

# FRIEZE MASTERS 2023

Pietro Consagra

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**PREVIEW**

Wednesday, 11.10.2023 (by invitation)

**DATES**

11.10 – 15.10.2023

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Following its participation in the Spotlight section in 2021 and in the Main Section in 2022, the Galleria Tommaso Calabro is pleased to participate in the 2023 edition of Frieze Masters (Main Section) with a monographic booth dedicated to the Italian sculptor **Pietro Consagra (1920 – 2005)**.

Born in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily, in 1920, **Pietro Consagra** was one of the most important Italian post-war sculptors. Since around 1947, the moment he started creating his first abstract sculptures, Consagra aspired to create a sculpture that would respond to the needs of a modern society, based on an egalitarian and democratic vision of the world. Hence, the theorization of his revolutionary "scultura frontale" (frontal sculpture), which rejected the traditional three-dimension of sculpture to develop a more direct and freer interaction between art, the audience and the environment. In creating "frontal" pieces to be experienced by a single point of view, as an antidote to the rhetoric and authoritarianism of conventional and monumental artistic sculpture, he wanted to integrate the plastic object and its surroundings into a completely new vision of space.

Drawing on the exhibition *Pietro Consagra. Immagini Vaganti* – held at the gallery between September and December 2022, and curated by Paola Nicolin – the Galleria Tommaso Calabro's booth at Frieze Masters fosters an unconventional reading of Consagra's output, partially moving away from the male coding traditionally associated with the imagery of his monumental iron, bronze and marble sculptures. Indeed, the selection includes examples of his **Giardini** ("Gardens"), **Ferri** ("Irons") and **Piani appesi** ("Hanging plans") series, coloured sculptures from the 1960s made of intersecting iron and aluminium slabs, in which Consagra engages with the new experimentations taking place in the arena of Pop Art.

Our presentation also focuses on lesser-known creations by the artist, the majority of which are exhibited on this occasion outside of Italy for the first time. The selection includes examples of Consagra's **Lenzuoli** ("Bed sheets") – cotton fabrics painted with washable colors, which the artist produced from 1967, the year he arrived in Minneapolis to teach at the School of Fine Arts – alongside **two paintings**, and colourful **pieces of furniture** he designed for his daily life. These works best exemplify the artist's creative freedom, and his aerial interpretation of sculpture as a combination of colours, surfaces, air and sound.

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Although sculptures by Consagra are included in the collection of major Italian and international museums (including the Galleria d'Arte Moderna – Rome, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum - New York, The MoMa – New York, The New Orleans Museum of Art – New Orleans), our presentation at Frieze Masters aims at originating a **new wave of appreciation** of such an important sculptor by unveiling lesser-known aspects of his research, and reaffirming his position on the global art world stage.

The gallery is grateful to the **Archivio Pietro Consagra**, Milan, and its director Gabriella Di Milia, for their assistance in the participation to the fair.

The gallery's participation at Frieze Masters coincides with the publication of Pietro Consagra's **catalogue raisonné of sculptures** – edited by Luca Massimo Barbero together with Gabriella di Milia Consagra, published by Skira Editore – which is the first exhaustive overview of the artist's sculptural oeuvre.

