

LUCIANO SCHIFANO - HIS LIFE

1943 Born on 13 December in Sabratha, Libya, **Luciano Schifano** was the second child of Amelia Bramante, originally from Syracuse, and Umberto Schifano, who hailed from Trapani. At that time his father was working on the archaeological site of the ancient Roman Sabratha. The monuments the young boy saw rising out of the soil were a sort of initiation for him, giving him an intuitive sense of the harmony of the classical style, a fact that was to prove decisive for his later vocation as a painter. In Libya, Luciano experienced a happy and very stimulating childhood that stayed in his memory and often emerged in his paintings. The political changes the country experienced in the post-war period forced the Schifano family to return to Italy as refugees. They settled in Lentini, inland from Syracuse. As an adolescent, Luciano had already developed a sensitivity to art. He studied at Catania's Art School, where he first started painting. These early works are an expression of his sadness at having left Libya. Schifano later completed his studies in art and art history in Milan.

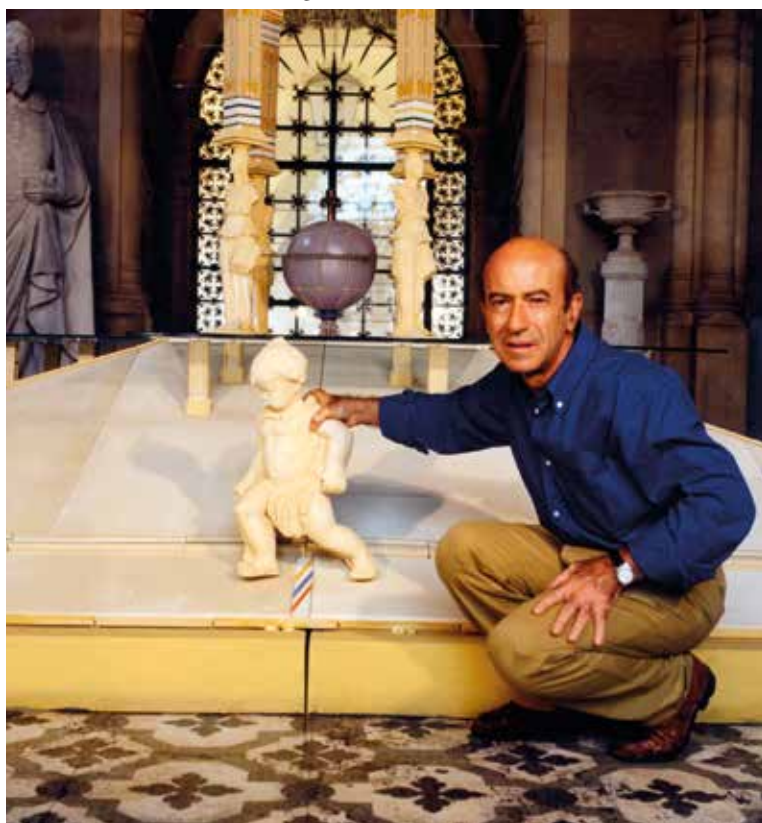


The ancient Roman city of Sabratha.

1965 After a brief stay in Rome, Schifano moved to the hills north of Florence, settling down in an old farmhouse. Here he found the perfect solitude to start painting the surrounding landscape on wooden boards taken from old abandoned pieces of furniture he collected nearby.

1966 The tragic 4 November 1966 Flood hit Florence very hard. Schifano left his lonely life and became one of the “Angels in the mud” who rescued those in need and solved emergencies in the stricken city. Soon he learned about the desperate condition of Florence's Archaeological Museum. Remembering the excavations at Sabratha and his later studies in the field into practice, Schifano helped to salvage and renovate the Museum's Etruscan finds. He decided to stay on in Florence and rented a studio in Via Santo Spirito, a neighbourhood in the old town full of craftspeople and antiquarians. Here he met and became friends with art collectors and gallery owners. Schifano later extended this network of contacts to other Italian cities.

