

The Galleria Poggiali is delighted to present ***Così tentammo di aspettare la fine*** (How We Tried to Await the End) the first solo show by the artist Giuseppe Di Liberto, fresh from his success at the *Sacro* exhibition (2024) at the Fondazione Merz of Turin and from his participation in *Dopodomani* (2023) at the Rome Quadriennale. The exhibition runs from 6 June to 13 September in the gallery's premises in Foro Buonaparte 52, Milan.

The work by Giuseppe Di Liberto (Palermo, 1996) explores the concept of end, challenging the human capacity to fully understand it. Through sculptures, paintings, installations and performances, the artist explores the paradox of absence and the mystery of the image as simulacrum, with a special focus on the social and anthropological contexts connected with death in Mediterranean culture.

***Così tentammo di aspettare la fine*** explores the artist's interest in two different thematic areas. On one side is the subject of the apocalypse, which has become the leitmotif of his most recent production. The sensation of an increasingly concrete and imminent end is influenced by the urban and natural contexts where the artist has lived and worked, such as Venice where he is now, and Sète, where he recently completed a period of residence sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Culture in France, in collaboration with the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the CRAC (Centre régional d'art contemporain Occitanie/Pyrénées-Méditerranée). On the other side is the role of the ex-voto, a supplication for good fortune in the form of an object and sometimes even a painting.

The works on display address these topics both by focusing attention on the local historical and anthropological traditions and by inserting them into the context of contemporary emergency.

As the artist puts it, 'For the first time, science has made us profoundly conscious of the end: in 16 billion, 700 million years the Big Rip will end the game of the Universe. We are in a time of transition like that of the Middle Ages.'

The exhibition device revolves around a set of 3D-printed incense-burners that emanate smoke in the middle of the first room, ***Feu Marin*** (2024). The red flames made of wax on the painting ***Punto di fuga*** (2023), symbolically reinterpret the typical elements of the grave goods of the Mediterranean basin, and the flares used by boats to signal emergency; these burn, giving off a short skyward flame, before going out and leaving a long trail of smoke in their wake.

The canvases painted with clay displayed in the exhibition feature the elements of the grave goods found by Di Liberto on the tombs of the fishermen in the cemetery by the sea in Sète, thus named by the poet Paul Valéry, who wrote a collection of poems honouring the place where he is now buried. These include the vernacular, or naïve, paintings made by the sailors as ex-votos to ward off unforeseen events during sea voyages. Paintings to exorcise the end that confirm the idea of the French aesthete Paul Beauchamp that the Apocalypse was created precisely 'to help bear the unbearable'.

***Il quarto cavaliere*** (The Fourth Horseman, 2024) recalls *The Triumph of Death*, a fresco dated 1446 conserved in the regional art gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, tying up with the artist's Palermo roots. The skeletal figure astride his horse smiles with a mocking sneer at the imminent end. Together with ***Il suono della seconda tromba*** (The Sound of the Second Trumpet, 2024), it reinterprets the iconography of the ancient French mediaeval tapestry commissioned by Louis I of Anjou. It was cut to pieces during the French Revolution to make coverlets for the poor, and has now been restored and displayed in the Château d'Angers.

The composition of this last work by Di Liberto recalls that of the famous postclassical masterpiece *The Raft of the Medusa* executed by Théodore Géricault in 1818 and defined by the American art critic Jerry Saltz as a painting for a collapsing world. In both cases the theme of the apocalypse indissolubly links the revolt of the natural elements with the collapse of political order: Géricault's waves, sea and sky evoke the cataclysm of three million deaths on the battlefields of Europe during the Napoleonic wars, just as the unstable figures clinging

desperately to what remains of Di Liberto's boat represent the profound upheaval waiting in the wings.

In the horizontal painting ***Merci N.D.*** (2024), again a number of figures are sailing in a small boat being buffeted by a stormy sea. Nature is looming above them and overwhelming them, and yet their faces express no emotion. The oarsmen appear calm as they continue to row with their gaze fixed upon a divine figure out of sight.

'I remember that, when I was little, there had been an earthquake in Palermo. My mother woke me up and we left our house and went to the road. The state of alarm had generated a change and I was struck by how extraordinary the situation was: there we were, us and our neighbours, all gathered together in the road in our pyjamas in the middle of the night.'

Visitors to the exhibition are accompanied by a soundtrack. A distorted sound, omen of an end on the horizon. The sound ambience has been specially created for the show by the sound artist Federico Pipia. The intense drama and the theatrical character of the layout play with the observer's perception, forcing him or her to constant shifts between a contemporary narration and a remote and imaginary one. This bewilderment ends in the second room with the sleeping cast of what remains of a countenance, the eternal impression of a face on a pillow.

Giuseppe Di Liberto was born in Palermo in 1996, and lives and works in Venice. His work has been displayed in several public and private institutions including: the Fondazione Merz (2024), the Rome Quadriennale (2022/23), Mercerie (Brussels 2023), the Fondazione Imago Mundi (2021), the Address Gallery (2022), the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa (2021), and the Galleria Poggiali (2021).