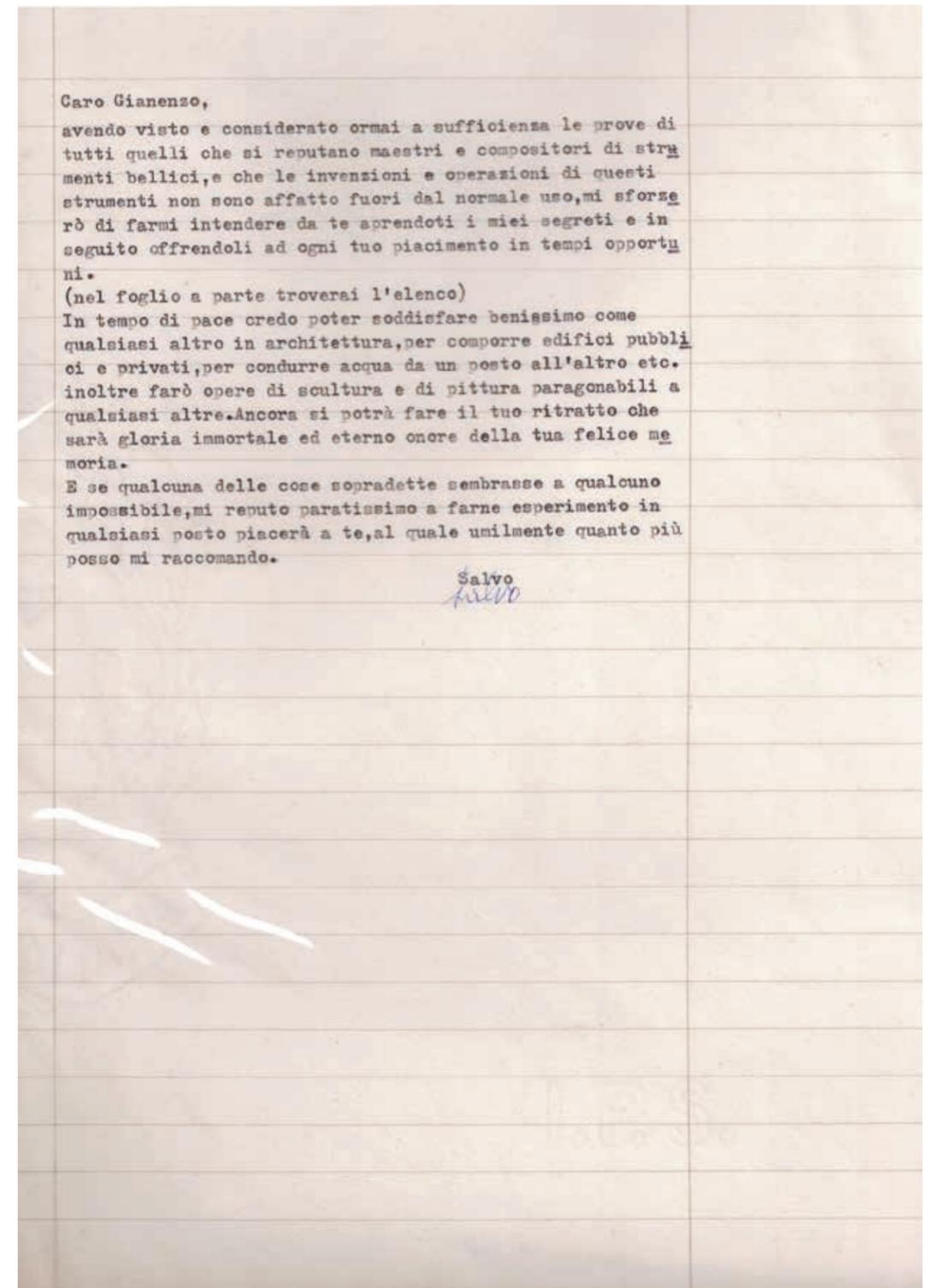


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In 1969 Salvo sent a typewritten letter to Gian Enzo Sperone. But the text was not by the artist: taken from the *Codex Atlanticus*, it was written by Leonardo to Ludovico il Moro.

