

An abstract painting with a textured surface, featuring various shades of blue, green, and purple. The brushstrokes are visible, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall composition is dynamic and layered.

Virtuosity & Versatility

75 Years of Gino Manelli's Art

June 28 - July 22 2016

PROGRAM



Virtuosity and Versatility

75 Years of Gino Manelli's Art

June 28th through July 22, 2016

Curator's thoughts:

The questions in putting together an exhibit from an artist that was as prolific, multi-faceted and, in some sense, mercurial as Gino are: What was his motivation? What was he saying? Yes, this exhibit is proof of his virtuosity and versatility but what is the answer to these two questions?

Foremost is a passion for color—for its beauty and how it communicates, expressing emotions. His brush is equal to a pen writing poetry.

Through his art, Gino conveyed admiration and joy for natural beauty. The voice of his paintings speak to a sense of wonderment and uniqueness of life.

Cristina Gruss,

Curator

Rouse Gallery

Howard Community College
10901 Little Patuxent Pkwy., Columbia, MD

Gallery Hours: 10 am to 9:30 pm

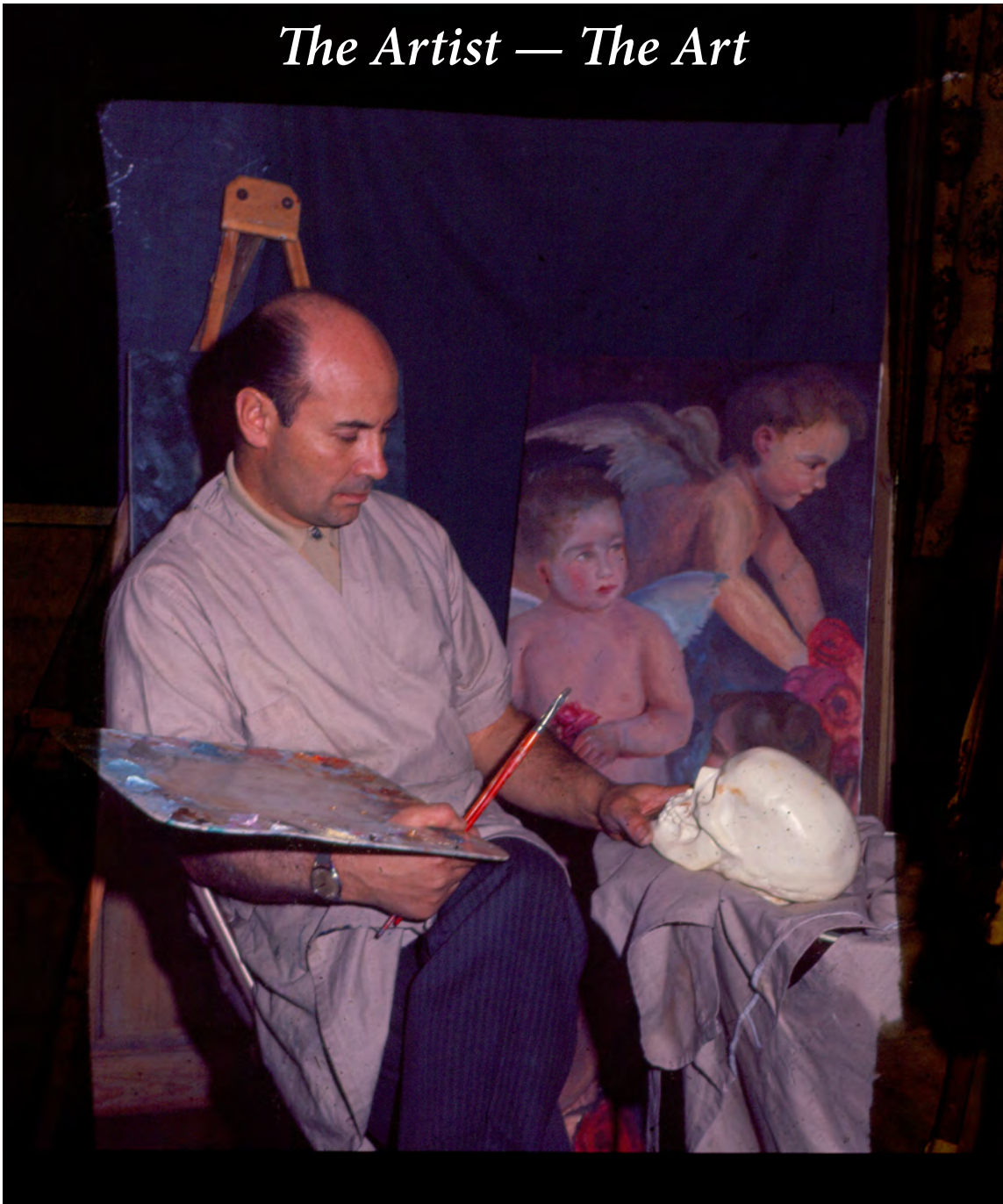
Opening Reception: July 9, 2016 from 5 pm to 7 pm

