

*Recent Painting and
Sculpture, 1982-86*

M I M M O

PALADINO

An exhibition organized by
Margo A. Crutchfield
Curatorial Assistant
Department of Twentieth-Century Art

Presented under the sponsorship of
the Italian Embassy, Washington, D.C.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
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LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Marshall Frankel, Chicago

Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Hedreen, Seattle

Robert Lehrman, Washington, D.C.

Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York



FOREWORD

One of the most challenging and exciting responsibilities of the Department of Twentieth-Century Art is to present loan exhibitions of works by artists from throughout the world. With the establishment of the Contemporary Arts Galleries, made possible in 1985 by the West Wing expansion, the Museum gained suitable gallery space to mount first-rate exhibitions of work that significant artists in all media are producing today.

These galleries provide the Museum with a showcase to feature not only regional and American artists, but also those of international reputation. Within the confines of budgetary restrictions, it is hoped that each year the work of at least one major international artist will be shown.

With this goal in mind, the Department inaugurated the Contemporary Art Galleries by mounting the work of the Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz. We are now pleased to present as the 1986–87 season inaugural exhibition the work of one of Italy's most esteemed painters and sculptors, Mimmo Paladino, and we are most grateful to have received the sponsorship of the Cultural Office of the Italian Embassy, Washington, D.C.

We hope that the public will benefit from this series of exhibitions, through which skillful artists sharpen our perception of the world around us. The art of today is important to our lives as it reflects the onward progress of civilization into the twenty-first century. These artists—our fellow human beings—enrich us with their unique creativity and stretch our imaginations to the limit. We hope that these exhibitions will give a small but fair sampling of their outstanding productivity and contributions to our culture.

Frederick R. Brandt
Curator, Twentieth-Century Art

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a special honor to feature this outstanding Italian artist at the Virginia Museum, and working with the many individuals who braved restrictions of time, transatlantic distance, and language barriers to make this project possible has been especially rewarding. Special thanks to Angela Westwater for her cooperation in lending works to the exhibition. For so generously agreeing to lend their paintings, and for graciously facilitating these loans, we thank Marshall Frankel, Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Hedreen, and Robert Lehrman.

Dr. Howard Risatti, Chairman of the Department of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, deserves more than our grateful appreciation for his interview with the artist. Conducted in Italian and translated by Dr. Risatti, the interview is an invaluable contribution to the catalogue.

Others who assisted in providing research materials include: Joshua Mack of Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York; Hester Van Royen of Waddington Galleries, London; Richard Gray of the Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago; and Phyllis Rosenzweig of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

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Of the many staff members who applied their energies and talents to the exhibition, we extend our appreciation to Lisa Hummel and Bruce Young for the logistics of transporting works to Richmond; David Noyes and David Kohan for the exhibition design; Mary Brogan for the lighting design; the Museum's Art Handlers for installing the exhibition;

George Cruger for editing the catalogue and Sarah Lavicka for designing it; Robert Shelley for his photography; Polly Bozorth for tirelessly transcribing the manuscript; and Pinkney Near for speaking with the artist on my behalf in Italian. I would especially like to thank Frederick Brandt, who was instrumental in the planning stages of the exhibition; Julia Boyd for her invaluable participation throughout this project; and Ashley Kistler and Donald Spanel for their continuing assistance.

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Above all, however, we thank the artist for sharing with us his compelling and thought-provoking vision.—M.C.



Space is a non-determining factor.

The dimensions of a table can incite tensions and strategies comparable to those of the largest fresco.

It is a question of restrained energies. If the external element is to be fought, however, it is appropriate to make use of the most far-reaching and most prominent arms which are physically capable of occupying great space.

I like to think of a military tent city on the eve of a battle. Everything is in its place; the carefully cleaned brushes lie on the tables, the colors are all in line: these are not mere tools but extensions of the arm and consequently of the soul and the brain, rather like finely sharpened lances and javelins. The large square canvases and panels are scattered on the walls ready to absorb the colors. The chair is strategically placed so as to guard as much of the space as possible; it is almost as if a flashing sign could suddenly appear from one of those surfaces only to fade instantly if an attack is not carried out with speed and cunning.

Almost immediately one is hand to hand; totally aware that there is nothing to vanquish, nothing to defeat. Immersed in the work, one falls and stands again in a duel fought with complete lucidity. Ideas don't "come," they are hidden beneath that delicate surface and are part of the "booty." Only intuition is a rare and distant moment. Whatever is outside comes and goes through the door without pausing and only gently skims the surfaces. Finished works are like the banners of war, but they are also palisades which ultimately beleaguer he who has constructed them.

Mimmo Paladino
Paduli, August 1984

From *Mimmo Paladino* (Munich: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1985), p. 146.

MIMMO PALADINO

Enigma, ritual and myth are inextricably bound into Mimmo Paladino's large canvases and sculptures. He fuses expressive and abstract styles with an abstruse iconography that conjures an ambiguous, surreal domain inhabited by archetypal figures, cryptic symbols, animals, spirits, and mask-like skulls that float in an eerie, unanchored landscape. Disconnected events occur simultaneously against backdrops resonating with vibrant color, texture and pattern. Human figures, disjunctive and incomplete, engage in sacred rituals, mythic battles, and obscure sacraments. The imagery quickens the viewer's sense that he has entered a primordial world that communicates through metaphor about death, the past, and the passage of souls through life to death and beyond. It is a labyrinthine journey, buffeting the viewer with unsettling imagery and sensual, luminous paint surfaces. The works, suffused with an uncanny spirituality, are magical.

The legacy of the past and a profound sense of history inform the themes and iconography of Paladino's work. He draws from a complex, multi-layered reservoir of sources—historic, artistic, stylistic—that includes not only the rich heritage of Italy but also that of many past civilizations. Prehistory, ancient Egypt, classical Greece, Africa, medieval and modern Europe, all are sources for his eclectic but unique aesthetic vision.

Paladino alludes repeatedly to primordial myths, classical mythology, and Christian themes of death and resurrection. While sculptures such as *Assediato* (*A Surrounded Figure*), 1983 (collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond D. Nasher, Dallas), evoke a primal world of harmony between man and nature, other works have more foreboding overtones, as in *Canto Notturmo* (*Night Song*), 1984 (cat. no. 6), which features an archaic shaman casting a spell, or perhaps warding off an unspeakable force. *Hortus Conclusus* (*Enclosed Garden*), 1982 (cat. no. 1), alludes to the

Assediato, 1983, bronze, 200 × 150 × 140 (78¾ × 59 × 55⅞). Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond D. Nasher, Dallas. (Photograph by Prudence Cuming Assoc. Ltd., London.)



classical myth of Charon, who ferried souls across the river Styx to Hades, and recalls Dante's description of this mythical figure in the *Inferno*. Images of death and resurrection, symbolized in the cross, surface repeatedly, as in the wall relief *Non avrà titolo* (*It Won't Have a Title*), 1985 (cat. no. 7), and in *Quelli che vanno, quelli che restano* (*Those Who Go, Those Who Stay*), 1984 (Waddington Galleries, London), which portrays the transmigration of souls through the vivid pageantry of life.

Stylistic influences spanning the history of art from prehistoric cave painting to major artistic movements of the twentieth century are also evident throughout Paladino's oeuvre. In the flattened frontality of his painted figures he makes references to ancient Egyptian and early Christian art forms; the repeated motif of skulls and dismembered bodies alludes to Etruscan burial reliefs; and primitive art is recalled by the stylized simplicity of his figures, images of primitivistic masks, and the totemic quality of his awe-inspiring, dignified sculptures.

Other influences include the nineteenth-century Symbolists, with whom Paladino shares an intuitive, highly suggestive vocabulary of signs that evoke visionary states, and the Italian Metaphysical School, particularly Giorgio de Chirico, with whom he shares a propensity for the irrational juxtaposition of images, as well as the manipulation of light and perspective, to create eerie atmospheres.¹ There are also clear references to Surrealism in Paladino's visualization of interior dream states and his emphasis on the fantastic, and to the Fauves, as seen in his brilliant colors and expressive handling of paint. Other twentieth-century stylistic traditions, ranging from those of Matisse and Picasso to later abstract painters, appear in Paladino's use of abstracted shapes, flattened picture planes, distorted figures, disconnected pictorial elements, and shared outlines or borders to depict forms.² He even refers to the

minimalist movement of the 1960s, as seen in *Non avrà titolo*, a monumental wall relief with austere geometric shapes.

