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It's Nice That

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CRISTINA BANBAN'S LA MATRONA EXPLORES THE FEMALE FORM AS A VESSEL OF INTROSPECTION

Soft and explosive: Cristina's solo show
marks the latest evolution of her thoughtful,
defiant practice.

Harry Bennett



“I must have always been subconsciously drawn to art,” artist Cristina BanBan tells us, “because I asked my parents to take me to the local after school art program when I was five years old.” It was here that the Barcelona-born, Brooklyn-based artist learnt the tools of her trade, consistently going for over a decade. “I loved it so much, I even became a teacher there when I was 17!” Cristina recalls. “I was really enamored with being surrounded by artists and the sense of community they shared.” Now, marked by the launch of her 2023 solo exhibition *La Matrona* at London’s Skarstedt Gallery, Cristina embraces a new era of practice and style – one that has

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significantly evolved over time, whilst always rooted in figure and, ultimately, her pronounced perspective.

“The female form has always been the subject of my work, which for me is significant and endlessly inspiring for a number of reasons,” Cristina explains, including her own body’s experiences and their translation through canvas as a “natural extension” of each other. “But I also think that, for so long, the nude woman was depicted by men for the male gaze,” she details. “I am a woman representing myself and my body, or my friends and their bodies, and in that way it’s important to me to paint these women,” and in doing so creating space for a new, earnest narrative. “Once I start painting, the process is very intuitive and fluid,” Cristina continues, addressing how her style and process go hand-in-hand. “The playful element is probably a result of that intuition,” she adds, following her initial sketchbook drawings that begin as more considered, detailed forms. “Since it’s so unplanned, there are plenty of opportunities for a sense of freedom to come through.” Here, she raises a prominent theme that undeniably is laced across her work, no more overtly than through her 11 paintings for *La Matrona*, where soft, gentle expression collides with a confident, explosive energy.



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Speaking of *La Matrona*, Cristina explains: “It encapsulates a series of paintings in which emotion and gestural expression are prioritized,” having recently found that what she thought was “a more universal representation of women” in using their bodies was, in fact, ultimately reflective of her own appearance and emotional state. “The works exhibited in this show are a portrait of a physical and mental effort for which I have suffered on a personal level,” she says. “For me, that struggle is reflected in this series,” which sees the female form as a motif and capsule for individual introspection. More specifically, in discussing her piece *Tres Mujeres*, Cristina describes her draw to dark red, and indeed a darker palette in general, across the series. “The dark red is something of a literal manifestation of the phrase *La Matrona*,” a Spanish term for midwife, she explains, corresponding with the recurring theme of women raising their arms. “It’s almost a defiant pose, but it’s also classical,” Cristina recalls. “I think it represents both the strength of women and especially how my women don’t exist for the male gaze,” standing defiantly, both independently and as part of a community, perhaps akin to the very start of her artistic journey, where Cristina found painted expression by herself and as part of a passionate collective.

Looking ahead, Cristina is set to be featured at Málaga’s Museo Picasso, as part of a group exhibition exploring the renowned artist’s legacy. “It feels particularly special because of our shared Barcelona upbringing,” Cristina details, “and because he is an artist I have consistently turned to for inspiration,” concluding, “but mostly I am hoping to relax and let the inspiration come through for the next show!”

