

# Leonardo Devito



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# My favourite things

SOLO

Galleria Acappella, Naples (IT)

Curated by: —

Painting, sculpture

16.04.23–05.06.23

«Few things, protected by solid walls, or scattered across the vast Valais landscape, accompany Rilke, like distant and tenacious habits. They live in the vastness of a metaphorical and real landscape interwoven with a thousand voices which, together, participate in a single, powerful melody». The words Sabrina Mori Carmignani uses to introduce the writer's reflections, poet and playwright Rainer Maria Rilke around the melody of things, and therefore the emotions, meanings and sensations he attributes to them, allow us to identify the relationship that Leonardo Devito weaves with his favourite things, as the title of the exhibition declares. It is, as for Rilke, an intimate relationship with things, a term that identifies not only objects but also certain situations and atmospheres tuned together in a melody.

Devito's works intend to restore his deep and solitary bond with them, carefully observed and preserved over time. In fact, the painting and the bas-relief never convey casual atmospheres, on the contrary they show scenarios which have deep and distant roots, linked to his personal history or to imaginaries in which he feels a part, sometimes taken from literature or from ancient, medieval and renaissance. An example of this is "Spaghetto a Porta Palazzo", a painting which has a special place in the artist's heart that becomes a semantic field of affections, memories, pure and sincere references.

Starting from an imaginary or a subject, such as the well-known Turin market, Devito prefers to give life to a spontaneous narration, leaving room for his own imagination guided by painting which progressively expands the mental image, transforms it and

exhausts it. The artistic process is thus more sincere and spontaneous for the artist whose openly playful action is performed on small and medium-sized canvases and bas-reliefs, necessary to be able to grasp his favourite things in their entirety and simplicity. The disinterested and playful character actually seems to become an expedient of defence: offering one's things of affection can be tiring since it implies extrapolating them from oneself and letting them be looked at from the outside, understanding them without succumbing to them. Thus, the transformation of their pictorial and sculptural restitution into a moment of play allows the artist to take distance from it, which protects him from possible emotional loss. The game, not surprisingly, also becomes the subject of different works: an example is "Gormiti" which, recovering the Byzantine aesthetic in the spatial rendering, shows inert adolescence in front of a childhood that has just ended, for which he feels nostalgia and at the same time the urgency of detachment.

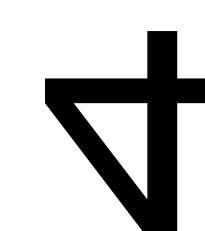
Devito's ultimate intent is not to create finished narratives, on the contrary, it is to allow the observer to complete the reading of the work through one's own position of vision which, articulated and complex, awakens distant memories and sensations. The artist therefore urges us not to let go of the things with which we establish a profound connection: emblematic, in this sense, is the work "Signori Calabresi", created starting from the drawing by a couple, found by chance, which allowed Devito to bring out a mental place of affection linked to his grandparents, to his distant Calabrian origins, to the colours, to the atmosphere that one breathes there. His artistic sensibility

therefore arises from the urgency to return the harvest of his favourite things carefully protected, first delicately cultivated.

Laura Di Teodoro







Signori Calabresi, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 50x40 cm  
Gormiti, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 50x40 cm

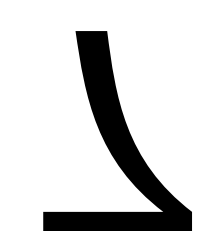


Mio fratello, 2020, oil on canvas, 60x70 cm

Spaghetti a Porta Palazzo, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60x70 cm



Senza titolo (uno che guarda un altro che muore), 2022, oil and acrylic on canvas, 20x20 cm  
Amici 4e, 2020, oil on canvas, 30x30 cm



Mamma sgrida figlio che guarda troppa tv, 2022, terracotta, 47x28x3 cm  
Addio Porta Romana, 2023, terracotta, 52x42x5 cm





Coppia al parco, 2022, terracotta, 30x30x5 cm  
Caccia lucertole, 2023, terracotta, 31x26x7 cm



# Piccolo testamento

SOLO

The Artist Room, London (EN)

Curated by: —

Painting

23.02.23–18.03.23

«Some images have a particular meaning for me; they come from personal experiences or from distant stories that I feel involved with or relate to. When I focus on an image, meanings, analogies, contrasts and complementary elements start to emerge that I decide to discard or keep until everything becomes perfectly clear». — Leonardo Devito

The Artist Room is delighted to present a solo exhibition of new paintings by Leonardo Devito (Florence 1997). This is the artist's first exhibition in the United Kingdom and his first solo exhibition outside of Italy. Combining autobiographical allegory with interests in religion and literature, Devito's works are grounded in compelling narratives devised by the artist, often explored through sequences of paintings. The paintings in *Piccolo Testamento* [Small Testament] relay the story of an adolescent male youth's hedonistic final days spent on the run in Italy.

Central to Devito's interest in painting is the potential for images to tell stories. Inspired by medieval Christian and Renaissance cultures, where the creation of religious imagery was necessary to communicate the sacred scriptures to an often illiterate audience, Devito seeks to revitalise painting's peculiar capacity to carry allegorical and moralistic traits. The artist often borrows compositional elements from pre-contemporary artists, reflecting on how historical events or fables can be understood in present-day terms.

