

Leonardo Pellicanò*OltrePanico!*

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When I was 7 years old, the gas plant in my hometown exploded and a fireball of red, orange and purple burned for four days. I saw it live and glowing through the black box of the TV. The gas supply to the entire state of c. 6 million people was cut off for 3 weeks. Although two men died and it was a certified national tragedy, I felt a guilty excitement gurgling in my stomach because it was evidence that everything can change unexpectedly and all at once -like a vast magic spell gone haywire.

The quantum world, full of chaos, was reflected in every part of the disaster - from the atomic plane of hydrogen and carbon gregariously moshing against each other, to the roaring rainbow-coloured sparks of the fire as it ripped through the plant and swirled its smoke in a 5km radius around nearby homes. The unpredictable fog infiltrated the universe of the day-to-day and upended residents' routines while the gas pipes lay still and empty.

In like manner, a cloud envelopes Leonardo Pellicanò's paintings - a living, moving, umber miasma populated by infants, imps, and fauns - whose size is indeterminable. It is a writhing, swampy mist that consumes the landscape and obscures any outside figures with whom we could establish scale.

In the nanoseconds between the pipe's rupture and ignition the gas streamed out into the blue sky like air from the end of a silver flute, distorting the clouds and the sun with transparent ripples. Pellicanò's jute canvases and wood surfaces are pregnant with the same subtle, curlicued flows, shivering with anticipation. As he applies pigment and water in layers, powder drops from the brush like mountain snow upset by wind, drifting lightly downhill, before melting back into paint.

And then, through a sometimes-open door, in slips the occasional cat. These are felines with knowing smiles neither playful nor sinister. Their aura is that of agents of power whose morals and motives run on a different axis to that of humans. Although the cats make me chuckle, they make me nervous too. A childlike lust and fear bubbles up inside, yet circumscribed by hard edged steel frames. For now, the flames will remain within the confines of the grate.

Old wives once suspected that those who stared too long into the embers were devil-possessed. Nevertheless, fire - with all its virile flourishes and licks - sings a siren song that seduces us to draw ever-closer to its embrace. According to academics, in cultures where children are taught to use fire as a tool, this fascination evaporates with age and experience. Does this reveal something inherently naive in the apparently sophisticated urban gaze?

Pellicanò's paintings themselves repeat and change with the absorbing gyrations of a twisting blaze. They are consistent in size but virulently variable in content, portholes to a world that can only be grazed by the sixth sense. As psychic contractions widen the aperture to the unconscious, the thrill of unrestrained freedom is undeniable. As is the trepidation towards the libidinous, animal spirits that, transported by archaic energy, may come exploding through the frame.

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