

The Universe on Paper. The Art of Linda Karshan



International Conference
Pisa, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo
13 October 2022

Paper Abstracts and Speakers' Bios

Linda Karshan's Humanism

Giulia Martina Weston, Sotheby's Institute of Art, London

Karshan's *oeuvre* naturally resonates with chiefly humanistic preoccupations such as the relationship between micro and macrocosms, the dialectics of gravity and grace, and an understanding of the body as measure of the universe. Taking its lead from a selection of works displayed at the exhibition *The Universe on Paper. The Art of Linda Karshan*, this paper aims to unearth the profound bonds between Karshan's art and *modus operandi*, and the thinking and writings of authors such as Leonardo da Vinci, Baldassarre Castiglione and Galileo Galilei. A synoptic reading of Karshan's drawings and jottings will cast light on the particular connection between the movements of the mind and those of the body, in full accordance with Leonardo da Vinci's notion of the *moti dell'animo*. Furthermore, the quintessentially Renaissance value of *sprezzatura* will be reconsidered in both its aesthetical and ethical implications. Ultimately, Karshan's personal marks – particularly the constructive element of the grid, and the seemingly geometrical patterns forming circles, squares and lozenges – will be read against Galileo's

understanding of the universe. Special emphasis will be placed on the notion of moral ‘uprightness’, intended as both a cornerstone of Renaissance society and a stronghold of contemporary humanism.

About Giulia Martina Weston

Giulia Martina Weston is a specialist in Renaissance and Early Modern art who lectures at The Courtauld Institute of Art and Sotheby’s Institute in London. Her publications include the volumes *A tale of two cities: Rome and Siena in the Early Modern period* (2020), *Niccolò Tornoli (1606-1651). Art and patronage in Baroque Rome* (2016), and *I Pittori del Dissenso* (2014). She is a Permanent Member of the Centre for the Study of Medicine and the Body in the Renaissance – Fondazione Comel (Pisa), an institution for which she curated the show *The Universe on Paper. The Art of Linda Karshan*.



Venice: the Transitional Space of Linda Karshan

Roberta Semeraro, Art Critic and Curator

The Venetian art critic Roberta Semeraro met the American artist Linda Karshan in Venice in 2019, during the exhibition *Equilibrium, Art, Architecture and Sacred Geometry in Conversation* at the Abbey of St. Giorgio Maggiore. She was immediately in love with Karshan’s Art. In this paper, she will explore how the city of Venice, suspended between reality and its reflection in the water, has become Linda Karshan’s transitional space. Notably, the artist will return to Venice in December 2022, with a tribute to Italo Calvino at the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti.

About Roberta Semeraro

A fixture on the contemporary art scene since 2001. She worked as an independent curator, novelist, documentary creator, screenwriter. In 2008, invited by the Armenian community of San Lazzaro, Semeraro began her now-constant collaboration with the city of Venice for the organization of contemporary art exhibits. She presented the environmental sculpture project “Nine Artists for Reconstruction” in L’Aquila, following the devastating earthquake that struck that city. In

2018, she published the book "Ricostruire con l'arte" - Rebuilding with Art-for Procredit, which received a special mention from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities in the landscape category. In March 2019, she curated the donation of works and the installation of "Linda Karshan's Library for L'Aquila" at the Palazzo dell'Emiciclo of the Abruzzo Regional Council. She was the curator of "Conexion," the Dominican Republic's Pavilion at the 17th edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021. Since 1991 she has written in catalogues and curated exhibitions for numerous international artists, and her activities have been featured in newspapers and other mass media. She is the president of the Cultural Association RO.SA.M.



The Intelligent Hand

Camilla Pietrabissa, IUAV University in Venice

The hand has always been central to the fashioning of artistic identity because of its ability to express the relationship between the physical and the intellectual part of artistic practice. In Aristotelian terms, the hand is 'the instrument of instruments' – the organ where intention is expressed and embodied, situated at the point where the body meets the world. Physically and metaphorically, the hand is an icon of creation, and as such it has been represented by early modern artists as different as Parmigianino and Goltzius. However, this notion of the hand as icon was put under scrutiny already during the Renaissance period, when the 'mind' began to gain prominence in artistic theory. Where do we stand at present in this process of conceptualisation of the hand? What contribution to this long-running process is advanced in the 'digital era'? In 2014, Linda Karshan participated to a conference organized at the Courtauld Institute of Art on the topic of the 'intelligent hand', conducting a workshop on her understanding of manual dexterity. My talk will resume part of that conversation, particularly about the role of the hand in her daily practice and the conceptual relationship between the hand and the mind.

About Camilla Pietrabissa

Camilla Pietrabissa is postdoctoral research fellow in the history of art at IUAV University in Venice. Her research examines the visual culture of

the Enlightenment, particularly the history and theory of drawing and of landscape representation. She has published on journals such as *Dix-huitième siècle* and the *Burlington Magazine* and edited volumes and held international fellowships in Paris and Munich. She obtained a PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art, and worked at the Louvre Museum and the Courtauld Gallery as a print room assistant.