## PIETRO CONSAGRA (Mazara del Vallo, 1920 – 2005, Milan)

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Born in 1920 in Mazara del Vallo, in the province of Trapani, Sicily, Pietro Consagra studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Palermo. In 1944, he moved to Rome – recently liberated by the American troops – where he befriended the artists Giulio Turcato, Mario Mafai, and Renato Guttuso, with whom he shared a studio. Consagra's first exhibitions were staged in the spring of 1946. In the December of that year, he went to Paris, where his visits to the studios of Constantin Brâncuși, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Laurens, and Julio Gonzáles, and to Antoine Pevsner's house, coalesced to trigger his initial abstract artworks. Back in Rome, on March 15, 1947, in his studio on Via Margutta, alongside Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Piero Dorazio, Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Antonio Sanfilippo and Turcato, Consagra wrote the manifesto that would be published in the first issue of the journal *Forma*, in which the artists declared themselves to be "Formalists and Marxists," taking a stand against Picasso's distortions and against metaphysical romanticism, in the name of "Abstract Art," the only language they believed still capable of breathing new life into art. In 1948, he exhibited at the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1949, together with Hans Arp, Brâncuși, Pevsner and others, Consagra was included in the *Mostra di scultura contemporanea* (Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition), curated by Giuseppe Marchiori and held in the garden of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni (the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation) in Venice. On that occasion, Peggy Guggenheim herself made her first acquisition of a large-scale work by Consagra for her collection.

Consagra's *Colloqui* ("Conversations,") were presented at the Venice Biennale in 1954 and 1956. They marked a turning point in his artistic and philosophical research, as they freed up sculpture from its traditional three-

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dimensionality, offering instead a frontal view, in direct dialogue with the viewer. Other solo shows were held at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels (1958), the World House Galleries in New York (1958), and the Galerie de France in Paris (1959). In 1960, Consagra was awarded the International Grand Prize for Sculpture at the 30<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. He was invited to participate in major international exhibitions, including Documenta Kassel (1959 and 1964) and *Modern Sculpture from the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Collection* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (1962).

With the advent of Pop Art, from 1964 onwards Consagra's practice opened up to new forms of technical experimentation, taking in subjects that were unusual within the traditional plastic repertoire, such as the colored, two-sided *Piani appesi* ("Hanging Planes"), the *Piani sospesi* ("Suspended Planes," 1964-1965) and the *Ferri trasparenti* ("Transparent Irons," 1965-1966), where the conceptual tension of his first *Colloqui* gave way to a more extrovert, joyful idiom. This was a form of sculpture with a profile that was no longer square but curved, the thin planes fragmenting and expanding out to compose a single image. Following an initial presentation at the Quadriennale in Rome in 1965, these new works were exhibited in his solo shows at the Marlborough Art Gallery in Rome in 1966, and at the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan and the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam in 1967, when Consagra moved to the United States, where he would spend a year teaching at the Minneapolis School of Arts. He then received an invitation to participate in the exhibition entitled *Sculpture from Twenty Countries* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, where, in October, he presented his *Giardini* ("Gardens"), *Ferri Trasparenti* and *Piani Appesi* (1966-1967) in a solo show at the Marlborough Gerson Gallery.

By 1965, Consagra's sculpture had become "bifrontal," two-sided, intended to be viewed from two opposite sides. In 1968, he conceived the *Sottilissime* ("Ultra-Thin Sculptures"), in which he experimented with the minimum possible thickness for a two-sided work, taking the surface down to just two-tenths of a millimeter. At less than a tenth of a millimeter thick, the sheet would fail to remain upright and would bend over, giving rise to the *Sottilissime impossibili* ("Impossible Ultra-Thin Sculptures"). In the same period, Consagra conceived, on a one-to-one scale, the *Edifici frontali* ("Frontal buildings," 1968), made using steel slabs of the maximum possible thickness for a two-sided work (8 meters). He also wrote a book entitled *La Città Frontale* ("The Frontal City"). In the atrium of the central pavilion at the 36<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 1972, Consagra exhibited *Trama* ("Weave"), a monumental installation composed of seven sculptures made from painted wood, more or less three meters tall, intended for visitors to walk through and around. This work was deemed to be one of the most significant encapsulations of his new approach. In these years, he discovered a fascination for stone and marble, and in particular for their infinite chromatic potential. In subsequent years, in Gibellina, he experimented with architectural design, producing *Teatro* ("Theater"), which remains unfinished, and *Meeting*, a two-sided building delineated by two opposite glass facades interacting with the surrounding landscape, created in Gibellina, the town for which, the previous year, he had

