



Pontone
GALLERY

Matteo Massagrande
The Essence of Light and Silence

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Matteo Massagrande, a native of Padua, has become both an outstanding contemporary Italian painter, and a seminal artist of the figurative, representational movement in European painting. His works are exhibited together with the art of such masters as Lopez Garcia, David Hockney and Vincent van Gogh.

The cornerstone of his artistic credo is to establish continuity between the past and the present, integrating the time-honoured values of art history with the innovative endeavours of modern painting and its tendency towards experimentation. His work is a continuation of the purest tradition of Venetian painting, in which, for centuries, colour and light have remained the most important means of expression. In every brushstroke we can sense respect for his great predecessors. He has created an autonomous artistic world where he continues to refine his original mode of expression. With the guidance of his mentor, Giovanni Barbisan, Massagrande learned (with the assiduity of a medieval artisan), all the intricacies of the different techniques and arcane methods of classical drawing and painting. At a young age, he even worked on restoration projects to investigate the secrets of his eminent predecessors. Original ideas and a strong artistic integrity saved him from the temptations of fleeting fads or an "excessive" veneration towards the great forerunners, and helped him instead to fashion a visual world built from the age-old traditions of the history of painting, that lives in the present.

Massagrande's world employs a distinctive set of symbols to address the profound human, ethical and philosophical issues of our time. He is knowledgeable about all major trends and important stylistic ventures in modern painting, but his mode of expression never diverts from objectivity and representational

figuration. He sees this as more suitable for the formulation of specific emotions and unequivocal messages than 'subject-less' art, which is shrouded in a veil of subjective aestheticizing and theoretical abstraction.

Seeing the 'realism' of his images, one would be tempted to think he paints before the motif, like the Barbizon artists or the Impressionists, or else uses photographs, in the manner of the hyperrealists. Massagrande's case, however, is different: above all, he has recourse to his own imagination, using the abundance of knowledge and visual fragments logged in his memory. The 'real' visual elements combine their effects with the viewer's own subjective, remembered experiences. The time-worn shreds become more than reproductions of perceived reality, but rather expressions of complex ideas. His works are so many links between the past and the present; each is marked with an orientation towards the future.

For Massagrande, the old is as important as the new, because only together can the two manufacture the continuity of human culture. His paintings rely on a respect towards the past. This is true in a material sense. As in the case of a medieval master, seven layers of priming are applied to the wooden panel, before the first brushstroke is made. Layers of paint follow, which mix with the marks of construction and specks of floating dust. The light-filled colours' natural beauty shines. The painter artfully manipulates the diverse possibilities inherent in the material. The scratched, cracked surfaces of the works he made a few years ago were reminiscent of antique frescos, while the powerful chiaroscuro of the latest paintings produces a bravura, extremely exciting facture that makes the humblest crack in the plasterwork, the tiniest patch of flaking paint, monumental in effect.

He builds his paintings in the manner of a sculptor who models a clay figure as if it were a nude, even though parts of the body are to be covered by the folds of clothes or drapes. Massagrande also builds the view from several semi-transparent layers, starting with the furthest part of the space, adding elements in a sequence that follows their distance from the viewer, maximizing the realism and richness of the painterly effect that is created by the light that travels through the scumbled layers. Surprising as it may sound, the skyscraper in the background of 'Maggio a New York' was painted in its entirety before much of it was covered up by the leaves of the trees that stand before it; as was the sea with the horizon behind the railings of the terraces, or the knotty branches of the trees that are now hidden by the window frames.



Another dominant effect of Massagrande's painting is silence, the capturing of motionless moments. This, however, is not de Chirico's metaphysical silence, but derives from Massagrande's arresting of time, his ability to simultaneously compress past, present and future into his compositions. As they capture a circumstance of the present, his pictures simultaneously refer back to the past and look forward into the future, like Myron's famous Discobolus,

which addressed a similar concept in the language of sculpture two and half millennia ago.

