

THE

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A/P V
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Paula Rego



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Paula Rego

This page (clockwise from top left):
Untitled 3 (from abortion series), Paula Rego 1999, courtesy of Paula Rego and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Paula Rego; *Loving Bewick* (from Jane Eyre series) Paula Rego 2001, courtesy of Paula Rego and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Paula Rego; *Flood* (from Pendle Witches series), Paula Rego 1996, courtesy of Paula Rego and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Paula Rego; *Children and their Stories*, Paula Rego 1989, courtesy Paula Rego and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Paula Rego *Little Miss Muffet II* (from Nursery Rhymes series), Paula Rego 1989, courtesy of Paula Rego and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Paula Rego.
Opposite page: Paula Rego © Nick Willing 2020; nickwilling.co.uk



Imaginative power

This month, Arnolfini is exhibiting the works of two extraordinarily creative minds. Here, we take a closer look at the work of world-renowned artists **Dame Paula Rego** and **Donna Huanca** and discover the inspiration behind their phenomenal creations...

I suppose it wasn't until we lost access to Bristol's rich culture and flourishing arts scene that we realised just how lucky we were to have such an eclectic mix of innovative artists, writers and musicians on our doorstep. Since venues, galleries and art spaces reopened last year, we've been hanging on with white knuckles, appreciating them for all that they are, and all that they bring us.

This month, one gallery in particular has caught our eye as it prepares to dazzle with an endless supply of world-renowned talent. From 5 February, Arnolfini will be welcoming a host of phenomenal creatives to its gallery space. Among them will be Portuguese-British visual artist Dame Paula Rego and Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca.

Rego – unarguably one of the most important figurative artists of her generation – returns to Arnolfini almost 40 years after her first exhibition at the gallery in 1983, creating an opportunity for a new generation of visitors to explore her subversive stories. Featuring over 70 prints from across her extensive career, the exhibition ventures inside the artist's disquieting imagination in which she casts herself as a storyteller, interweaving her wit and dark humour into stories old and new. In Rego's world, women are often repositioned as the protagonists and heroes as she reinterprets classic folk tales while instilling issues of gender, power, poverty and politics.

Equally as spectacular, Huanca presents a new and immersive site-specific installation by performance, choreography, video and sensory interventions. Most remarkably, she will build her experiential

installations around the history and architecture of Arnolfini, enhancing the sensory elements of visitors' interactions with scent and texture. At the very heart of her work is an exploration of the human body and its relationship to space and identity. The exhibition, *CUEVA DE COPAL*, will plunge the viewer into a cocoon-like space, encouraging them to separate their experience from the world around them.

Ahead of the openings this month, we had the pleasure of speaking to Donna Huanca, delving deeper into her extraordinary body of work, while simultaneously learning more about the life and career of Paula Rego.

PAULA REGO: TELLING TALES ON CANVAS

Rego's *Subversive Stories* exhibition, will be a chance to not only celebrate an artist of the highest calibre and study the meanings behind her paintings – many of which draw on nursery rhymes and fables – but to learn more about the narrative of her own life.

Rego recently recalled her fond memories of exhibiting at Arnolfini in 1983 and told the gallery that she was looking forward to showing her prints to Bristol audiences once again. "When the prints are shown well, their stories dominate," she said. "I'm very interested to see how it all comes together."

Rego was born in Lisbon in 1935 when the country was under the oppressive fascist regime of the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar. It is said that the society in which she lived stoked her



need for freedom of speech in her art. From a young age, her work was often courageously political; consistently and defiantly addressing complex power dynamics in both personal, romantic relationships as well as in war and exile.

At the age of 16, she was sent to a finishing school in Kent. From there, she moved to London to study at the Slade School of Art, soon becoming an exhibiting member of the London Group, working alongside painters David Hockney and Frank Auerbach. In 1957, she returned to Portugal with her husband, the artist Victor Willing, and their three children, before finally settling back in the UK capital in 1963.

Rego came to prominence in Britain after her first major solo exhibition at the Air Gallery in 1981 and subsequently at the Serpentine Gallery in 1988, which saw her become the first National Gallery artist-in-residence in 1990.

