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Luigi Pericle - Biography

Luigi Pericle was born Pericle Luigi Giovannetti on 22 June 1916 in Basel, Switzerland. His father was Pietro Giovannetti, from Monterubbiano in the Marche region (d. 1939), and his mother Eugénie Rosé, of French origin (d. 1926).

The artist began painting at a very young age, receiving his first painting commission when he was just twelve. He began studying at art school, but quit at the age of sixteen, disappointed with the subjects he was required to study, and in disagreement with the teaching methods that were used.

In his youth, he became interested in ancient and Far Eastern philosophies, delving deeply into Zen, Chinese and Japanese philosophy, as well as the philosophies of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece. What these diverse influences had in common was an interest in transcendence and inner depth, outlining an artistic, spiritual and literary reference framework that would accompany him throughout his existential journey.

In 1947, he married Orsolina Klainguti from Graubünden. Nicknamed Nini, she was also a painter; the two would be inseparable companions for the rest of their lives. In the Fifties, Pericle and his wife moved to Ascona. A man of many talents and interests, Pericle defied classification, proving to be not just an all-round artist but a talented cartoonist too.

In 1952, he created Max the Marmot, the star of a wordless comic strip that became well-known in Europe, the United States and Japan. Pericle acquired international renown in his work as an illustrator: his cartoons were published by Macmillan in New York, and featured in publications like the "Washington Post", the "Herald Tribune" and "Punch" magazine. The artist was keen to keep the two professions separate: he signed his illustrations with his surname Giovannetti, and his paintings with the name Luigi Pericle.

In 1959, he suddenly destroyed all of his early figurative paintings, except for one still life from 1939. He started in on a new phase of output, shifting to abstract, informal research that would distinguish his work and spark tireless experimentation.

In 1962, Pericle met (John) Peter Warren Cochrane (1913-2004) and Martin Summers (b. 1939) of the Arthur Tooth & Sons Gallery in London, which put on two solo and two group exhibitions for him. His work was displayed alongside such artists as Karel Appel, Sam Francis, Asger Jorn, Antoni Tàpies, Jean Dubuffet, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Pablo Picasso. Many renowned collectors bought his paintings, including Brigitte Helm, Bennet Korn, Helmut Kindler, Lady Tate, and Sir Basil de Ferranti MP. In 1963, an exhibition was held at the Castelnovo Gallery in Ascona, owned by Trudi Neuburg-Coray, daughter of Han Coray, who owned the Dada Gallery in Zurich.

In 1963, he met Hans Hess (1907-1986), a museologist and curator at the York Art Gallery, who suggested he meet Sir Herbert Edward Read (1893-1968), an art critic, co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and artistic advisor to Peggy Guggenheim. When he came to speak at the Eranos Conference in Ascona in 1964, Read visited Luigi Pericle's atelier and was highly impressed by his work.

With support from the Arts Council, of which Read was then a commissioner, in 1965 Hans Hess toured a solo exhibition of fifty works, titled "Luigi Pericle", around several British museums. The exhibition opened at York Art Gallery before travelling on to Newcastle, Hull, Bristol, Cardiff and Leicester.

Before the year was out, Pericle decided to withdraw from worldly life and the art system to devote himself to research and painting, meditative practice and spiritual studies: theosophy, anthroposophy, integral yoga, Zen, Kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, ancient Egypt, ufology, Chinese medicine, homeopathy, acupuncture, Eastern languages, and Greek.

Although he entered a period of isolation, he kept up international correspondence and met artists such as Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), Hans Richter (1888-1976) – who praised his painting in a letter to the Tokyo Gallery – and Ingeborg Lüscher (b. 1936), to whom the artist gave private lessons.

His many interests in literary, astrological, philosophical, theosophical and anthroposophical spheres prompted him to draw up horoscopes, write on ufology, and fill notebooks with diagrams, quotations and Japanese ideograms, homeopathic combinations, and astronomical symbols.

In 1979, De Agostini published a monograph on the artist. From 1981, his curiosity and voracious creativity were directed towards the study of his favourite disciplines, and to writing *Bis ans Ende der Zeiten – Morgendämmerung und Neuanfang statt Weltuntergang* [Until the End of Time – Dawn and a New Beginning, Rather than the End of the World], a veiled autobiographical and visionary novel which he completed in 1996. Only one chapter would ever be published, in 1995, under the title *Amduat*.

Orsolina died in 1997; Pericle would follow her in 2001. They left no heirs.

Luigi Pericle's works are held in the collections of Swiss, Italian, British and American museums.