In recent years interiors, yards and terraces that open into each other have provided the most important theme of Massagrande's paintings, complemented with details from the earlier landscapes, which offer broad outlooks on the rich variety of nature or the endless horizon of the azure sea. An internal and an external state of equal weight are simultaneously present in these works, creating a close-knit visual and conceptual context. In contrast to the foreground, which is frozen in a "lifeless" timelessness, the lush vegetation of the background (the view of nature), hints at the possibility of movement and change. The interlocking rooms and corridors, the backlit interiors, and the diverse geometric patterns of the floor tiles, are reminiscent of 17th-century Dutch painting. The painterliness of the natural details, his meticulously elaborate, skilful handling, follows the practice of Venetian vedutists, like Canaletto or Francesco Guardi. However, Massagrande transforms the classical precedents for the purposes of his own message. He combines the linear perspective, strict space-construction of Renaissance painting with an early 20th century, modernist treatment of space. He uses both cold and warm lights, which now bring out, now blur, the sharp contours, and radiating from all directions, make the colours glow. All these effects create a rhythm for the painting, which adds further nuances to the meaning of the composition. The deliberately "hidden" imperfections in the paint, the distortions, the irregular perspectives and the use of light that contravenes the academic canon, are all at odds with the verisimilitude of the representation. They are meant to diminish the sense of perfection, and make the picture evoke emotions and ideas in the viewer, rather than offer a faithful rendition of a view. Synthesis and creation are the two pillars of Massagrande's art.

To appreciate this, take a careful look at the view that is reflected in the glass of the green door in his painting, 'Greenwich Village': in this narrow band we can "follow" the development of the art of painting, from Giotto's murals in Padua, through Impressionism, to Malevich's Suprematism. His wide-ranging knowledge and openness towards both classical and modern art reconciles Mantegna's strictly logical Renaissance composition mode with Cézanne's method of image construction, which is based on the chromatic values of colours. In addition, Massagrande harmonizes the manner in which Vermeer and the Venetian masters treated light with the heritage of 20th-century Italian painting.



His exhibitions are informed by 'synthesizing innovation'. The current display is no exception. This crisp and coherent selection encapsulates his painterly enquiries of recent years: how exteriors and interiors connect, how cold and warm lights can be balanced, what varied perspectives and distinctive illumination effects can be attained by connecting spaces. There is always a painting that is the odd one out and that points towards the future, to new experiments and painterly adventures: the urban view reflected in the glass surfaces of the skyscrapers in Bryant Park, the lights

that flash on different materials (concrete, grass, ivy, glass, etc.), and the replacement of silent, unoccupied interiors with a noisy, crowded square, mark the direction of Massagrande's artistic evolution. While the change seems substantial, a careful look will reveal all the important elements of his signature construction mode. The spaces continue to open into each other, the cold lights of the background and the foreground are still contrasted by the warmer shades of the centre, and the varied textures of crumbling plasterwork find a new lease of life in the glass surfaces, the creases of clothes, and the tops of tables and chairs scattered on the terrace. All that is new is that the space has "turned inside out," and what has been shown from inside is now presented from the outside.

What Matteo Massagrande performs is a systematic series of painterly experiments, probing into space, colour, perspective, light and facture. The conceptual depth and expressive power of his paintings persists. His development is not interrupted by unnecessary dallying or vain displays of technical virtuosity. Every one of his works is marked by the desire to articulate an original visual system that stems from classicist principles. This is the ultimate value of his painting and full expression of his artistic philosophy.

Péter Fertőszögi

Art Historian

Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Kovács Gábor Art Foundation





1. Maggio a New York | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 60 cm (23.6 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)

2. L'ulivo nel giardino | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
50 x 80 cm (19.7 x 31.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



3. **La sala grande** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
50 x 80 cm (19.7 x 31.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



4. **Greenwich Village** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 60 cm (23.6 x 23.6 in) | *ENQUIRE*



