

Luciano Castelli

Whispers of Japan

15 May - 22 August, 2026

With the exhibition "Whispers of Japan," Luciano Castelli turns to a source of inspiration that has accompanied his work since the early 1980s: Japanese culture, its visual language, and its distinctive understanding of body, space, and movement. The works assembled in the exhibition combine painting, photography, and site-specific interventions into an atmospherically charged Gesamtkunstwerk in which memory, gesture, and architecture converge. Earlier groups of works enter into dialogue with new pieces created in response to Castelli's renewed engagement with Japan and his journey there in 2024.

Born in Lucerne in 1951, Luciano Castelli is regarded as one of the defining artistic figures of European art since the 1970s. He first gained international attention as the youngest participant in documenta 5. After moving to Berlin, he became a central protagonist of the "Neue Wilde" movement while simultaneously developing an independent, interdisciplinary practice spanning painting, photography, performance, music, and film. Questions of identity, transformation, and self-staging have remained central to his oeuvre throughout. For Castelli, artistic space is never a static site of presentation, but rather a stage for emotional and corporeal experience.

In "Whispers of Japan," this understanding unfolds into a multilayered reflection on proximity and distance, ritual and transformation. A significant point of reference is Japanese Butoh dance, whose slow, often existentially charged movements have fascinated Castelli for decades. The photographs created for the exhibition capture the fragile physicality and psychological intensity of this dance form and encounter the large-scale paintings in a compelling visual choreography. Castelli's characteristic, impulsive brushwork here attains a new sense of concentration: the gestures appear at once spontaneous and meditative, forceful yet imbued with remarkable sensitivity.

At the center of the exhibition are works created on traditional byōbu folding screens. Since the 8th century, these multi-panel screens have occupied a significant place within Japanese art history. Originally conceived to divide interior spaces and protect against drafts, they soon evolved into precious pictorial surfaces depicting land-

scapes, scenes from courtly life, motifs from nature, or calligraphic compositions. Particularly during the Momoyama and Edo periods, monumental byōbu paintings with gold-leaf backgrounds emerged, dissolving the boundaries between architecture and image. Their distinctive structure resists linear viewing; the image unfolds only through the movement of the viewer. Castelli does not approach this tradition as a historical quotation, but as a living structure of perception. His paintings respond to the folds, interruptions, and transitions of the screens, generating an open and rhythmically articulated pictorial space.

As in earlier expansive installations, Castelli once again deliberately transcends the limits of conventional display. Painting extends across architectural structures, lines and gestures continue into the surrounding space, and image and environment begin to merge. The exhibition thus reveals itself less as a sequence of individual works than as a poetic field of experience — a quiet yet intensely resonant echo of Castelli's decades-long dialogue with Japan.

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The exhibition by **Roman Frechen** and **Yukiko Terada** in the Basement shares its connection to Japan with Castelli's exhibition, yet approaches the subject from different contemporary perspectives on identity, transformation, and cultural perception. Roman Frechen's paintings draw on the Japanese Gyaru and Ganguro subcultures of the late 1990s and early 2000s, examining their resistance to traditional beauty ideals as well as their continuing global presence through digital culture and social media. His works move between memory, projection, and cultural observation. The Berlin-based Japanese artist Yukiko Terada addresses themes of change and existence from a quieter, deeply personal perspective. Her work *black bird + white bird*, created during her pregnancy, reflects on oppositions such as life and death, light and darkness, using feathers as metaphors for fragility and transformation. Together, the two positions open a dialogue between pop culture and poetic introspection, between surface and vulnerability, revealing identity as something fluid, constructed, and constantly evolving.