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Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. Photo credit: Lorenzo Palmieri

After a Five-Year Absence, Pier Paolo Calzolari's Works Will Be Shown in the US

By: Giulia Baldini
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The first Calzolari retrospective since 2017, "Painting as a Butterfly", at the Boesky Gallery through April 23, is filled with new approaches, colors and desire.

Today's tales and the tones with which **Pier Paolo Calzolari** narrates his art enable the fresh and remarkable landmarks of his outstanding career, in both Europe and North America. Until April 23rd, **Marianne Boesky Gallery** is hosting the exhibition *Painting as a Butterfly*, the artist's first solo show in the United States since 2017.

This exhibition follows the legacy of his first major survey of paintings at the Madre Museum in Naples, exhibited in Italy in 2019 and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and Andrea Villani. From the motherland to the American territories, Calzolari marked his first debut at the Marianne Boesky Gallery in 2012. This year his works are a reflection of the latest phases of his career, filled with new approaches, colors, and desires to be evoked through the canvases.

The artist is seen here with these works in a transfixed era, where he takes time to embrace the alchemical universe of the physical and surrounding environment. We're seeing flowers, rain and celestial bodies that create synergy with and through each other. There's a continuous communication, an evolution in the message, from the first room until the very last space, where elements like water and earth clash with warm and caustic features. Sculptural elements made of organic matter like salt, feathers, clover petals and seashells are present in these works, hung or attached on their surfaces, but this isn't the newest element that Calzolari incorporates in these masterpieces.

The novelty of these pieces stands in the new use of raw pigment powders and tempera in saturated and bold colors that imbue these new paintings with an exuberance both radiant and sensorial. These radiant canvases feature rich hues of yellow, red, blue, and white with diverse surfaces and textures that recall different spaces and times in Nature, such as a night sky, or sunlight with fire. It's almost like the artist wants to find beauty in the natural world at ease through simplicity, humility, and observation.



Painting as a Butterfly (Installation View). Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen, 2022. Photo credit: Lance Brewer

Many of these new works were created in isolation and delicately channel a collective longing for human connection. The subjects of them are strictly connected to the natural world, with a howling wolf, flowing rivers, and suspended shoes dancing in space. The latter feature recalls the human sign in his pieces, almost with the intent to leave his personal mark and reference to a materialized concept that is encapsulated through the materials of the piece. These smaller scaled paintings, a new series called “Shop Signs” (2019 – ongoing) are inspired by the absence of daily rituals. Hung salon-style, they reimagine the pleasure of a stroll past a flower shop, a hatter, or a shoemaker in the artist’s native Marche region in Italy.

“Calzolari’s paintings are performative and poetic,” said gallery founder Marianne Boesky. “This show is the result of Pier Paolo’s tremendous output over the last few years during the isolation imposed by Covid-19. In these new works, the artist is returning to raw pigments in vibrant reds, blues, and yellows with an unexpected exuberance after several decades. This exhibition reflects a kind of laser focused energy that might only have been possible in quarantine.”

Born in Bologna (Italy) in 1943, and now a resident in Lisbon (Portugal), Pier Paolo Calzolari has been on the art scene for quite a long time. He’s one of the few artists belonging to the Arte Povera, an artistic and cultural Italian movement that occurred during the second part of the Sixties. Through vision and touch, the artist reaches his audience with a variety of media and techniques that make his portfolio rich and intense. Calzolari has always been a work in progress, with no plans nor intention to stay fixed within one style, concept, or idea. The way Calzolari deals with art is unique in its stylistic choices, as well as color patterns and metaphysical approaches to the subject.

Calzolari’s works are included in many catalogs and collections all over the world, including, among others, at the Art Institute of Chicago, Guggenheim Museum (New York), Sammlung Goetz (Munich), Centre Pompidou (Paris), and at Palazzo Grassi, Punta della Dogana François Pinault Foundation (Venice). He has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art twice (1985, 2013), Documenta (1992), Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume (1994), Venice Biennale (1978, 2007), Ca’ Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d’Arte Moderna (2011), the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (2011), and at the Centre Pompidou (2016).



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According to him, “the idea of color is truly tonal, simply because color, the soul and the eye that sees are tonal. The eye breathes, it moves freely, it is not codified.” Colors and hues, shapes and textures: those are the elements that make Calzolari ponder on the connection and meaning of life compared to the medium of Art.

Exhibited in five macro-lounge-looking spaces, the paintings are overall majestic in their dimension and captivating with their pigments. As a true member of the Arte Povera movement, the artist uses his pragmatic approach in executing his pieces, by making use of burnt wood, salt, lead, moss or even edible products, to protest against capitalism, materialistic realities and the loss of humble human creativity.

Calzolari’s message is choral, global, yet personal and intimate in his exposure. Located in the heart of Chelsea, Manhattan, the Marianne Boesky Gallery was clearly the best gallery to support this artist’s body of work.