"Each material, each technique has its own particular secret," Paladino has said, "which is to be discovered, which I wish to penetrate."³ This quest has not only led him to explore and assimilate many stylistic possibilities, but it has also inspired him to command versatility in a variety of media—including oil, encaustic, wood, stone, and bronze—to produce a diverse body of work in both classical and modern conventions. While returning to the academic traditions of stone and bronze sculpture, panel painting, and mosaics, he has also investigated shape and scale in circular canvases, the integration of wooden sculptural elements into his paintings, and the creation of monumental wall reliefs. His formal explorations of the expressive potential of paint surfaces—by using impasto, luminous glazes, and thin washes—have resulted in a rich sensuality of texture and color recalling various techniques, ranging from those of medieval frescoes to contemporary neo-expressionist paintings.

Assimilated and transformed, these formal and thematic references remain elusive, resulting in an amalgam that cannot be attributed to any specific time or culture. Instead, Paladino's work assumes an elemental, timeless posture potent with multiple allusions.

Although Paladino draws from this vast composite of sources, it is the history, the legends, and the imagery of his native province in southern Italy that have exerted the strongest influence. He was born in Paduli, a small town near Benevento, south of Naples. The area has a long and complex history that reaches back through layers of past civilizations. Benevento was an important Roman town in the third century B.C. Before it became a center of early Christianity, various secret cults of Egyptian origin

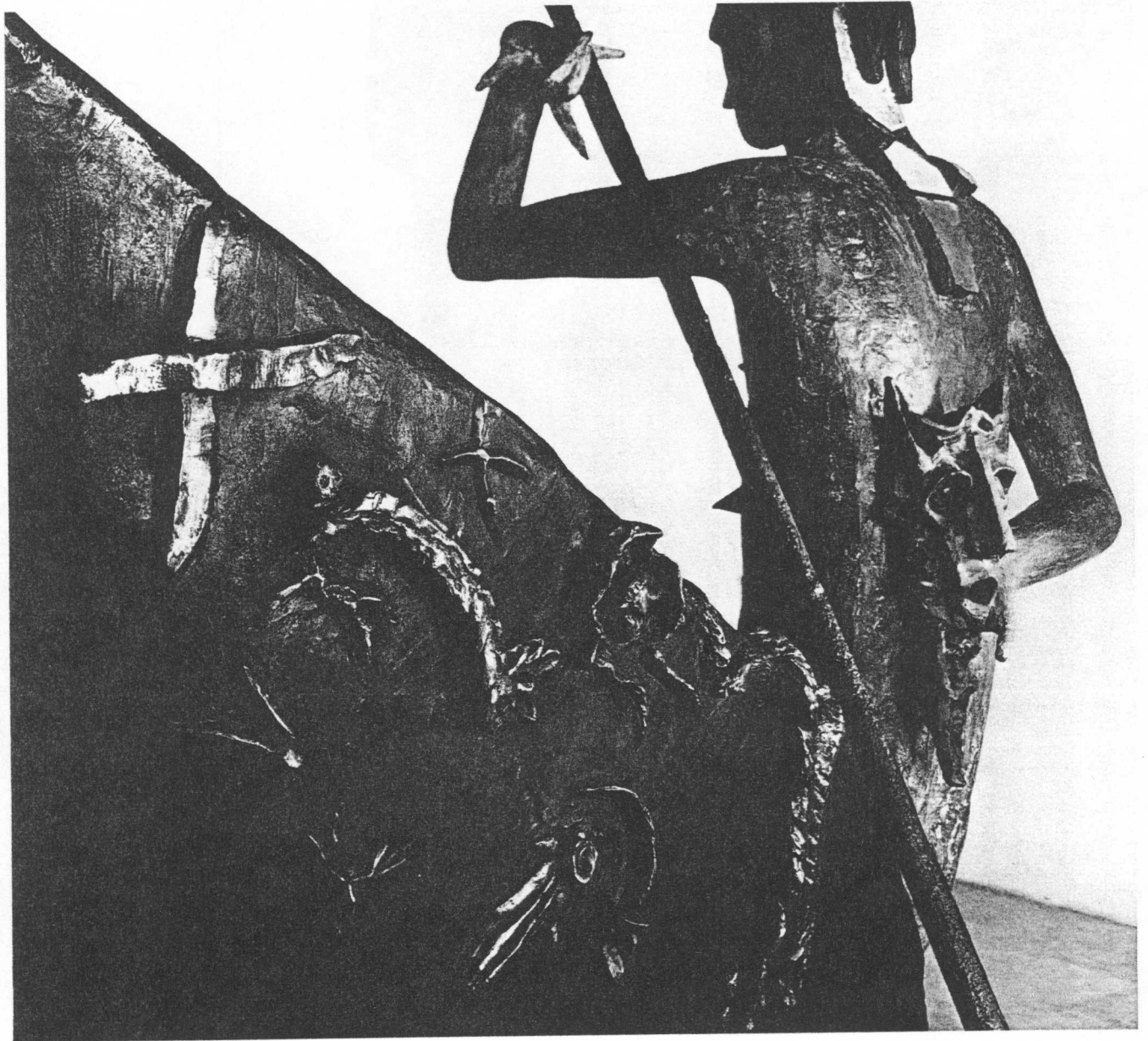
and pagan traditions of animal worship flourished in the vicinity. Memories of these mysterious cults, which in time mingled with Greco-Roman and Christian mythologies, still linger in local customs and are visually represented in the archaeological fragments of monuments and sculptures. Such vestiges of the past—the worn, sometimes faceless fragments of Roman sculptures; stylized Etruscan reliefs, whose figures bear hollow, vacant stares; remnants of medieval frescoes—vaguely recall for the artist a panoply of myths from the distant past.⁴ Although these deities and myths are largely unknown to Paladino, he acknowledges their “memory” and their penetration into the deepest recesses of the psyche.⁵

These “traces of remembrance”⁶ are fundamental to Paladino’s vision. Intimations of cultic rites become in his paintings mysterious, ritualistic dramas. *Sull’ orla della sera* (*At the Edge of Evening*), 1982–83 (cat. no. 2), portrays an underworld of haunting spirits, animals, and disembodied heads surrounding a human figure. Seated in a magical hollow, or cave, he holds a severed head and glances furtively over his shoulder. His body is stylized, disjunct, and branded with obscure markings. A strange hand appears to the right of his head, while to the left two animals engage in an ambiguous ritual. In *Sonetto* (*Sonnet*), 1984 (cat. no. 4), the central figure is seated in a tent surrounded by darkness. Draped in what appear to be sacral vestments, he shares his table with a bizarre animal and seems to be engaged in painting or inscribing its paw. A detached hand thrusts upward as another three-fingered hand reaches inexplicably across the table. An ominous figure stands guard at one side; at the other, a third figure holding an exotic bird, a strange talisman, and a pen or brush is engaged in some indefinable activity. Disembodied faces lurk in the shadows, and the entire scene emanates an aura of secret ceremony.





Sull'orla della sera 1982–83 (cat. no. 2).
(Photograph by Zindman/Fremont,
New York.)



Likewise, *Tre Comete (Three Comets)*, 1983 (Paine Webber, Inc., New York), depicts three figures at some magical site engaged in an inquisition, or perhaps a rite of initiation or sacrifice.

"The existence side by side of non-simultaneous events in my pictures, conscious or unconscious," Paladino states, "is very similar to the method of medieval painters. When I paint such a picture, I proceed from event to event on various levels but on the same canvas. The pictures develop themselves while I layer one over the other. This is not because I am searching for forms, but because I want to let this idea, that color, this painting, these forms grow out of each other, like a mental exercise or a veneration."⁷ The result is a fluid, almost organic interweaving of disconnected images that denies a cohesive narrative or literal interpretation. "Even when it sometimes seems so," Paladino comments, "my pictures do not tell stories, they contain no explanations, only allusions. The pictorial elements say nothing. They strive toward each other, are placed across from each other, they return. This concept is more musical than literary."⁸

Because they are so abstruse, even inexplicable, Paladino's paintings produce a baffling effect. They raise unanswerable questions, remaining ambiguous and essentially indecipherable, not unlike the half-written stories left by the shards and fragmented artifacts found around Benevento.

