

BLUE VELVET

MÓNICA MAYS
ridden

13.6.– 26.7.2025

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ridden

12 June – 26 July 2025

In her exhibition «ridden» at Blue Velvet, Monica Mays presents a series of sculptures composed of salvaged industrial and domestic objects, evoking the forms and mechanisms of fairground rides. Like theme parks — closed, paradisiacal spaces engineered for evasion and escape — her installations conjure architectures of disorientation and extraction. These are not sanctuaries, but vehicles that traverse worlds, body and mind. These devices siphon sensation, draining energy in exchange for the orchestrated thrill of the sublime — a jolt of adrenaline laced with choreography and control.

In its primary sense, an attraction is a force that pulls. Here, that force becomes a vortex — seductive, violent — revealing the infrastructures that shape submission through delight. On the top floor of the gallery, two spinning metal tubes are enveloped by inverted horse saddles: once symbols of domestication and mastery, here presented as a distorted echo to the carousel, with its wooden horses and endless orbit, turned into a gyratory theatre of reversed eroticism — mechanical pleasure flipped inside out.

This flipping is central to the exhibition, the insides of vehicles are revealed to form the foundation of her sculptural pieces. Mays' work speaks in metonymies: one object gestures to another system. A collection of miscellaneous materials collected from the insides of found chairs are presented in a new series called «bottoms». A conveyor belt and taxonomic boards echo roller coasters — vast circuits dictating movement, duration, and calibrated fear. These tracks contain boxes housing moth cocoons: a transit space of mutation and decay. What could be more authoritarian than a ride that scripts every motion?

Inside this closed circuit, nothing is innocent. Every element — a saddle, a cross, a pipe — carries residues of use and abuse. The exhausts in the first floor of the gallery are scorched, bearing visible traces of burns. These are escape mechanisms, but also relics of depletion. They offer no exit, only detour. Desire here combusts rather than resolves — heat without release, motion without arrival.

They reveal support structures normally hidden: the anxious skeleton beneath comfort. These fragments recall not only domesticity but the ergonomics of authority — the way bodies are seated, trained, subdued. Likewise, the taxonomic boxes Mays uses — typically vessels of knowledge, order, and display — are parasitized by moth cocoons, disrupting their logic, turning classification into obstruction.

Here, the chrysalis becomes not just a biological envelope, but a symbol of entrapment-as-transformation — one form of captivity begetting another, more elusive one. Organic matter fuses with industrial debris: exhaust pipes hardened with resin grow into atrophied limbs, or the haunted apparatuses of ghost trains. On the upper floor, a cross made from the charred exhaust system of a car blocks entry. Part architectural body, part industrial reliquary, it stages a sacred claustrophobia — suspended between attraction and crucifixion, fantasy and fatigue.

Mays's sculptures hover near the body, but never fully become it. Anatomies emerge only to unravel: limbs suggest desire, yet recoil into formlessness. Her practice channels a neo-

