

Art Through Artificial Intelligence: Montico's Time-Traveling Artworks

With works by children from the Cremasco and
Lodigiano areas



Montico, an environmentalist since the 1970s

Preface

I have known Gigi Montico for over forty years: our mutual friend and refined writer, Gino Commissari, introduced us in the countryside west of the Cremona springs. Montico, along with his young children, lived in a small wooden house with a steep roof, as is common in the Alpine valleys. Next to it, he then devised a home-studio with a blood-red brickwork and the architecture of a miniature farmhouse.

Since then, we have traveled in parallel, and let's say right away that Montico's works stand out for their distinctiveness. While I was giving life to the poetics of terminal realism, Gigi, in addition to working on the texture of surfaces, collected abandoned and/or discarded objects to make them come alive on his canvases or in sculptures. So far, nothing new: many artists ecologically recover materials. The fact is, however, that Montico uses these findings to construct natural aspects.

Here, the novelty appears: these works express nature, but it openly resembles objects. The fact that nature is progressively becoming more artificial is precisely the canon of terminal realism, and Gigi Montico represents it with elegance and lively formal and chromatic vivacity.

Close to his works, one can appreciate the beauty of a spring-like art, and this is happily in contrast to all too many artistic forms now turned to decline.

Guido Oldani, founder of "Terminal Realism"*



*Oldani, G. *Il realismo terminale*. Mursia.

Introduction

The "Art of Sustainability" has established itself as a bold artistic movement, intertwining ecology and social responsibility at the core of artistic creation. This movement employs natural or recycled materials and eco-friendly practices, crafting works that delve into themes of environmental sustainability. In an era increasingly defined by ecological and social challenges, the Art of Sustainability stands as a creative, visionary answer to these pressing concerns.

Artists championing this movement aim to engage communities actively and raise awareness about environmental issues through their art. In this respect, the Art of Sustainability serves as a powerful medium for addressing vital topics and spurring social change.

In the updated monograph "Art Through Artificial Intelligence (AI): Gigi Montico's Time-Traveling Artworks," we offer an expanded perspective on the works of Italian artist Gigi Montico, a prominent figure in this philosophy. Born in Malnate in 1943 and currently residing in Dovera, Cremona province, Montico honed his artistic skills in Milan, showcasing his talent in numerous exhibitions in Italy and internationally. His sustainable creations underscore the role of art in promoting environmental consciousness and propelling shifts towards a more sustainable future.

What sets this edition apart is the introduction of Montico's innovative foray into the realm of artificial intelligence. Montico has embraced AI as a tool to reimagine his original works, creating parallel pieces that envision how his art could evolve in the distant future. These artworks, reinterpreted by the Artist through a collaborative process with AI, present a dual narrative when placed beside their originals. One narrative honors the legacy of traditional artistry, while the other delves into the potential transformations brought about by the synergy of human creativity and technological progress. This fusion of AI with Montico's sustainable ethos not only extends the conversation on environmentalism but also pioneers a dialogue on the intersection of art, technology, and sustainability.

Montico's commitment to creating works that positively impact society and the environment remains steadfast. His creations, both original and AI-enhanced, are not only aesthetically striking but also carry profound messages. This monograph invites readers to explore the Art of Sustainability through Montico's innovative lens, hoping to inspire how art can contribute to building a sustainable future. We thank you for choosing to embark on this exploratory journey into the Art of Sustainability, augmented by the lens of artificial intelligence. May Montico's works, in both their original and AI-augmented forms, inspire you to act for the safeguarding of our environment and embrace a more sustainable lifestyle.





Untitled (100x55cm)

Montico's work, created using a pair of worn-out work pants, demonstrates the protest of sustainable art as it counters optimistic optimism. The crisis that manifests itself in Europe within the social body, the many flags waved in the wind of indiscriminate progress, the pursuit of happiness, or the slogans to spread the euphoria of a peace and prosperity perspective over the discontent of the populations do not take into account the echoes of time. (Montico) "our future is no longer what it once was." The choice of material, the work pants, is very significant, as it symbolizes the toil of the common man who works, but also his ability to transform what is old into something new and useful.





Untitled (100x50cm)

Montico's work, in which he uses an old windbreaker and a mask, is powerful and unsettling at the same time. The depicted figure, bound and appearing dead or embalmed, evokes strong feelings of distress and helplessness. The windbreaker and mask, symbols of protection and anonymity, become elements of oppression and deprivation of freedom in this painting. (Montico) "Today's fear seems even greater than that of yesterday, but we live primarily in the present, and it is the anxiety of this moment that most overwhelms us."

