

La Salita

Named after the Salita di San Sebastianello, which runs from Piazza di Spagna up to the Pincian Hill, this gallery consisted of a space at street level, at number 16 / C. Gian Tomaso Liverani opened it on February 23rd, 1957. The inaugural show was a prudent one (which would seldom take place again over the following years), a collective with twenty names including Pietro Consagra, Leoncillo, Titina Maselli, Piero Sadun, Antonio Scordia – all chosen under the aegis of Lionello Venturi and presented in a catalogue by his pupil Valentino Martinelli.

Liverani was thirty-eight years old at the time, descended from an ancient Faenza family. Formerly a cavalry officer, he had followed his father's wishes and obtained first a degree in law and then one in agricultural science. After moving to Rome, he worked at FAO, only opening the gallery after his father's death.

Along with La Tartaruga, La Salita immediately came to be considered Rome's most prestigious contemporary art showcase. Its activity spanned almost thirty years in three different venues – after San Sebastianello it moved to Via Gregoriana 5 (1967-1971) and then to Via Garibaldi 86 (December 1971-1986). Shortly before its definitive closure, Liverani ran a series of shows that retraced its history entitled “Il disegno dell'arte”, conceived in collaboration with Simonetta Lux.

It is safe to say that the *disegno* (drawing) in question, traced by this gallery, was a perfect reflection of the evolution of history of art in those years. Entirely independent in his choices, Liverani had an instinct for spotting novelty before it became mainstream. He almost always anticipated artists and trends that would become established, frequently contributing to their emergence himself. To this day he ranks as one of the gallery owners with the highest number of debut solo shows to his name. Just a few of these are sufficient to give an idea of his remarkable intuition and courage: Ettore Sordini (1959), Franco Angeli (1960), Tano Festa (1961), Titone (1964), Carlo Battaglia (1964), Giulio Paolini (1964), Ettore Innocente (1965), Teodosio Magnoni (1965), Francesco Ravizza (1966),

Richard Serra (1966), Maurizio Mochetti (1968), Franco Gozzano (1970), Vettor Pisani (1970), Alberto Abate (1977), Antonio Capaccio (1983).

Liverani was one who listened to what artists had to say without having to embrace their lifestyle. Some have accused him of not stimulating the art business in terms of financial turnover. But he was generous in other ways. He was active in cultivating – something few did in those days – relations with government figures to promote Italian art internationally. In 1959, for example, he endorsed the exhibition “Italian Painting Today”, which travelled around Japan presented by Giulio Carlo Argan, Palma Bucarelli and the Japanese art critic Sōichi Tominaga.

Given the profusion of eminent names commissioned to contribute to his gallery’s catalogues, it would appear that Liverani made a concerted effort to lend academic substance to the broad tapestry of artists he featured in his shows. To begin with he engaged established art historians who were often also university professors – as well as Venturi, Martinelli and Argan, there were Marco Valsecchi, Franco Russoli, Enrico Crispolti, Nello Ponente, Ermanno Migliorini, Giovanni Carandente. There were also exponents of biting new theories on contemporary art like Michel Tapié’s *Art Autre* and Pierre Restany’s *Nouveau Réalisme*, alongside brilliant independent thinkers like Cesare Vivaldi and Emilio Villa. Over the 1970s, the relation between artists and art critics changed. La Salita reflected this in full and critics all but vanished from its activities, only to return the following decade with Simonetta Lux and Fulvio Abbate.

From 1957 to 1960, the gallery’s activities frequently featured prominent figures from Italy’s non-figurative art scene: Gastone Novelli, Carla Accardi, Bice Lazzari – two women artists in this first select group formed by Liverani, who never discriminated against the female sex in his choices – Toti Scialoja, Alberto Burri, Ettore Colla, Mimmo Rotella, Antonio Sanfilippo, Giulio Turcato. Some shows were striking also for the way in which the works were displayed, such as Carla Accardi’s 1958 show in which the paintings were hung at different heights, disseminated across the walls, or the Alberto Burri show that presented just two large-scale works.

