

Art | Basel
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GALLERIES, HALL 2.0 / BOOTH E19
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MAZZOLENI □

MAGNIFICENT SYMPOSIUM

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO
ALBERTO SAVINIO
MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO
GIULIO PAOLINI
SALVO

The group exhibition “**Magnificent Symposium**” explores the work of five leading Italian artists spanning two generations: **Giorgio de Chirico** (1888–1978), **Alberto Savinio** (1891–1952), **Salvo** (1947–2015), **Giulio Paolini** (1940) and **Michelangelo Pistoletto** (1933). Exploration of their work focuses on the theme of myths and legends, uncovering the similarities and divergences that arise from the distinct languages each artist adopts and the consequential narrative attitude of mythical, symbolic and dreamlike elements.



“The whole modern mythology still
in the making has its source in the work,
almost indivisible from the spirit,
of Alberto Savinio and his brother Giorgio de Chirico”.

With these words André Breton in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (1940)
describes the work of de Chirico brothers.

Giorgio and Andrea **de Chirico** - who took the name **Alberto Savinio** in 1914 - were very close and shared an international education, influenced by classical Mediterranean culture, German romanticism and nihilist philosophy, and the Parisian avant-garde. Both born in Greece (in Volo, de Chirico, in Athens, Savinio), the two brothers would be profoundly influenced by the years of their youth, characterised by an atmosphere steeped in **classical and mythological imagery**. This dimension is pervasively reflected in all their artistic and literary production, both in the themes dealt with and in the style adopted, the landscapes painted and the characters evoked. Although they both address common themes such as travel, the mystery of separation, the turmoil of return and reflections on human nature, their interpretations often lead to distinct stylistic

and iconographic results. **Myth, antiquity and the classical tradition are rethought through the modern lens of the avant-garde and citation, reinterpreted to address the great questions of the 20th-century.** It is Savinio himself who, in his 1913 play *Les chants de la mi-mort*, introduces a series of surreal characters, among whom appears a man “without voice, without eyes and without a face.” This is the first description of the **mannequin**, the archetypal metaphysical character who would later appear in de Chirico’s famous paintings. These faceless figures, part human, part statues, part objects, are composed of an arsenal of geometric figures that surround and hold them, pointed and deliberately disproportionate, with a monstrous but at the same time fragile stature.



Protagonists of the first de Chirico's metaphysical phase of the 1910s and 1920s, the **mannequins** occupy an important place in the entire Dechirican artistic parabola, returning periodically and then with greater insistence in the Neo-Metaphysical period, heralded here ten years in advance by 1958 ***Il pittore paesista*** (The Landscape Painter).

The work, which came from the Galerie Beyeler and was exhibited at the **1984 Venice Biennale**, revisits metaphysical stylistic features, stripped of their original meaning and presented in a disenchanted and playful atmosphere. In the space of the painting, the landscape depicted by the painter serves as a scenic backdrop to the main subject, thus creating a work within the work. The **Pictor Optimus** captures nature *en plein air* beyond the boundaries of the real canvas and the imagined canvas, while revealing the landscape of his imagination.

Giorgio de Chirico
Il pittore paesista, 1958 ca.
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm, 39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in

Also from the 1950s are ***Le muse inquietanti*** (Disquieting Muses). First made in the 1910s, mysterious characters whose appearance resembles that of mannequins, return to the scene in this painting.

The scene is dominated by a deserted square, illuminated by an imaginary light that gives the setting a dreamlike and mysterious atmosphere. The background of the canvas has a distant horizon and the long, sharp shadows create a marked contrast, amplifying the feeling of illusion and uncertainty. In the centre of the composition, two statues of classical muses, traditional symbols of inspiration from ancient art, stand, yet instead of embodying beauty and harmony, they appear distorted and disturbing, with expressionless faces and rigid postures. Their presence accentuates the sense of estrangement and disorientation, suggesting a world in which certainties crumble and creativity is pervaded by a world of anguish.