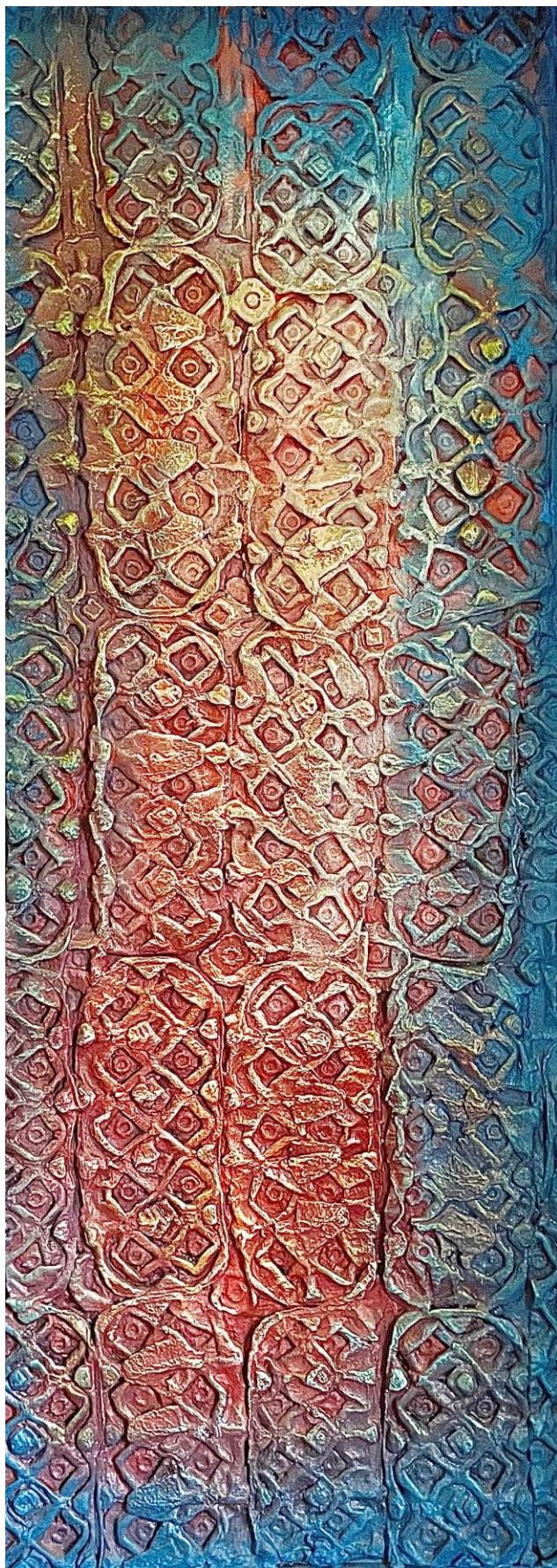




Duetto (34x25cm)

Montico's sculpture titled "Duetto" is a work of art that skillfully combines emotional memory and aesthetic sensibility in an original and touching way. Using an old pair of his music-loving son's shoes as material for the sculpture conveys strong emotional significance and serves as a tribute to his son's musical passion. At the same time, the shape of the shoes, bent and molded to create a sort of harmonious visual dialogue, represents a perfect synthesis of aesthetics and content.

(Montico) "I feel like an automaton, overwhelmed by the activities and objects of everyday life. But creation gives me the freedom to express myself and find meaning in the things I do: here I can break the routine and rediscover a sense of spontaneity and autonomy."





Passacaglia (145x60cm)

Montico's painting paying tribute to music, "Passacaglia," is a work of art that combines formal experimentation and aesthetic sensibility in an original and intriguing way. The use of many cardboard egg cartons, creating a repetitive pattern that slightly changes from one box to another, represents an interesting exploration of form and visual composition. At the same time, the title "Passacaglia," referring to a musical form that involves the repetition of a theme/pattern with subsequent variations, suggests a connection between the artwork and music.

In this exploration, Montico also turns to conceptualism; like walking with heavy steps through a three-aisled church in winter, or listening to the passage of time while standing on the seashore or placing one's ear against an hourglass. All of this reminds us that nature is in constant motion and change, and we are fortunately a part of it in our wonderful, albeit brief but indelible, history.





Magnetic Rain on the Lions of Delos (135x128cm)

In Montico's painting titled "Magnetic Rain on the Lions of Delos," the lions of Delos symbolically represent nature and the past, while the magnetic rain represents the risk of electromagnetic radiation, a phenomenon related to the era of technology and communication. According to legend, the lions of Delos were guardians of the island and protected its inhabitants from danger. The lions of Delos were carved from the island's white marble and were used as ornamentation for the temple of Apollo, the Greek god of music, poetry, and prophecy.

The painting, built on a large marine plywood panel originally covered in tiles, should not be confused with the surrealist glorification of the same but should be understood as a demystification and an ironic take on consumerist civilization.