The "forms, signs, and figures" of these remnants of the past are of special significance to Paladino. They repeatedly amaze him.⁹ Transformed and echoed into the Xs that brand his figures, crosses and palm-like staffs, elongated hands and exotic birds, skulls and masks, and reptiles, they become the "obscure hieroglyphs of some unknown language,"¹⁰ creating an iconography that is characteristically Paladino's. Reminiscent of archaic cave paintings, they contribute to the eerie, unsettling cast of his art.

Referring to these signs and symbols, Paladino states:

The prehistoric artist translated something which came from somewhere, perhaps a universal idea. Therefore, these very precise correspondences between cultures which never had anything to do with one another do exist. Because such things remain uncanny to people, they are termed symbols, some call them archetypes, but I call them correspondences. There are such things in the air, at all times, and in different places. He who has an antenna for such things searches for them and records them.¹¹



Tre Comete, 1983, oil on canvas, wood collage, 205.7 × 306 (81 × 120½). Collection of Paine Webber, Inc., New York. (Photograph by Zindman/Fremont, New York.)

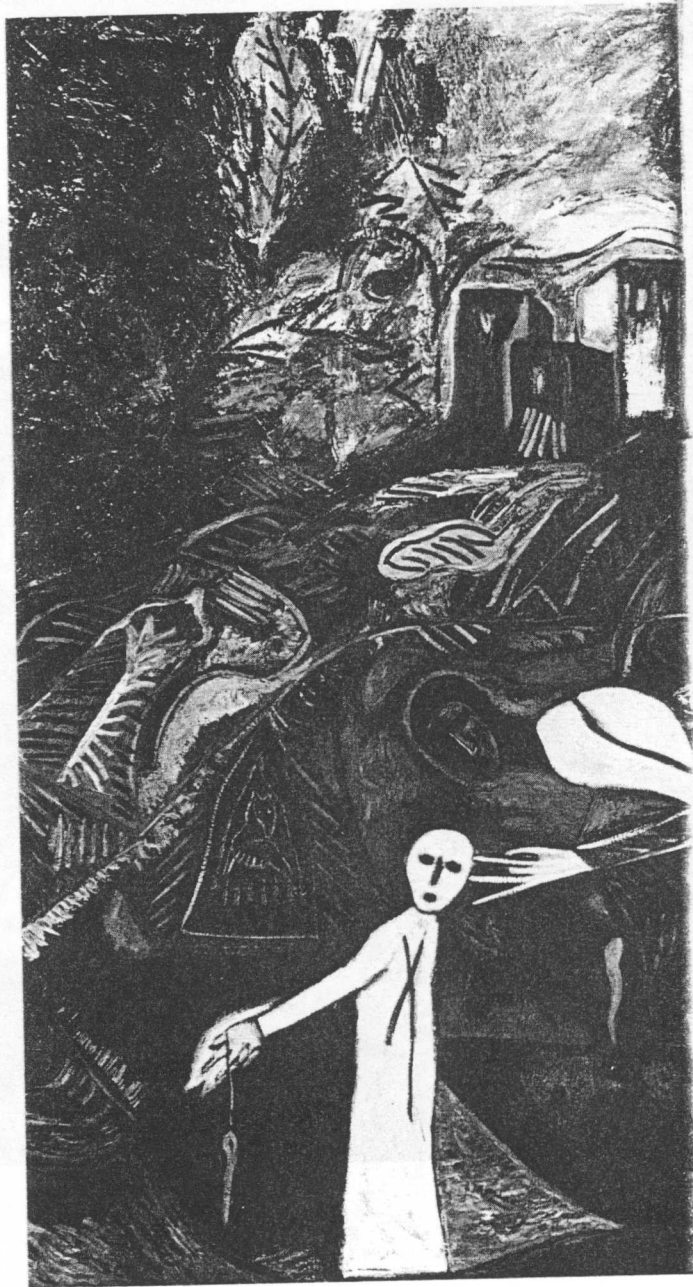
Detail, *Hortus Conclusus* (cat. no. 1). (Photograph by Paolo Mussat Sartor.)

Vespero, 1984, (cat. no. 5). (Photograph by Milwaukee Art Museum.)

Paladino's fascination with and sensitivity to the unseen phenomena that link him mystically with the past, and other unseen realities form the basis of the spirituality that radiates from his work. "Painting," he says, "is a liturgical action and a frame of mind. To make a painting means to create a link between human nature and something else. This happens through the artist. He is the filter."¹²

Seeing himself as a "messenger between two worlds,"¹³ Paladino assumes a theological role, which is evident in the pervasive mysticism and metaphysics that underlie his work. Steeped as he is in the complex, layered history that surrounds him in Benevento, Paladino is absorbed with the passing of cultures, the death of civilizations, and, in their wake, the transiency of life. Questions of what impact history has on man, how the past affects the present, and what man's place is in the journey through time are raised in Paladino's stirring work, and they remain the thematic constants that imbues its every aspect.

Death is often Paladino's principal subject matter. *Vespero* (*Vespers*), 1984 (cat. no. 5), depicts an ominous burial rite. In other paintings, looming ghosts or masks refer to death, as in *Sonata*, 1985 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art). In *Lucomone*, 1983 (cat. no. 3), the mask of death appears next to the protagonist's head. Death, perhaps a reflection but always a constant companion, assumes a parallel, or dual, presence that is hauntingly echoed throughout the work. Even in the sculpture *Canto notturno*

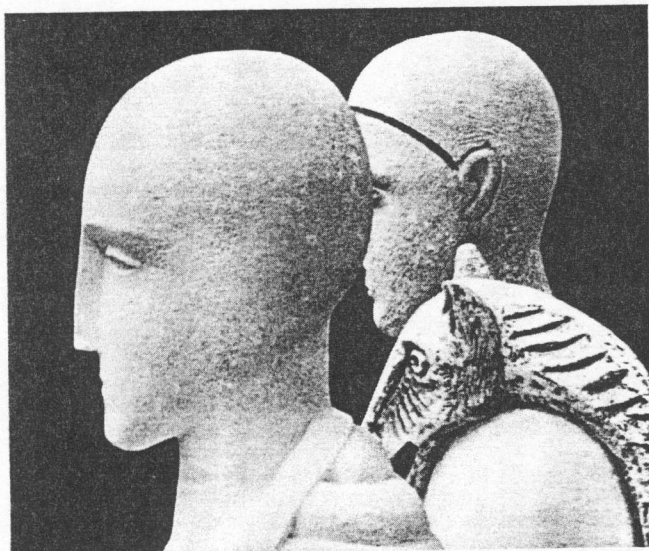




(Night Song), 1984 (cat. no. 6), where death does not appear to be the central subject, it is present in the form of a prehistoric creature that issues forth unexpectedly from behind. Removing the veil that shields life from death, Paladino "descends through layer upon layer of traditional iconography, an archaeologist of the spirit, researching past allegorical codifications of the numinous, terrifying experience of death."¹⁴

Lucomone, 1983 (cat. no. 3). (Virginia Museum photograph.)





