ARTFORUM



Leornado Pellicanò, *Tornati* (Returned Ones, 2025, oil on wood, steel frame, 10 5/8 x 13 3/8.

Leonardo Pellicanò's exhibition "Fear Fear, Fear Sky, Play Fear, Fear Work" included four large paintings, each with a palette as distinct as a fairy tale's four seasons. These intricate works in oil on wood set terribly human scenes of battle and exodus in dreamlike landscapes. His titles, *Fear Sky* and *Fear Grass*, both 2025, for example, situate this primordial human emotion within a universal landscape, while his compositions align the terrors of ancient mythology with the trauma of a nightmarish present.

Painting on unprimed wood panels, the artist animates his natural and untreated surfaces to an alchemical effect. He finishes each surface with brushing or scraping, so that crystalline colors shine as if through the vaporous haze of apocalyptic loss. *In Play Soil*, 2025, rippling veins of wood grain, as if invoking a gust of wind, rise in a composition built in tones of tired earth and fallen leaves.A group of figures, reminiscent of a nativity scene complete with a lonely cow, is suggested with loose, Chagall-like strokes amid smoggy clouds that rise above a turbulent horizon. *Play Night*, 2025, with the colors of a High Anthropocene sunset, features winged creatures encountering pairs of earthbound figures in a universal stance of panic: arms raised in confusion, bodies leaning toward escape. The immensity of Pellicanò's landscapes, expanding here in deep-violet caverns and emerald horizons, unites this quartet. This sweeping, panoramic effect offers a sense of possibility that counterpoints the dire situation of its inhabitants. The artist pictures landscape as a stage much wider than humanity's wrongs.

At the top of a stone staircase fit for a princess, *Pellicanò's Tornati* (Returned Ones), 2025, hangs on its own in a small book-lined studio. This enigmatic composition combines a range of surreal visual references. Framed by a white folding screen, archetypal figures—I see a clown and a magician—hover between two rainbowlike arcs, a one-legged bull, and a treble clef. Like a collage, this painting playfully reunites disparate parts: surface and color, form and figure. Meanwhile, in eight paintings hanging in the adjacent space, a luminous top-floor gallery, Pellicanò zooms in on unique scenes of disquiet (*Evening the Score*, 2024) or collective vigil (*Turn off the Lights*, 2025). *Fear Work*, 2025, appropriates the composition of Belgian painter Constantin Meunier's *La coulée à Ougrée* (The Steel Foundry), ca. 1880, a realist homage to a team of foundry workers. Pellicanò, who often organizes collaborative exhibitions and performances, carries his concern with the power of the collective through to his paintings, nearly always populated with scenes of group action.

Pellicanò cites mid-twentieth-century anthropologist Ernesto De Martino and his thesis that humanity's pressing responsibility for the "world of tomorrow" demands that the individual, conscious that "the world must continue but that it can end," reengage "encounter and discussion, relation and unification."

Pellicanò's feeling for this "elementary relationship with the world" is evident in the thickness and weight of each of his unframed wood panels, as well as his intensely labored surfaces. In a society increasingly bent on consumption, Pellicanò positions painting as an essential, rebellious act of creative production.