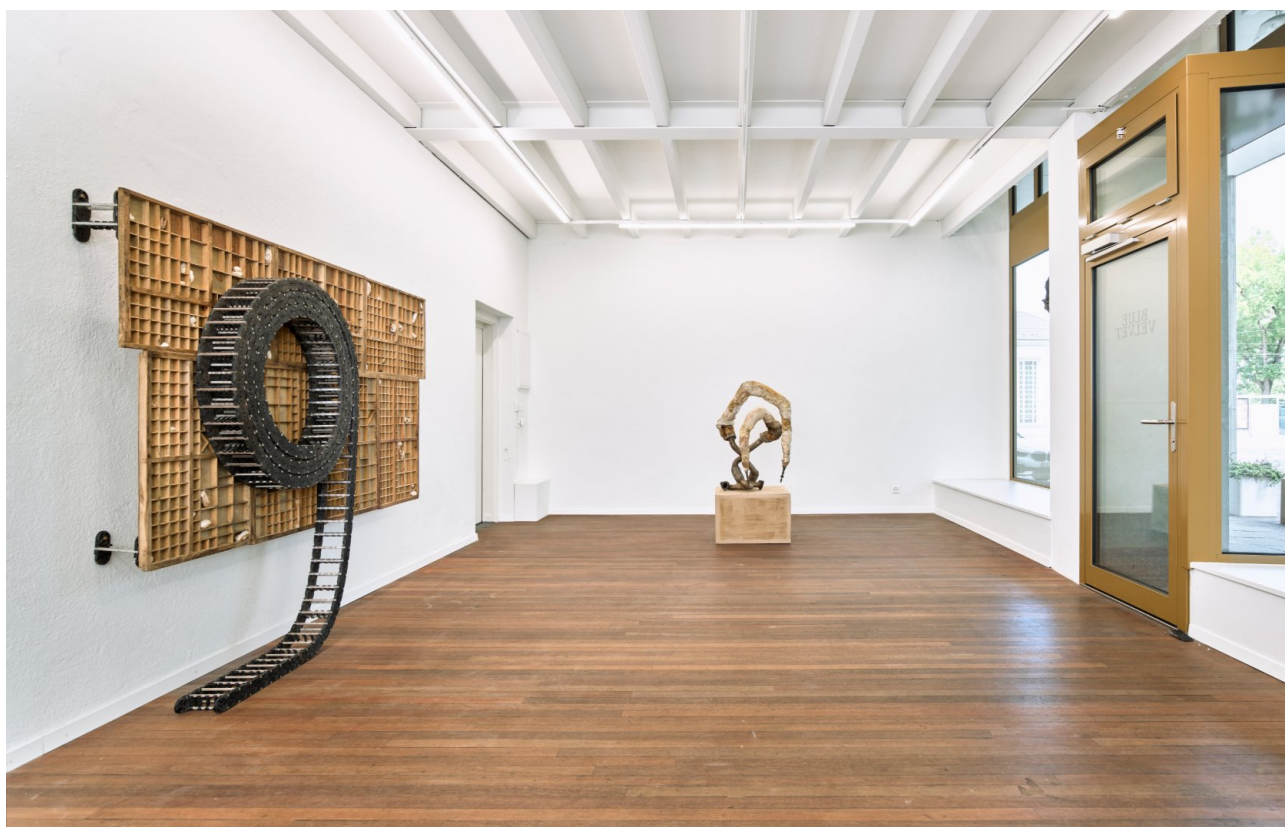
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surrealist logic of collapse, echoing Bataille's notion of the informe — the formless — that which resists category, undoes taxonomy, and shatters binaries. These pieces are unstable beings: not bodies, not machines, not monuments, but fragments in flux.

Objects here are transformed, stripped of use, imbued with a sensual ambiguity. Through a kind of formal martyrdom, Mays constructs autonomous systems, unsocial and recursive — bachelor machines without function nor progeny. They carry the weight of violence and delight, of exhaustion and pleasure. They are paradise machines: constructed heavens that betray their own illusion.

Her practice resonates with precarious forms, at once intimate and collective, evoking bodies in resilient states, on the edge of decay. Whether in the form of a tube, an exhaust pipe, a cross or a rail, each element derails from its original function — tracing the outlines of power, consumption, and submission, they grow weary, combust, and open toward other possibilities: uncertain, but powerfully fertile. In reproducing the violence embedded in their conditions, these pieces gradually extract themselves from their raw materiality to enter a more existential dimension. They become pure attractions: performative forms, actions, unstable forces that reject all fixity, without ever relinquishing their transformative power.

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Exhibition views, Mónica Mays: ridden, Blue Velvet, Zurich, Switzerland, 2025.

