

Titina Maselli

(Rome, 1924 – 2005)

Having grown up in a learned family environment frequented by painters, writers, musicians and intellectuals, Titina Maselli developed an artistic vocation at a young age, encouraged first by her father Ercole, a well-known art critic linked to the Roman School of the 1930s, and then by Toti Scialoja, whom she would marry in 1945. But Maselli soon broke away from both of them, developing her own personal iconography that would never abandon her and which would intentionally keep her outside of any style or artistic movement of the day.

She had no interest in the pomp of imperial and baroque Rome, but in the neighbourhoods destroyed by the bombing, the reconstruction sites, the shiny asphalt of the roads, which she would paint after setting up her easel in the middle of the night. In her early works, the paint material is pasty and applied with virgulate brushstrokes, very much influenced by the local context, but the subjects she selected make a clear break with tradition. When the Galleria L'Obelisco held her first solo show in 1948, her paintings featured objects from the everyday horizon such as a telephone, a watermelon, a beefsteak, the debris and litter along the sides of the streets. In that same period, her first sporting figures also start to appear, especially players on the football pitch, captured in the dynamism of their actions that Maselli takes from photographs in the newspapers. Alongside them, we find boxers and cyclists, as well as household objects, the urban panorama with its signposting, scaffolding, petrol stations and the electric cables of the trams. Details which the artist defines as 'archetypes of modernity' and which, even more than in Rome, she would find in New York, where she moved on her own in 1952. The Roman palazzos are replaced by the transparent verticality of the skyscrapers, the reflections of neon lights, the sides of metropolitan vehicles shooting along frenetically. As her palette becomes garish, acidic and elementary, also the format of her canvases is affected by this transformation, growing to host the extraordinary variety of stimuli that the American metropolis has to offer. Maselli reproduces close-up and claustrophobic framings with great insistence, diagonal cuts and upward angles so as to capture the competitive effort of the athletes as much as the rapid passing of urban vehicles.

The evocations of New York accompanied her also on her return to Europe: first to Austria, then once more to Rome and lastly Paris, where she would live from the 1970s onwards. It was in this moment that she painted the work in the collection *Tramonto nello stadio* (1973) which marks a further passage in her reflection on the body and on space. The outlines of the players overlap by transparency with the architecture of the playing field, the crowds on the stands and the flickering lights of the city at night. It's a synthetic compenetration of all the iconographical themes already addressed and now blurred together by the dense interweaving of markings on the background, illegible letters which are lost within the saturated red of the painting.

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