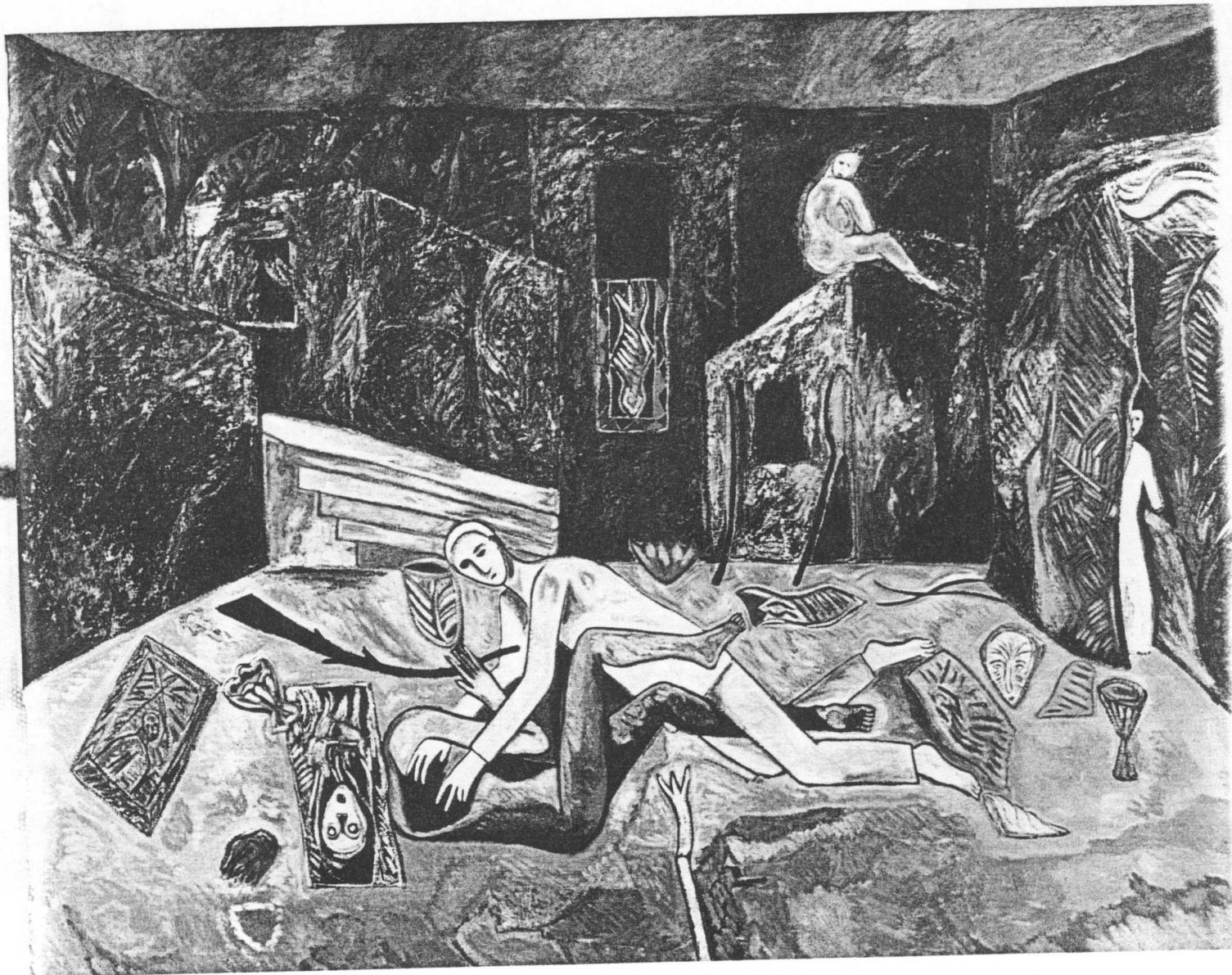
"Probably all my work has something to do with death," Paladino states, "not with real death but with a general 'grande instabilità,' the worlds in between."¹⁵ As clearly illustrated in paintings such as *Cordoba*, 1984 (Waddington Galleries, London), Paladino's spirits, animals, and human forms seem to exist in a twilight of their own, hovering in a dimension that borders between the physical and spiritual worlds. The protagonists, pallid and almost semi-transparent, seem to float weightlessly as if suspended in space. The theme of death is reiterated in a 1985 series of untitled limestone sculptures in which an ambiguous procession of human forms or souls seems to journey through life towards the unknown beyond. More explicit is *Hortus conclusus* (cat. no. 1), which presents a haunting image of the archetypal boatman ferrying souls into Hades. Heralding the unknown, the uncanny elf-like figure has one foot placed in the boat behind, the other placed on an angled plane beyond the confines of the boat, as if to signify his simultaneous existence in the dimension between the worlds of both the living and the dead.



Although the depiction of death initially seems macabre and menacing, its enduring presence is surprisingly untrammelled and benign. For Paladino, death is a force to be confronted and ostensibly accepted as coexistent with life. Because he believes that earthly entities never expire but instead are transformed by death, his ghosts and skeletons act as living informants to the spiritually attuned.¹⁶

Details, untitled sculptures, encaustic on carved limestone, 1985.

Cordoba, 1984, oil on canvas, 300 × 400 cm. (118¹/₈ × 157¹/₂ inches). Collection of Waddington Galleries, London. (Photograph by Prudence Cuming Assoc. Ltd., London.)





This is made clear in *Sonetto (Sonnet)*, which portrays death as an integral part of life: "Death is not displaced to Hades but sits around society's great timeless table at which the living and the dead, man and animal, are all guests."¹⁷

Hence, for Paladino, the separation between the living and the dead becomes indistinguishable. The past, the present, the living, spirits of the dead, all exist simultaneously in a continuum, an uninterrupted plane of existence where even the distinction between animate and inanimate, between subject and object, dissolves. As Paladino has said, "The brushes, the colors, are not mere tools but extensions of the arm and consequently of the soul and the brain."¹⁸ A fluid, expansive reality emerges in which all aspects of life converge into a mystical dimension that is hypnotic and subliminal. Perhaps this is what Paladino means when he says, "Space is a non-determining factor."¹⁹ For him, space becomes an all-encompassing reality unbounded by time, circumstance, and location.

It is this glimpse into a mystic realm beyond history, life, and death that accounts for the enchanting yet disquieting effect of Paladino's work. Resonating with an ethereal magic, the intangible domain that he describes for us is open to many possible interpretations, but essentially it eludes explanation and remains shrouded in mystery. For Paladino, "Art is a riddle, visible but silent, not able to provide an answer as such except in the form of a vision."²⁰

Paladino is fundamentally a visionary. With a commanding presence, and an elegant, sensual immediacy, his paintings and sculptures seduce the viewer with intimations of life's unfathomable mysteries. Beckoning from an allegorical plane, he brings us to the brink of the unknown. As such, Paladino's oeuvre serves as a catalyst, an invitation to revelation.

Margo A. Crutchfield

1 Diane Waldman, *Italian Art Now* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1982), p. 11.

2 Holliday T. Day, *New Art of Italy* (Omaha: Joslyn Art Museum, The Contemporary Arts Center [Cincinnati], 1985), p. 47.

3 Interview with Helmut Friedel in *Mimmo Paladino* (Munich: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1985), p. 144.

4 Helmut Friedel, "Fragments on the Skin of Painting," in *Mimmo Paladino* (Munich), p. 129.

5 Howard Fox, *A New Romanticism* (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution Press for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1985), p. 82.

6 Friedel, "Fragments on the Skin," p. 129.

7 Friedel interview, p. 143.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

9 Friedel, "Fragments on the Skin," p. 129.

10 David Joselit, exhibition handout for *Currents, Mimmo Paladino* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), p. 2.

11 Friedel interview, p. 145.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

13 Donald Kuspit, "Mimmo Paladino's Sculpture," in *Mimmo Paladino* (Munich), p. 149.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

15 Exhibition catalogue (Hannover: Kestner Gessellschaft, 1981), p. 9, as cited in Friedel, "Fragments on the Skin," p. 139.

16 Exhibition handout for *A New Romanticism* (Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden), p. 2.

17 Armin Wildermuth, "Mimmo Paladino," *Flash Art* (Nov. 1982): 21.

18 *Mimmo Paladino* (Munich), p. 146.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Norman Rosenthal, "Mimmo-Paladino—Looking at New York" in *Mimmo Paladino* (London: Waddington Galleries, 1984), p. 6.

Sonata, 1985, oil and collage on wood, 317.5 diam. (125). Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Photograph by Dorothy Zeidman, New York.)

INTERVIEW WITH MIMMO PALADINO by Dr. Howard Risatti

H.R. Your work has been associated with the new Italian figurative art, which marks a shift from the influence of American modernism. However, the paintings that you did around 1980 look very similar to the American color-field paintings of Rothko and Reinhardt but with the addition of three-dimensional elements, often masks.

M.P. Yes, this is true, but before these works, I did a very important painting in 1977 titled *Silenzioso, mi ritiro di dipingere un Quadro* [*Silent, I Retire to Paint*]. It is a small yellow canvas with a figure in a room. This was one of the first paintings I did with images. It was immediately after I had painted this picture that I began to paint monochromatic pictures in blue, red, yellow. It seemed to me that the idea of the image, at that time, should have had only a conceptual value, not a poetic or narrative value. Therefore, the idea of returning to a simple monochromatic style was important because it made these works with images become much stronger, and the significance of the narrative become purely conceptual.

H.R. In these earlier works, is there the influence of *Arte Povera*?

M.P. Yes, surely there is an influence of *Arte Povera*, just as there is an influence of antique painting, just as there is the influence of Masaccio from the Renaissance. That is to say, I don't think that it is a question of direct influence because I think that art is actually a thing that is made of many historical moments of currents that come together.

H.R. What about classical art, like the paintings at the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii? Are these kinds of works also an influence on your painting?

M.P. Surely there are signs that belong to the patrimony of world culture. Because of this, various signs

reoccur, signs which, without doubt, are part of Pompeian civilization just as they could be part of primitive societies. For me this doesn't make any difference. My work is not a "quotation"; it is a work of memory, a work layered in time, so to speak.

