

Pasolini in Chiaroscuro

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Francesco Vezzoli is part of *Pasolini in Chiaroscuro*, at Villa Sauber, Monaco.

The exhibition at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco - Villa Sauber approaches the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini by looking at the ways in which classical and contemporary painting influence his filmmaking. The term “chiaroscuro” in the title refers to the painterly technique of the likes of Caravaggio as much as to the black and white in *Accattone*. The exhibition brings together a variety of pieces (film excerpts, paintings, drawings, installations, photographs), dating from the 16th century to the present day. It finishes with a presentation of contemporary art works in which over thirty international artists have paid tribute to Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Pasolini is perhaps the last internationally famed European intellectual. Half a century after his death, his influence is still felt in the various fields in which he worked: he is read, quoted, commented on and adapted; he inspires today’s creators. While he liked to define himself above all as a “writer”, it was his films that brought him public attention. Cinema was a sounding board for his political ideas and held a central place in his body of work. It is this aspect, seen through the lens of the influence which classical and contemporary art had on his cinematographic aesthetics, that is the main focus of this exhibition.

It starts by evoking Pasolini’s formative years. His studies at Bologna University, under the supervision of the art historian Roberto Longhi, trained his gaze and had a lasting influence on his tastes. This is shown through excerpts from his films freely juxtaposed with the works that inspired them. Pasolini adopted these in three ways: by reproducing them as *tableaux vivants* (Pontormo’s *The Deposition* in *La Ricotta*); referencing their composition or certain striking details (Caravaggio’s *The Young Sick Bacchus* in *Accattone*); or featuring them in the film sets (Giacomo Balla’s *Pessimism and optimism* in *Salò*).

Most of the works that inspired the Italian director are classical paintings and frescoes, with one notable exception: the paintings of Francis Bacon, which are both referenced and shown in *Teorema*. This exhibition thus reveals Pasolini’s ambivalent interest in the art of his day. It takes a special look at his friendship and collaboration with Fabio Mauri, which gave rise in 1975 to *Intellettuale*, a performance during which the film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* was screened onto the artist’s body.

Pasolini’s totalizing artistic approach did not prevent a profound unity in his work; his poems, novels, essays, opinion pieces in the press and feature films all answer and complement each other. Pasolini was an intellectual who recorded his era, notably the onset of consumer society on which he cast a painfully lucid gaze. This is seen in the last part of the exhibition, devoted to *Salò*, Pasolini’s final film. Without straying from the influence which Pasolini’s cinematographic aesthetic drew from painting and literature (here the Marquis de Sade), the exhibition explores how all these references were mobilized to paint a political discourse.

To finish, after highlighting the ways in which Pasolini drew on the artistic influence of his predecessors, the exhibition continues upstairs at the Villa Sauber with works by contemporary artists who have symmetrically paid homage to Pier Paolo Pasolini: Adel Abdessemed, Giulia Andreani, Tom Burr, Adam Chodzko, Clara Cornu, Walter Dahn, Regina Demina, Richard Dumas, Marlene Dumas, Cerith Wyn Evans, Laurent Fiévet, Alain Fleischer, Claire Fontaine, Giovanni Fontana, Jenny Holzer, William Kentridge, Astrid Klein, Stéphane Mandelbaum, Fabio Mauri, Martial, Charles de Meaux, Dino Pedriali, Ernest Pignon-Ernest, Giuseppe Stampone, Jean-Luc Verna, Francesco Vezzoli, John Waters.