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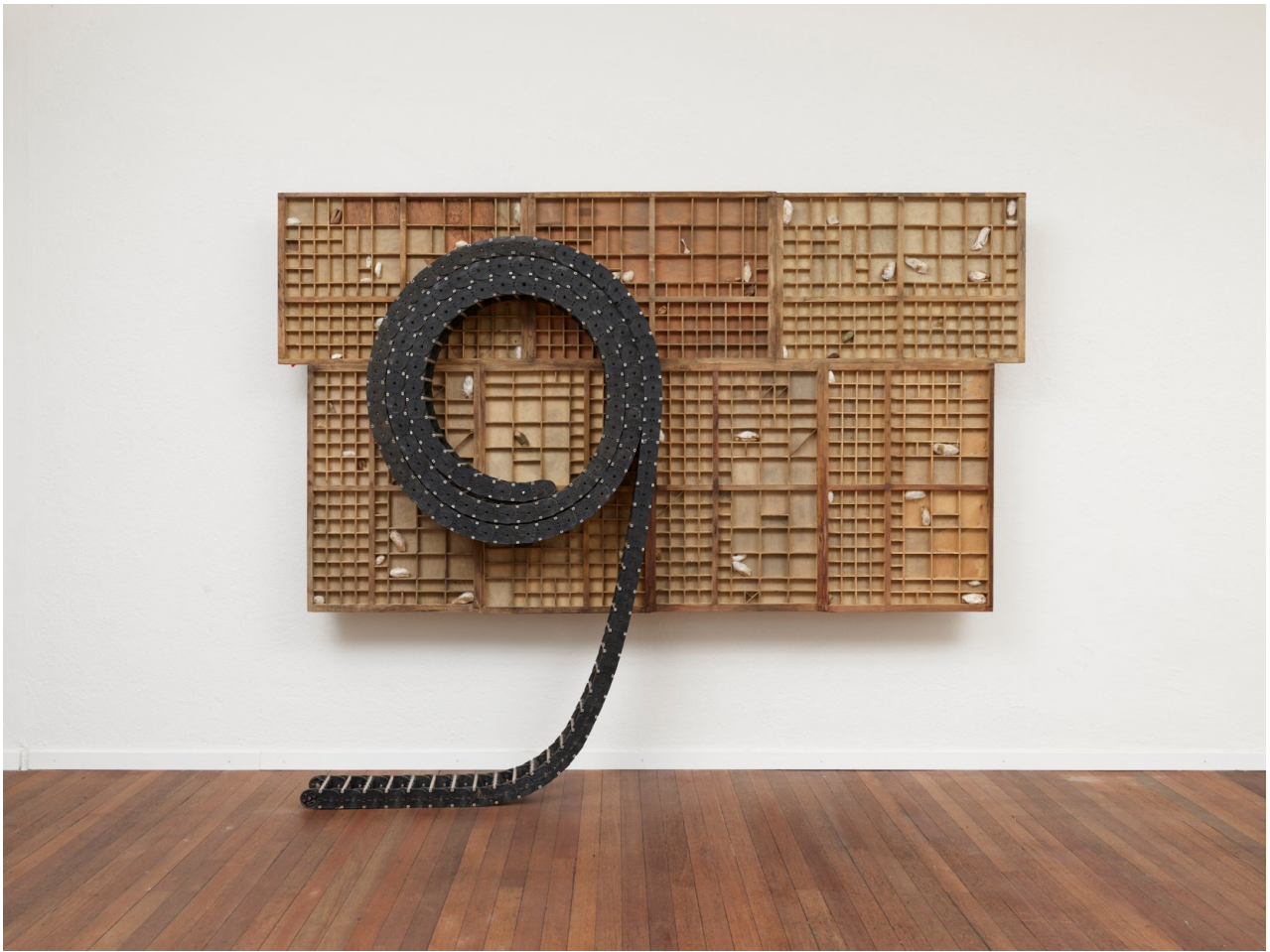


Mónica Mays
Feeding, falling, flying II, 2025
Found exhaust system, vellum, wax, cardboard, wood
142 x 67 x 66 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-68



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Mónica Mays

She watched the bar of time, which broke, 2025

Conveyor belts, pulley, palm, chain

190 x 225 x 33 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-73





Mónica Mays
Feeding, falling flying I, 2025
Found exhaust system, vellum, wax, cardboard, wood
155 x 50 x 38 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-69



Mónica Mays
Lub permeates wall I, 2025
Found exhaust system, vellum, wax
145 x 28 x 47 cm

