

# Maison de l'Amérique latine in Paris

27<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

## Alicia Paz

### *Juntas (Together)*

Curators: Julie Crenn and Lassla Esquivel



Olympe de Gouges, 2021. Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 30 cm, photo Steve White

Press release

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Publication :

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48 pages.

The next exhibition at the Maison de l'Amérique latine, from 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022, is dedicated to the work of the Franco-Mexican-American artist Alicia Paz, who hereby proposes a reflection on a transcultural, collective and intimate history of women.

Co-curator Julie Crenn explains:

Alicia Paz's paintings, sculptures and installations are the vehicles of a rhizomatic thinking process whose vortex is fuelled by her personal experience. She was born and raised in Mexico, before living in the United States, France and now the UK. It is therefore not surprising that the artist explores **notions of displacement, territories, genealogies, identities, cultures, aesthetics, diversity and representation**. These questions open up and are deployed within works that are conceived as fragments of a visual and critical reflection in perpetual movement.



Portraits Juntas (Together) 2021, photo Steve White

Alicia Paz draws her references from a variety of cultural domains, including the **decorative arts** (tapestry, wallpaper, Delft plates, *azulejos*, jewellery, etc.), **history books, botanical drawings and geographical and maritime maps**. She paints portraits of women on canvas. Who are they? Women who matter to Alicia Paz. Women she admires, who have supported her, who inspire her or who move her. They are her friends, members of her family, anonymous women and famous women (politicians, scientists, poets, authors, theoreticians, activists, singers, artists, etc.). **From one portrait to the next there is Nina Simone, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Virginia Woolf, Marie Curie, Sonia Delaunay, Elvia Carrillo Puerto, Rosa Luxemburg, Angela Davis, Ana Mendieta, Billie Holiday, Olympe de Gouges, Phillis Wheatley, Rosario Castellanos, Mary Shelley, Anna Julia Cooper, Esperanza Brito, Audre Lorde and many others.** Alicia Paz brings together women from different eras, cultures, social classes and geographies. Together (*juntas*) they are the protagonists of their own history (*herstory*). Within an organic and localised visual reflection, Alicia Paz brings together the geographies, temporalities, experiences and struggles of the protagonists represented.

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Far from an eternal patriarchal representation where women are considered as objects, sensual, silent and docile, here women actively express themselves and claim a shared history.

The works, from various series, are seductive and appeal to a collective imagination. If they are the result of strong visual intentions, they also state a distinct political desire: that of making visible a transcultural, collective and intimate history of women. It is a question of putting faces, names, paths and discourses to the multiple chapters of a history that suffers from amnesia.

(J.C)

## Biography

Alicia Paz is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, ENSBA-Paris, Goldsmiths College and the Royal College of Art, London.

Her exhibition **Juntas (Together)** at the Maison de l'Amérique latine is the **third part** of a broader research and production project supported by the **Arts Council England**. The first two exhibitions in this triptych include **Río y Mar (River and Sea)** at the Beecroft Gallery, Southend-on-Sea (UK), produced as part of the **Estuary 2021** regional festival, and **River Makers**, currently on show at the 20-21 Visual Arts Centre, North Lincolnshire (UK).

She recently exhibited at the FRAC Ile-de-France, Château de Rentilly, in the group show *Le Cabaret du Néant* (September-December 2020), and participated in *Life Stories* (May-September 2021), a group show at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (UK). As a multicultural artist, her work was featured in the group exhibition *Tous, des sang-mêlés*, at MACVAL, Vitry-sur-Seine, France (2017).

Previous solo exhibitions include Dukan Gallery in Leipzig (2014), the Institut Culturel du Mexique in Paris (2013), Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London (2006), and Ruth Benzacar Gallery in Buenos Aires (2005).

A semi-retrospective exhibit was presented at the L.A.C. in Sigean in collaboration with the FRAC Occitanie (2010). She has also participated in various international exhibitions on contemporary painting such as *Heute. Spektrum. Malerei.* at Kunstmuseum Magdeburg (2012) and *Slow Magic, Contemporary Approaches to Painting* at the Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (2009).

Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas, 160 x 130 cm, Photo Brendan Cox



## Alicia Paz interviewed by Lassa Esquivel

A.P. *Juntas* is the third phase and culmination of a year-long research and artistic production project, starting in May 2021 and continuing throughout March 2022. This international exhibition triptych takes place in three separate venues –with a different consideration of the local context each time. The show first aired with *Río y Mar* at the



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Becroft Art Gallery, Southend-on-Sea, United Kingdom, from May to August 2021, with a particular focus on the Thames Estuary, its connections and its aesthetics. The second part, *River Makers*, opened at 20-21 Visual Arts Centre in Scunthorpe, United Kingdom, from September to December 2021, this time with an emphasis on the river Trent and the notion of water as a symbol of flux, as well as on aspects of relocation, migration, heritage and cultural exchange. The last chapter, *Juntas*, is a showcase at the Maison de l'Amérique latine in Paris, France, from January to March 2022. This third exhibition sheds light on a group of women whose representation consolidates symbolically the multi-layered research that Alicia has carried out across the previous iterations: cross-cultural connections, identity, and a multidisciplinary exploration through her practice. Alicia is not only making visible the network of women that have inspired, supported and educated her, both personally and professionally, but also the manifold aspects of her own diverse background and interests.

*L.E. 1-Alicia, the three stages of this project are conceived together but have evolved separately and organically, as you focused on each location. Could you elaborate on how each context impacted the original exhibition concept? From the time of the project's conception to the actual fruition of each iteration, what are the most valuable aspects that each location added to your research, and more importantly, to your body of work?*

**A.P.** As the project evolved, I established a dialogue with each context. For instance, the period wedding dresses and bathing costumes from Becroft Gallery's collection became a sort of "back story", a subtext or reference to women's history in my research process. Also, being part of the regional festival Estuary 2021 led to enriching conversations with other local venues and artists. I decided to paint portraits of the first women who swam across the English Channel. Regarding North Lincolnshire in the second venue, it was exciting for me to learn about two notable local women, a novelist and a folklorist. I was also interested in the historic European migration to the area in relation to water management, thinking of the Dutch connections to my representations of Delftware. I also felt drawn to depict sea creatures, as well as river Trent fauna, such as eels, which I learned have extended migration patterns. For the Maison de l'Amérique latine, I have focused on female portraiture more broadly, combining instinctively individuals from my personal life, together with historical figures I feel inspired by. Gradually, the symbol for organic connectivity, exchange and flux has shifted from water to the motif of the tree. The *Juntas* portrait series acquired new "participants" at every stage.

*L.E. 2-One of the issues we have discussed often while working on this project is the importance to you of making women visible: acknowledging their public and private lives as equally relevant, making information about them available to people, carving a place for women in a world where this still needs to be fought for, all coming together in the shape of a committed and personal research that unveils, reveals and maps the connections between people, ideas, experiences and geographies. That requires a large amount of study of these women and a commitment to them, before*



Estuario, 2021. Mixed media on wood, painted steel basis, 198 x 145 x 40 cm.

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*depicting them, as you have to know them and connect with them. This is evident in the exhibit Juntas in such a way that symbolically can be read as a "family tree" that represents different aspects and interests of your personal and professional life. How do you weave that register, a testimony of these women via your research, together with your artistic practice?*

**A.P.** If I may borrow the concept you like to call bio-geographies (in contrast to biographies), my decision to paint a particular woman's portrait flows very much from the path my own life has taken, and my having an 'arborescent' sense of identity. By this I mean that one has roots in a particular place, and in my case that is Mexico, but as we develop existentially, reaching towards new horizons, our interests, chance meetings, conscious and unconscious decisions take us in many directions, leading to multiple encounters. I have been fortunate to live and work not only in Mexico but also in the USA, France, Germany, and now in the UK. These multiple "branches" of my life are all interconnected...The remarkable women whose portraits I have painted are held in a common conversation, across time and across cultures, at least in my mind's eye. I hope to humbly pay homage to them, and to claim a kind of matrilineage, a symbolic sisterhood.

**L.E.** *3-In relation to notions of visibility and invisibility, there is still a tendency in art history and in the art world, of giving a more prominent position to fine arts in contrast to arts & crafts. Your practice is rich in cross-disciplinary references, your paintings and sculptures often suggest other media such as textiles, ceramics and jewellery to mention a few, and you do this sometimes in a playful, humorous way, sometimes metaphorically, and sometimes even as technical challenge, like when you use trompe-l'oeil painting to mimic ceramics. Why is this important to you? –or what is your interest behind this?*

**A.P.** I have always been attracted to mise-en-abîme structures, as paintings-within-paintings. What fascinates me about ceramic tiles is that they are often hand-painted objects, and also that, depending on their provenance, they incorporate so much history and so many cross-cultural influences. I saw blue-and-white Talavera tiles as a child growing up in Mexico, and this resonated pleasurably within me, when, later in my life while living in Europe, I came across English and Dutch Delftware, as well as Portuguese azulejos. It is a very rich iconography for me to explore, in so far as it reflects my own cultural hybridity and nomadic journey. I am also interested in the notion of "translation" from one medium of expression to another, from one cultural register to another, as a way of layering interpretations. The history of trompe-l'oeil painting is part of this, as a playful masquerade, one material pretending to be another. They say imitation is the greatest flattery. By painting images that reference a ceramic tradition, I am also celebrating that beautiful craft, legitimising and elevating it, just as I aim to do with the remarkable and often unsung history of women's lives.

