



Italianità

Contemporary Art Inspired by the
Italian Immigrant Experience

JOANNE MATTERA

PAUL **FABOZZI**



Rio, Municipal Cathedral, 2020, oil on canvas, 48 × 32 inches



Rome, Ivo #1, 2018, oil on canvas, 72 × 48 inches

LIGHT, LANDSCAPE, GEOMETRY

I was born in Amsterdam, New York, a once-booming small industrial city along the Erie Canal that has been home to generations of Italian Americans. My paternal great-grandfather, Antonio Fabozzi, came to the United States in 1907 from a small town in the Campania and headed straight to Amsterdam. His brother-in-law was already there—and so were opportunities to work. Antonio was a skilled craftsman who made carriages in Italy; in Amsterdam, he worked as a blacksmith.

As a teenager in Amsterdam, I went to a Catholic high school, Bishop Scully. My social studies teacher, Gene Lees, nurtured my interests in art and culture and organized an occasional Easter trip to Italy for a small group of students. Through some necessary support and a bit of luck, I was able to join one of these trips, as Gene's assistant, during my first year of college. During this weeklong trip to Rome, Florence, and Venice, Gene opened a world for me, and I came home with an overwhelming sense of wanting to return to Italy.

I studied painting, drawing, European history, and philosophy at Alfred University, and spent the fall of my junior year in Siena in a study abroad program. I lived as a guest/boarder in the home of a local family. Every aspect of this experience—from exploring the winding streets of this magnificent medieval city to participating in the daily two-hour midday meal with my host family—changed me deeply. Being immersed in the space and time of a location so different from

any I had experienced presented questions which, in fundamental ways, I am still exploring in my work. When I arrived in Siena, I was painting and drawing to better understand modernism and abstraction; when I departed, I was examining the ways in which the built environment frames emotional experience. My interest in abstraction was forced to contend with my connection to place.

Two years later, I returned to Italy for another extended period, this time in the ancient Tuscan hill town of Cortona. Throughout this three-month period, I was able to dig deeper into Italian art history and the Italian language as well as to advance my painting practices. The light, the landscape, and the geometries of humanmade forms, all so integral to Italian life, are still very present in my work.

After receiving my MFA in painting from the University of Pennsylvania in 1993, I moved to New York City. By 1996, I was a professor at St. John's University—teaching students in Queens during the fall and spring and bringing them to Rome every summer to study Italian art and culture. Fueled by my decades-long engagement with Italy, my approach to painting and drawing has made me feel more deeply the extent to which spatial experience is the basis of perception; for me, the act of creating images is intertwined with making meaning from experience, which then loops back around and widens the parameters of my engagement with space and time.



Paul Fabozzi in the studio with *MoMA #1b* in the background
www.paulfabozzi.com



Istanbul, Kanyon #2, 2019, oil on canvas, 32 × 48 inches