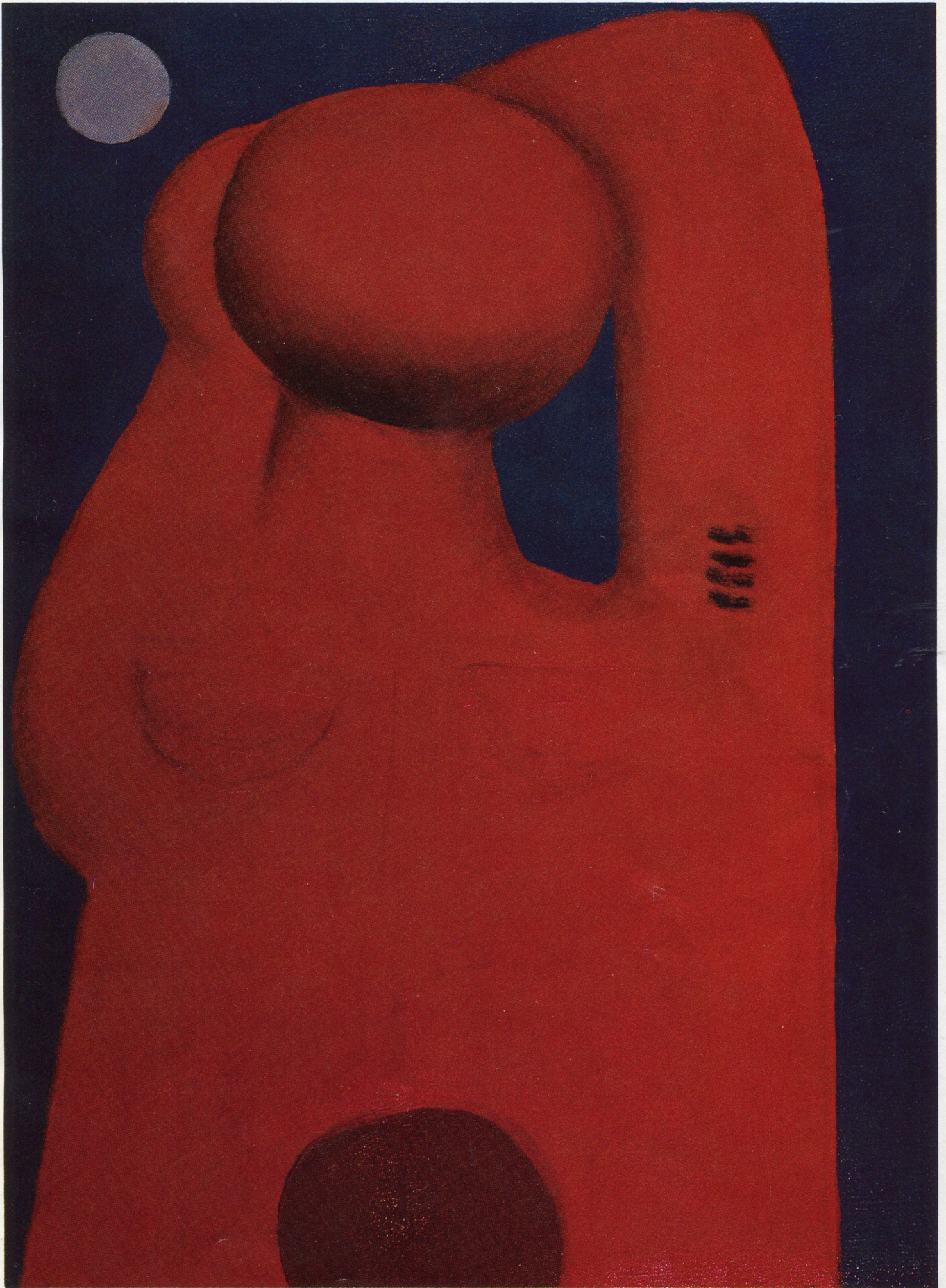


F A R R U G G I O



FARRUGGIO

A RETROSPECTIVE
EXHIBITION

JULY 1-24, 1983

PROVINCETOWN
ART ASSOCIATION
& MUSEUM

PROVINCETOWN
MASS.

