

PRESS RELEASE

Extended through September 29, 2024

Gallery hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Monday, 11–5 and Sunday 12 to 4; other days by appointment

COSTANTINO NIVOLA

bronze, fresco, concrete, marble, sandcast, terracotta



M28, 1969, concrete, paint, 18 3/4 x 6 3/4 x 5 inches



M.05, 1959, concrete, paint, 28 1/4 x 20 1/4 x 1 3/8 inches

Opening July 26 and on view through September 29, 2024, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present Costantino Nivola (1911-1988), an exhibition of figurative sculpture spanning four decades. The show includes a brilliant fresco from 1959, important examples of his innovative sandcast reliefs, and sculptures in concrete, marble, terracotta and bronze.

Nivola's natural intuition about materials and proportion began with his early practice as a Sardinian mason, and grew from his training in design and architecture at the Instituto d'Arte, Monza, Italy in 1935. 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 in 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. Other artists in their community included émigré artists renowned for their original, radical responses to the contrast of life between the wars in Europe and America.

Drawn to the qualities of both high and low materials in modern art, Nivola was a master of traditional sculpture techniques as well as an innovator of methods for large scale mural reliefs. Sculpting in bronze, wet concrete, marble and terracotta he reimagined the modern idol after Cubism at the peak of Abstract Expressionism. By 1953, Nivola's ambitious sandcast process for wall reliefs won him the commission for a grand architectural mural for the first Olivetti showroom in America in New York City. A commanding maquette for the Olivetti project is currently on view in the 2024 Venice Biennale.

Collaborations with noted international architects inspired by the success of his Olivetti mural continued through the 1980s with numerous prestigious public commissions on buildings designed by Eero Saarinen, Jose Luis Sert, Ivan Chermayeff and Marcel Breuer. Several reliefs in this exhibition are maquettes for those important and monumental public and private commissions.

Each of the pedestal sculptures stands proud and timeless in space, and slim terracotta figurines recall the silhouettes of Cycladic art. In the bronze casts from the 1980's Nivola refined the sleek, swaying silhouettes of his dancing Sardinian figures; the classic, dark brown patina gives the proportions a profound unity of form. In contrast, the diminutive chunky cubistic bronzes suggest man as architecture. In translucent black, pink and white marble, Nivola's figures embody both ancient and modern traditions.

Nivola's lyrical opus of figurative sculpture stands in contrast to his vision and execution of the sandcast reliefs in which he explored flatness and shadow, resonant concerns of Abstract Expressionism. His existential representations of the human figure hover on the brink of pure abstraction.



M.06, 1968, 11 ¼ x 6 ¼ x 5 ½ inches



P67, 1982 bronze, 8 ¾ x 4 ¾ x 1 ½ inches



DM230, 1982, 7 ¼ x 4 x ¾ inches



A46, 1961, sandcast plaster relief, 16 ¼ x 28 ½ x 1 ⅝ inches

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contact Candace Whitman at 631 324.5016 or info@drawingroom-gallery.com
www.drawingroom-gallery.com