



# Giancarlo Impiglia's Bright and Bold Compositions Beckon and Challenge to Come Close to the Art

July 28, 2017

by Pat Rogers

It's a colorful show—bright shards of yellow, red, gold and blue are integral parts of numerous paintings by Giancarlo Impiglia. The Italian-born American artist's work is currently the subject of a retrospective at the Levitas Center for The Arts at the Southampton Cultural Center. Both the show and its presentation at the Southampton Cultural Center are unexpected for a gallery that primarily presents group shows.

"Giancarlo Impiglia – Rhythms of Color" is a concise retrospective of 23 paintings and one sculpture that echoes a sprawling show at the [National Arts Club](#) in New York last year. The Southampton show presents selections from several series plus one distinct body of work. Made between 1999 and 2017, the art provides a window into Impiglia's eclectic style and satirical sensibility, representing a long-ago decision to push his art and chosen materials to wherever they might lead, the artist said in an interview, bucking early advice to adopt a single identifiable style for his art.



"Gossip" by Giancarlo Impiglia. Oil on panel, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy Counterpoint Contemporary.

[Giancarlo Impiglia](#) is known primarily for abstract figuration or abstraction inspired by Cubism, Arte Povera and aspects of Italian Futurism. He is arguably best known for his figurative art deco paintings with people forming homogeneous crowds in identifiable scenes, possessing featureless faces as if their identities had been swapped with those of flattened manikins. Works of note include commissioned murals or paintings for the [legendary QE2](#) (Queen Mary 2), currently docked in Dubai for transformation into a hotel resort, and for the original art deco luxury liner [Queen Elizabeth](#). Impiglia's work may also be recognizable through an [Absolut ad](#), based on a 1972 painting of a couple rendered in his cubist anonymous style.

Born in Rome, Impiglia studied at Licco Artistico and the [Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma](#) and worked under Italian post-war artists including [Umberto Mastroianni](#) and [Mario Mafai](#). He was part of the avant-garde of the early '60s in the Arte Povera movement, pioneered by [Alberto Burri](#), and

made art using blue jeans, fabric and camouflage canvas as commentary to speak against the Vietnam war and the pursuit of social status, he said. Impiglia's move to New York City in the '70s also influenced and transformed his art. Enraptured by the pulse of the city and its grid-like navigation structure, he began to make paintings that revealed the energy of people living their urban lives with hints that all wasn't as wonderful as it might seem. The social commentary was portrayed as subtle touches in the colorful and easy-to-enjoy compositions, he explained.



"Morning Commute" by Giancarlo Impiglia, 1998. Oil on canvas. Courtesy Counterpoint Contemporary.

The more paintings he made, the more an awareness began to set in that layering his reflections of current society as subtle contrasts was an important aspect of his art making approach. The result is art that pulls viewers close but keeps them at bay until a decision is made to fully approach the work and explore what might be lurking quietly in picturesque corners.

Gazing around the two-room space of the [Southampton Cultural Center gallery](#), it's easy to get swept away by the bright colors, bold compositions and striking stories of lives in mid-motion portrayed in Impiglia's paintings. Rendered in flat geometrics, the faces of the figures are devoid of features and presented as solid plains of color. While individuality has been stripped from each, the narrative circumstances are specific and easy to interpret. Scenes include life in freeze-frame at upscale parties, the bustle of people jockeying for space on crowded sidewalks in an energy-charged New York City, and a homey setting for a clandestine sexual connection.



"The Secret Affair" by Giancarlo Impiglia. Acrylic on silk, 52 x 52 inches. Courtesy of Counterpoint Contemporary.

The relatable settings and facelessness of the players within them are a commentary on the societal emphasis on material possessions and a lifestyle that supports it, as well as superficiality and self-centeredness, the artist explained while surrounded by his art on view. "I don't want to hit people over the head with this," said Impiglia. "I want them to enjoy the work. But when you start to look closer, you begin to see something other than bright colors, happy people and parties or night scenes."