REMO M. FARRUGGIO

Twentieth century art is a complex thicket indeed. Many critics and art historians seem to see their collective role, therefore, as that of a gardener, weeding out the "insignificant" artists, nurturing certain selected shoots, and pruning the overgrown so that a few chosen art-plants may flourish more visibly. The real landscape that artists actually inhabit gets rearranged from the outside, oversimplified, overtended and consequently falsified. One man's weed, after all, can be another man's flower.

The generation of artists to which Remo Farruggio belonged was the generation of the Abstract Expressionists. He was born in Sicily in the same decade as DeKooning in Holland, Tworckov in Poland, and Rothko in Russia. In the nineteen-fifties Abstract Expressionism became the first "American" art movement to achieve international fame and influence, but this positive achievement had at least one negative side effect. Art's gardeners and pruners made it difficult at the time to see other artists—even exact contemporaries like Farruggio—who were pursuing different aesthetic directions. It is only now, after his death, that Farruggio's very complex and personal world begins to come into sharp focus. It is an oeuvre full of surprises.

I arrived in Provincetown for the first time in the summer of 1956, and I must have met Farruggio shortly thereafter.

Remo, in person, was unforgettable. His neatly trimmed old-world-artist's goatee was no less a trademark than the blackened accountant's cigar he always seemed to have clamped between his teeth. I remember occasionally having trouble decoding his language since he tended to talk around the cigar. He moved slowly, carefully, solidly, and one did not often remember seeing the activity of his legs when he did so. He floated gracefully, all of a piece. His essential feature was the expression in his eyes: alert, amused and affectionate, the look of a man who loved things and never stopped enjoying them.

In those days I was an Abstract Expressionist. Remo's work struck me in a way that it must have struck the art-gardeners and pruners: it was very European. The characteristic size of his paintings was modest and traditional. The paint handling was calm and elegant, and the emotion was under control. European was a bad way to look in those years, but now (to paraphrase Mark Twain) one can be amazed at how much drama and beauty those same works have acquired in the meantime.

His was a rich and valid aesthetic, building as it did upon European models as disparate as Paul Klee and Giorgio de Chirico. The painterly facility of his touch is obvious. What is now most surprising to me is his expressive

range. His emotion begins with the two basic Farruggio sonorities: a dark, nocturnal, romantic color world and its opposite—a warm, atmospheric, blonde chord. This latter territory is sometimes occupied by abstracted landscapes, nostalgically evocative of his native Sicily. But the same golden, high-keyed color world is employed in Farruggio's solid, sensual, earth-goddesses who seem anything but nostalgic or tentative. For a painter who often created soft, sometimes dreamily evanescent works, Farruggio had a healthy appetite for the physical, which manifested itself in some strikingly blunt and effective erotic works.

His dark, nocturnal paintings were, like their blonde, sunlit opposite numbers, more often gently romantic and atmospheric than broodingly introspective, though there are exceptions. A dramatic large early painting of a disembodied female nude and

a mysterious green horse provides one marvelous and surprising example. Despite its unmistakable Surrealist "violence" one still senses Farruggio's pleasure in the calm act of applying paint, gracefully, delicately.

Farruggio's temperament, then, is a rich mix. As much an abstract painter as a realist one, he is simultaneously earthy and nostalgic. One is tempted for a moment to think of him as a kind of Sicilian Chagall, but that seems much *too* rich a mix. In all his work Farruggio is both witty and humane, and never self-consciously "spiritual." When I look at one of his paintings I think of those eyes of his—warm, smiling, enjoying. An artist at peace with the world in which he lived, and expressing that peace with great painterly generosity.

by BUDD HOPKINS

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