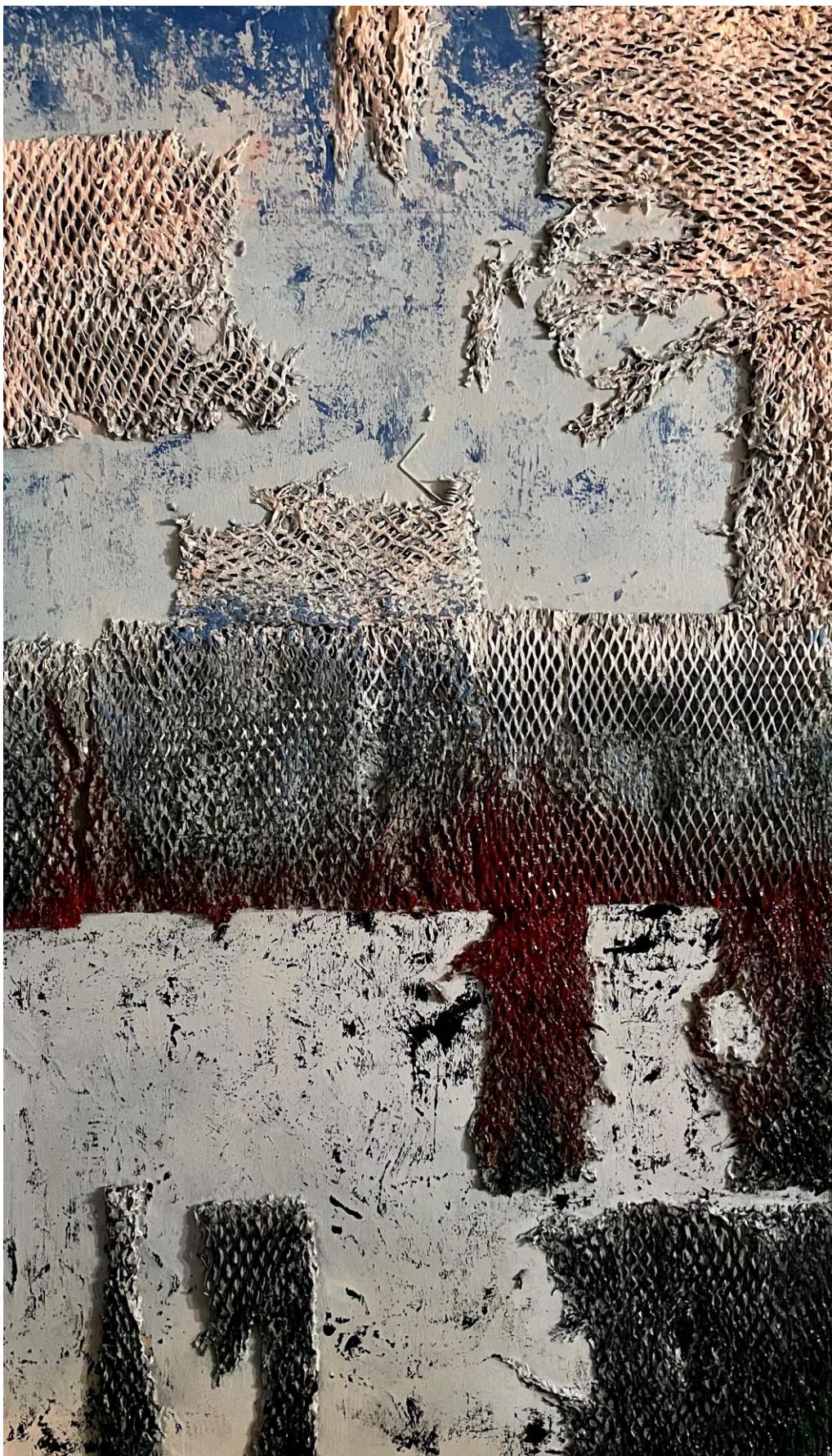




Untitled (100x50cm)

In this work, Montico presents a strong denunciation of the condition of women in some parts of the world, particularly in less emancipated countries. The use of a plastic bag and a woman's mask tied with a rope effectively represents the oppression and deprivation of women's freedom in some societies.

Drawing a furrow over a frozen river, digging a pit in the ground, and then filling it with other soil taken elsewhere does not lead to an aesthetic result, but to a result that is almost exclusively intellectual, a realization of awareness. More or less shocking artifacts like this also contain an abstract concept; this operation remains exclusive to photographic captures, immortalizing the symbolism through the human image. Therefore, the symbolism is enclosed in the performance of presenting the tied image.

