

# Visions from the Metropolis

An artistic research between urban life and early Renaissance imagery.

Franca Marini

On the early painters of the Italian Renaissance:

“ ... those magnificent artworks resonated with my own personal imagery affirming the universal nature of art, capable of creating an emotional link regardless of distance in time and culture. I attempted to reinterpret them and in doing so to create my own visions. They were an important source of inspiration during the years I lived and worked in the American metropolis (New York City), far away from the timeless beauty of medieval Siena.”



# VISIONS FROM THE METROPOLIS

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Simone Martini (1284 –1344) in Siena City Hall, *The Equestrian portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano*, 1330 commemorating the conquering of Montemassi Castle by the Sienese.

Franca Marini (1962) comes from the medieval city of Siena, Italy, located in the north central region of Tuscany. Marini pursued her studies first at the Art Institute in Siena (Istituto Statale d'Arte Duccio di Buoninsegna) and in 1986 received her degree with honors from the Art Academy in Florence (Accademia di Belle Arti). Franca Marini moved to the United States in the late 1980s to continue her education at the San Francisco Art Institute, then for more than a decade, Marini lived and worked as a professional artist in New York City.

The current exhibition *Visions from the Metropolis* features work the artist painted during this period in the 1990s. While living in the United States the artist was exposed to many new ideas, however, the traditional imagery of the great Sienese painters of the Medieval and early Renaissance times continued to influence her. Throughout this exhibition the relationship of the old master's images are evident in Marini's contemporary artworks.

Although trained primarily as a painter, over time, Franca Marini developed an interest in technology based artwork. She is currently engaged in the creation of site-specific installations and video art in addition to her ongoing work with traditional materials. The subjects of her videos are often connected to urban living and issues surrounding human rights.

In 2018 Franca Marini will engage in a semester-long project at the Human Rights Institute Gallery at Kean University, entitled Transnational Migration and Immigration. The humanitarian crisis in Italy will be the example she will use to focus on universal human rights and issues of economy, politics, and conflict which ultimately influence all refugees. Marini's work has been shown in Europe, the United States, Central America and the Middle-East. Today Franca Marini teaches painting at the Siena Art Institute and for the SUNY Siena Program of Buffalo State College.

Neil Tetkowski

Director of University Galleries



## Paintings influenced by Sassetta



Sassetta, *Saint Anthony Beaten by Devils*, 1430-32, 9.4 x 15.4 in, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena

Stefano di Giovanni di Consolo, known as il Sassetta (ca.1392–1450) was an Italian painter who is considered one of the most important representatives of Sienese Renaissance painting. While working within the Sienese tradition, he innovated the style by introducing elements derived from the decorative Gothic style and the realism of contemporary Florentine innovators as Masaccio.

This small painting by Sassetta was part of a triptych called the “Arte della Lana” altarpiece, commissioned by the Wool Merchants Guild for the order of the Carmelites in Siena. It is an important source of inspiration for many of Franca Marini’s paintings. The artist found the tension between foreground and background, between the four figures and the landscape extraordinary, as they adhere to modern principles of composition rather than imitating reality or nature. The same is true of the abstracted striped sky – one of the first cloud-streaked skies in Italian art – adding an amazing sense of depth to the image which was created without the use of perspective. Franca Marini experimented with the composition using both horizontal and vertical formats, and both cold and warm colors. Painted solely with a palette knife and many layers of acrylic impasto, the surfaces of the paintings have a rich texture which often results in a unique dimensional effect.



## Paintings influenced by The Fall of the Rebel Angels



Unknown artist from the Sienese School, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1340-45, 25 x 11 in, Musée du Louvre, Paris

This group of works from 1993 was inspired by *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, a painting by an anonymous master of the Sienese School. Franca Marini first encountered this painting on the cover of a catalogue, and was immediately attracted by its unique view point and original representation of depth. In spite of the modest size of the painting, Marini was moved by the powerful, monumental quality of the composition. From this piece, the artist developed a series of paintings ranging from very small to very large, all painted with a palette knife and heavy acrylic impasto. In the vertical, more narrow works, Franca Marini substitutes the dark orb — likely a representation of hell — with an image of a medieval wall town, which is her hometown of Siena. In the largest painting of the series the dynamic movement of the figures, representing the descent into hell, is paradoxically balanced by the vital feeling of movement and perhaps even growth.