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produced *La Stella* ("Star"), a 28-meter-tall iron sculpture, also known as the *Porta del Belice* ("Bèlice Gateway"). In 1987, he began work on the *Pianeti* ("Planets") series, featuring wooden layers overlaid with short, thick offcuts, all painted in bright colors. In 1989, Consagra staged a major solo show at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, where, in December 1993, a room was given over to a permanent exhibition of 32 of his sculptures, some donated by the sculptor himself to expand the museum's existing collection. From 1969 onwards, Consagra lived in Rome and in Milan, where he died on July 16, 2005, at the age of 85.

Numerous urban-scale works by Consagra are sited outdoors. The rotating bronze *Colloquio con il vento* ("Conversation with the Wind," 1962), originally in front of the Mies van der Rohe-designed Houston Museum of Fine Arts, is today in the Isamo Noguchi Garden. *Fontana* ("Fountain," 1966), made of travertine and measuring 3x20 meters, is to be found in the showpiece courtyard of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome; the bronze *Solida e Trasparente* ("Solid and Transparent," 1967) can be seen at the headquarters of General Mills in Minnesota; *Muraglia* ("Wall," 1977), made of yellow Mori and green Alpi marble, is located at the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona; and the 18-meter-tall concrete sculpture *La materia poteva non esserci* ("The Material Might Not Have Been There," 1986), is in the Fiumara di Tusa. At his solo show in Milan in 1996, Consagra installed an iron *Porta* ("Gateway") in front of the Palazzo di Brera. In Rome's Largo di Santa Susanna, he created *Giano nel cuore di Roma* ("Janus in the Heart of Rome, 1997), a 5.5-meter tall sculpture made from Botticino marble. In 2002, the marble sculptures *Nembro Rosato* (1977) and *Giallo Mori* (1977) were permanently sited in Piazza Duomo in Milan, on Via dei Mercanti. In 2003, the 4x6-meter sculpture *Doppia Bifrontale* ("Double Bifrontal") was positioned at the Winston Churchill entrance to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The numerous awards bestowed upon Consagra during his long career as a sculptor included: the Metallurgy Prize, São Paulo Biennial, 1955; the Einaudi Prize at the 38<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, 1956; an Honorable Mention at the International Exhibition, Pittsburg, 1958; the Belgian Critics' Prize, 1959; the Morgan's Paint First Prize, Rimini, 1959; the Antonio Feltrinelli Prize for Sculpture, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, 1984; and the Gold Medal from Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi for services to culture and art, 2001. His sculptures appear in the collections of national and international museums including, amongst many others, the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the National Gallery, Washington; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; the Tate Gallery, London; the Ludwig Museum, Cologne; the Sprengel Museum, Hanover; the Musée d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; the Musée de la Sculpture en plein air, Antwerp; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; and the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

In addition to his output as a sculptor, Consagra also wrote numerous critical and theoretical works, including *Necessità della scultura* ("The Necessity of

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Sculpture," 1952), *La Città Frontale* ("The Frontal City," published in 1969), *Vita mia* ("My Life," 1980) – an autobiography that won the Mondello special prize – and *Architetti mai più* ("Architecture Never More," 1993).

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## FRIEZE MASTERS

October 11 – 15, 2023

The Regent's Park, London, UK

Main Section – Booth B11

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## OPENING TIMES

Wednesday 11.10.2023 | 11 am – 7 pm (by invitation only preview)

Thursday 12.10.2023 | 11 am – 1 pm (by invitation only preview); 1 pm – 7 pm (general admission tickets)

Friday 13.10.2023 | 11 am – 7 pm

Saturday 14.10.2023 | 11 am – 7 pm

Sunday 15.10.2023 | 11 am – 6 pm

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## PRESS ENQUIRIES

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## INSTAGRAM

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## WEBSITES

[www.tommasocalabro.com](http://www.tommasocalabro.com)

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