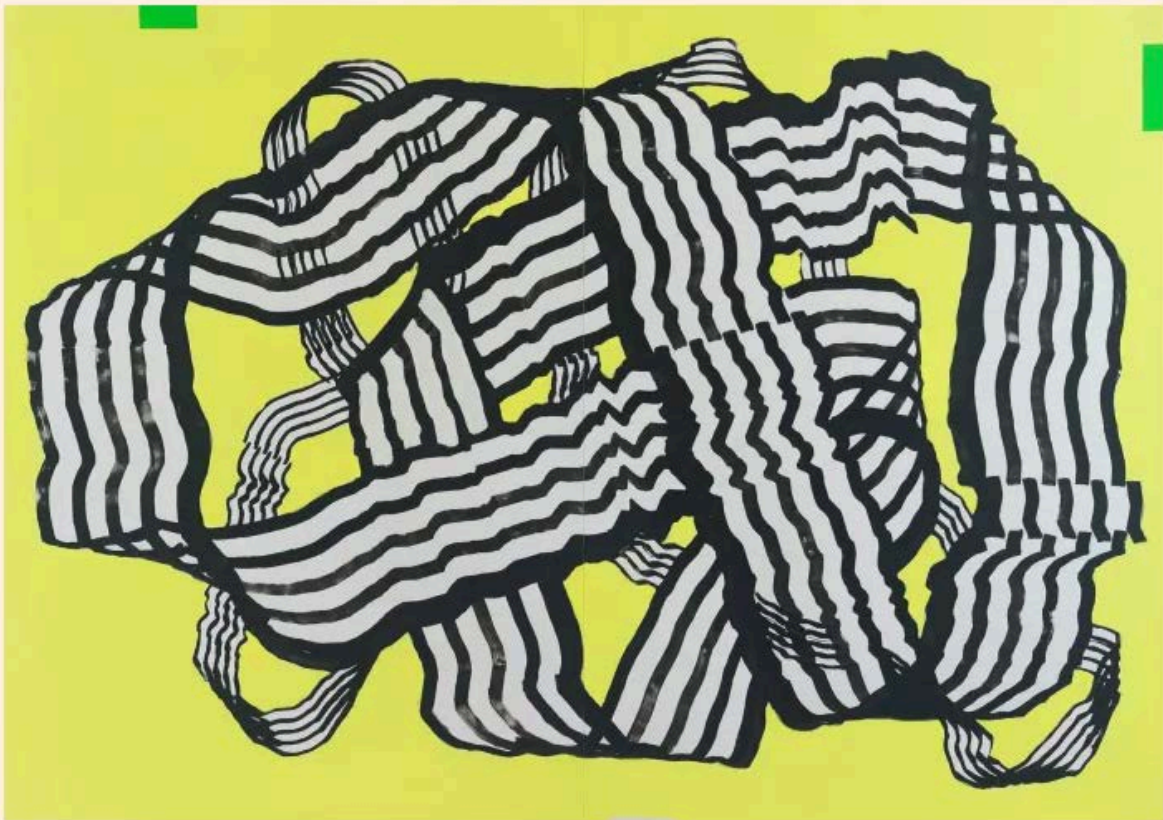


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Visual Arts

Beauty and devastation of women's art from Latin America

An 'extended reality' exhibition will showcase more than 100 female artists from the region



Sofia Clausse's 'unorientable' (2017)

Caroline Roux 6 HOURS AGO

Sofia Clause is 31 years old, an Argentinian-born artist who should have been studying at the Royal Academy for the past 12 months. Pandemic reality got in the way of that, so she has taken on a studio near to where she lives in east London, to work on an exhibition for London's Kupfer gallery, whenever it reopens. But before that happens, a show of her existing work — of tangled infinite lines, words and letters, in acrylic paint on newsprint — will appear online from March 8. Clause, courtesy of Kupfer, will be part of *Female Voices of Latin América*, a digital celebration of more than 100 living women artists from 15 countries — from Argentina to Venezuela — launched to coincide with International Women's Day.

The exhibition, or extravaganza, will be delivered by the new extended reality app Vortic, which allows artworks to be shown in real spaces and in an almost tangible form. "The sky's the limit, really, as long as you know what you want to do," says Vortic's special projects director Elena Saraceni, who was born in Argentina and grew up in Venezuela. "We can customise a solution for each gallery." While these services could cost substantial sums of money, the latest initiative is offering free space to every participant. "After this year, we wanted to do something supportive and meaningful and memorable," says Saraceni, "and I've always been passionate about art from Latin America, especially by women, and the fact that it's so badly represented in the contemporary art world." At fairs, such as Art Basel and Frieze, that do much to dictate the direction of international art collecting, Latin America is often under-represented.

Saraceni assembled a committee of like-minded women — curator Kiki Mazzucchelli (b. Brazil), PhD researcher Leslie Ramos (b. Venezuela), curator and lecturer Lassla Esquivel (b. Mexico) and Alessandra Modiano, a sales director at the Victoria Miro gallery in London who was born in Brazil. "We all wanted to create a greater awareness of women practitioners. This is not about selling work, it's about visibility," says Saraceni. Among the artists, some are well-known — such as the vibrant collagiste Beatriz Milhazes (at Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel) — but many are not.