## Paintings influenced by the Master of the Ossevanza



Master of the Osservanza, *Saint Anthony tempted by the devil in the guise of a woman*, 1435-40, 14.9 x 15.8 in, Yale University Art Gallery, Connecticut

One of the most admired narrative series in fifteenth-century Sienese painting comprises eight panels illustrating the legend of Saint Anthony the Abbot, generally attributed to an anonymous artist known only as the Master of the Osservanza. Originally part of an altarpiece, the series includes works now divided among museums in New York, Washington, D.C., and Berlin, in addition to the two panels in the Yale University Art Gallery's collection. In this panel, Saint Anthony, retiring to a life of abstinence and isolation, is beset with temptations of the flesh. The wings of the seductress at the right identify her as a devil concealing her true motives.

### Area 2:

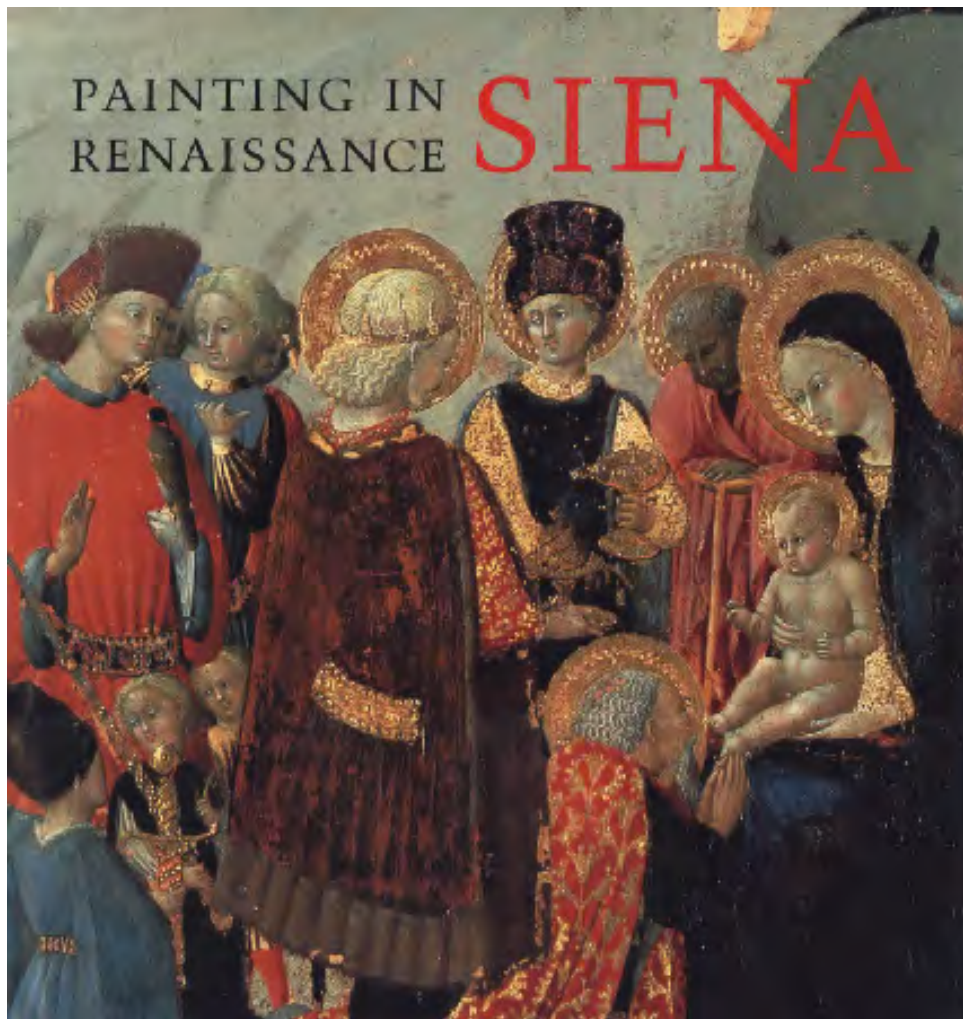
The starting point of reference for the artist is a detail of the work by the Master of Osservanza. Note the black crow depicted in the sky in the upper left side of the painting. Marini develops this series of works with horizontal and vertical compositions in varying sizes based on this painting from nearly 600 years ago.

