

**Galleria Sospesa, Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine, *Naturalis Historia*  
18 January–10 February 2024**



Untitled, oil on glass mirror. Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine. Photograph by Victoria Froberg

Entering Galleria Sospesa, I cannot help but be excited as the door is held open for me by the warm, smiling face of the curator Chiara Cianni and the founder Marta Banci. Two women nonetheless. My shoulders drop down my back in silent relief as I squeeze in the door. I am greeted by amber lighting and the room smells like turpentine, as if I just walked into a fresh tube of paint or a Caravaggio painting. Above my head, branches dangle in front of my face like tentacles, kissing me, saying “welcome.” If I stay in place and spin on my heels, I can easily view the gallery in its entirety. A deep breath off the busy street.

This is the first exhibition in Rome for Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine, who primarily has exhibited in Mexico. This show is aptly titled *Naturalis Historia*, and opened the 18 January, 2024, featuring a live painting opening night by di Roccagiovine. Two large egrets on a rust stained vintage mirror, I end up watching them more than they notice me. The artist leaves traces of himself in the space everywhere, including a giant shell under the mirror. He used this as his

palette the same opening night. The art, outside world (land), building, viewer, and artist are meant to meld together. The featured works are a combination of installation, oil paintings, and preserved animals, almost exclusively butterflies, all nodding to the flamboyancy and ritual of the traditions of Rome.

The embrace of being inside feels like I am being encased in darkness, but in reality, almost every wall is white. The artist is colorblind—so there is a sense that my feelings are prioritized over sight. This doesn’t change the attention to detail and emphasis Di Roccagiovine places on whimsical esthetics. With multiple large branches bursting through the ceiling, foliage littering the floor below, nature is reclaiming this gallery, knocking on each surface, never messy or chaotic, waiting for me to also surrender. Nothing is ever truly out of place and beauty is of utmost importance.



Palette, shell. Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine. Photograph by Victoria Froberg

Di Roccagiovine has animated the complexity of human experience by chipping away at the western mindset that nature is a wild thing that must be tamed. He presents it as sacred, pretty, tender, worthy of preservation. Epitomized by a vivid blue butterfly, frozen in a gold centerpiece. Above it, more large branches and moss burst through the ceiling, at risk of disrupting the altar where the animal rests. Moss symbolizes water in nature, survival, hope. Having no spiritual connection to religion myself, beyond appreciation for idolatry (again pretty), I can't help but be drawn to this piece. The branches and moss are indigenous to Italy, however the butterfly was collected in Latin America. I became emotional learning that the artist works out of Mexico so often because his partner, Esteban Fuentes de Maria, lives there. The two share a studio together in Mexico, imbedded together in many ways. The butterfly, frozen in time, ripped from life at its "most beautiful", and brought here to be immortalized. Two homes combined and celebrated. Do I feel safe because components of my own

history are breathing here, or is it because I understand the necessity to take what these institutions have dealt to create something wholly exquisite? The artist weaves altars to his ability to experience love in everything he does, very publicly, and with elegance.



Untitled Installation, Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine in collaboration with Maria Sole de Angelis. Photograph by Victoria Froberg



Gates of Paradise I, II, III, & IV. Installation. Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine  
Photograph by Victoria Froberg

This is a cozy space, as if someone may bring me a cup of tea while I slowly pace among the art. And it is romantic. Numbers of each work are listed as roman numerals and appear as faded ink on marble. The shutters, *Gates of Paradise I, II, III, & IV*, appear like the gold halo of a warped Byzantine Mary but again, the butterfly is center stage, becoming an enduring symbol that follows me along my walk. They are never hidden. Repurposed doors because sometimes you just use what you have, a theme among the materials present here, or perhaps, because, what is behind the door is not for me. The rooms in the exhibition are not closed off to one another, transitioning smoothly from foliage to birds, coral, and shells. The experience is gentle.

*“A frantic search for freedom, not only personal but collective. [Of] a society that doesn’t manage to mesh with the world and with the nature that surrounds it.” [Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine, *The Walk*; “Art is a Tool of Love (Peacock Issue), June 2024].*

Humans in the western world strategically isolate from and (attempt to) dominate nature, including anything living that has come to be associated with land. I see these butterflies — alive for one day after one month of cocooning, deliberately choosing their time of rebirth, much like the prophecies of the collective religions we claim to stake the lives of children on— only to be destroyed by curious hands. I want more than just bodies, more than martyrdom. As we step into spaces such as *Naturalis Historia*, it is critical to consider what and who we have tied to nature. Further—what is our personal relationship with earth? It is worth evaluating our need to control everything that lives outside of our own truths. Nature is never passive, and neither are actions of love. Di Roccagiovine offers an important reminder in his art: nature and bodies, are by no means unbreakable, but they cannot be separated and are not anonymous.



Butterfly from Overhead Installation. Paolo del Gallo di Roccagiovine. Photograph by Victoria Froberg.