1968 During his one-man exhibition at Galerie St. Luc, Schifano stayed in Paris and got to know the lively local art scene there, before pushing on to St. Paul de Vence on the Côte d'Azur. Back in Florence, at the age of 25, he signed a contract with Contemporarte's Sergio Denti, an art dealer, who exhibited Schifano's work in galleries across Italy alongside the works of the great artists of his time. Schifano's close friendship and professional association with Denti lasted many years. He also made friends with all those who were Denti's art collaborators: De Marsanich of Milan's Galleria Il Canocchiale, Barsi at Galleria L'Accademia in Turin, Ghelfi who ran galleries in Verona and Montecatini Terme, Leuzzi at the Luzzi galleries in Lecce and Nardò. In this same year he met his future wife, Rosmarie, who bore him two children, Ramòn and Lucilla.



Luciano Schifano in front of the Fountain of the 3G's installed at the Civic Museum of Padua on the occasion of the exhibition *I due Soli*, 2000

1972 Luciano moved to Pian dei Giullari, nestling in the hills above Florence's Piazzale Michelangelo. There his large studio cum residence was immersed in greenery. The house had earlier been a stud farm – indeed, horses often crop up in the painter's works of this period.

1981-82 For the 8th Centenary of the birth of Saint Francis, the Assisi municipality commissioned Schifano to create a commemorative event. The result was “Imagine a sacred subject”, a project inspired by the Poor Man of Assisi's philosophy – still so modern today. Employing a wealth of different techniques, Schifano produced 80 works that were exhibited in the cloister of Assisi's Basilica of Saint Francis.

1983-85 The exhibition was later moved from Assisi to the cloister of Santa Croce church in Florence. It was here, in this other world famous Franciscan basilica, that Giotto had created his frescoes depicting the Saint's life. Father Franchi, the rector, asked Schifano to create four large stained glass windows for the crypt. Schifano took up the offer enthusiastically, eager to work with glass, a material he had not experimented with before, and also to further study Saint Francis' personality. He started work, solving a number of difficult technical issues on the way. By 1995 the windows were ready to be installed and were solemnly inaugurated. Other significant events took place in this period, including Schifano's participation in Italian and foreign events. In 1985 he was invited to contribute his work to Baden Baden's IV Biennale of European Graphic Art (EBBB). In 1988 Perugia's Fine Arts Academy named him an "Academic of Merit". In 1989 a large one-man show of his work was held in Geneva's UN Building.



XIX European Biennale of Blacksmithing Art, "The Paint Brushes of the Magic Divine. Equilibrium, The Man and His Icon", Lanificio "Lombard", Stia, 2011.

1996 In this year Schifano was asked to paint the Palio di Siena's large pennant – which the local people call the "cencio". This is awarded to the winner of the city's internationally known horse races which take place in Medieval costume. This is not only an exciting event, but a collective "rite" as well, that gives expression to Sieneese traditions, its spirit and culture. Schifano turned to Franco Cardini, the famous medievalist, to gain an in-depth understanding of the Palio's history and its cultural meaning. Cardini later contributed other critical writings to Schifano's work.

2000 For his one-man show *I due Soli* (Two Shining Hermits), i.e., Saint Francis and Saint Anthony, held in Padova's City Museum, Schifano unveiled his 3G Fountain, a work that commemorated a threesome – Giotto, the Jubilee and Justice. This complex monumental work he once again dedicated to Saint Francis.