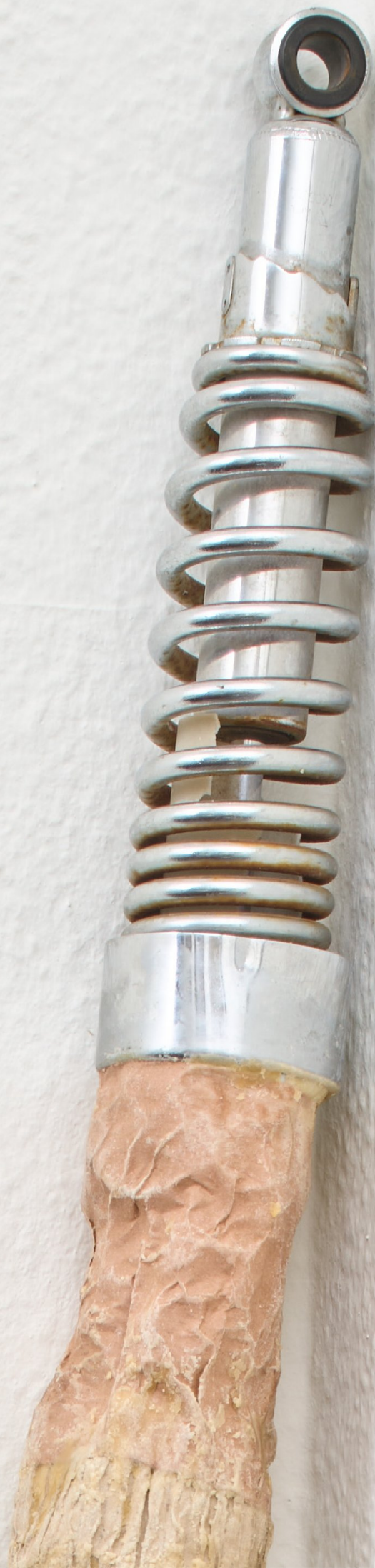
Inv.-Nr. 249-72





Mónica Mays
Jumbo, 2025
exhaust system, vellum, cotton, raffia, wax
36 x 24 x 18 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-77

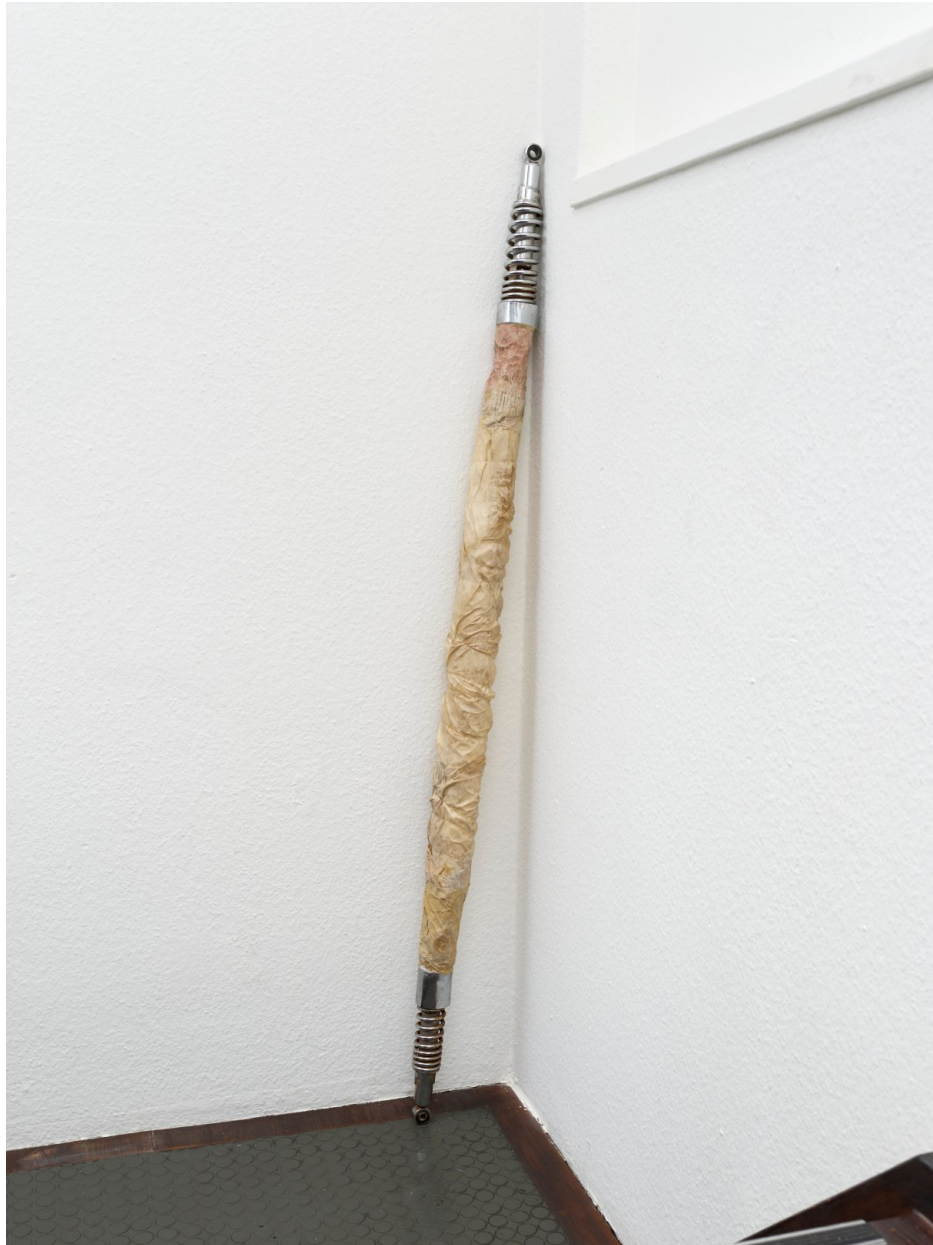




Mónica Mays
Get rid, 2025

Found exhaust system, vellum, wax
45 x 140 x 70 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-78



