

# COLLI

## PESCE KHETE

### OLDIES but GOLDIES

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curated by di Cecilia Canziani

For a while I was convinced that the size of Pesce Khete's works was a function of the space available in his studio. I even wrote about it, as if the works were goldfish. We met, in fact, in his first studio in San Lorenzo, a narrow room that accommodated a tiny table on which he could work only by sliding just one part of the sheet of paper over the top at a time, meaning that he only ever had parts of the entire work under his control.

His next studio was bigger and had more rooms. Here, his work consolidated, and the sheets of paper he drew on were noticeably larger. Other materials, other signs and gestures had come to flank his oil sticks. I remember the idea of the last studio I'd taken formed from the enthusiastic description Pesce Khete had provided, and the fact that it wasn't far from the sea seemed worthy of note to me, as well as the light, the distance from town, and the silence. The sea might be nearby, but Pesce Khete never goes: nothing much around his studio really interests him. What all his workspaces seem to have in common instead is his tendency to saturate them completely, to the point of making a visit to his studio a real challenge, obliging you to dance on your tiptoes around his works one by one, paw through drawings ordered by size, not by date or theme, gaze at the largest ones spread out mostly over the floor, some atop others, and step cautiously to see those on the walls. You really have to get into the feel of how Pesce Khete works, I decided then, at least that much, but then perhaps only in part.

This note on the accumulation and the tendency to occupy every square inch possible isn't just a pretext: Pesce Khete's work builds on layers. Certain signs (or drawings) extracted from the size of a sketch that migrate to the larger sheet where he recycles them as subjects (or gestures) with their own degree of autonomy. The sedimentation of sheets in his studio, on tabletops, the floor, or in the loft used as archive, inevitably requires some to stay on the bottom and get forgotten before returning later to the surface (memory works the same, by the way). This appears to require two movements: one is out of the corner of the eye, in which an object or a sign present in surrounding space may

become part of the work, the other is internal, and it puts the thought of the painting—and of painting —together with a nearly automatic rhythm derived from gesture. Many things have happened in the last five years in the studio that the show acknowledges only partially by concentrating on a body of works that differs remarkably from those of the past. To begin with, all the new works are horizontal; they start and end inside a determined surface: there are no additions, the drawing does not continue, sheet after sheet, until it succeeds in composing a large vertical surface where the tape used to hold it together has been left visible nor is there sufficient space to develop the ascending compositions that often characterize his paintings (as we should finally call them). In a certain sense, these latest works may be seen as the beginning, the start, to those previous, with the only difference being that they show no need to exceed the space allowed, depositing themselves in layers as the drawing gradually progresses (on second thought, what I'd just defined as an upward motion is instead a progressive emptying and thinning of the image). The sheet of paper is explored through an alphabet of signs that often repeats its coordinates, and—to reiterate the finiteness of the work, its autonomy—the picture is finally framed.

Most of the signs that appear in this body of work appear new: airier, freer, poised between abstraction and figuration, and, I would argue, are even less problematised, in the sense that they communicate an amused abandon. They recall one other, one and the next, but refuse to compose themselves into an aggregate, balanced as each one is in its own space. I said they appear new, but in fact they are not; they come instead from the artist's beginnings, the result of the accidental discovery of his earliest works that his memory has allowed to accumulate on the bottom and now, placed into contact with the present, become the start of a new path. Surprisingly, but perhaps not even very much so, by repeating a gesture from the past today, Pesce Khete seems to trace the entire history of drawing, matching his hand with that of our ancestor who left traces of himself for future memory on a cave wall in earth and coal. The dimension of History, so far perceived in individual works as a reflection on form, is central to the drawings and works that have come to be deposited in his studio in the last five years. Here, it shows itself against the light and suggests a vocabulary, whereas in the studio it becomes clear in the recurrence of certain themes or suggestions and atmospheres: the helmets and boots of early twentieth-century German soldiers, hallucinatory landscapes suggesting the end of modernism and its utopias, portraits of extinct animals and our ancestors, Sapiens and Neanderthals, in general, a certain sense of alertness, as if the world were coming to an end, but when seen from inside the crisis, from a wound, its collapse could also offer the chance for a new beginning.

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