

Three new pieces in her ongoing series “*Gavetas*” (Filing Drawers), 1994–, are particularly striking: Molding painting and sculpture, she fills drawers from old filing cabinets with diverse objects and maplike encaustic paintings. The type of container and the wax medium have remained constant since she began this series, while in these recent works the motifs imprinted range from Art Nouveau patterns to lion paws. In *Typus Terra Incógnita*, 2022, and *EW18 Quase Catástrofe* (EW18 Near Catastrophe), 2022, both recent iterations in another ongoing series, “*Macio*” (Soft), 1980–, Geiger paints, embroiders, and drives nails on padded surfaces to demarcate different versions of historical world maps that show, for instance, Africa, colored in black, or South America, laden with stitches as if over a barely closed wound. Tracing and working over these images of the continents in various materials, the artist underscores on the one hand their status as coveted prey of the centuries-old cartographic-colonial enterprise of exploitation, while also gesturing toward the possibility of healing these scarred territories. As such, the poetic subtlety of Geiger’s work does not mitigate its political implications, which amount to a scathing denunciation of colonial language and ideology.



Anna Bella Geiger,
Typus Terra Incógnita,
2022, mixed media,
acrylic on canvas.
From the series
“*Macio*” (Soft), 1980–.

This critique is apparent in *A linha de Tordesilhas lunar* (The Lunar Tordesillas Line), 2022, for instance, in which the artist refers to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas signed by Spain and Portugal. The two kingdoms divided the “known” world into two zones of colonizing influence and laid the foundations for the invasion and conquest of the Americas, including the Portuguese penetration of the territory of present-day Brazil. Here, the map of South America is displayed horizontally and looks as if it is painfully pierced by a spear-like rigid copper wire, an emblem of that artificial (and violent) cartographical division. The problematic relationship between Brazil, the rest of Latin America (the so-called peripheries) and European and English-speaking centers of power continues to captivate the artist’s attention and discourse after decades of work. By questioning, rewriting, blurring, and redrawing her maps, Geiger proposes a decolonized perspective on our mental representation of the world.

—Javier Montes

Translated from Spanish by Michele Faguet.

ROME

Setsuko

GAGOSIAN

Rome holds a special place in the heart of Japanese artist Setsuko Klossowska de Rola, better known as Setsuko. She spent much of her twenties and thirties living in the lush splendor of Villa Medici, home

to the French Academy in Rome, where her late husband, the painter Balthus, served as director until the couple moved to Switzerland in 1977. It was in Rome that Setsuko began to dedicate herself to art—mostly painting—and also where she met ceramicist Benoît Astier de Villatte, who would spur her work in clay decades later. The intimate exhibition “Into the Trees II” marked the octogenarian’s return to the city with a group of sculptures and paintings that radiated warmth and fostered a sense of peaceful contentedness. Nature was the protagonist here in still-life compositions in watercolor and gouache in plain wooden frames, as well as in exquisite terra-cotta, bronze, and wood sculptures depicting trees, plants, and animals.

The walls of the gallery’s antechamber were painted buttercup yellow, giving the impression of early-morning sunshine, when everything feels sleepy but full of possibility. Walking into the main room was like stepping into a miniature forest populated with fantastic spirit trees that tapered upward like long, chunky legs. Placed on raw-spruce four-legged tables, these enameled terra-cotta trunks in shades of white sprouted branches laden with all manner of fruit and leaves: lemons (*Citronnier I*), grapes (*Raisin II and IV*), figs (*Figuier III*), and pomegranates (*Grenadier I*), all 2022. Grooves in the trunk of the last sculpture give way to small branches with delicate leaves and pomegranates bursting with seeds. A small bird perches on top of the branches, feasting on one of the fruits, in an idyllic scene of bounty. The intricacies in this charming scene made evident the artist’s dexterity with a material she only recently started using. Bronze candelabra laden with leaves and ripe fruits offered another take on treelike forms, as in *Chandelier (La vigne)* (Candelabra [The Vine]), 2021, with its golden grapes dangling from oxidized green limbs, while *Renaissance de l’Olivier* (Rebirth of the Olive Tree), 2019, a striking painted oak sculpture, portrayed an ancient olive-tree trunk. Though the width of its deeply grooved and gnarled trunk implied a state of maturity, the trunk sprouted fine leaves and flowers representing renewal.

Setsuko points to Shinto—a traditional animist Japanese religion, according to which the soul is present everywhere in nature, and in trees especially—as an influence on her work. She also draws upon her own surroundings, as she has lived for nearly fifty years in the small woodland village of Rossinière, Switzerland. The town’s mayor moonlights as a carpenter and made the spruce pedestals. The artist lives with her daughter and two grandchildren, who are the only human protagonists in her paintings on display here, in the former eighteenth-century chalet hotel that she and Balthus made their home. These three watercolor and gouache paintings done during the lockdown stand in contrast to

View of “*Setsuko*,”
2022. Photo:
Matteo D’Eletto.



her still lifes both in subject matter and palette, binding them more closely to the sculptures. In tones of brown, black, and white in a dreamlike scene, *Mei et Sen* (Mei and Sen), 2020, depicts the artist's grandchildren leaning against a tree while reading.

