

PRESS RELEASE

KALI
GALLERY

Michele Gabriele

Brambora

17.10. – 5.12.2025

KALI Gallery, Lädelistrasse 4, 6003 Luzern

KALI Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition by the Italian artist Michele Gabriele, in Switzerland.

The coloration of birds' plumage, crucial for camouflage, communication, and sexual selection, is the result of various biochemical combinations of pigments. However, the Tyndall effect is exempt from this rule. This phenomenon occurs when the keratinous nanostructure of feathers selectively disperses light, rendering structural colors that would otherwise be unattainable by pigments alone. One of the best-known examples is the blue that characterizes the plumage of various types of parrots, mantled in an optical illusion that makes their aesthetic peculiarity an event rather than a substance. A perceptual deception created by physics dresses the most colorful of animals, as if to suggest that identity is a construct. A mirror of what the viewer wants to see.

Like structural colors, Michele Gabriele's practice hinges on the constructed nature of appearance, the dynamics of perception, and the relationship between object and subject. *Brambora*, the artist's first solo exhibition devoted entirely to painting, owes its title to an encounter with an Ara chloropterus with which the artist found himself sharing space during the setup and opening of an exhibition. It is precisely this animal that gives shape to the series *Portrait of a Parrot. An Unbothered, Sad, and Cringe Parrot. Indifferent to its Context* (2025), whose corpus embodies a dialectical and constitutive relationship with its audience, which the artist condenses in the central series of the exhibition: four portraits aware of being observed. These paintings are not objects that simply allow themselves to be looked at, passive to the power of the public, which reduces everything it sets its eyes on to a consumer image. On the contrary, they want to be seen, actively engaging in the dynamics of fruition and demanding complexity from those who reciprocate their gaze. This ontological difference reflects back the viewer's projections, undermining their processes of interpretation and narration.

The three paintings depict as many parrots, painted according to the stylistic features of classical portraiture, the pinnacle of the culturally mediated eye. In these effigies, however, the parrot manages to escape its iconographic destiny: instead of posing intentionally, it awkwardly occupies the entire scene. It takes up so much space that it obscures the dynamics behind it, which, through the few details still visible, suggest an exhibition space. A sterile and vaguely depressing non-place, a hypothetical exhibition that the parrots prevent us from seeing. They occupy the scene in a hypertrophic way, like someone wandering mindlessly around a vernissage, passing in front of the works while someone else is looking at them.

Symbolically, the parrot is a foreign subject, a personification of the unexpected, an atypical figure. Similarly, Michele Gabriele's parrots are inappropriate, ridiculous, and gauche, pathetic in the dualistic sense of the term. Completely out of place, yet they seem at ease; somewhat contrite, but also imperturbable, tenderly absent. Unaware of the impact they have on their surroundings, like the parakeets that, due to the tropicalization of the climate, have been casually populating the parks of mid-European cities for years. Integrated into a globalized and distorted world, where the place to be no longer exists. Thus, the iconic tropical bird extricates itself from the web of meanings, emancipating itself from luxury and elegance: no longer invested with a semiotic density so dense as to obscure its animal otherness, the bird imposes its presence ungainly. Tragicomic and almost grotesque, it appropriates kitsch, sublimating this intellectual taboo into a clumsy force that survives its human owners and their aesthetics.

With their piercing eyes and crossed wings, those masters are somewhat echoed, raising the question of whether these birds are perhaps hybrids, if not people in costume. The classical portrait fades into character design; the parrots stare at us like humans, deliberately blurring the boundary between the two natures. Nothing is clear, everything is plausible. This time, it is the anthropomorphic paradox that problematizes our relationship with reality, reminding us how this inevitable cognitive lens makes the world intelligible only at the cost of flattening its radical otherness. We can only empathize with animals by humanizing them; to get closer to them, we make them resemble us, once again placing ourselves at the center of the rhetorical topos of world history.

This contradictory dynamic perfectly represents the distortion that the artist intends to display throughout the entire series. Parrots that talk without saying anything, that repeat without understanding. They simulate language without producing authentic meaning, just like cultural systems that often mechanically reproduce codes emptied of critical substance. The portrait thus becomes a mirror, a reflection of the microcosm of art where everyone makes noise. Self-referential yet lost, privileged yet oblivious to a world rattling behind us.

This investigation continues in *Study for the Plumage of a Parrot. An Unbothered, Sad, and Cringe Parrot. Indifferent to its Context* (2025). Although created without pre-defined compositional rules, the three plumage studies recall abstract expressionism, informal painting, and those artistic currents born of times of crisis, in which artists revisited the figurative approach to represent discomfort and uncertainty. It is this commonality that marks a significant turning point in Michele Gabriele's production, which moves from hyperrealistic finishes to visible, textured brushstrokes connected to the very sensitivity of the pictorial gesture. If the portraits were imaginary mirrors hanging on the walls of fairs and galleries, these studies are mirrors hanging in the artist's studio. Here, emotion abandons the realm of the implicit and stretches out to offer itself to the public gaze. An exposed vulnerability that does not seek to be the center of attention, but rather a responsibility towards a more direct and personal artistic act.

A graphite drawing closes the exhibition, by opening up another narrative. In *La colpa* (2025), a parrot sits next to a triton, the protagonist of Michele Gabriele's previous series. The two characters meet in the artist's imaginative ecosystem, superimposing two narrative worlds into a hypothetical storyboard where rapid and essential marks retain the immediacy of an apparition and the promise of a sequel yet to unfold. No longer defined by the tension of others' gazes, but united by their respective otherness, the two exchange an act of comfort, a relationship based no longer on observing but on feeling. A finally silent dialogue becomes the epilogue of the exhibition, opening an escape route from the trap of the objectifying gaze.

Text by Zoë De Luca Legge

Michele Gabriele (they/he, born 1983, IT) is a visual artist currently based in Milan and recognized mostly for his sculptures, paintings and performances.

Their work addresses the contrast between the digital and material worlds, exploring the feeling of inadequacy engendered by progressive visions of an eco-sustainable future against the disillusionment of their concrete realization. Michele Gabriele's work is deeply rooted in exploring the distances between representation and materiality, as well as the divergences between space and time relative to the observer.

Among his notable solo exhibitions are those at EACC Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo de Castellón in the Comunitat Valenciana, MeetFactory in Prague, NAM Museum, Manifattura Tabacchi in Florence in, Ashes/Ashes Gallery in New York, Kunthalle Ost in Leipzig, Fondazione Pini in Milan and Kunstihoone Art All in Tallinn. He has also participated in various group exhibitions, such as at ICA Institute of Contemporary Art in Maine, Portland, FRAC Corsica, MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneve, International Objects in New York, the 16th Contemporary Art Biennale Alios, and at Et. Al Gallery in San Francisco.

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