Here the mannequin merges with classical statuary, in which the influence of the native land resonates. The souls, forms and characters of Greek myth, along with the quiet majesty of classical statuary, constitute the foundations of de Chirico's inspiration. He draws on ancient Greek art through marble heads, amphorae and statues preserved in Italy's most important archaeological museums.

Giorgio de Chirico
Le muse inquietanti, late 1950s
Oil on canvas
100 x 70 cm, 39 3/8 x 27 1/2 in





Alberto Savinio describes his painting as a “**painting of memory.**” His classical training, influenced by German philosophy with a nihilistic and romantic reading, blends in the 1920s with the Parisian avant-garde, particularly the Surrealist aesthetic. Savinio freed his imagination, evoking a playful and childlike past in his works. Geometric and multi-coloured toy-like forms are grouped together as if they were a microcosm, a vision evoking that apotropaic dimension of memory, accompanied by the historical memory of Mediterranean civilisation, which projects man into a paradisiacal world: “**Memory is our culture. It is the ordered collection of our thoughts.**”

In ***Chevaucher marine*** (1929), objects appear as fragments of memory, collected and immersed in a seascape where the dense sea pushes them toward the breakers in a kind of continuous play between present and past. The monotonous and inhuman present offers no subject for a painting that seeks to trace stable and certain values. The past is a repository of useful and coherent images gathered from memory: art emerged from the fertile womb of memory surrounded by primordial waters.

Alberto Savinio
Chevaucher marine, 1929
Oil on canvas
60 x 73 cm, 23 5/8 x 28 3/4 in



“A plaster statue simulates an original that we do not see, a photograph refers us to something we do not directly witness at that moment, a perspective drawing distances the plane of vision by the little that allows us not to see the canvas on which it is made. I am fascinated by any device of falsification, of faking the narrative through materials.”

Interview with Giulio Paolini by Angela Vettese, *Time Machine*, in *Flash Art*, May 24, 2017.

Giulio Paolini's artistic production constitutes an in-depth exploration of the creative process in art. Artwork exists in a pre-existing dimension, albeit in a platonic way, with respect to the artist who made it tangible, inviting the viewer to elaborate his or her own interpretation. Paolini questions the role of the artist, the tools of representation, the link between author and work, between work and viewer and between viewer and artist.

His practice, which is essentially conceptual, albeit with moments of tangency with the Arte Povera movement, is thus characterised by a **meta-artistic reflection**, dwelling on the nature, meaning and implications of art itself.

Central among the fundamental aspects of his practice is the **theme of vision**: through his manipulation of historical images, the artist creates an intense dialogue between past and present, myth and reality.

Through various languages, from drawing to photography, collage to sculpture, Paolini explores the boundless territory of myth and invites the viewer to reflect on its eternal impact in our perception of the world.

The work ***L'altra figura*** (The Other Figure) (1983) consists of two plaster casts of the Roman marble copy of the head of Phidias' *Athena Lemnia*, one of three bronze statues in the Acropolis of Athens honoring the goddess of wisdom Athena. With an absorbed and pensive attitude, the goddess exudes beauty, accentuated by her soft cheeks and harmonious nose. Her hair, styled in symmetrical locks, imparts a sense of sinuous grace to her form. Encircling the goddess's head is a tenia, a typical honorary band often seen on the foreheads of classical statues.

Between the two casts placed opposite each other, slightly offset so that the two gazes cross, Paolini places thirty-three fragments of an identical third bust.

While conveying an apparent calm, the two busts seem to question whether those fragments are part of them, whilst reflecting on the irretrievability of the past. **The aura of mystery and the allusion to absence evoke themes of melancholy and nostalgia for the classical past,** the **cast**, echoing an absent model and a distant, mythical image, serves as a privileged tool for Paolini. It allows him to reflect on themes of vision, image duplication and the relationship between the image and the expanse of history.

In his work *Clio* (1977), Paolini situating within a room's spatial arrangement a mirrored vis-à-vis doubling of two identical photographic reproductions of the muse Clio. Through this, the artist engages directly with the muse of history, invoking the influence of narratives in shaping our comprehension of the world. However, Paolini moves beyond mere commemoration of the past, suggesting that myth remains a dynamic and evolving force, deeply interwoven with contemporary human experience. (The image titled *Clio from a statue in the Villa Borghese* is taken from T. Hope's volume, *Costumes of the Greeks and Romans*, Dover, New York 1962, table 109).