Sponsors:

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The Artist — The Art



Gino Manelli was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1915, but his art is deeply rooted in Italy having spent 34 formative years there. Nearly all of those years were in Teramo in the province of Abruzzo.

To trace Gino's artistic roots we need to begin in 1930 Abruzzo. Abruzzo was and still is, in many ways, a scenic pastoral province, sheltered from Rome and Naples by the towering, rugged Apennine peaks and from the east by the soft Adriatic Sea--a world very much apart.

It was here that Gino's father returned some years earlier from America to settle his family in his native homeland.

At age 15, Gino struck up a friendship with Ugo Sforza, a prominent Abruzzese artist. This friendship initially was not based on art but on their mutual love of the sport of cycling. Sforza had been in his youth an Italian regional champion, and Gino was an avid cyclist.



Above: In the photo Gino is at far right.

Sforza recognizing Gino's athletic potential became his coach. Gino would continue to compete and win in cycling at the regional and national level through most of the '30's but art had taken hold of his soul.

Sforza saw Gino's artistic potential.

His mother always thought that Gino was a bit of an artist. She would recall that Gino enjoyed doodling with bits of charcoal from the the fireplace on the plaster walls and later on discarded paper wrappings. By his early teens he would dash out cartoons and caricatures to entertain his friends.

At 17, Gino joined Sforza's "bottega d'arte." An apprenticeship in a bottega was a time honored method where aspiring individuals would learn the craft and skills sets of the master artist. In those years Sforza's bottega's source of commissions were primarily decorative set pieces: murals for churches, public buildings and wealthy private homes.

During this period he attend the Liceo Classico Delfico of Teramo where he studied the caricatures and technique used by Melchiorre Delfico and Gennaro¹ Della Monica².

He was deeply influenced by the "Macchiaioli" and the related Italian "Naturalismo" and "Verismo" movements that they embodied.

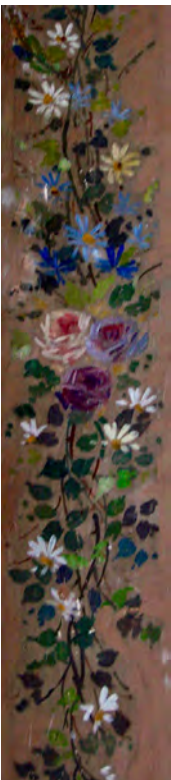
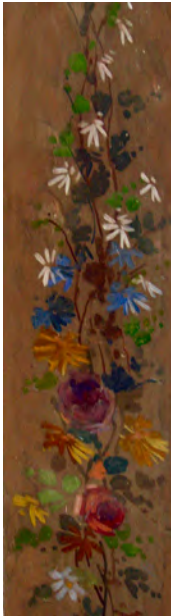


*Landscape
by
Ugo Sforza*

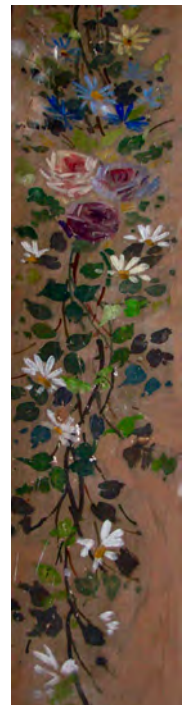
¹ Melchiorre Delfico, born in Teramo in 1825, became an internationally recognized caricature artist. He died in London in 1895. He left his mark on the "Liceo Classico Delfico" of Teramo. Much of his portfolio of works are housed there and, in the first part of the 20th century, many artists came to participate in studio caricature practicum.

