

Il Sole **24 ORE**

Lola Montes, Plastic Alchemy
for the New Circe of Ceramics

by Filippo Brunamonti
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Installation view, *Lola Montes: Cirica*, Vito Schnabel Gallery, 2023; Artworks © Lola Montes; Photo by Argenis Apolinario; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery.

New York - Kindness. It's the Southern word carried by the wind to the West Village. The word that saves a child, an artfully struck gong, the latest incarnation of dressed cashmere. Kindness is how our day begins and ends, climb onto Lola Montes' mermaid waves and the laces of her shaman boots. From *Cirica's* 'montage of attractions' - the Lola Montes exhibition until January 20th at the Vito Schnabel Gallery which has ceramics as a leitmotif for painting and sculptural works, accompanied by artichoke-candlesticks inspired by the Torcello castraura - to an unexpected visit to the father Julian's house, Palazzo Chupi, in which "Venice meets Leland" and three enormous luggages of an ethereal femme fatale, just unpacked, stand out under the plates, oil and bondo on wood of *The Patients and the Doctors* (1978).

On the heights of Scicli

You really have the sensation of traveling on the wings of an angel when Lola leads the way. And of the angels thrown onto the hills of Scicli, where she has been living and painting for a few years, Lola shares at least six flashbacks: a fig tree in the center of her garden in Sicily; the fire to set under the moon when "I feel that everything I will do in the future is already inside me, it's just a matter of keeping this space pulsating so that it can happen"; the evergreen carob tree with its Mediterranean cocoa that challenges Sampieri and every 30th August (the anniversary of the day Lola was born) turns her seed into a "musical carat"; the silence of time spent meditating with Sadhguru on Velliangiri mountain (the South Kailash) in Coimbatore, India; the south of the Kathmandu valley, where Dakshinkali stands, a temple dedicated to the goddess Kali, among sacred and bloody offerings, and a priest who shouts to her, behind the rustling of the trees, "You are not concentrating enough on faith!"; finally, the color blue - a potassium silicate strongly colored with cobalt oxide - obtained by Kremer Pigmente, in Munich, following a 19th century recipe, melted at around 1150 degrees Celsius, tempered and ground into powder, with the addition of oil and a resin solution ("I carry it in my bag to portray my nephew's face").



Lola Montes
Cirica



Top: Portrait of Lola Montes in Sicily by Alex Majoli; Installation view, *Lola Montes: Cirica*, Vito Schnabel Gallery, 2023; Artworks © Lola Montes; Photo by Argenis Apolinario; Courtesy the artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery. Bottom: Opening of *Cirica* at Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York. Photo by Paul Bruinooge/Patrick McMullan Company.

My wind

"I'm riding my own wind," Lola tells us as we leave West 11th Street and crawl toward a Dominican deli in search of rice and beans. "I traveled a long time, I had to give up comfort to find my identity. A self-exile that allowed me to learn, humbly, from local artists, all over the world." The angels still speak to her: from the godfather Rene Ricard - poet, art critic, painter, a pathological flamboyant elegance à la Wilde - to the sculpture in plaster, linen, velvet, wood, wire mesh, newsprint and coral rocks *Becoming Our Mothers' Mother* (2016) in memory of her maternal grandmother Anne-Marie Good, who died aged 102, modeled on a pocket-sized statue found in an abandoned house in Haiti.



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Consequence

“If God sends angels to assist human beings, why can’t he also send human beings to assist their brothers” asks Kyriacos C. Markides in *The Magus of Strovolos*, one of the most popular healing passages dear to Lola. But Lola’s worm is now called Consequation, and with her new ceramic works exhibited in *Cirica* she seems to sanction an act of scarcity and abundance inspired both by the picturesque Homeric myths of Sicily and by the idiosyncratic clay works of Lucio Fontana, up to to the classic ceramics of Luca della Robbia. *Cirica*, explains the artist, “derives from the Cirica peninsula, where fishermen gather to collect ancient fragments of Roman and Greek ceramics that emerged from the sea; in mythology it is known as the home of Circe, daughter of the sun god Helios”. Described in Homer’s *Odyssey* as Odysseus’ enchantress and the phalanx behind the transformation of his ship’s crew into pigs, Circe could transform humans into other life forms, both as punishment and as a means of revealing their true nature interior. Here then Lola becomes an alchemist of the moulded, glazed and cooked earth: she bows to the intuition of her master ceramist from Bagheria, Maurizio Scianna, for the working of the majolica and the direction of the paint which follows the fire, up to the scientific use of the hydrometer and clay which from malleable mud acquires a fixed shape, under the silhouette of Mount Etna. If on the shelves of the Schnabel bookshop the sublime red cover of *Blinky Palermo* or the book *The Shape of Time* by George Kubler, we know that inside the tall and masculine gaze of Lola Montes there is a revolution. Still in existence. As Ricard would say, it is a revolution “much more than real, much more than new, and it will never be understood”.

The preceding article has been translated from Italian.