Mónica Mays
Shock absorber, 2025
suspensions, wax, steel, paper, cardboard, vellum
160 x 8 x 8 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-79



Mónica Mays
Bottoms I, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-74



Mónica Mays
Bottoms II, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-75



Mónica Mays
Bottoms III, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-76



Mónica Mays
Bottoms IV, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-76



Mónica Mays
Bottoms V, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-76

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Mónica Mays
Bottoms VI, 2025
insides of found chairs, wood, glass
66 x 66 x 9 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-76





Mónica Mays
Merry-go-round II, 2025
Metal, found saddle, wax, vellum
150 x 65 x 58 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-65



Mónica Mays
Merry-go-round I, 2025
Metal, found saddle, wax, vellum
152 x 60 x 47 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-66





Mónica Mays
Engine, 2025
Found exhaust system, vellum, wax, wood
220 x 455 x 140 cm

Inv.-Nr. 249-67

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Mónica Mays

*1990, lives and works in Madrid, Spain.

Mónica Mays lives and works between Madrid and Amsterdam. Her sculptural practice combines autobiography, material process, and historical archive. Her pieces consist of assemblages of anachronistic domestic and industrial waste, which she reconfigures and appropriates through the incorporation of raw materials. Drawing from Baroque logic, Mays explores excess, blurry edges, and dramatic movement, focusing on the complex layering of meaning embedded in the objects she uses and revealing the violence and fragility they oscillate between.

Having studied Cultural Anthropology at the University of New Orleans, she graduated from the École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg in 2015 and received an MA from the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam in 2017. She has developed projects in artistic residencies such as Rupert (Vilnius), Matadero (Madrid) or Cemeti Institut for Art and Society (Yogyakarta, Indonesia). Her works have been exhibited in spaces such as Arti et Amicitiae (Amsterdam), Tallinn Art Hall (Tallinn), KUBUS (Hannover), Goethe Institut (Bucarest), Kunstfort bij Vijfhuizen (Netherlands) or La Casa Encendida (Madrid). This year she was awarded the Arco Art Prize and her work was acquired by notable institutions such as Reina Sofia Museum, CA2M or Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. Other awards include the 3PD prize bestowed by the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts 2022, the Mondriaan Fonds Young Talent 2023, and the Generation 2022 prize from the Montemadrid Foundation.

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MÓNICA MAYS

Born in Madrid, 1990

Lives and works in Madrid and Amsterdam

Education

2015-17 MA Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam
2009-10 BFA Cum Laude, HEAR / École Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Strasbourg, France
2009-10 Cultural Anthropology, University of New Orleans, USA

Solo Exhibitions (selection)

2025 ridden, Blue Velvet, Zurich
2024 Cibriañ, Donosti
Pedro Cera, Madrid
En la Palma de sus Manos, Blue Velvet, Arco Madrid

2023 The Serpent Bearer, Lucas Hirsch, Dusseldorf
Shadow Boxes, Blue Velvet, Liste Art Fair, Basel
Buttermilk, Blue Velvet, Zurich

2022 Nail That Stems, Twin Gallery, Madrid

2021 Bucolic Gang, Virgin Maria Church, Rupert, Vilnius
Sand Shine, Aparador Monteleón, Madrid

2019 Homies, Corridor PS, Amsterdam
2018 w.i.l.l.i.a.m., organized by Helena Lambrechts and Tim Roerig, Bologna.cc, Amsterdam
2016 ooo.ooo, A Place Beyond Desire, Rietveld Pavilion, Amsterdam

Group Exhibitions (selection)