Giulio Paolini

L'altra figura, 1983

Two whole and one fractured

plaster casts, white plinths

45 x 23 x 23 cm (each bust)

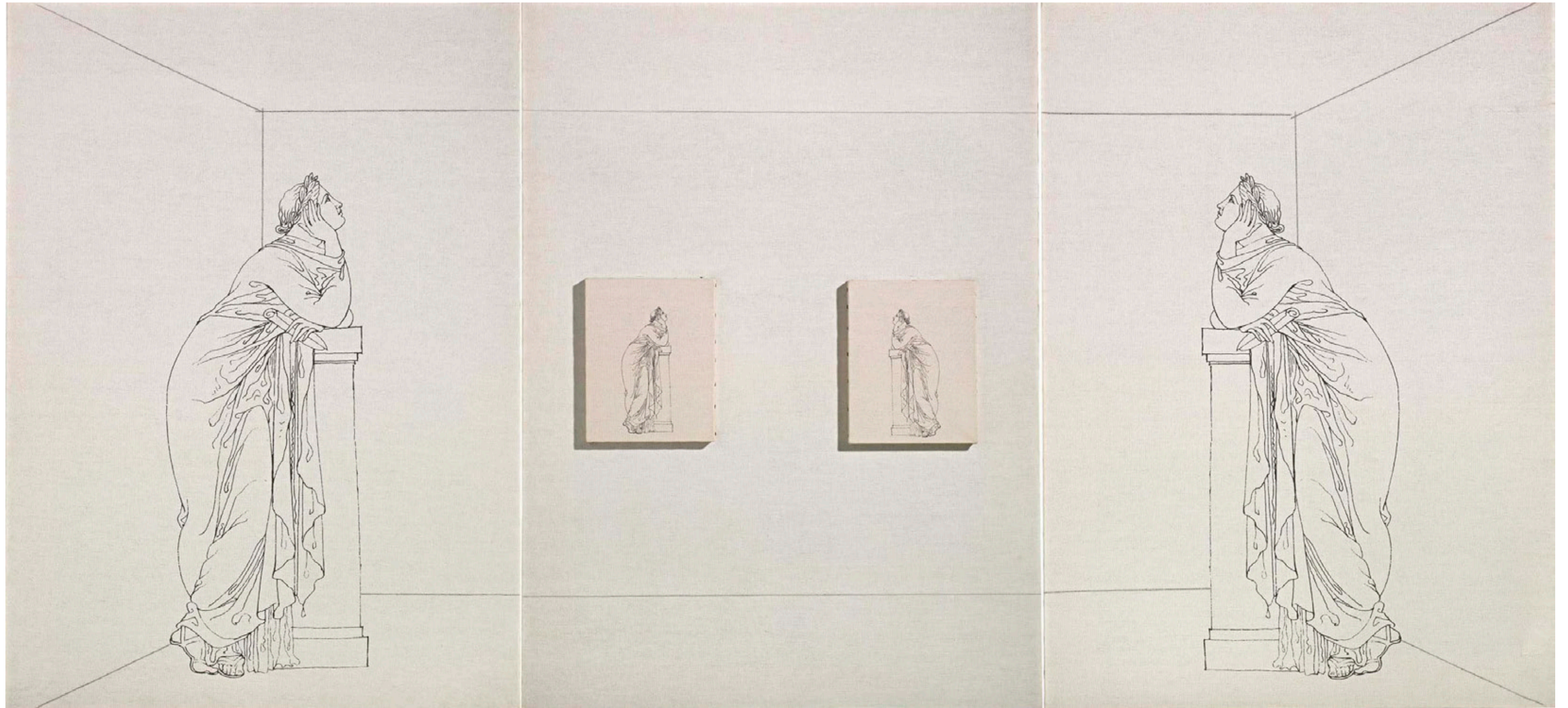
17 3/4 x 9 1/8 x 9 1/8 in (each bust)