H.R. I was thinking that the paintings of around 1980, monochromatic works like *Porta* [*Door*] and *Selvatico Cavaliere* [*Savage Knight*] are also like sculpture. They are not just paintings on a wall; they have a sculptural quality about them.

M.P. Yes, this is true. I think that my work never moves in a single direction. Rather, it seems to move from the static state, like that of the flat two-dimensional canvas with images, to the extremely immediate, more instinctive, more emotional state, as in the monochromatic works with the three-dimensional objects. My work continually changes. Like the rhythm of a symphony, it is, at times, very clear, very light, and at other times it is extremely emotive. When the work becomes more sculptural it is more complex, more symphonic.

H.R. In relation to the idea of Modernism, as seen, for example, in American Minimalism, I think that your work is not in this mode; it seems to take a different course. Do you think this is true?

M.P. In reality, Minimal art, as I think it must be defined, has a fundamental characteristic, which is a metaphysical idea about life. Thus, I think that Minimalism even enters into my work if Minimalism has this metaphysical intention. It certainly does not enter simply as a reduction of painting—just as adding things to the canvas doesn't always mean an entrance into the baroque style—but as the concept that the work is always an extremely lucid, extremely reductive idea. However, the work is never *either* Minimalist *or* figurative; I am really not interested in this sense of style or narration.

I think that Minimal art began with Reinhardt and Rothko. For me, these are the truly important artists; I think that Rothko is extremely important for this reason, and I feel myself very close to this sensibility, to this atmosphere, even if my own work is, in many ways, very different.

H.R. I read Achille Bonito Oliva's book, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde*, where he includes your work among the group he calls the trans-avantgarde. What do you think of this? Is it a valid assessment of what you are doing?

M.P. No. I think that, naturally, the art critic is a person who accompanies the work of the artist in a parallel manner by his writing. But he can't precisely define the style or characterize the significance of the work of the artist. After all, the work is made independently and doesn't naturally lend itself to any simple classification. This moment in the history of art is probably one of the few times in which art is being made by individual actions. This situation has its coincidences around the world, and therefore it happens that in America, Germany, and other places other artists are doing similar things. But, it is not really a group or movement. Therefore, it is different from *Arte Povera* or Conceptual art, which were movements around a concept or an ideology. I think that my work occurs, above all else, because of a loss or lack of ideology; it originates from a desire for freedom from an ideology. Therefore, it couldn't originate as part of a group or movement.

H.R. Would you say your work has a Post-Modern sensibility about it?

M.P. No, not precisely. I would say that, in whatever case, one admires the avant-garde. But in my case, I think that my work could not become a work of the avant-garde because it doesn't have this problem of "research" into the present or an overt concern with the future. I like to see myself as being in tradition, as part of a kind of classicism.

H.R. Yes, but couldn't you say that because of this attitude your work is actually counter to, or perhaps even against, the idea of the avant-garde?

M.P. I wouldn't say that the avant-garde is a negative thing. I think that the avant-garde, very often in art history, has shaped things. For example, the most interesting works of Picabia, without doubt, were probably those he did when he was no longer an avant-garde Dada artist, the things he made after he had left this group. When he was still an artist of the avant-garde he made interesting things, but interesting only for that historical moment. As a Dada artist, he was probably limited by the idea of an avant-garde.

When he liberated himself from this situation of avant-garde ideology, he made works that were less historically bound but more timeless.

Futurist painting is very important, but the Futurist artists lived only in a climate that praised technology and for that period around the first world war. They were too tied to the ideology that formed their notion of the avant-garde.

H.R. By contrast, it seems to me that your work is not tied to an ideology in this way.

M.P. No, I don't want to be tied to any ideology in the strict sense of the word. Practically speaking, all ideologies can be valid, and for this reason my work moves on diverse levels and is indifferent to them.

H.R. In Modernism there was an anti-historical sense. I see in your work, on the other hand, a strong sense of history: classical, medieval, pagan, primitive.

M.P. Yes. This is true. Because, in effect, history probably doesn't define or provide only isolated sources from which one can choose but is rather more like a continuum from which one can take from all of its phases. Perhaps one could say that history or time is the only thing that revitalizes art.

Whatever the case, without doubt I don't feel tied to a single cultural past. On the contrary, I think that all the cultural past of mankind serves art.

H.R. I think that this is the great change in the art of our time, this reconciliation with history.

M.P. This could be a great change. However, I don't think that we are yet at that moment, because there are, as always, circumstances surrounding art. Such circumstances could even be economic, like an excessive consumerism that won't allow the artist to free himself or be freed of all ties. I am not against the art market; it is an important thing; it has always existed. But when it is carried to excess, very often it makes art become a language that is very rapidly consumed. Because of this, there is the necessity that another language be substituted for the previous one, but always more quickly and without becoming more profound. Thus it begins to become a very superficial situation.

This is extremely dangerous for art. When images were introduced again into painting, this was an important event. However, many artists simply made of this a rather decadent return to a language that

was nothing other than figuration. This is also extremely dangerous. One can't be startled or dumbfounded again by painting; this wasn't the problem that caused a return to imagery. The problem is that today the artist provokes uncertainty, and thus his work must always become more incomprehensible, and this then becomes a political fact. But, as you well know it, is difficult to fight against circumstances.

H.R. It seems to me that the economic changes in Italy of the last decade, the "miracle" as it is called, have changed Italian culture and have seriously affected Italian painting.

M.P. Italy, from the cultural point of view—for instance, concerning contemporary art—is always less encouraging. The contemporary artist in Italy doesn't have any rapport with the public; there are no contemporary museums, nothing. In this dramatic climate of terrorism, extreme uncertainty, and economic and political worry—probably all of these things that have affected Italian culture have favored the growth of a new and different art with a stronger, more diverse energy.

H.R. Tradition seems to be losing its force in America as well as in Italy; the old way of life seems to be disappearing.

M.P. I see it this way. One doesn't have to become nostalgic. I don't like the idea that art should seek its reason or existence in nostalgia. I feel that contemporary man, thus also the contemporary artist, lives squarely in the midst of this civilization of the auto, of speed, of consumerism, of violence. Naturally, he can't isolate himself trying to recapture a lost tradition; the result of this is that he ends up making a nostalgic statement. This is not good.

Instead, the artist must make a space for himself contemporaneously to this history, but by *using* tradition, which is something different. He must not cry over tradition, otherwise his work becomes something sentimental and nostalgic.

H.R. The Futurists rejected tradition. . . .

M.P. Certainly. Apart from the fact that their rejection was part of the idea of the avant-garde, there was a natural enthusiasm for technology at that time. Today, there isn't *any* enthusiasm for technology or for tradition. It is as if the artist exists in a climate totally estranged in respect to these two things. Consequently, he creates his own abstractions, his own space, his own world. It is there that the mystery occurs; and the greatest mystery happens while making a work. It is then that the old sense of the mysterious returns naturally to art.

H.R. This work of 1985, *Non avrà titolo [It Won't Have a Title]*. Why that title instead of *Non ha titolo [It Has No Title]*?

M.P. In a certain sense this is a very particular work that uses pieces from some old works of about ten years ago. It is a work in which I employ elements that are abstract and geometric along with flat panels and figurative images, painted and in bronze. The work came about because I was interested in the contrast between these elements and between the various ways of making them. However, to me this work is a little like an alarm, for, as I said earlier, we should be leery of figurative painting, or of just trying to paint "beautiful" pictures. To do so is extremely dangerous, for one risks the danger of again falling, in a sense, into a climate in which the work

becomes extremely empty, lacking any meaning. Instead, this work, which derives from a geometric or formal idea, is also, because of the figurative elements, a friendly gesture, a kind of wink at Minimal art.

As you know, the title, above all in my works, acts as if it were another work in that it gives one a further indication about the piece. Thus, the title of this work would have the impossible task of trying to define the artistic idea by something verbal and poetic. Instead, it doesn't; it is nothing other than what it is. And, consequently, the presentation of the idea can only be through the various forms and figurative elements frozen in bronze. That is to say, it is a type of statement concerning the fashion for the use of archaic images like these elements in bronze. But this point is lost if one believes that art can only be a matter of fact, of remembering, of recording, not a statement that is, above all else, intellectual.

H.R. I have seen several photographs of this work, and it seems to change, to be reorganized. Is it now finished or will it continue to change?

