

# MERGING CULTURES

Artist Anthony Signorini tells *Arts & Collections* how his latest exhibition reflects the Oblong Gallery's cross-cultural mission

BY CHRIS JENKINS



With headquarters in Forte Dei Marmi and Dubai, Oblong Contemporary is an Italian contemporary art gallery which gives a platform to artists from all over the world, with the mission of bridging a cross-cultural exchange between Italy and the Middle East.

With its strong links to the mediaeval town of Pietrasanta, known as the "City of Artists", Oblong's vision is to represent a place of cultural dialogue, giving a platform to artists from the region as well as hosting a strong programme of workshops, educational initiatives between Dubai and Italy.

Oblong's latest exhibition features the works of Italian artist Antonio Signorini, who began an in-depth study of primitive art in 2003. His studies of archaeological sites with particular interest in Libyan, Saudi and Iraqi caves informed his work to recreate in sculptural form the drawings represented inside these caves, giving a modern

interpretation that connects today's man to his past.

As his research expanded into Europe and Mesopotamia, he developed the series known as *The Warriors*, inspired by the Paleolithic prehistoric period. The first warrior is inspired by drawings from the caves of the Saharan Libya, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and some regions within Algeria; the other warriors developed one after the other as a memory of the author's personal past, like an ancient tale that he has through art took shape becoming the voice of all humanity.

Complementing *The Warriors* is another sculptural series, *The Dancers*, capturing motion and challenging the forces of gravity.

## BALANCE

If in *The Warriors* and *The Dancers*, Signorini focuses on the power and strength of our ancestors, in the collection *The Flying Horses*, he honours the

importance of balance. Each horse stands in an impossible equilibrium, supported only by almost non-existent support points. The engineering problems using bronze in this way were matched by the complexity of producing a patina representing the burning of fire, an effect achieved through a very long and difficult process using open flame and acids.

Antonio Signorini's first solo exhibition in Dubai, *Movement*, opens at Oblong Contemporary Gallery on 9th February, 2022. "Art is the universal language that brings all people together," Signorini tells *Arts & Collections*. But how else would he describe his exhibition?

"This is the first time I've exhibited my *Warriors* and *Dancers* sculptures together,

Opposite Oblong Contemporary in Dubai  
Below Antonio Signorini, *The Warriors*



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Dubai and how did the region and its archaeology influence Signorini's artistic practice? "My main inspiration comes from ancient art" he says. "I was in Gibraltar for a dive to see beautiful underwater cave art when I happened to read a newspaper article about Saruq Al Hadid, the archaeological site in Dubai. The professor I was with in Indonesia told me about Dubai as well. I came to the United Arab Emirates just to quickly see the site, but I ended up staying. For a year, I was only with the people studying the artefacts, the desert sights, the mountains of Ras Al Khaimah. Now I am a UAE resident."

### INSPIRATION

Signorini's work, though, is still mainly produced in his studio in Florence, Italy. "My favourite place to work is in my foundry in Florence. It's around 50 square metres of chaos. There are 20 workers there smacking and pulling the bronze down and I'm not bothered at all by the noise or the mess or all the things on the floor!"

Creative inspiration, though, continues to come from a range of sources. "I'm not romantic in the sense that I don't need to be on my own in the middle of the desert waiting for the inspiration come. Ideas come to me by doing."

"As a kid, I would stand on our apartment balcony in Italy, and look across at the mountains and ask my mom why I could see snow on them even in summer. Eventually, I learned that the snow was actually marble. For practical reasons, I chose a career in the business of fashion, and the whole time I kept this vital part of me a secret and I never stopped thinking about becoming an artist for a single day in my life." ♦

**OBLONG CONTEMPORARY GALLERY  
DUBAI**

*R29 Bluewaters Boulevard  
Bluewaters Island, United Arab Emirates  
+971 4 232 2071*

**OBLONG CONTEMPORARY GALLERY  
FORTE DEI MARMI**

*Via G. Carducci 45 and 14/C  
Forte dei Marmi, 55042 (LU), Italy  
+39 0584 300290*

*www.oblongcontemporary.com  
info@oblongcontemporary.com*



Top Antonio Signorini  
Bottom Oblong Contemporary in Forte dei Marmi

Those figures don't stop. They are not fighting, but journeying onwards to face down issues that lie in wait just ahead.

"I'm also introducing some different, new *Flying Horses*, in my ongoing series. The ceramic paint I chose is also used for aircrafts and supercars. It absorbs into the pores of the bronze and seals them. The sculptures are not only a perfect white, but they are beautifully smooth to touch."

So what is the artist's relationship with

though I always imagined it happening", Signorini tells us. "Life is movement. The Earth turns at a constant speed of 1,670 km/h. Nothing, not even a statue, is static."