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Author

Muddy Stiletto



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First Look: Beatriz Milhazes: 'Maresias', Tate St Ives

Beatriz Milhazes' vibrant and compelling 'Maresias' opens at the Tate St Ives on 25 May, and Muddy's had an early preview. Here's what to expect.

24 May 2024

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A visit to arty St Ives is always a winner. Beaches galore, shops and restaurants aplenty, and places to fill your cultural boots or, you know, hide from the Cornish weather if it's not playing ball.



Left, Maracola, 2015 and right, O Turista, 2004-5

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New for the May half-term and running until the end of September at Tate St Ives is a major exhibition celebrating leading abstract artist **Beatriz Milhazes**. Originally curated by Turner Contemporary in Margate, this joyful colourful explosion of colour and texture is named after the salty sea breeze in Milhazes' native Rio de Janeiro – not dissimilar to that which sweeps off the Cornish shore and over the gallery.

You'll find the vibrant, compelling kaleidoscopic paintings continuing the livening up of gallery four, replacing the similarly brightly coloured textile installations of Outi Pieski.



O Diamante, 2002. Contemporary Art Collection la Caixa Foundation. Photo Vicente de Mello. © Beatriz Milhazes Studio

What a treat it was to be shown the works by the artist herself (and if you fancy taking the tour with Milhazes, she's **doing another on Sat 25 May**). Milhazes guided us through the evolution of her work, variously comparing herself to a scientist and to a vampire; explaining how she saw her studio as a lab for seeking new ways of mixing and evolving existing possibilities, and soaked up inspiration from everything from Catholic imagery and iconography and Brazilian street culture, to shapes and colours from artists as varied as Henri Matisse, Sonia Delaney, Bridget Riley and Piet Mondrian.

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L-R Giles Jackson, Assistant Curator, Anne Barlow, Tate Director, and Beatriz Milhazes discussing *O Mar, 1996*.

Milhazes concept of 'chronic free geometry' and use of circles throughout her work underpins her work across the decades. You'll be able to trace circles across all of her work, from the early, smaller pieces made in the 1980s and 1990s set against the backdrop of political change in Brazil with the end of military dictatorship and new artistic freedoms, right through to the much bigger more nature-inspired installations made more recently.

These ever-present circles represent the 'core of spirituality' and the natural world, and Milhazes told us how she invented and then uses an intriguing sounding monotransfer technique to layer painted motifs in the way you might layer paper in a collage (she also showed us some of these, in one of the later rooms, made from shopping bags and sweet papers), painting onto the underside of plastic which is then transferred across to the canvas.

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Left, detail from collages, Right, detail from Dança dos reis, 1997-8

Is there an overt connection to St Ives, or an obvious reason to host Milhazes in St Ives? Not in the same way that **Naum Gabo** or **Barbara Hepworth** were associated with the town, and not in terms of being in St Ives to create work, like **Outi Pieski**'s installation that was created in Porthmeor Studios for the exhibition, but! Milhazes' work is imbued with light and sunshine, is inspired by sea breezes and the bringing together of diverse cultural references and inspirations, just like all artists that are drawn to St Ives.

Stand under the concrete skylights as the unique Cornish light pours in, and watch the tone of the paintings change as the cloud scud across the sky, and then watch the paintings glow as the sunshine picks out the vibrancy of the layers. The fluoro highlights take on new depths, and the paint emerges like layers of pom-poms, or dancer's costumes ruffling with energy.

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Beatriz Milhazes-Maresias 2002-03, Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection. Photo Fausto Fleury © Beatriz Milhazes Studio

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The Muddy Verdict

The scale of Milhazes work is greater than the images here show; the colours and patterns are mesmerising and the more you look, the more you get drawn in. The exhibition was first shown in Kent at the Turner Contemporary in Margate, and this is another excellent seaside location for the works. When all is said and done, the sea in Brazil, in Margate and St Ives is all related; “the same water, different cultures, but in the end it is about life.” Diverse references reflect the ‘high low’ of everyday life – art, architecture, shopping, sweets, pop culture and religion. We can all relate.

Good for: I’ve written this before, but I’d defy anyone with even a passing interest in modern art to not enjoy a bit of culture with their beach trip; this is a joyful exhibition and a feast of colour, visually compelling, with deeper meaning too, if wanted.

Not for: No sea-scapes here, although there are some waves and lots of circles! If you’re more of a sculpture fan, head for the other rooms in the gallery instead, or just straight for the Barbara Hepworth garden.

The damage: Free to members and locals pass holders (£10 with proof of a TR or PL postcode) or £10

Tate St Ives, Porthmeor Beach, Saint Ives TR26 1TG