

## SOCIETAS RAFFAELLO SANZIO

BY LORENZA PIGNATTI

**Lorenza Pignatti:** *The Societas Raffaello Sanzio has many fans not only among avid theatergoers but also among those in the visual arts. How do you explain this success with audiences so diverse and, at the same time, so demanding?*

**Romeo Castellucci:** Those who are not regular theatergoers in particular love the theatrical works of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio. People who are not intimidated by this art form are drawn to our work. Yes, we are influenced by theatrical tradition, but we are also interested in experimenting with visual, literary and musical elements.

**Lorenza Pignatti:** *Your concept of the theater is one in which the performance leads to different forms of perception, as if there were contrasting forces vying for the audience's attention.*

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**Romeo Castellucci:** Absolutely. Theater is the art form that is closest to life and its decay, the one that moves us more than any other. In it all artistic techniques come together. All fields of art see the theater as a kind of quintessential play, able to encompass time or our very existence.

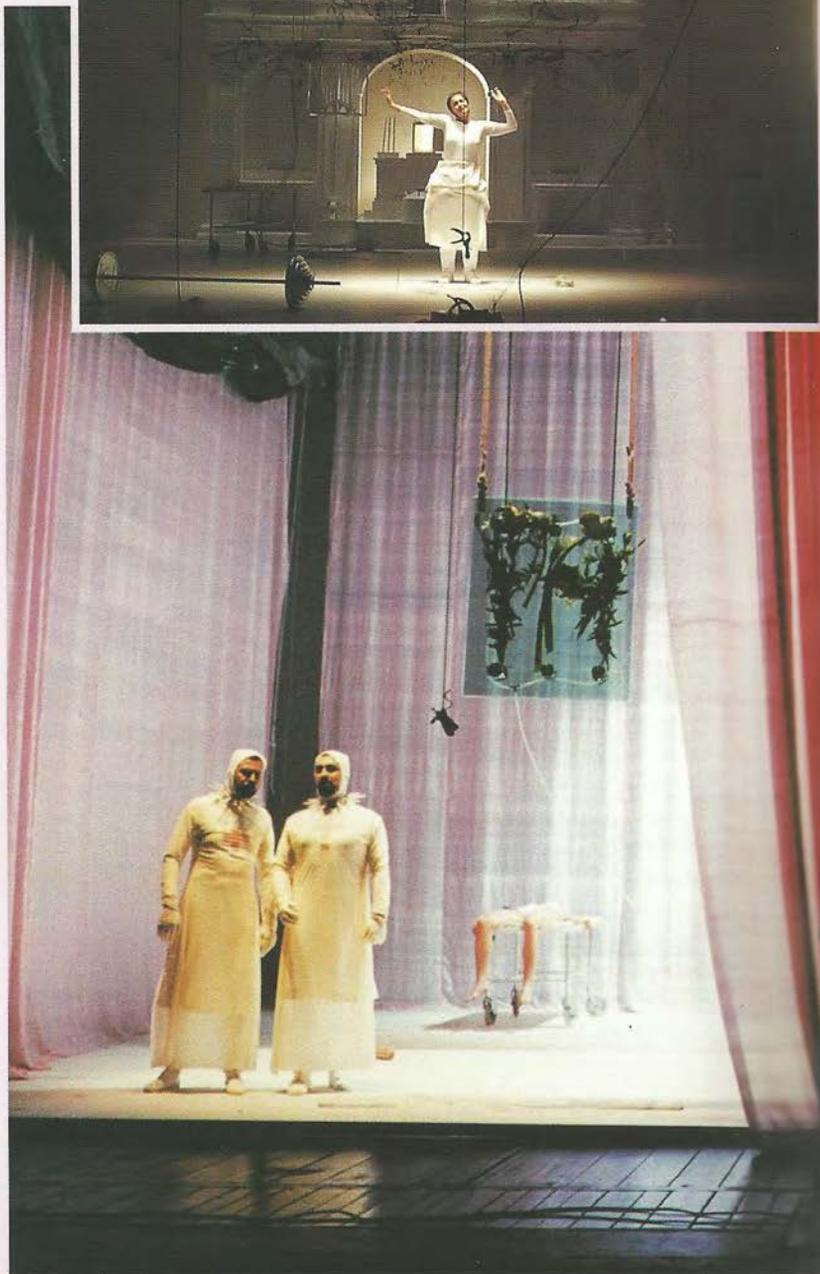
**Lorenza Pignatti:** *Who is the visual artist you feel closest to, that you particularly admire, who can inspire you when you are planning a new work?*

**Romeo Castellucci:** Masaccio. He was one of the great fighters of the past. Using simple means, he managed to overcome the difficulties of visual representation: a man walking through a scene in a painting, for example.

**Lorenza Pignatti:** *You finished a degree in art before embarking on your career in the theater. I know you recently showed your work in Palermo. Can you tell us about that exhibition?*

**Romeo Castellucci:** The show was in a place called Vignicella, which used to be an asylum run by the Jesuits, and which is now abandoned. This space interested me not only because it was once a mental institution, but also because it belonged to the Jesuit Order, whose involvement in the theater has not been given enough attention by theater historians and critics. Right away I felt deeply in tune with the dual history of this place. The installations I created for this space contained fossils from our history: a Roman ram, a sarcophagus dedicated to Onan and a Neo-classical ceramic bas-relief.