**L.E.** *4-The theme of water is present in the first two titles of the show, and although it is not evident in your paintings, it is always suggested through textures, through water creatures such as octopuses and eels, also via representations of ships and pirates, and with the grandiose presence of the marine blue that connects many of your works in this series. What is the significance of water in terms of a conceptual connector and as significant symbolic element of this series?*

**A.P.** I have been inspired by authors such as Mira Schor, who writes about the "goo" of painting and femininity, and also by Luce Irigaray, who approaches fluidity both as a philosophical concept and an embodied materiality. I like to use water as a metaphor not only for identity, but also to evoke movement and connection. Many of the women I paint have undergone some kind of displacement or dislocation, at times

literal/geographical, at times emotional/existential, like in my works *Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere* and also in *Pirates and Poets*. My use of blue, my representing boats and waves in some of the works, and even my depiction of historical female pirates in conjunction with poets such as Emily Dickinson, who wrote so many poems about the sea, is a way for me to pay tribute to brave, creative explorations of the self, which is as deep and vast as an ocean...!

As a note to conclude with, I would like to add that working with both of you, Lassla, and Julie, has been a very insightful, fruitful and enriching collaboration, for which I am so grateful. We did this project together, *Juntas* in every sense of the word!

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*Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere*,  
 2019. Mixed media on canvas, 162 x  
 130cm. Photo Brendan Cox



*Ana Mendieta*, 2021. Mixed media on  
 canvas , 40.5 x 30.5 cm. Photo Steve  
 White



*Anna Julia Cooper*, 2021. Mixed  
 media on canvas, 25.5 x 20 cm.  
 Photo Steve White



*Louisa May Alcott*, 2021. Mixed media on canvas, 25 x  
 20 cm. Photo Steve White

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*Olympe de Gouges, 2021. Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 30 cm. Photo Steve White*



*Rosario Castellanos. Mixed media on canvas 30.7 x 25.5 cm Photo Steve White*



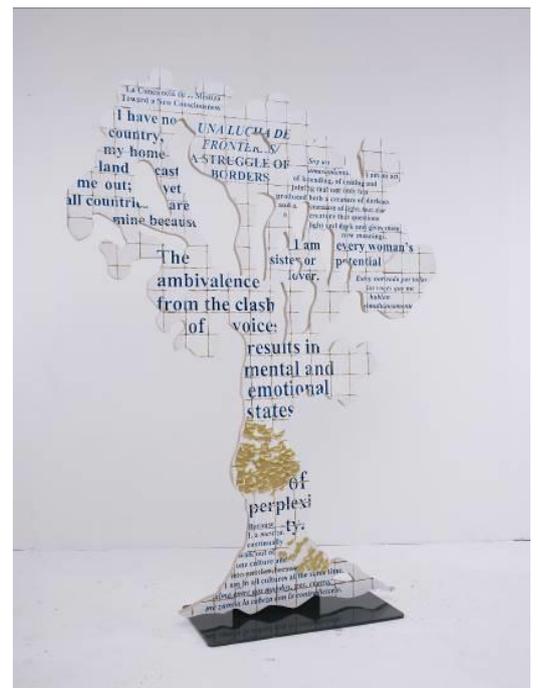
*Estuario, 2021. Mixed media on wood, painted steel basis, 198 x 145 x 40 cm*



*Portraits Juntas (Together), 2021. Photo Steve White*



*Pirates and Poets, 2021. Mixed media on canvas, 190 x 130 cm. Photo Steve White*



*Estuario, 2021. Mixed media on wood, painted steel basis, 198 x 145 x 40 cm*

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*Estuario (detail)*, 2021. Mixed media on wood, painted steel basis, 198 x 145 x 40 cm



Alicia Paz, photo Anthony Lycett

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Alicia Paz in his workshop, photo Alessandro Ceccarelli

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