Overall dimensions:

165 x 85 x 40 cm (65 x 33 1/2 x 15 3/4 in)

Edition of 6 + 2 unnumbered editions





Giulio Paolini
Clio, 1977-1978
Pencil on photo
canvas (triptych)
110 x 80 cm (each)
43 1/4 x 31 1/2 in (each)



Michelangelo Pistoletto's work encompasses a plurality of languages ranging from performance to sculptural installation. His work is a masterful combination of conceptual and visual elements, in which myth is often a tool for exploring the relationship between the individual and contemporary society, investigating social, political and cultural issues.

In his works, Pistoletto resorts to allegory to deal with themes such as identity, memory and time. A leading exponent of Arte Povera, beginning in the 1960s Pistoletto produced **mirror paintings**, which challenge the traditional idea of the painting as a window to reality, actively involving the viewer in the creation of the work itself through reflection. The idea of a reflective surface recalls the classical conception of art as a mirror of reality and as a tool for reflecting on our role in the ever-changing universe.

The relational principles that underpin the **mirror paintings** form the foundation of Pistoletto's entire body of work, expanding progressively across time and space. In the enigmatic work titled ***Dono di Mercurio allo Specchio*** (Gift of Mercury to the Mirror) (1971), the classical statues transcend static musealisation and come to life. The female figure, positioned in a three-quarter pose in front of the mirror, appears to make space for the viewer. Derived from a 19th-century sculpture by Bertel Thorvaldsen, preserved at the Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen, *Hebe*, the cupbearer of the gods, symbolises eternal youth as she pours nectar from the vessel she holds. Indifferent, much like the characters in Pistoletto's wall works, she gazes at her reflection in the mirrored bowl she bears. This setup creates a triangular relationship between the goddess and the two mirrors, challenging the viewer to retrace their steps and weave together the threads of memory.

The work is a significant example of the **theme of the double and duplication** and is a key element of his poetics as a tool to examine the nature of reality and representation, engaging in a continuous dialogue between past and present.

Michelangelo Pistoletto

Dono di Mercurio allo Specchio, 1971

Bronze and mirror

230 x 130 x 2.5 cm (mirror)

