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Pier Paolo Calzolari, *Untitled*, 2021 Salt, pigments, oil pastels, gold leaf, walnut, feather, steel, lead on wood
Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Pier Paolo Calzolari Photo credit: Michele Alberto Sereni

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now: Pier Paolo Calzolari

By: Will Heinrich
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Pier Paolo Calzolari is the rare conceptual artist whose paintings really look like paintings. Of course they look like conceptual pieces, too. Several recent works in the show *Painting as a Butterfly* are monochromes adorned with delicate objects like a walnut shell with a feather stuck in it, or a yawning, iridescent razor clam shell that casts a drooping shadow. They're funny, but Calzolari's attention to surface and color means that they also stand up to closer looking. Both shells hang in front of grainy, bright red surfaces made from pigments and salt, but the even application behind the walnut calls to mind a clay ball court, while the dry, white-streaked surface behind the clam feels more like a sunburned wall overlooking some Mediterranean beach.

Calzolari came out of the radical 1960s Italian scene later known as *Arte Povera*, literally "poor art," and like many of his peers, he sometimes lets the interest of an unusual material carry too much weight. But most of the time he adds just enough expressive gesture — a few yellow drips crossing a blue stain in *Venetian Landscape* (2017), or a cluster of blotchy red jellyfish on a nearby untitled triptych — to balance things out. *Monocromo blu*, from 1979, a movie-screen-size tempera on cardboard landscape showing in New York for the first time, takes this balance especially far. Thick ridges of tempera lend gravity to the painting's storms of multicolored dashes, while the dashes serve to heighten the beauty of the tempera's transfixing midnight-blue.