

Freed Spirit

Maria Spadoni



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The Studio and Gallery Kilbirnie
Catalogue September 2018

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Maria N Spadoni

Maria N Spadoni came from Italy to Scotland (Greenock) in her late twenties to marry into an Italian-Scottish family. In the late 1970s as she was turning 50 she began to draw and paint. Her paintings were an act of rebellion, self-deliverance and connection with her inner being. The death of her parents and illness of her husband were also triggers. Tempus Fugit. Time was running out and she needed to make her mark on this planet, liberate a desire she had always fostered: to be an artist. Or rather, as she insisted, she was first and foremost a Poet in her interaction with life. She regarded her paintings as poems, and later and towards the end of her life (2014) she focussed mainly in writing her poetry.

Maria was a self taught artist. She dabbled with evening school classes in technique for a little while, but felt that finding her own style and expression was essential to her journey and exploration as an artist poet. As a young girl in Italy she had trained in dressmaking, at which she was highly skilled and inventive, though she did not pursue it as a profession. This to a certain extent would have imparted transferable technical skills. Maria's approach to painting was to start a journey with the brush in her hand and she would not know where that journey would take her. It was as if she felt possessed and communicated with alternative universes. She painted obsessively at night time. Sometimes, with a celebratory glass of red wine in hand. An all night party with strange guests that materialised in her canvas by the time dawn appeared.

She painted for company, she said, as she felt alone, isolated and her spirit trapped. Painting also transcended language barriers. And time and space. “Nella pittura si trova la liberazione dello spirito” (In painting we find the liberation of the spirit). By ‘spirit’ she meant the vital fire of her being, her energy, her imagination.

Through the inspired curatorship of Val Boa, Maria first exhibited some of her early work in the McLean Museum and Art Gallery, Greenock to complement the works of Samuel Lovi, a Nigerian sculptor. An encounter in 1982 with the artist and sculptor, George Wyllie, was a pivotal moment in Maria’s life. George and Daphne Wyllie gave Maria her first one woman show at the Greenock Arts Guild in 1983. George wrote: “Maria is a free spirit. She draws well on her own imagination, her personality and freely expresses herself.” George and Daphne Wyllie remained life long supporters and friends.

Maria continued to exhibit in mixed shows, especially at the Inverclyde Biennial Exhibitions (McLean Museum) and had a second major solo show at the Dundee Repertory Theatre. Sandra McNeilance was impressed with this show and reviewed it for ‘The Glasgow Herald’ (Wednesday October 1 1986). Sandra McNeilance, was an artist, art critic, exhibitions organiser for the Edinburgh Science Festival. The Sandra McNeilance Memorial Prize for Painting and Drawing was established after her premature death in 1994. Sandra particularly praised a painting called ‘The Runner’ which was about time running out - a theme Maria discussed with Sandra about her obsession to paint. George Wyllie, years later, told Maria that ‘The Runner’ (of which he cherished a photocopy) inspired his Clock with running legs (Buchanan Street, Glasgow).

Another formative encounter was with Adele Patrick (founder of The Women’s Library, Glasgow) who supported Maria’s work in various Women in

Profile exhibitions, including a notable one at Glasgow School of Art in 1990 during Glasgow's year of celebrations as European City of Culture. Two Glasgow School of Art students visited Maria to include her in their graduate Dissertations during the 1990s.

Favourable connections that George Wyllie brokered in the 1980s for Maria included Richard Demarco (Richard Demarco Gallery) and George Melly, then Chairman of the Outsiders Gallery (London). The challenge Maria faced was that she did not want to sell her work which she regarded as 'her children'. Occasionally, she gifted her work. 'Autumn Gold' (featuring in this exhibition) was gifted to George Wyllie and this painting hung in George's sitting room above the seat where he sat. Maria also donated a painting to Glasgow Film Theatre which was snapped up at their fundraising Auction to help create Cinema 2 in 1991.

Towards the end of her life (she died in March 2014) Maria grew depressed about leaving her paintings behind. She said she regretted she had not found them new 'homes'. She particularly wanted her paintings to be part of public collections in the Museums and Galleries she enjoyed visiting. Some of the paintings in 'Freed Spirit' previously featured in exhibitions during the 1980s and 1990s, however the large majority of these paintings have never been viewed publicly. The late Sandra McNeilance observed that Maria's paintings "frankly interpret life's dangers and delights in colourful semi-abstract style". Titles for Maria's paintings sometimes came strongly and naturally to mind. With others, she felt leaving a painting untitled allowed it more freedom of interpretation and the changing mood of the artist herself as well as the viewer. Many of these paintings, don't have titles or we need to research further her notes to establish if she left titles for these paintings (the ones which were not previously exhibited).



“In the midst of melancholy and solitude painting began as a release of my being. An unloading of my spirit. Now an endless road leads me in a landscape of changing companions. Children brought to life by a selfless passion, a burning energy driving me to alight the dark womb of mother earth with all my nascent babes one by one into infinity.” (Maria N Spadoni)





Small text label below the painting, likely providing the title and artist's name.





1950