In the early 1970s the gallery continued to devote shows to Scialoja, Accardi, Rotella and Colla, although its programme would soon become saturated with a new generation of artists. This was partly anticipated in the group shows that ran in 1959, to then emerge in full in the famous show entitled “Roma 60. Cinque pittori. Angeli, Festa, Lo Savio, Schifano, Uncini”, which opened in November 1960 following two previous editions. The show marked a turning point, a break with the past and a new beginning all at once. The works on display were all monochrome surfaces tenaciously adherent to the values of painting (light) and matter, from which each artist soon developed new images each according to their personal sensitivity.

Of all the artists from this new generation, La Salita is most associated with Francesco Lo Savio, although many others were featured at the gallery – some just for a single show – and together offer a fairly articulate picture of the tensions of the time. Alongside Angeli and Festa there were Fabio Mauri, Christo (for his show he completed one of his very first ‘wrappings’ on a statue in Villa Borghese), Ettore Sordini, Piero Sadun, Nanda Vigo, Aldo Mondino (in his solo show that ran in 1964, visitors were encouraged to finish the paintings on display by colouring them in with pencils), Giulio Paolini, Marcia Hafif, Carlo Lorenzetti, Ettore Innocente, Teodosio Magnoni, Sergio Lombardo, Gianni Colombo, Richard Serra (who exhibited several stuffed animals and a live pig, for which Liverani was reported by the police for detaining merchandise that was not included in his license – Argan and Bucarelli testified in court, in his favour), Luciano Fabro, Maurizio Mochetti, without forgetting the groups of artists, revitalised in those years, such as Gruppo T, Gruppo 0 and Gruppo MID.

Liverani was not immune to the occasional *divertissement*, which were sharper and more incisive than they appeared at first glance. One such was his version of the typical Christmas show, in which he asked the artists to create “a useful object, a chair, a plate, a bed, a cupboard, a mirror, a candlestick, a cabinet, an armchair, a box, a vase, a stove, a table, a ladder etc.” (1962-1963). Or the time when he offered “200 pieces at great prices” in the show entitled “La Salita grande vendita” (La Salita grand sale), laid out like a supermarket with a cash desk borrowed from the well-known Italian department store Standa (1964-1965). Those were the years of the all-consuming debate on the relation between object and artwork, and of the triumph of American art that culminated in the 1964 Venice Biennale. It was possibly as a response to the struggle Italian artists were having to define their identity – in their effort to stave off an art that had the backing of the most powerful economy in the world at the time but which had nonetheless fascinated them – that in the summer of 1965 Liverani conceived the show “Mostra a soggetto. Corradino di Svevia”. He asked his artists to create a work about the unfortunate Conradin of Swabia, captured in 1265 at the Torre Astura fortress where the works were to be displayed. At Torre Astura Pino Pascali officiated a mock funeral, marking the birth date of Italian performance art and in general consolidating the espousal between contemporary art and vestiges of the past.

In the 1970s the gallery became a kind of art laboratory, made available to artists by a Liverani who, with hindsight, appears to have been inclined to embrace even the most unusual art forms, unfettered from all prejudice except his own intuition. A number of the gallery’s most memorable events date from this time, such as the *Progetto di avvelenamento* by Sergio Lombardo or Pisani in an ‘ideal dialogue’ with Duchamp. There was also Fabio Mauri’s *Ebrea* and Jannis Kounellis in the darkened space seated at a table with in front of him the scattered plaster fragments of a Classical

