

Russo



The Art Gym Exhibition Program is sponsored by Marylhurst Art, the Art Division of Marylhurst College for Lifelong Learning, an accredited liberal arts college. Kay Shusarenko, Chairman; Paul Sutinen, Program Assistant; Terri Hopkins, Exhibitions Director. Marylhurst, Oregon 97036, telephone (503) 636-8141.

This catalogue is part of a series of exhibitions, catalogues and public forums on contemporary Northwest art sponsored by Marylhurst Art and the Marylhurst Art Advisory Board.

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ISBN 0-914435-12-4

Designed by Claudia Nix
Photography by Judith Muzzy

Michele Russo at Marylhurst is a retrospective exhibition of over forty years of paintings and drawings by one of the Northwest's most revered artists. Working closely with Russo, we have selected over thirty paintings and a like number of drawings for the exhibition in The Art Gym and the Mayer Gallery. It is of course impossible to fully represent an artist's career with only sixty works, and we can only hope that the paintings and drawings which we have included in this show will give the viewer a strong introduction to the major themes in Russo's art.

In preparing a large scale exhibition of this nature there are many people to whom we wish to express our appreciation. There are the collectors who have generously loaned works from their collections. Our thanks to Myron Bergren, Gerald Robinson, John Storrs and Michael Russo. Several individuals have contributed to the publication of the catalogue. We thank Ronna Hoffman, Susan Hoffman, Bernard Merrill, Robert Stoll, Harold and Arlene Schnitzer, Leonard and Lois Schnitzer, Gerry Pratt, and Harold and Ruth Saltzman.

We would also like to thank Jane Van Cleave for her thoughtful and insightful essay on

Russo's art; Claudia Nix for this and past catalogue designs; and Judith Muzzy for her work preparing photographs for the catalogue.

Both the Oregon Arts Commission and the Metropolitan Arts Commission in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts have helped make this project possible. We also wish to thank the members of the Marylhurst Art Advisory Board and Friends of The Gym for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Finally, we thank Michele Russo for the fully human works of art which he has given this community for over forty years, for his activism on behalf of art and artists, and for his ideas and inspiration to those who make art and those who present it to the public. In the spring of 1980, Mike was the guest speaker at a luncheon which raised the first funds to remodel The Art Gym for Northwest art. We were honored then, and we are honored now to launch our fifth exhibition season in The Art Gym with a major exhibition of his work.

Terri Hopkins
Exhibitions Director

Russo

Michele Russo
at
Marylhurst

Paintings and Drawings 1940-1984

August 4, 1984-October 10, 1984

Essay by
Jane VanCleve

The Art Gym, Marylhurst College for Lifelong Learning, Marylhurst, Oregon.

Paradoxes: The Painting of Michele Russo

by Jane Van Cleve

The paradox of Michele Russo's art, as expressed in both paintings and drawings, lies in the powerful discrepancy between a seemingly 'innocent' subject matter and its disquieting effect. This Northwest artist does not exploit exotic imagery. He does not confront us with an intensely private or specific information. Instead, we are confronted with the familiar—*but* his monumental nudes seem to extend the classical tradition—*but* his 'couples' evoke association with European masterworks (Monet's *Dejeuner sur L'Herbe*)—*but*, why is it, when the work looks so 'harmless', we feel ourselves delighted, but also provoked, challenged, teased or even 'on the spot'?

"You know, your paintings disturb me," said one candid art patron, pleasing Russo by this response. "Well, yes, they disturb me, too," the artist commiserated. "An intuitive pressure or impulse guides me. I have looked at images and wondered how they came about that way or what they could possibly be doing. When my faces disappeared, I was very puzzled by that. And, when the work became more simple, the simplicity made me uncomfortable. It was a kind of simplicity that was disturbing to me."

At some level, Russo's art happens in a dream. Almost every day for over fifty years he has committed brush to canvas or pen to paper, letting the hand guide the mind's search for contemporary impact and meaning from the figure. But at another level few artists import so much historical perspective to apparently timeless forms. Few artists are so thoughtful, canny or mischievous as Russo about the relevance of art to contemporary concerns. "The greatest contribution art can make is to be controversial," he has stated. "I think a work of art that is not controversial is a work that does not have any life." Russo also

admits his own paintings are deliberately confrontational. "Painting should be confrontational," he believes. "You want to say something in the strongest way you can say it that will involve the viewer as deeply as he is involved with reality. The painting moves into reality through the viewer. The viewer doesn't escape into fantasy through the painting." In other words, Russo doesn't intend his work to be 'easy.'

Russo's familiarity with controversy has deep roots in a complex childhood where he was exposed to two cultures without fully belonging to either one. Born on April 30, 1909, in Waterbury, Connecticut, he was the oldest child and only son of Nicola Maria Guisepppe Russo and Maria Filippa Ismele, who had emigrated from a small town in the Italian province of Foggia. Russo remembers his father as 'a slightly literate' peasant with high energy to better his prospects in America. He suspects his mother was less pleased with the move and still attached to old ties. When Russo was five, his mother took him to Italy for a visit which became a prolonged stay in a community jeopardized by World War I.

Ineligible for public schooling because he could not speak Italian, Russo became the charge of a Catholic priest, Father Giulio Perillo, who became a significant father-substitute. A jack of all trades, Perillo exposed the boy to the Italian language and culture, to his own passions for birds, gardens and art, and to humanistic values regarding the 'ideal.'