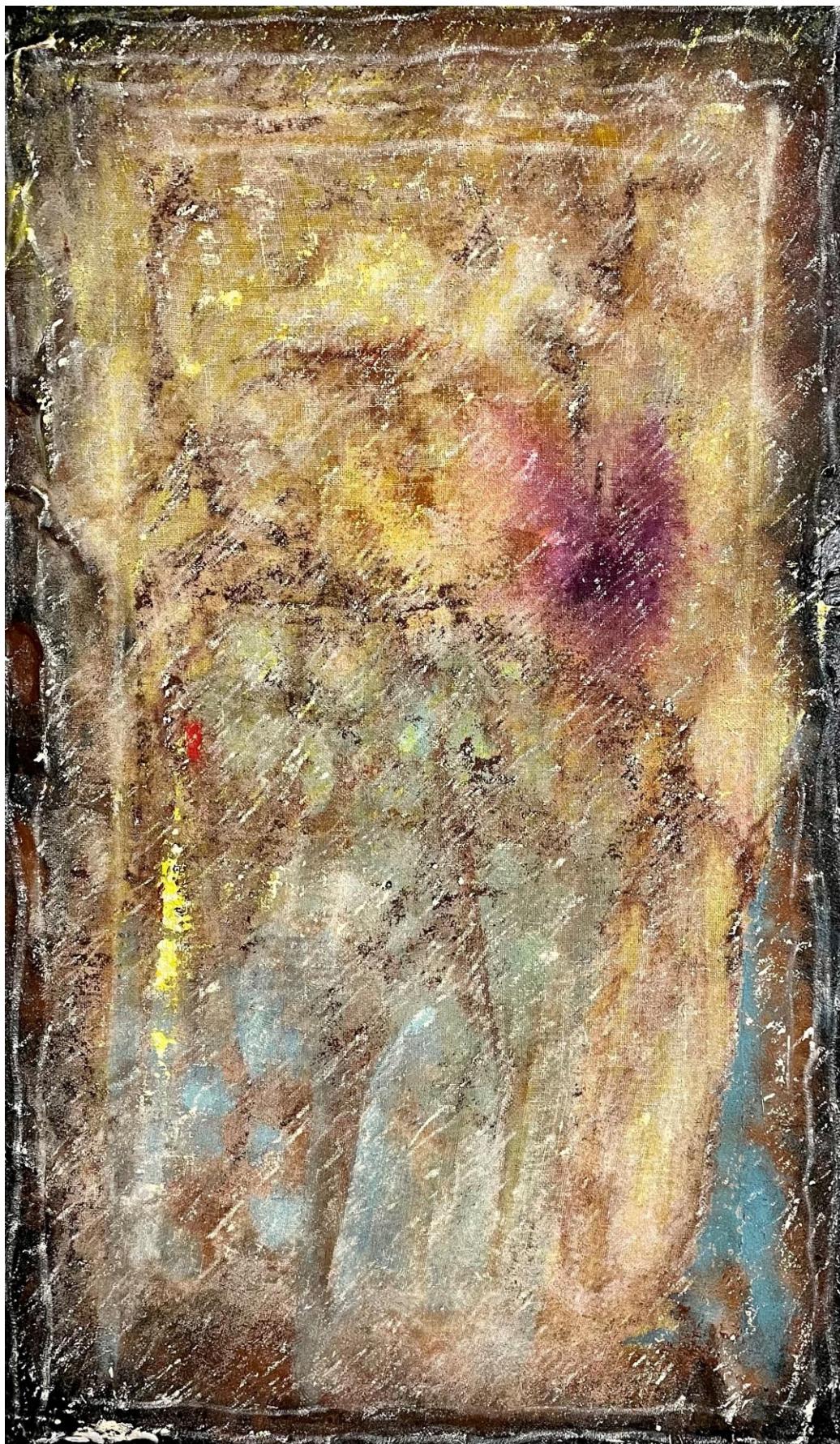


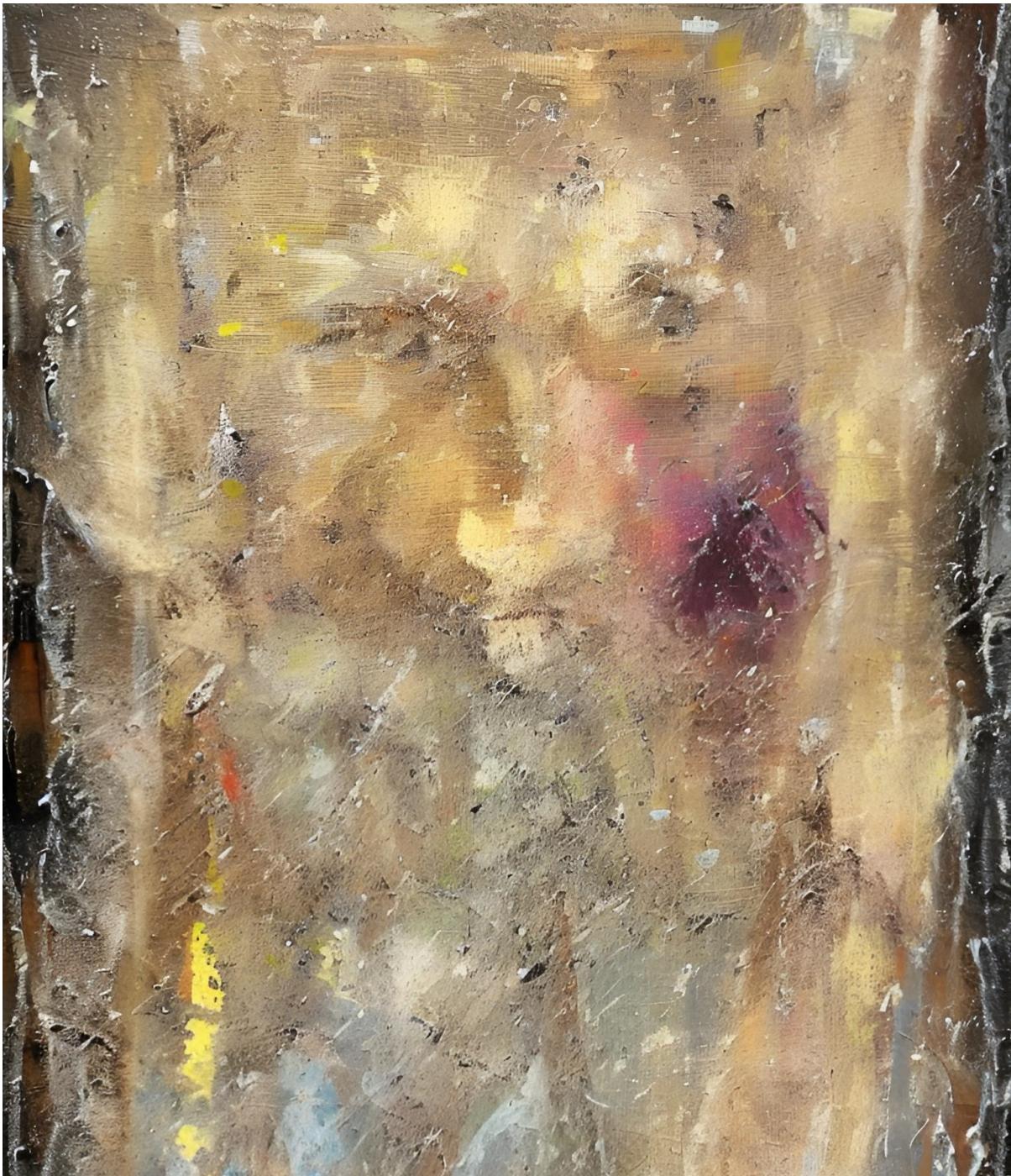


The Trap from the Sky (90x52cm)

Montico's collage work on board titled "The Trap from the Sky" presents a strong denunciation of war and bombs dropped by drones. The use of reclaimed material shaped like a honeycomb to abstractly represent a mousetrap falling from the sky effectively illustrates the concept of violence and destruction caused by war.

In this work, Montico emphasizes the physical act of painting, feeling the influence of Pollock's "action painting," considered a forerunner of American and European informal painting, but already anticipated by Kandinsky who, in 1946, defined himself as an "action painter." Another characteristic of this painting is a certain distrust regarding the presence of figurative elements within the abstract texture.





Dance of Time on the Warp (100x60cm)

Using a frame similar to that typically used for weaving, Montico presents a reflection on the beauty of aging and the memory of passing time. The use of reclaimed canvas material, with the warp as a fundamental component, upon which colors are deposited over time due to the aging of the canvas, attests to the history of this material and its use in the past. The warp, the set of interwoven or parallel threads stretched along the length of the fabric, represents the basic structure of the fabric and determines its characteristics and use. The choice of material, the canvas, is very significant, as it symbolizes transformation and change, as well as resilience and the ability to withstand the passage of time.

This painting can also be appreciated as a work of art of systems (Systems Art is a subgenre of conceptual art, theorized by Argentine critic Jorge Glusberg). This creation considers the interaction between sociological, ecological, and scientific research, aiming for individual iterative communication with a strong socio-political component.





Inside the Wave (108x80cm)

This work, created with natural palm fiber on a panel, effectively represents the vulnerability of humanity in the face of unforeseen and uncontrollable events, such as a pandemic, which can disrupt our lives. Through the use of reclaimed materials, Montico manages to create a powerful and symbolic image, reminding us that we are all part of an interconnected system and that our actions can have an impact on others. Moreover, the use of the wave as a metaphor to represent these events makes us reflect on the strength and power of nature, which can be unpredictable and impossible to control.

From artistic movements to the underground of poor art cinema, Montico has reworked the powerful destructive violence of Hokusai's wave, merging it with an approach dominated by visual art, which claims a return to the gnoseological function of visual expression.





