

Press Release

Luchita Hurtado. Just Down the Street

Hauser & Wirth Zürich

13 March – 23 May 2020

Opening reception: Thursday 12 March, 6 – 8 pm



In an extensive eighty-year career spanning various artistic movements and styles, Venezuelan-born, Los Angeles-based artist Luchita Hurtado has dedicated her practice to investigating the interconnectedness of the natural world, the cosmos and the environment. For her inaugural presentation at Hauser & Wirth Zürich entitled 'Just Down the Street', an intimate selection of Hurtado's early works from the 1960s are on display – a dynamic series of drawings and paintings on paper that reflect a moment of flux between abstraction and figuration. By merging visceral and abstract sensibilities, the works on view express a universality and transcendence that have continued to define the artist's practice for decades.

Hurtado, still working at 99, has an innate dedication and capacity for creation which has formed her artistic vocabulary, speaking to the multicultural and experiential contexts that have shaped the artist's extraordinary life and career. Born in Maiquetía, Vargas, Venezuela in 1920, she emigrated to the United States in 1928, settling in New York where she attended classes at the Art Students League. In the mid-forties, Hurtado freelanced as a fashion illustrator for Condé Nast and window designer for Lord & Taylor. She relocated to Mexico City in the late 1940s then moved to San Francisco Bay the following decade, ultimately settling in Los Angeles where she continues to make work today. Although associated with a vast network of internationally renowned artists and intellectuals throughout the decades, including Mexican muralists, Surrealists, and members of Dynaton, Hurtado's practice always remained an independent – and until recent years, largely private – pursuit.

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The 1960s signalled an evolution and fluid shift towards representation in Hurtado's practice and marked a new trajectory to uncover forms of self-portraiture in the late 1960s and 1970s. Through a coalescence of surrealist figuration, biomorphism and geometric abstraction, executed in brightly hued palettes, works in the presentation such as 'Just Down the Street' (1965) and 'Portrait' (1965/68) uncover the full expressive potential of Hurtado's variety of form and breadth of experimentation during this period in her oeuvre.

Combining abstraction and representation with mystical effect, pieces such as the 'Untitled' works from 1961, morph from landscapes into figures on two-dimensional planes. The compositions incorporate sweeping lines and curves, seemingly depicting the interaction of bodies and muscular forms. These totemic figures coupled with the pinks, blues, and greens that draw inspiration from the landscapes and tropical flora of Mexico and her native Venezuela, demonstrate Hurtado's deeply rooted belief in the mutuality of all living organisms. The works in Zurich celebrate Hurtado's radical expression of the human form in constant dialogue with the world and emphasise the transcendental possibilities of a keen awareness of and close relationship to nature.

Hurtado's presentation at Hauser & Wirth Zürich will coincide with the artist's touring survey exhibition 'I Live I Die I Will Be Reborn'. Originating at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery in London in 2019, the exhibition opened this February at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and will subsequently travel to Museo Tamayo in Mexico City in 2020.

About the artist

Born in Maiquetía, Venezuela, in 1920, Luchita Hurtado has dedicated her painting and drawing practice to the investigation of universality and transcendence. Her body of work is cohered through an examination of self-affirmation, introduced in her early period from the 1940s to 1960s through experimentations with abstraction and figuration in acrylic paint, oil, crayon and ink. Hurtado's work continued to evolve throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, demonstrating a shift toward naturalistic representation and figuration that led to a production of contemplative self-portraits known as her 'I Am' paintings. This series was followed by a group of surrealist Body Landscapes wherein the human figure assumes the form of mountains and desert sand dunes. Functioning as a symbolic proxy and an intimate meditation on the Earth as mystic progenitor, these works underscore the between corporeality and the natural world — a delicate balance that is now in jeopardy. In her new work, Hurtado recognises the urgency of this ecological crisis and her environmental advocacy continues to inform and suffuse the ever-expansive visual language of her work.

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In 2019, Hurtado was listed in TIME 100's most influential people and received the Americans for the Arts Carolyn Clark Powers Lifetime Achievement Award. Recent solo exhibitions include 'I Live I Die I Will Be Reborn', London, UK at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery (2019) that then travelled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2020) and 'Dark Years' at Hauser & Wirth New York (2019). In 2018, her work was included in the Hammer Museum's biennial exhibition 'Made in L.A. 2018'.

Hurtado's work is featured in public collections worldwide, including The British Museum, London, UK; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston MA and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA.

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Gallery hours:

Monday to Friday, 11 am – 6 pm
Saturday, 11 am – 5 pm

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Luchita Hurtado
Untitled
1968
Oil on graphite on paper
48.3 x 61 cm / 19 x 24 in
Photo: Jeff McLane

Luchita Hurtado
Untitled
c. 1968
Oil on paper
61 x 48.3 cm / 24 x 19 in
Photo: Jeff McLane

Luchita Hurtado
Untitled
c. 1957/1968
Oil and conte on paper
61 x 48.3 cm / 24 x 19 in
Photo: Jeff McLane

Luchita Hurtado
Just Down the Street
1965
Oil on paper
46.4 x 60.3 cm / 18 1/4 x 23 3/4 in
Photo: Jeff McLane