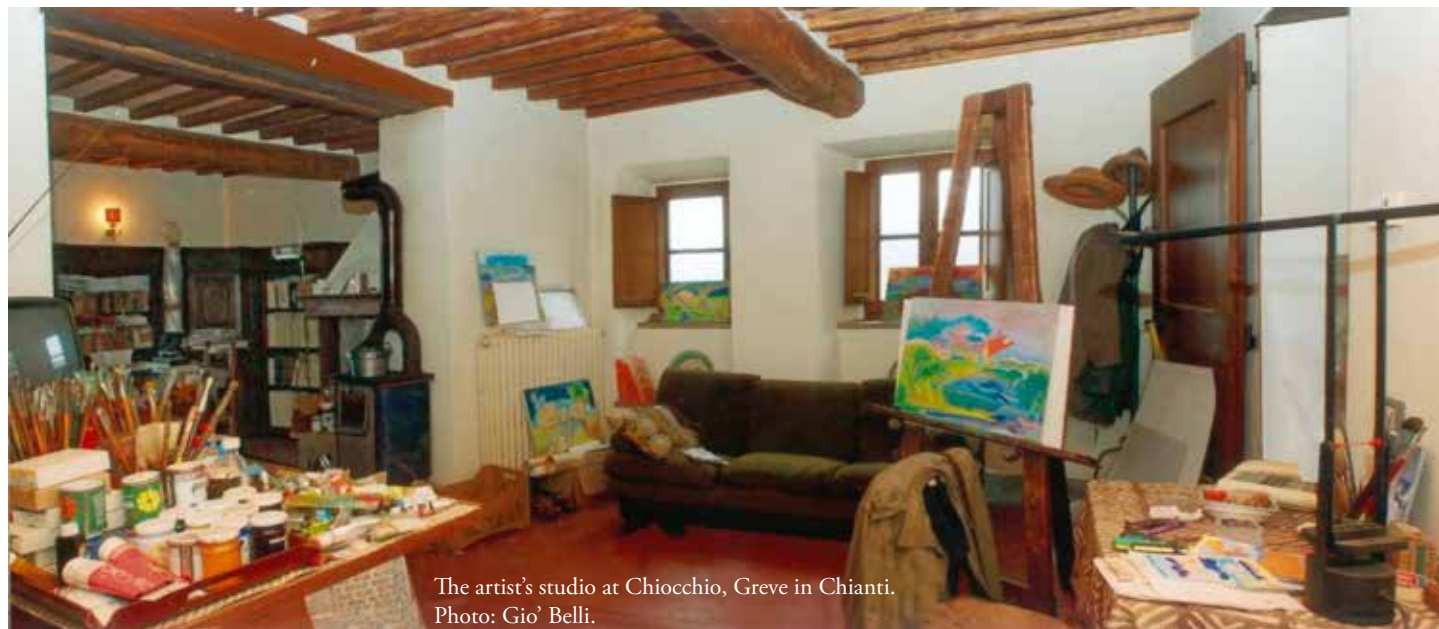
2000-01 Different exhibitions and events led him to spend time in the places he loved in France, Switzerland, the Veneto, Puglia and Tuscany. In this period he moved his studio and home to a farmhouse in Chiocchio, near Greve in Chianti.

2008 Two events stand out in this year: an exhibition, *Dal Nobile alla sacralità del vino* (From Vin Nobile to wine's holiness), was based on a project and works authored by Schifano, and included a dinner party and a charity auction for Telethon. The second event, *Made in Carcere* (Made in Jail), Schifano planned and personally executed together with the female convicts in Lecce Jail.

2011 Schifano was asked to help organize the XIX European Biennale of Blacksmithing Art in an abandoned wool mill in Stia, Arezzo, and contributed to it a wide selection of works of his own. For this event he created paintings as well as original design objects such as waterlilies, flags, T-shirts, using traditional Casentino woollen fabrics in an entirely new way. Schifano also organized a performance by having the horses of the local carabinieri shod in the public square, to the admiration of old and young alike.

2012 Schifano organized for the second time in Malta a one-man show, this time in La Valletta's Palace of de Salle. This gave him a chance to feel the proximity of North Africa and its culture, which he still yearned for, remembering his happy childhood and his lost roots.

On **13 February, 2013**, Luciano Schifano died of a heart attack in his studio in Chiocchio. He was preparing the official inauguration of the 3G Fountain. Donated by him to Padova, the municipality later installed it inside the city's Law Court.



The artist's studio at Chiocchio, Greve in Chianti.
Photo: Gio' Belli.

THE WORLD OF LUCIANO SCHIFANO

Especially in the early period, Luciano Schifano's painting expresses a range of sensations, sounds – high-pitched at times – and deep-seated emotion linked to memory. Much of his work is criss-crossed by childhood recollections, a fact that signals his human condition marked by the loss of roots as well as his carefree youth.

His having to leave behind his motherland, with its visual and cultural stimuli, proved an experience so poignant that it marked the artist for the rest of his life and left him with a longing for home and a deep-seated sense of exclusion and injustice.

His painting tackles these sentiments. Not by chance is the stylistic mould of his first period expressionistic. The unlovely design builds on brushstrokes charged with matter. The pictorial syntax he uses is made of disorderly signs and shapes which tend towards succinctness. His use of planes is based on overlapping as well as upside-down levels. Thus space appears as a visually simultaneous screen.

An early and recurring stylistic trait in Schifano is his use of colour in pure and vivid tones to depict the strong emotions that are present throughout in his work.