### Area 3:

Franca Marini recreates the same structural composition of the work by the Master of Osservanza. She also represents the same figurative elements: the landscape, the stripes of the curved sky, the round shaped hills with the animated trees, the winding path, the two figures and the small edifice. Instead of flying black crows in the sky – one of which was her source of inspiration for the previous work, Marini depicts just one flying creature in the lower part of each painting. She builds up the surface with a thick acrylic impasto applied with a palette knife rather than a traditional brush. In the second piece, the texture and the layering of the impasto make the figurative elements of the work by the Master of Osservanza barely recognizable. The final result is a transfiguration of the masterwork into two large monochromatic paintings where figures and landscape, foreground and background, have completely merged.

## Renaissance Paintings of Siena at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

In 1988 Franca Marini lived in San Francisco and had the opportunity to visit New York City. Fortuitously at that time, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was showing a major exhibition of art from Siena entitled, *Painting in Renaissance Siena, 1420–1500*. The experience of seeing artwork from her hometown of Siena, in this very different context marked a meaningful moment in the artist’s development. Marini bought the catalogue which she continues to keep in her studio.



“This study devoted to Sienese painting centers on the fifteenth century, a fascinating period when Sienese artists confronted the innovations of Renaissance painting in Florence. The painters of Siena, without betraying their heritage of the previous century—which had produced some of the greatest artists of all time, including Duccio, Simone Martini, and Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti—succeeded in adapting their artistic traditions to a new and completely original vision, rejecting many of the norms by which subsequent generations have come to define Renaissance art. These later Sienese artists frequently took a non-rational approach, seeking not to replicate nature, but to explore a more subjective world—one that in some respects is akin to that of twentieth-century art. The result is one of the most singular schools of Italian painting, which must be viewed on its own terms and understood within the religious and social framework of fifteenth-century Siena.”

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This catalogue is available at:

[http://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/Painting\\_in\\_Renaissance\\_Siena\\_1420\\_1500](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/Painting_in_Renaissance_Siena_1420_1500)



## Saint Anthony the Abbot in the Wilderness



Osservanza Master, *Saint Anthony the Abbot in the Wilderness*, 1434, 18 3/4 x 13 5/8 in, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This panel is part of a cycle of scenes depicting the life of the hermit Saint Anthony the Abbot. The painter's penchant for original and descriptive narrative detail appears in the treatment of the desert landscape and its fauna (symbols of the saint's temptations) beneath the luminous sky at dusk. A pot of gold in the lower left corner (which has been scraped away) symbolized the seductive worldly goods that the stalwart saint resists. The series of eight panels were likely arranged vertically, surrounding a central painted or sculpted image of Saint Anthony. The complex was probably commissioned for a member of the Sienese Martinozzi family (whose arms appear on one of the panels) for an Augustinian foundation, either in Siena or perhaps in the Marches region, where several branches of this family were located.

This panel is the sixth in a series of eight that includes Saint Anthony at Mass (Gemäldegalerie, SMPK, Berlin); Saint Anthony Distributing His Wealth and Saint Anthony Blessed by an Old Hermit (both National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.); Saint Anthony Tempted by the Devil in the Guise of a Woman and Saint Anthony Beaten by Devils (both Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven); and Journey and Meeting of Saint Anthony with Saint Paul the Hermit and Funeral of Saint Anthony (both National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

The enigmatic Osservanza Master has variously been identified as Sassetta and also as the young Sano di Pietro, based on close stylistic affinities with these other Sienese artists. It is also possible that the paintings attributed to the Osservanza Master, including the altarpiece from which this panel originated, are the product of a collaborative workshop to which these artists belonged.

## Siena, Italy



How does a city last for a thousand years? Perhaps the answer is partly found in the city hall (Palazzo Pubblico) graced by an ancient tower that you can still climb today. This landmark building is one of the most highly regarded examples of pre-Renaissance Italian architecture and is the focal point of Siena. Construction of this mostly terracotta building began in 1297 and its original purpose was to house the newly evolving public form of government. At that time, monarchies were on the way out and representative councils were being established. Inside the Palazzo Pubblico are the famous frescos by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1290–1348) with allegorical depictions of good and bad government, illustrating the effects that such regimes would have on the people in the town of Siena and the people of the surrounding countryside. For many, the Palazzo Pubblico with its fabulous Gothic arches and majestic tower is the icon of Siena. There at the central piazza, twice each year, 50,000 people gather as the Palio horse race takes place with Medieval fanfare and pageantry. Costumes, flags, drums and local folks with extraordinary civic spirit take over.