

Obituary

Carlo Rossi RSW, RGI: 13 February 1921 – 6 November 2010

Carlo Rossi RSW, RGI has died aged 89.

Eugenio Federico Carlo Rossi was born in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, Glasgow in 1921. He studied at Glasgow School of Art graduating in 1943 and in. He was elected a member of The Royal Scottish Society of Painters Watercolour in 1973 and the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts in 1978.

Although born in Scotland, Rossi's work from the beginning was dominated by a sympathy and feeling for Italy. His parents were Italian and the culture of the Rossi home in Glasgow – language, music, etc - was Italian. His father Domenico modelled for Fra Newberry (head of the Glasgow School of Art in the 1880s and inspirational teacher to Charles Rennie Mackintosh).

Rossi's talent for drawing and painting was soon evident. He received his first commission at the age of four: to make three drawings to advertise the Pianola in the family café in Glasgow. He excelled academically at school, achieving highly in English, French and Mathematics. His headmaster wrote a letter to Domenico encouraging him send Rossi to University. Domenico had too much respect for the arts and refused to convince Rossi to waste his god-given talent of painting. So as a child Rossi committed to his artistic career, supported by his father and never had to struggle to break free from a different career path chosen for him.

In 1938 whilst studying at Glasgow School of Art Rossi sought inspiration in the work of Paul Cezanne, Picasso and French cubist Georges Braque. His still life works of that period are remarkable for their treatment of colour, soft muted tones enhancing very quiet compositions, where echoes are seen of the work of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi. Although Cezanne and Braque were dominant forces Rossi also experimented with works in the style of both Picasso and briefly the Fauvists. Rossi's teachers included Hugh Adam Crawford and Henry Young Alison but felt he was encouraged most of all by J.D. Ferguson. Ferguson's influence enabled Rossi to break free of any establishment expectations to commit to the French impressionists or Scottish Colourists. This was a brave decision to make at that time and he remained committed to his resolve. Amongst his friends were Joan Eardly and Alfredo Avella and Margot Sandeman.

The turning point for Rossi came when he met his Italian speaking wife Vittoria Bertoncini who had travelled from Italy with her sister to Scotland to study. He was twenty three years old. They married in 1944 and had two sons : Paolo and Mario.

Rossi travelled to Italy for the first time in 1946 and came into direct contact with the sights, sounds tastes and smells of Italy that he had heard of all his life. The sight of the pink and ochre painted houses with their terracotta roof tiles, surrounded by vines, cypress and pine trees along the west coast rail line to Pisa were a revelation. After

Pisa he journeyed through the Serchio Valley, past his mother's (Teresina Francesconi) birthplace, to what was to be his new spiritual home: Barga. This small town perched on the summit of a peak in the middle of the Tuscan Apennines has magnificent views and we can date Rossi's lifelong passion for the Italian landscape from this first visit. The many paintings of the hill-town are filled with warm colours depicting the red-roofed buildings, luxuriant foliage and represent magically on the canvas the full impact of the atmosphere of an Italian midsummer's day. Rossi applied the paint with great virtuosity, tempered always with his sensitive and poetic nature.

Rossi never tired of experimenting using paper packaging and collage in his work. He became a prolific printmaker producing thousands of monotypes of reclining nudes and classical Greek and Roman imagery. Music was a dominant force in his life and subsequently in his art musical instruments often appeared in his paintings. Rossi often compared his work to the music of Bach. His still life works were carefully orchestrated fugues of shape and colours linked together and controlled by the geometry of the line. Rossi frequently recalled that first journey through Italy when he was once accompanied by Giuseppe Taddei, a then young Italian baritone who regaled Rossi with the full majesty of his vocal dexterity as they journeyed down the peninsula. Rossi journeyed in his paintings moving out of Barga, if only for sojourns and begun to pay attention to other town and cities – San Gimignano, Siena and Venice. Whether it is a response to the ever changing sunlight, revealing myriad of colours in the facades and the rippling waters of the Canal Grande and lagoons; Palazzo Dario or the magic cast by the artificial lights of the lanterns on the buildings and boats, these paintings inject the vitality of life-force that is Italy into the crumbling stone and stucco of the fast-fading splendour of the most serene republic.

Rossi inherited things bred in the blood; inspiration from his distant homeland awakened arguably the most brilliant unsung hero Scotland has ever seen.