Stefano Puleo

Essays on the Artist

HECTOR DIAZ

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Stefano Puleo
The visual poet of Sicily

By Javier Arizabalo
May 2025

Stefano Puleo, born in Sicily in 1950, was shaped by classical tradition and the beauty of his land, which invites viewers to immerse themselves in a world of optimism and vitality, offering a respite from the monotony of daily life.

From an initial period of more expressionistic and monochromatic work, he transitioned in the mid-1980s to a mythographic re-foundation with youthful and beautiful figures, also diversifying his chromatic range. In 2010, he joined the "Movimento degli Arcani," led by art critic Polo Levi, a promoter of modern and contemporary art. It was through this group that Stefano's art expanded into exhibitions across Italy, Europe, and the United States.

The first analysis we can make of his work is that of its structure. Figures are defined by strong lines, and space is created by the accumulation of different perspectives, sometimes with slight support from straight vertical or horizontal lines. The lack of vanishing points and atmosphere makes this formal organization, along with the intensely vivid and saturated color, give us the sensation that the painting is rushing towards the observer.

His use of color is related to Fauvism, exciting the observer with the use of strong contrasts of complementary colors—reds and oranges against greens and violets—but with a warm dominance that brings tranquility and joy. He employs the Italian knowledge of using earth pigments, such as those extracted from Mount Etna itself.

The second aspect worth mentioning is the use of archetypes in timeless scenes of characters who could be part of a film, while in other works, he brings us closer to the warmth of tranquil Mediterranean villages, their bar and terrace, their church, pine forests, orchards, and the maritime horizon.

Puleo explores several themes that reflect his concerns: cultural identity in the relationship between humans and their environment, that of the Mediterranean landscape of Sicily; historical memory, through references to archaeological ruins, traditional architecture, and everyday objects; the sea as a border and connection, a barrier simultaneously a path of communication between cultures, reflecting the island's position as a crossroads of civilizations; and finally, the

transformation of mundane elements such such as tables, vases, fruits, and boats into symbols loaded with cultural and historical meaning, relating him to Italian metaphysical painting.

Puleo does not copy reality but transforms it into an idyllic and dreamlike universe where people live, love, dance, play music, and interact, and landscapes seem to have a life of their own due to their organicity. He is not, therefore, an analyst, a cataloger, or an illustrator, but a seeker of essences, who seeks to extract all the mystery and spirituality from things and people.

His work reflects international influences, expressionism, abstract art, which prioritizes color and expressiveness, post-impressionist painting of Van Gogh, Cézanne, from the late 19th century, until reaching the avant-garde of the 20th century, with Modigliani, balancing global influences with local particularities, creating a dialogue between tradition and modernity.

The vibrant serenity of Stefano Puleo
A 21st-century Sicilian Fauvist

By Héctor Díaz
May 2025

In the effervescent panorama of contemporary art, where stylistic boundaries blur and new proposals emerge with dizzying speed, the work of Stefano Puleo stands as a beacon of coherence and chromatic passion. This Italian artist, born in Sicily in 1950, has dedicated over half a century to exploring the expressive possibilities of color, consolidating himself as a key figure of Fauvism in the 21st century.

Representing him in my gallery, HECTOR DIAZ, is a privilege that allows me to share with the world the profound beauty and serene vitality that emanate from his canvases. Through three enriching interviews that I have had the pleasure of conducting with Stefano, I have been able to delve into his artistic vision and the philosophy underlying his unmistakable style. This essay seeks, based on these encounters and the enormous admiration for his work, to offer a comprehensive view of Stefano Puleo's trajectory and the significance of his work.

Stefano's childhood in a coastal Sicilian town, surrounded by the energy of the sea and the intense Mediterranean light, indelibly marked his artistic sensibility. In his own words, he recalls with nostalgia that primal connection with nature, an inexhaustible source of "energy and joy." This vital experience is translated into his work through a vibrant and luminous palette, which evokes the warmth and intensity of the Sicilian landscape.

His training at the Catania School of Art laid the technical foundations of his craft, but it was his innate need for expression, fueled by passion and dedication, that drove him to become the artist he is today. The decision to dedicate himself entirely to painting, relegating any other hobby, underscores his absolute commitment to his art. Even his experience as a teacher at the same Artistic Lyceum that trained him reveals a connection with the transmission of knowledge and the cultivation of artistic talent.

The question of his influences reveals a constant dialogue with the great masters of the early 20th century: Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, and, fundamentally, the Fauvists. This affiliation does not imply mere imitation, but an immense understanding of the principles that guided these pioneers: the liberation of color, the simplification of form, and the primacy of subjective expression. Stefano Puleo is part of this tradition, but he revitalizes it with his own sensibility and his particular vision of the world.