*Piccolo Testamento* begins with "First time", a painting that depicts a young couple's first experience of erotic intimacy together. In presumed elation and bliss, the male figure's head levitates away

from his own body. Later, in "Pickpockets", the same figure, in a seemingly calmer aura, is witnessed with a friend pickpocketing a figure absent from the frame in a seaside city at night. In "Caccia" three hounds hunt for the boys in the countryside, and the two police officers controlling them fade into the distant woods behind. Meanwhile, in "Sleeping Thieves" the figures rest alongside a bush surrounded by ghostly insects and lizards. The tree central to the painting "Caccia" is visible in the distance behind, indicating the police are close and arrest appears imminent. Before being caught, the boy has a dream. "Sogno di un prigioniero" depicts a knight appearing to save him; defeating a multi-headed hydra guarding his eventual prison's walls that can be seen in the distance. The structure of the painting references "Ercole e l'Idra" a tempera-on-panel painting by Antonio del Pollaiuolo that is housed in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence and Saint George and The Dragon (1502) by Vittore Carpaccio housed in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni of Venice. "Esecuzione", the final painting in the exhibition, takes place on the opposite side of the wall as "Sogno di un prigioniero". In this work, the protagonist is being executed by a police firing squad, marking the end of his being on the run. In its structure, the work inverts Édouard Manet's painting "L'esecuzione dell'imperatore Massimiliano" by swapping the position of the protagonist and those chasing him. Marking the end of his life are three small flowers growing, their vivid colour echoing the vast red mountain on the horizon.

While the works on view can be understood as a whole narrative, Devito asserts how each work can be interpreted on its own terms. «Each painting

is an inconclusive story that can leave the viewer with the freedom to conceive a particular narrative» he explains. «The way in which the writing in books leaves us the faculty to be picture totally different images depending on who we are». As such, in his practice, the artist seeks to link two cultural forms (writing and painting) by distilling images that hold peculiarities to define a certain context and an «atmosphere and narrative not unlike that of literature».

Approaching his work, Devito draws from varied sources of interest: fresco cycles of the Italian fifteenth century; the dreamlike atmosphere of Franz Kafka's novels such as "Il processo" and "Il castello"; stories by Italian writers Italo Calvino and Dino Buzzati; and the practice of reclusive American artist Henry Darger. As such, Devito's complex worlds, incorporating idiosyncratic and recognisable characters (often situated in dark and dramatic environments) are laden with symbols and parables relevant from historic times to the contemporary. Functioning like a coming-of-age story, the works in *Piccolo Testamento* tell a familiar saga, of confidence causing conflict and the downward spiral of losing oneself to one's ego.

Laurie Barron





Prima volta, 2021, oil on canvas, 90x100 cm  
Pickpockets, 2022, oil on canvas, 80x90 cm



Caccia, 2022, oil and acrylic on canvas, 120x120 cm  
Sleeping thieves, 2022, oil on canvas, 120x120 cm



Sogno di un prigioniero, 2022, oil on canvas, 150x150 cm  
Esecuzione, 2022, oil on canvas, 100x100 cm



# Ghost dance

SOLO

Osservatorio Futura, Turin (IT)