By the time Russo returned to the United States at age ten, he was Italian enough to feel himself 'a misfit' among his peers. Instead he empathized with the alienated and dispossessed figures in his ghetto-like neighborhood who were also 'outside' the American dream. An exceptional student, Russo did well in

grade school and high school, but resisted the expectations that he would be a middle-class success. After graduation, he preferred to take a job as a common laborer even though this employment was at odds with his intellectual and artistic giftedness.

Another kind of struggle happened at Yale University, which Russo entered in 1930 at a time when that school's elitism was mirrored in an academic conservative approach to art that frustrated Russo's inquisitive nature. As he explains, "I have an enormous regard for the great traditions. I was brought up with the classical traditions emphasized. Still, for my own self, I felt it was very important to reflect 'contemporariness.' To me, being a contemporary represented my vitality, my relationship with my own world and my own time. I've also felt that 'contemporariness' allows certain discrepancies in viewpoint, and I think these discrepancies are legitimate."

An example of Russo's capacity for discrepancy can be seen in his post-graduate lifestyle, where he became a political activist, but refused to be a politicized artist. By 1934, he had met fellow painter Sally Haley, who had also graduated from Yale. The couple married in 1935 and supported themselves by involvement in mural projects for the Works Progress Administration. Russo in particular espoused those student, feminist, and peace movements which opposed the rise of Fascism here and abroad. Simultaneously, however, Russo eschewed the aesthetics of "social realism" in painting. He preferred to inform his classical leanings by the more experimental aspects of European Expressionism and Surrealism.

If he was committed to the figure, he was also committed to the figure's 'shadow': the way the contemporary figure could not claim a heroic status in such difficult times. "The

figure was always a positive symbol of man's ability to solve problems, but in our time we have lost that," he muses.

"I think even during the Depression there was a strange alienation almost between nature and man and also a strange alienation between society and man because society often wasn't meeting the needs of needy people. There was a very strong feeling of helplessness that showed people up against a harsh, bitter landscape. These people were refugees. In a sense I have developed a philosophy that man is a refugee in our time."

Russo's own figure became a 'refugee,' too: generalized, awkward and of no particular place or time. It was an international figure that did not express a particularly American character even though chauvinism was vogueish in the Thirties. As Russo recalls, "America was going through an economic crisis, and this economic crisis turned our vision inward in a national way, where we began to emphasize all the provincial aspects of American life. There was a tremendous emphasis on everything that had local content," he states.

"But I felt very uncomfortable about this direction. I felt an obsessiveness about the American character was an artificial, limiting factor on the point of view of the artist. I also felt that much of the work of that time was a superficial and 'sight-seeing' sort of work."

In contrast, Russo remembers his early painting as being allegorical and mysterious, often involving dark tones that could seem 'gloomy, depressing and anti-painterly.' Russo had been chided at Yale for his strong use of black, one of his favorite colors. He was warned against black again by Boardman Robinson, under whom he studied when he received a fellowship to the Colorado Springs



Men Argue Strongly (c. 1937)

Fine Arts Center in 1936.

More important to Russo, though, even at this time, was a clarity of focus where the figure could be central to his canvas. "I always had an ambivalent attitude about subject matter and the obvious illustrative message painting. The only thing that I am consciously aware of is the figure and the gesture. The expressive nature of the gesture itself becomes an element of expressiveness as well as reality, giving the figure a living image," he believes. "And I think I have always avoided specific references, whether to landscape or time or anything. The figure itself is a symbol of universality, and references to a time and a landscape seem to defeat that universality."

In order to intensify the figure's impact, Russo began to explore the scale. "In my very earliest work, there's the presence of scale and experimentation with scale. I wanted to free the image from its representational aspects by enlarging the image to a size which would be in a sense irrational. When I was in Colorado Springs, I would paint huge giant still lifes with pots, and I would make the pots of such a dimension that they would have no relationship to any specific image."

This distinctive use of scale is evident in Russo's early Portland work, for by the time Russo came to the Northwest in 1947, he was already honing his particular way with the figure. First of all, his paintings had a striking simplicity. Often he would take a conventional composition and infuse it with a 'special 'hidden' life. Even in the intimate portrait of his son, Mike, one senses the figure's power, but also its vulnerability. In *Men Argue Strongly*, we see an energized baby, its little arms raised in a gesture of once assertive and defensive. This infant completely fills his space. He has a strong, full-bodied torso and wide open eyes. We don't doubt his presence. At the same time we are touched by the undeveloped legs and genitalia, suggesting the growth yet to happen. The child is singular, but also alone, with no shielding supports: no tufted mattress, no cradle frame, no protective garment. Russo's title is interesting, implying the baby already has a combative attitude about his survival, as if he has mixed feelings about joining the world and connecting with 'others' who are likely to demand as much as they give.

In another 'family portrait', *The Grandfather*, we sense the tenuousness and the hidden ambiguities of human relationship more directly, given the figures' irrational scale. Ostensibly, we see an old man and his granddaughter, both formally dressed and in a conventional pose. But the little girl, done up in her bow and patent leather shoes, is as large as her 'superior', the male, whose aristocratic mien doesn't quite rescue him from the collapsing axis of his body. The girl is open-eyed, engaging us directly while the old man holds us at bay through a heavy-lidded squint. The girl has dropped a casual arm on her elder's shoulder, this 'gesture' at once dependent and proprietary. By such simple details, Russo raises questions about power versus authority, life versus death, and placement versus displacement. The portrait has tension because so many oppositions will co-exist in a quiet, 'frozen' moment.