Stefano delves into his conception of Fauvism, defining it as a movement based on the use of pure color, the simplification of form, and the expression of subjective emotion. His assertion that there are no major differences between the Fauvism of the past and the present highlights the timelessness of these fundamental principles. Matisse's quote about the "purity of means" resonates with Puleo's constant search for the essence of painting.

His style is defined by a "dominant color tendency," a constant search for harmony between tones that, linked to his imagination, reflects light in a unique way. This chromatic balance is not just an aesthetic exercise, but a quest for serenity and proportion in the composition, essential elements for transmitting the calm and vitality that characterize his works.

His claim that style is not chosen, but emerges unconsciously from culture and experience, underscores the authenticity of his expression. His goal of expressing the "values of beauty" in his paintings is a constant thread in his work.

His reflections on the creative process reveal an inquisitive mind and a keen sensibility. Any image, memory, or event can become a stimulus for his work, and often, during the act of painting, new ideas arise that take him beyond the initial conception. His observation on the loss of the "construction of color and its density" in the photographs of his works highlights the importance of direct experience to fully appreciate the richness of his palette.

Composition, for Stefano, is "decisive" for the success of a painting, an element that determines the balance between design and surface. While he does not consider the subject itself to be the most important, he acknowledges its potential in the face of a good pictorial realization.

The difficulty of painting lies, for Stefano, in facing the blank canvas and in the search for compositional balance. Satisfaction is found in the search for color tones on the palette, a source of energy for his work.

The palette, when the painter fully trusts color, acquires a "remarkable" importance, leaving an indelible mark on the artist.

Light, for its part, is an "essential" component that highlights details, completes plasticity, and enhances contrasts.

His perspective on the most complicated works to paint is revealing: the difficulty resides not in size, but in the "construction times" and the constant challenge of translating his vision. His agreement with Horace's statement that "a picture is a poem without words" underscores the ability of art to communicate emotions and meanings beyond verbal language.

His rejection of the idea that seemingly simple works are the most complex, emphasizing that the difficulties are equal when balance is found, reveals a deep understanding of the challenges inherent in any artistic creation.

The message that Stefano wishes to transmit through his art is deeply human: to arouse emotions, be they joy, sadness, astonishment, or reflection. Color becomes his main vehicle of communication, stimulating the viewer's creativity and offering a different perspective on life. When contemplating his paintings, one cannot help but feel that "joy" and that "serenity" that he himself perceives when observing his own painting. This ability to evoke feelings through the pure force of color is, without a doubt, one of the greatest achievements of his work.

The explanation for why not all works express something lies in the possible absence of basic elements such as "inner impression," the "artist's personality," and "compositional balance."

His assertion that it is not necessary for a work to tell a story, but that every work of art is a story, invites the viewer to a personal interpretation and the creation of their own narratives.

His recognition that a drawing can be as valuable as a painting if it transmits emotions through sign and composition, expands the boundaries of artistic appreciation.

His goal as an artist, to express his personality through color, is intertwined with his conviction that the creative experience is an inherent human faculty and that the artist's success lies in the authenticity of their individual expression.

The reflection on whether an artist makes a work or vice versa finds an eloquent answer in his perspective: a genuine work of art ends up defining the artist. This symbiosis between creator and creation underscores the profound personal investment involved in the artistic act.

His strong denial of the need for madness to be an artist, instead emphasizing the importance of method, balance, and constancy, demystifies the figure of the tormented artist and vindicates rigor and discipline as essential elements of the creative process.

His advice to aspiring artists—to give free rein to inspiration and creativity, and above all, to be oneself—is a call to authenticity and perseverance.

The question of what novelty his work brings to art resonates strongly in his words: his work demonstrates that creativity is fundamental and that individuality is the engine of artistic innovation. In a world where trends often homogenize expression, the singularity of Stefano's voice is an invaluable asset. His conception of art as a stimulus for creativity, a source of new

experiences, and an awakening of critical thinking, reveals an understanding of the vital role that art plays in our lives.

His spiritual beliefs, centered on peace, love, kindness, and friendship, fuel the passion he tries to transmit in his paintings through color. His vision of classical and contemporary painting as stars that shine with their own light avoids any value judgment and celebrates the diversity of the artistic landscape.

His motivation to paint—passion, the pleasure of creating, the love of solitude, and the energy to transcend—reveals a deep connection with his craft.

The distinction he establishes between an "artist" who creates, communicates, and transmits, and a "painter" who simply paints, underscores the importance of intentionality and emotional depth in artistic creation.

His aspiration for his works to be eternal moments of beauty and reflection, although he acknowledges that he still has much work to do, reflects his ongoing commitment to excellence.

His conviction that, in both life and art, nothing is perfect but everything is perfectible, encapsulates a philosophy of constant growth and learning.

Stefano delves into his conception of vocation, considering it innate but often hidden, needing care and nurtured by the study of visual education, color, and nature.

