

# Sant'Andrea de Scaphis

**SIMONE FORTI**

***LARGO ARGENTINA***

**FEBRUARY 14 - MARCH 30, 2024**

*When I think of the world, I feel mental models of dynamics. I almost see swirls of histories and tensions forming in space and extending through my body. — Simone Forti*

Artist, dancer, choreographer, writer. Simone Forti is a figure that transcends all boundaries and incompatible with any form of expressive coercion. Forti was born in Florence in 1935 to parents Milka and Mario Forti. While Forti's father was from Prato, where her grandfather Beniamino founded an important textile firm, her mother was of Jewish descent from Eastern Europe. If Italy was the country that gave her birth, it was also the one she had to escape from against her will. In 1938, the Forti family emigrated to Los Angeles as Mussolini came to power. After enlightening studies, first with Anna Halprin in San Francisco and then with Marta Graham and Robert Dunn in New York, and two marriages, with Robert Morris and Robert Whitman, Simone returned to Italy in 1968 and chose to spend some time in Rome.

At a time when the art scene was mourning the death of Pino Pascali, Forti emerged and began working with Fabio Sargentini. Forti utilized Sargentini's gallery space to rehearse and perform her studies of movement. Galleria L'Attico became the venue for the artist's first performance of *Sleep Walkers* (aka *Zoo Mantras*), developed from her observations of animals at the city zoo. Living nearby, Forti often visited to observe the movements of the animals, developing an acute awareness that every movement – including the non-human – had a potential quality that deserved exploration. Through the study of the head-swinging movements and the repetitive rhythms of polar bears and elephants inside their enclosures, the artist segmented and repeated their different movements. Forti created a musical score of the body with defined pauses, intervals, and tempos, reflecting and investigating the balance between captivity and freedom.

Forti also found herself fascinated by the strange amalgamation of memory and trauma that

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oscillated between movement and enclosed space at Largo Argentina, an archaeological site inaugurated in 1929 by Mussolini. By the time of Forti's visits the ruins of ancient temples had become a natural colony for feral cats to fiddle, eat, hang-out and rest. Here Simone shot a series of photographs that in 2012 she chose to present in the form of an installation where the images are projected as a slideshow onto a white sheet moved by the wind from a fan that animates and brings to life both the photos and the animals.

Forti has consistently approached her work in more laboratory and improvisational rather than object-oriented terms. Consequently, she always considered her work to be a living matter that can be rethought and reshaped in both its potential and actual forms. Forti began to engage with the medium of exhibitions in the early 2000s which reinforced this approach: seamlessly blending disciplines, intertwining dance, choreography, and the written word. This deliberate fusion serves as a poignant reminder that artistic expression, for her, is not confined to a singular medium but rather a dynamic interplay of various forms.

A new book of poems by Simone Forti, published by NERO, will be presented for the conclusion of the exhibition, and on the closing day of the exhibition three songs sung in Italian by the artist from the album *Al di là* will be played in the church. Writing is an extension of Forti's voice, and drawing is an extension of her body. Three poems make up this new book in which the artist scrutinises the outside world, scanning and probing its very details: sounds, lights, movements. The stillness of her body is counterbalanced by the vivacity of her gaze and the fervour of the city of Los Angeles. As one reads these poems, one moves forward with wonder amidst everyday memories, recollections of life, a sense of civic duty, glimpses of a precarious world, the beauty of nature, melancholy, a rage to live.

Luca Lo Pinto