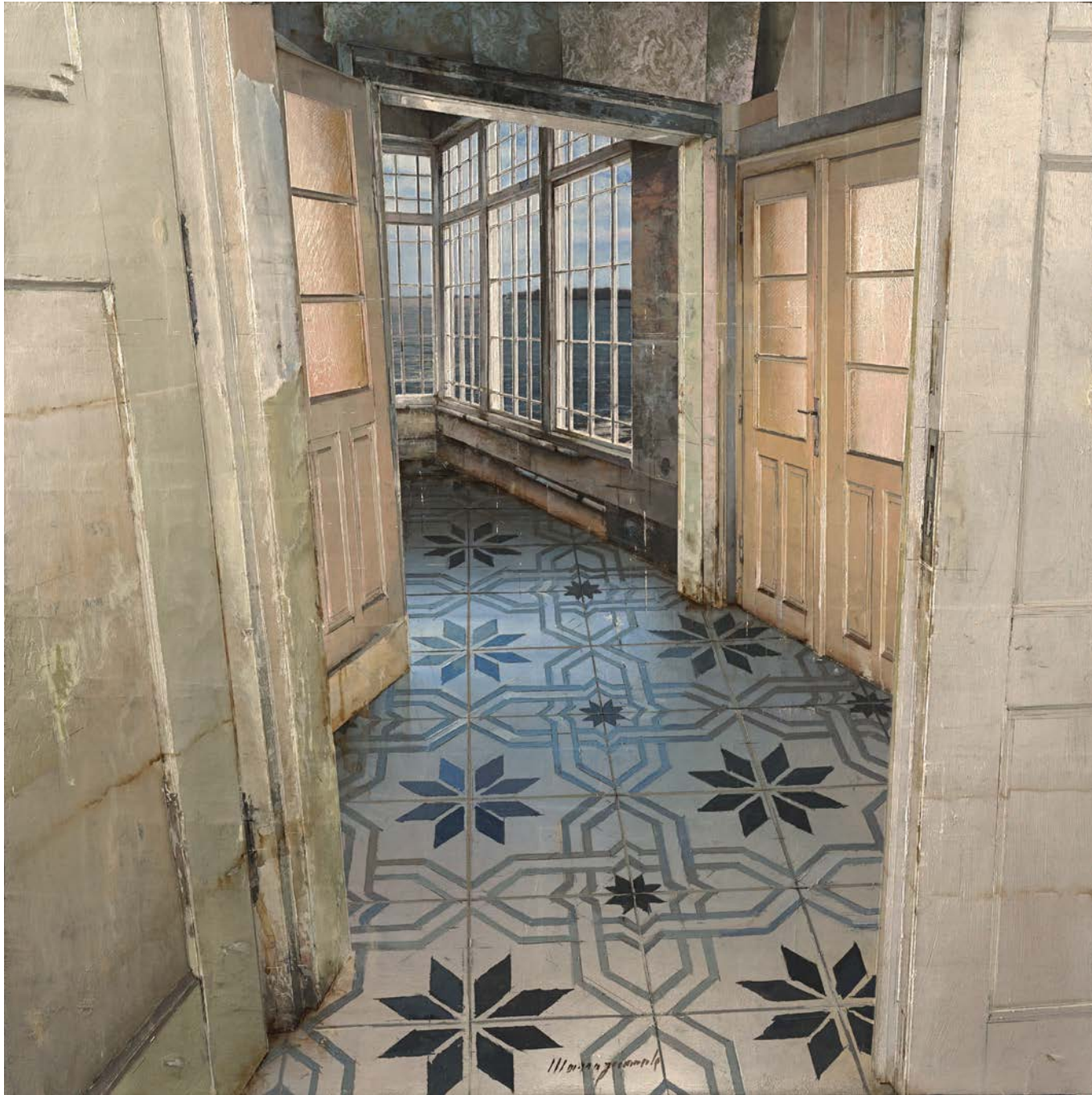
5. Piccolo autunno | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
15 x 15 cm (5.9 x 5.9 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



6. Piccola estate | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
15 x 15 cm (5.9 x 5.9 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



7. **La persiana** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 70 cm (15.7 x 27.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



8. La casa sul mare* | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 40 cm (15.7 x 15.7 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



9. Baglio | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 70 cm (15.7 x 27.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



10. **Cedraia** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 70 cm (15.7 x 27.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



11. **Albero rosso** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 40 cm (15.7 x 15.7 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