His description of his work as an attempt to translate and reproduce the cultural experiences of great 20th-century European painting reveals his profound respect for tradition.

His vision of the artist in the 21st century, partially overshadowed by the market, laments the loss of their guiding function in determining taste and the message of beauty.

His belief that people buy art because they find in it something that is not evident in daily life—serenity, harmony, the strength of color, and the capacity of imagination to travel within the painting—reveals a deep understanding of the connection between art and the viewer.

While he values the presence of his works in private collections, he recognizes the importance of museums for greater visibility and the consecration of his trajectory.

His metaphor that people find paintings, and that paintings find homes if they are well-guided by gallerists, underscores the crucial role of artistic mediation. The elements that give value to art,

according to his perspective, are the ability to transmit emotions, quality, composition, and the artist's trajectory, with the gallery being a decisive factor in imposing this value on the market.

His trajectory, however, has not been without challenges. Like many artists, Stefano faced complexities when introducing his work to the art market. His testimony on the importance of "coherence in production" and establishing relationships with "serious galleries" underscores the need for professionalism and a long-term vision to overcome these difficulties.

He defines the work of a gallery not only as selling art but as creating value for the works of the represented artists and presenting them to the market.

He considers auction houses useful for confirming an artist's value, while important art fairs can provide prestige and greater visibility. To stand out in a globalized market, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining a high quality of work and trusting in experienced galleries with international charisma.

His opinion on the privacy of the artist's personal life is that it should only be private if it does not directly affect their work.

The most important thing in his life is "To paint and improve!", a motto that summarizes his unwavering dedication. The suggested title for a book about his life, "The Garden of Dreams: Nature and Colors in the Paintings of Stefano Puleo," poetically captures the essence of his inspiration and his artistic language.

Transcendence is a "very important" theme for Stefano, a necessary condition to give impetus and energy to his work, with constant dissatisfaction as proof of its cruciality.

Reflecting on his legacy, Stefano is humble, but his desire to be remembered simply "as an artist!" encapsulates the essence of his life and work.

His biography, marked by his beginnings in Sicily, his training in Catania, his artistic debut in 1966, and his international recognition, including the Arts Award for Culture in Milan and his current presence in London, attests to a solid and constantly evolving trajectory. His representation in three regions of the world, including Mexico through my gallery, underscores the universality of his artistic language.

In conclusion, Stefano Puleo's work represents a vibrant and serene exploration of color, rooted in the tradition of Fauvism but revitalized with a contemporary sensibility. His profound connection with the light and landscape of his native Sicily, his unwavering dedication to his craft, and his

ability to transmit emotions through the pure chromatic force consolidate him as a fundamental artist of the 21st century.

Representing him in my gallery, HECTOR DIAZ, is an honor that allows me to share the beauty and depth of his artistic vision with the world, a legacy in constant construction that will undoubtedly continue to enrich the panorama of contemporary art.

His work invites contemplation, emotion, and a renewed appreciation for the beauty that resides in the harmony of forms and the exuberance of color.

Stefano Puleo

By Héctor Díaz
October 2024

Stefano is an Italian artist recognized for his distinctive classical style, deeply influenced by Cézanne and Modigliani. His art captures the essence of the Mediterranean, both in its vibrant color palette and the emotional depth of his subjects. Focusing on simplicity and harmony, Puleo invites viewers to explore narratives that transcend time, immersing them in a universe where emotion and form coexist in serene balance.

Puleo's compositions range from portraits to landscapes, all imbued with contemplative energy that goes beyond literal representation. Whether it's his series on "Women," "Characters," or "Landscapes," his works convey a quiet atmosphere that reveals hidden beauty in the everyday. Through his balanced use of color and form, Stefano creates visually captivating compositions filled with calm and introspection.

Color is a central pillar of Puleo's artistic approach. He employs a Mediterranean palette full of warm and vibrant tones that reflect the light and warmth of his homeland. This use of color is not merely decorative but becomes a visual language that communicates the passion and emotional depth of his themes. For Stefano, color is the essence of painting, a tool to express the energy and spirit within each piece.

Throughout his career, Puleo has developed an aesthetic that blends the classical with the contemporary, respecting tradition while still innovating. His large-scale formats and mastery of technique allow him to create works that, although seemingly simple, conceal visual and emotional complexity. Light, another key element in his work, is used to highlight forms and create a sense of volume, giving his paintings a dynamic quality that invites exploration from multiple angles.

Represented in Mexico by HECTOR DIAZ Gallery, Stefano Puleo is considered one of the most important contemporary Fauvist painters in Europe. His ability to combine a clear, balanced composition with deep emotional resonance has captured the attention of collectors and critics worldwide. Through his art, Puleo continues to create moments of timeless beauty and reflection, establishing himself as a key figure in the contemporary art landscape—an artist whose legacy will undoubtedly endure in the history of art.

HECTOR DIAZ

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