

JACOBO CASTELLANO

GRAFT

September 12 – November 01, 2025

Mai 36 Galerie is pleased to present the second solo exhibition by Jacobo Castellano.

Spanning new and earlier works, Castellano unveils his artistic practice, guided by the enduring appearance of the object. Far from being static or decorative, objects in his work serve as vessels, repositories of memory, emotion, and untold histories. Found, inherited, or rescued from forgotten places, these materials form the foundation of a sculptural language that is both intimate and precise. Each piece in the exhibition emerges like a small excavation, a kind of affective archaeology, where domestic, spiritual, political, and playful dimensions intersect without hierarchy. Rather than transforming or dominating them, Castellano constructs quiet, minimal structures that allow the objects to speak in their own time. His interventions are subtle, offering a realm for resonance, where there is no imposition of narrative, only an invitation to look, to feel, and to remember.

These pieces are not treated as nostalgic fragments of the past, but as active entities, remnants of other lives that reappear with renewed intensity. His sculptures do not aim to explain history; they hold it. Through them, he redirects our attention away from grand narratives and toward the delicate traces of the everyday. This is the case with *Paisaje de Jaén* (2025), a dark ebony sculpture with carved reliefs reminiscent of traditional Baroque drapery. At its center he pours olive oil, a product with roots in Andalusia since the Phoenician period, which slowly seeps into the wood, gradually darkening its surface. The work offers an intimate portrait of his birthplace in the heart of Andalusia, a quiet volume that moves fluidly between religion, tradition, and childhood memories.

Memory and the marks of the past similarly surface in *Rombo Detente* (2025), a rhombus of four small uneven wood triangles poorly held together. A tiny detente, historically a protective charm linked to the Spanish Civil War, appears in one corner as a bullet pierced to hold a cross. The gesture is subtle, yet charged with tension and vulnerability. As with Castellano's other works, it does not narrate; it holds, it suggests, and allows meaning to unfold in the encounter. This sensibility has been present since the beginning of his artistic journey. In one of his earliest works, he embedded a projector from his grandfather's cinema into the hollow trunk of an old olive tree from the family land - an act of recognition, a way of acknowledging that objects are never silent. They endure, they resist, and they carry stories that often elude understanding. Castellano works from the awareness that memory is never pure, always filtered through layers of narration and emotional inheritance.

While hints of autobiography and the visual legacy of Spanish masters such as Goya or Zurbarán may surface, Castellano avoids predictable historical references. His focus lies instead on the silent power of overlooked images and materials to hold remembrance, resist erasure, and open a space where presence and transformation coexist. This method of unfolding echoes what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory¹, a memory not lived firsthand, but received, carried, and reshaped over time. Castellano did not live the histories embedded in the elements he collects, yet he receives their weight, responds to their existence, and builds environments where they may continue to be seen anew.

There is always a sense of play in his process, not lighthearted or decorative, but profound and generative, in line with the categories described by Roger Caillois². This type of play combines tension, chance, fiction, and vertigo. In his daily routine, Castellano is guided by *alea*, where chance governs the discovery of objects whose meaning remains obscure. Back in the studio, these objects are carefully observed and allowed to rest, allowing *agon* to arise through the subtle struggle between the artist's intention and the object's internal logic. In the finished sculpture, mimicry emerges, as the piece evokes what is no longer present. Lost worlds, fictional memories, and hidden narratives surface through material gestures. At times, *ilinx* appears: a perceptual vertigo, a sudden emotional disorientation. This sensation recalls a joyless carousel, a childhood unease beneath play. Castellano observes that he has never seen a child smile on a merry-go-round, a blend of playfulness and disquiet that lingers in his work.

The title *GRAFT* is an homage to the act of joining two living parts so they grow together, while retaining the memory of their separate origins. In Castellano's practice, the graft is not only a method but a metaphor, allowing past and present to coexist within the same body. The join is always visible, in an attempt to create an honest seam that honors the histories each part carries, while opening new possibilities for growth. Amidst the flood of images and accelerated forgetting, this exhibition provides a refuge, a place where we can listen carefully to things that still have something to say. As he once said: "Objects exist, and I build a context around them. Nothing more." But that "nothing more" is, in fact, everything.

Jacobo Castellano (Jaén, Spain, 1976) lives and works in Madrid. He holds a Fine Arts degree from the University of Granada and furthered his studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence and the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York. He is recognized as one of Spain's leading contemporary artists.

Throughout his career, Castellano has presented solo and group exhibitions at institutions such as Sala Alcalá 31 (Madrid), Centro José Guerrero (Granada), CAAC – Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (Seville), ARTIUM (Vitoria-Gasteiz), Kunsthalle São Paulo (Brazil), Fundación Gabarrón (New York), and Bozar (Brussels), among others. His work is part of major public and private collections, including ARTIUM (Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain), CAAC (Seville, Spain), CA2M (Móstoles, Madrid, Spain), Fundación Botín (Santander, Spain), TBA21 – Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (Vienna, Austria), FRAC des Pays de la Loire (Carquefou, France), MUSAC (León, Spain), the DKV Collection (Valencia, Spain), and the Kunstsammlung der Mobiliar Genossenschaft (Bern, Switzerland). In 2017, he was awarded the Cervezas Alhambra Emerging Art Prize, further consolidating his position within both the Spanish and international contemporary art scene.

¹ Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 17.

² Cailliois, Roger. *Los juegos y los hombres: la máscara y el vértigo*. Translated by Jorge Ferreiro. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.