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Beatriz Milhazes
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The Vibrant Paintings of Beatriz Milhazes Arrive at the Guggenheim

BY GRACE EDQUIST

March 6, 2025



LAYER BY LAYER

Beatriz Milhazes, *Santa Cruz*, 1995. Ariel Ione Williams. © Beatriz Milhazes.

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When I visited Rio de Janeiro recently, I spent an afternoon at the Botanical Garden—home to orchids and bromeliads, giant monstera, and the grandest canopy of palms you'll ever see. It had just rained, and everything was slick and extra green, like a magical paradise. For decades the 65-year-old Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes has maintained a studio near the gardens. With this tropical flora as her backdrop, and with Brazil's complex past in mind, Milhazes builds up her canvases layer by layer. Embedded in her designs are flowers, fruits, and intricate patterns inspired by traditional textiles and 19th-century costumes. "I think that art, this practice—it's always kind of a mystery," Milhazes says.

This Friday, 15 of her spellbinding works go on view in one of the tower galleries at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Spanning 1995 to 2023, the exhibition, "Beatriz Milhazes: Rigor and Beauty," represents the artist's movement from ornamental arabesques to more geometric abstraction. Throughout, "color remains of the essence: vibrant, bold, her own chromatic universes," says Guggenheim curator Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, who organized the show. Perhaps no other artist has better succeeded at capturing Rio's exuberant blend of maximalism and grit.

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Beatriz Milhazes in front of her painting *The Four Seasons* in 2024 © Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: David Heald

Milhazes was born to an art historian mother and a lawyer father. Originally she studied journalism, but later, at her mother's suggestion, tried art school. "I felt completely that's where I was to stay," Milhazes remembers. Her heroes were the European modernists like Matisse and Mondrian, along with the North Star of Brazilian modernism, Tarsila do Amaral. She filters all of these influences through the lens of abstraction. "And then," says Gutiérrez-Guimarães, "you add her unique technique."

A few years out of art school, Milhazes started painting with acrylics on sheets of plastic; once the paint dries, she adheres it to her canvas. Finally, she peels away the plastic, leaving a reverse of the painted image. "This was an enormous opening for me," Milhazes says. With this method, she has more control over the shape and placement of her motifs; the works are still painterly, but at a remove. Detail from a

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brush—a string of pearl-like dots, say—might be later applied, but the artist's hand is elided by design.



Beatriz Milhazes, *Inalbis*, 1995–96 © BeatrizMilhazes Photo: Ariel Ione Williams, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Not long after this breakthrough in technique, Milhazes was exhibited at the influential Carnegie International in 1995. From there her global career took off, with appearances at the São Paulo Biennial (1998 and 2004) and the Venice Biennale (2003 and 2024). She has branched out to other art forms as well: sculptures and stage sets for her sister Marcia Milhazes's dance company.

“When she started as an artist in the early ’90s, traditional craftwork, like tapestries, weaving, they were considered women’s work, especially in Brazil, where everyone was looking to European modernism,” says Jessie Washburne-Harris of Pace, the gallery that has represented Milhazes since 2020. “Now, of course, craft has been embraced by the art world, and I love that that’s always been a part of what she does.” Steadfast and enchanting, like the city that made her.

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Beatriz Milhazes, *Carioca Landscape Paisagem Carioca*, 2000 © Beatriz Milhazes. Photo: Ariel Ione Williams, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York