statue of Apollo – the mask of the god covering his face, a stuffed crow and music by Mozart performed live. Eliseo Mattiacci was featured with his *Essere e respirare*, and there were solo shows of Franco Gozzano, Alighiero Giuseppetti, Ernesto Tatafiore and Roberto Barni. The group show *Ghenos Eros e Thanatos* curated by Alberto Boatto set a new pace for Italian art, in the direction of an avant-garde that was inclusive of history and passions. A new generation of artists was also featured prominently – Sandro Chia, Ferruccio De Filippi, Gianfranco Notargiacomo – with a quick succession of shows in which they experimented with a form of conceptual art that was dense with anthropological and linguistic references, returning once more to the building blocks of traditional art: drawing, painting and sculpture. A number of shows were conceived jointly by Carlo Maurizio Beneduti and Tullio Catalano, the minds behind the situationist group known as the Ufficio per la Immaginazione Preventiva, which was actively promoting a capillary diffusion of art and was founded on the conviction that aesthetic values are, by definition, revolutionary. A lasting meeting point for a new generation of artists, in the early 1980s La Salita opened up also to artists it had never presented before, some of whom came from very different and independent artistic backgrounds such as Felice Levini, Mariano Rossano and Antonio Capaccio.

Throughout his career, Liverani was also an art publisher, commissioning projects from many artists over the years. Among his catalogue of publications, some were devoted to sculpture. There were also the monograph editions devoted to artists in the 1960s, of which the best known is *La Litografia*, introduced by Argan, with works by Accardi, Colla, Dorazio, Festa, Fontana, Lo Savio, Rotella, Schifano. His *Collana di Perle* series presented artists of the calibre of Sandro Chia, Ferruccio De Filippi, Gianfranco Notargiacomo and Jannis Kounellis. The many lithographs commissioned by Liverani were always printed in the traditional lithographic printing workshop of Roberto Bulla, in Rome. (DL)

Giulio Paolini

Galleria La Salita
from October 31st 1964

Giulio Paolini was just about to turn 24 when he inaugurated his first solo exhibition on October 31st, 1964, at Rome's La Salita gallery. Born in Genoa, Paolini was living in Turin at the time, where he had moved with his family while still an adolescent.

In her biography of Paolini (*Catalogo ragionato*, Milan 2008), Maddalena Disch traces the sequence of events that led to his first solo show in Rome: "Early in 1963, in Rome, he met Guido Montana, editor-in-chief of the journal 'Arte Oggi' (...), who introduced him to the city's art scene. He met Plinio De Martiis, the owner of La Tartaruga gallery, to whom he submitted a project for a solo show that was never made (*Ipotesi per una mostra*, 1963). In June 1964, Paolini attended the Venice Biennale (...) for the first time, where he met Carla Accardi and several other artists close to De Martiis, who were exhibiting at the Italian pavilion: Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Giosetta Fioroni, Mario Schifano. Through Aldo Mondino Paolini also met Gian Tomaso Liverani, the owner of La Salita, who invited him to hold his first solo exhibition".

Before October 1964, Paolini had only two group shows to his name. Both were prize reviews, which at that time offered the best chance of visibility for artists at the start of their careers. His entry for the 1961 "XII Premio Lissone internazionale per la pittura" was a frame around a white, gesso-primed canvas (initially he had considered sending a similar piece with a pot of paint instead of the canvas). His train of thought was already clear at this stage – he was not interested in fixing his experience in an image, he wanted to remain in a suspended state among his frames, his pots of paint and to use them, as he in fact stated soon after to Carla Lonzi, not to arrive at a result but to create a model, even humbly, with means that are not pretending to have any meaning.

Only two photographs from Paolini's debut solo show are known to us, both anonymous. One shows a young woman and was probably taken on the opening night. On the floor behind her, propped against a wall, is the work which today forms part of the MAXXI collection. The other photo is of the work currently in deposit at the Lugano MASI, and the one from the Milan collection. Somewhat dated (it would be changed soon after), the gallery's lighting consisted of articulated arm lamps

shedding cones of light onto the works hanging on the walls. But there are no images on the plywood surfaces which Paolini arranged in the various rooms of La Salita, and which must have given visitors the impression that the exhibition was not completely mounted. Some works were up on the walls, while others appeared as if they were still waiting to be hung, stacked against the walls or (as sometimes happens in non-museum spaces) against each other.

In a text published in 1971, Paolini described the show at La Salita thus: "A show that gives the impression of an exhibition being mounted, with panels of untreated wood (either propped against one another or stacked against a wall) 'substituting' pictures and analysing the purely conventional associations normally found within an exhibition".