The confrontational aspects of Russo's art are often achieved by a juxtaposition of contradictory and inconsistent elements so that a painting may be realistic and surrealistic, logical and illogical, pleasing but also disturbing at the same time. As he explained in *The World of Russo* (Bigoni Books, 1981), "Not only am I Italian, but in many ways I feel Italian in a sense that I live with conflict. I think Italians have this extraordinary ability to combine lucid rationality with irrationality. Out of conflicting aspects of life, they create wholeness by putting opposites together. It's sort of a dualistic way of existing to make oppositions create the whole or the unity."

Certainly the painting *Swordsmen* confronts the viewer with a monstrous spectacle we both believe and disbelieve. Two well-dressed gentlemen are going at each other with knives, apparently engaged in mortal combat, but with such theatrical verve that the conflict seems burlesque. In their top hats and high collars, the males are high-positioned but also armored. Their fierce duel seems to entertain the smiling woman in the foreground, who may assume she is central to this contest even though she is scantily attired for another place, another scene. She could be irrelevant. Her toothy grin is echoed by the bared fangs of the dog, who also doesn't fit into the power struggle.

The visual irony in this painting is masterful: Russo in effect makes a violent shambles



Grandfather (c. 1945)



Retrospection (late 1950s)

of certain expectations associated with Romantic Love. He exposes how the 'heroes' are bestial, the woman is no princess, but rather a form of spoils or booty. And the dog becomes the 'wise figure' to actively bark against such absurd and deadly goings on. To the extent that the males are wordly and 'civilized', to that extent we have to question the purpose of civilization: does it merely mask or launder our worst instincts by euphemistic tactics whereby it becomes 'honorable' to kill or die for love?

Retrospection is much more poetic and subtle in its ironies although Russo is once again intrigued by the games people play: We see a very dapper young man, looking cocky and full of himself as he engages the viewer. But simultaneously, this figure looks awkward and even wooden, his feet not fully grounded, as if he might be a puppet held up by invisible strings. He lacks the power of presence one senses in the featureless but full-bodied nude, who half turns away from the male in a coy gesture, at once inviting and off-putting. We sense a courtship, but also the art of courtship where the woman gets the man by pretending to be hard to get. The surrealistic landscape in this painting gives the scene a dream-like quality. The two figures are at once 'knowing' and in the dark. Furthermore each figure projects such a stubborn separateness that one doubts their 'togetherness'. They're together, but they could be worlds apart.

That men and women may pretend 'relationship' in order to mask a complex alienation is an issue that pervades Russo's mature work.

As he explains, "I think the whole social struggle of the history of man revolves around the desire to fulfill a relationship with environment and a relationship with one another. And, of all the relationships between individuals, the relationship between men and women seems to be very complex and central.

"But I also think the man-woman relationship has a lot of absurd fantasy aspects to it which in my own mind produced almost automatically "the mockeries and ecstasies" theme I've explored in my paintings of 'couples.'

"I suppose man's ego requires that he consider himself more capable and efficient than women are," Russo speculates. "But it's also true that men believe women are more real



Processional (c. 1959)

and more practical. I think that men are really absurd. The woman becomes idealized and then becomes enslaved to that ideal which man has invented to keep her in her place.”