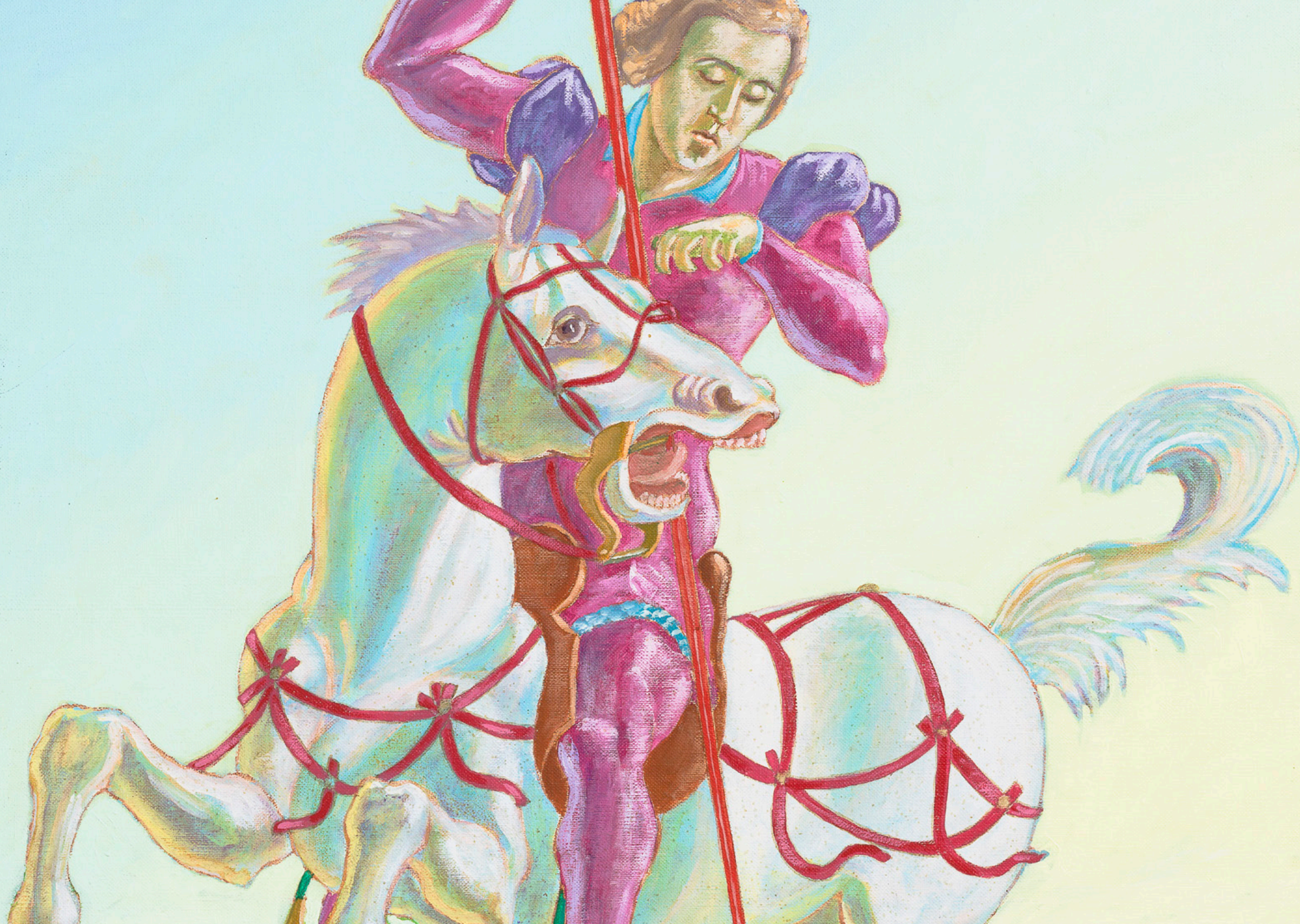
90 1/2 x 51 1/8 x 1 in (mirror)

146 x 44 x 56 cm (statue)

57 1/2 x 17 3/8 x 22 1/8 in (statue)

Edition of 4





“I was interested in saints who were a bit like Ercole and the Idra, world subjects. The dragon is there in Greek mythology, in the Catholic religion, but also in Chinese art... I was interested in the symbolic meaning of the figure of the man fighting against the dragon.”

The artist in *Conversazione mobile between Salvo and Laura Cherubini*
in Laura Cherubini, *Il paese delle meraviglie e le Tavole della Legge*, Volpaia Castle, 1994.

The practice of revivalism and the incorporation of citations can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th-centuries. This period served as a pivotal laboratory for reimagining and experimenting with past references. One of the most significant moments of the last century in this regard was discovered in the metaphysics of Giorgio de Chirico. De Chirico's theatrical Neoclassicism shows a self-critical and self-ironic awareness that we find mirrored in **Salvo's** archaeological approach.

This “**archaeological spirit**” accompanies Salvo's entire artistic parabola. It nourishes the languages and techniques with which he experiments from the late 1960s and early 1970s. These include marble tombstones with engravings, self-portraits such as *Cristo benedicente* and photographic self-portraits inspired by Raffaello. He also creates lists of illustrious historical and artistic figures of the past, in which he includes his name.

Salvo resumed painting in 1973. At an early stage, the iconography of his works focused on various versions of "St. Martin and The Poor" and "St. George and the Dragon" in their Renaissance interpretations, which he in turn transported into the 20th-century by sometimes substituting his own face for that of the saint depicted and adopting an unusual palette of lilac, purple, pink, indigo, yellow and acid green.

The **choice of colour** contributes to the essential, almost primitive nature of his works. The saints of the **Christian tradition** are stripped of their mystical aura and combined with the secular heroes of **Greco-Roman mythology**, or caprices with classical ruins.



