

GIULIO PAOLINI

In studio (ora come allora) [In the Studio (Now as Then)]

Galleria Christian Stein | Corso Monforte 23, Milano

Opening Thursday June 4, 2026 from 6 to 9 pm

Within the walls of my studio I can count on my most reliable work tools (pencils, triangle, compasses...). There I am able to feign existence, to get things sorted out: truth be told, to stage a fake and calculated disorder that makes me think I'm at work.

Giulio Paolini

The Galleria Christian Stein presents a solo exhibition by **Giulio Paolini** (Genoa, 1940) entitled ***In studio (ora come allora) [In the Studio (Now as Then)]***. The artist showed for the first time in our gallery in Turin almost sixty years ago, in 1967, and has done so regularly ever since, throughout his career, most recently with the exhibition held in Milan in 2023.

There are six works on show, four of them for the first time, along with collages and preparatory studies. The title of the exhibition, borrowed from one of the works on display, ***In studio (ora come allora), 2025***, refers to one of the themes investigated on this occasion: the studio, as preferred and ideal space for the staging of the work, i.e. the atelier as *Hortus Clausus*, separated from the world, characterized by the suspension of time, and the artist (or his stand-in) who inhabits the studio and brings it to life in the company of the figures of all time that mean most to him.

On the rear wall ***Mnemosine (Les Charmes de la Vie/8) [Mnemosyne (Les Charmes de la Vie/8)], 1981-90***, is part of a cycle of six episodes. The common denominator is the presence of one or more painted canvases reproducing details of Jean-Antoine Watteau's picture *Les Charmes de la Vie* (1717-18). The canvases, commissioned by Paolini from a scenic painter, are derived from dividing an enlarged copy of the eighteenth-century painting into nine equal sections, with the figures that originally animated it removed. In the work on show here, the eighth detail of the painting is associated with eight frames and a primed canvas, on which there is a pencil drawing of eight elements rotating around a central hub.

The ***Mnemosine (Les Charmes de la Vie/8)*** cycle does not aim to progressively reassemble the puzzle of the old painting; rather, it seeks to disperse its reading through the evocation of individual details, as if in a coded game. From one episode to the next, Watteau's scene becomes the stage that a painting, by its very nature, opens to the gaze of anyone standing at its threshold: the space of representation, with all its artifice and its intimate theatricality.

On the right-hand wall is located ***Arianna [Ariadne], 2025***, on whose back-to-front canvas there is a lacerated image of the female figure on Antonio Canova's *Funerary Stele of Giovanni Falier*. Her gaze intersects with a radial outline in red superimposed on two offset images reproducing spaces in perspective. The canvas is mounted on an easel backed against a French window, where a long drape of fabric representing the sky seems to be an extension of Ariadne's robe. Everything foreshadows or suggests the expectation of a vision. It is in this sense, explains the artist, that we should understand the title, an allusion to the Metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, «in which the statue of Ariadne often appears, as a figure waiting eternally to welcome the image.»

On the wall in front of the entrance is set the work ***Sottosopra [Upside Down], 2005***, consisting of a canvas and two music stands inserted one inside the other the opposite way round and placed next to the canvas. Two texts written in the artist's own hand on a sheet of blank paper and on one of music paper respectively and then torn into pieces are scattered freely over the canvas and the wall. On the canvas, a

square drawn in pencil, with diagonals running from the four corners, acts as “ideal geometry” in contrast to the disorder of the upside down scene. The subject of the two texts in the autonomy of the work of art from its presumed author. The first, written on a blank sheet, concerns the “passing of the baton” from Verrocchio to Leonardo, while the second, on a sheet of music paper, the handover from Rossini to Wagner. In both cases it was a question of the recognition, on the part of the elder artist, of the superiority of the younger one. Paolini declares: «The voice of the author is silent if there is no echo of the work that Time, on each occasion, assigns to writers, artists, musicians... To its trusted and devoted ‘workers’?»

In front of the window is placed the work on a base entitled **Riservato [Reserved], 2025**, made up of a golden cushion on which are placed an envelope, a reproduction of the face of an 18th-century footman, a gilded paper clip and a piece of paper on which the artist has written the word “*riservato*.” Here the expression reserved refers both to the assignment of a physical location and to a personal characteristic that evokes a sense of privacy and discretion. Thus the elegant cushion, relic of a glorious past, is “reserved” for a figure of the time, the footman. Perhaps a stand-in for the artist?

The work in the middle of the room, **In studio (ora come allora), 2025**, which gives the exhibition its title, is a homage to the studio as a workshop of creation and reflection. An easel divides the space into two equal parts, a front and a back, both the theater of the artist’s actions. A disparate range of objects are crowded together in a calculated disorder: an hourglass, magnifying lenses, a sphere, mirrors and a black stone. At the back a scale model of a Thonet chair, canvases with lines drawn in pencil and photographic reproductions. The crowd of objects is dominated by an easel holding a pair of glasses (the artist’s gaze?) and two photographs (on the front and back) of the studio itself: an echo that amplifies the tribute to the space of the studio.

The collages displayed in a gallery-style arrangement on the large wall and in the office represent Paolini’s most recent works, serving as a sort of echo and counterpoint to the pieces on display.

In the office, **Copia e originale [Copy and Original], 2026**, a plaster cast of a man’s hand clenched into a fist and a pearl shell are set next to one another on a reflective sheet. Their common closed shape evokes isolated universes, although multiplied by the mirror. The hand, moreover, as a plaster cast, has the character of a copy, while the shell, as an organic form, is an original element.

Giulio Paolini’s installation on Corso Monforte conducts the visitor into the circumscribed space of the studio and into the extended time of reflection on the art of the past.

As he approaches his 86th birthday, the artist continues, with the dedication and rigor he has always displayed, to come up with new visual formulations of the themes around which his conceptual reflection has turned since the 1960s.

Further information on the Giulio Paolini’s s work: <https://www.fondazionepaolini.it/eng/>.