

IT'S A SURREAL WORLD

Hannah Watson uncovers the influences that inform the work of Italian artist Marco Napolitano

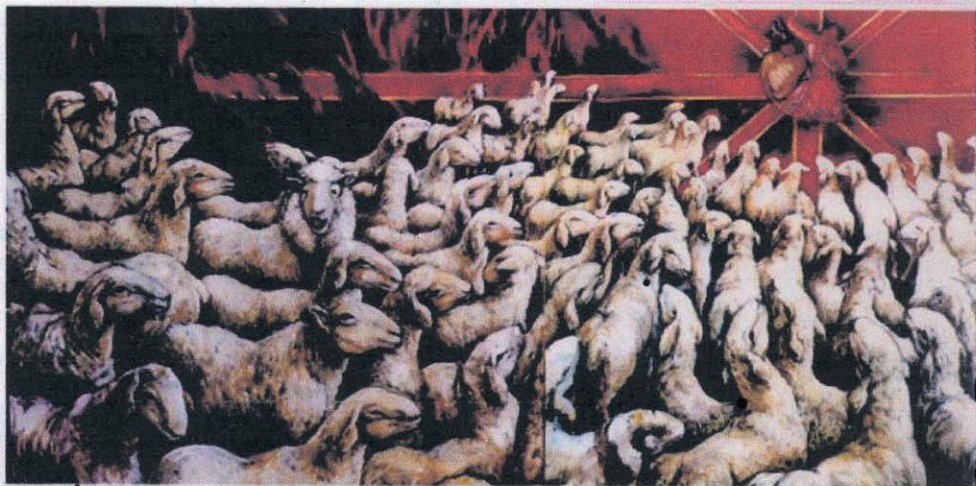
THE SURREAL WORLD of Marco Napolitano owes its influences to a diverse series of artists, from the drama and narrative of Caravaggio, the allegories and symbolism of Botticelli, the darker side of the human psyche portrayed by Francis Bacon, to the surrealist world of surrealist Duchamp. Together they create a melting pot of ideas and representations that probe both the artist's inner world of the artist and also a perturbing uneasiness in all of us.

His *Masses in Love* shows a swarm of sheep rushing towards a bloody heart, blind to what they are rushing towards or why they are rushing towards it. It evokes the scene in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, when the shepherd Gabriel Oak is grief-stricken to find that his flock have charged in their ignorance over the edge of a quarry.

In Napolitano's work we see one of the flock look back out at us. "My stories do not carry a moral lesson. I only aim to tell about doubts and about that which doubts create," the artist explains.

"In *Masses in Love* an extreme creed pushes the flock into the flames. However, among the sheep there is one who looks the other way, a sheep who doubts mass beliefs."

Inspired by the UK foot and mouth epidemic, the work seeks to comment on mass panic and hysteria, and the resultant destruction. There should be one in the flock who questions what is propelling their cause before it becomes nonsensical.

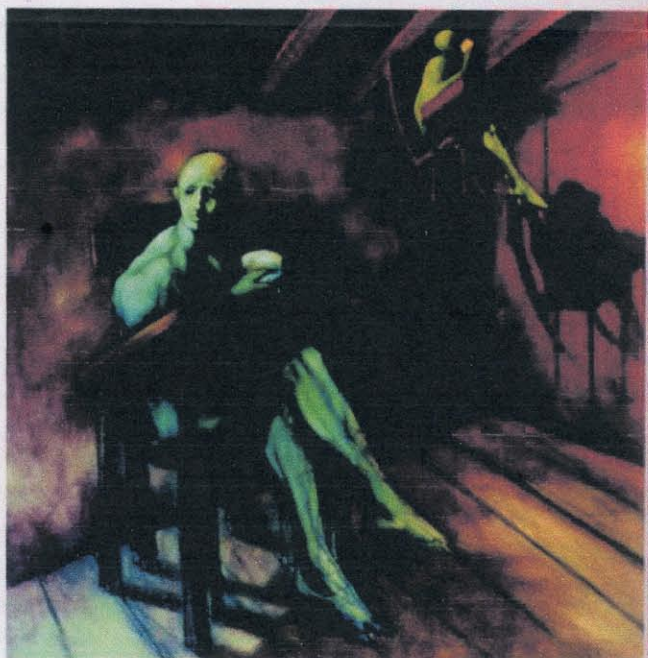


Napolitano explains: "The flames, reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*, also brought to my mind the phrase 'faith and mouth', that could be adapted to a more human vision of the same predicament."

Napolitano is drawn to Botticelli's *Primavera* because of its deep and complex narrative, its allegories, symbolic gestures and characters, as well as a composition that presents various stages of a tangled story in one. Likewise, in his own work, he wants to draw people in as if they were watching a film. It's "as if the canvas were an open window looking on to a place where people and things move, telling a story."

In his *Portrait of a Painter* which we may assume is a self-portrait, Napolitano depicts the winged ankles of Mercury, as Botticelli did, and hangs his porcelain figure against the dark menacing backdrop of an almost bovine and intimidating face.

The shadows do not match the puppet in the figure's hand, and the



distrust he feels towards the puppet he holds in his own hand asks disturbing questions about who controls who – puppet or maker. Is this the artist as a slave to the forces he expresses?

Or is it a more general comment

about who controls our lives and our right to question that control. **£**

• Marco Napolitano's work can be viewed and purchased at www.londonart.co.uk. Prices range from €800 to €8,000.