Salvo
Untitled, 1984
Oil on canvas
190.5 x 200 cm, 75 x 78 3/4 in

For **San Giorgio e il drago** (St. George and the Dragon) (1976), Salvo was inspired by one of the Ferrara cathedral organ doors painted by Cosmé Tura in 1469. In the 15th-century painting, the confrontation between the saint on horseback and the dragon is set in an open landscape bathed in golden light and is characterised by great dynamism. Dark shadows accentuate the expressionism of the faces of the saint and the animals, which move in an articulate and compact composition. In Salvo's painting, on the other hand, the composition widens and crystallises against the almost heavenly backdrop of the green meadow, mountains and the very high yellow-blue sky. The colours are bright and ringing, dominated by the pink of the warrior saint's robes, the pearly blue tones of the horse's coat and the dark green of the dying dragon, while the saint's serene concentration conveys an allegorical interpretation of man determined in his defeat of evil.

Salvo gives new life and meaning to the classical iconography of the Christian hero defeating the dragon. According to personal postmodern sensibility and through a **process of "de-semanticisation"**, Salvo unfolds a new series of interpretations and values: the break with perceptible appearances towards a more contemplative vision, the elimination of any narrative excess in favour of a more rarefied atmosphere.

Salvo
San Giorgio e il drago, 1976
Oil on canvas
73 x 60 cm, 28 3/4 x 23 5/8 in



“As long as the model can be seen in a new way,
because the definition is not finished,
why should one stop the search?”

The artist in *Salvo, On Painting. In the Style of Wittgenstein*, Hrsg,
Paul Maenz & Gerd de Vries, Colonia, 1980, p. 24, par. 37.





Salvo

Il trionfo di San Giorgio, 1974

Pastel on paper mounted on canvas

270 x 760 cm, 106 1/4 x 299 1/4 in

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Vittore Carpaccio
Trionfo di san Giorgio, 1502
Courtesy Scuola di San Giorgio
degli Schiavoni, Venice

In *Il trionfo di San Giorgio* (da Carpaccio) (The Triumph of St. George [after Carpaccio]), Salvo revisits Vittore Carpaccio's *Trionfo di San Giorgio* (1502–1507). Carpaccio's canvas spans 3.5 metres wide and was commissioned by the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in Venice, where it is still preserved. The scene shows George leading the tame dragon, with the broken spear still in his throat, after rescuing the princess, into the Libyan city of Selene and raising his sword to decapitate it for good. On either side, the Selenites, in their exotic robes and with the sumptuous trappings of their horses, form two dense wings full of colour. Behind stands the city of Selene, with a large, centrally planned building. From the balconies the people look out, farther away the sloping hills can be glimpsed, cleared by the mist, against the background of a blue sky variegated by light clouds.

