

Kunsthalle Wien
Karlsplatz

EN

Guglielmo Castelli
Sweet Baby Motel
13.2.–12.4.2026

Guglielmo Castelli works across painting, drawing, print and sculpture, developing figurative compositions through a process of cutting, layering and recomposition informed by collage. For his first exhibition in Austria, he presents a site-responsive installation at Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz, conceived in close dialogue with the architecture and shaped by principles of theatrical scenography and narrative sequencing.

Visitors enter the exhibition as if from backstage, encountering a constellation of works that unfolds in space. Castelli's human-like subjects recur in different media, positioned between painterly surface and sculptural form. Drawn from the artist's sketchbooks and research; images, scenes, and reference materials are densely assembled into layered compositions that draw on dream imagery and processes of unconscious association. Trained in set design, Castelli constructs multi-centred scenes in which figures appear suspended at the threshold of action. *Sweet Baby Motel* brings these elements together in an environment marked by intimacy and tension, where familiar situations are subtly destabilised through the interplay of conscious staging and the unconscious.

Sweet Baby Motel

The exhibition is titled with the text from a small gold plaque installed at the artist's studio in Turin, Italy. Engraved in serif capital letters, *SWEET BABY MOTEL*, functions as a provisional marker of place, reflecting an interest in how language can frame and momentarily stabilise spaces of creation:

I wanted to have an indication of a place and to explore how words could define a place. So some time ago I printed this plaque, imagining that one day I would put it in my studio – which I eventually did, leaning it against the glass as if it were something I could pick up and take away, since it wasn't fixed. And maybe, in the end, *Sweet Baby Motel* is all the places where I go to create.*

Mural

Using the exhibition space as a temporary studio, Castelli transformed one of the exhibition walls into an twenty-two-metre-long, site-specific mural inspired by the German fairy tale of *Hansel and Gretel*. Castelli mixes acrylic paint with water to create semi-transparent layers of paint applied to the wall, often in large, sweeping brushstrokes. Two larger than life, sprawling, reclined figures unfurl from a dance pole piercing through an upturned house. Musical instruments provide alluring traps. Tongues and teeth dance playfully, free of bodies. This narrative structure aligns with the artist's sustained engagement with childhood as a space where imagination and reality converge. An interest that resonates within Vienna, where Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalysis in the late 19th century, officially coining the term in 1896.

A series of canvases are installed directly onto the painted mural, creating an installation in which painting and environment intersect. Castelli's figures, frequently accompanied by autonomous shadows, are pictured in a state of becoming, evoking the transition from childhood to adulthood and reflecting a desire to explore the hidden depths of the psyche. The figure in *Senza sussulti, senza conflitti* [No jolts, no conflicts] (2025), stands legs together, while its shadow adopts a wide-legged stance. Child-like attributes – such as make-believe costumes, disproportioned and flexible bodies – signal that they are neither fully adult nor real, echoing Freud's assertion that childhood memories often resurface in adult dreams as fantasy rather

than recollection. The titular figure in *Madame Sato* (2025) wears a tightly patterned diamond print reminiscent of a harlequin's costume. She both conjures and inhales a heady smoke. Castelli's images demarcate a threshold between the supposedly rational adult world and the imaginative terrain of childhood:

For me, childhood is a source for the things that happen in my paintings. To my mind, it's scarier to get creatures that are apparently more infantile than you – the creatures that you're looking at – to do things that you believe you would never do, or which you have never done. These actions take place with objects that are apparently normal but which, in reality, may become coercive devices.**

Oil paintings

Castelli's paintings hanging on the mural can be viewed as films condensed into a single image. In cinema or theatre, actions unfold across time and space; in these paintings they are compressed into one single frame, compositional elements, such as objects, figures and their shadows all take shape simultaneously:

I'm interested in the fact that the pictorial body, even if dismembered, remains a single body. Just like at the theatre or at the cinema, you have a scene before and a scene after, but what happens in that moment has a circumscribed temporality ... That's the part which interests me, the fact of having a representation which is really a frame that is a universe unto itself.**

Castelli paints figures that appear androgynous and fixed in a state of falling, enduring or resisting constraints and captured in moments that are at once playful and tragic. The figure in *Negato concetto di fine* [Denied concept of end] (2025), seems to be both dancing and slipping; seated and falling. Not quite human and not always adhering to gravity. This in-between-ness lends an elusive quality to the images, which is carried in other details, such as the expression of the figure in *Prediletta* [Favourite] (2025), who stands next to a rendition of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565). The painting, held in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, is also a favourite of Castelli's.

