



Syracuse International Film Festival Day One: Magnifico

Posted by Dante A. Ciampaglia April 19, 2007 11:30PM



Photo by Dante A. Ciampaglia
Silvano Campeggi

Tonight was the first official night of the festival. Films were screened at the Wescott, Palace, Gifford and Persian theaters. And while that work was worthwhile, the place to be was at the Point of Contact Gallery on East Genesee Street. Along with the Everson Museum of Art, The Redhouse and the Company Gallery, Point of Contact is hosting poster and other art works by noted and acclaimed poster artist Silvano Campeggi, also known as Nano. But only at Point of Contact could movie fans and art lovers mingle with the great Campeggi, hear him discuss his work and get his signature on prints of his work and the film festival poster, which he designed.



Photo courtesy Syracuse International Film Festival

The poster, which can be seen above, is a striking image of a face with a rainbow ribbon of film over the eyes. Without knowing anything about the image, what it is and who it is supposed to be, you can't help but be arrested by it. At Point of Contact, though, some light is shed on the image. Walk into the gallery and look to the back of the room, on the right. There on the wall is a larger image of the festival poster, except it has some added dimension. The rest of

the person's head is showing, as is a little bit of the person's body below the neck.

Looking at the identification tag yields the discovery that the image is of Sophia Loren. Silvano Campeggi used Sophia Loren as the model for the Syracuse International Film Festival's poster and publicity artwork! If the idea of the beautiful and talented jewel of Italian cinema looking out from bus shelters and newspapers onto the people and places of Syracuse doesn't send shivers up your spine, you should turn in your cinephile membership card.

Campeggi was supposed to arrive at Point of Contact at 8 p.m., but he didn't appear until closer to 9 p.m. But that was OK for the crowd gathered in the small gallery space. His delay gave them more time with the hors d'œuvres being carried around on trays and the wine and cheese table in the corner of the gallery. There was also a display of prints for sale at \$20 a piece, and the longer the wait became, the more prints were sold. (For my part, I bought a really fine print of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.)

More importantly, though, attendees could live with the collection of his magnificent, almost futurist-inspired poster sketches for *West Side Story*, *Ben Hur*, *Casablanca* and *An American in Paris*, among others, as well as the 15 or so examples of his fascination with Marilyn Monroe a little while longer.

Most of the Marilyn images were of her face, close up with no definition of a head. Instead, there are smoky, brightly colored eyes, a wispy nose and blood-red lips on white, silver, gray and blue backgrounds. Some are on canvas, others paper and still others on a collage of paper and torn tissue paper, where Marilyn is painted on the tissue paper, which has been applied to regular paper, and then torn.

One striking piece in this collection of Marylins is "'Nano' in Marilyn's Eyes," a 40x56 piece he completed in 2000. It has the typical construction of his Marilyn work, but in her eyes are self-portraits sketched in outline and in 3/4 profile. When you first approach the painting, you're instantly drawn to the striking red lips that burst

off the white background. Then, you look further up the posterboard, following Marilyn's noseline until you reach those stormy eyes. And when you look in them, you find Campeggi. He's smiling. It's as if Marilyn is stealing a glance of him, and while he's not looking at her he knows he's being watched by her. The woman who has been watched for so long has become the viewer.

On an accompanying card, Campeggi explains his love affair with Marilyn Monroe:

"Since 1957, when I had the pleasure the paint Marilyn's portrait for the first time, I tried to capture the essence of her pure, sensual beauty, while years later Andy Warhol reduced her image to a more geometrical composition. Even nowadays, Marilyn is my muse and I still paint her when I wish to represent the pure essence of female appeal. The symbol of her image is sculpted in my soul and it is a pure artistic madness that will never end."

What a beautiful, powerful sentiment, the perfect companion for a beautiful, powerful piece of work.



Photo by Dante A. Ciampaglia
Silvano Campeggi signs the back of one his prints.

When Campeggi finally walked through the door, the gallery was transformed. No longer was this a gallery space in Syracuse. Now, it was a chic meet-and-greet that could have easily come from an Italian film. Attendees crushed the space around him, saying hello, shaking his hand and waving their prints at him for his autograph. For a while, it looked like he simply wanted to enjoy the ambiance, camaraderie and wine. But soon enough, he became engaged with his audience, speaking to them through a translator about his work, then sitting at a table and signing whatever

people brought to him: prints, show catalogues, books, festival posters. (For the prints and posters, he was forced to sign the backs of them for licensing purposes.)

After about a half-hour of signing, shaking hands and taking photos, Campeggi again wandered through the crowd, looking at his work and discussing it with the people around him. [One particularly noteworthy exchange, albeit brief, came after Brent Michael Davids, the composer of last night's score for The Last of the Mohicans, entered the gallery. Campeggi approached Davids, shook his hand and complimented him on the fine music from the night before. Davids returned the compliment about Campeggi's work, and just like that two of the festival's biggest guests parted company.](#)



Photo by Dante A. Ciampaglia
Silvano Campeggi and Brent Michael Davids express appreciation for one another's art.

Tonight, Hollywood history came together with Syracuse's film future. It was a magnificent experience, and one that will surely rank as a highlight of this year's festival.