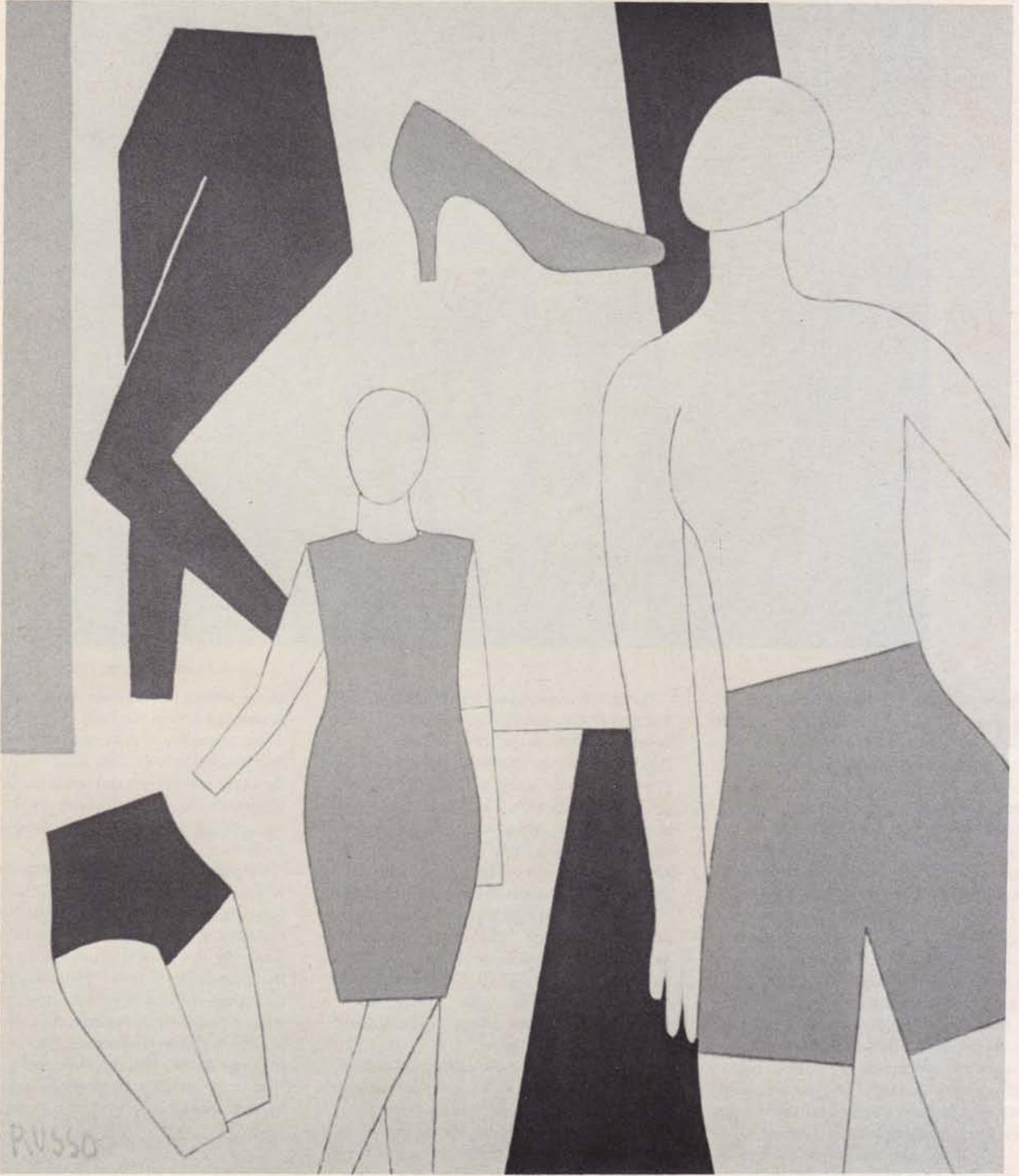
Thus, in another kind of painting—*Gesturing Women*, for example—Russo will deal with the tentativeness of the human figure. We see two women with their arms raised in parallel gestures of service or supplication. Both figures have a mute dignity; they are enough alike that they could be two aspects of the same form. Yet in a curious way they don't seem connected and could be two strangers. Such paintings confront us with what Russo calls “the mystery of being.” We sense the privacy of these figures, but also an ‘apartness’ we are moved to respect. Such figures are very powerful in their simple autonomy. They are featureless, anonymous, and yet they exhibit a kind of courage, just to hold their own and be themselves. To Russo's credit, such gentle images can evoke a strong emotional response.

We feel emotion again, responding to *Untitled* (1960s) (clothed man, nude woman), where the nude in the foreground has her head lowered, her shoulders slack and whose physical attitude seems to convey dejection, defeat or resignation. The suited man who observes her could be her friend, her lover, or her detractor, but he seems paralyzed in any case, unable to bridge an awkward or difficult gap between them. To Russo, spatial distance between figures becomes another kind of discrepancy. “This discrepancy seems to have an unreconcilable character to it so that the figures, while they are together, are also isolated from each other. While they're walking toward each other, they may also be walking away,” he says.

In *Processional*, we see a group of male bathers who, while walking toward us, also seem to be held back by a hostile atmosphere, mutilating of form. Heads are misshapen, features are lost. We could be observing this group in a distorting mirror. A further perversity is the absence of joy in a

group where figures once again are connected but not particularly engaging each other. A quality of grimness pervades this beach scene, where dark shadows overcast the body and there's an ominous sense of silence. *Processional* is not simply the sunny recreational image it pretends to be on the surface.

Frequently the ‘surface’ of a Russo painting will have an initial impact of lightness or light-heartedness, then undone by lurking, furtive and menacing possibilities we feel but don't see. Art critic Rachael Griffin expressed this paradox very well: “If the design, the treatment and the images in the canvas reassure us with their simplicity, the total import of the work does not. On the contrary it can be both troubling and bewildering, the meanings we begin to sense (as we continue to look) seeming always just beyond our reach.”



The Blue Shoe (c. 1968)