Rego's work ranges from painting, pastel, and prints to sculptural installations. Perhaps the most well-known of her collection is the Dog Woman series: large-scale pastels depicting women in dog-like positions, scavenging for food, sleeping and grooming. Addressing the series, she once said: "To be a dog woman is not necessarily to be downtrodden; that has very little to do with it. In these pictures every woman's a dog woman, not downtrodden, but powerful. To be bestial is good. It's physical. Eating, snarling, all activities to do with sensation are positive. To picture a woman as a dog is utterly believable."

An uncompromising artist of imaginative power, Rego's influence has transcended the world of art and penetrated the cultural consciousness. In 2007, her abortion series, which depicts women in the aftermath of illegal abortions, was so powerful that it was credited with influencing the public to campaign for a second referendum, after which abortion was finally legalised in Portugal.

Today, Rego is internationally renowned as having revolutionised the way in which women are represented. She is one of only four painters to receive a damehood and is widely acknowledged as one of Portugal's leading artists. In fact, Rego is respected to such an extent

that, in 2006, a museum was built in her honour: Casa das Histórias – the House of Stories, situated in Cascais, Portugal. It was designed entirely in keeping with her wishes, having indicated that it should be "fun, lively and also a bit mischievous."

DONNA HUANCE: A SOLACE FROM EVERYDAY LIFE

CUEVA DE COPAL will be Huanca's first time exhibiting in the south west and we couldn't wait to discover the inspiration behind her creations. "For this exhibition, I wanted to make a cave-like, hermetic space," she tells us. "In my practice, I often explore cycles of light and dark, and the physical and emotional states that can be achieved through their interplay. For *CUEVA DE COPAL*, I embrace and experiment with darkness and I think it brings about a type of intimacy and solitude that opens up possibilities for reflection and meditation.

"I'm really excited for *CUEVA DE COPAL* to open. It has been such a special opportunity to think about the Arnolfini and its unique audience who will encounter this installation. After the last two years, I hope that this exhibition can provide a glitch to their everyday life."

Huanca's previous installations have seen her transform the Copenhagen Contemporary's industrial space of the former B&W welding hall, the early 18th century palace of the Belvedere Museum in Vienna and the high desert landscape surrounding the Ballroom Marfa in Texas. Well-known for working primarily with nude bodies, she draws particular attention to the skin as a complex surface via which we experience the world around us. By exposing the naked body, while at the same time concealing it beneath layers of paint, cosmetics and latex, Huanca and her performers urge the viewer to confront their own instinctive response to the human form.

CUEVA DE COPAL, however, will see the artist move away from using the live body as a key element and produce new pieces through ideas first seen in the reflective sculptures at Ballroom Marfa. Huanca will incorporate mirrored and metallic surfaces, inviting audiences to view their own reflection alongside glimpses of body, skin and human



form in her monumental and multi-panelled paintings. She will immerse her audiences in intimate moments, encouraging them to explore their own body in relation to perceptions of space and time.

“The mirrored surfaces offer multiple perspectives and portals into the exhibition,” she says. “They work to destabilize the audience by augmenting their sense of sight. The viewer is also incorporated into the landscape, lending their body and movement to the exhibition.”

Born to Bolivian parents but raised in Chicago, Huanca graduated in Fine Art at the University of Houston, in 2004, before going on to study at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and at Städelschule, a renowned art school in Frankfurt. Huanca has exhibited widely including at solo exhibitions in Los Angeles, Shanghai, London and New York. She is a recipient of the Hirshhorn Artist Award, Fulbright Scholarship, DAAD Artist Grant and the Francis Greenberg Award, to name but a few. Throughout her career, she has extensively explored the human body, which, she says rather profoundly, has taught her that “everything is temporary”.

“This is something that I pursue in my practice,” she explains. “These cycles of regeneration and decay. *CUEVA DE COPAL* is meant to be an intimate encounter with oneself – to be a solace from everyday life and provide a space for privacy and contemplation.”

A space that we are very much looking forward to exploring. It is truly remarkable to see such outstanding artistic talent arrive in the city this month. We have been granted with the opportunity to admire both Rego and Huanca’s world-class art in one fell swoop at Arnolfini – how lucky we are.

• *Donna Huanca: CUEVA DE COPAL and Paula Rego: Subversive Stories will be at the Arnolfini from 5 February to 29 May; arnolfini.org.uk*

This page and opposite: Paintings featured in *CUEVA DE COPAL*, courtesy of Peres Projects, Berlin; portrait of Donna Huanca, photograph by Tobias Willmann.