M.P. It may change again simply because of its nature. Not being a work of fact, it can be changed in response to its own formal logic, without, however, changing anything in the end. It is, in this way, like the black paintings of Reinhardt; they are always the same painting.

H.R. Will the pastels you are doing for this exhibition be similar to *Non avrà titolo*? Will they have Minimalist overtones as well?

M.P. No. My pastels, like all my drawings, are works that aren't made for or from my other work. I consider my drawings and pastels an activity, like my sculpture, that is parallel to my painting. Since the size of the paper, the medium, and the proximity of the artist to the image are distinctly more intimate, one must consider drawing and pastel like writing, a kind of writing instead of painting. This is the difference.

H.R. It is said that you like to work rapidly, or at least in materials that aren't resistant, like stone, for instance. Because the process is slower than the formation of the idea, it becomes difficult to translate the idea fast enough.

M.P. There is easy material, and there is hard or resistant material. I believe that art can even be designed and thus need not actually be hand-made by the artist. I like to make art directly. Naturally, sculpture requires a quantity of energy and a great amount of time to be able to see the work realized; this is different from drawing. Perhaps it is because of this that of all things I probably like drawing the most. By contrast, in the sense of quickly translating an emotion or idea, painting, sculpture, and similar media seem slow. One needs more force, actual physical force, but still they slow down the process of translating the idea into image.

H.R. Was your bronze sculpture *Hortus conclusus* first made in ceramic, then cast in bronze?

M.P. It was made in clay, then cast in bronze. It is my first bronze sculpture. However, I worked directly in the clay, and then a technician cast it.

H.R. Your work—as in pieces like *Hortus conclusus*, with its enigmatic symbols and figure—has often been said to have the sense of a dream world about it.

M.P. I think it makes more sense to think of sleep rather than dreaming. There is a difference. It is as if there were images that appeared, that materialized in a state of somnambulism, as if one were awake and asleep at the same time. This is different than the dream state of the Surrealists. The dream state makes one think of Surrealism, of psychoanalysis. I speak of sleep. Sleep is something that can become like death, but it is imagined by one who is alive. Dreaming is another dimension, another world. Conversely, sleep is not. In sleep, one doesn't know if one is alive or not at that moment.

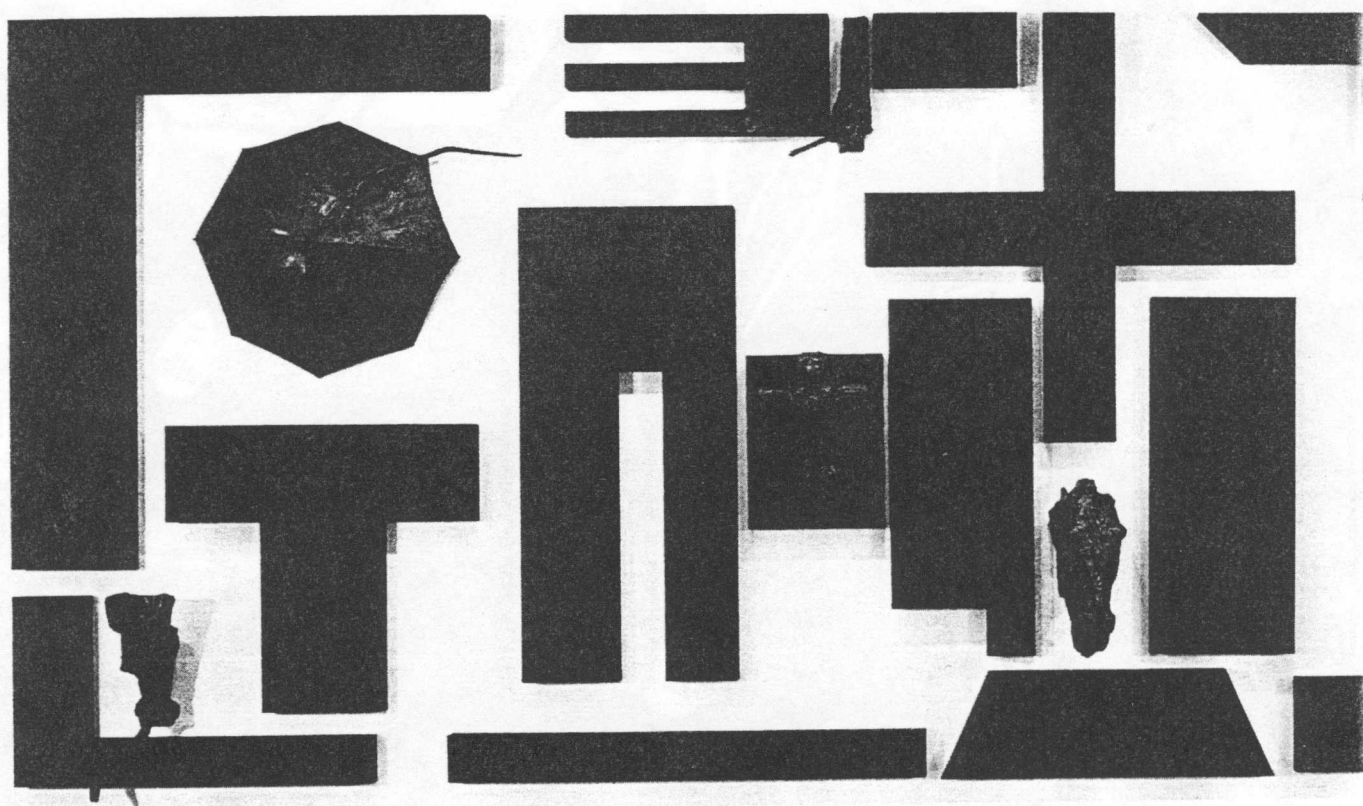
In effect, all of the mysterious narrative aspects of the work are secondary aspects. The thing most interesting to me is the sense and the significance that painting is able to have, the mystery that painting is able to provoke, not the mystery that painting is able to illustrate or represent. The Surrealists, for example, were very interested in their representations. I am interested in *how* things are represented; why, in that moment, they are represented as they are; what has occurred in the painting process to make them like that. I am not especially interested in what the images narrate. Thus, I am interested in the process that brings Reinhardt or Rothko to do a monochromatic painting, in the mystery that occurs in that moment.

Naturally, if I use images, the idea of the narrative, even if there is one, is not fundamental to the work. Because of this, I can even do abstract images; that is why I also do abstract work, because the difference is non-existent.