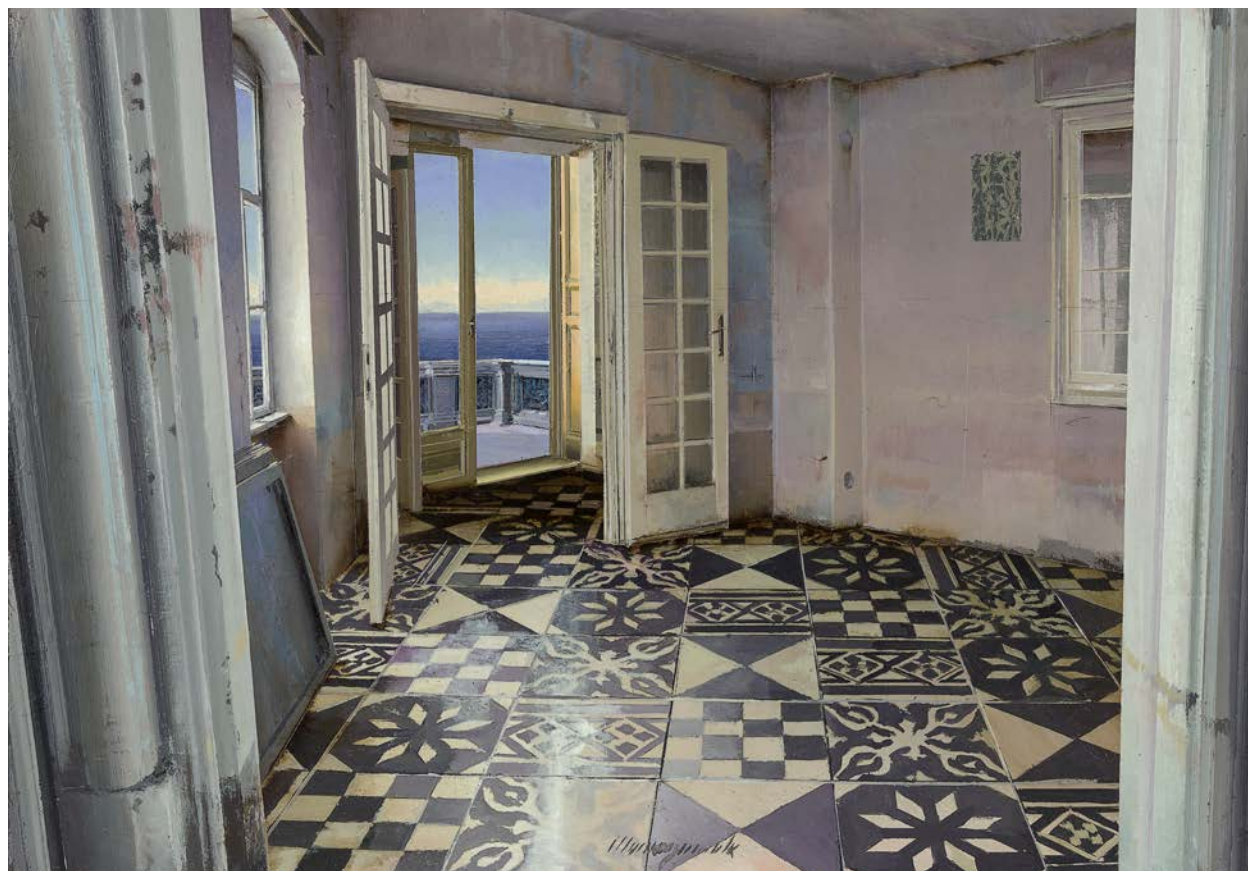
12. Azzurro | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
33 x 23 cm - (13 x 9 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)

13. Central Park | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
150 x 150 cm (59 x 59 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)





14. **Il portone** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 70 cm (15.7 x 27.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



15. **Luce della sera** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
23 x 33 cm (9 x 13 in) | *ENQUIRE*