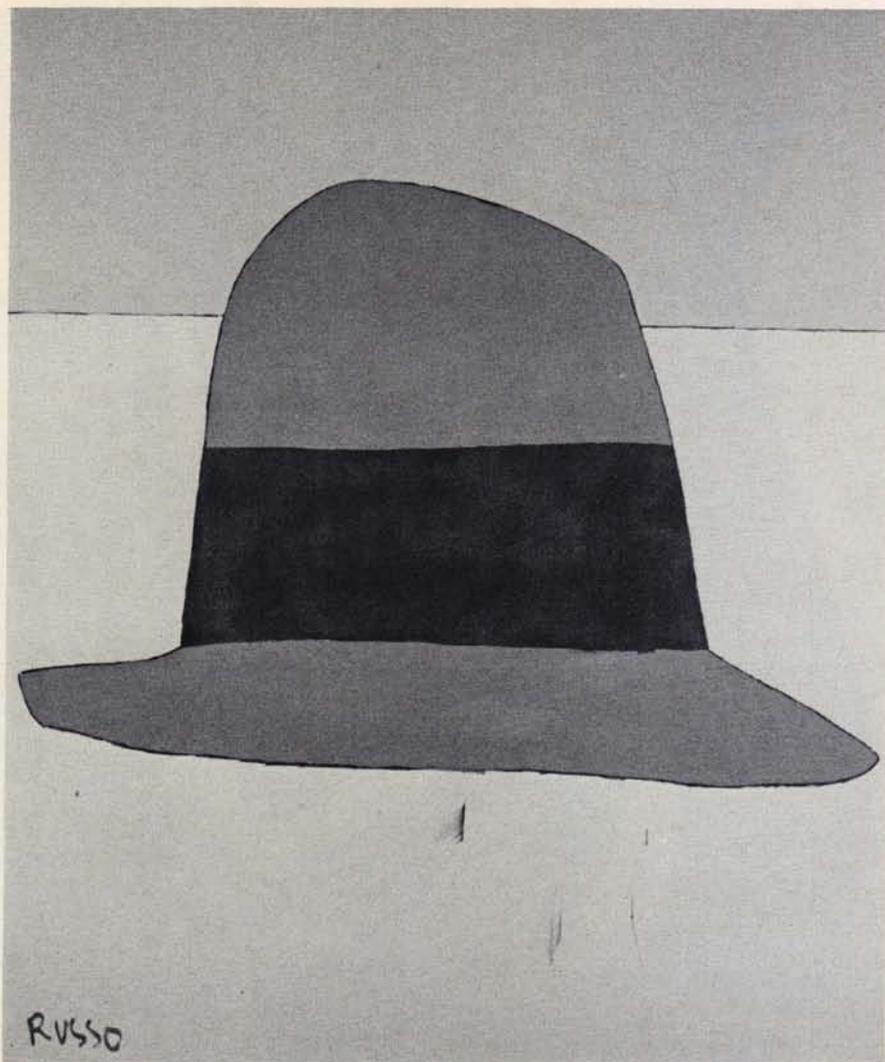
In the sixties Russo's painting style became more abstract, this abstraction once again serving to both clarify and distill the eloquence of the figure and the figurative gesture. Russo consciously shed unnecessary color, texture, and surface detail. Although a highly gifted painter, he minimized or toned down his technical virtuosity, feeling that at some level a display of technique competed with and distracted from the impact of the image. Contexts were not so much landscapes as spaces intersected by margins or horizon lines. His shapes, too, became more formal and geometric.

"I was always interested in geometric shapes, even on a philosophic basis," Russo has stated. During the violent debate between abstract expressionists and representational painters in the Fifties, Russo refused to choose a side. "I always felt that art is essentially abstract, and the methods, the forms and the structures an artist will use are abstract in essence. I have never felt there was a conflict between the abstract and the image. I felt that I was a figure painter, but I did not oppose in any way the abstract in art because I have always felt the abstract was essentially the grammar and language of art."

In some ways, abstraction has allowed Russo to be more pointed about the "life and life symbols" his art work explores. One can sense more clearly his humor and his light touch about the lie and the truth of his surface images. He can also highlight or underplay contrasts or absurdities that comment on our reality through art.

An example would be those paintings where the figure is fragmented or cut into pieces, these abstract body forms reminding us of advertisements, catalogs or sewing patterns. By further inference, these forms can work as symbols for the fashions, styles, and costumes by which individuals both communicate and camouflage their existence in the world. Russo's use of these conventions is never judgmental or accusatory. We don't sense a simplistic indictment of these symbols because he has rendered them in a way that is respectful and even tender. One could apply the insight of poet Richard Wilbur: "Love calls us to the things of the world."

However, Russo does convey his interest and curiosity about the fact that we invest external appointments—shoes, umbrellas, pants, and hats—with human meaning. Such



With Certitude (c. 1983)

externals—and particularly the hats—become figurative by implication. A hat traditionally has been a protective covering, but it has also been associated with myriad connotations, including wealth, class, power, authority, and aesthetic elegance. Russo has been both reverent and irreverent about the language of hats.

In one kind of painting, hats are juggled, kicked, stood on end, worn at a jaunty angle, or put on a pedestal like an art object. In another kind of hat painting, the image has been treated as seriously and solemnly as a papal portrait. What is significant about

Russo's skill is that he can make us feel as strongly about figurative objects in art as we may feel about such objects in the world. And we love certain forms. We love curves and straight lines. We love stripes. To the extent that we build our reality, incorporating these forms, to that extent the forms are extensions of figurative gesture.

On the other hand, when the hat stands for the figure that is 'present', we may have to wonder about the figure that is missing: the body fugitive and kept out of the picture. If we became our hats, would we be fully human?



