

THE DRAWING ROOM 16R Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937 T 631.324.5016

COSTANTINO NIVOLA

Bronze • Marble • Terracotta • Tin • Cement • Wood

Opening July 12 and on view through August 14, 2007, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present *Costantino Nivola (1911-1988)*, an exhibition of sculpture in bronze, marble, terracotta, tin, cement and wood. Nivola was drawn to the qualities of various materials both high and low in modern art. This presentation of his sculpture in five media allows one to appreciate the breadth of his mythic vision for sculpture and to see the lyrical figural forms for which he is well known in Europe and America.

Born in Sardinia, Nivola immigrated to New York City with his wife Ruth Guggenheim in 1939, via Milan and Paris where he was trained in painting, architecture and design. Their move to The Springs on the East End of Long Island in the late 1940s placed the Nivolas at the center of the birth of Abstract Expressionism that was underway in the studios of his friends Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko along with the other émigré artists renown for their rich, painterly response to the contrast of life between the wars in Europe and life in America. Interested in the possibilities for integrating sculpture and architecture, Nivola created sand-cast and plaster murals in collaboration with architects such as Eero Saarinen, Jose Luis Sert and Marcel Breuer for many important buildings. The unique and consummate understanding of scale and material that he gleaned from his experience with architects, coupled with his background as a Sardinian mason, led him to explore freestanding sculpture as well as wall reliefs.

The majority of the small works in this show, made in the eight years before his death in 1988, are a summation of the highly abstracted figurative forms he realized also on a larger scale in marble and travertine at the quarries of Pietra Santa, Italy, and in bronze at foundries in Astoria and Rome. Three major stone figures tower over the smaller works. Two superbly carved white marbles reveal the translucence of the stone, which enhances the subtle modeling of the smooth surface that seems to wrap the figures in a silent, reverent posture. One figure appears to embrace itself while the other is proud and open to the world. Nivola was a master of the nuances in form that bring his sculptural representations of the human figure to the brink of pure abstraction. Nivola went to the edge with his figuration and held onto the human presence when he gave himself the choice.

The earliest works in this exhibition date from the 1970s and are carved concrete forms with painted surfaces. In these one senses the influence of Mediterranean village walls, rock cliffs and ancient materials put to modern use. In one cubistic block of carved concrete, Nivola paints jazzy black and gray stripes with blue accents making each side pop. In another figure a sleek, flat body of white concrete is delineated by a painted vermilion line, which zips the carved planes into focus. In the cements (as well as in bronze and marble), Nivola often incised lines to give figural definition to his abstract shapes with slow contours. The concrete sculpture was carved wet in the Nivola's garden where he also made graffiti wall murals. While he enjoyed the sand colored recipe for concrete, he also experimented by mixing pigments to achieve a marbled medium, which adds a geological history to several of the monumental, cubist cements.

In contrast to the cement sculpture in which the human form emerges from a cubistic block of carved cement, the work in terracotta seems to fly. Evoking winged goddesses or chasubles spread as in Matisse's chapel in Vence, the terracotta figures have an ancient, windswept presence. Their delicacy of form gives the terracottas with elongated waistlines a Cycladic profile.

The two works in wood represent a large body of carved figures in which Nivola searched the grain in a block of wood to find the balance of movement and color to give expression to his archetypal female figures. Humble in their materials, these two works show the artist's hand and mind at work as he mined the potential of physical materiality to serve his ideas.

It is in the bronzes that Nivola refined the silhouettes of his Sardinian widows; their sinuous profiles depict frontal female forms with breasts and bellies. The classic, dark brown patina gives the unique proportions of his sleek figures a profound unity of form.

Rarely shown before, the tin sculptures reveal the immediate pleasure the sculptor took in shaping a material to his own imagination. Cutting tin as if it were paper, Nivola used metal smith's scissors to fancy an entire population of puppet figures. Some are regal with capes fashioned from folding the edges to effect costumes. Others clearly represent a mother with a child on her lap or a couple attached at the core. These tin sculptures are a reduction of all of Nivola's shapes and, seen on this intimate scale of five inches in height, they reveal a remarkable fresh playfulness unparalleled in modern sculpture.

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 international institutions. The Nivola Museum, founded in his hometown of Orani, Sardinia in 1995, 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.

For further information or reproductions, please contact Susan Papa at 631.324.5016 or info@drawingroom-gallery.com