

edi hila
al di là del vetro

PRESS RELEASE

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We are proud to present *Al di là del vetro*, Edi Hila's first solo show with Galleria Raffaella Cortese and our first exhibition of works on canvas in over 25 years of programming. After visiting the gallery's spaces, the Albanian artist conceived this project entirely from home, where he rebuilt the three exhibition venues as maquettes. In Tirana, he created each site-specific work meditating on the idea of displacement—mental and physical—and on the gallery as a fluid container for the assembly and disassembly of ideas. The result thus broadens the usual boundaries of the pictorial medium: each painting is site-specific, inextricably linked to the architecture—both of the exhibition space and of the portrayed locations—and the objects that inhabit them, as well as the photographic act that is at the origin of each work.

Edi Hila (Shkodër, Albania, 1944) has borne witness to the social and political history of Albania. Through his life experience, sensitivity, and painting practice, his work reaches peaks of great poignancy. Trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana in the early sixties, he found in the lessons of Danish Jukni the only possible access to the knowledge of contemporary art in Albania under Enver Hoxha's communist regime. Despite the difficulties stemming from the intellectual isolation mandated by the regime, he managed to deepen his understanding of twentieth-century art history. In 1972 he realized the well-known painting *Planting of Trees* with a technique that was far from the doctrines taught at the Academy, finding joy in chromatism, as well as in gesture, which immediately created serious problems for him. The attitude of freedom to express one's happiness in that painting was the principal reason that led the regime to distance him from painting for years. In the seventies and eighties he was indeed forced to work in a re-education camp in the poultry industry. Only after the fall of communism in Albania, in the nineties, he returned to painting and began to define the style and content that also characterize the works exhibited in this first show of his in Galleria Raffaella Cortese's three spaces.

The idea of displacement is the common thread that ties together many of the exhibited works. Hila, immediately after the Italian lockdown of Spring 2021, visited the exhibition spaces in Milan and then started to conceive the exhibition from his home in Tirana, where he rebuilt, with a maquette, the headquarters of the gallery. 'Moving' from Italy to Albania in a mental and almost 'physical' way, albeit in scale, the gallery ceased to be *just* an exhibition space and became a device of thought. Brining the gallery with him also meant the artist had it close to him in those months of the pandemic that marked all of our lives with the difficulty of traveling. As the artist writes: "the gallery has now been transformed and becomes a creative terrain, as if it were a 'laboratory', a source of proposals on the project to be realized. Even the model in itself undergoes changes during the creative process. This cannot be a place of real exposure, but it is a terrain suitable for creation, experimentation, it becomes a playing field to exercise imagination, an important personal moment that feeds the internal dialogue".

Among the new paintings in the exhibition, in *Natura dipinge gli alberi* [*Nature paints the trees*] I and II the artist's meditation shifts from architecture to nature. Walking in the woods allowed him to discover "another magical aspect, the reflection of the trees on the surface of the water where a small stream flowed, calmly". Hila took this 'moment-vision', embedding it as if it were a piece of a stained glass window, inside a landscape made of trees, bushes, branches, and wind.

In the artist's painting, time–historical and personal, photographic and pictorial–meets space, exhibition venues and quotidian environments. His understanding of photography, which is often at the origin of his creative process, as something that is not a mere duplicate of reality was crucial. Firstly because the camera mechanically records more information than the human eye, which is inevitably personal and selective, and secondly because from the moment of shooting time continues to flow in non-photographic reality. Hila's creative process is therefore composed of multiple sessions during which the artist reconsiders details, areas of composition, glazes, passages. Each of his works becomes a 'palimpsest painting' comprising, in a formal and chromatic synthesis, different moments of life connected to a precise feeling that led him to a specific work. Another comment penned by the artist about *Riflessione sulla mostra [Reflection on the exhibition]* is particularly significant: "the moment was tense and the thought vague. It was noon. In the meantime I am being called to sit at the dining table."

Via Stradella 4 hosts, instead, a significant work created in the nineties which was featured in Hila's recent solo show at the Secession in Vienna in 2020 as well as in the artist's major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2018. The 1997 triptych *People of the Future* is inspired by a story from that year's news, which saw dozens of Albanian migrants shipwrecked and lose their lives in an attempt to reach the Italian coasts. Here the idea of movement is, on a symbolic level, associated with the migratory flows of History, while at the compositional level it is suggested both by the ship, painted at different distances, and by the 'point of water'. It is in this circle, which from its reductive size in two of the canvases is then analyzed macroscopically in the central one, that we find the wandering of souls who will continue to float for eternity.

BIOGRAPHY

Edi Hila was born in Shkodër, Albania, in 1944. He lives and works in Tirana, Albania.

Recent solo shows include *The Sound of the Tuba*, Secession, Vienna (2020); *Edi Hila: Painter of Transformation*, which originated at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and travelled to the National Gallery of Arts, Tirana (2018); and *Mirages of a Boulevard*, Center of Openness and Dialogue, Tirana (2016). The artist has participated in a number of international exhibitions including *Learning from Athens*, documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, and Athens, Greece (2017); *Potential Monuments of Unrealised Futures* (with Adrian Paci), Architectural Association, London, travelled to Albanian Pavillion at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2014); *The Desire for Freedom, Art in Europe from 1945 to the present day*, Historical Museum, Berlin; travelled to Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy and Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn (2013); *Touched*, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK (2010); *Blood and Honey — The Future's Balkan*, Essl Museum, Vienna (2003); *After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1999); travelled to Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin and Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, and Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2000); and the Albanian Pavillion at the 48th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (1999).

His work is represented in collections of museums such as: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw; Musée national d'art moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Fonds municipal d'art contemporain de la Ville de Paris; FRAC Pays de la Loire, France; FRAC Auvergne, France, and the National Gallery of Arts, Tirana. Edi Hila has held teaching positions at the Fine Art Academy in Tirana for several decades since 1988. The artist received the Onufri Award in 1993 and 1998; in 2019 he was awarded the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program fellowship.