

New York

Not just a pretty face

Model and society celèb Lisa Rosen tired of vanity fair and retrained as a conservator. Now she is just finishing the conservation of the Salviati Stations of the Cross in Manhattan's Saint Ignatius church

NEW YORK. In an unusual double-bill, Lisa Rosen currently stars both Up- and Downtown in New York.

At the New Museum of Contemporary art she can be admired as part of the East Village USA exhibition where she shines as all-round participant, camera-girl, interviewee, and graffitist in that cult classic of the 80s, "Glenn O'Brien's TV Party".

Meanwhile, at St Ignatius Loyola, one of the grandest Catholic churches in Manhattan, located on Park Avenue at 83rd Street, her work as a highly sought-after art restorer is on display.

Designed by Schinkel and Ditmars, the church was dedicated in 1898 and ever since has been a celebrated high society sanctuary, hosting the funeral of Jackie Onassis.

St Ignatius has a Tiffany glass semi-dome, a Carrara marble font, and the largest mechanical action pipe organ ever built in Britain, by N.P.

Mander of London no less. But no small part of the church's fame is due to its 14 Stations of the Cross, a suite of marble mosaic murals that cover most of the wall space. These were created by Salviati & Company of Venice (a firm still in business today creating glassware) and specially designed in 1897 by its chief artist Professor Paoletti, whose skills included the steady darkening of the sky during the progression of the drama.

Considered a masterpiece of the genre, some panels were exhibited in Turin before being shipped to America. Using 20,000 different shades of enamelled glass for the tesserae, the murals were built in Italy then installed directly on site.

When the church realised the mosaics needed cleaning and restoration, they called on Ms Rosen.

Ms Rosen had been a veritable fixture of the downtown scene: a top fashion model who worked for Chanel, Gaultier,

Jean Muir and Dior; an actress in Jim Jarmush's first film, as well as in music videos for Culture Club and David Bowie; a star of a TV commercial being devised by Avedon for Coco Chanel perfume.

Tiring of the catwalk, not to mention incessant Transatlantic nightlife, Ms Rosen moved to Rome and immersed herself in a rigorous four-year apprenticeship as an art restorer, working to begin with on Trajan's Column schlepping buckets. She set up her own company, Fine Art Restoration, in 1994,

dealing mostly with 15th- to late 19th-century and Modern blue-chip paintings.

For the Ignatius Loyola mosaics, Ms Rosen has been painstakingly clearing away a century of grime, 20 feet up a scaffold. The missing tesserae have been replaced by filling the gaps with painted stucco, then varnishing for shine. After almost a year of Rosen's single-handed work the results are truly impressive and may well prove to be a first stage of restoration for the entire building. **Adrian Dannatt**

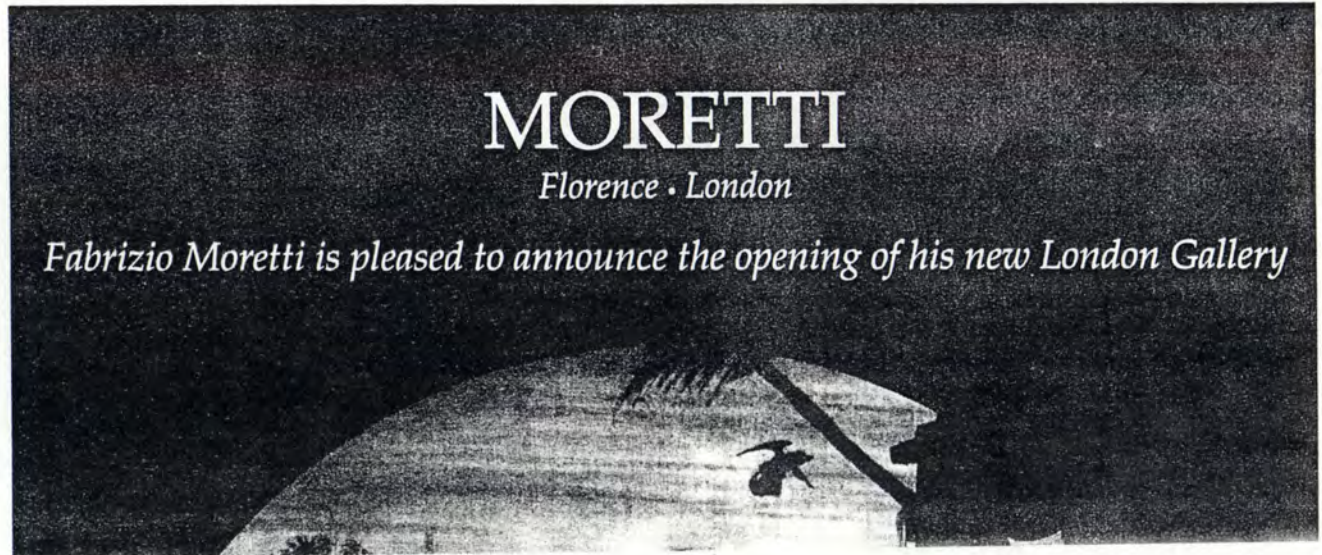


Lisa Rosen working on a 17th-century painting in Rome, 1998

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