



nara roesler

cristina canale
the encounter
nara roesler new york

opening
sep 8 | 6–8pm

exhibition
sep 9 – oct 23

cristina canale: o encontro/the encounter

Luis Pérez-Oramas

When we cease to ask ourselves what art might be and instead ask ourselves when it might be, when it occurs, we find that it always comes to be an encounter, in an encounter; and when we cease to ask ourselves when painting came to its end—among its infinite deaths—, we simply notice that painting continues to exist, as a ‘metamorphosis by addition’¹, surviving itself, often in antithetical fashion, and absorbing its seminal configurations into its newest manifestations, as a hybrid entity, ‘larval’ and incessant.

Every time this happens, as with any form of art, it happens in an encounter. A painting—a work of visual arts—is always an encounter, it exists as an encounter: spectatorial encounter, scopic encounter, encounter of gazes.

It is thus extremely important to understand the frontality of painting, painting as a frontal agency of visibility: the fact that painting in its countless iterations, from the ancient and cavernous to the most recent, including when the effect of painting surpasses its conventions and comes to exist in artistic forms that are no longer painting, the dimension of its facial power transpires: it is the face of the pictorial surface, the faciality of painting, painting as a visage that gazes at us, even when there are no longer distinguishable faces or figures represented therein.

This faciality of painting has never been more potent than in works where there is barely anything more than a surface obtuse with pigments, as in the famous *Black Square* by Kasimir Malevich. And it is precisely there, where it becomes possible to argue that—buried in pigments—lies our culture’s most frontal face: the iconic *Mandylion*, the frontal visage of the *Vera Icon*, the face of Christ, a matter that the author himself elliptically indicated as he presented the work for the first time installed on the superior angles of a room, a sacred place where old orthodoxes from Russia used to place their icons.

Cristina Canale’s most recent work seems to question this facial dimension, this frontal agency of painting, as if she were developing a system, a treaty of faces: they are portraits, often frontal, and also frequently devoid of expressive details, pure faces that look at us, like figural metonymies of painting itself.

The sovereignty of portraiture in western art does not reduce itself to the portrait genre. One can assert that the sovereignty of portraiture in western art embraces the entire realm of images, as if all images were, potentially, portraits of someone or something, a matter that photographic techniques and digital imagery have taken to paroxysm. In face of the rapture by these ephemeral images that characterize our contemporary world, Canale’s painting conveys a slow gaze, summoning us to an unhurried and repeated encounter with her faceless visages, with her profiles, and with the frontal density of chromatic matter where they take form.

Imago was, in ancient Rome, the name given to a funerary portrait, to the effigy of an absent one. The fact that, in our languages, this word became the absolute denominator of all images remains intriguing. Through his studies in Christian iconography, Hans Belting has reminded us that the Greeks used the word *prosôpon* both for a mask and a face, terms related to theater. This etymology and its theatrical roots vanished in Rome. *Prosôpon* was thus what we look at, the object of our gaze, what we have before our eyes, what looks back at us. The *prosôpon* offers itself to the gaze, by contrast to the mask that Romans called *persona* and that covered or concealed the actor’s face. The Roman funerary *imago* was the mark—the casting—of the natural visage of someone who had died, their *facies*, their face. It was therefore, a face without individual expression, like Cristina Canale’s portraits of some of her feminine characters: *facies* without *vultus*, without facial expression.²

¹ Vdr. Emanuele Coccia: *Metamorphoses* [Paris: Rivages, 2020], p.80

² Vdr. Hans Belting: *Le masque et la personne du Christ in La vraie image* [Paris: Gallimard, 2007], p. 71 sqs.

The deliberate absence of *vultus*—that is, of facial expressivity—in Cristina Canale's portraits is compensated by the painting's complex chromatic apparatus, as if the architecture of form and color that gives them presence on the painting's surface could supplement their lack of expression. Prodigiously expressive in spite of their faceless faces these portraits remain an enigma that inquires us through the frontality of painting. It is painting that looks at us.

Among Canale's most recent works, there are some portraits of particular significance in that they feature a surprising—and novel—lateral dynamism. Faces depicted in profile emerge and mark the laterality of the pictorial field through their action, through their effect: it could be a cloud of breath, the smoke of a cigarette, a gaze that does not meet ours, but that nonetheless summons it.

The fact that the portrait's visages do not apprehend us frontally does not attenuate whatsoever the agency of the works' system in interrogating the faciality of painting, on the contrary: they define another dimension for the encounter, particularly activating the edges, their lateral resonance, their potential capability to determine space beyond its material limits.

This lateral dynamism, oblique, explosive, vital, energetic, appears to be a new feature in Cristina Canale's repertoire. A work titled *The Encounter*—a depiction of two characters in profile facing each other and set in a colorful atmospheric context, within a rich chromatic galaxy of undefined forms—hybrid, seductive, warm, uncertain in which a fetal figure seemingly appears—could be an emblem of these new works. It synthesizes the sensorial encounter through which the world unfolds for us, where the visible and the living are engendered, where the face-to-face in painting comes to life as its frontality apprehends our gaze. Cristina Canale's new and ample works embrace this immense cosmic ambition, with unprecedented plenitude.