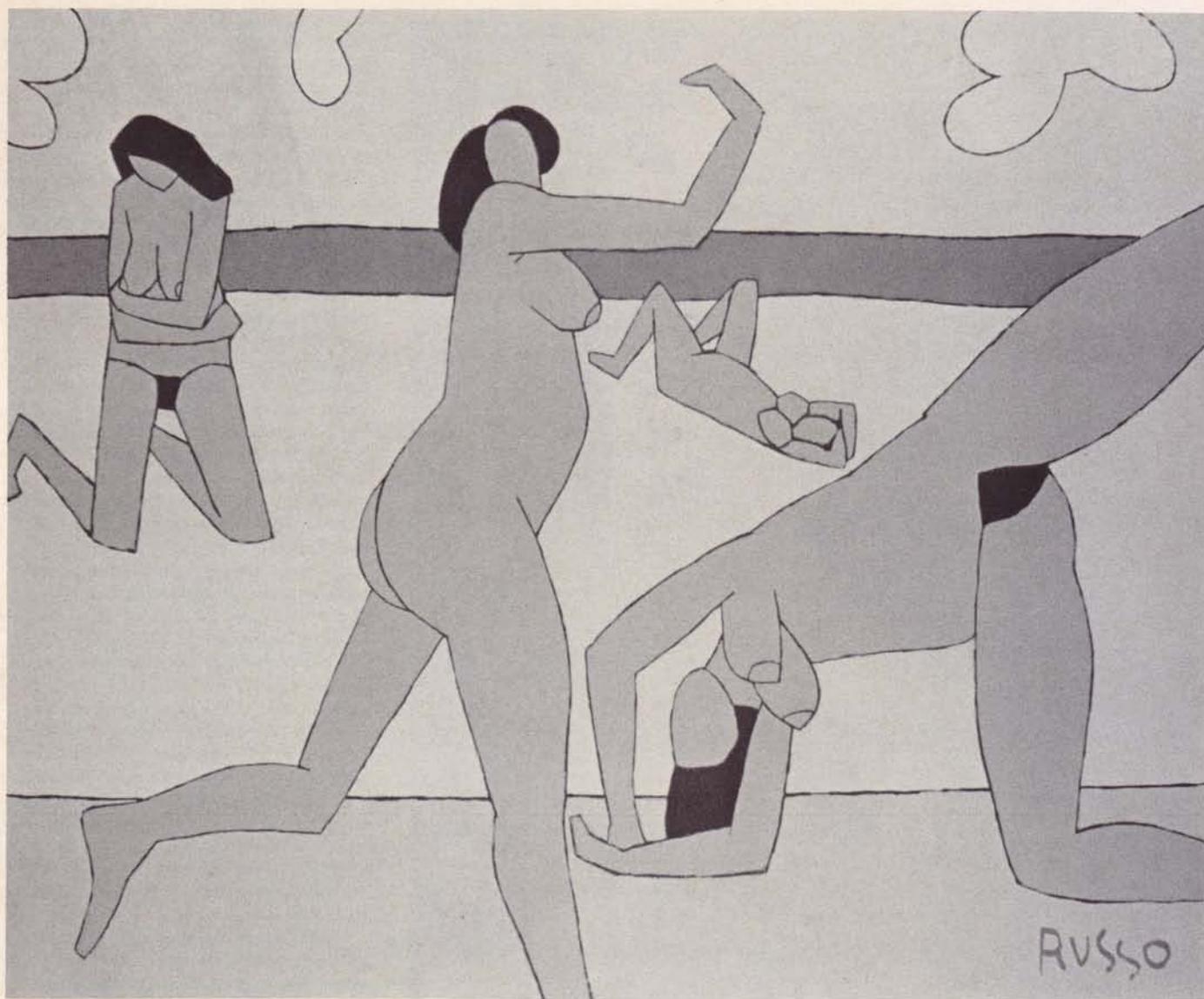
Carolling Stripes

"The Twentieth Century is really the century which emphasizes and dramatizes and is struggling with the importance of the individual," Russo has stated. "I think the figure has lost its central position both in modern art and in modern society. I think there is a great deal of embarrassment attached to the image of what the figure is. Who is he or she? In the modern world, the human figure has been discredited and has lost heroic significance."

When Russo came to Portland in 1947, he imported a fresh and perceptive kind of work, but he also imported the world view of a veteran 'refugee.' Not only had his generation survived a Depression and two World Wars, but artists in particular had been affected by political and aesthetic censorship trials. They could see more trouble on the horizon, plus the emergence of new industrial, technological, and media 'systems' that, while they promised human liberation, also carried the possibility of massive de-personalization.

Because his sympathies were with the individual as 'refugee', Russo was acutely aware of social restlessness: how most of us responded to change by changing ourselves, moving from place to place, relationship to relationship and constantly reshuffling the terms of our lives in an almost desperate search for wholeness or selfhood. "I have always had the feeling that we are all incomplete," Russo has mused. "Human beings are always on a search to recover what is missing. And often what is missing takes different forms, but often it is an ideal form, which to me, is a woman. When I have looked for this thing that is inside me and outside me, women have symbolized the mystery of myself."

Russo's nudes are at the heart of his creative vision and statement. Even in satiric works, they are full-bodied and consciously or unconsciously confront us with the unpredictable nature of the human spirit on one hand and nature on the other. A Russo nude makes personal and unified what traditional Western art subverted with 'sacred' and 'profane' conventions for female sexuality. In one kind of work, Russo's nude will convey the awkwardness and vulnerability of being human. Her power of presence will be obvious, but her fugitive aspects will be implied by a tentative footing or a turn of the head or a small telling gesture that conveys a



Of Days and Hours (c. 1983)

hidden, often disturbing 'otherness.'

In one strand of work, we will see nudes playing on a beach, these figures so innocent and beautiful as to produce feelings of longing. These women leap, cavort, prance and risk pratfalls without forfeiting grace or buoyancy. They express an energy that is contagious, inexhaustible and 'where it's at' if we could only get there. Such images transcend culture, time, and history by conveying a way to be alive that seems at

once natural and inaccessible. Maybe in rare moments as children we may have felt that 'free.'

In a contrasting strand of work, done in the Sixties, Russo's nudes embody the energy of struggle. A figure, complexly defined by light and shadow, will actively protest the ceilings, margins or oppressive space that keeps her cornered, not completely extended and not completely on her own feet. Feminists would be delighted that Russo has used

such a woman as a freedom fighter for the whole body: the woman not as passive victim, but as a kind of earthy, fierce underground guerilla, resisting oppressive constraints on her autonomy.