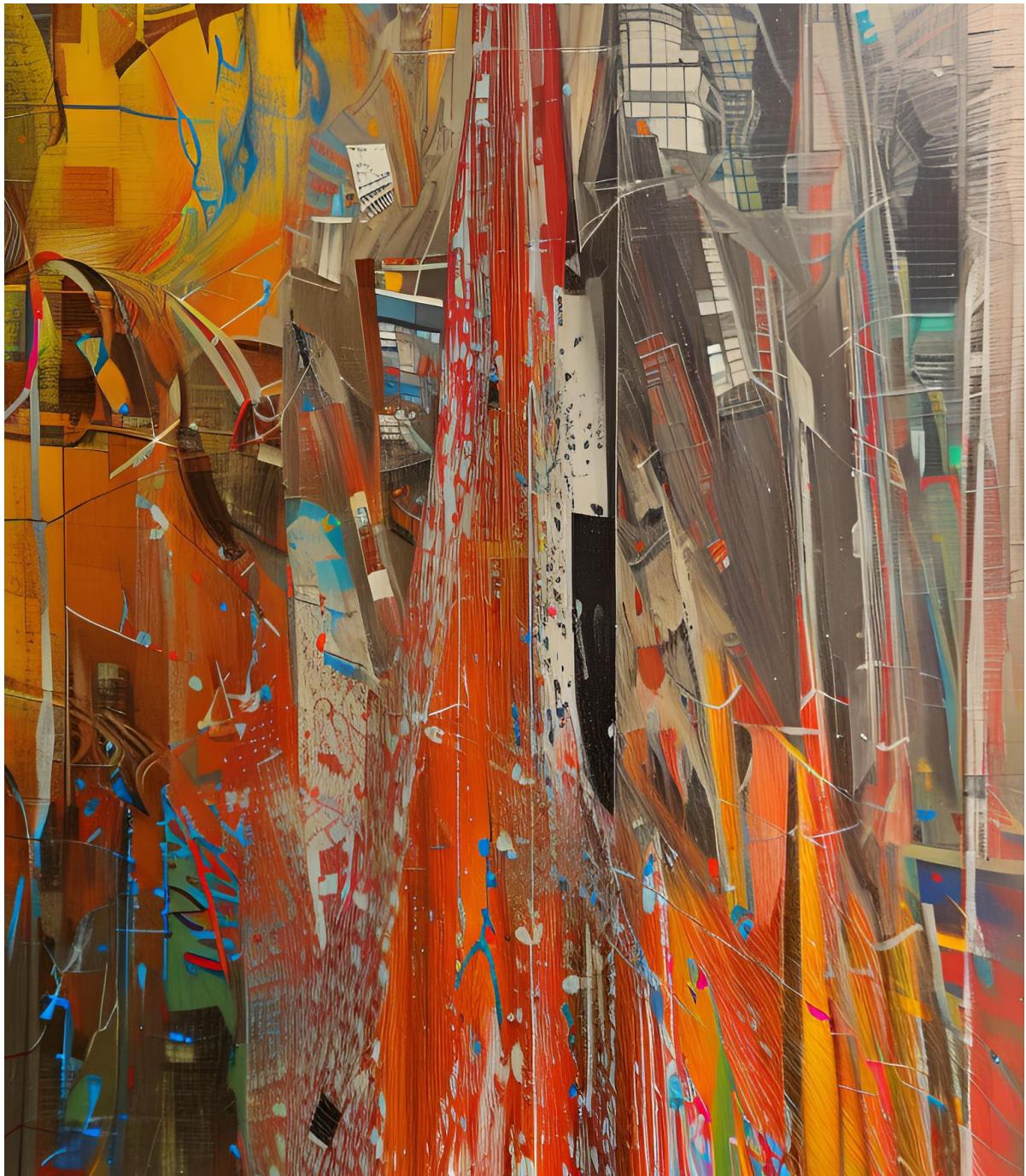
The Moon Under the Sand (102x68cm)

In this abstract-concrete painting, Montico reveals a recurring dream of his about the treasures of the past. The use of reclaimed materials made of cardboard, which appear like castles in a desert of sand, represents the strength and beauty of the hidden, submerged, or forgotten treasures of the past that can be rediscovered and valued.

An abstract-concrete painting that represents a dream further emphasizes its abstract-concrete nature, as it combines dreamlike irrationality with realistic elements, creating an artistic work that blends geometric and abstract shapes with tangible references to the dreamt reality.

The expression "abstract-concrete" was used by Lionello Venturi, an important Italian art critic, to describe the work of a group of painters known as the "Group of Eight Abstract-Concrete" or "Group of Eight". These artists were mainly active during the 1930s and 1940s and sought to create art that fused abstract elements with concrete ones.





Informal Composition (on the toilet) (100x65cm)

From his favorite bathroom, Montico offers a reflection on art and creativity in an everyday and informal context. Inspired by humidity-swollen wooden veneers, he transformed them as the background of the painting. The improvised composition of colors, like a piece of jazz music, represents the freedom and originality of art and creativity, while the image of Montico sitting on the toilet represents the everyday and informal context in which art and creativity can emerge and develop. ... sometimes an image explains more than a thousand words.

In this thought, the composition of the painting is realized almost in the logic of the dripping of colors used for the first time by Max Ernst and later also by Pollock in 1946. This technique, also known as "dripping" or "action painting", involves dropping, pouring or spraying paint directly onto the canvas, often placed horizontally, without the use of traditional tools such as brushes or spatulas.





Core Sampling in 3022 A.D. (90x80cm)

Montico's painting "Core Sampling in 3022" offers us a reflection on the transience of things and the relativity of time. Through the image of a core sample exploring the underground past, the artist reminds us that we, like everything around us, will soon be just a part of history. The choice to mix modern objects like a shovel with ancient objects like an Egyptian sarcophagus highlights the relativity of the concept of antiquity and invites us to reflect on our position in the world and how it will be remembered by future generations. The technique used, with the application of plywood and torn wood, painted with an improvised color composition, gives the painting a dynamic and informal appearance, which well suits its profound and introspective meaning.