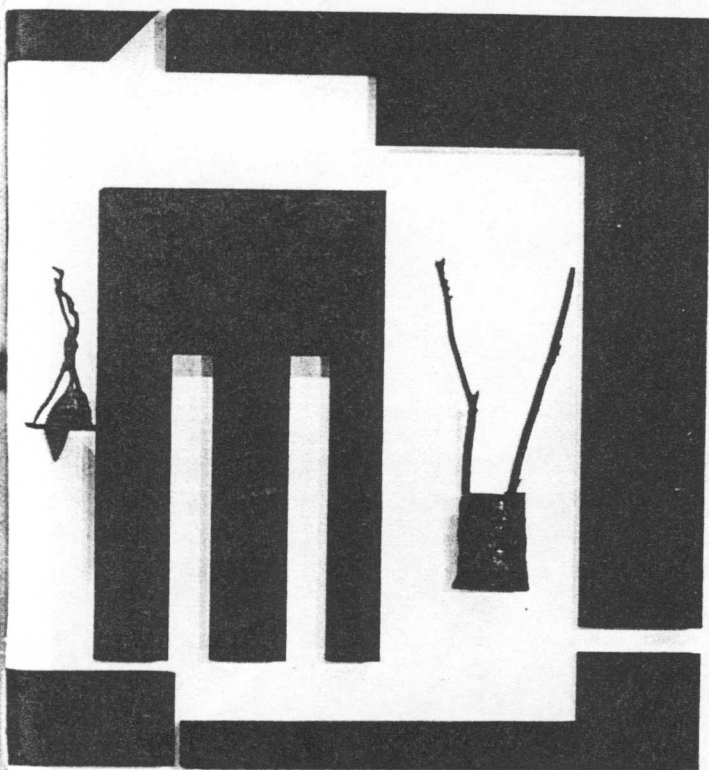
June, 1986

CATALOGUE

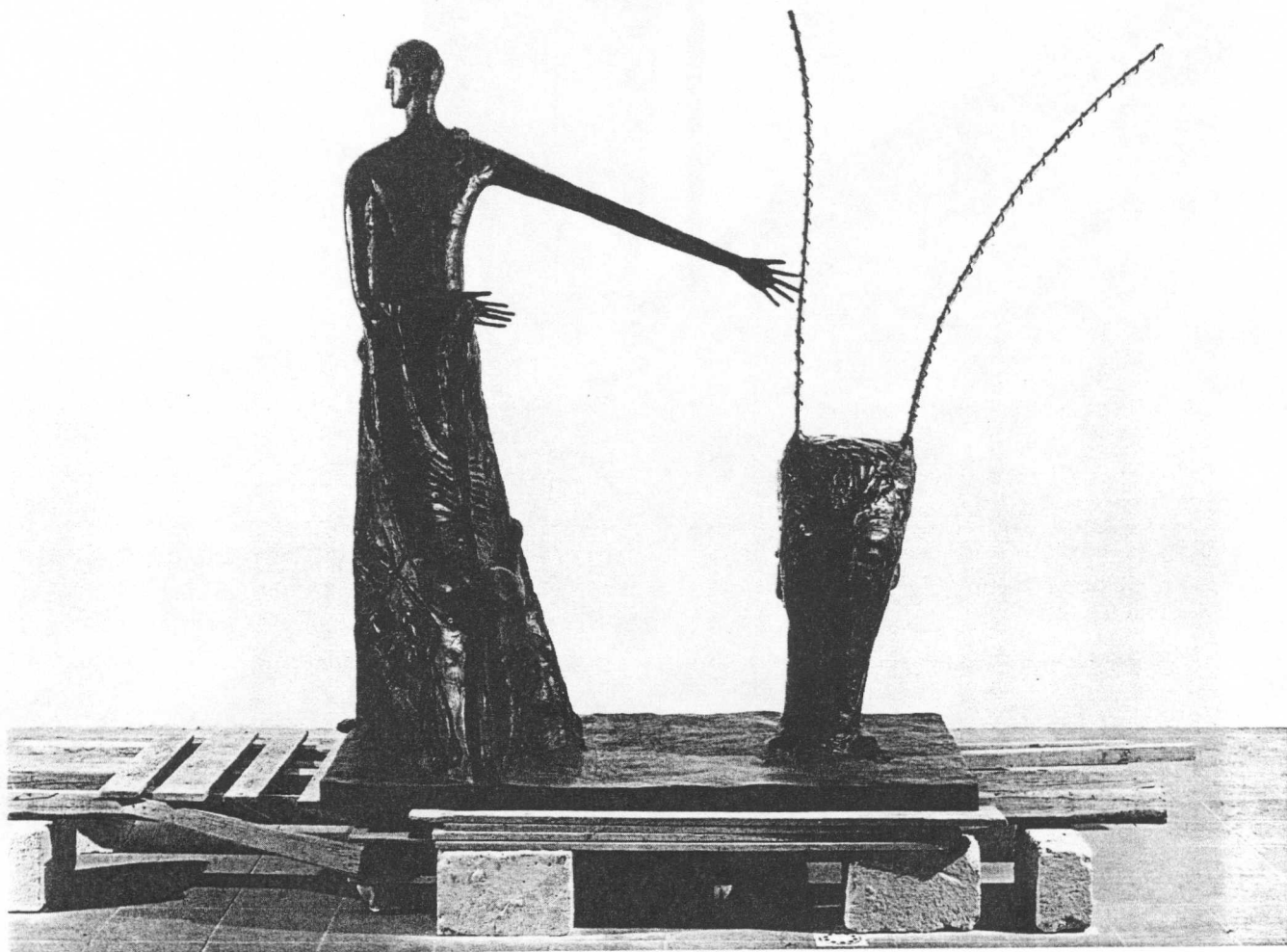
Dimensions are in centimeters, followed by inches. Height precedes width, then depth. Unless otherwise noted, all works are courtesy of Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.



Non avrà titolo, 1985 (cat. no. 7).
(Photograph by Dorothy Zeidman,
New York.)



1. *Hortus conclusus (Enclosed Garden)*, 1982
Bronze, 203 × 152 × 142 cm (80 × 60 × 56)
Edition of four
2. *Sull'orla della sera (At the Edge of Evening)*, 1982–83
Oil on canvas, 235 × 432 (94¹/₄ × 173¹/₂)
3. *Lucomone*, 1983
Mixed media on canvas, 140 × 111 × 5 (56¹/₄ × 44¹/₂ × 2¹/₄)
Collection of Robert Lehrman, Washington, D.C.
4. *Sonetto (Sonnet)*, 1984
Oil on canvas, 300 × 325 (118 × 128)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Hedreen, Seattle
5. *Vespero (Vespers)*, 1984
Oil on canvas, 300 × 325 (118 × 128)
Collection of Marshall Frankel, Chicago
6. *Canto Notturmo (Night Song)*, 1984
Bronze, 200 × 230 × 105 (78 × 90¹/₄ × 41³/₈)
7. *Non avrà titolo (It Won't Have a Title)*, 1985
Oil and wax on canvas on wood, and bronze, 320 × 882 × 98 (128 × 353 × 39¹/₄)
8. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
9. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
10. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
11. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
12. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
13. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
14. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)
15. *Untitled*, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 100.62 × 149 (40¹/₄ × 59⁵/₈)



Canto notturno, 1984 (cat. no. 6).

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1976

Galleria D'Arte Duemila, Bologna.
Nuovi Strumenti, Brescia.

1977

Lucio Amelio, Naples.
Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan.
Deambrogi-Cavellini, Milan.

1978

Galerie Tanit, Munich.
Paul Maenz, Cologne.
Giorgio Persano, Turin.
Franco Toselli, Milan.

1979

Art and Project, Amsterdam.
Lucio Amelio, Naples.
Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva.
Galerie 'T Venster, Rotterdam.
Emilio Mazzoli, Modena.

1980

Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe.
Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan.
Galerie Tanit, Munich.
Marian Goodman, New York.
Kunsthalle, Basel
Museum Folkwang, Essen
Paul Maenz, Cologne.
Annina Nosei, New York.
Giorgio Persano, Turin.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Annemarie Verna, Zurich.

1981

Lucio Amelio, Naples.
Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich.
Mario Diacono, Rome.
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna.
Groninger Museum, Groningen, The Netherlands.
Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover.
Kunstmuseum, Basel.
Mannheimer Kunstverein, Mannheim.
Franco Toselli, Milan.
Schellmann und Klüser, Munich.

1982

Lucio Amelio, Naples.
Galerie Buchmann, St. Gallen, Switzerland.
Marian Goodman, New York.
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark.
Munro Gallerie, Hamburg.
Schellmann und Klüser, Munich.
Städtische Galerie, Erlangen, West Germany.
Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, West Germany.
Waddington Galleries, London.

1983

Engström, Stockholm.
Galerija Meduza, Koper, Yugoslavia.
Emilio Mazzoli, Modena.
Ponova Art Gallery, Toronto.
Schellmann & Klüser, Munich.
Sperone Westwater, New York.
Gian Enzo Sperone, Rome.
Annemarie Verna, Zurich
Villa Fidelia, Spello

1984

Galerie Thomas, Munich.
Galleri, Ressle, Stockholm.
Galleria Toselli, Milan.
Galleria Chisel, Genoa.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais St. Pierre, Lyon.
Thaddäus J. Ropac, Salzburg.
Waddington Galleries, London.

1985

Lucio Amelio, Naples.
Deweer, Zwevegem-Otegem, Belgium.
Richard Gray, Chicago.
Bernd Klüser, Munich.
Sperone Westwater, New York.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

1986

Currents, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.
Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin.
Galleria Toselli, Milan.
Bernd Klüser, Munich.
Kunsternes Hus, Oslo.
Marisa del Re, New York.
Gian Enzo Sperone, Rome.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1975

Campo dieci, Galleria Diagramma, Milan.
Da mezzogiorno al tramonto, Villa Volpicielli, Naples.

1977

Cara morte, Gavirate, Varese.
Diece opere di pittura, Bancó, Brescia.
Fotografia come analisi, Teatro Gobeti, Turin.

1978

International Drawing Triennial, Wroclaw, Poland.

1979

Arte cifra, Paul Maenz, Cologne.
Clemente, De Maria, Paladino, Annemarie Verna, Zurich.
Le stanze, Castello Colonna, Gennazzano.
Parigi o cara, Yvon Lambert, Paris.
Perspective Art 10.79, Basel.
13 rassegna internazionale d'arte: opere fatte ad arte,
Palazzo di Citta, Acireale.

