

Lucia Leuci: *Le 3:17*

by Caterina Riva

Two months before the opening of Lucia Leuci's solo show at the gallery, I met Leuci in Milan, at her home-studio, stepping into her world where life and art intertwine. In every room, works by the artist can be seen, either hanging or leaning against surfaces, while her working materials are neatly arranged on shelves and inside boxes, which are opened for me, and whose contents — drawings, sculptures, sketches — are laid out all around, across the floor and on the powder-pink sofa. I have the privilege to be able to gain the thoughts and inspirations of her creative process, and of beginning to see some of the works that will continue to be developed up until their delivery in Rome.

The artistic practice of Leuci unfolds in a continuity of spaces and a concatenation of times, both real and imagined. The table where we are having tea is the same one where, at one end, a work in progress is placed.

Black clamps hold together one of the works for the exhibition (*Suffumigi*): the metal part has been completed, while the resin elements are still in an ongoing state of development. Leuci tells me that she often destroys parts of the resin in order to remake them, until she is satisfied with the result and convinced by the balance that emerges between transparency and colour.

On her phone, she shows me a photograph sent by a friend, depicting the bust of a figure with a towel draped over the face, inhaling steam from a pot. An ordinary image becomes extraordinary through the artist's treatment. Struck by the raking light and the pastel tones of the composition — which remind her of the blue veil of the Madonna painted by Antonello da Messina — she decides to reproduce it in what she calls a *tableau vivant*, inspired by Liberty-style stained glass windows.

I meet her in the morning, but it is the night that is the true protagonist of this exhibition: the night of ideas, of obsessions, of insomnia. The moment when the gaze searches for the time (3:17 a.m.) on the phone screen, and the mind or the body no longer allows sleep to return.

In her drawings made with black acrylic (*La dea crea il padre*), Leuci demonstrates a consistency that feels almost surreal, or at least mechanical, in her repeated rendering of the same subjects: the handles of jugs intertwined with flowers, but also breasts, thighs, and buttocks. Female bodies without heads, not only as a subtraction of individual identity, but also as a universal archetype of the feminine: from primitive Venuses, where fertility is overwhelming, to the sculptural works, at once resilient and vulnerable, of Louise Bourgeois.

Leuci is also known for creating female sculptures with impeccably rendered faces and hands, real hair (wigs hand-crafted by skilled artisans), and garments sewn with the help of her mother and decorated with taste and precision using small pearls, shells, buttons, found materials, and much more.

In Leuci's works the feminine overflows, freeing its protagonists from worn-out definitions and the suffocating categories imposed by society. Within them, one can see reflected both the dreaming child, trying to imagine what she might become as an adult, and the worldly woman, determined to live and to fight when necessary, as

in la *Fornarina*, the protagonist of her solo exhibition in Fermo in 2025. In the same exhibition, there was also *Geminali Post-Liberty*, where two diaphanous resin hands, casts of a nineteenth-century sculpture, were arranged in display cases like pop relics. The thread set in motion by those works continues in the Roman exhibition you are now looking at.

In Leuci's compositions, makeup brushes become artistic tools for drawing. Makeup itself, eyeshadows and powders, is used to define **Sciame**, her new series of bronze sculptures, to which the artist seeks to confer a "primitive and aggressive" attitude, as she tells me during our conversation.

Leuci gave these precise instructions to the specialized artisan responsible for the bronze castings. Meanwhile, in the Apulian countryside, her place of origin, she collected branches from various shrubs and trees (lemon, almond, cherry, olive, cedar) as well as ailanthus, an invasive non-native species, which she sent to the foundry and later assembled as stylised bodies. These now reappear in the gallery, seemingly giving form to the wall drawings.

The heads are bronze casts of eighteenth-century models, establishing a link with classical religious figuration, which the artist remarkably reworks into her own secular and disquieting language, where the faces of putti and angels evoke suspended, ambiguous presences, children in potentiality.

My personal association goes to the Sforza coat of arms in Milan, with the snake appearing to swallow a child, reminiscent of those lifeless figures or the infants falling upside down in other works by Leuci, in a deliberate negation of the dominant salvific vision of motherhood.

Pearls, shells, buttons, makeup, and tonal shadings between violet and pink reconfigure a fantastical and dreamlike world, at times childlike, starting from small haberdashery treasures, later set like jewels in meticulously balanced compositions.

Leuci's works could fully belong to the constellation of *Bachelor Machines*, a term used, from Duchamp in art to Mary Shelley in literature, to describe creations that, oscillating between the playful and the macabre, simulate "useless and unproductive" effects, thereby short-circuiting the productive cycle that presupposes a single final function.

Strongly inspired by the 20th-century landscapes of Milan painted by Mario Sironi and Carlo Carrà, Leuci captures what is perhaps the most universal element of contemporary metropolitan landscapes: plastic bags containing dog faeces, which she transforms into *Bellezze*, sculptures in translucent blown glass through which the sculptural excrement can be glimpsed. Even though they are not present in the gallery, these works exemplify the balance Leuci is able to calibrate between form and idea, irony and sincerity, transforming the surrounding world through her prodigious artistic vision.

Caterina Riva

Curator and contemporary art critic, she has been director of the MACTE – Museum of Contemporary Art of Termoli since September 2020. She founded and co-directed the project space FormContent in London (2007–2010), directed Artspace in Auckland, New Zealand (2011–2014), and worked as curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (2017–2019). Among her recent curatorial projects are the exhibitions *Le 3 ecologie* and *L'esca*, both held at MACTE.



Via Giulia 96, 00186 Rome, IT
info@galleriaeugeniadelfini.it
galleriaeugeniadelfini.it

+39 06 976 039 46
Tuesday – Saturday
3 – 7 PM or by appointment