

Lui Shtini

Tree Spirits

November 22nd 2025 – January 10th 2026

Tree Spirits presents work that emerged from Shtini's deep engagement with the landscape, materials, and traditions of Sardinia, where the artist has spent significant time over the past decade. The exhibition features ten sculptures that occupy both floor and wall space, mounted on steel structures that allow these mask-like compositions to inhabit the gallery with a commanding presence.

The works are mainly made of cork—a material abundant in Sardinia and central to the island's culture and economy. A tree bark, cork to Shtini has always felt magical and full of potential. When first collected, it is in a rough state. Its outer surface is then carefully cleaned and laid out to be observed. During this process, the forms that belong to the shape of the trees where the cork came from begin to reveal themselves and suggest possibilities. That's when the process of imagining the sculptures begins.

Each piece is brought together through a process of improvisational subtraction and addition, with different sections cut, carved, sanded, and layered to create unified compositions. The finished works reveal smooth and rough surfaces combined, inviting closer inspection of the assembled parts. Their backs feature semi-rough textures with irregular concave forms, emphasizing the material's organic origins.

Shtini draws significant inspiration from Sardinia's carnival tradition—a pagan celebration deeply rooted in the island's mythology and the interconnectedness of human, animal, and nature. Even though not depicted literally in the work, many aspects of the different regions' distinct gear and rituals have had a strong impact on the way these sculptures came together.

Importantly, this body of work was created in proximity to where the cork used to make them was collected. Working closely with local harvesters to source irregular pieces that match his vision, Shtini extends the intimate connection between material and place. That unity further enhances the flow of imagining these forms into existence.

Shtini's sculptural approach mirrors his painting practice through improvisational methods and the use of traditional formats—portraiture, landscape, still life, and now the mask—as vessels to be filled with his vision. In *Tree Spirits*, this methodology yields suggestive forms that hover between the familiar and the uncanny, the ancient and the contemporary.