

“I would like to briefly recount in what way and under what circumstances I came to know Quinto Martini in his person and in his art.”^[1] Thus begins Mario Richter’s account of his encounter with the artist and the work to which I would like to introduce you through two gazes that are not mine.^[2] In fact, I thought it might be more interesting to present the artist Quinto Martini (Seano 1908 – Florence 1990) through the eyes of a man of letters (Richter) and a photographer (Aurelio Amendola), who were among the most subtle interpreters of his sculpture. In short, the idea would be to let the images – photographic or evoked with words – direct your imagination.

A fine literary critic, expert on French poetry and scholar of the work of Ardengo Soffici, who was a vector of French culture in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century,^[3] Mario Richter was one day in Poggio a Caiano, the village between Florence and Prato where Soffici had retired to live after his avant-garde adventure. The occasion was important: it was 1975 and that was the first major conference of studies on Soffici, attended by important scholars, artists and the highest political authorities.^[4]

The story begins like this: “There was, next to me, a man with a particularly plain, dishevelled, somewhat unkempt, rather unremarkable appearance. He looked like a retired labourer, perhaps a park gardener.^[5] But he also had the air of a stranger, of someone who happened to be there. He seemed vaguely distracted. I didn’t even think he was able to follow what Messina,^[6] increasingly aware of the role he had won for himself at that juncture, was saying.

“At one point, that simple man standing next to me turned to me, almost apologising for doing so, telling me that he had listened with interest to my communication at the conference (...). ‘You know,’ he told me, ‘I knew Soffici very well. I learnt everything from him’ and then, hurriedly, added his name. (...) But in short, I did not give him the importance he was certainly due. (In my partial defence, however, I must say that a terrible toothache had put me in a less favourable mood, even preventing me from listening to Martini’s speech at the conference).”

Later, the critic met Martini again, by chance, but “the relationship did not deepen this time either. Certainly through my fault it remained on the surface. (...) Later, when I asked about him (...), I was told that unfortunately he was no longer with us”. So, years later, back in Poggio a Caiano for a conference, Richter took the opportunity to visit the new Park Museum set up nearby, in Seano, where a friend had pointed out to him the presence of works by Quinto Martini – the artist’s gift to his native

village. Inaugurated in 1990, the park was the realisation of Martini's last great project: an open-air museum, dedicated "to women and men from all over the world",^[7] with "a people of statues"^[8] that the artist had wanted to place "in that nature from which they were taken and where everyone can have their hours of freedom".^[9]

At this point, after his encounter with the man, Richter goes on to describe his encounter with his work. "Upon entering the park, I immediately realised that this simple-looking man was a great artist, a giant of art. Almost religiously understood, as if I had entered a sacred place, I stopped to contemplate each of those statues that stand in nature in all their vital solemnity, in their singular hieraticity. I was struck by the exceptional representational power of the human and animal figures. (...) In particular, those sculptures became a present and living testimony of the most popular and disadvantaged classes, of peasants, workers and artisans. (I now have in mind the astonishing Joan of Arc, those extraordinary arms and hands, those magnificent hands stretched towards heaven: there is there a real peasant girl or a shepherdess taken to the heights of sanctity, of mercy, of the noble entreaty of an unusual Madonna). In short, in all those monumental statues the eternal was united with the transitory, the humble popular reality rose to the most solemn sovereignty."^[10]

The encounter with Quinto's works in Seano is epiphanic for anyone, but it has produced special effects in the fine literary critic, who has been able to grasp the greatness of the work of art precisely in the gap with the simplicity of the man who produced it.

Now, however, after reading this inspired imaginogenic text, any photographic reproduction of the park's sculptures would risk disappointing expectations. A high risk, in this case, because, like Medardo Rosso's, Quinto's sculpture is not photogenic. From life it expresses itself, it seems animated – a visit to the Casa Studio, inhabited by a crowd of plaster presences, is a unique experience. In photos, Quinto's sculpture may appear inert matter, as happens to Rosso's works. Try searching the web for 'medardo rosso conversation in the garden': the only decipherable and suggestive images are those of photographs taken by (or under precise instructions from) Medardo Rosso. Rosso, who conceived of sculpture as an Impressionist painter, was aware of the possibility that his sculptures might look like melted ice cream in the wrong light, but he got around this problem by presenting them to the public personally: through theatrical staging (in the dark, by setting up ad hoc lighting), or through photographic reproductions made by framing and lighting the subject exactly, so that the sculpture would then live in the photographic image.

Quinto Martini did not practice photography, but on the other hand he was a painter, which made him

a sculptor particularly sensitive to the effects of light and atmospheric fusion. The problem is therefore the same: even his sculptures are hardly revived in photography.

