

TornabuoniArt

Playing with Light and Color. A Dialogue between Nicola De Maria and Piero Dorazio

September 30 - October 25, 2025

Opening | Tuesday, September 30, 2025 | 5:30 pm
Milan | Via Fatebenefratelli, 34/36

Press Release

With this exhibition, Tornabuoni Arte pays tribute to two masters of color—two painters long represented in the gallery’s collections, who in the second half of the twentieth century made light their subject and abstraction their poetic universe. Through atmospheric canvases such as Dorazio’s *Reticoli* and De Maria’s *Sono un pittore di cassette* (1982); gestural works like Dorazio’s *Nebulae* and De Maria’s *Testa baciata dagli angeli belli* (1990–91); and more playful compositions, such as *Arcanciel nuovo I* (Dorazio, 2001) and *Romanticismo segreto ribelle* (De Maria, 2000–05), the unprecedented pairing of these two artists suggests an imagined passing of the baton during the two decades in which their careers overlapped.

Born in Rome in 1927, Dorazio took his first steps in the art world within the Marxist circles of the capital during the 1940s and '50s. In search of “new chromatic relationships”, he studied the “dynamic and graphic properties of colors”. He contributed to the founding of Gruppo Forma 1, which was built on the conviction that “the terms Marxism and formalism are not irreconcilable.” De Maria, by contrast, was born in 1954 in Foglianise (Benevento) and soon settled in Turin, where he still lives today. He emerged with the artists of the Transavanguardia movement, which the art critic Achille Bonito Oliva defined as an “attitude and philosophy of art that focuses on its own centrality and on the recovery of an inner rationale”. Founded in 1979, it favored intuition and personal expression over the cerebral and conceptual current that had dominated the postwar art scene.

Throughout their respective careers, both artists upheld a steadfast commitment to abstraction as their primary mode of expression. In their early work, such as *Time Locker* (1963) for Dorazio, and *Nell’occhio del bambino* (1981) for De Maria, there emerges a shared interest in the manifestation of what Dorazio described as an “indefinable colored light.” Dorazio, however, explored the relationship between space, form, and color through rigorous, dynamic, and structured compositions, in which color becomes luminous architecture. De Maria, by contrast, worked through emotional and visionary stratifications, where dense, material color conveys a more intimate, poetic, and lyrical dimension.

For De Maria, the “function of color” is to “trigger emotional jolts.” Dorazio, on the other hand, maintained that one becomes a painter “when, after studying in museums, exhibitions, and artists’ studios the visual effects that only painting can produce, one understands that a painter has the power to create a personal virtual reality, capable of offering viewers phenomenal sensations such as light, space, distance, time, weight, and movement.” Dorazio’s analytical approach thus stands in contrast to the spiritual attitude that guides De Maria. If for the former painting tends to become the construction of a “virtual reality,” for the latter it aspires to be an “expression of Creation.”

And yet, canvases such as De Maria’s *Regno dei fiori - Sorridi faccia* (1984–85) inevitably recall, both chromatically and compositionally, paintings like Dorazio’s *Leal* (1972), where shards of vibrant color stand out against an ultramarine ground. Indeed, Dorazio’s canvases of this period—often compared to the stained-glass windows of cathedrals—seem to reveal, beneath their formalist rigor, an underlying concern with the spiritual dimension of light and color. Likewise, works such as Dorazio’s *Felix orient* (1983) and De Maria’s *Giardino e angeli + luci + baci (Giorno di Pasqua)* (1984–85) seem to converse compositionally, although Dorazio’s brushstroke remains precise, almost kinetic, while De Maria’s is more expressive and material.

The oeuvres of Dorazio and De Maria thus arise from different approaches, yet they share a common drive toward a free and independent way of painting, capable of acting directly on perception and on the emotions of the viewer. The unprecedented parallel between these two painters reveals two sides of the same coin: a modernist and a postmodern approach to light and color. Within the exhibition, the dialogue between research and expression, formalism and metaphysics merges into a single reticular reality, which we invite the Milanese and international public to experience. In the gallery spaces, the canvases encounter one another and converge irresistibly, revealing the indomitable nature of light and the ineffable power of color.

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OPENING TIMES | Monday 3 - 7 pm | Tuesday - Saturday 10 am - 1 pm / 3 - 7 pm