

## IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

### Enzo Cucchi's symbolic language conquers New York

The artist from Marche returns to the Big Apple with two exhibitions: one at Vito Schnabel Gallery in Chelsea and another at Gavin Brown's space in Harlem

by Luciana Fabbri  
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Installation view of Enzo Cucchi: *Mostra Coagula* at the Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York, 2025; © Enzo Cucchi  
Photo: Argenis Apolinario; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery

[Translated from Italian]

The first work by Enzo Cucchi that greets visitors as they enter the Vito Schnabel Gallery (*Enzo Cucchi: Mostra Coagula*, on view until May 22) is a large steel net, with a man on a boat painted on it, intent on painting despite the fact that his boat is sinking. The work consists of bold, minimal brushstrokes in blue, white, and black enamel, with much of the surface left empty. The essential brushwork and the sheer size of the net, compared to the figure, create a visual perception where, from a distance, the industrial metal object is noticed before the painting.

Continuing in the main room, we are surprised by a large number of small and medium-sized works, installed along the entire perimeter of the gallery. «*It's like a wave, a little agitated, a bit excited. Otherwise everything everything being the same would block your heart*», says Cucchi. The intense colors fill the space with vibrant energy. The arrangements suggests a narrative,

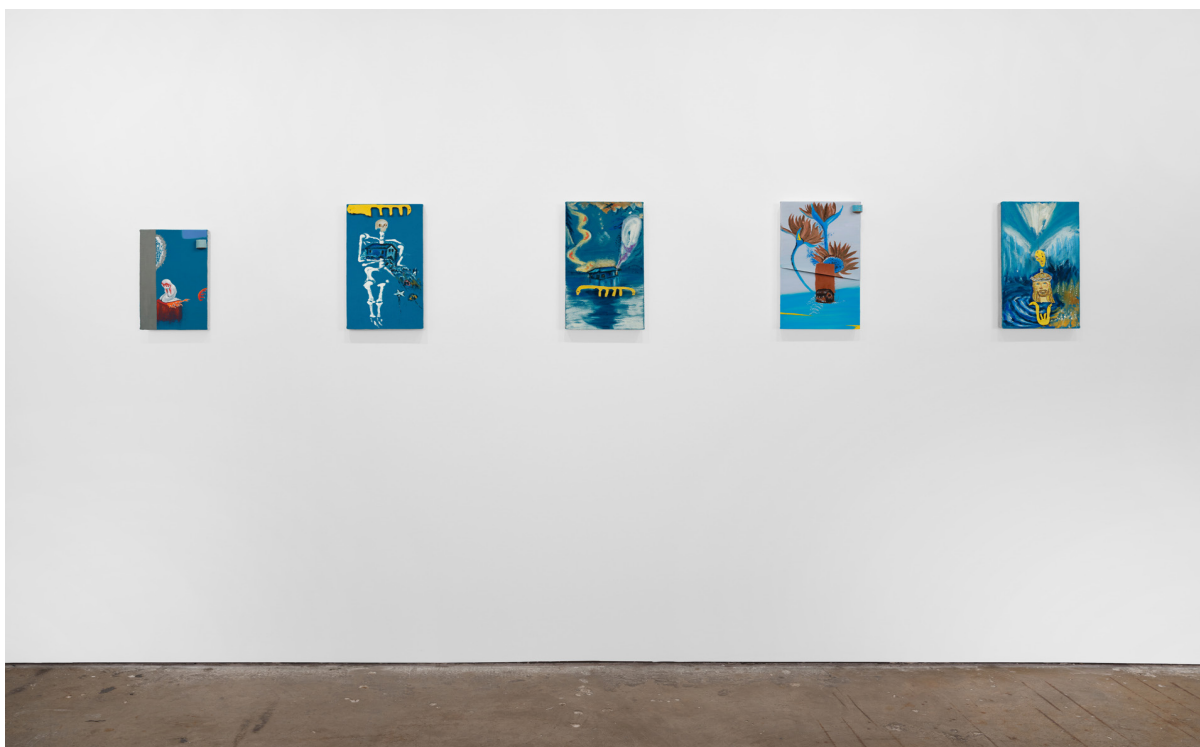
ENZO CUCCHI

a continuity. Among the first works, we notice a painting of a skeleton holding a house, from which an undefined flow of forms spills out; nearby, there is a prehistoric animal in front of a dwelling, and right next to it, the face of Jesus. Cucchi's symbolic language seems to draw from deep memories, intertwining references to his personal history with collective cultural, artistic and religious roots. They are dreamlike visions painted in a symbolic language. The symbolism is hidden, and the images do not fully reveal themselves to us.

