



In the field, 2022

SANTIAGO DE PAOLI INSIDE THE RED BARN

In his paintings, Argentinian-born artist Santiago de Paoli has long experimented with unusual grounds, applying oil paint to substrates such as felt, plaster, ceramic, and board. He has embraced a surrealist sensibility of fragmented objects, disjunctive interior spaces, mundane objects, fruits and vegetables, and bodily references replete with genitalia. After moving to the Western Catskills in New York state during Covid, de Paoli discovered a kind of flashing material—thin copper on a roll, approximately 11 inches wide—which he transformed into a new substrate material of hand-formed, slightly irregular panels of copper, onto which he would paint. Inspired by the new materials, motifs, surroundings, and experiences of his rural residence in upstate New York, de Paoli has produced a new body of work of oil-on-copper paintings that were first presented in his exhibition *Inside the Red Barn* at OSMOS Station in Stamford, New York. The smooth and reflective copper supports, sourced by de Paoli from a local building supply store, are reminiscent of a 17th Century painting the artist first saw in a Paris museum, and which has ever since fascinated de Paoli for both its luminosity and oddity.

The exhibition opens with a slightly wonky rectangular object on the wall, entitled *In the Field* (2022). This small oil-on-copper painting presents a close look at a piece of corn, which is rendered as a luminous relief, driven into the pure copper as outline and volume, while the surrounding night scene is painted and oddly mute. Striated lines in the conical, muted red background are reminiscent of a ribcage or a carcass, while a silhouetted snail (a frequent occurrence in de Paoli's

surreal menagerie of animal protagonists) attempts to mount the corn stalk from the bottom right edge of the painting. The same snail form makes an appearance in the painting directly across from *In the Field*. A diptych of hand-formed copper panels, the painting *Going Up* (2022) presents a table-top still life of three forms—two vase-like, tall, and erect shapes and a heart-shaped, slightly vaginal form on the left side of the table. At the bottom, a snail caught in mid-climb up the right table leg mirrors the shape and placement of the snail in the painting *In the Field*. In the bottom center of the painting, a painted penis, replete with two scrotums, oddly mirrors the shape and position of the snail.

Several smaller paintings feature details from the artist's immediate environment, such as *Red Window* (2022), which refers to the artist's studio with its crimson walls, carpet, doors, and windows, while *Blue Meadow* (2022), a delicate triptych of lightly curved copper sheets, captures the view from the artist's office as an imagined brown knoll under a bright blue sky densely populated by bright, copper clouds. Two paintings on felt connect the new work to de Paoli's previous oeuvre: *Morning Clouds* (2021) presents a low, rolling cloud of morning fog over a brown, ragged field, crowned by an oddly blue sky with a yellow curved, almost breast-like cleavage in the center. A thick line of solid paint, dissecting the low cloud like a scar or a fissure, is meant to be read, according to de Paoli, as a line of cocaine—further proof of the artist's unique, surreal (and slightly dangerous) sensibility. The second oil-on-felt painting, *Warbird* (2022), is even stranger. A central



