

## COSTANTINO NIVOLA [1911-1988]

marble travertine bronze concrete terracotta



*Travertine 5*, c.1982, travertine, 24 1/4 x 14 x 13 in.



*Bronze E*, c.1982, bronze, 11 7/8 x 16 1/8 x 2 in.

*"The lyrical imagination and technical excellence of Nivola's work had never been a secret....we are privileged to enter the singular world of Costantino Nivola."*

Henry Geldzahler, Curator, Dia Art Foundation, Bridgehampton, NY  
*Costantino Nivola*, memorial exhibition catalogue, September 3 – October 9, 1988

On view August 2 through September 3, 2012, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present *Costantino Nivola (1911-1988)*, an exhibition that highlights the late sculpture in marble, travertine, bronze, concrete and terracotta. This overview of the distinctive forms Nivola created marks the centennial of the artist's birth in Sardinia and follows the April 2012 exhibition and catalogue *Costantino Nivola: 100 Years of Creativity* organized by the Italian Embassy in Washington, DC.

Nivola's early training as a mason in Sardinia compelled him to devote his five-decade career to the mastery of carving, casting and innovative bas-relief techniques in ancient materials familiar to him since childhood. True to his place of origin, Nivola's creativity and vision for sculpture opened collaborative opportunities for him with architects in the postwar years in America and Europe. He played a vital role in humanizing international style architecture and gave voice to the archaic in the modern movement. His legacy spans groundbreaking urban and campus projects with pioneering architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a major oeuvre of individual sculptural forms of evocative, primal beauty, on every scale.

In 1939, Nivola and his wife, Ruth Guggenheim, immigrated to New York City by way of Milan where they met and were trained at the Istituto Superiore d'Arte. His career as an art director began at Olivetti in Milan and was followed by his commission to create a monumental mural for the company's New York showroom in 1953. This highly original sandcast cement bas-relief inspired more collaborations with influential modern architects such as Eero Saarinen, Jose Luis Sert, Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer. The unique and consummate understanding of scale and material that Nivola gleaned from his experience with architects, coupled with his early training as a mason, soon prompted him to explore freestanding sculpture and wall reliefs in the private atmosphere of his studio.

(over)

The Nivolas' move to The Springs on the East End of Long Island in 1948 allowed Costantino to build a large studio and inspired him to create an open plan garden and outdoor sculptures around the family's 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse. Nivola found himself living at the fulcrum of Abstract Expressionism underway in the nearby studios of his friends Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko. Indeed, his response to the contrast of life between the wars in Europe and America was many faceted. He painted the vitality of New York in dazzling cityscapes; he was moved to humanize the texture of cement architecture with his novel sand and cement casting technique; and, ultimately, he sculpted calm silhouettes of iconic female figures and cubistic male volumes in wet cement, plaster and sand, travertine, marble, wood, terracotta and tin. In his mason's hands, the various materials of both high and low art became modern.

Seen for the first time in America, several late sculptures made in the decade before his death in 1988 are highly abstracted figurative forms in travertine and Carrara white, black and salmon marble carved in a marble yard in Pietrasanta. Three superbly articulated white marble abstract figures reveal the translucence of the Carrara stone discovered by Michelangelo centuries earlier. The open embrace of a female archetype appears as if released by the geological history of a pink marble holding wisps of gray clouds. The subtle modeling of the smooth surface wraps these figures in silent, reverent postures. Nivola was a master of the nuances in form that bring his sculptural representations to the brink of pure abstraction. The largest work on view, wrought in rich, fossil-embedded travertine, is a cubist monument to the transformative power of a stone mason's chisel. Process and form are one in this masterpiece.

In a series of cast bronzes made in an Italian foundry where he returned to work over thirty years, Nivola expanded the range of refined silhouettes of his Sardinian widows. Their sinuous profiles finished with the classic, Roman patina gives the unique proportions of his sleek figures a profound unity of form. With delicate breasts and bellies emerging like rising bread from the bowl, these archaic Mediterranean forms celebrate the mother goddess. Also presented are a number of diminutive *Architectures* that Nivola cast in 1981 from highly textured wax sculptures less than five inches high.

The earliest works in this exhibition are concrete forms carved wet in Nivola's garden. In these one senses the influence of Sardinian village walls, rock cliffs and ancient materials put to modern use. Nivola made the concrete sculpture to inhabit his garden, a unique aspect of his legacy that continues to engage international audiences.

Costantino Nivola was a sculptor of monumental talents. His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art among many other institutions. The Nivola Museum, founded in 1995 in his hometown of Orani, Sardinia, houses the most comprehensive collection of his work in all scale and media. He is the subject of several monographs and an upcoming catalogue raisonné.

Gallery hours: Monday – Saturday 10-6; Sunday 11-5

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