² Gennaro Della Monica, Teramo 1836-1917, would become in his later career a strong exponent of Naturalismo.

Gino was one of Sforza's best in devising and fabricating pigments. Once all his skills were honed and proven, Sforza used him more and more on large commissions. It was on one such commission while prepping for fresco work at the church of St. Bartalomeo Apostel in Teramo, Sforza sustained a serious injury, falling off the scaffolding. Gino was his first assistant and continued the work on the frescos and flower decorations.



*The Church of St. Bartolomeo
and selected interior frescos*



In his twenties he came in contact with a number of prominent Abruzzese artists such as Basilio Cascella, Tommaso Cascella, Venanzo Crocetti, Salvatore Fume and Giovanni Melarangelo among others. Gino and his Abruzzese artistic circle were keenly aware of the percolating “Modern” movements of the 20th century—Cubism, Fauvism, Futurismo, etc. To Gino and his circle these movements seemed only an urgent dash by artists to be in vogue. Gino choose to remain faithful to the traditional concept of art; a path that would make his art true to his artistic soul, not a sycophant to fashion. He rounded out his art education at Rome’s Art Lyceum.

Financial hardship befell the family in the late ‘30s; his brothers and father returned to America leaving Gino, his mother and sister in Teramo.

In 1940, Gino began work for the newspaper “Il Messaggero” as a caricaturist. He was successful but his caricatures where quickly deemed politically offensive and he lost his job. He was drafted into military service. At the first opportunity he deserted and joined the partisan fighting to liberate Italy durring World War II.



Gino's identity card as a caricature artist



This cartoon of “Il Duce Reviewing the Troops” which he submitted for publication got Gino fired and harassed by the local fascist authorities.

That same year Gino married the woman that would become his lifetime partner, Cristina Flagelli. She was a commensurate realist in life's practicalities. His wife was the linchpin keeping the family together over the war years. He would benefit from the partnership for the rest of his life, even when in later years, it would indeed be a very stormy partnership.

Much of Gino's early easel works were lost in World War II. Bombing, advancing Allies, retreating Germans, fear and fighting came to Abruzzo. "The only art there was, was the Art of Survival" were Gino's words to describe the war and its immediate aftermath. (We do have a few of his drawings, caricatures, a pastel and a few paintings from this period in this exhibition).



After the war he was rehired by "Il Messagero" to do caricature work but it was not steady income. Gino continued to paint but, due to the scarcity of materials, he painted in the "Macchietta" format of little specks or spots which were small plein air paintings. (This style of painting is one of his hallmarks and more are included in this exhibit.) There were no opportunities for Gino to earn a living as an artist of any kind so he wanted to return to America to reunite the family. After many difficulties Gino returned to America in 1956.



In 1957, he was interviewed by the Baltimore Sun to talk about his art. Gino had been in the United States 18 months. The interviewer knew no Italian; Gino spoke English poorly. The interviewer asked why he didn't paint like Jackson Pollock or similar. Gino told him that his art was relevant, that his artistic tradition was rooted in the Macchiaioli movement with artists such as Giovanni Fattori and Carlo Domenici. The interviewer looked blankly at Gino; this movement and artists were unknown to him. Gino showed him a painting by Carlo Domenici and said in broken English, "This is how I paint. I paint, "Sciolto Realismo," loose realism: expressive color with the brush suggesting the story or the mood." This was all lost in translation and the article dubbed him an anti-modernist.



The painting at left by Carlo Domenici (1897-1981)

His "Sciolto Realismo" style can be seen in many of the pieces in this exhibit.