"Self portrait", 1964, oil painting on canvas, 50x34 cm.



"The immigrant", 1960
oil on yuta 100x50 cm



"Misery", 1962
oil on hardboard 65x40 cm

ENCOUNTER WITH FLORENCE

FIRST STEPS TO A BETTER WORLD

When he first moved to Florence, Schifano was still a young artist and used his painting to make strong statements about his existential malaise. Florence offered him a different solution. At first it was the light of the lonely countryside, where he decided to settle down and work, tackling new and more relaxed themes. Landscapes, sunsets, nature's multiple aspects, dynamic horses – these were the subjects he worked on during his peaceful years of rustic seclusion.

Now his colour takes on shape and grows playful between dawn and sunset. This was when fundamental concepts and aesthetic and poetic ideals developed in Schifano, ultimately inspiring all of his work. The following words bear testimony to this:

For a better world let us truly quench humanity's thirst. Given my state of mind, I prefer to stay high in the clouds. For a better world – well, then yes, I'll come down landing on my feet.

But his years of rustic seclusion were suddenly interrupted, and again life changed for him. On 4 November, 1966, the Arno river broke its banks and flooded the city of Florence, devastating it. The waters never spared its enormous and unique historical and artistic heritage. Schifano rushed to Florence to offer help. He was one of the most motivated “angels in the mud”, i.e., those volunteers who toiled to salvage and restore the artefacts that had been submerged by the flood.

This rescue operation helped Schifano to relate more and more to the local places and its people, thanks to which his artistic vein developed and expanded further. He now started painting ancient churches, portraits of friends of his, interiors with flowers, female nudes, giving himself increasingly over to the joy of colour, which now gushes out of his work like a spring and reaches the viewer in all its clarity and light.



“Florence, Ponte Vecchio”, 1968, oil painting on canvas 40x50 cm.

BIRTH OF THE SACRED THEME

ELEVATION TO A BETTER WORLD

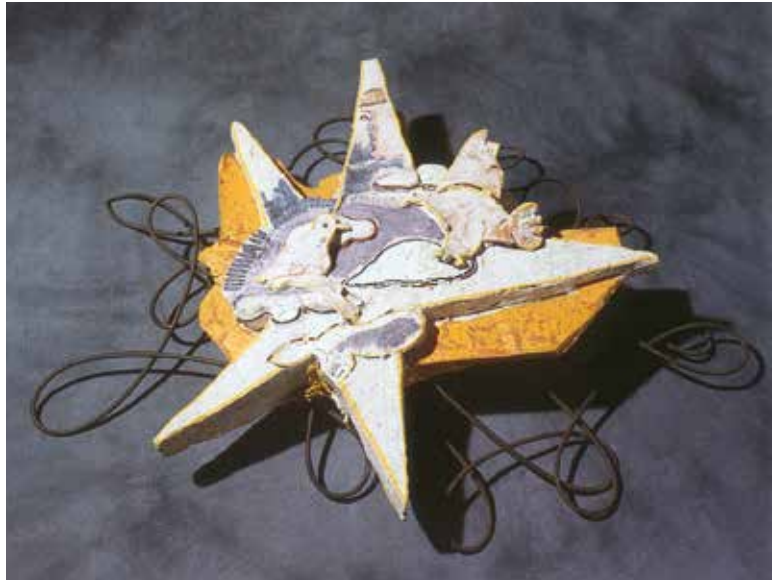
Schifano was already a well-known and sought-after artist in the early 1980s, when he was quite suddenly asked to organize an exhibition by the name of “Let’s Imagine a Sacred Theme” in Assisi’s Basilica of St. Francis, to celebrate the eight-hundredth anniversary of the Saint’s birth. Only in later years did he realize that the journey he had now undertaken would mark him deeply and last for his whole life.

He now began producing works using the most diverse techniques: painting on cloth, wood, cork, sculptures in terracotta and iron, collages, ceramics. At first Schifano looked to the Canticle of the Creatures for inspiration; then, increasingly fascinated by St. Francis’ life, he plunged deep into the saint’s innermost nature. He admired his philosophy of life and his ethics, his respect for animals, his deep love for nature and for all creation.

The works Schifano produced as a result of this spiritual encounter with the saint are a hymn to the simple life in harmony with oneself and the surrounding world. These words tell us a lot about the artist:

Let’s take off our shoes and set off bare-foot, treading the soil without ever trampling on it.