The extensive holdings in the Salvo Archives contain the life and self-portrait of Salvatore Mangione, aka Salvo. Established in 2016 by Norma Mangione and Cristina Tuarivoli, it enables users to interface with the artist's performative identity. As if we have reached a staging point from which to set off again, the countless materials in the archive, at first Salvo's studio and then his apartment, make it possible to relate to the development of his work, reconstruct his achievement and understand the considerable attention devoted to him in recent years.

The cataloguing of the works, drawings and documents, still in progress, opens the archive to different forecasts and reinterpretations of the materials it contains. For this reason, the analysis presented here selects some of the archived documents and works to emphasise the intertextual duality present in the artist and his works, and as an obvious consequence in the archive itself.

In 1969 Salvo sent a typewritten letter to Gian Enzo Sperone. But the text was not by the artist: taken from the *Codex Atlanticus*, it was written by Leonardo to Ludovico il Moro. For Salvo, the gesture of copying and reusing was not a servile act. Replicating the model represented a deliberately enhancing self-affirmation, constituting a tour around the world and his own identity. The process implemented by the artist was radical and stratified. The questioning of subjectivity, in an age when the "consecrated tradition" of Arte Povera and conceptual art seemed not to permit it, flowed in multiple directions. In *12 Autoritratti* the practice of photomontage enabled Salvo ironically to be a single figure, himself, and at the same time multiple subjects at work, from the miner to the bartender, in the midst of the Vietnam war or during an aeroplane flight as a pilot. But the roles to be interpreted were not just these. There was a revived tradition and a history of art that had to be placed at the centre. His research into photographic self-portraits was extended in 1970 to the figures of Raphael and Christ blessing.

"If I'm influenced by the painting of another age, it's like the Cheshire Cat's smile in *Alice*. The smile remains when the cat is gone. In other words, I might be influenced by Rubens but I certainly wouldn't want to paint like Rubens."¹

Sure enough, like De Kooning, Salvo never meant to paint like Raphael. His face in the image is simply found, starting from one of the most famous masters of the Renaissance, in a state of emersion beginning at the end of his neck.

He is the more-than-present of a reminiscent act; and this also hap-

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pens in other media: writing and painting. In 1970, in fact, in his first solo show at Sperone he presented a series of manuscript books (1969-1971) together with the *12 Autoritratti* in which the process was the same as the letter he addressed to the gallery owner to introduce himself and disrupt the ordinary interviews in the art system. In *Mille e una notte* ("Thousand and One Nights") he becomes the porter and Sindbad sailor, in the Gospel of Mark he is Jesus Christ. Salvo again becomes a figure in transit in the iconography of the saints that he has been painting since 1973. It almost seems that, in his adherence to the figural, painting absorbs his face and that he is not the one who is "tampering" with the figure of St. George or St. Michael.

His relationship with identity, subjectivity and artist's role could be described as almost a performative process.

All this work is accompanied by the theoretical text *Della Pittura* in which, imitating Wittgenstein's limpid method, Salvo extends his reflections on painting and subjectivity.

69 I imagine myself to be Napoleon.
I think I'm not Napoleon.
I'm not Napoleon.

70 Remembering is one of the tools of thinking. I remember that I am Salvo. If I suffered from total amnesia, wouldn't I be in a coma? What thinking would it be?

71 I imagine myself to be Napoleon; why do I think I'm not Napoleon? I see certain things, I remember some others and I conclude that I am...²

So one wonders who Salvo is. Saint or baker? Wittgenstein or Napoleon? In the mystery of his gesture and in the transparency of the titles of his works, he brings a new mythology to the contemporary condition. He performs the saint or Raphael, manifesting his generous aptitude for rendering a noble representation of the artist.

1 L. Marin, "Un peintre sous influences: notes sur de Kooning et la tradition flamande et hollandaise de peinture, in Willem De Kooning", exhibition catalogue, Musée d'art moderne, Centre G. Pompidou, Paris 1984, pp. 31-39.

2 Salvo, *Della Pittura*, Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln 1980, p. 31.



S1974-1. Autoritratto come San Martino by Salvo. Watercolor on paper 1973



S1974-1. San Martino e il povero by Salvo. Oil painting on canvas, 1974

