

MANUELLA MUERNER MARONI

CHALLENGING THE VIEWER TO CONFRONT HIMSELF

BY ROSE HOBART



[Top] Manuella Muerner Marioni, *Torso Gold*, 2010. Mixed media sculpture, 20 x 8 x 12 in. Courtesy of the artist. [Bottom] Manuella Muerner Marioni, *Solar Torso*, 2010. Acrylic painting on canvas, 40 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist.

At first glance one sees color, transparency, and maybe even a reflection of themselves in the artwork of Manuella Muerner Marioni. Manuella was born 1964 in Thun, Switzerland and grew up to study Fine Art and Fashion Design in Zurich. This Swiss artist exhibits her creativity and appreciation for history through her colorful, vibrant art, which takes the form of paintings and sculptures. She defines art as being “the creation of contradiction” which she portrays exquisitely in her work. The contradiction comes about through her use of varying materials such as Perl Acrylic and CDs, affixed to paintings and sculptures, which create prismatic surfaces opening them up to a variety of interpretations, thoughts, and feelings.

Soon after Manuella finished her Fine Art studies, she traveled to Florence, Vienna, Lisboa, Paris, Spain, and more—this is where her cultural education took place. These experiences had a profound impact on her but perhaps the strongest influence on her art was a friendship with collaborator Niki de St. Phalle. Manuella recounts that “she was the best artist in the world and for over 7 years we worked together.” This intense period of collaboration stimulated her thoughts about life and art in general and her new ways of thinking, encouraged by St. Phalle, have accompanied her works for the entirety of her career. She soon came to the conclusion that her works should “move from death to life. Where, with specific perceptual effects, the piece itself becomes alive. Materials are dead, inert. But with my work I want them to become activated. My beholders should become a part of the work.” This is exactly the case with works like *Solar Torso*. This stunning, bedazzled work conjures up references to the body and the celestial sphere—prompting us to consider transcendent states of mind. In other works such as *Orange Head*, she creates a bust with an anonymous face, yet when one looks directly at the sculpture they are confronted with multiple reflections of themselves instead of be-

ing able to adequately look at the expression or details of the sculpture in front of them; consequently these works are incredibly self-reflexive.

Much of Manuella’s artwork is reminiscent of some historical pieces, namely her sculpture *Torso Gold* which could easily be compared to the Venus de Milo. Although it doesn’t exactly have the same characteristics as the Venus, Manuella’s piece has a similar impact in its scale, authority, and intensity. *Torso Gold*, as the title suggests, only portrays the torso of a woman’s body, although the Grecian Venus de Milo not only portrays the torso but is also accompanied by the head of a woman. The de Milo was made to pay homage to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. In kind, *Torso Gold* is a visual manifestation of the abstract ideas of love and beauty. A woman’s torso, in Western conception, is usually considered one of the most attractive areas of the body—due to the slender, sensuous curves of her breasts and waist. The use of mirrored mosaic tiles, however, is what gives this piece the added dimension. A trait found in the majority of Manuella’s artwork is that of self-reflection—one literally is able to see their own reflection in this sculpture; one is able to see the beauty, per say, within his or herself. Manuella explains, “It is important to give meaning to my art. I often write about the pieces, giving them a narrative. I want to express my sense of life through my work and I want to give ideas to others around me. Art allows us to see things from different perspectives. You don’t have to accept on view. No tunnel vision. Art allows us to look at things with different eyes, to be open.”

Manuella Muerner Marioni’s use of innovative techniques is especially exciting—she uses Perl Acryl because it “flashes a lot, like lightning. My fascination has always been form, light, colors in sunlight or seen through prisms and crystals.” Combining this medium with reflective surfaces like CD’s creates a mirror like appearance. Painters depict-



[Top] Manuella Muerner Marioni, *Music S/Wer*, 2009. Mixed media sculpture, 19 x 10.5 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist. [Bottom] Manuella Muerner Marioni, *Power of Music*, 2011. Digital art, 40 x 27.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

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ing someone gazing into a mirror often show the person's reflection. This is a form of abstraction—in most cases the angle of view is such that the person's reflection would not be typically visible. Similarly, in movies and still photography an actor or actress is often shown ostensibly looking at him or herself in the mirror, and yet the reflection faces the camera. In reality, the actor or actress sees only the camera and its operator in this case, not their own reflection. One thinks of Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* or Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, which capture an expression of intense drama and near shock in the beholder. This same shock is given to the viewers of Manuella's work. Her fascination is translated in a way that allows the viewer to see the world in an entirely new, ever changing, dynamic way. The subtle changes in daylight thus shift our perspective each time, creating the work ever anew. Something as simple as even changing one's clothing the second time you look at a mirrored sculpture can also make a world of difference. Different colors exude different emotions and therefore changing the color allows for a completely different experience with the exact same sculpture.

Not limited to physical pieces, Manuella maintains a place in the contemporary art world with her foray into digital media. Graphically redesigning her mirror sculpture and renaming it *Power of Music* adds yet more layers to the piece, forcing the viewer to look at the work in an entirely new respect and reaching out to a whole new audience.

Manuella Muerner Marioni's artwork is some of the most uniquely made art in today's society. Her use of vibrant color and mirrored mosaic tiles are what captivates the audience. Manuella's art also captures the modernity of today's society while successfully giving the 'vintage' feel of historical pieces that allows her artwork to be adored and appreciated by both older and newer generations. □