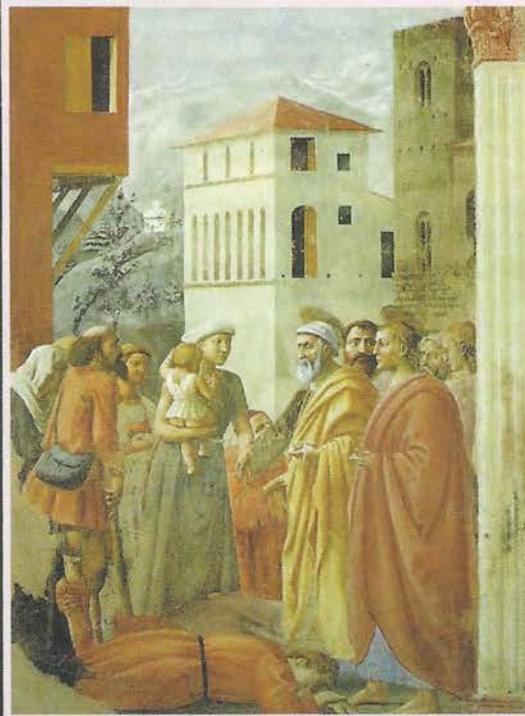
**Lorenza Pignatti:** *Returning to theater, Il Combattimento (The Fight), the latest Societas Raffaello Sanzio theatrical work, deals with an episode from La Gerusalemme liberata (Jerusalem Liberated) by Torquato Tasso. It combines many different visual, historical, literary*



*and musical elements. Which of these interested you the most?*

**Romeo Castellucci:** It was the musical element that really led us to choose this work. Monteverdi's moving music has become universal music. Even though it was written at the end of the fifteenth century, it is timeless. It still has a profound drama that transcends time and place. In fact, in the fifth book of *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi* (Madrigals for soldiers and lovers), Monteverdi invents new techniques that break with polyphonic order by inserting characters, as in opera. After hearing the madrigals that Monteverdi had written for Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, I tried to separate the two elements and deconstruct their language. All of the sets are based on the text. I also

**Societas Raffaello Sanzio**, two scenes from *Il Combattimento*, 2000. Venice Biennial 2000, Theater.



**Masaccio**, *Saint Peter Distributing Alms and the Death of Ananias*, 1425-26, fresco, 232 x 157 cm. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

with silence as well as with sound frequencies that are at the outermost limits of our hearing. The sound collages that he composed for *Il Combattimento* provided a strong contrast with the original music by Monteverdi. After recording Monteverdi's *cantata*, Gibbons manipulated it, producing a contrasting interplay between Monteverdi's

moving music and his own complex and sometimes disturbing sounds.

**Lorenza Pignatti:** You wrote about *Il Combattimento* that "the mystical army of the Crusades can be seen as a metaphor for sperm fighting to create life." Were you perhaps thinking of a victory of natural fertility over the many cases of genetic

**Romeo Castellucci:** Well, that's a legitimate interpretation but it wasn't my intention. I am concerned only with the fight for life, with the "battle" for the origins of life. This act contains the tiniest of human tragedies and every possible drama. There is also a huge difference between a war and a fight. Gilles Deleuze in *Critique et clinique* (1993), speaks about this, saying a fight

always brings about a transformation. As he battles with his opponent, the fighter wrestles with himself—against his inner self. It is a process of growth and evolution. Whereas war is simply the destruction of others. At the moment of Clorinda's death, the narrator shows the audience the "battle" for life using sperm and an electronic microscope.

collaborated with contemporary musician Scott Gibbons, a composer of electronic music, in order to produce a mind-expanding effect.

**Lorenza Pignatti:** Gibbons is an experimental musician who is often compared to Ligeti and Stockhausen. His multimedia performances have been shown at international events like Linz' Ars Electronica and Amsterdam's Holland Festival, as well as in exhibition spaces like the Weisman Museum of Art in Minneapolis. He was also a key figure in the Granular Synthesis Showcase in 1998, where he demonstrated a new form of electro-acoustic synthesis. What was it about Scott Gibbons' music that really hit you the first time you heard it?

**Romeo Castellucci:** I was immediately fascinated by his ability to work

**Roberto Gini:** The narrator is a kind of microscope anyway. He is the one who communicates the whole event and leads us into the heart of the story. He is comparable to the chorus in a Greek tragedy. He shows us the incredible sweetness of Tasso's poetry, magnified by Monteverdi's original music, which is later manipulated by the modern experimental sounds of Scott Gibbons.

*The Societas Raffaello Sanzio* is a theatrical company founded in 1981 by Claudia Castellucci (b. 1958), Romeo Castellucci (b. 1960), and Chiara Guidi (b. 1960) in Cesena, Italy. The company collaborates regularly on various projects with other artists.