16. La casa del faro | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
23 x 33 cm (9 x 13 in) | *ENQUIRE*

17. Istria | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 30 cm (11.8 x 11.8 in) | *ENQUIRE*



1880



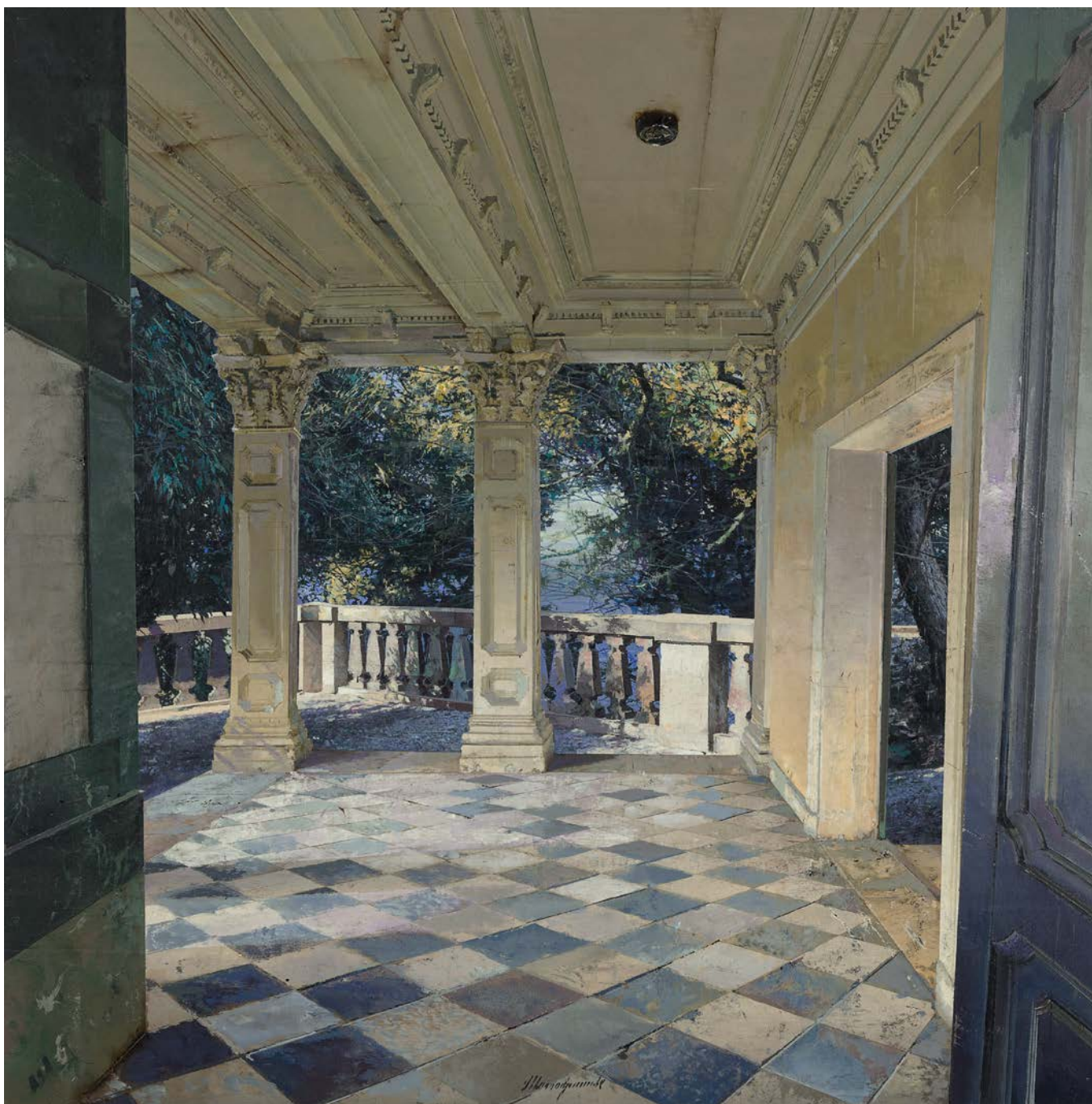
Bryant Park [detail]

18. **Bryant Park** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
150 x 100 cm (59 x 39.3 in) | *ENQUIRE*





19. Colline | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 60 cm (11.8 x 23.6) | [ENQUIRE](#)



20. **Villa** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 60 cm (23.6 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



21. **La porta sul giardino*** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 60 cm (23.6 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



22. **Corridoio** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 60 cm (11.8 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



23. La finestra di Piero | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
23 x 33 cm (9 x 13 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



24. Sera | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
70 x 100 cm (27.5 x 39.4 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



Handwritten signature or mark at the bottom center of the image.



