



Vincent Pepi, Unique Abstract Expressionist, at Quogue Gallery

June 16, 2016

by Sponsors

Continuing its exploration of the expressionist masters that made New York the post-war center of the art world, Quogue Gallery will spotlight the remarkable career of Vincent Pepi in a survey of the vibrant paintings and watercolors he made from 1949 through 1996. "Vincent Pepi: Over 50 Years of Painting" will be on view at the gallery at 44 Quogue Street from June 16 to July 14, 2016, with an Artist's Reception scheduled on the artist's 90th birthday, June 25, 2016, from 4 to 7 p.m.

Pepi's story is one of a committed Abstract Expressionist from the heyday of the movement, but with a difference. While many in the group remained in New York—in the city and in many cases on Long Island's East End—staying close to the museums and galleries that fostered their careers, [Vincent Pepi](#) followed a globe-trotting trajectory that included Mexico, North Africa and extensive periods of residence in Italy, adding an international diversity to his unique approach. One of the highlights of the exhibition is a core group of early works, starting in 1949, made during a spectacularly prolific stay in Rome.



"49" by Vincent Pepi, 1949. Watercolor, 15 x 20 inches.

Currently a resident of Hampton Bays, N.Y., Pepi was born in Boston and moved with his family to Manhattan, where he attended the famed High School of Music and Art. Right after graduation he found a job as an illustrator, publishing his work in Good Housekeeping magazine. After serving in the U.S. Navy, in 1946 he was admitted to the highly competitive Cooper Union. He also attended studio classes at the Pratt Institute.

Two years later he moved to Mexico to study the murals of [David Alfaro Siqueiros](#) and [Diego Rivera](#), a fascination he shared with [Jackson Pollock](#) among others. When he returned to New York he joined an advertising agency, setting the pattern for a career as a painter that was supported by his steady work as a graphic designer. He would go on to head the graphic design team at New York University in 1953.

In 1949, just as the Abstract Expressionist movement was establishing itself as the up-and-coming force in New York, Pepi went to Rome for two years to study at the American Academy and immerse himself in the art historical tradition to which he pointedly related his painting, giving rise

to later critical accounts of his work as “academic” at heart.

His teacher was [Beppe Guzzi](#), a classically trained painter who instilled in his student a technical foundation in the figure and historic studio practices. Pepi absorbed the lessons of the Old Masters as well as the aesthetic of the Futurists such as Boccioni and Ballo, and was especially taken by the work of Matta, whose delicate figural gestures are a clear influence on Pepi’s watercolors.



“The Kiss” by Vincent Pepi, 1950. Watercolor, 20 x 15 inches.

The exhibition presents several works from the period, taking an in-depth look at Pepi’s Rome years and their lingering influence on his career. His commitment to the European source materials of his abstract art is similar to that of [Conrad Marca-Relli](#), who also shuttled between New York and Italy and, ironically enough, ended up sharing the same studio building as Pepi in New York; the other tenant was [Franz Kline](#).

Both Pepi and Marca-Relli combined their sophisticated European experience with the raw energy of New York’s Abstract Expressionism in an idiom that was both international and original.

Returning to Manhattan in 1951, Pepi plunged into the heart of the action painting scene, taking classes with the renowned [Hans Hofmann](#), who had trained Kline, [Lee Krasner](#), [Robert Motherwell](#) and many others.

In addition to studying under Hofmann, Pepi attended a few of the meetings of the famous “Club,” where Pollock, Kline, [Willem de Kooning](#) and the stars of the era energetically held forth and produced their manifestoes, but he assiduously avoided becoming a mere follower on the scene.



“705” by Vincent Pepi, 1986. Oil on board, 48 x 36 inches.

Pepi’s work from that period brought the action from the vast canvases that were popular at the time to the controlled space of a watercolor. One of the hallmarks of Abstract Expressionism was the liberation of the gesture to convey meaning and feeling. From the start of his long career to his later works, Pepi made generous use of this license to unleash bold strokes on an intimate scale.

When Pepi turned, as de Kooning did, to the figure in a late phase during the 1980s, he gave his

classical training in life drawing a chromatic and gestural twist that was wholly expressionist.



"973" by Vincent Pepi, 1988. Watercolor on paper, 14 x 11 inches.

The artist's place in the chronicles of art history is assured by his inclusion in many of the reviews of major exhibitions from the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, as well as in the scholarship of important critics. He was included in an important survey compiled in 2000 by Marika Herskovic, "The New York School Abstract Expressionists: Artists Choice by Artists." He is featured in a number of prominent public collections, including the Smithsonian, the Heckscher Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, the Montclair Museum of Art, and such university museums as Brown University, the University of Greensboro and Tufts University.



"1226" by Vincent Pepi, 1993. Watercolor and gouache, 18 x 24 inches.

Among the most insightful essays on his work is a career survey by Greta Berman, an art historian who teaches, appropriately enough, at the Juilliard School. Berman connects Pepi's painting not only to such artistic influences as [Matta](#), [Gorky](#), [Kandinsky](#) and [Cezanne](#), but to the inspirational model of music. After noting that Pepi learned to play the tenor saxophone, Berman observes: "Color and music appear parallel to him; the artist/musician improvises with both."



"1227" by Vincent Pepi, 1993. Watercolor and gouache, 18 x 24 inches.

ABOUT QUOGUE GALLERY

As Quogue's first and only private art gallery, the [Quogue Gallery](#) is a dynamic new space in the Hamptons where artists, collectors, and art enthusiasts can meet and share their common passion for serious artistic investigation and appreciation. The gallery's mission is to present a program of

artistic excellence not limited to any genre or medium. Its focus is on modern and contemporary art created by emerging, established, and historically important artists. An essential aspect of the mission is to establish the gallery as an active, vibrant, and inventive participant in the Hamptons art panorama, with artist talks and events that significantly contribute to the modern and contemporary art discourse.

Quogue Gallery is at 44 Quogue Street, Quogue, NY 11959. www.quoquogallery.com

BASIC FACTS: “Vincent Pepi: Over 50 Years of Painting” is on view June 16 to July 14, 2016, at the Quogue Gallery, 44 Quogue Street, Quogue, NY 11959. An Artist’s Reception is scheduled on Saturday, June 25, from 4 to 7 p.m.

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