

## **Los Angeles Times August 13, 1999**

### **Blossoming Graffiti**

By David Pagel

Until fairly recently, graffiti did more than mark territory or advertise an individual's moniker. At the Instituto Italiano di Cultura, Stefano Arienti's spray painted pictures of flowers and people take viewers back to a time when anonymous street writing conveyed provocative social messages to the general public. Although no words appear in the Milan-based artist's ghostly portraits and still-lives, a sense of urgency charges their hastily sprayed shapes. Imagine what urban centers would look like if taggers abandoned written symbols and instead left behind images of their friends and heroes, as well as paintings of roses; sunflowers and orchids.

This will give you an idea of the dissonance at the heart of Arienti's otherwise simple depictions, in which the desire to make the world more beautiful is reckoned against the knowledge that there's not enough time to do the job properly. The artist's fleeting, fugitive traces throw in their lot with the incidental pleasure that give everyday life its texture and resonance.

Restricting his palette to brick red, fiery orange, plum and purple, Arienti manages to give his sitters a jolt of bodily substance and emotional vitality. Likewise, his single blossoms and casual arrangements are endowed with just enough detail to allow even casual gardeners to identify them as birds of paradise, mums, lilies and daisies.

All of Arienti's images can be read swiftly and from a distance. When you move up close, their once-solid forms dissolve into puffs of colored air. Arienti's art thus duplicates the experience of glimpsing things through the windows of lurching subways and speeding automobiles. Made rapidly and viewed in a flash, it occupies your mind's eye like a vanished apparition of a world that might have been different.