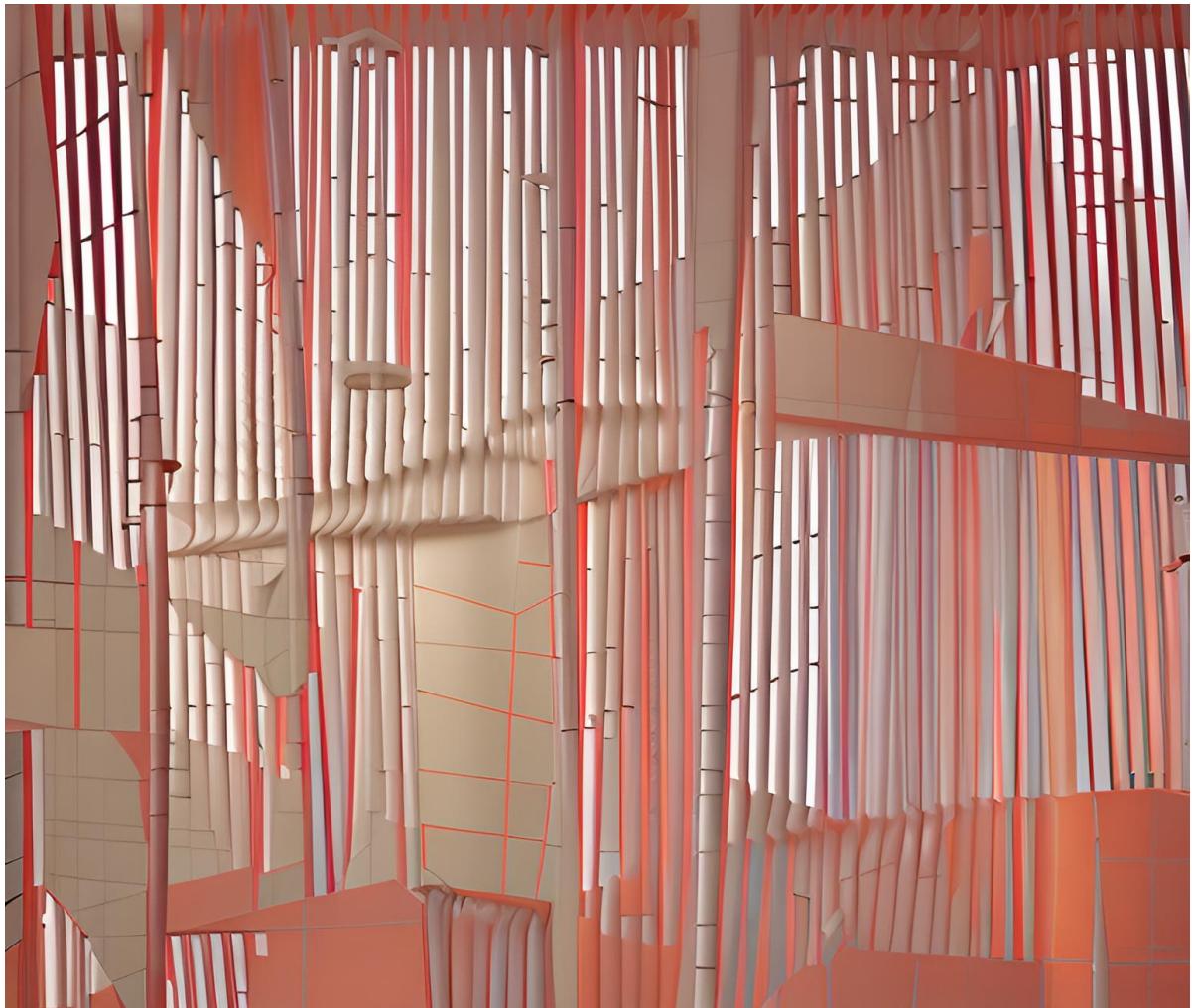




Migratory Currents (106x74cm)

In homage to the song and poetry of Pierangelo Bertoli "Eppure il vento soffia ancora" (Yet the Wind Still Blows), Montico represents the phenomenon of global migration in an original and abstract way. Using organic plant material, the artist manages to create a powerful and evocative image of how humans, like some animals and plants, move around the world, carrying both positive and negative elements with them. The choice to represent migratory currents through the symbol of seeds crossing oceans is particularly effective and makes us reflect on the fragility and impact of our actions on the environment. Moreover, it reminds us of how globalization can have unpredictable effects on the health of the entire world population.





Interior Exterior from Mosul, Iraq (128x109cm)

The madness of war, which enriches the few and annihilates the many, is interpreted by the artist in the work "Interior Exterior from Mosul." The idea materializes when he sees on the news an old Iraqi man slowly washing a child in a bathtub and, when the camera pans to the room, he is astonished to notice that the walls are pierced by bomb shrapnel, tiles fallen on the floor, and the roof partially collapsed.

