

## **Massimo D'Orta at Più Tono. Celebrating an Anniversary with a Neapolitan Brush**

Marina Melchionda (July 22, 2009)



On July 9, Più Tono, the Beauty Salon owned by the renowned Italian Hair Stylist Maria Teresa Sansolone celebrated its first anniversary. On that occasion, painter Massimo d'Orta made his debut in the US with the exhibit "Sponde", hosted in the venue for two weeks. I-Italy joined the celebrations



and interviewed the Neapolitan artist

1345 Second Avenue. On July 9, the best of Italian New York was gathered here, just a few steps away from the Italian Consulate, the Italian Cultural Institute and Central Park. Half way between the beauties of Manhattan and the Italian flag. Many Italians are frequent visitors of this venue, just as all those New Yorkers who just love Italian fashion and style. The beauty salon Più Tono was celebrating its first anniversary by throwing a fancy Jazz party and hosting an exhibit dedicated to the Neapolitan painter Massimo d'Orta.

During this past year, Più Tono has offered its busy clientele its exclusive facility not only for getting a new look, but to promote meetings, meet acquaintances and engage in cultural exchanges. Designed in a modern fashion, and sparkling with mirrors and brilliant lights, for its 1st Anniversary it welcomed hundreds of people who joined the party to celebrate the owner of the business, the Italian hairdresser Maria Teresa Sansalone.

Maria Teresa has gained popularity over the years, importing and also, why not, reproducing and creating in the city that typically Italian style that beauty salons throughout the world try to imitate. She has designed the hairstyle of many Italian and international top models and actresses, such as Jill Stuart, Monica Bellucci, Laura Morante, Sabrina Ferilli. Her cuts, colors, looks, are fresh, elegant and fancy just as she is, and they led her to become a symbol of "Italian Fashion" here in Manhattan.

Her salon with its sparkling walls offered an interesting contrast with the exhibit "Sponde" (Shores) : the paintings hung in every corner of the long and narrow room. For the first time in the United States, the works of art of Massimo d'Orta were there to communicate to the visitors a storm of sensations, from sorrow to wonder, sadness, pain and excitement. Dark colors and elusive shapes, not neat designs, invited the observer to explore the artist's soul, catch his thoughts, discover his dreams, looking at the world from his Neapolitan eyes. Naples is there, the canvas hides it under a cloak of colors. You can see how it shapes the works, affects them, changes them. That city full of problems, torments, but still incomparably charming, accompanies Massimo in his daily life, and his artistic path. That is the place where he grew up roaming its backstreets and where, at 14 years of age, he decided to reveal his contrasting sentiments through artistic expression. The masters he learned from were painters bound together by a common theme, depicting suffering humanity. And among these masters, he most often copied Caravaggio, receiving commissions from overseas.

It is not easy to describe Massimo's art. We might try to do it quoting the world renowned

critic of contemporary art: "... d'Orta considers an artistic work to be in constant loss of its potential, or better yet, trapped in a kind of dead zone where it retains its potential. It is for this reason that the artist's conception of the world is worthy of interest: his aim is to create images with a tangible need, not necessarily stemming from ideology or exclusively esthetic, but rather a real representation of the soul and of perception which can only be expressed through art.'

It is the title of the exhibit itself, "Sponde", and the selection of the works displayed that tells us the real aim of the artist: to introduce Naples to a wider public, a foreign one. To let people discover its secrets, those that can only be caught while walking on the "sponde", shores, of the Gulf of Naples known the world over, while staring at Vesuvius on one side and the immense horizon on the other, with the city in the background.

We asked Massimo something more about his American adventure, his works, and his life as a Neapolitan artist. This is what he told us...

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**Most of your exhibitions have been organized in Italy, and in Naples in particular. What brings you to the United States?**



The United States is the country where abstract Expressionism was created. It is the artistic current at the base of my work. I thought it was right to start my career outside of Italy here.

**Why did you chose such a particular venue, a beauty spa, for your exhibition?**

I have always loved challenges , both in my artistic and private life. Since my works portray sentiments of pain and sorrow, showing them in a location where, presumably, people try to escape from such feelings, seemed like a powerful provocation to me!

**The title of the exhibition is “Sponde”. Why did you choose this theme and these particular works for your “debut” in the United States?**

People are born, live, and die. Every once in a while they stop by a shore to rest, reflect, talk, dream and hope. They prepare themselves for a new journey to find love and they look for it until their sun sets... I was following this stream of consciousness while trying to find a title for my exhibit. And I thought “Sponde” would be the perfect one...

**Is there any particular reason why you chose to start your American adventure from New York?**

I consider the United States and New York in particular, a land of freedom and opportunity. For those who, just like me, never accepted clientelism and pseudo cultural behaviors, it is the ideal place for a show.

**What does this city mean to you? Do you feel that Naples and New York are similar in some way?**

Naples and New York are very different: under many points of view they represent opposite realities, but there is a strong bond between them. An extremely strong bond: a great vital energy that animates both cities. Neapolitans have always, with a smile on their face, been used to fight against moral death and bubonic pestilence that challenge the city; New Yorkers use it to achieve goals that become greater and greater as time passes by, and thus more difficult to attain.

**Do you believe in the globalization of art?**

I love diversity in all its forms. Diversity is enriching, it's stimulating, it is a continuous confrontation: Van Gogh would have never become such a great painter if he did not know Japanese art. The same for Picasso with African art. The only borderless language that I know and that I have always been dreaming of is the one of love.

**How much of Naples is there in your pictures?**

A lot, or at least I hope there is. Naples represents the eternal battle between life and death, good and evil. I try to portray it abandoning the classical stereotypes that see it as the city of pizza and mandolins. I try to introduce people to the real essence of the city.

**At the beginning of your career you defined art as a “therapy”, a shelter from a tough life. Does it still mean this to you?**

Quoting Freud, Art is a way to escape. As in the past, I consider art as a sort of pain killer against the evil for both the artist and the audience: it eases the pain, but does not eliminate its cause. The “



Cappella Sistina", the "Gioconda", the "Ronda di notte", the "Sposalizio della Vergine", did not prevent the creation of concentration camps, the raping of thousands of women, the death from hunger of millions of kids. And they never will, unfortunately, Nonetheless, I will keep painting. It's the only thing that I can and want to do.

### **What is the "mission" of an artist?**

I do not think that the artist has a mission. Those who claim to have one, are fooling themselves and others. I don't consider myself so important as to have a mission. I just have the duty to try to do what I was born for in the best way possible.

### **What are your projects for the near future?**

In October I will hold a solo exhibition in Castel dell'Ovo in Naples. In November, I will participate at the contemporary art fair in Padova and Brescia. Thanks to the well known art merchant Nahmad David, my works will soon enter the American market. At last, I feel the Statue of Liberty is looking right at me!

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