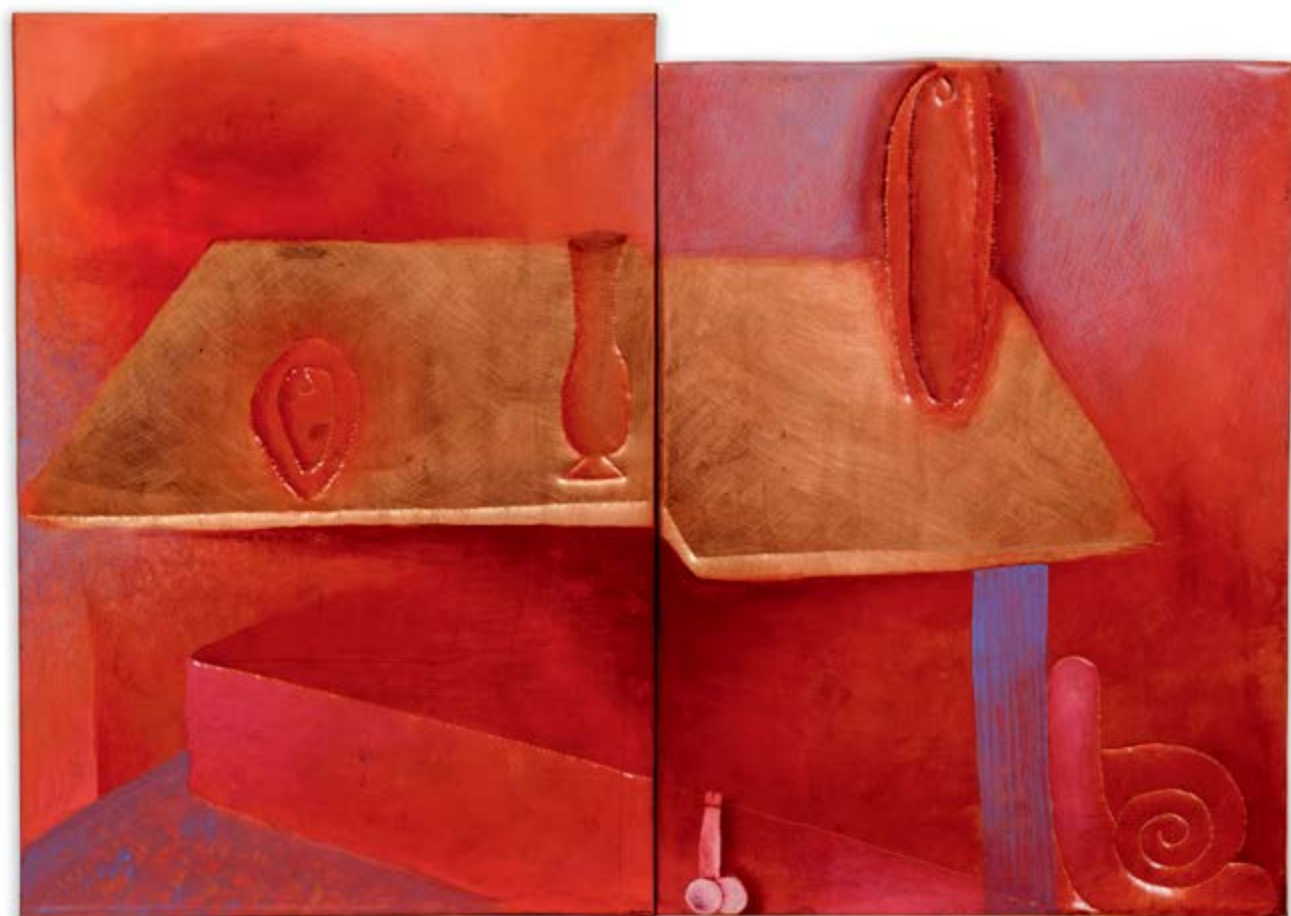


Morning clouds, 2021

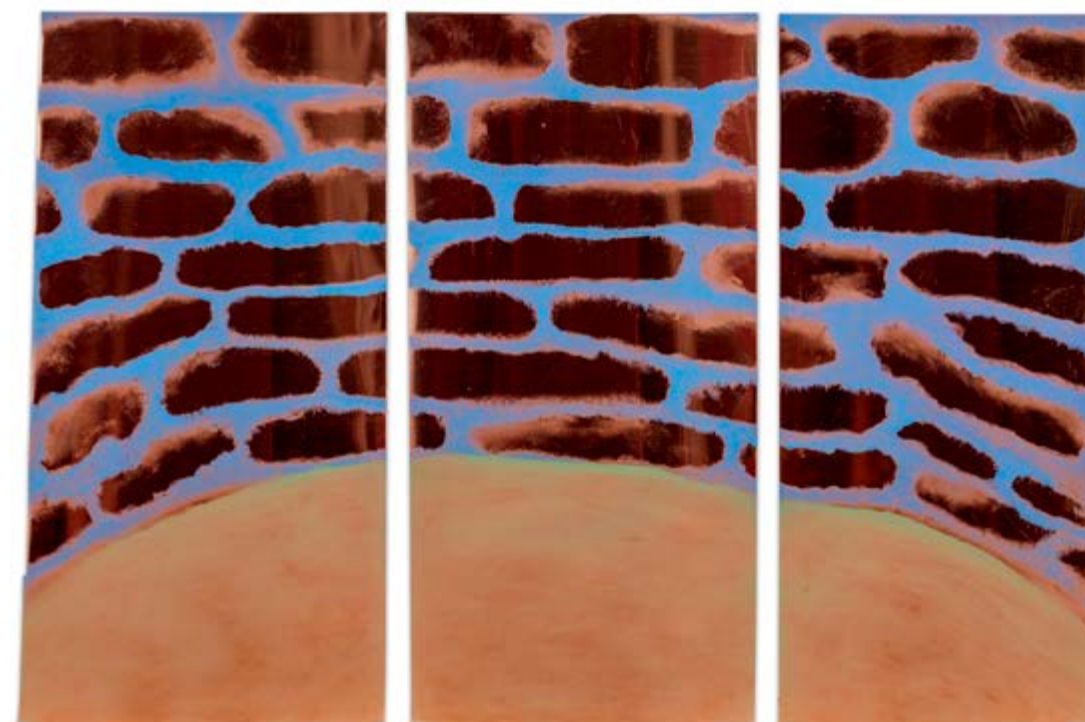


Warbird, 2022

Previous spread: *Inside the red barn, 2022*
Installation view, Santiago de Paoli, *Inside the Red Barn, OSMOS Station, Stamford, NY, July 22 to August 28, 2022*



Going up, 2022



Blue meadow, 2022

form, shaped like a winged whale or fish-like airplane, has two hotdogs as rockets or jet propulsion engines, and a fried egg as a hovering control center or a cloud of anti-missile countermeasures hovering above. Clearly flying above a densely crenellated cloudscape, the titular warbird seems to rather enjoy the view.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a multi-panel oil-on-copper painting that the artist describes as “an altarpiece for Stamford.” Comprised of nine vertical sections—each containing a tall upper and square lower panel—the polyptych borrows from the visual logic of the altar pieces of the Trecento that served as de Paoli’s inspiration (think Duccio and Giotto), with their narratives dispersed across a central panel, wings, and predella while still preserving the gilded ground of earlier pictorial conventions. Here, each upper segment features a variation on the same repeating motif—a priapic shape of two round fields connected by a central “neck” that ends at the bottom in two additional spherical forms. The overall form paradoxically evokes both the suggestion of a phallic shape and the torso of a woman with her breasts exposed. Each figure is crowned by a round segment of exposed copper reminiscent of a halo or mandorla. The bottom panels, much like Renaissance predellas, present a continuous still-life scene of apples and plates on a suggested tabletop. In equal parts surrealist devotional painting, still life painting of upstate New York’s most iconic fruit, and material experiment, the monumental work is one of de Paoli’s most ambitious and masterful creations to date.

Together, these works represent a powerful evolution of and departure from de Paoli’s earlier works and can be understood as a celebration of the artist’s new surroundings in the Western Catskills, an area that for the Hudson River School painters and poets such as William Cullen Bryant represented a new kind of spiritual edifice, a “cathedral of nature,” for which de Paoli created his spectacular altarpiece. **BY CHRISTIAN RATTEMEYER**



Installation view, Santiago de Paoli, Inside the Red Barn, OSMOS Station, Stamford, NY, July 22 to August 28, 20022