

Giosetta Fioroni Drawing Center

By Lisa Turvey ☞



Giosetta Fioroni, *Ragazza TV (TV Girl)*, 1964–65, pencil and white and aluminum enamel on canvas, 44 7/8 x 57 1/2".

In 1964, American Pop art arrived in Italy with a bang. Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns, and Jim Dine showed at the Venice Biennale, and Robert Rauschenberg won the exhibition's Grand Prize, the first American ever to do so. That award process, accompanied by jury dissension and partisan maneuvering, set astir the art press, which saw in the laurel nothing less than a blow to European cultural hegemony administered by American imperialism. For its part, Italy's homegrown strain of Pop was sidelined, and has remained so in the decades since, by the dominance of Arte Povera in 1960s narratives. But before Rauschenberg's paintings graced the Giardini, a Roman cohort known as the School of the Piazza del Popolo had coalesced around a Pop aesthetic, one with only superficial affinities with its American, British, French, and German variants. Giosetta Fioroni was the lone woman in this group, and this engaging exhibition, which was her first solo

presentation in North America and travels this fall to the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome, finds ready contexts in both the recent swell of attention (institutional and scholarly) to postwar Italian art and the latter-day reckoning with Pop's female exponents. Curated by Claire Gilman, with more than one hundred works in painting, drawing, photography, and film, as well as illustrated books and ephemera, the show makes a persuasive case for Fioroni's distinct take on image filtering and diffusion.

Fioroni's early efforts betray her first influences: Yves Klein shadows the trio of monochromes that opened the show, while a dozen drawings comprising glyphs and textual snippets conjure Cy Twombly, to whom she was close. Her "silver period," which gave the exhibition—"Giosetta Fioroni: *L'Argento*"—its name and constitutes its core, began in the early '60s and encompasses depictions of faces and figures, the preponderance female and solitary, rendered in aluminum enamel and graphite and set within ample fields of white. Many images were sourced from popular magazines, though the actress Elsa Martinelli, the same picture of whom engendered five works here, is the only identifiable personage. The others are rooted in found or family photographs, including a self-portrait of the pigtailed artist at age seven. These sources relay a certain poignancy, one accentuated by Fioroni's spare means (she called silver a "non-color") and by the isolation implied by her blank, expansive supports. Yet however affecting, such means are also agents of alienation, and Fioroni's subjects, chary of exposure, are often hard to actually see: *Ragazza che piange* (Crying Girl), 1960, has downcast eyes; *Ragazza con occhiali* (Girl with Glasses), 1965, is concealed behind dark spectacles; *Bambino solo* (Lone Child), 1968, turns his back. Silver paint works to allure, but it also, in reflecting, deflects.

If this anonymity (in both personal and cultural registers) is anathema to Pop as we know it, so too is what Fioroni called her "artisanal sympathy." Her silver forms glance off the surface, evoking photo emulsion, but they are also incised, doubled, and fringed by marks emphatically made by hand. While some images recur on paper and canvas, the former is not simply a prelude to the latter. Drawing also seems for Fioroni a way of fixing—of pinning down—her subjects, across mediums. Among the additions in the move from the drawing *La fidanzata* (Girlfriend), 1961, to a painting of the

same title six years later are enamel marks whose graphic quality—a shadow suggestive of recession and an overlay of parallel lines that anchor its female figure—betrays a draftsman’s impulse. And the penciled elements of *La maschera* (The Mask), 1966, a painting of a mirrored female face that is one of the exhibition’s standouts, serve as a primer on the various ways line can function: to shade, silhouette, duplicate, and frame; as horizon, grid, and doodle. This emphasis on the drawn persists in canvases that summon other visual modes, from the telescope (*Liberty*, 1965) to the television (*Ragazza TV* [TV Girl], 1964–65), and a corollary consideration of seeing as a process that can be crafted as well as automated—that not only divulges but distances—extended to undertakings in theater design, books, and three short films that were on view.

In 1970, Fioroni’s fields became emptier still, with people exchanged for fragmentary views of Italian landscape and architecture. *Piazza San Marco*, 1970, one of twenty such selections, is denoted only by a sketchy trapezoid; elsewhere, buildings and mountain crests are evanescent boxes and curves. This work dramatizes a question approached by Fioroni’s earlier output: What minim of visual data can effect representation? Yet it also invites a broader context, namely the moment of postfascist Italy’s encounter with modern consumer culture. Contra the amnesiac tendencies of much Pop, these apparitional vistas intimate the abiding presence of history, however ruinous and partial.

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