

Goombarooch Resignified

WORKS BY

John Avelluto

Cover image:

Maloik, acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017, 7 x 9 inches

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Curated by Joseph Sciorra

Catalog for an exhibition at the
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

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JOHN AVELLUTO has set out to play with, undermine, and confound Italian American culture, toying with the existing linguistic and visual repertoire of vernacular references that all too often have gone underappreciated and unexamined. His artwork can be seen as the ludic antics of the mythic circum-Mediterranean trickster Giufà, the hero/fool of oral narratives who, despite his simplicity, often overcomes quotidian adversities and in doing so imparts a critical life lesson.

Avelluto positions his art at a crossroads of what in Italian is referred to as *contaminazione*, those hybrid moments and places where ideas and idioms collide across ever-shifting borders to create innovative articulations. He revels in mash-ups of transliterated sounds, images, products, and ideas where Italy and the United States converge. Avelluto's artistic renderings referencing Italian American iterations of cultural touchstones such as "galama" (calamari) and "maloik" (*malocchio*; evil eye)—deliberately spelled phonetically in nonstandard Italian—capture flashes of transcultural encounters to highlight the profound and the whimsical.

I am calling these elements of vernacular Italian American culture *goombarooch*, a derivative of *goomba*, a not-uncommon term in Italian America. This Southern Italian dialect and Italian American slang word—originally meaning godfather, a form of extended parentage and an honorific—becomes a diminutive with the Italian American suffix ("uccio" in Italian), connoting both a gendered pejorative and endearment. Collectively these cultural components suggest a funky Italian American soulfulness that has permeated U.S. and international popular culture in the form of films, television, and online memes and games. In the exhibited works and elsewhere, Avelluto cultivates both the everyday and mediated permutations of *goombarooch* in a creative act of dynamic resignification.

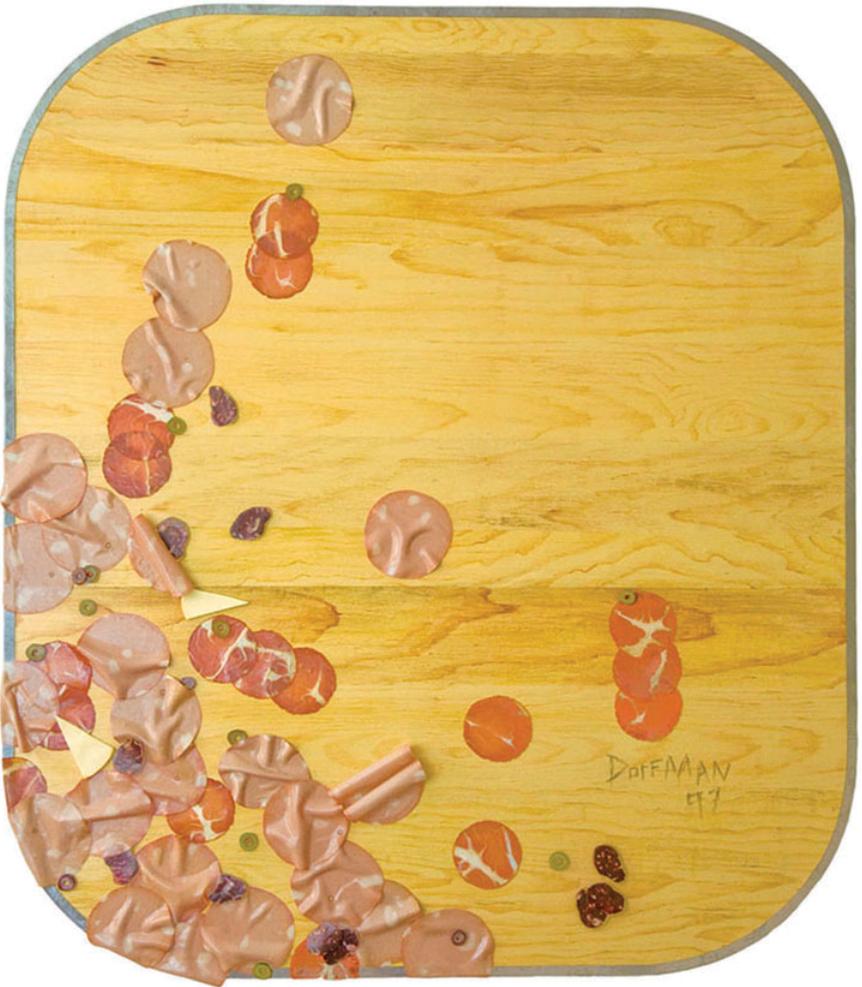
Avelluto's cultural appropriation is achieved through a visual legerdemain, a time-consuming method whereby the artist layers numerous coats of acrylic paint to create strata of simulacrum imitating paper, plastic, and other items that he augments and then applies to a flat surface. This virtuosic effect is best seen in his tabletop renditions where imitation salami slices or a dripping pizza are ensconced on deftly rendered faux tablecloths and wood surfaces. They are three-dimensional *trompe-l'œil* assemblages *all'italiana* by way of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, where the artist lives and works.

Thus Avelluto's meticulous process and deliberate craft are made material, and the notion of *lavoro ben fatto*, or work done well, becomes an integral element of his art. These facsimile objects offer refracted takes on the subjects at hand, be they a squid's tentacles or an apotropaic gesture. Ultimately John Avelluto's recalibrations of suggested Italian American imaginaries offer possibilities for simultaneous reclamation and critique.

—JOSEPH SCIORRA, curator



Untitled (JheartM), acrylic paint films on panel, 2008, 36 x 36 x 2 inches



Untitled (Portrait of ND), acrylic paint films on panel, 2008,
39.5 x 48.5 x 2 inches



GaLaMa 1, acrylic paint mounted to glass panel, 2016, 27 x 37 inches



GaLaMa 2, acrylic paint mounted to glass panel, 2018,
28 x 29 inches unframed



GaLaMa (Azzooree), acrylic paint films mounted to glass, 2018,
16 x 25 inches unframed



Gobbaghoul, acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017,
7 x 9 inches unframed



Cornuto I, acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017,
7 x 9 inches unframed



Maloik II, acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017,
7 x 9 inches unframed



Cornuto II, acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017,
7 x 9 inches unframed



Eyetalians (Seeking Opportunities), acrylic paint films mounted to museum acrylic, 2017, 7 x 9 inches unframed

JOHN AVELLUTO was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. In 2006 he received his MFA from Brooklyn College and studied with Elizabeth Murray, Vito Acconci, William T. Williams, and Jennifer McCoy. He received the Charles G. Shaw Award for Excellence in Painting and was invited to lecture as a Visiting Artist at the Glasgow School of Art. He has shown his work both domestically and abroad with Studio 10, PS1 MoMA, the Living Art Museum (Iceland), and Centotto, in both group and solo exhibitions. He was the co-founder and president of the Bay Ridge Storefront Art Walk (SAW), where individual artists were selected to collaborate with local store owners to create site-specific installations along the commercial artery of Fifth Avenue in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Avelluto currently works in Brooklyn and partners with Stand4 Community Art Space and the Owl's Head wine bar, developing creative outlets in both the visual and literary arts for the Bay Ridge community to experience and participate in. For more information, visit john-avelluto.com.



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