Curated by: Federico Palumbo

Sculpture

19.01.23–20.02.23

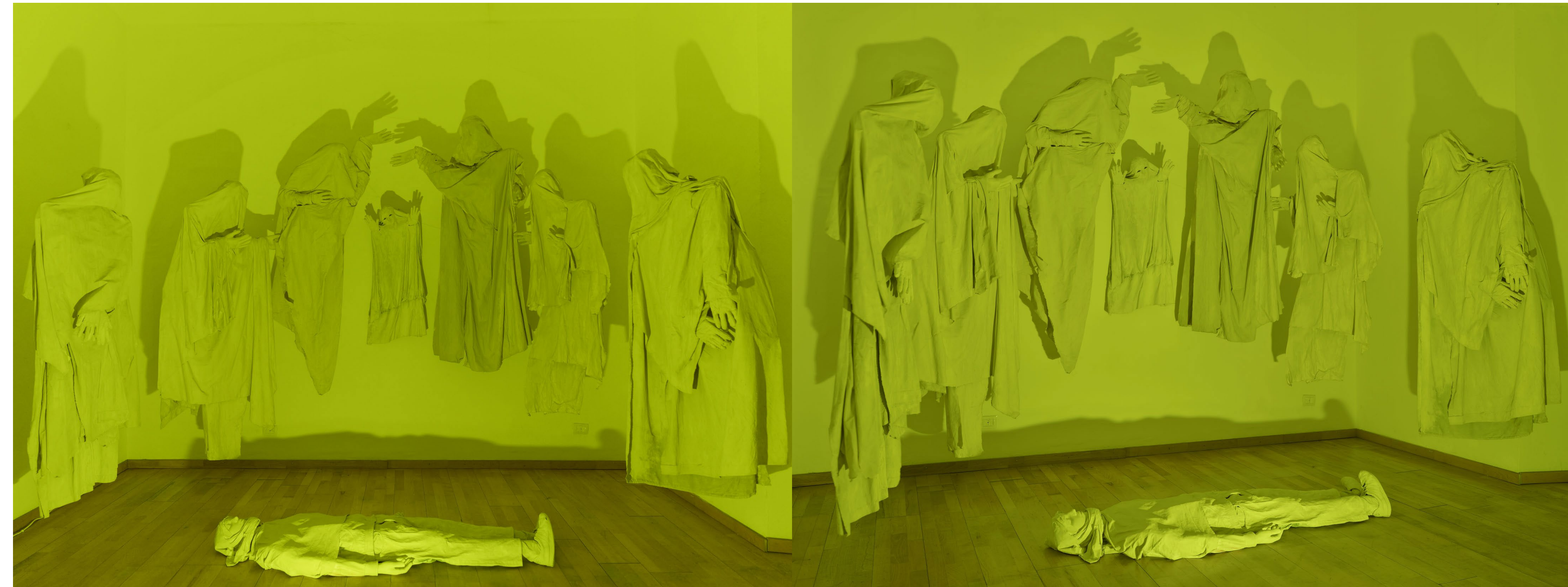
The idea for the exhibition arose from the proposal and the discussion which followed with Osservatorio Futura, an independent space located in the San Donato district of Turin. Starting with the assumption that the space has no commercial purposes, the idea of creating a site-specific work was born, with the possibility to use mediums and techniques I do not usually adopt in painting. The proposed name of the work is Ghost dance, and it is composed of eight sculptures designed specifically for the exhibition space, born with the purpose of creating a unique image. The work represents a group of ghostly figures in a dance or action of some kind around a boy who is lying on the ground. The meaning of the image is unclear and open to interpretation. It could possibly represent a group of ghosts in ritual prayer over a dead boy, as well as depict a series of presences disturbing a boy in his sleep. I preferred to leave the ultimate meaning of the work undefined. As the exhibition space consists of a single room, I was interested in suggesting an image with a scenic and enveloping feel. In fact, I ideally used as a reference some 15th-century sculptural groups of the Emilian school, first and foremost Niccolò dell'Arca's "Lamentation over the Dead Christ" in the church of Santa Maria della Vita in Bologna.

When I create an image I am always interested in reasoning in retrospect as to why I chose a particular subject and why I found it particularly evocative. In general, the theme of death interests me a great deal, especially in its relationship to the visual arts and to images in general. The theme of death is intrinsic to the language of photography: any image is the presence of an absence, and this finds its great-

est expression in images of deceased persons, which are representations of figures permanently absent in the space and time in which they are made. As early as ancient Egypt, the deceased ideally exchanged their physical, earthly body for the imperishable body of the portrait or funerary mask, a process constantly perpetuated by the relationship between the visual arts and funeral rites. Thus, the image becomes both representation and ghost of the represented object, and in this sense, the boy's sculpture simultaneously signals his presence and absence, welcomed with a dance from the world of Elsewhere.

Leonardo Devito









Leonardo Devito (Florence 1997) lives and works in Turin. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence (BFA) and at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste of Vienna. In 2020, he graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence. In 2023, he graduated at the Albertina Academy of Fine Arts of Turin (MFA).

## STATEMENT

At the base there are images that have a particular meaning for me, they come from my personal experience or from distant stories that I feel involved in. When I focus on an image, meanings, analogies, contrasts and complementary elements start to emerge that I decide to discard or to keep until everything becomes perfectly clear. I prefer to start from an image of the present to bring it to its origin, invent the stories that constitute my current reality, give life to figures that embody sensations and particular meanings. The process is never the same, sometimes it also happens to come across remote images, of times never lived and never seen with which I accidentally find a connection. Not everything happens exclusively in the mind, once I start, painting becomes the protagonist. Colour guides the mental image, dilates it, transforms it and depletes it, even to the point of completely overturning its meaning. Surely it is always the painting in relation to the image to have the last word, to pull the strings of the speech.

## CONTACTS

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## SOLO

→ My favourite things  
 Galleria Acappella, Naples (IT) 2023

→ Piccolo testamento  
 The Artist Room, London (UK) 2023

→ Ghost dance  
 Osservatorio Futura, Turin (IT) 2023

→ No title  
 Era Gallery, Milan (IT) 2022

→ I giorni e l'infante  
 B.east gallery, Florence (IT) 2021

→ 48h  
 Palazzo dei Pittori, Academy of Fine Arts of Florence, Florence (IT) 2018

## GROUP

→ Benim adim gravür  
 Port Art Gallery, Ankara (TR) 2023

→ Exhibition finalists Premio Compat XIII ed.  
 Museo G. Fattori, Livorno (IT) 2022

→ Unity wanted volume 2  
 Street Levels Gallery, Florence (IT) 2021

→ XI Biennale d'incisione  
 Mac,n Monsummano Terme (IT) 2019

## FAIRS

→ Era Gallery, Investec  
 Cape Town Art Fair, Cape Town (ZA) 2023