

The series of questions and answers that follow are a synthesis of some interviews with Umberto Di Marino during his nearly thirty years of activity. What results is a short story of the gallery told by the gallerist himself, starting from the origins and arriving to the future, passing by the relationship of the gallery with artists, collectors, and the different topics faced through the years.

The material for this text was provided by the contributions curated by the following: Antonello Tolve, Artribune, Nicoletta Daldanise, Giosuè Di Marino, Enzo Di Marino, Maria Di Niola, and Alberta Romano.

### **1. What desire pushed you to pursue running a gallery?**

The gallery was first founded in 1994 in a city near Naples, Giugliano in Campania. Honestly, I couldn't help but analyse the strong contrasts of the environment I was immersed in: the Neapolitan suburbs, abandoned by the urban politics, but central in its function as the industrial heart for the rest of the city. I always saw it as a rich resource, as inspiration, and I found that this intuition of mine was always mirrored in the artists that I worked with. I was convinced in art's capacity to pull entire regions out of anonymity and speculation, transforming them momentarily into pathways of global thought. I was and still am convinced of the necessity of looking with a new perspective at the potential of suburbs as reigns of innovation and possibility. Moved by this enormous passion, I participated in the city's cultural life, I traveled, and I tried to understand more of this world that I didn't belong in initially, but from which I received beauty and profound vision. The first steps I took were dictated by acknowledging that I wanted to throw myself into this subject in order to create direct contact with some of the artists I loved most. At the beginning of the 2000's I started to see the gallery take form, which then would lead me into moving the gallery space in 2005 to Piazza dei Martiri in Naples. This move helped restore order and helped clear the vision for the gallery. The big city allowed me to start new collaborations with international artists that widened my perspective and called my attention to social and political matters, the failure of Modernism and post-colonialism.

The city itself then inspired me to evade the architectural borders of the gallery, which have led me in the last few years to organize more projects and exhibitions in public and private spaces in Naples. And it is here that I started to understand what the future of the gallery will be...

### **2. Tell us a little about your programme: What unites the artists who you work with? What is the red thread that connects your exhibitions? How did this evolve during the years?**

As I was saying earlier, the gallery was born from the observation of the social and political climate of my surroundings at the time, above all else. I always thought of the programme as an extension of my own thoughts, of what makes me passionate, and a way of digging deeper into these subjects was by adding in more points of view, those of the artists. A radical interest in the relationship between the suburbs and the center slowly evolved into a discussion of the influence of art on the landscape, especially through the relationship with young artists. With them we tried to keep a continuous dialogue, and these different perspectives gave me a way to understand and develop multiple visions of what I had always sensed in my region. A re-reading of a colonial past at times very distant; the overcoming of typical dichotomies of modernist thought; anthropological, social,

political, mystical, and at times even religious research of “human and nonhuman things”; all things that have always tied together the programme and the artists of the gallery. After many years of activity, I still feel the need to have continuous dialogue and listen to new opinions that challenge and question my own certainties. None of this would be possible without the more intimate layer of the relationship with each of the artists, the daily cultural exchanges, the sharing of perspectives, the great participation in production and preparation for the exhibitions, and even the smallest discussions done for constructive dialogue. With some of them it has evolved into deep and honest friendships, nurtured by years of intellectual growth done together, in an atmosphere that’s increasingly informal, in which I preferred to avoid the usual “protocol” of the unattached gallerist to give more space to the unpredictable occasions of contact that grow from day-to-day interactions. My house has always been open to everyone and I think that whoever has come to the gallery has felt welcomed to what feels like a family.

**3. As you developed your path in such an intimate and informal environment, do you think there’s something fundamental that you’ve learned from a specific artist? And from a collector?**

In my career as a gallerist, I’ve had the luck of meeting people that have contributed into shaping my vision of contemporary art. Amongst the artists the first one on the list is definitely Vettor Pisani. His advice, his professionalism, but most of all his sharp analysis of the art world has allowed me, from the beginning of my career, to sharpen my vision of the panorama that I was intending to put myself into.

Vettor never had any hesitation in producing and showcasing his work in Giugliano in Campania when my gallery was taking its first steps. Additionally, he was also an important figure for the education of my childrens, other than being a precious friend.

From the collectors I can’t help but include Ovidio Jacorossi and the partners Anna Rosa and Giovanni Cotroneo, who had the courage of going out to the frontiers of the Neapolitan province, overcoming all types of territorial prejudices, pushed by their passion for art and by the quality of the work of the artists. They are the ones that taught me how to separate true passion from speculation-based interest.

This involvement, almost emotional, I see today in younger collections such as the Collezione Agovino, the Collezione Taurisano, and the Collezione Novarese. Apart from the passion, these collections also added an openness to taking risks and putting themselves into play, which by constructing networks, opportunities of dialogue and exchange, and giving financial support to young artists and curators, have led them to become true institutions.

**4. Following the bigger events that have happened in recent years it seems that it is more necessary every day to have a careful analysis into how the structures we belong to can evolve and change. What are your predictions of a structural change in the art system and what is the biggest challenge you think you will have to face?**

In the last few years, I’ve pondered often on how the art world has been changing; of how certain processes of overproduction, typical in capitalism, have also started to generate within our system. A year ago, I was already trying to answer this question by trying to strip my exhibitions off a lot of additions that I found unnecessary, by bringing the artwork and the artist research to the center of it all I wanted to generate new debates over a strict structure. With the project *Visto da qui* I tried to revisit the institution of the “gallery,” nevertheless I wouldn’t throw myself into predictions about the international art market in its great expanse. What I am able to answer is the trajectory that we’re trying to employ in our gallery, which will be our most difficult feat yet.

A concept I've been circling around lately has been the *home-gallery*.

The idea is to transform the gallery. We recently purchased a new space that is around 400 square meters in a historical building at the center of Naples, where we will try to construct this initial intuition of a gallery as a communal good, inviting the public to consider our spaces as a place for curiosity and an occasion to expand our proposed content in a more personal and organic approach.

#### **5. How do you then imagine your gallery in 10 years?**

To bring back the last question, I think it was evident enough before the covid-19 pandemic that art institutions are in need of reforms to their existing structures. Personally, keeping in mind that idea of a common good, I imagine a gallery meant as an intimate place, losing the presumption of being a global entity, where it is possible for collectors, curators, artists, students and friends to experience our work and that of our artists, to visit our deposits and to see our archive. Aiming for this communal aspect of the space, I have the objective to radicalize the idea that a gallery isn't only a business, but an active place of artistic production. Thinking about it, in some cities galleries have represented the only path to building an art culture, shaking them up and shooting them into contemporaneity, anticipating museums by miles. For this reason I don't believe that the future will bring a downfall to institutions, like a lot of people say, but to the creation of new forms and models that will be more dynamic and sustainable. In one of these possible solutions is where I see our gallery in 10 years. Exactly as a *home-gallery*, a space not only connected to a place of work, but one that will be lived and sustained by not only our family but by all the visitors that will want to get in contact with this new dimension of the gallery.