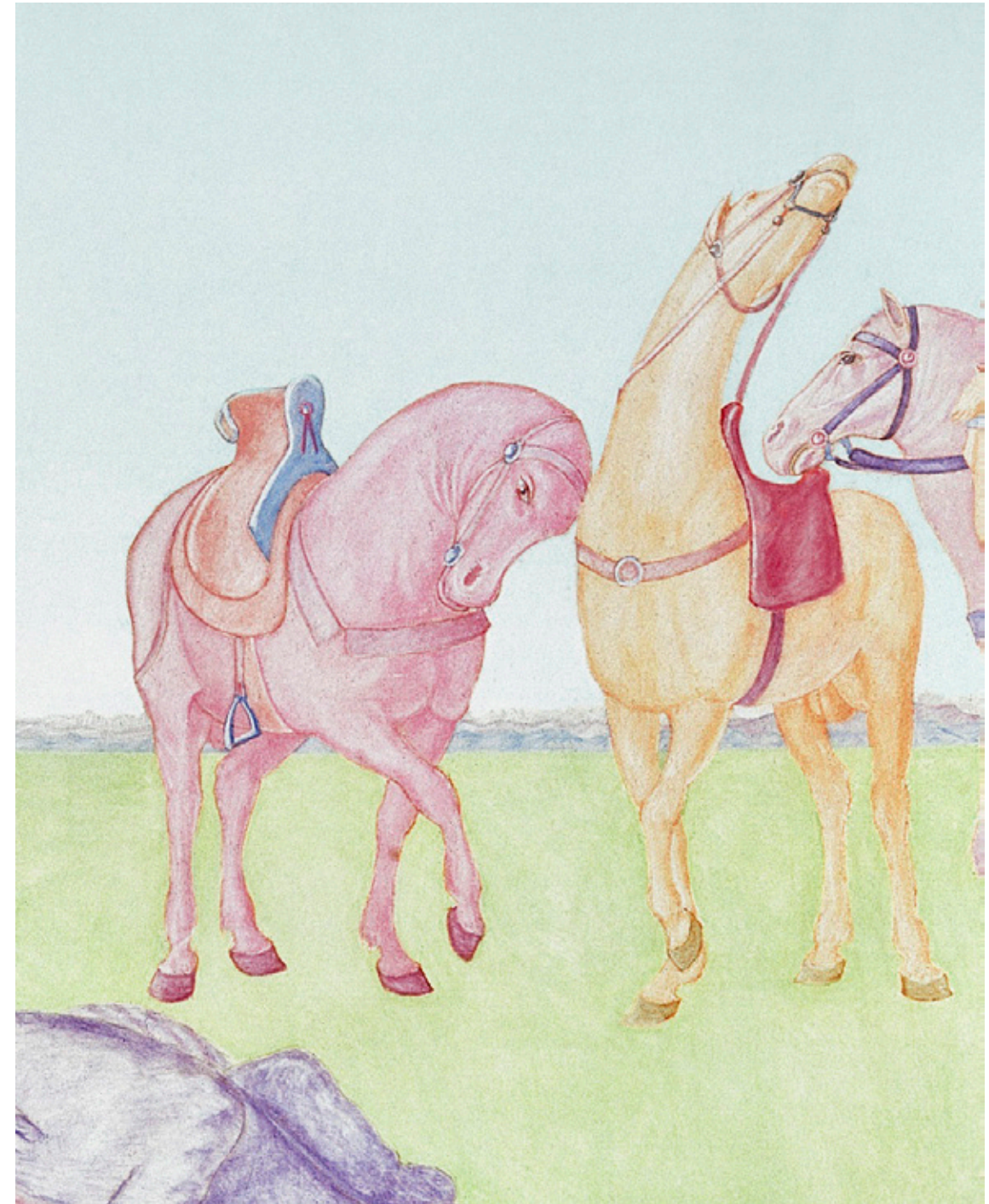
Salvo's interpretation of it is under the banner of **narrative simplification and colour**

translation. He retains only the groups of figures and animals in the foreground by placing them on a pastel green meadow, the urban background disappears in favour of a very low mountain range silhouetted on the horizon line, a cold and homogeneous light illuminates the scene by canceling the shadows. The decorativeness of clothes and accessories also disappears in exchange for a bright chromaticism all played out in shades of pink, purple and indigo.

The work was exhibited in the same year at Galleria Toselli in Milan and at the **1976 Venice Biennale**. It has been later widely exhibited, with notable shows at institutions such as Mannheimer Kunstverein, Mannheim (1977), Galerie der Stadt, Stuttgart (1994–1995), GAM, Turin (2004) and MACRO, Rome (2021–2022). It is also documented in the book curated by Archivio Salvo and published in 2023.



Vittore Carpaccio
Trionfo di san Giorgio, 1502
(detail)



Salvo
Il trionfo di San Giorgio, 1974
(detail)



Installation view of the exhibition SALVO. *Autoritratto come Salvo*,
MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma, 2021–2022
Photo: Melania Dalle Grave, DSL Studio

MAZZOLENI

Mazzoleni is a leading Post-War Italian and contemporary art gallery based in London and Turin. With over 35 years of activity, Mazzoleni focuses on a museum-calibre exhibition programme and participates in the main international art fairs, including Art Basel, Frieze, and TEFAF, as well as Artissima, Artefiera and Miart. Most recently, the gallery has expanded its reach towards new art scenes with its participation in Frieze Seoul, Art Abu Dhabi and Art Dubai.

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