White Glove, 2021
acrylic, oil, graphite, charcoal
and acrylic spray on linen
110 x 100 x 4 cm
43.3 x 39.4 x 1.6 in





Vox, 2021
acrylic, oil and graphite on canvas
110 x 100 x 4 cm
43.3 x 39.4 x 1.6 in





The Rose, 2021
oil paint on linen
110 x 100 x 4 cm
43.3 x 39.4 x 1.6 in





Stumble, 2021
acrylic and oil on canvas
200 x 300 x 4 cm
78.7 x 118.1 x 1.6 in





The Encounter, 2021
acrylic, oil and acrylic
spray on canvas
170 x 200 x 4 cm
66.9 x 78.7 x 1.6 in





‘In these works, where the human figure appears integrated with the landscape, the idea of romanticism permeates the piece through the human merging with nature—it is a harmonious integration, not a hegemonic one. In this case, nature takes on a function within the narrative, it is not merely a stage for action, it is part of the narrative.’

—Cristina Canale

The Sad Queen, 2021
acrylic, oil, graphite, charcoal
and collage of linen fabric on linen
110 x 100 x 4 cm
43.3 x 39.4 x 1.6 in



‘In this series of portraits I refer directly to the classical iconographic dynamics in the formation of a portrait: a centralized figure, a neutral, contained action, an intention to freeze a moment, immortality. I am more interested in representing a portrait, in the form of representation of portraiture, than in representing a figure, a face. In this sense, the anatomical features are only of interest in as much as they exert a function or emphasize a certain element of the painting. I am more interested in the essence of a portrait than in portraying a person, just like in landscape, where I am more interested in the form of the elements shaping the landscape than in depicting a specific place.’

—Cristina Canale



Girl and UFO, 2020
oil paint on canvas
170 x 140 x 4 cm
66.9 x 55.1 x 1.6 in







Twins, 2021
acrylic, oil and acrylic
spray on linen
170 x 180 x 4 cm
66.9 x 70.9 x 1.6 in





The Origin of Life (Dawn in the Tropics), 2021
acrylic, oil and acrylic spray on canvas
170 x 200 x 4 cm
66.9 x 78.7 x 1.6 in





‘For me, painting is an exercise that has a meditative element to it, in the sense that I seek to abandon my own will and enter a dialogue with the abstract or inanimate process that is the exercise of a painting, the formation of an image.’

—Cristina Canale



Askance, 2021
oil paint on linen
50 x 50 x 2 cm
19.7 x 19.7 x 0.8 in





Vase, 2020
oil paint on linen
50 x 50 x 2 cm
19.7 x 19.7 x 0.8 in





Petit Pois, 2020
acrylic, oil, graphite, charcoal
and collage of cotton fabric on linen
110 x 100 x 4 cm
43.3 x 39.4 x 1.6 in





Girl and Balloon, 2021
acrylic, oil, graphite and collage
of cotton fabric on linen
100 x 80 x 4 cm
39.4 x 31.5 x 1.6 in



‘Portraiture, like landscape painting, is a genre that has a history within itself, it has a very specific dynamic. In fact, what is most interesting to me in this series is to address the idea of a portrait, rather than making a portrait. In this sense, leaving the face empty gives space to see the work as an abstract portrait, instead of a portrait of someone.’

—Cristina Canale



Thinking About A.S., 2021
acrylic, oil, graphite
and charcoal on canvas
170 x 190 x 4 cm
66.9 x 74.8 x 1.6 in





cristina canale

b. 1961, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Cristina Canale rose to prominence following her participation in the iconic group exhibition *Como vai você, Geração 80?*, at Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage (EAV Parque Lage) in Rio de Janeiro in 1984. Like many of her colleagues from the so-called 'Generation 80', her early works reveal the influence of the international context as painting resurfaced, especially impacted by German Neo-expressionism. Loaded with visual elements and thick layers of paint, her early paintings have material and textural characteristics that are reinforced by her use of contrasting and vivid colors.

In the early 1990s, Canale moved to Germany to study in Düsseldorf under the guidance of the Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets. Her compositions soon acquired a sense of spatiality, as she began to incorporate the use of planes and depth, while also adding greater fluidity to her use of colors

Cristina Canale's work is often based on prosaic everyday scenes, sometimes extracted from advertising photography. Her paintings result in elaborate compositions that blur the boundaries between figurative and abstract. According to the curator Tiago Mesquita, Canale's production opposes the quest for constituting structures of the image, which artists such as Gerhard Richter and Robert Ryman engage with, tackling instead 'images and the established genres of painting in a subjective manner, whilst believing in a singular experience.'

selected solo exhibitions

- *Cabeças/Falantes*, Galeria Nara Roesler | São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
- *Cristina Canale: Zwischen den Welten*, Kunstforum Markert Gruppe, Hamburg, Germany (2015)
- *Entremundos*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2014)
- *Espelho e Memória – Spiegel und Erinnerung*, Galerie Atelier III, Barmstedt, Germany (2014)
- *Arredores e rastros*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2010)

selected group exhibitions

- *A Escolha do Artista na Coleção Roberto Marinho*, Casa Roberto Marinho, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)
- *Cristina Canale, Vojtěch Kovařík, Brice Guilbert and Paulo Nazareth*, Mendes Wood DM, Villa Era, Italy (2020)
- *Xenia: Crossroads in Portrait Painting*, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, United States (2020)
- 8th Beijing Biennale, Beijing, China (2019)
- *Ateliê de Gravura: da tradição à experimentação*, Fundação Iberê Camargo (FIC), Porto Alegre, Brazil (2019)
- *Mulheres na Coleção MAR*, Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2018)
- *Alucinações à beira mar*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2017)
- *Land der Zukunft*, Lichthof–Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Germany (2013)

selected collections

- Coleção Gilberto Chateaubriand, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Coleção João Sattamini, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói (MAC-Niterói), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Sparkasse Oder-Spree, Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany
- Museum No Hero, Delden, The Netherlands

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