The colours and the sentiment alike that infused the artist while he produced these works grew lighter and more delicate with time. He rediscovered his old passion for classics, now marked by a more flowing, unhurried, harmonious self-expression.



“The Star”, 1981. Ceramics and metal 97x46x36 cm.
(Assisi, 1982 – Florence, 1983 – Padova, 2000)



“For St. Francis”, 1981. Ceramics and metal 97x46x36 cm.
(Assisi, 1982 – Florence, 1983 – Padova, 2000)

THE SANTA CROCE WINDOWS

Schifano's windows for the crypt in Florence's Santa Croce church were officially inaugurated on 14 October, 1995, in the presence of Padre Franchi, the rector of Santa Croce's Franciscan monastery, and Ms. Fuscagni, head of the same church's Vestry Board. The windows depict the 4 elements rendered in St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures: the sun, the wind, earth and fire. They have been idealized by means of a special technique that does without the traditional "lead jointing", thus affording the viewer a seamless reading of the work. The central window is dedicated to the sun and bears the title Cowl, Sun and Sackcloth. It represents the symbol Schifano first created in 1982 for his exhibition in Assisi Let's Imagine a Sacred Theme, to mark the 800th anniversary of the Saint's birth.



Glass window named "Brother Fire", 1990, 118x87 cm

From **Franco Cardini's** presentation in the catalogue of *Two Shining Hermits*, Padova:

[...] and again, in 1995, the windows Schifano created in a very beautiful, solemn and suggestive place – but also one of the most difficult of all the "sacred spaces" of Florence, namely, the Crypt of the Fallen in Santa Croce Church. Taking inspiration from St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures, this work symbolically depicts the elements that constitute the foundation of the cosmos and our life. On that occasion, not only did Schifano draw much praise and admiration for his artistic craftsmanship and poetic discourse, but also for the technical prowess that enabled him to create windows without lead joints and with deep, bright colours whose quality seems almost to change in accordance with the light coming from outside at different times of day. The occasion here was another centenary, marking the 700 years from the founding of this Franciscan basilica which is, among the great churches of Florence, the most cherished by Italians at large, for it is here that Machiavelli, Galileo, the poet Alfieri, the philosopher Gentile, and other celebrated members of our nation have been laid to rest.



The main window "The habit, the sun, the cilice" called "The symbol", 1990, 276x76 cm