Fortunately, some time later, it was Aurelio Amendola^[11] who had the experience of an epiphanic encounter with Quinto's sculpture. The result was a photographic book that, as Giorgio Bonsanti wrote, unfolds all "the representative and evocative power of photography, the point of conjunction between objectivity and creativity, between technique and artistic imagination."^[12] In the book, a short text by the photographer reveals the origin of the spark generated by his encounter with the sculptor's art.

Upon entering his Casa Studio,^[13] Amendola recognises there the habitat of the true artist of yesteryear. Today – the photographer notes – artists' studios "are places where no one would want to live. No more paints and brushes, chalk, marble, dusty shelves and cobwebs, marking time, but computers, industrial milling machines, crafty assistants with sharp tools or large digital screens. There is no dust, no silence, no history." Instead, he concludes, in Quinto's studio, "there, where there is art, I found poetry."^[14]

Thus, penetrating the artist's world by professional empathy, the photographer explored the Casa Studio. With the eye of his camera, he caught exactly the sculptor's poetic intentions and intuited the framing, incidence and intensity of light capable of animating the figures sculpted or moulded by Quinto Martini. The result is a photographic corpus that is a bit like a virtual visit into Martini's world and art, made through the sensitive and attentive eyes of Amendola.

The words end here. The imagination exercise continues now with images.



Aurelio Amendola, Parco Museo Quinto Martini, Seano



Aurelio Amendola, Casa Studio Quinto Martini, Seano



Aurelio Amendola, Casa Studio Quinto Martini, Seano



Aurelio Amendola, Casa Studio Quinto Martini, Seano



Aurelio Amendola, Parco Museo Quinto Martini, Seano

Notes

1. Mario Richter, *Quinto Martini: una testimonianza*, 2013, Pentalea Editore, p. 1 [this and the following quotations are translated by the author]. [↑](#)
2. The author currently directs the Museo Diffuso Quinto Martini di Seano (<http://www.museoquintomartini.it/>), a recent museum reality composed of the Parco-Museo and the artist's Casa-Studio in Seano, in the municipality of Carmignano (Prato), still little known to the general public. [↑](#)
3. Ardengo Soffici (1898-1964) was a painter, critic, writer and poet who was very active, between France and Italy, in the art world of the early 20th century. A militant in the ranks of Florentine Futurism, he was responsible for the dissemination of knowledge of modern and avant-garde French art, from Cézanne to Cubism, but also, later, for the promotion of the 'Return to Order' – the anti-modernist appeal for a return to the forms and techniques of the native artistic tradition. [↑](#)
4. For Italians of a certain age, it will be easy to find images like this one in the memory: “the very pompous arrival (with procession, band, etc.) of Giovanni Spadolini (then Minister of Cultural Heritage)”. Richter p. 6. [↑](#)
5. He refers to the park of the villa where the conference was held: Villa Medici in Poggio a Caiano. [↑](#)
6. Sculptor Francesco Messina (1900-1995), among the speakers at the conference. [↑](#)
7. Quinto Martini, from the Parco-Museo inauguration speech in 1988. [↑](#)
8. Tomaso Montanari, from the video by Federico Bondi, *Le Vie dell'acqua. Da Lorenzo a Leonardo. Primo tratto*, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLthnN2TJEE>. [↑](#)
9. Martini, 1988. [↑](#)
10. Richter, pp.11-13. [↑](#)
11. <https://www.aurelioamendola.it/> [↑](#)
12. Giorgio Bonsanti, “Per Quinto e Aurelio”, in *Quinto Martini. Fotografie di Aurelio Amendola*, Magonza, 2020, p.18. [↑](#)
13. The artist's home and studio, now open to the public and part of the Museo Diffuso Quinto Martini. [↑](#)
14. Aurelio Amendola, “Lo studio di un artista”, in *Quinto Martini. Fotografie di Aurelio Amendola*,

p.26. [↑](#)ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lucia Minunno

Lucia Minunno is director of the Museo Diffuso Quinto Martini in Seano (Carmignano, PO), teaches art history at the School of Photography FSM, and collaborates with educational publishing houses (Mondadori Education, Rizzoli Education). In the past, she followed the training of young artists at SACI in Florence, curated contemporary art exhibitions and events, and was curator at the contemporary art centre Palazzo delle Papesse in Siena. She has published essays and monographs on modern and contemporary art and photography, and historical-artistic guides to the cities of Florence and Lucca. Her last publications about the artist Quinto Martini include *Scrittura, scultura e pittura di Quinto Martini*, in *Quinto Martini scultore*, edited by Marco Fagioli (Firenze, 2021), and *Quinto Martini, in Il Novecento: dalle collezioni al museo*, edited by Valentina Gensini (Firenze, 2021).