

Pasquale Gadaleta  
*The Fourth Labour*  
Curated by Alex Urso

Spirituality, esotericism, and mythology converge in the figure of the wild boar, an animal that has been associated over the centuries with concepts and meanings that are sometimes at opposite ends of the spectrum. From Greek and Roman iconography that depicts the wild boar on banners and in the finest ceramics, to recent “campaigns” against them in the local news. How did such an iconic and legendary animal become an enemy to be fought outside our own sphere? Pasquale Gadaleta’s (Terlizzi, 1988) new exhibition for Fiuto Art Space puts the focus on the wild boar, going against the propaganda and stereotypical thinking about the animal, shedding light on the archetypal elements and iconographic value that it has always held.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE HUMAN-CENTRIC VIEW

If we are discussing wild boars today – and with such emphasis and zeal – it is because we find ourselves (us and them) in a situation created by man, when, in the nineteen-fifties, it was decided to bring certain species of this mammal from the Balkans to the Mediterranean. The aim? To ensure this species would be represented throughout the forests of the country so that hunting fanatics had new targets to shoot at.

This initial influx of ungulates for hunting purposes led to the sub-species taking over quickly, to the detriment of native breeds. In just a few years, the Balkan sub-species, which was larger in stature and more “bull-like” than its Italian counterparts, overtook the smaller Maremma wild boars, irreparably altering the equilibrium in terms of the environment and wildlife.

The first point to be taken into consideration if we want to remedy the illusion of opposition between man and nature, between man and boars, is that we need to understand that the presence of these animals in our area is absolutely a man-made issue, an “original sin” we prefer to ignore and, if anything, we aim to deal with it through violence. This is the same violence that brought on the problem a few decades ago, a contradiction in terms that speaks volumes about our ability to understand events and look to the root of the problem to find solutions.

#### PASQUALE GADALETA’S FAIRY-TALE BOARS

Created over the last two years – based on Pasquale Gadaleta observing these animals in the hills of the Murgia area – these pieces fully take on the topic but without serving as an explanation or solution. The observer is asked to look beyond the surface of things, with various meanings that coexist, going beyond good and evil. And it’s no surprise that this exhibition is being hosted in a small space in Ripatransone. This town, along with others, has suffered the most over these last few years from the effects of the antagonism between humans and wild boars.

Curated by Alex Urso, the show is entitled *The Fourth Labour*, bringing together a series of works that invite visitors to discover and feel comfortable with the hidden sides of this demonized animal. From small ceramic pieces that are a bit “bawdy” (sculptures that feature the animal swept up in intimate situations that are quite humorous) to the wonderful oil on canvas *Boars in the Swamp*: a meticulous landscape work that brings to mind the natural elements of Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, with two boars portrayed in an incredibly delicate twilight scenario. Elements of sacred iconography also return in the grandiose *Large Painting*, with a family of beasts strolling through Pompeian vegetation, while the terracotta sculpture *Sleeping Boar* depicts the beast with a calm expression, the opposite of the usual ferocious image that we imagine.

## HERACLES' FOURTH LABOUR

The theme of all of these pieces has to do with the mythological and the divine. And how could it be any different? There are an endless number of sacred references to the wild boar, and the artist draws on those to bring his primordial, fairy-tale images to life.

Starting with Hindu traditions and looking as well to those of Nordic and Eastern populations, the wild boar represents fertility, energy, wisdom, and indomitable courage. Take the many medieval coats of arms featuring this animal in all of its elegance and pride.

The title of the show also takes inspiration from Greek mythology, *The Fourth Labour*, and the imposing boar sculpture created especially by Gadaleta – and never before shown – can be traced back to the figure of Heracles (or Hercules). According to Greek legend, it was the boar that was the fourth labour faced by the hero son of Zeus, who made history for his famous twelve exploits. After capturing the Ceryneian Hind, the demigod was sent to Arcadia to bring back – alive – the Erymanthian Boar, a wild beast that was enormous in size. Naturally, Heracles succeeded in the feat, continuing on to his next labour and progressing on his path of spiritual ascent. The mythological episode is referenced here, though Gadaleta has turned it around as a function not of conflict but of coexistence with the captured beast. *"I thought about this boar as having won it over it, not killed it as Heracles did. Using kindness to catch it and care for it, going on to befriend it, without the aim of conquering it. Like all beasts, if we approach them with kindness, they will show us sides we didn't know existed."*

The process of forging the work, which is made of clay and elements gathered by the artist in the hills of Puglia, thus becomes a metaphor for approaching and understanding this creature. Just as in the 1979 song, *L'era del cinghiale bianco (The Age of the White Boar)*, Franco Battiato wished for a return to simpler times in a spiritual and social sense. In the same way, Pasquale Gadaleta's painstaking pieces conceal a desire for transformation, for coexistence with our dark side, in order to overcome the age-old division between man and nature.