In his male-female 'couples', the nude often looks 'less fooled' than the male. She may conspire with him in worldly, comic postures, but she will simultaneously convey a quality of mischief or knowing bravado that makes the art of manipulation an open



As With Affection (c. 1980)

question. The suited male may 'show off', 'strut his stuff', but his form is more angular, more 'cut out' and puppet-like so that he is at once in charge and 'in tow', performing his escort role.

In the painting *As With Affection* the nude seems to keep an effortless 'natural' poise, 'going along' with her companion who has twisted his own body out of shape in order to cradle and embrace her. This male has already lost his hat and seems in danger of losing his head. In contrast, she is self-contained, her large dark nipple conveying a reality that counter-points his 'inventiveness.'

In another painting, *Come On Now*, the male seems to turn himself inside out, his balance in total jeopardy, in order to impress his 'lady', who functions like a 'straight man' to his absurd antics. It's as if she's tolerating a ridiculous behavior to appease his notion that he's pleasing her. His masculine hat teeters precariously on her shoulder, and what does that signify?

In a Chaplinesque fashion, Russo often captures that moment where the 'clown' is hoodwinked, but the audience isn't. And like Chaplin, he will use the pathetic and touching and lovable aspects of his figures to comment on the irrationality of certain social expectations, particularly in *Modern Times*.

Usually, the nude fares better, though, because, as Russo has said, "Women have a certain kind of reality that men don't have. Men can feel very helpless in relationship to the reality of women. Men associate women with a life force in a way that they don't associate themselves. Women bear children. Women have periods. Women are beautiful in unaccountable ways."

The ambiguity of feminine power is expressed in recent works where Russo's nude will confront us with the limits of what we know or are willing to face. Often this nude is alone and pensive, either sitting or supine, in a passive study that belies the energy of her sexual presence, which can't be ignored or denied. This nude is almost too large for her space. More importantly, she is a figure of mixed messages, her vitality at once expressed and latent. We see her body in an open, apparently unselfconscious display, her legs widespread and her pubis exposed: a dark wall or gate to something 'hidden' that could be renewing or annihilating, depending on one's point of view. Simul-

taneously, however, a casual gesture—an arm across the face or a hand dropped over the pelvis—will qualify her assertiveness. Then we'll sense the private hold-out, the 'shadow' of her doubts or fears or negative feelings, that inhibits her freedom of movement.

About this nude, Russo has said, "There's an element of aggression and struggle and defiance and maybe defeat. I don't know. She's very much a sexual being, and I think she's struggling with that." To some extent, we're made uncomfortable, too. Russo has confronted us with a physicality and a nakedness that would be shocking if not for his abstract treatment, which saves the 'purity' of the image. Even so, in another time, this work might have been censored. We, too, might censor that edge where our own insecurities come into play. Being frontal about sexuality in its fullest implications is still a taboo for most people.

"I think my paintings probably represent a challenge to that idea of what is pornographic," Russo muses in that soft, mildly accented voice that cannot be placed simply in Italy, New Jersey, or Portland. "And is pornography always pornography, or does it for some people at some time represent some kind of vital energy? Sometimes you have to go to strange places to tap this energy. I think the streets of America have often provided this energy, even the slums and the ghettos. Artists will even venture into the vulgarities of life to discover this energy."

In reference to the figure, Russo admits his fascination with the negative or troublesome or difficult aspects of 'being', which are mysterious. "To me, the emotional areas identified with rage, fear, and anger convey the unknown. When you paint or draw, you are trying to reach the unknown. I think the unknown is the greatest resource a person can have," he has said.

"I don't know how to define pornography, but whatever is anti-human or sexually brutal I would find distasteful." Russo's sexual nudes challenge the implications of pornography for their opposite qualities of humanness and fierce beauty. Through their abstraction, they also work at both the visual and symbolic level to raise questions about who we are.

Russo, in his work and in his life, has explored 'What it means to be human,' but he has done so through the language of art.



Nude (1984)



Michele Russo in his studio

Through his own commitment as both an artist and a citizen, he has gone against that tradition, particularly in this country, where art itself has been a kind of taboo, kept off the streets in temples and garrets where it can be de-toxified and neutered as a luxury item, a status symbol or a fine madness without relevance or power.

As an artist, a teacher, an art organizer, an art advocate, and an art commissioner, Russo has been an activist to connect art with people while also insisting that 'the language of art' not be restricted to popular tastes. Rather, people should have the opportunity

to expand their own limits from exposure to the insights and perceptions of artists. He is well aware of the paradox by which the private artist becomes 'the public servant' in time.

"I think, when the artist reveals his or her inner workings, that artist is really revealing what we all are, what everyone is," Russo asserts. "But I think we are very fragmented, and I think consciousness and awareness come with time and do not exist completely within one work. It's the total work that reveals the kind of path a man has travelled—where he came from and where he is going.

"And that's why, I suppose, museums, exhibitions and public art are important: they promote that idea of bringing the works of an artist together so that they can be scrutinized by everybody. In my opinion, art is by its nature public and universal," says Russo, who describes himself as 'shy', but who, by a prodigious outpouring of work, has both informed and advanced our Northwest culture.