The crypt



THE 3G FOUNTAIN

GIOTTO GIUBILEO GIUSTIZIA

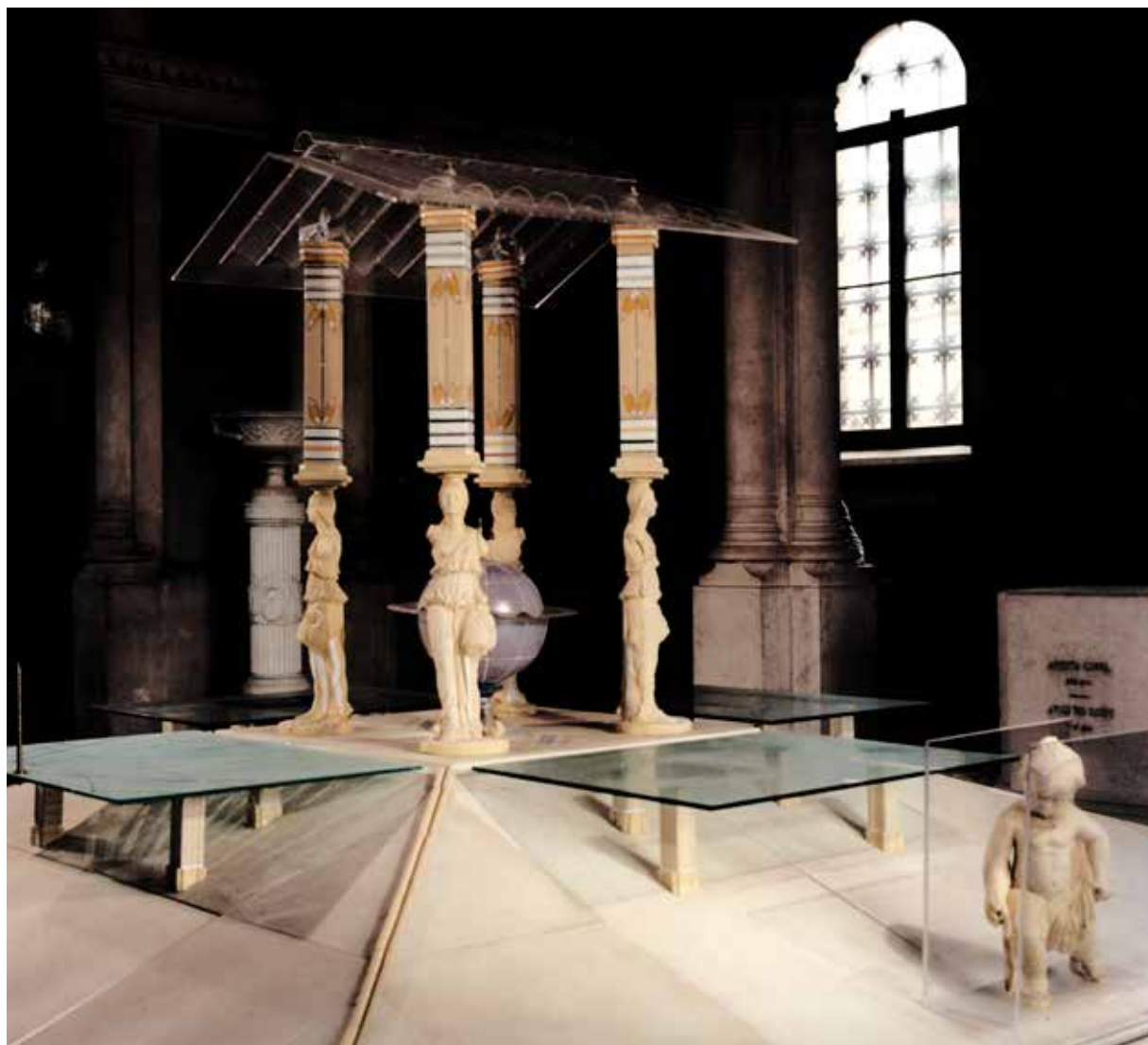
The 3G Fountain is both conceptually and technically Schifano's most elaborate and complex work. The artist first exhibited it at Padova's Museo Civico, to mark his vast one-man show for the Great Jubilee in 2000. He called it *I due soli* (Two Shining Hermits): St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua. He then presented the work to the municipality of Padova, where it was installed inside the Law Courts.

Schifano himself unveiled the Fountain with these words:

... As I am the one who conceived it, and ever before that, imagined it, and subsequently gave it shape and personally decorated it, let me say: it's not painting, it's not sculpture, it's not architecture, it's not engineering, but it is the symbol of the art of Faith, and Faith in art. The faith I have, and the faith we should all have.

The quest for beauty distances the world from the mundane and brings it closer to God our Master. The mix of clay has made everything very luminous. It reminds you of the desert sands, tufa in Italy's deep South, the stone of Lecce. Finally, it gathers in our Mediterranean culture which, thanks to its origins, is a bridge for this millennium. [...]

Given my recklessness, I still wonder at all the difficulties I plunged into during the six adventurous months it took me to bring the work to end. But then this is how I find my balance. ...



SCHIFANO AND THE SALENTO

Salento is a land of resounding colours. It is a land that brings together different cultures and heritages, indeed all of these have marked both its landscape and its character. Sometimes we get confused and think we're in Africa. This is probably why Luciano Schifano felt the Salento to be close to home. Something in the air, in nature, in the relationships with people, always reminded him of Libya.

And so, he produced many works for this land. His painted "tapestry" here was "narrated with clear and luminous panels", as Flavio Caroli put it – and streaks of orange, blues, reds. Crucially, he also collaborated with Officina Creativa on the project "Made in Jail". The female convicts who met him, were immediately drawn to the artist, and felt much at ease with him: "such a sober and subdued middle-aged gentleman; we immediately noticed how different he was from his works, which we had seen in the catalogue – so colourful, so conspicuous and communicative..."

Indeed, a fascinating story emerges from the works Luciano Schifano created for this land that finally made him feel at home.



"Land of Puglia"
Salento, "Maquis"
2011, oil painting on canvas 170x80 cm