The paintings are enriched with ceramic and wooden elements, applied in different ways: hung on the sides, glued to the surface or suspended with copper wires, creating projections of shadows. *«All these works are born from the shadow. Things in the shadows are preserved»*. He adds: *«It's not usual for their language (of the Americans, ed). Here the surface is always very evident, you see what's there»*. Recurrent motifs—prehistoric animals, dwellings, mountains and landscapes—return in ever different variations. Real slashes cut through some surfaces, increasing their thickness. The artist laments how many successful curators and critics today have written nothing and recalls the depth of authors such as Berenson, Ortega y Gasset, Alberto Arbasino.

Speaking of New York he says: *«In the past the cultural fabric here was softer, more emotional... there were various spaces, all the galleries were rundown, now everything is standardized, extremely clean. Energy is tragically consumed... but to go where? We need to find time for reflection... Poetry is a thing of the poor, a little shattered thing. Compared to an intact, impenetrable surface»*.

In the center of the room, four polychrome marbles depict children: one with a skull face, another in the act of crying or defecating, as in *"Piscia, Caca, Muori (Piss, Shit, Die)"* (2023). Cucchi's excessive language escapes rational control, presenting an overload of signs, materials, and heterogeneous references. The inclusion of hybrid creatures, animals inspired by the grotesque, and the frequent annexation of elements that spill over from the body of the work seem to emphasize a rejection of the idea of formal purity and any logic of modernist progression.



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A central role in the installation is played up by the “angular” ceramics, installed at the corners of the gallery. Cucchi, with admiration, quotes the writer Manganelli, who, while referring to architectural space, asked: *«How is it possible to dream in a room full of corners?»* These works transform the volumes and capture the eye in a different way than usual. In one of these, you can see the figure of an elongated cat, cut in half, with a diamond or a faceted object on top of it that reflects light. Cucchi, surprised and amused, comments: *«ah, you see a cat?! Who knows if it's a cat or a souvenir...»*.

As if what we see is a reflection of something we carry inside us. The image is never fixed, but it is conditioned by the perception and references of the viewer. These works reawaken our way of seeing and remembering. *«The painting is all behind, what is behind is fundamental. The subject doesn't matter»*, he says. *«Take Piero della Francesca's Madonna of Senigallia. It's not the religious subject that's important, but the way Piero used the color pink. Besides, color doesn't exist; only light exists, but he managed to paint a type of pink that is already in our minds»*.

Cucchi paints in a direct and instinctive way (*«to draw you have to have an empty head»*). The images emerge as if rising from the subconscious in a self-revealing exercise. The artist transforms into a sort of container, or a filter, through which the images that populate him flow. *«For me it's always and only a formal matter... There's nothing to explain, you have to act... My tool is not language»*.

Crossing through all of Manhattan northward we arrive in Harlem, a historic center of African American culture, where Gavin Brown's space houses another exhibition dedicated to Cucchi until April 18. A hub of art and political thought in the 1920s and 1930s, the neighborhood was transformed by gentrification. Upon entering, one senses a whispering presence: it is a ceramic uroboro, painted in an opaque yellow, coiled on a corner of the room. In the background, hanging at the corners of the room, are two other angular ceramics: on the right, a sculpture in the shape of bird wings; on the left, two circular mirror shapes. Both are painted yellow and along the sides, small black beetles are visible. In the center, five vase-sculptures create a dense core of references. *“Giar...dio”* (2022) stands out, a punk skull head painted yellow emerging from a perforated white vase, overturned on his head.

The vases dialogue with two small paintings dedicated to Van Gogh, framed in white wooden panels *«like the benches where the workers walk. Painted white, with limestone»*, says Cucchi. They seem to recall the floor of Van Gogh's room in Arles. Uniting the works on display is precisely that shade of yellow, which the Dutch painter was so obsessed with. Cucchi speaks, in a somewhat cryptic tone, of when Van Gogh and Gauguin painted together in Arles. He seems to want to emphasize the color as a trace of a memory that is passed down, sedimenting itself in the material. It is not only a visual homage, but a true transfusion of sensibility. Van Gogh's yellow becomes for him a link between different bodies and times, a common thread that crosses matter. Artistic memory is never static, but rather an energy that renews itself in contact and dialogue. The Ouroboros, ancient symbol found in various cultures and traditions, suggests the idea of cyclical time and opens itself to the possibility of a new beginning. Upon leaving, Cucchi's words come back to mind: *«The body of an artist passes through the body of other artists»*.



Enzo Cucchi, *Giar...dio*, 2022, Gavin Brown