

BROOKLYN RAIL

Luca Pancrazzi: FLASH LIGHT

By Jason Rosenfeld

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Luca Pancrazzi, *Baluginante riflettente (Flickering, 1)*, 2022.
Acrylic on canvas, 78.5 x 59 inches. Courtesy the artist and TOTAH.

On View

TOTAH

FLASH LIGHT

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The spectral predominates in Luca Pancrazzi's second solo exhibition at TOTAH. Here are fourteen paintings dated 2022 wherein subtly bests realized form, works that expand awareness into realms of the luminous. These acrylic on canvas pictures are harmonies of varied levels of white, trading somewhere in the space between Robert Ryman monochromes and blinding lens flares caught on film. A committed experimentalist, the Valdarno-born Pancrazzi, who lives and works in Milan, reveals the man behind the curtain in one key picture, *Flash*, of a camera on a tripod. Its flash is aglow at left—it

seems to explode from the picture surface—causing delicate blue rippling rings to pulse out from its center. Source becomes subject, and it is the combination of lenses, flares and glancing reflections, suffusing incandescence, and manipulated perspective that coalesce in this stimulating body of work. The easternmost room is the most spectacular. There are four portrait format works on three walls, all titled *Baluginante riflettente (Flickering)* and numbered 1 through 4. These are a series of aerial views of the industrial Po River Valley in Lombardy. The snaking river and office parks, motorways and bridges stretching up and back to a distant and imperceptible horizon slip in and out of focus. Artistically, these works share a strong cinematic effect with Stephen Hannock’s similarly lofty, but chromatically much more intense, views of Tyneside and Cleveland and the Napa Valley. Pancrazzi’s pictures work just as well as abstract compositions, however, especially number 2, with its receding and rising hopscotch of rectilinear white forms that, like Mondrian’s gradually broken-up pier in his early works, begin to lose their moorings to the ground and enter space.



Luca Pancrazzi, *Abbacinare gli occhi abbagliare la mente (Dazzling the eye blinding the mind, 3)*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas, 35.5 x 35.5 inches. Courtesy the artist and TOTAH.

The economy of brushstrokes in these works is extraordinary, a kind of geographical caricature, with beaded lights and the bare armature of perspective. The paintings envelop you, especially with the gallery lights out, when they present a most magnetic glow. On the center wall, number 1 is the most resolved, the Italian rust belt in all its bird’s eye glory. A low bridge with long shadows cast by a rising or setting sun fills the center and orients the eye. Pancrazzi has well captured the way that bodies of water in a distant landscape as seen from a plane catch the sunlight and momentarily burst into flame before the angle of vision changes; the plane moves on. The Po snakes back into space, a Poussinesque means of pulling sight into pictorial depth. At the bottom, an island in the river appears like a gaping mouth, a transplanted Cloaca Maxima, a void against the light. In my mind I was hearing Liz Phair’s lyrics in “Stratford-On-Guy” (1993):

I was flying into Chicago at night / Watching the lake turn the sky into blue-green smoke / The sun was setting to the left of the plane / And the cabin was filled with an unearthly glow / In 27-D, I was behind the wing / Watching landscape roll out like credits on a screen / The earth looked like it was lit from within / Like a poorly assembled electrical ball / As we moved out of the farmlands into the grid / The plan of a city was all that you saw / And all of these people sitting totally still / As the ground raced beneath them, thirty-thousand feet down.

In the passageway between the two main exhibition spaces, and in the westernmost room, there are four related works titled *Abbacinare gli occhi abbagliare la mente* (*Dazzling the eye blinding the mind*) numbered 1 through 4. Three line the west wall and make a fine grouping. The premise is simple: a view from a hurtling car in a tunnel or from under a darkened overpass, each with a single vehicle in the distance framed by light emanating from the exit. The works feel like expressions of relief and hopefulness; this reading borders cliché, but as we feel our way into the uncertain and hopefully brilliant future post-COVID-19, this suite of works finds its purchase. They capture that singular experience of anticipating the conclusion of a lengthy transit, the pure expression of a coming sense of freedom—Eurydice surfacing from Hades at the moment just before Orpheus looks back, Theseus blinking half-blind in the Knossos light as he emerges from the labyrinth.

As Pancrazzi writes in a hopeful poem that accompanies the show, “After a lapse of time I open my eyes and the world reemerges through a blaze of light.” Number 4 includes a single car, just off to the right, seen enveloped by light through the windshield of the viewer’s own vehicle, following in the adjacent lane quite a few lengths behind. Each picture becomes a kind of essay in Albertian perspective: the tunnels read as a barrel vaults or beam roofs, or latticework trestles. The quality of light is that of a glare, as if you are squinting or the windshield is slightly wet. Delicacies of touch abound: spots of white acrylic in various viscosities, conveying depth through the density of the pigment. At the end of this room, *Prelucente illuminante* (*First light*) implies a divine authority, in both its title and the image of fifteen radiant beams emanating from a central section of nearly pure, unvariegated, white paint. It presents a comprehensive perspective absent any ground.



Luca Pancrazzi, *Prelucente illuminante* (*First light*), 2022.
Acrylic on canvas, 31.5 x 31.5 inches. Courtesy the artist and TOTAH.

Nearby, *Komorebi* continues concerns of Pancrazzi’s recent more nature-based work, with washes of thinned paint or solid dabs that lie atop a modulated green ground, more clearly visible at three edges of the picture. The overall effect is sunlight seen in sparks and slashes and bursts through a forest canopy. With Pancrazzi, unlike the broken use of light in Impressionism, the landing point of the illumination is not a stretch of grass in a park, the dress and cheeks of a young woman laughing and

dancing in Montmartre, an undulating façade of a hotel on the English Channel, but, rather, the direct effect on the viewer's vision. So, the comparatives are not Monet or Renoir, or Macchiaioli artists such as Silvestro Lega or Telemaco Signorini. Instead think of the burst of light in Valdemar Schønheyder Møller's *Sunset. Fontainebleau* of 1900 in the National Gallery of Denmark, the most blinding painting I have ever seen. You can look it up. But here, again, there is also the cinematic: a tracking shot looking up through the trees, seeking divinity and sustenance, and perhaps escape, so familiar from films like Terrence Malick's poetic rumination on World War II, *The Thin Red Line* (1998), blended with the dynamics and beauty of the lens flares in P.T. Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002).

Pancrazzi's poem concludes with, "I close my eyes and the dazzling darkness gives way to shapes of another world where it might be possible to live. I try to dwell in both, but often I don't recognize where I am anymore, and I become lost, even if I know I am not entirely." This glimmering and conceptual show gives us a vivid sense of the artist's explorations, and his path forward.

Contributor

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