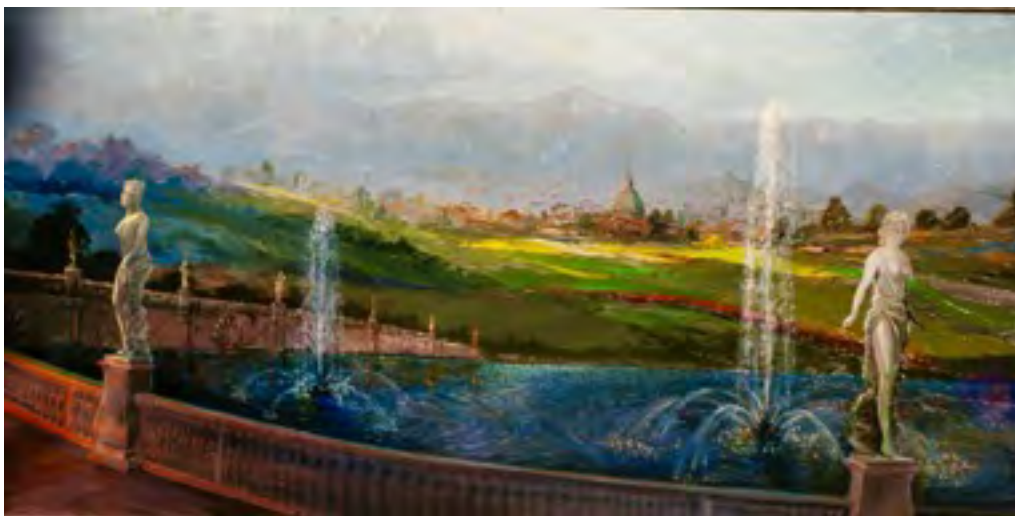
He returned to America with a family and little money. He worked in a factory for eight years and at the same time sought commissions, painted in the evening and weekends and sold his art through any venue that he could find. Over time commissions for large paintings began to come his way—many for restaurants, others for homes. He began to draw caricatures at street fairs and parties. The possibility of being a full time independent artist was slowly emerging. An agent would secure more commissions for him.

Besides his growing commissions, the Hutzler Brothers in the mid '60s had Gino draw caricatures at their family gatherings. In the early '70s, he assisted Betty Wells with court room sketches for WBAL and the Baltimore Sun.



This scene of the dome of St. Peter looking from the Tiber River through the Ponte Sant'Angelo was the first (1959) of what would be many commissioned decorative large scale paintings (90"x42").

This even larger piece (120"x 52") of the view of Turin from the royal villa was commissioned in 1974.



In this Exhibit we have several other examples of these commissions

All of his large format art were preceded by a “bozzetto,” a preliminary sketch. Many were just discarded after the work was completed. However, in this instance we are fortunate to have both, note how the bozzetto contributed to the final piece.



This is a detail from the “Feast of Heliogabalus”

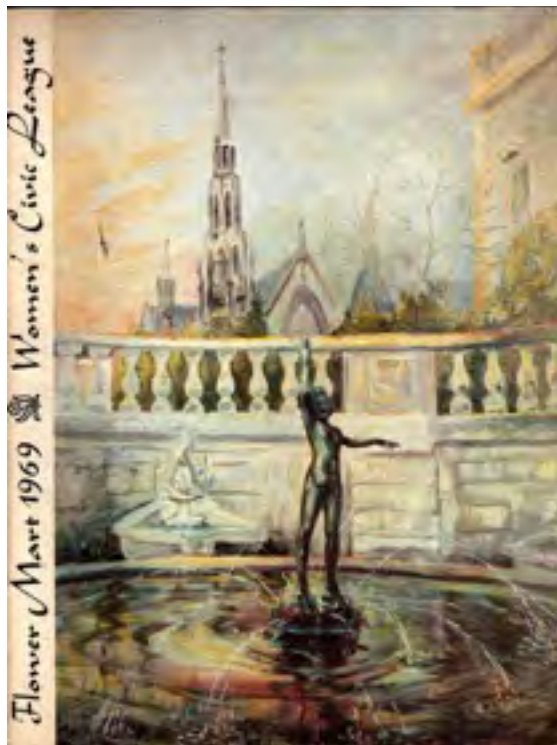
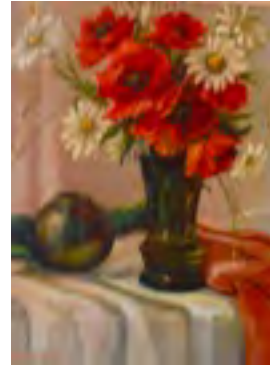