'Solo Pintura II' (2018) by Sol Calero

The mid-career artist Sol Calero, born in Venezuela in 1982 and now based in Berlin, has more presence than some. Her eye-popping installation of a Venezuelan shopping mall at the Hamburger Bahnhof in 2017 won a public vote; her multicoloured bus made a popular appearance at Tate Liverpool in 2019.

“I know they say, ‘Let’s get Sol! Her work’s so colourful!’” says the artist over the phone from Tenerife, where she works in the winter months. “And it is fine just to look at the surface, but there are more references the deeper you go.” The Eurocentricity of her art education in Madrid appears in Matisse-like moments; the tension around the exoticism of the south pulses through her technicolour installations. “This might look bright,” she says of an installation featuring a bureau de change booth and hypnotically upholstered furniture that she created for the Future Generation Art Prize, which took place at the Pinchuk Art Centre in Kyiv in 2017. “But it’s about hyperinflation in Venezuela. It’s anger seen in colour.”

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Even to work on non-political subjects, in the context of Latin America, is political

Calero will be showing paintings at the Paris gallery Crèvecoeur. Meanwhile, at the project space she runs with her husband, the American artist Christopher Kline — called Kinderhook & Caracas after their hometowns — Calero is showing two artists: the Peruvian Andrea Canepa and

Ana Alenso from Venezuela. Alenso, like a number of Latin American artists, makes political work. Some involve dense accumulations of scaffolding parts, hoses, pipes and barrels that talk about illegal mining in the Amazon. But then politics is rarely off the agenda in many of the countries that occupy the southern parts of the Americas, even though it is impossible to give one identity to a name that embraces places as far apart culturally and geographically as Mexico, Chile and Costa Rica. Still, as Omayra Alvarado says, “Even to work on non-political subjects, in the context of Latin America, is political.”



Installation view of Ana Alenso's 'The Mine Gives, The Mine Takes' (2020) © Tomas Eyzaguirre

Alvarado is the director of Instituto de Visión, a green-fronted house in Bogotá, Colombia, where exhibitions run alongside a programme of research which revives and builds on the artistic discourse of 1980s Colombia, and pioneers such as Alicia Barney who started the country's ecological art movement.

"We're a female-owned gallery," explains Alvarado. "I'm a visual artist, then there is a curator and an art historian. For the Vortic show, we have decided to pair two artists — Carolina Caycedo and Nohemí Pérez, both working around the impact of extractivism." In Colombia, the presence of "new colonialism" — multinationals in search of natural resources — is often a story of coercion, community breakdown and abandonment by national politics. "There's no legislation," says Alvarado. "You can build a mega-dam in Colombia."

Pérez's work, in particular, explores the devastation of Catatumbo in the north-east of the country, where important rainforest has been destroyed by oil prospecting and cocaine laboratories. Appearing at first like luscious room-sized jungle panoramas, Pérez's murals gradually reveal scene after bloody scene: an oil company arriving with heavy machinery; townspeople pouring toxic chemicals on cocaine plantations. "Her objective is to make this region visible."



Pamela Castro's 'Laura Lima' (2020) from her 'Vigil' series

Even Luisa Strina, the grande dame of São Paulo's gallery scene, cannot steer away from this insistent background noise. Among her artists is Panmela Castro, the *nom d'artiste* of 40-year-old Anarkia Boladona, who uses graffiti to highlight violence against women. "My main objective, when I started my gallery in 1974, was to bring Brazilian art to the world," says Strina. "Until 1985, the country was closed to export. We were so isolated. It wasn't just about women artists, it was any artists. But now there's a new group, like Panmela, who are both artists and activists. Panmela even has an NGO and money made from projects goes to help people in need."

Strina herself has done much to enhance the reputations of female artists over the years: 20th-century practitioners such as Lygia Pape who have gone on to be the most significant to emerge from their country. "There were always women artists here," says Strina, "because in the 20th century, they had to stay at home, but were able to paint and make work; it was a tradition. Now some of them, like Lygia Clark, Tarsila [do Amaral] and Ana Maria Maiolino, are the most important."

In 2017, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles staged a show called *Radical Women*, which focused on 120 women artists working in Latin America between 1960 and 1985. It has been a touchstone ever since, upheld as a major curatorial exercise. "But we wanted to celebrate artists who are very much still alive," says Leslie Ramos, one of the organisers of *Female Voices*. "There has been a tendency to celebrate women late in their careers." Indeed, the Cuban-American [Carmen Herrera](#), though a top-tier minimalist painter, was finally given a retrospective museum show — at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York — in 2016. She was 101. "Let's at least have a record of women in this sector, working at this point in time," says Ramos.

Let's not make them wait until they're 100.

'Female Voices of Latin América' will be on the Vortic platform from March 8-May 2, at vortic.art