25. La terrazza di ponente | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
23 x 33 cm (9 x 13 in) | *ENQUIRE*



26. **Tre porte** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 90 cm (23.6 x 35.4 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



27. **La luce nelle stanze** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
80 x 80 cm (31.5 x 31.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



28. **La pergola** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 70 cm (15.7 x 27.5 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



29. **Il mare** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 60 cm (11.8 x 23.6) | *ENQUIRE*



30. **Corridoio verso il mare** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
40 x 40 cm (15.7 x 15.7 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



31. **La balaustra** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 60 cm (23.6 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



32. **Mezzogiorno** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 60 cm (11.8 x 23.6 in) | [ENQUIRE](#)



33. **Sera** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
30 x 60 cm (11.8 x 23.6) | *ENQUIRE*



34. **La grande rimessa** | 2018
Oil and mixed media on board
60 x 110 cm (23.6 x 43.3 in) | *ENQUIRE*

MATTEO MASSAGRANDE

Born in 1959

RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 "In my room: artists paint the interior 1950-NOW," curated by Dr Rebecca Schoenthal and Ryan Steadman, The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville
- 2017-2018 "Canto dolente d'amore (ultimo giorno di Van Gogh)," alongside the exhibition "Van Gogh, Tra il grano e il cielo," curated by Marco Goldin, Basilica Palladiana, Vicenza
- 2017 "Flying Dreams," curated by Stamperia d'Albicocco, Italian Cultural Institute, Melbourne and Sydney
"Di volta in volta," curated by Alessandra Radaelli, Punto sull'Arte, Varese
"Matteo Massagrande. Lights of Silence," curated by Dr Pedro Tseng, Pontone Gallery Taiwan, Taichung
- 2016 "Quattro pittori per Parise," alongside the exhibition "Storia dell'Impressionismo," curated by Marco Goldin, Museo Santa Caterina, Treviso
"Genius Loci," curated by Vittorio Sgarbi, Fondazione Pio Alferano e Virginia Ippolito, Castellabate, Salerno
"Matteo Massagrande," curated by Péter Fertőszögi of the Kovács Gábor Art Foundation, KOGART Museum, Tihany
- 2015-2016 "Open House," Shine Artists, London
- 2014-2015 "Attorno a Vermeer," curated by Marco Goldin, Palazzo Fava, Bologna
- 2014 "Water Views Century Landscape Watercolourists – Paesaggisti all'acquerello del XXI secolo," curated by Marco Fazzini, TheArtsBox, Vicenza
Solo show within the exhibition "Da Tutankhamon a Van Gogh," curated by Marco Goldin, Museo Civico di Palazzo Chiericati, Vicenza
- 2013 "Matteo Massagrande," curated by Péter Fertőszögi of the Kovács Gábor Art Foundation, KOGART Museum, Budapest
- 2012 Retrospective, curated by Alberto Buffetti and Nino Sindoni, Museo delle Carceri, Asiago
- 2011 "Matteo Massagrande," Albemarle Gallery, London
"54th Venice Biennale on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy," curated by Vittorio Sgarbi, Italian Pavillion, Venice
"7x11 La poesia degli artisti," touring exhibition curated by Marco Fazzini, Fondazione Balestra, Longiano
- 2009 "Massagrande, Scene d'Ungheria," alongside the exhibition dedicated to the European Impressionists L'età di Courbet e Monet, curated by Marco Goldin, Villa Manin, Passariano di Codroipo

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All photographs by Changwoo Ryu except 'La casa sul mare', 'La porta sul giardino', 'La terrazza di ponente', 'La finestra di Piero', 'Central Park' and the artist's portrait, by Alberto Buzzanca.

*Exhibition History:

IN MY ROOM: ARTISTS PAINT THE INTERIOR 1950–NOW
The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia USA

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