Billowing, theatrical costume and shadows shroud and support Castelli's figures. In *La tendenza precoce ad anticipare catastrofi* [The early tendency to anticipate catastrophes] (2025), the garment's tails swirl ambiguously around the reserved, stoic-faced figure in the schoolroom-like setting. Of certainty and uncertainty the artist says:

I want to arrive at the construction of a work that has elements which are extremely identifiable, but which then instil a sense of doubt. Engendering doubt through certainty. In other words, adding or taking away, only to then add, take away, and add again [...] when I work, I don't feel at ease if I don't understand.**

Table sculptures

I've always had to go beyond the limit: whether it's the canvas, the sheet of paper or the signs that emerge from the cleaning of the paintbrush, that constriction has to be there. In the end, what interests me is the storytelling, because my memories, my earliest memories, come with stories attached. And even if the stories do not always speak of us, to a certain extent they do, albeit by mistake, as a remnant.**

Each of the ten table sculptures comprises a miniature wooden table with a cut-paper element curling around it. The paper figures are born of remnants of a painter's ritual: at the end of the day, Castelli cleans his brushes and uses the results of this gesture to create some of the figures that populate his pictorial universe. He cuts out the marks left behind, gives them a human semblance and collects them for use later:

Many parts of the body of my figures emerge from the cleaning of my brushes. This process creates shapes on the paper, which I then go ahead and cut out, so they are a sort of residue or offcut. I even find myself recycling them time and again: for example, what started out as a leg then becomes a jawbone.**

Each sculpture is titled after a room within a domestic environment (such as *Kitchen*, *Bedroom* or *Dining Room*, all 2025). Conceived as experiments in three-dimensional composition, the maquettes – as the artist calls them – feature slender, almost liquid figures who seem on the verge of an action. These figures correspond to those found in the paintings, where shadows often diverge from the bodies they accompany:

It's an inversion because in the end the inside becomes the outside. The act of performing an autopsy on something does not inevitably reveal its inner extent. Probably, the act of making a cut, a recomposition, means that I end up being satisfied by it, because I know that at that moment the balance between a possible catastrophe and a possible comeback has been struck. The operation went well, but the patient is dead.**

Across this series, the figures occupy ambiguous positions in relation to the furniture, variously seated at, beneath or clinging to the tables. The domestic interior becomes a site for examining spatial relationships, bodily orientation and implied hierarchies within familiar settings. Tellingly, the languid, sprawling figure propped up by one of the upturned table legs in *Studio* (2025) bears an uncanny resemblance to the artist:

I designed the little tables with a view to representing small-scale tragedies – with respect to the idea of power, of sitting at the table, of what is happening in those moments.**

Sketchbooks and cuttings

Castelli keeps a magnetic board in his studio where all the elements (cuttings, sketches, notes) that will end up in his work are pinned. The selection of sketchbooks and preparatory materials on display 'backstage' allows visitors to trace the conception of various compositional or narrative elements that inform the exhibition (a scene, a character, or a detail) along with a collection of cuttings made from brush cleaning that form the work *Geography of Nothing* (2025). Shown to the public for the first time, these *carnets de voyage* offer insight into the artist's working process, characterised by twist and turns:

I use the sketch as a form of condensation, as a fragmentation of the elements that I would like to then include in the representation. The development of a sketch is not an end in itself: I produce one because it then leads to another, and then another. The exhibition would not exist if the sketch did not exist.**

*Email from the artist to the curator, 26.11.25; **Artist interview with Francesco Manacorda published in the accompanying publication.

