

"View/ Vista": an Italian Artist's Vision on Display

Maya Paula (May 03, 2013)



On display at NYU's Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò is Gianni Dessì's newest exhibit, "View/ Vista", an evocative collection of paintings which serve as the artist's reflection on his career, as well as a bold resurgence in New York. Learn more about the influence of his Roman education in fine arts, which imbues every inch of his canvases, as well as his subversion of convention in art.

Italian artist [Gianni Dessì](#) [2] is not one to shy away from the unconventional in his works, always aiming to engage his audience and urge them to approach his pieces from all perspectives. [New York University's Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò](#) [3] is the proud host of his newest exhibition, "[View/Vista](#) [4]," which simultaneously attracts viewers with its bright colors and asks them to take a step back and reconsider the spectral figures of its subjects. Curated by the Casa's Art Consultant, Isabella Del Frate Rayburn, these one of a kind works are not to be missed.

A graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome under the tutelage of [Toti Scialoja](#) [5], Italian poet and abstract painter whose works were displayed in the Casa Italiana just last year, Dessì is strongly influenced by abstract forms that not only speak for themselves, but engage in a complex



conversation with the space they are in. Since his emergence on the art scene in the late seventies, Dessì has been concerned with the interaction between his pieces and their surroundings. One of his first undertakings involved his audience following a trail of blue lights in the tunnel of Rome's San Pietro station while viewing his works and their short descriptions.

Immediately upon entering the exhibition space at the Casa Italiana, the viewer is struck with the thoughtful arrangement of the pieces, which act as an interplay between the artist's past works and his contemporary focus. The first piece that captures one's eye shares its name with the exhibit, "View/Vista" - an eight panel polyptych generated with charcoal on a combination of wood, paper and glass.

The subject of the black and white images seems indiscernible at first glance, yet upon further investigation, the eye begins to pick up on the multitude of rectangles of different shapes and sizes that mirror the assembly of panels which make up the piece. Each rectangle contains another shape within, one which the viewer soon realizes is a representation of previous works by Dessì, each arranged on different planes to resemble an art gallery - a retrospective of the artist's career through the years. A map is also made available to visitors, which presents in detail the precise works which Dessì conjures up in his polyptych.

While this exhibit is not Dessì's most daring in reference to the space, he evokes a sense of depth and intersecting planes in his works, mainly "View/Vista," which lead the viewer's eyes across the canvas and invite them to explore the rest of the works in the two rooms of the Casa. In addition to the artist's concern with the relationship between past and present, tradition and the avant-garde, Dessì's works aim to make a commentary about the role of nature in art. The frustrating rivalry between nature and art is especially embodied by the works in this exhibit, as the artist constantly strives to match the perfection of nature's creations.

Several of Dessì's pieces in particular illustrate this connection between nature and art. It is most explicit in "Senza titolo (la nature fa il verso all'arte)", a large canvas with an outstanding river stone at its center, acting as nature's tongue, which it sticks out in art's direction. An interesting conversation arises between this work and the artist's self portrait - a black canvas with light strokes that evoke his characteristic appearance, and his hands held in the air, as if to signify his concession to the arduous aspect of his career.

The juxtaposition of art and nature is apparent also in the exhibition space; Dessì's canvases hang on walls that surround the Casa Italiana's garden. It is at the door that leads to the outdoor area where visitors may find the exhibition's only sculpture, "Lucciola." Though he had gotten his start as a painter, Dessì first exhibited sculptures in 2003, in Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza's courtyard in Rome including "Qui ora," which featured a large hand holding a yellow lantern. "Lucciola" is reminiscent of this sculpture - two hands which are gently clasped together, and in the space between them, a firefly flickers.

At the exhibit's opening ceremony on May 1st, the director of the Casa Italiana, Stefano Albertini, spoke of this sculpture, presented at an honor ceremony for director [Pier Paolo Pasolini](#) [6] last year, saying it acts as a reminder that "art is alive but needs to be protected, and not crushed." This same delicacy is found in all of the smaller canvases, tied together not only by their beautiful, vibrant colors, but also by the light, yet deliberate and definitive strokes. Each work in the "Riflessi," or "Reflections," series, whether it is a self-portrait or a sensual depiction of a couple's embrace, is comprised of soft, rounded lines. These, when viewed from different perspectives, reveal a myriad of subjects and emotions.

The exhibit will be displayed at the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò until May 31st, and will give its visitors the perfect opportunity to view these works, right as the artist makes a comeback to the city's abstract art scene. The artist's audience will surely share Director Albertini's hope that "View/Vista" will help in providing Dessì with further success in New York.



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