

## ONLINE VERSION

### Sandro Chia: Moments of Sacred Magic

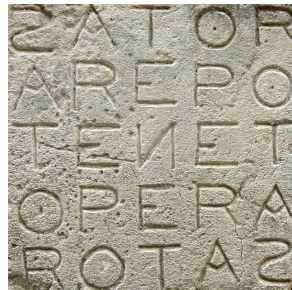
By Tammy Duffy: April 24 2014



Photo by Tammy Duffy

Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects in NYC was packed for the opening of a solo exhibition of recent mixed media works on paper by Sandro Chia (b. 1946). The exhibition, entitled, *Sator Arepo*, opened on April 23, 2014, incorporates work completed by Chia in 2011-2014. The title of this exhibition was formulated from a Latin palindrome word square (Sator squares) with magical associations. You will find this inscription in ancient Roman tablets throughout the world.

The Sator Squares have been attributed to having magical properties to them. Some actually are viewed as being immune to tampering by the devil. The devil would become confused by the repetition of the letters, and hence their popularity in magical use.



The square has reportedly been used in folk magic as well for various purposes, including putting out, removing jinxes and fevers, to protect cattle from witchcraft, and against fatigue when traveling

Chia describes his work in the exhibition as:

*“The artworks are scaled like a maquette. The challenge is knowing when to stop. One must exercise your perception when viewing the pieces in the exhibition. Use your mind not your eyes to view the pieces. Think of Galileo and the early challenges he had when developing the telescope. The multiple layers seen in the pieces add value. They are an*

*accumulation of words and images that are cut and pasted. The magic of the image emerges as the piece is developed."*

The layers of pentimenti (*which is an alteration in a painting, evidenced by traces of previous work, showing that the artist has changed his or her mind as to the composition during the process of painting*) demonstrated in the works creates a romantic fire that is impossible to extinguish. The layers seen in each piece feed the fire and allow the viewer to develop a relationship with the pieces in a deep and meaningful way. The imbedded words seen in the pieces, the calendar page from St Patrick's Day in 2005, exercise ones mind to the level of an extreme athlete. It's a marathon of mythological and religious sophistication. The teddy bears seen in the works have a unique meaning as well. Chia explains, "the male figures are showing off the work they have done to their teddy bears, looking for their approval." One must exercise your mind when viewing the show. The Tuscan colors Chia uses, are marinated into the ancient stories, all the while feeding the roots of his life and work.

Chia wants you to think of Galileo when viewing the works. Galileo, and early telescope developers, faced difficulties finding clear and homogenous glass for their lenses. The glass was full of little bubbles and had a greenish tinge (which was caused by the presence of iron impurities). This was an issue that plagued telescope developers for centuries. It was also hard to shape the lenses perfectly. The images of stars were blurry, and surrounded by color haloes. There are halos evident throughout the pieces in the exhibition. Chia purposely wants you to look for the blurred edges.

Sandro Chia was born in Florence in 1946. He studied at the Istituto d'Arte and then at the Academia di Belle Arti in Florence where he graduated in 1969. After graduation, he has travelled extensively in India, Turkey and throughout Europe before settling in Rome in 1970.

Chia has been part of the Italian "Transavanguardia" movement, which began in 1979. The Italian art critic, Bonito Achille Oliva coined the movement, Transavanguardia, which originating in the "Aperto '80" at the Venice Biennale, and literally means *beyond the avant-garde*. This art movement is the Italian version of Neo-expressionism. It swept through Italy, and the rest of Western Europe, in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The movement rejected conceptual art and reintroduced emotion, especially joy, back into drawing, painting and sculpture. The artists in the movement revived figurative art and symbolism. The principal Transavanguardia artists were: Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino.

Sandro Chia has exhibited in many of the most prestigious museums and galleries of the world. During the 1970's he began to exhibit in Rome and Europe, gradually moving away from conceptual works towards a more figurative style of painting. Between September 1980 and August 1981 he received a scholarship from the city of Monchengladbach in Germany where he moved to work for a year. The following year

he moved to New York City, where he remained for over two decades, with frequent trips back to Montalcino, near Siena in Italy.



Photo by Tammy Duffy

Chia has also exhibited at the Biennale of Paris and San Paolo and three times at the Venice Biennale. His work has been part of internationally acclaimed museum group shows. Amongst his most important personal shows are exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam (1983), the Metropolitan Museum of New York (1984), the National Galerie of Berlin (1984, 1992), the Museum of Modern Art of Paris (1984); the Museums of Dusseldorf (1984), Antwerp (1989), Mexico City (1989); Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence (1991); the Museums of Karlsruhe (1992), Palm Springs (1993), Villa Medici in Rome (1995); Palazzo Reale in Milan (1997), the Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida (1997), the Galleria Civica of Siena (1997), the Galleria Civica in Trento (2000), the Museo d'Arte of Ravenna (2000); Palazzo Pitti and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Florence (2002); and most recently the Duomo of St. Agostino in Pietrasanta (2005) and Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna of Rome (GNAM) (2010).

In 2003, the Italian State acquired three important works of his for the permanent collection of the Italian Senate at Palazzo Madama, and in 2005 two monumental sculptures were acquired by the Province of Rome and placed in front of its headquarters in Via IV Novembre, Rome.



Photo by Tammy Duffy (Sandro Chia seen in the middle)

In 1984, Sandro Chia acquired an estate from his friend Baron Giorgio Franchetti. The restoration of Castello Romitorio began, followed by the transformation of its overgrown

lands into vineyards, and the construction of a cellar on the Castle's ground floor. In 2006, the winery broke ground on a new state-of-the art underground cellar which was completed in 2007. Castello Romitorio winery takes its name from the massive twelfth-century fortress that sits atop a hill surrounded by thick oak forest in Northwestern Montalcino. Sandro Chia's wines are irresistible, just like his art.



Castello Romitorio, photo courtesy of Sandro Chia

Today, Sandro Chia lives between Miami, Rome and his Castello Romitorio wine-making estate in Montalcino, where he produces prestigious wines, amongst which the world-famous Brunello wines are made. Sandro Chia's wines won the 'International Wine Challenge' for best red wine in 2010.



Castello Romitorio, photo courtesy of Sandro Chia

**Sandro Chia exhibition runs from: April 23 –May 25 2014**  
**At**  
**Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects**  
**208 Forsyth Street, NY, NY 10002**  
**Hours: Wed-Sun 12-6pm & by appointment**