1980

Aperto '80, 39 biennale di Venezia, Venice.
Après le classicisme, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-
Etienne.
Die enthauptete Hand: 100 Zeichnungen aus Italien, Kunst-
verein, Bonn.
Ego navigatio, Mannheimer Kunstverein, Mannheim.
Italia nuova immagine, Ravenna.
Kunstverein, Bonn.
Linee della ricerca artistica in Italia 1960/1980, Palazzo delle
Esposizioni Rome.
Sieben Junge Künstler aus Italien, Kunsthalle, Basel; Mu-
seum Folkwang, Essen; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

1981

A New Spirit in Painting, Royal Academy of Art, London.
Drawings and Paintings on Paper, Annina Nosei, New York.
XI Biennale de Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de
Paris, Paris.
Il mobile infinito, Facoltà di Architettura Politecnico, Milan.
Mostra d'arte, Acireale.
Westkunst, Museen der Stadt Köln, Cologne.

1982

Arte italiana 1960-1982, Hayward Gallery and Institute of
Contemporary Art, London.
Avanguardia transavanguardia 1968/1977, Mura Aureliane,
Rome.
Documenta 7, Museen Fredericianum, Kassel.
European and American Editions, Pace Gallery, New York.
Forma senza forma, Galleria Civica, Modena; Palazzo Lan-
franchi, Pisa.
Giovani pittori scultori Italiani, Sala Rotonda di via Besana,
Milan.
Halle 6, Hamburg.
Neue Skulptur, Galerie Nächst St. Stephan, Vienna.
New Figuration from Europe, Milwaukee Art Museum,
Milwaukee.
Portraits et figures, Galerie Beyeler, Basel.
Transavanguardia internazionale, Gallerie Civica, Modena.
Vision in Disbelief: 4th Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of
New South Wales, Sydney.
Zeitgeist, Internationale Kunstausstellung, Berlin.

1983

Aktuel '83, Kunst aus Mailand, München, Wein, Zurich, Städ-
tische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.
Arts '83, Ateneumin Taidemuseo, Helsinki.
Artisti italiani contemporanei, Venice.
Bilder der Angst und der Bedrohung, Kunsthaus Zurich.
Marilena Bonomo, Bari.
Concetto-imago, Generationswechsel in Italien, Bonner
Kunstverein, Bonn.
Conguenze impreviste, Florence.
Costellazione, Galleria Giorgio Persano, Turin.
Det Italienska Transavantgardet, Boibrino, Stockholm.
Expressive Malerei nach Picasso, Galerie Beyeler, Basel.
Galerie Beyeler, Basel.
Galerie Munro, Hamburg.
Galerie Tanit, Munich.
Galerie Thomas, Munich.
Italia: la Transavanguardia, Obra Culturel de la Caja de
Pensiones, Madrid.
Latitudine Napoli New York, Lucio Amelio, Naples.
La Transavanguardia, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.
Les revues d'aujourd'hui en Europe, Marseilles.

L'informale in Italia, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna.
L'Italie et l'Allemagne, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva.
 Mario Merz, Mimmo Paladino, A. R. Penck, Emilio Vedova,
 Franco Toselli, Milan.
 Emilio Mazzoli, Modena.
 Mimmo Paladino, A. R. Penck, Galerie Buchmann, St. Gallen,
 Switzerland.
 New Art, Tate Gallery, London.
 New Drawing, *Europska Amerisvka*, Koper, Yugoslavia.
 New Italian Art, New Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cleveland.
 New Painting from the Collection of Joshua Gessel, The Tel Aviv
 Museum, Tel Aviv.
 Nuovi Disegni, Kunstmuseum, Basel.
 Prints 1982, Waddington Graphics, London.
 Recent European Painting, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
 New York.
 Tema celeste, Museo Civico d'Arte Contemporanea, Gibelina,
 Sicily.
 Tracce, Palazzo Sormani, Milan.

1984

Centro d'Arte Contemporanea, Syracuse, Italy.
 Contemporary Italian Masters, Cultural Center of the Chicago
 Public Library.
 Content: A Contemporary Focus, 1974-1984, Hirshhorn
 Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
 Det Italienska Transavantgardet, Kunsthalle, Stockholm.
 Galerie Léger, Malmö, Sweden.
 Galleri Ressle, Stockholm.
 Galerie Rolf Ricke, Cologne.
 The Human Condition, Biennial III, San Francisco Museum
 of Modern Art.
 Il modo italiano, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport
 Harbor, California.
 Images and Impressions, The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
 An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture,
 Museum of Modern Art, New York.
 Modern Expressionists, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
 New Painting, Krannert Art Museum, Champaign-Urbana,
 Illinois.
 Annina Nosei, New York.
 Opera su charta, Antiope-France, Paris.

Reference, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi, Belgium.
 Rosc '84, The Guinness Hop Store, Dublin.
 Skulptur in 20 Jahrhundert, Brülingen Park, Basel.
 Terraemotus, Villa Campolieto, Naples.
 Totem, Bonnier Gallery, New York.
 Une selection de la collection particulière de Joshua Gessel,
 Halle Sud, Geneva.
 Via New York, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal.

1985

Arbeiten zu Skulpturen, Schellmann & Klüser, Munich.
 Bilder für Frankfurt, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt.
 Collection, Musée St. Pierre, Lyon.
 The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today,
 The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.
 Horses in Twentieth Century Art, Nicola Jacobs, London.
 Images and Impressions, Institute for Contemporary Art,
 Philadelphia.
 Herbert Palmer Gallery, Los Angeles.
 New Art of Italy, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha; Dade County
 Center for The Fine Arts, Miami; Contemporary Arts
 Center, Cincinnati.
 A New Romanticism, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture
 Garden, Washington, D.C.; Akron Art Museum,
 Akron.
 Ressle & Larsen, Stockholm.
 São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo.
 Selections from the William J. Hokin Collection, Museum of
 Contemporary Art, Chicago.
 7000 Eichen, Kunsthalle Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany.
 Sperone Westwater, New York.
 Franco Toselli, Milan.
 XIII Biennale de Paris, Grande Halle du Parc de la Villette,
 Paris.
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Galerie Thaddäus J. Ropac,
 Salzburg.

1986

Eugene Binder Gallery, Dallas.
 Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt.
 Galleri Mustad, Molnlycke, Sweden.
 Galleri Zero, Stockholm.
 Hommage à Beuys, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
 Munich.
 Sculpture for Public Spaces, Marisa del Re, New York.

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- Il modo italiano* (exhibition catalogue). Essay by Germano Celant. Los Angeles: Piedmont Region and Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984.
- Images and Impressions* (exhibition catalogue). Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1984.
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- Mimmo Paladino* (exhibition catalogue). New York: Sperone Westwater, 1983.
- Mimmo Paladino* (exhibition catalogue). Introduction by Mimmo Paladino, essay by Norman Rosenthal. London: Waddington Galleries, 1984.
- Mimmo Paladino* (exhibition catalogue). Introduction by Thierry Raspail. Lyon: Musée St. Pierre, 1984.
- Mimmo Paladino* (exhibition catalogue). New York: Sperone Westwater, 1985.
- Mimmo Paladino* (exhibition catalogue). Essays by Helmut Friedel, Donald Kuspit, and Thomas Lehnerer. Munich: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1985.
- Mimmo Paladino: giardino chiuso* (exhibition catalogue). Introduction by Achille Bonito Oliva. Modena: Emilio Mazzoli, 1983.
- Mimmo Paladino: Skulpteur og Tegning, Kunstneress Hus*. Essays by Steinar Gjessing, Dieter Koeplin and Donald Kuspit. Oslo, 1985.
- Paladino bei Thomas* (exhibition catalogue). Introduction by Andreas Franzke, interview by Wolfgang Max Faust. Munich: Galerie Thomas, 1984.
- Waldman, Diane. *Italian Art Now, An American Perspective* (exhibition catalogue). New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 1982.
- Wildermuth, Armin. "Mimmo Paladino." *Flash Art* 109 (November 1982): 18–21.

STAFF FOR THIS EXHIBITION

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H. Ashley Kistler, Curatorial Assistant,
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Richard Woodward, Manager, Art Services
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David Thompson, Graphic Display Designer
George Cruger, Catalogue Editor
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Don Dale, Assistant Manager, Office of Public Affairs