

Leoncillo

Perché più bruci

16 September—14 November 2026

Opening Wednesday 16 September 2026, 6.30—8.30pm

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan
Piazza Belgioioso, 2, 20121 Milan



Leoncillo with *Taglio rosso*, 1961

Because with [clay] a new organicity is possible. The organicity of what grows and is alive [...] Because ceramics, precisely for this reason, can convey more than any other material those visible, almost tactile conditions through which a state of mind is expressed.

— Leoncillo

Thaddaeus Ropac Milan presents *Leoncillo. Perché più bruci*, the Italian sculptor's first solo exhibition with the gallery and the first chapter of a trilogy the gallery will dedicate to his work, developed in collaboration with the Leoncillo Foundation. Curated by Lorenzo Fiorucci, Alberto Salvadori and Azalea Seratoni, who form the Committee of the Foundation, the exhibition brings

together sculptures and works on paper spanning the four decades of the artist's career, conveying the subversive force with which Leoncillo redefined the expressive possibilities of clay, transforming it into one of the most innovative languages of 20th-century sculpture. Literally translated as 'the more it burns', the exhibition's title evokes fire as both material process and symbolic force, a burning that transforms matter and artist alike into their truest incarnation. At the centre of the exhibition's itinerary is the motif of the tree, a recurring form in the artist's practice since his early drawings of olive trees in the 1930s. Through this element, Leoncillo unites nature and the body, developing a poetics of transformation that runs through both his early sculptures, rich in bucolic and

mythological references, and the informal works of his final decade, where fissures, incisions and fractures become sites of material variation.

Considered one of the most important Italian sculptors of the post-war period, Leoncillo Leonardi (1915–68) conceived clay as a living substance, capable of expressing tension, memory and rebirth. His practice redefined the relationship between material and gesture, transforming sculpture into a continuous process of becoming.

Throughout his career, Leoncillo represented Italy in six editions of the Venice Biennale between 1948 and 1968. His work has been presented in major Italian and international institutions, including the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome, Museo Novecento in Florence, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.



Leoncillo, *Taglio rosso*, 1964
Stoneware and enamel. 82 × 50 × 20 cm (32.28 × 19.69 × 7.87 in)

About the artist

Leoncillo Leonardi (1915–68) was born in Spoleto, Italy. He began working with clay in 1930, attending the Institute of Art in Perugia. In 1935 he moved to Rome where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1939 he settled in Umbertide, commencing his collaboration with the Rometti manufactory, a pivotal moment in the development of ceramic technique.

In 1940, at the bequest of architect Giò Ponti, he exhibited his work for the first time at the VII Milan Triennale. During the Second World War, he was actively involved in the Resistance, and after the Liberation in 1944 he participated in *Art against Barbarism. Roman artists against Nazi-Fascist oppression*, at the Galleria di Roma. He joined the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti in 1947, with whom he exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1948. He would go on to participate in five more editions of the Venice Biennale in 1950, 1952, 1954, 1960 and 1968. His work was included in a group exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1948) and his first solo exhibition took place at the Galleria del Fiore, Florence (1949).

In 1950, his sculptures were included in the major exhibition *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*, which debuted at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, before touring to 11 other venues in the USA. In this decade, he exhibited at the Antwerp Biennale (1953, 1959) and Rome Quadriennale (1955, 1959), and staged his second solo exhibition at Galleria La Tartaruga, Rome (1957), following his resignation from the Communist Party. In 1954, he won the Faenza Prize, a prestigious competition for contemporary ceramic art.

In 1962, his work was included in *Sculptures in the City – V Festival of Two Worlds*, Spoleto, curated by Giovanni Carandente. He was awarded the Faenza Prize for the second time in 1964. His work was the subject of solo exhibitions at venues including Galleria Blu, Milan (1960); Galleria L'Attico, Rome (1962); Galleria Odyssia, Rome (1965; travelled to Galleria Odyssia, New York); and Modern Art Agency, Naples (1968); and group exhibitions at international institutions including the Musée Rodin, Paris (1960, 1966); Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek (1961); Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh (1964); and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (1964).

Since his death, Leoncillo's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (1979); Rocca Albornoziana, Spoleto (1985); Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Palazzo Forti, Verona (1985); Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza (1995); Fonti del Clitunno, Campello sul Clitunno (2015); and Museo Novecento, Florence (2021). He was also included in group shows at institutions including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1986); Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (1990); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1994); Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence (2012); Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza (2014); Palazzo Fortuny, Venice (2017); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome (2018); and Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (2018).

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