The La Salita show is now recreated at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni thanks to the collaboration of Giulio Paolini himself, who has conceived its present layout. The new project has borne in mind a number of factors, from an awareness of the time that has passed to the sedimented identity of each single work and the different space to which the works must necessarily relate.

The works arranged along the walls are almost all the ones on show at La Salita in 1964. The original collection only lacks two works that were broken up after the show. A third work, now in the Coetz collection in Munich, could not be loaned on account of conservation risks and has been substituted by a similar work dating from 1964 in which, from a nylon wire in the centre of a vertical panel, hangs a smaller element in the same material proportioned to the one onto which it is leaning. In addition, the artist has included a plywood board piece coated in laminated plastic on which rests a hook suspended from a nylon wire.

As in his previous works, Paolini placed his art tools on show within the exhibition – the sketching sheet discernible on the reverse of a work, or the wood or Masonite panel (a material widely in use as a painting support at the time, as visitors will – by pure coincidence – be able to see also in the works by Titina Maselli on show in the adjacent room).

In his project for La Salita, Paolini was striving to forge a new exhibition 'model' (with hindsight and his artistic maturity, it is now clear that each single work was part of this design) by questioning his own concept of how a show works. A number of clues support this interpretation: the hooks and wires normally used to hang pictures and which appear in the works themselves, the inclusion of elements on the rear of works that are not visible from the front, the interaction between different elements arranged against one another or the presence of untreated surfaces which Paolini identified as walls where pictures were missing. A further subtractive action was performed in the invitation, again with the intention of redefining the overall perception of what an exhibition is – on

the sketch card he ordered for the purpose, Paolini reserved the upper right hand corner for all the usual information (Giulio Paolini October 31st 1964 / Galleria La Salita Rome Via / San Sebastianello 16 c telephone/ 672841) except that it was written with a dry pen and was therefore invisible unless placed at a right angle under a source of light. Folded in four, the card contained a loose image of one of the works in the show.

The exhibition generated interesting results for Paolini. Carla Lonzi and Marisa Volpi came to see the show and they became friends, a bond that would extend also into their respective professional spheres. Paolini also made his first sale at that show, to Corrado Levi, the Turinese collector and talented intellectual who still owns it and who generously loaned it for this reconstruction.

After the show devoted to Paolini, La Salita ran a solo show of Marcia Hafif which was followed immediately, on December 19th 1964, by one of those customary shows in which gallery owners attempted to lure Christmas shoppers away from their choice of traditional Christmas presents and opt for an accessibly-priced artwork. The same year Pop Art had triumphed at the Venice Biennale, Liverani decided to mount a show featuring works that he had specially commissioned from his artists. He availed himself of the collaboration of Standa, a chain of department stores, which “kindly took care of shelving the merchandise” (according to the invitation). According to Liverani they even loaned a cash till. On the invitation poster, the exhibition was advertised in the promotional language used for marketing mass products: “12 days at La Salita. 200 special items at very special prices!”.

This prompted Paolini to exhibit and question also the very dynamics of the art market. In the exhibition poster his work was advertised as “BUSTE con sorpresa” (surprise envelopes) with a price tag of 1000 lire. Buyers received in exchange an envelope containing a card folded into four, similar to the one that had been used for his previous show, with 1000 lire inside – the same sum they had paid to buy the work.

Given their assonance with the works presented in his first solo show, Paolini has decided to place three of his *Disegni* from 1964 in the middle of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni room. They are part of a series of works which were also made up of a card folded into four and each contain a different object: a sheet of paper signed by the artist, three tubes of paint, a paint-stained spatula, a pencil, a scrunched up piece of paper, a page printed with geometrical elements... (DL)

With many thanks to Giulio Paolini, who agreed to rethink his first solo show in arranging the works here at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni.

A heartfelt thank you also to Maddalena Disch for sharing with us the information and her understanding of the works described in the profile cards written by her, and never published, for the Fondazione Giulio e Anna Paolini.