

Fortune Cookies by Rischa Paterlini

Have you ever opened a fortune cookie and, for a moment, thought that slip of paper was speaking about you? "You will return to where you've already been." "Today someone will think of you." "A small unexpected event will improve your day." Mass-produced phrases, identical for everyone, yet the way they arrive—unexpected, without explanation—makes them capable of striking us. We just need to read them.

With *Fortune Cookies*, Cristiano Tassinari (1980, Forlì) transfers the same mechanism to images: fragments that seem random and open, for those who encounter them, an unexpected space. The exhibition at Ncontemporary in Milan is the third, ideal chapter of a journey that began with *Mother's Bliss* and *Gli uomini delle scintille*: if then the gaze was directed toward family memory, roots, and a sense of belonging, here it returns to itself—not to close a circle, but to open another.

The exhibition proceeds through subtle transformations: of the body, of memory, of matter. It doesn't follow a linear order: it advances through returns, through images that surface and dissolve, leaving traces. Each work inhabits an intermediate state, a passage that doesn't fully complete itself and remains open. *Fortune Cookies* doesn't construct a unified narrative: it proposes a collection to be traversed over time, pausing, going back, allowing something to emerge—even just for an instant, like a message found by chance that reaches us when we're not looking for it. Some works sediment over time, others seem born suddenly; some look backward, others toward what still has no name. None prevails: each, in its own way, asks only to be looked at.

Putto, for example, is a figure we've already encountered in past exhibitions, and which returns here in another form. The body is placed atop a pedestal that seems to be disintegrating, as if it can no longer support it. The ankles give way, the feet are about to sink into the dripping paint. In its hands it clutches two rigid beings—they look like birds, but it's not certain. Even the gaze bends: it's not an invitation, it's a retraction.

Further on, another body. *Autoritratto da giovane (Piromane)* [Self-portrait as a young man (Arsonist)]. The same unnatural green of the skin, the same inclined posture, but something has changed. The lines are sharper, and at the same time more vulnerable: transparencies, cuts, openings. The face seems absent, almost extracted from itself. Below, we can still glimpse the Putto's foot; behind, its face returns as a mute presence, sculpted, almost surveilled. It's not a doubling, but a slippage. A passage from one body to another, from one image to another, that doesn't erase what has been but transforms it. In the title, in parentheses, appears the word *Piromane*. It's not a decorative addition. It's a short circuit, a restrained intention. It's also, perhaps, a clue left there by the artist: a word that seems to confess, rather than describe.

From this gesture—still internal, still directed at the self—the exhibition opens outward. But it's not a linear evolution: it's rather a discreet metamorphosis, a process involving the body, desire, relationship. Each figure seems to cross a threshold, as if becoming something else, or returning to something that has always been there. The images don't tell a story, but move in a continuous tension between contact and distance, between visibility and disappearance. In *Her Child*, the body of a boy leans slightly forward. The orange shirt anchors him to the space, but his gaze is projected off-frame, as if seeking an impossible point to reach. Everything is still, but nothing is immobile: tension condenses in the folds of the posture. The movement continues in *Roses Bar*, where two bodies brush against each other. She bends toward him, eyes closed, mouths close but restrained. It's a gesture of intimacy that doesn't fulfill itself, and that background blends into the scene; the paint becomes living matter, dense, almost a tactile echo of restrained emotion. The contact becomes more direct in *Lovers*, but here too the union is only apparent. The mouths touch, but the

faces tilt in opposite directions, as if the gesture itself contained an unbridgeable distance. The painting underscores this: the background doesn't unite, it separates. The surrounding matter frays and, with it, the image seems on the verge of dissolving. This also happens in *Portrait with flowers*: the face at the center merges with the petals, so vivid they don't remain contour; they absorb the features and the portrait escapes definition. More than an identity, a mask in mutation: a presence that is changing form before our eyes. In all these works, metamorphosis is not a theme, but a condition: what we see is always in transit. Each work preserves a form of distance—between bodies, between subject and gaze, between the image and what it represents. It's in that gap, in that continuous attempt to become, that the images find their time.

From this point forward, the human figure withdraws. But it doesn't disappear. It reappears, transformed, in other presences that inhabit the space: animals, hybrid forms, creatures balanced between gesture and vision.

The lizards here seem barely appeared or barely vanished. Their body doesn't impose itself: it remains etched, left on the surface as a trace. Around them, the tones become aquatic, silent, crossed by an opaque pink or a transparent azure. It's a rarefied space, in which the image withdraws rather than reveals itself. That same suspension condenses in the scene of *Garden Deer*, where a deer's head emerges from vegetation that explodes and dissolves together. The painting doesn't construct an image, but a condition. Then everything contracts: forms wrap around themselves and what remains is unrecognizable—a green tangle, a spiral breath. A presence remains: *L'incontro* [The encounter]. A title that here seems to bend, as if the very act of encountering were deforming. It could be animal, or merely imagined.

Of that bestiary, a principle remains, which passes from painting to sculpture. It's here that *Auspicious Beast* returns: not the observed animal, but its idea, condensed in beeswax.

The posture is collected, the paws clasped around a sphere, the head slightly turned. It's a figure of waiting, like *Her Child*, balanced between listening and immobility. It's a presence that observes *Night Bamboo* from a margin, without being part of it. In this painting there are no animals, only the trace of a passage. The painting becomes environment: vertical stems cross a stratified surface, made of overlapping, erased, recomposed gestures. The green is not natural, the pink is not light, the azure is not clear. The colors compress and a reference to the mosaics of San Vitale in Ravenna emerges—carved in the artist's childhood memories. It's not an explicit citation, but a visual memory that returns.

From here another passage opens: The figure withdraws, the skin of things remains. *Philharmonie* and *Prussian's breast* reveal themselves as Berlinesque through an accumulation of traces: the titles; the echo of Scharoun's concert hall in the folded planes; the copper that turns green like the city's roofs. In an unstable present traversed by conflict, a subtle, non-illustrative warlike element surfaces: more than symbols, a lexicon of coverings and armor. Gold as a plaque that holds light without fixing it; copper as exposed metal that patinas, registers air, humidity, passages. Cuts and joints seem like slits, seams of a fragile protection. The work doesn't stabilize the world: it takes note. The surface changes; the presence remains.

There's a form of knowledge that proceeds through returns. It doesn't ask to understand immediately, but to pause: to remain in that uncertain time in which images haven't yet fully occurred, or perhaps are already fading. Like in the most intimate diaries, not everything is meant to be shared: some pages remain closed, others are lost. Those very forgotten ones come back to visit us when we stop looking for them. It's a bit like at dinner, with more fortune cookies than expected: we open some, others remain closed; the messages arrive, but only partially legible. It's this quota

of incompleteness that concerns us. Each work is a fragment that reaches us when we're ready to change our skin. It doesn't ask for explanations; it asks for time and gaze. And it remains.