

Figlio di gazza

Curatorial text by Vasco Forconi

On the occasion of his third solo exhibition at Matèria, Giuseppe De Mattia continues his exploration of the phenomenology of the artist's profession. The exhibition, comprised of new works marked by a certain formal heterogeneity, revisits and hones in on some of the central themes in De Mattia's work: the poetics of humble objects, a love for dialect, popular culture, craftsmanship, and collecting; the disclosure of artistic tricks, superstition, animal symbolism, play as a working methodology and as a strategy of gentle resistance. Fuelled by these multiple imaginaries, the exhibition proceeds through an accumulation of narrative fragments united by the leitmotif of theft and appropriation, alongside the recurring appearance of a thieving magpie that alternately assumes the roles of a guiding animal, interlocutor, and the artist's conscience.

The magpie follows her instinct by stealing shiny objects and hoarding them in her nest, transforming it into a sort of unintentional cabinet of wonders. Similarly and specularly, the artist captures ideas, objects, and suggestions, both from history and reality, reassembling them in his studio before returning the metaphorical stolen goods in the form of artworks. By playfully aligning his persona – and, in essence, the one of all artists – with a thieving magpie, De Mattia reminds us that invention is never absolute, and always the result of a patient and continuous process of research and rewriting. This celebration of theft and serial accumulation, that can be interpreted as an attempt to sabotage the logic of a linear economy, becomes an opportunity to reflect with a touch of irony on the methodologies and structural conditions of the artist's profession, narrating the constant material and metaphorical labor that is essential for their daily survival.

The result is a body of work in which different styles and languages are mixed, unified by the desire to unleash the poetic potential of inherently poor materials, using simple yet ingenious formal solutions. Upon entering the gallery, the visitor is welcomed by the elusive, playful, and auspicious presence of the magpie nesting on the ceiling beams, proudly displaying her sparkling loot; slightly forward, a small photograph shows De Mattia standing next to his guiding animal. On the floor, a textile work from the *pettegolezzi* series alludes with veiled tenderness to a youthful misadventure experienced by the artist's father, who, in post-World War II Puglia, was unjustly accused of stealing sun-dried tomatoes when, as it seems, it was a magpie that committed the theft. Displayed on the walls are the artist's *baracchette and semenzelle*, a series of works that combine architecture, sculpture, painting, and photography. Like the magpie's nest, each of these strange devices becomes a place for the accumulation of artifacts of dubious economic value; an opportunity to tickle the mischievous curiosity of the public, who is invited to peek through small holes applied to the surface of the structures. Completing the exhibition trajectory is an installation that brings the constructive and poetic insight of the *baracchette* to an environmental scale. Under the fixed gaze of a key-bearing magpie, the artist erects a large wall, isolating an entire gallery room from the view of the public. Only small holes allow glimpses of what is happening inside, unless one comes into possession of the small golden key, jealously guarded by the magpie. On the back wall of the concealed room, a collection of sparkling and sumptuously framed objects appears: a series of votive icons that, with careful observation, immediately reveal their pagan essence; one not devoid of a certain sacredness. These are representations – characterized by the use of embossed drawing – of precious items discovered, collected, and resold by the artist over time; a practice that has allowed him to find financial support in the early years of his career. In confiding with the public and revealing the tricks of the trade, De Mattia provides a glimpse of the fascinating performance of cunning ingenuity that has long preceded and has made possible all of his artistic operations; of which the artwork is essentially an enduring trace. It is always in the

realm of intimate confession that the soundtrack, filling the architectural volumes of the room, is inscribed: in this fictional narrative, the magpie – in this case representing the artist’s conscience – delivers a monologue with a tender and fairy-tale tone, yet marked at times by a certain disenchanting realism. The magpie compares herself to the artist, shares his innate curiosity and disappointments, consoles him, and ultimately, in her own way, absolves him: “Do not fear,” she says, “the act of copying is a right, stealing is not a dishonor. For me, it is a vital disposition.”

After all, each of the multiple narrative fragments that make up Giuseppe De Mattia’s new exhibition contributes to the creation of an intimately autobiographical story, one that when analyzed in its details, reveals itself to be broader and generational, another chapter in the ongoing tragicomic saga of a mid-career artist.