He paints on a wooden board, after furiously hammering and removing the glued tiles, an interior scene from which, through a cracked wall, one can glimpse the exterior. Lines of intense red that cover the traces of glue left on the wood alternate with blue that fades into gray and then purple. This is a metaphor for the tumultuous and painful feelings that overlap in the painter's mind when faced with the tragedy that continually persists in human life.





Vertical Garden (103x64cm)

Reconsidering the challenge of metropolitan reforestation, which aims to recreate plant and animal biodiversity in our cities, the artist envisions a world where energy consumption, noise pollution, and air pollution are reduced thanks to the protection of trees on houses, streets, and squares. He is inspired by skyscrapers, hanging gardens, the song "Un albero di trenta piani" by Celentano, and the idea of living respectfully with nature so as not to die with it when it is degraded.

The veneered wooden board is stripped and painted, following the cracks created, and producing the effect of a metamorphosis that transforms skyscrapers into trees that stand out in the brightness of a finally clean sky.





Composition with Iron (107x86cm)

The reflection on the fleeting nature of time, as seen by a person who remembers the past and anxiously hopes for the future, is represented in the artwork "Composition with Iron" where a thin layer of rusted metal is glued onto the canvas. The corrosion of iron, losing its discernible shape, symbolizes the passage of time. The shadow of the disintegrating material stands out against the painted background, whose colors create a perspective of time and space. The color that seems to escape from the central body of the artwork represents the distant past that still lingers, frayed and torn in our memories.

The enigma of how human choices will affect the very existence of the world is present in this work. The artist seems to be inspired by the "Carpe Diem" concept from the Odes of Quintus Horatius Flaccus:

"Do not ask, we must not know what end
the gods have granted to me, to you, Leuconoë,
and do not consult Babylonian horoscopes.

How much better to endure whatever comes,
whether Jupiter gives us more winters, or whether this is the last,
weakening the Tuscan Sea on opposing cliffs.

Be wise, strain the wine, and since life is brief,
limit your far-reaching hopes. Even as we speak,
envious time is fleeing: seize the day,
placing as little trust as possible in tomorrow."

Carpe diem, dalle Odi di Quinto Orazio Flacco.

Appendix

Spreading the message of sustainable art: Montico's experience with schools in Cremasco and Lodigiano

In this appendix to the book "The Art of Sustainability," we focus on Montico's teaching experience with dozens of classes in schools in Cremasco and Lodigiano, involving around 1000 children and young people. Montico demonstrated how art can inspire sustainability through his works. His lessons allowed young students to discover the beauty of sustainable artistic creation and express their creativity using natural or recycled materials. Montico's lessons were followed by practical classroom activities, led by the art teachers from the respective schools, which enabled the children to put into practice what they had learned. The result of these activities are the artworks that you can admire in the following pages of the book, a testament to their commitment to a more sustainable future. These artworks have been displayed to the public in the respective towns of the schools (such as Vaiano Cremasco, Pandino, Dovera, Brembio, Palazzo Pignano, Gradella, Rivolta d'Adda, Offanengo, Monte Cremasco, Bottaiano, Agnadello, etc.), drawing attention to the importance of sustainable art and sparking interest in young people about this crucial topic.



Dai rifiuti nasce l'arte

Un concorso che coinvolge settecento ragazzi

di Emilio Cuti

VALANDO DOVERA. Maggio è un mese di festa per i bambini. E anche per gli studenti delle scuole primarie, che hanno partecipato alla quarta edizione del concorso "Arte da raccolta differenziata" promosso dall'associazione "Montico". Vincitori della manifestazione dicono Luigi Montico, che ha ideato una delle due opere esposte, e Primo Bombelli, che ha realizzato l'altra. Entrambi hanno adattato gli oggetti



Primo Bombelli e Luigi Montico

come materie prime per le loro opere. Il primo, 11enne di Monticello d'Adda, ha utilizzato un ampio disegno su uno strato di gesso, che ha colorato con le mani, per rappresentare un paesaggio montano. Il secondo, 10enne di Monticello d'Adda, ha invece utilizzato

materiali diversi, come la carta, la plastica e la legna, per creare un dipinto su tela. I due studenti, insieme a altri 14 concorrenti, si sono aggiudicati i premi destinati ai classificati. Primo Bombelli, vincitore della categoria "Arte da raccolta differenziata", ha ricevuto un premio di 100 mila lire, mentre i secondi classificati, Saverio Cimatti e Giacomo Speranza, che hanno realizzato opere molto simili, sono stati premiati con 50 mila lire ciascuno. Al terzo posto, con 30 mila lire, è andato a Giacomo Scattolon, che ha realizzato un dipinto su legno. Inoltre, i tre vincitori e i 14 concorrenti si sono visti regalare dei libri di storia dell'arte, mentre tutti i partecipanti hanno ricevuto un diploma di partecipazione.

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