“Golden Nights” by Giancarlo Impiglia. Acrylic and oil on silk. 60 x 48 inches.  
Courtesy Counterpoint Contemporary.

A highlight in this style is *Personaggi*, 2010. In a sense, this is where Impiglia’s broader inclusion of social issues and commentary in his art took root.

Invited to Cuba as part of a cultural exchange in 1996, Impiglia was struck by the contrast of the festivities and lighthearted nature of social gatherings he was part of while unrest and threat of upheaval seemed to lurk right outside the doors. Upon returning to the United States, the memory stayed with him and Impiglia eventually painted *Personaggi* to capture the contrast. The painting features bolder visual elements and color choices to key to the commentary woven into the work. Since then, a strong element of social commentary is as much a part of the art as the materials themselves, although masked among colorful and intriguing compositions, no matter which style and tone the artist employs.



“Personaggi” by Giancarlo Impiglia, 2010. Oil on Camouflage. Courtesy Counterpoint Contemporary.

In the exhibition, “The “Camouflage Series” is arguably the most distinct series on view and is a far cry from his near decorative figurative works. All the paintings are made on fabric with a camouflage pattern that is left exposed in places and painted over in others. Each of the four paintings exhibited portrays a single religious icon or figure as a primary compositional element. The series explores violence and war and religion’s role in inflaming both by juxtaposing scenes inspired by classical paintings, religious iconography and contemporary symbols of violence. Impiglia’s use of fabric and camouflage reconnects the artist to his early art making practice in Rome when outspokenness and pushing art as far as it could go through materials plucked from daily life and conceptualism were an integral part of his process.



“A Meditation on War” by Giancarlo Impiglia, 2013. Acrylic and Oil on Camouflage. Courtesy of Counterpoint Contemporary.

A return to his more rebellious days and go bolder in his art only seemed fitting, considering the

turmoil currently in the world, Impiglia said. Expressing commentary in a more distinct way felt like a call to arms of sorts to channel his art making as a way to contribute something positive to the world at large and stand up for what he feels is right.

"I am an artist and this is what I do," he said. "It's important that I express my thoughts on society and what is happening now in my paintings."



"The Beginning" by Giancarlo Impiglia. Oil on camouflage. Courtesy of Counterpoint Contemporary.

Returning to embrace an overview of the distinct series of art that makes up "[Rhythms of Color](#)," Impiglia commitment to going where his art leads him can be found in the range of styles that round out the retrospective. The show presents a nice selection of pure abstract paintings and a sculpture expressed in colorful geometric abstraction that portrays Impiglia's penchant for steep triangles and shards. The title of the exhibition, "Rhythms of Color," was inspired by an abstract painting from this body of work, said Impiglia. In addition, there are cut out paintings on aluminum incorporating natural forms and religious parables, and a series of small nudes.



"Shards of Glass" by Giancarlo Impiglia, 2012. Oil on panel. Courtesy of the artist.

"Since the beginning, I have detached myself from conformity and make art by embracing a unique vision where eclecticism is the foundation of my signature style," said Impiglia. "I'm not interested in trends; I create art where it takes me and use materials that aren't typical. This is my roots and the roots of Arte Povera. It's not because the art is poor, it's because the materials are ordinary and this helps to keep the avant-garde in the art."

Giancarlo Impiglia's art has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in the collections of The Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Absolut Art Collection in Stockholm. His art has been the subject of three books. The artist is based in Bridgehampton in The Hamptons.

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**BASIC FACTS:** "Giancarlo Impiglia - Rhythms of Color" is on view in the full retrospective from June 16 to July 28 and continues, in part, through July 31, 2017 at the Southampton Cultural Center's

Levitas Center for The Arts, 26 Pond Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. [www.scc-arts.org](http://www.scc-arts.org).

To see more of Giancarlo Impiglia's art, visit [www.giancarloimpiglia.com](http://www.giancarloimpiglia.com). He is currently represented by [Counterpoint Contemporary](#) in The Hamptons.

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