

BEATRIZ MILHAZES

FREE FLOATING



Beatriz Milhazes is among the most respected artists in the international art scene. Paintings, stage sets, façade design, textile and ceramic works, as well as mobile installations comprise the oeuvre of the Brazilian artist, born in Rio de Janeiro in 1960. She develops her basic motifs from a juxtaposition of the colorfulness of Brazil's tropical botany and culture, and European-American

tradition. Her ensuing, entirely unique style comprises simultaneously pulsating and structured compositions of wave-shaped leaf tendrils, floral patterns, and ornamental abstractions, geometric colored figures, and rhythmic movements in a wealth of luminous colors.

The new building for the Nicola Erni Collection (NEC) allows a unique installation by Beatriz Milhazes to become an integral component of the collection premises. This constitutes something special in many ways: for one, it is the third major mobile installation that Milhazes has ever realized, and for another, it is her first commissioned work created for a private museum as a permanent, site-specific sculpture, while last but not least, *Gamboa* contains the continuation of a story that is closely related to the life and person of Beatriz Milhazes.

The Fondation Beyeler devoted Switzerland's first exhibition to Beatriz Milhazes in 2010. For that, the artist created a cycle of the seasons composed of four magnificent paintings as well as a mobile entitled *Gamboa Seasons* (470 x 710 x 146 cm). The mobile is made up of decorative elements, for which Milhazes found inspiration in the ceremonial wagons, parades, and opulent textiles of the costumes donned by the kings, queens, princesses, and baianas at the Carnival in her home town Rio de Janeiro.

The vibrant construction made up of thin threads with plastic objects, pearls, artificial flowers, little, colorful paper plates, and bits of material hangs freely from the ceiling, into the space, presenting a further development of the first mobile that the artist created in 2006 for the stage set *Tempo de Verão* (summer time) for her sister's dance troupe, the Marcia Milhazes Dance Company. *Gamboa I* at NEC is, consequently, the continuation of a creation that harbors characteristic emotions and the artist's intuition.

When beholders stand under the nine-meter high, monumental installation composed of three downwardly cascading gyrations, a waterfall of colors and forms seems to almost inevitably pour over them, setting them into a drunken state. This explosion of forms, colors, styles, and quotations spontaneously evokes a wealth of images in beholders, carrying them off to a shimmering world. For Milhazes, the mobile moves between symmetry and asymmetry, a bipolarity that she aptly describes with her desire to find "ordered freedom".¹

In terms of technique, the various versions of the *Gamboa* mobile are connected with Milhazes's early development of canvas works that move

in a charged relationship between representativeness and abstraction. She transfers the idea of the cut-out collage pictures, made freehand, and glued in her characteristic, irregular method, to three-dimensional volumes. She hereby orchestrates details to fascinatingly beautiful compositions, which nonetheless cannot be reduced to a purely decorative level; for that, they lack the necessary consistent precision and precious-ornamental arrangement.

In her art, Milhazes proves to be a master in combining opposing elements and conflicting thoughts. She thus fuses, for example, the naïve style of the Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral with a European formal language oriented on artists the likes of Henri Matisse, Wassily Kandinsky, Robert Delaunay, and Op Art. As Milhazes says, "I need to have all these elements and put them together. They are in some sort of a conflict that will never really end up anywhere. There are not peaceful surfaces. There should be some struggle on the surface and then create some activities for your eyes".²

The impulsiveness of her style comes through mainly in the unconventional, intuitive application of color. The artist orients on European art history for her treatment of color. She finds the way that Henri Matisse applies color particularly fascinating—Matisse, whom she claims, was "my first and permanent reference".³ For both Matisse and Milhazes, color stands for expression and spontaneous emphasis, but has no mimetic function.⁴ At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that the most important and well-known artworks of Brazil are, for the most part, conceptual or constructivist. In Brazilian art history, there is traditionally no special interest in color; even though the country presents itself in such glorious color, art does not tend to reflect this.

Otherwise, Milhazes' artworks arise entirely from Brazilian culture: *Gamboa's* improvised, cheerful elements sashaying downward and back and forth mediate a carefree attitude towards life. Everything moves free of any functionality, simply for the sake of itself and its beauty; irrational and romantic, in harmony with *Modernismo* the movement of Latin-American cultural renewal dominant at the time, which promoted a carefree attitude and turned against the country's historically-conditioned, culturally stagnating uniformity. Postulated was a liberated self-awareness, as described by the writer Érico Veríssimo, among others.

Gamboa I—the free-floating, well-balanced structure playfully dancing in the drafts brings the various characteristics of the Nicola Erni Collection together in a common rhythm: the interest in textiles, colors, and fashion (fashion photography, Fleury, Milhazes), the interplay of abstraction and figuration (Schnabel, Basquiat, Rauschenberg), the impulsive (Basquiat, Milhazes, Schnabel), tangible, narrative installations (Aitken, van Benthem, Elmgreen & Dragset, Milhazes, Noble & Webster), and the courage to create artworks of unusual dimensions (Basquiat, van Benthem, Milhazes, Schnabel).

Florentine Rosemeyer

¹ Michiko Kono, "Geordnete Freiheit", in *Beatriz Milhazes*, ex. cat. Fondation Beyeler: Riehen/Basel, Ostfildern 2012, pp. 30–45.

² Interview with Beatriz Milhazes, in *RES Art World/World Art*, no. 2, May 2008, Istanbul 2008, p. 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ Schwabsky, Barry, "Beatriz Milhazes, 'From Painting to the Book,'" in *Parkett* no. 85, July 2009, Zurich 2009, p. 146.



Gamboa I, 2013