Latitudes of the Body and Rhythms of the Soul

Fabrizio Bigotti, CSMBR, JMU Würzburg, University of Exeter

At the heart of Renaissance philosophy lies the conviction that the body is a kernel of potentialities. With its limbs, the body extends in space, defining distances and units of measure, while, by way of its inner rhythms and cyclical patterns, it also extends in time, helping musicians to set the musical rapports between duple and triple time and architects to define harmonic proportions between masses and volumes. Yet, most importantly, the body is regarded as "the capacity to resist decay" ("potentia resistendi") via the cyclical restoration of the inner balance between fluids and temperaments. These aspects became the object of detailed studies by physicians and philosophers who rediscovered the practice of anatomy and developed the use of diagrams to define the range of health and disease. The Renaissance view of the cosmos was probably the last organic vision the West actually had of its culture, place in history and destiny. It rested on the assumption that the human mind can understand the external world as it is for, in its essence, the world is a macrocosm, a big order, that reflects the familiar order of the microcosm, i.e. the small order. In this analogy and correspondence between man and the universe, more than in anything else, lies the concept of humanism. By showcasing a variety of images, metaphors, musical pieces and artistic renditions that embody the Renaissance idea of measuring the world by drawing on the latitudes and rhythms of the body, in this lecture I will dwell on the timeless themes offered by humanism to present-day scholars and artists.

About Fabrizio Bigotti

Fabrizio Bigotti is the Director of the CSMBR as well as DFG Fellow at the University of Wurzburg in Germany and an Honorary Fellow of the College of Humanities at the University of Exeter. As an intellectual historian, his work specialises in the history of science, medicine and technology with a focus on the period 1300-1700. He has published widely, in English and Italian on the history of Galenism, Renaissance anatomy and the invention of early modern precision instruments.



The art of Linda Karshan: a Scientific Perspective

Ximena Montano, Comprehensive Cancer Centre – King's College London

History has demonstrated that science and art are disciplines that can be linked. Scientists have a creative and deductive mind that is reflected on their power of observation and analysis. Importantly, visual observation contributes to the thinking, understanding and interpretation of the matter under investigation. The complexity of cancer can also be represented within this perspective, as art is considered a universal language that could be applied to every aspect of the human condition. This paper will concentrate on the different attributes and qualities of Linda Karshan's drawings within the remit of the life's building block, the cell, and how it relates to cancer. The organic logic, versatility and interconnectivity will be discussed. The overall aim is to appreciate the significance of homeostasis, equilibrium, in relation to the presence or absence of such challenging disease and to emphasise the beauty of life in all its forms and aspects.

About Ximena Montano

Dr Ximena Montano obtained her bachelor's degree in Microbiology from Imperial College London and then studied for her PhD in the laboratory of Professor David Lane at Imperial College London. She undertook her postdoctoral training in laboratories at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard Medical School with Professor David Livingston, National Cancer Institute in Maryland and Bristol Myers Squibb in New Jersey with

Professor Mariano Barbacid, where she began work on the role of RAS proteins and receptor tyrosine kinases in human cancer. In 1996 she became a Lecturer and started her own laboratory at Newcastle University, UK where her group initiated the analysis into the molecular mechanisms of nerve growth factor receptor, NTRK1, activation and its functional relationship with the tumor suppressor p53 in human tumors. She continued with this work by obtaining a Senior Research Fellowship award at Imperial College London and subsequently at UCL, and currently as a Lecturer at King's College London and Westminster University. She has published in Journals of international prestige. Dr Montano is a member of British Association for Cancer Research and European association for Cancer Research. She is an Executive member of Europa Dona UK and a Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Science. Dr Montano was awarded the Freedom of the City of London on 2011 for her contribution to teaching and research.



Drawing as the Embodiment of Action

Linda Karshan in conversation with Giulia Martina Weston

“The important thing here is the surprise, as much for me as for the viewer.’ What is surprising about Linda Karshan’s drawings is their sense of familiarity. Their presence is self-evident and inescapable, as if that was the way it has always been [...] Do we always draw our own true self-portrait when we are self-unconscious? Is that the real practice?”

– Matthias Bärmann, 2001

In this prelude to the exhibition launch, Linda Karshan will talk about her own working method and artistic practice, reflecting about the self, and sharing with the audience her experience of bringing art into being during the Covid-19 pandemic.

About Linda Karshan

Karshan was educated at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY (1965-67); the Sorbonne, Paris (1967-68); and the Slade School of Art, University College London (1969). In 1983, she earned a Masters in Humanistic Psychology from Antioch Centre for British Studies, London. Karshan's solo museum exhibitions include those at Museum Pfalzgerie Kaiserslautern, Germany (2013); Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK (2003); Sir John Soane's Museum, London, UK (2002); and Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain (2002). Her works were featured in group exhibitions at the Courtauld Gallery, London, UK (2014, 2012), Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK (2013, 2010), Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, Germany (2013), British Museum, London, UK (2010), Graphische Sammlung, Munich, Germany (2009), and Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany (2008) among others. She regularly exhibits with several galleries in Europe and the USA, and took part in the BAD+ Art and Design Fair in Bordeaux (2022). Karshan's drawings, prints and artists' books are held in public and private collections in the USA, Europe, and the UK. In July 2022, Karshan was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by The Courtauld Institute of Art in London.