In Italy he had done a number of portraits primarily of family and close friends. His agent secured a number of commissions for portraits of Colt football players. With these completed, his reputation as a portrait artist was established and over his career he did many more. We have assembled a small sample for this exhibit.

In America he receive requests for devotional pieces. In 1966 he completed this academic painting of the Christ, "Ecco L'homo." There were a number of other devotional pieces annotated in his notes. In particular he mentions a commission for a "Good Shepard" for a chapel. We know that it was complete because we have the record of payment and the accompanying note from the purchaser noting that "Gino's 'Good Shepard' was a woman!"



It was a ritual with him to clear his palette's colors after a day of painting and turn the colors into flowers. The extraneous paint would be turned into a still life. He enjoyed painting them quickly and discovered that they sold just as quickly. We have included a number of his flower paintings in this exhibit. Gino never felt that "still lifes" were "dead;" To him flowers embodied life itself.



Gino painted many scenes of life and places in Baltimore. In this exhibit we highlight his Mt. Vernon Square Cycle. He completed pen and inks of a number of views of the square hoping that these would snag commissions for larger paintings. He was able to secure three commissions. In the exhibit we are fortunate to have one of the large paintings, a preliminary sketch of another painting and all of his pen and inks of the square. The image printed here of the third painting, the "Boy with the Sea Urchin Fountain" was used for the cover of the 1969 Flower Mart Program.

In 1967, he took studio space at Tongue Row in Ellicott City. He felt financially able to support himself and his family with his art. In 1972, he bought the red house about 70 yards up from his prior studio. Ellicott City's edgy bohemian feel appealed to Gino. The town's setting, nestled in hills bound by the rapid Patapsco River, spoke to his passion for nature. The atmosphere whispered of halcyon times like the old towns of Abruzzo, a perfect place for a studio. Now in his late fifties, he began giving private lessons. There was no set curriculum—Gino taught his art. He taught what he knew.

To the right, a work by one of Gino's many students



Ellicott City and its surroundings inspired him and are featured in many of his landscapes which lent themselves to his “Sciolto Realismo”. He also painted the towns landmarks.



With his new sense of financial independence and the contentment that the studio provided, he painted what he enjoyed and experimented with different techniques and approaches. His canvases were of landscapes that appealed to him, portraits of friends, flowers and whatever else fascinated him.



He delved and probed into his “Sciolto Realismo” for its next evolutionary step. He wanted his art to explore the surreal. He painted in a style he named “Surreal Expressionism.” His canvases would transmit his dreams and thoughts, in the process of coming into focus, not fully formed, but expressive suggestions.

In this exhibit we have included a number of paintings in “Surreal Expressionism, (Below examples of others not included in this exhibit)



One of his unique approaches to watercolor was “Create/ Crush.” He would complete a watercolor using the very best paper. On the reverse of the painting he would wet it sufficiently to saturate the paper until the dampness reached the painted side. Then he would crush the paper into nearly a ball and then stretch it loosely to dry. The aesthetic of the resulting work he would describe as, “The artist paints a deliberate composition; the reverse is the randomness of fate.”

In this exhibit we have included two paintings with this approach. (Below examples of others not included in this exhibit)



As the 20th century drew to a close, an illusory, astral and chimerical world took hold of his compositions and palette. The “Sciolto Realismo” was melting into another dimension. He put down his brush in 2008 never to pick it up again. Gino died in 2010 at age 94.