Michele Russo

Biographical Summary

- 1909 Birth of Michele Russo in Waterbury, Connecticut
- 1934 Graduation with Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Yale University
- 1935 Marriage to Sally Haley; employment with WPA for state of Connecticut
- 1937 Fellowship to Colorado Springs; birth of son, Michael
- 1940 War-time employment as artist-technician at U.S. Rubber Company
- 1947 Acceptance of Faculty Position with Portland Art Museum School
- 1950 Birth of son, John
- 1958 Participant in the founding of Artists' Equity in Oregon
- 1961 Participant in the founding of the Fountain Gallery, Portland
- 1973 Participant in the founding of the Portland Center for the Visual Arts
- 1974 Retirement from the Portland Art Museum
- 1977 Appointment to the Portland Metropolitan Art Commission
- 1979 Recipient of the Governor's Award for the Arts

Selected Exhibitions

- 1983 *38th Corcoran Biennial of American Painting and Second Western States Exhibition*, circulated to Houston, Santa Fe and San Francisco
- 1983, 1982, 1980, 1978, 1977, 1975, 1971, 1968, 1965, 1963 Fountain Gallery of Art, Portland, Oregon, One-man Shows
- 1982 Fountain Fine Arts, Seattle, Washington
- 1982 Northlight Editions, Print Show, Portland, Oregon
- 1978 Portland Center for the Visual Arts, One-man Show
- 1977 Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Invitational
- 1974 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., *Art of the Pacific Northwest*
- 1966 Portland Art Museum, One-man Retrospective
- 1963 The Bush House Museum, Salem, Oregon
- 1963 Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California, *Pacific Coast Invitational*
- 1962 Seattle Center, World's Fair Exhibition, Washington
- 1959, 1952, 1951 Reed College, One-man Show
- 1952 Portland Art Museum Group Show
- 1952 Kraushaar Gallery, *Eight Oregon Artists*, New York
- 1947 Mamtuck Historical Society, Waterbury, Connecticut
- Early 1940s A.C.A. Gallery, New York City
- 1936 Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, *Artists West of the Mississippi* Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut

Selected Public Collections

- Pepsi Cola Bottling Company, Portland
- Fletcher, Finch and Farr, Portland, Oregon
- McGuire Co., San Francisco, California
- Dayton Art Institute, Ohio
- Instromedix, Portland, Oregon
- Portland Art Museum, Oregon
- Fred Meyer Savings and Loan, Portland, Oregon
- Hilton Hotel, Portland, Oregon
- Equitable Center, Portland, Oregon
- University of Oregon Art Museum, Eugene
- Seattle Art Museum, Washington
- Reed College, Portland, Oregon
- Pacific Northwest Bell Co., Seattle, Washington
- Rainier National Bank, Seattle, Washington
- Emanuel Hospital, Portland, Oregon
- Claremont Resort Hotel, Oakland, California
- Vista Travel Service, Portland, Oregon
- Pihas, Schmidt, and Westerdahl, Portland, Oregon
- Tonkin, Torp and Galen, Portland, Oregon
- Harsh Investment Corp., Portland, Oregon

Catalogue Listing

In the following listing, paintings are grouped primarily by theme. Within each theme we have attempted to list the paintings chronologically. As Russo does not date his canvasses, the years listed here are

approximations based on conversations with the artist and records provided by the Fountain Gallery of Art. Dimensions are in inches. Height precedes width. All works are in the collection of the artist unless otherwise noted.

EARLY WORKS

Men Argue Strongly (c. 1937)
Portrait of Michael Haley Russo
Oil on canvas

Grandfather (c. 1945)
Oil on Burlap
43" x 31"
Courtesy of Gerald Robinson

Swordsmen (c. 1951)
Oil on burlap
35" x 46"

Gesturing Women (c. 1957)
Oil on burlap
Courtesy of Myron Bergren

Bathers (c. 1958)
Oil on burlap
Courtesy of John Storrs

Retrospection (late 1950s)
Bulletin colors on canvas
62" x 45"

ABSTRACTION

Untitled (mid 1950s)
Collage

Bloodflower (1960s)
Bulletin colors on canvas
59" x 44"

Untitled (c. 1968)
(Stripe painting)
Acrylic on canvas
56" x 49"

Carolling Stripes
Acrylic on canvas
58" x 51"

GEOMETRY, CLOTHING AND

THE FIGURE

The Blue Shoe (c. 1968)
Acrylic on canvas
58" x 50"

Vestals (c. 1977)
Acrylic on canvas
49" x 58"

Putting It Back Together (1983)
Acrylic on canvas
56" x 45"

With Certitude (1983)
Acrylic on canvas

I Am Afraid of Myself (1983)
Acrylic on canvas
61" x 50"

Two For Musicians (1983)
Rhoplex and pigment on canvas
56" x 44"

MEN

Processional (c. 1959)
46" x 34"

As If They Are (1950s)

The Precise Moment

Double Men (1960)
Courtesy of Harold and Arlene Schnitzer

Untitled (c. 1982)
Rhoplex and pigment on canvas
60" x 48"

Untitled (1984)
56" x 69"

MEN AND WOMEN

Untitled (1960s)
(Clothed man, nude woman)

Awake Now Rise (1960s)

Sandy Beach Ascension (1960s)
62" x 49"

Evening Bathers (1968)
Courtesy of Gerry Pratt

Untitled (1970s)
(Man and woman in the landscape)

As With Affection (c. 1980)
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 48"

Of Days and Hours (c. 1983)
Acrylic on canvas
50" x 60"

NUDES

Unquiet and Forever (1964)
Courtesy of Leonard and Lois Schnitzer

That Woman Blasting Oblivion (1967)
Courtesy of Harold and Ruth Salzman

Untitled (1970s)
Grey nude
Acrylic on canvas

Legend

Untitled (c. 1982)
Reclining back

Nude (1984)

Nude (1984)