A friend of mine who recently trained in forest therapy (its roots lie in *shinrin-yoku*, meaning “forest bathing” in Japanese) has been expounding enthusiastically on the therapeutic benefits of walking in the woods. “Into the Trees II” produced a similar sense of wonder at nature and at this woman who, at eighty, continues not only to paint but to reinvent her practice.

—Ana Vukadin

VENICE

María Berrío

VICTORIA MIRO

María Berrío's dreamlike compositions render imaginary worlds at the intersection of myth, history, folklore, and personal experience. Her evocative scenes are populated by tragic heroines or “embodied ideals of femininity,” as she calls them, who inhabit rarefied and timeless space, limned through an unusual technique: the skillful alternation of watercolors on layers of collage created from Japanese paper. This beautiful world is also a heartbreaking one, vaguely referring to the political and social upheavals that victimize the weakest and most marginalized social classes.



María Berrío, *Closed Geometry*, 2022, paper collage and watercolor on linen, 72½ × 90".

Berrío's exhibition “The Land of the Sun” told the story of a woman who is the sole survivor of a disaster in a postapocalyptic world on the verge of dissolving. One imagines the figure accompanied by only her pain and phantoms. The New York-based, Colombia-born artist conveyed an atmosphere close to what she identifies as “magical realism,” connecting to a deeply rooted tradition in Latin American literary and visual culture, particularly associated with her fellow Colombian Gabriel García Márquez. Like his writings, her art melds memory and fiction, challenging boundaries between reality and fantasy in a strategy to address the struggles and contradictions of the present.

Delicate, pastel-toned watercolor was fitting for the surreal plot suggested by the show, which also employed a number of Berrío's recurring elements, including the natural environment where these works were set. Berrío draws upon her own experience of the regenerative

power of nature in a childhood in Bogotá and a period spent studying in the countryside outside the Colombian capital. Her landscapes' fairy-tale hues draw out the oneiric quality of these spaces, as an atmosphere of suspended time permeates the works. The women's diaphanous faces and linear silhouettes rendered in dreamy tones lent them an evanescent, hieratic presence. *Sisyphus*, 2022, for instance, is named after the tragic character from Greek mythology. He was condemned by the gods to forever transport a heavy boulder to the summit of a hill, where it would inexorably roll back down, forcing him to start over again. In the artist's interpretation, Sisyphus is a woman, whose unwavering gaze gives her the power of a protagonist who dominates the scene.

Closed Geometry, 2022, shows a contemporary Ophelia in a scene that recalls John Everett Millais's Pre-Raphaelite composition: The young woman floats on a mirror of water, arms spread wide, eyes and pursed lips turned upward. She is surrounded by marsh plants and by vegetation that grows along the shore. Despite a heightened attention to detail, the atmosphere is unreal. The works' multifaceted surfaces created an overall impression of detailed flatness, as Berrío moved between representation and ornamental abstraction. Byzantine and Japanese motifs came to mind, as well as elements of Gustav Klimt's pale splendor. Berrío, however, supplements such art-historical references with a personal decorative language in which ornament is not empty form but instead structures the image by fostering interaction between diverse elements. In “The Land of the Sun,” Berrío made audible the silence that follows a catastrophe. Her powerful narrative works convey a solemn call for resilience and adaptation. They suggest that in the face of devastating loss, art can foster understanding and healing.

—Eugenio Viola

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

VIENNA

“Extraneous”

EXILE

The exhibition “Extraneous” was a quietly devastating addition to this year's Curated By festival. Assembled by Zasha Colah and Valentina Viviani, the compact group show took as its emblem the Indian tradition of leaving a *matka*, a clay pot of drinking water, on the street for thirsty passersby as an act of communal hospitality. Foregrounding generosity as a response to violence, the exhibition opened with a series of staggered pedestals, each bearing a sculpture in shades of slate and both fired and unfired clay. Part of Margherita Moscardini's ongoing project *The Fountains of Za'atari*, 2015–, the objects beckoned with the simple material pull of a minimalist heirloom, some great-aunt's ashtray that's too nice to use, but such a shame to store away. Seemingly abstract, each sculpture is a model of an actual courtyard from Jordan's Za'atari refugee camp. Founded in 2012 at the beginning of the war in Syria, the camp eventually swelled to become the country's fourth-largest city, with at one point just over 150,000 inhabitants. Now, a decade later, what was supposed to be a temporary shelter operates as a near metropolis, buttressed by a network of informal economies and improvised, largely illegal, amenities, such as the concrete courtyards with their water fountains. Moscardini's models exist as more than an inventory; they signify an agreement with the collecting institution that these courtyards will be realized at full scale on European soil but, critically, will not be subject to European laws. Instead, these once-private spaces would operate as a true international commons, sharing the indistinct legal status of the high seas.