The exhibition *Guglielmo Castello: Sweet Baby Motel* is curated by Sarah Crowe.

Biography

Guglielmo Castelli (b. 1987, Turin) has held solo exhibitions at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin (2025); Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice; Villa Medici, Rome (both 2024); Aspen Museum, Colorado (2023); Fondazione Coppola, Vicenza (2019) and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2018). His work has been presented within significant surveys including Triennale Milano, Milan (2023) and the 17th Quadriennale di Roma, Rome (2020). It has also been exhibited at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo/Museo Nazionale dell'Automobile, Turin; Fondazione Nicola Trussardi/Palazzo Morando, Milan; Centre Pompidou Metz in collaboration with Musée du Louvre, Paris (all 2025); MAXXI L'Aquila (2023); The Parkview Museum, Singapore and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (both 2018). Castelli lives and works in Turin.

Exhibition Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication featuring texts by Sarah Crowe and Lillian Davies and an interview with the artist by Francesco Manacorda. Published by Lenz, Castello di Rivoli and Kunsthalle Wien, it will be available from the end of March 2026.

List of works (clockwise from entrance):

- 1 *Geography of nothing*, 2025
Oil on paper cuttings, canvas, fabric, wooden ruler, cigarette case, leather glove, metal clips, pins
- 2 *Untitled Mural*, 2026
Acrylic paint
- 3 *Prediletta* [Favourite], 2025
Oil on canvas
Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo
- 4 *La tendenza precoce ad anticipare catastrofi* [The early tendency to anticipate catastrophes], 2025
Oil on board
- 5 *Madame Sato*, 2025
Oil on canvas
Private Collection
- 6 *Specula*, 2025
Oil on board
Private Collection
- 7 *Senza sussulti, senza conflitti* [No jolts, no conflicts], 2025
Oil on canvas
- 8 *Negato concetto di fine* [Denied concept of end], 2025
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

- 9 *Forme di libertà circoscritte dal limite*
[Forms of freedom circumscribed by the limit], 2025
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of Y.D.C.
- 10 Artist's notebooks and sketchbooks
- 11 *L'abitudine è il corpo che reclama*
[Habit is the body that claims], 2025
Collage on paper
- 12 *Studio*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper
- 13 *Toilet*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, rice paper, glass marble
- 14 *Bedroom*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, tissue paper, cotton string,
metal bell
- 15 *Pantry*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, acrylic paint on polystyrene
apple, canvas
- 16 *Kitchen*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, resin
- 17 *Closet*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, oil on tissue paper, paper collar,
bookbinding tape, metal clip
- 18 *Dining Room*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, glass beads
- 19 *Attic*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, metal ruler, cotton label
- 20 *Laundry*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, cotton thread
- 21 *Entrance*, 2025
Inox, wood, oil on paper, silk gloves
Collection of Donald Porteous

Public Programme

- 6.3. 17:00 Curator's Tour with Sarah Crowe (EN)
 12.3. 11:00 Baby-friendly Tour (DE)
 26.3. 18:00 Artist Talk and Book Launch:
 Guglielmo Castelli in conversation with
 curator Sarah Crowe, launch of
Guglielmo Castelli: Sweet Baby Motel (EN)
 9.4. 18:00 Guided Tour (DE)

Guided tours are offered in German, English, Einfache Sprache
[Plain German] and Austrian Sign Language.

Full programme details for the exhibition are available online:



The exhibition is organised in collaboration with Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin. The project is supported by PAC2025 – *Piano per l'Arte Contemporanea*, promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Culture, and the Italian Cultural Institute in Vienna. Kunsthalle Wien is grateful to Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo/Bruxelles/New York/Paris and Sylvia Kouvali, London/Piraeus. All works courtesy Guglielmo Castelli; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo/Bruxelles/New York/Paris and Sylvia Kouvali, London/Piraeus.

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Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz
 Treitlstraße 2, 1040 Vienna
www.kunsthallewien.at
 +43-1-52189-0
office@kunsthallewien.at

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