview with Renato Miracco, art critic, Museum Curator and Cultural Attaché at the Italian Embassy in Washington D.C. talks about Joseph Stella before his presentation titled "Stella and the Futurists: Italian Itineraries in the American Museums," as part of the panel discussion titled "Joseph Stella's Futurism between Italy and the U.S." sponsored and organized by the Inserra Chair.

i-Italy spoke with Renato Miracco before his presentation "Stella and the Futurists: Italian Itineraries in the American Museums."

What is the purpose of this particular panel on Joseph Stella, sponsored and organized by the Inserra Chair?

The panel although centered around the figure of Joseph Stella, is also inserted in a broader context, that of creating a sort of an Italian path in every American museum. This project, created by me, materializes in the selection of Italian works belonging to the collections of these various museums,



on which then historical research is conducted with regard to the dates, reasons and ways of their acquisition. This is one of the cultural events being held in the celebration of the 150 years of the Italian Unification that has just passed.

Until now, I have been able to accomplish this in 54 museums, beyond the 22 museums of the Smithsonian in Washington. Also here in the Museum of Newark, in the numerous works of Stella, I have detected a small Italian path. And today this path is unveiled and can be followed by it via the small guided tour that we are about to take or by the panel which will describe precisely the characteristics of Stella, his relationship with Marinetti, his relationship with all the futurists, his vision of Futurism and how deeply he was influenced by Futurism in particular and therefore, certainly how it impacted all his works. We will talk about him meeting the Futurists in Paris, first in 1909 then in 1912 and his relationship with them, Marinetti in particular, about his relationship with Balla, about how he gets inspired by it all. Stella at the same time is considered by them, and especially by Marinetti, to be a great friend and supporter of the Futurism experience. Stella also had a considerable collection of Futuristic works, both painting and letters, which later is sold due to his health problems. This was the great Joseph Stella, little known by a large audience.

This is a strange fact, given that he practically brings Futurism to America, and if one goes to a website (not an academic one, but one such as Wikipedia) this important fact is omitted.

Exactly. Exactly. I would like to say that this is incredible. It is right to discover this fact, and this artist even if only now. Discover how he worked, how he revised Futurism, what strikes him about it. The speech today will address that subject, his relationship with Marinetti, Balla and Boccioni, and that which strikes him in the works of Balla and Boccioni. Then I will try to demonstrate the intensity of Futurism, the impact of Futurism, and I plan to stage a small onomatopoeic performance, which I think will make everyone understand that which was happening during the boom of Futurism in city squares.

One thing comes to my mind, the fact that Italy is best known for the Renaissance, a period during which artists and writers were looking to the past, to the Romans and the Greeks for their inspiration, Futurism on the other hand was a movement that emphasized themes associated with contemporary concepts and those of the future and forgetting the past, therefore the complete opposite of the Renaissance.

Many people are used to this idea of Italy. The Italy of the Renaissance. I instead, during my whole career, have always been captivated by another aspect of Italy. I was a curator of the Metropolitan Museum for years, and one of my major exhibitions was that of Giorgio Morandi. On Morandi, I held 87 conferences and led 95 groups, 40 television interviews. I practically made people discover Morandi and with him, another point of view on Italian art, one that goes unnoticed. America at the time of Stella, was still under the influence of Cubism, and was still looking for its own identity, especially cultural one. Post-Impressionism was still in place, it was still influenced by European Impressionism, so Futurism was considered a European craze. Stella instead got addicted to the idea of Futurism.

I see this, as an important fact that the public should be aware of, that Italy is not only about the Renaissance but it is as present in modern and contemporary art world.

Italy definitely has a presence in the art world beyond the Renaissance. Right now we have Maurizio Cattelan at the Guggenheim, and he is Italian. Someone studying futurism for example, will find relevant Italian art. All one has to do is be able to shift his or her mentality. I just inaugurated a Renaissance exhibition last Friday at the National Gallery of Washington dedicated to Antico, one of the major sculptors of the time and people were wowed. When I draw the Italian path through the American Museum Institution, each time I emphasize the point that this is a Renaissance piece, yes, this is an old piece; this is a modern piece, this is a contemporary piece; but they are all on the same path. That is, on the same path one can find many different aspects.

Do you think the fact that Stella was an immigrant who came here at a young age, he was



18 years old, could have been something that has pushed him into futurism? Futurism being everything novel, everything modern, everything that America would offer at that point.

No, it was probably the fact that Futurism was new at that time. Immigrants are people that are looking for identity, and if one is looking for a new identity here and the suit doesn't fit, they look for something they can bring to this new reality. Probably immigrants, I don't know if that's correct, are much more open-minded to reality, to changes, because if one is arriving in a different country, they have to be able to be open, to adapt to the new. It makes them open to new ideas. The panel touches on this subject.

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