2025 Fragment and Formm Henry Moore Institute (upcoming)
2024 Pedro Cera, Art Basel, Basel
Blue Velvet, Basel Social Club, Basel
Someday Gallery, New York, US
Catinca Tabacaru, Bucharest
NN Awards, Kunsthal Rotterdam, Netherlands
Prospects and Concepts, Art Rotterdam, Van Nelle Factory, Rotterdam, Netherlands
2023 Bodies of Resistance, Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon
Old sky, old dirt, new grass, Travesía Cuatro, Madrid
Y mis ojos son como el jerez que el huésped deja en la copa, Nebrija Art Prize, CC Galileo, Madrid
If we remain silent, Casco Art Institute, Utrecht, Netherlands
Desengaño, Ateneo, Madrid
Lo que pesa una cabeza, TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes, Spain
How long is an echo?, Städtische Galerie KUBUS, Hannover, Germany
2022 International Art Talent 3PD-AFK, Felix Meritis, Amsterdam
Dogo Totale - Home, Alte Turnhalle, Lichtensteig, Switzerland
Her Legs, an Egg, Her Toil(e) and Blankets, Linnagalerii, Tallinn Art Hall, Estonia

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- Broken Open, Gallery Luis Adelantado, Valencia, Spain
fundamental occurrences, Nosbaum Reding, Brussels
Getting Lost in the Woods, Twin Gallery, Madrid
Amigos Reina Sofia Museum, ARCO fair, Madrid
emotions are facts, curated by Chloé Bonnie More, Nosbaum Reding, Luxembourg
Generación 2022, La Casa Encendida, Madrid
- 2020 Unsayings, Industra Gallery, Brno
- 2021 Al Revés, Art Nueve, Murcia, Spain
Silencio Oscuro de los Grandes Troncos, Injuve, Madrid
A Green Jade Lake, Centro Centro, Madrid
Itinerancias Premio de Arte Joven C&L, Museo de Palencia, Museo de Segovia, Spain
Appendix Songs, Punt WG, Amsterdam
Sand Shine, Aparador Monteleón, Madrid
- 2020 I'm Not Your Territory, We Are My Only Character, Atelier Chiffonier, Dijon, France
Young Talent Sculpture Prize, Museo de Zamora, Museo de León, Sala Unamuno, Palacio Butrón, Spain
Unsayings, Industra Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic
Homies Prayers, performance, Come Together V, Frascati Theater, Amsterdam
Un gesto que permanece, Salón, Madrid
- 2019 hypnoquinomagia, Combo, off-site Biennale Venetie, Italy
Soft Landings, Dutch Design Week, TAC, Eindhoven, Netherlands
City Circles, wemakethecity, wow, Amsterdam
Kunst Rai 35, fair, Amsterdam
- 2018 Museumnacht, performance, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, Amsterdam
Shifting Class, former Gsus Industries headquarters, Amsterdam
Auricula Garden, Open Tuinen Dag / Music for Plants (ii), with Tom K Kemp, Amsterdam
Breathe in, breath out, performance, Neverneverland, Amsterdam
- 2017 No zero No two, scenography, SNDO, Academie voor Theater en Dans, Amsterdam
Isola 3000, performance, Amsterdam Art Weekend, ISO, Amsterdam
Amsterdam Dance Event, performance, De School, Amsterdam
NEWTOWN, Sandberg graduation show, Metro Station Noord, Amsterdam
- 2016 Modern Body Festival, performance, De Nieuwe Regentes Theater, Den Haag, Netherlands
Instant Composition, performance, Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerpen, Belgium
Bienal Arte Contemporaneo Emergente, Eve-Maria Zimmerman, Tenerife, Spain
Photo Book Madrid, Reina Sofia Museum Library, Madrid
paranymph (slush puppies), De Fabriek, Eindhoven, Netherlands
A Place Beyond Desire, Rietveld Pavilion, Amsterdam

Grants, Awards, Residencies (selection)

- 2025 Arco Prize Comunidad de Madrid
Alhambra Prize
- 2024 XVII Illy SustainArt Prize
Selected NN Awards
Cemeti Institute for Art and Society Residency, Yogikarta
- 2023 Selected Premi Miquel Casablanas
Ceramicres Co-net Residency, Alcora
Selected Nebrija Art Prize
Young Talent Funds, Mondriaans Fonds
- 2022 Landescape Residency, Italy

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2021	Dogo Residency, Lichtenstein
	Matadero Residency, Madrid
	Generación 2022 Prize, Fundación Montemadrid
	Bilbao Arte Foundation
2020	Visual Arts 3PD Prize, Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst
	Rupert Residency, Vilnius
	Young Talent Sculpture Prize Castilly y León
2019	Project Grant, Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst

Public Collections (selection)

Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo
Museo Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sofia
DKV Arteria
Fundación Montemadrid
Junta de Castilla y León
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Madrid
Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo

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PAST EXHIBITIONS



Installation views, Mónica Mays, Blue Velvet at LISTE 2023, Basel Switzerland

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Exhibition views, Mónica Mays: Buttermilk, Blue Velvet, Zurich, Switzerland, 2023

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MÓNICA MAYS IN CONVERSATION WITH NOAM ALON

NOAM ALON: Your two recent projects, *“Eventually, Eden”* and *“Fueled, Oasis, Fueled”*, explore the concept of Paradise on multiple levels. Can you share your personal definition of Paradise? Or perhaps, more specifically, how do you interpret the idea of delight?

NA: Your work seems to ground Paradise in earthly imagery rather than a celestial realm. *Oasis* evokes *fata morgana*—an illusion luring travelers to their demise—while *Fueled* suggests climate catastrophe or a dystopian desertified world. How does your work engage with the ecological crisis and this looming collapse?

NA: As a curator, I engage with ecological disasters not to assign blame or offer solutions but to explore the emotions they provoke—this looming sense of “no tomorrow.” I see parallels between natural catastrophes and mental states, yet much of the art world’s approach feels didactic, focusing on guilt rather than helping us process fear or understand our reality.

NA: In your work, you don’t seem to address Paradise in a strictly theological, biblical, or religious sense. However, one of

MÓNICA MAYS: I don’t have a fixed definition of paradise; what interests me is its contradictory and universal nature. Across cultures, it appears as Jannah, Nirvana, Heaven, or The Garden of Delights—both an origin and a destination, embodying an idyllic order in contrast to Earth’s chaos.

Etymologically, “paradise” means “enclosed garden,” implying separation and duality, which aligns with how paradise is commodified today. This idea took shape during my residency in Valencia, where fast tourism manufactures an illusion of paradise. Imported palm trees, rather than native ones, create a fabricated escape—beautiful yet hollow.

This artificiality connects to local rituals: on Palm Sunday, woven palm leaves replace traditional olive branches, later burned on Ash Wednesday, evoking cycles of combustion and destruction. This theme ties to my exploration of paradise’s fleeting and exploitative nature.

Palm oil, omnipresent yet invisible, became a metaphor for this system—lubricating global consumption and extraction. Rather than treating it as a commodity, I saw it poetically, representing unseen forces that sustain and exploit our world.

MM: My work engages with these themes through the objects I use, but I don’t see myself as explicitly tackling environmental issues. I approach it as a passenger, part of this era and its challenges.

What resonates with me is the emotional response to living in a moment that feels like both a peak and an ending—enjoying civilization’s comforts while sensing their impermanence.

I’m interested in the unease and violence born from the conjunction of desire and our relationships to objects. It’s more about affection, emotion, and the way we connect with these things on an erotic level.

MM: Yes, for me, turning art into a vehicle for didactic statements about the world feels... almost dirty. My role as an artist isn’t to preach or instruct—it’s to witness, to exist within the chaos and reflect on it.

For example, the exhaust systems I use in my sculptures are “escape routes” that embody this ambivalence. On one hand, they are literal mechanisms for evasion, systems that channel combustion and expel waste. You can see the harsh traces of oil burning on them, and they are undeniably industrial and utilitarian. On the other hand, they have a sensual quality—the way they fold and curve reminds me of organs, as though they are mechanical parts of a body. At times, they even resemble horns, which led me to think about the mythological proximity of paradise and hell.

A didactic approach might say, *This is what’s happening, this is the conclusion, and this is what we must do*. I’m more interested in asking: How can language, symbols, and form translate and coexist in a way that doesn’t instruct but instead points to connections and possibilities? For me, the violence is present in the work itself, but it’s not my role to speak about it as a scientist or politician. I aim to create space for all these layers to interact without prescribing a singular narrative.

MM: When I think of “suspension of disbelief,” I’m reminded of the theater. It’s that moment when you step into a play or a

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the recent texts about your work mentions the concept of “suspension of disbelief.” I wanted to ask: What does that mean to you, and what happens to you personally in that moment? What do you believe in during such a suspension?

NA: Let's extend this link between suspension of disbelief and theater / cinema to your relationship with viewers. What kind of experience do you aim to create for those who visit your exhibitions? Are you constructing a fictional universe or imagining a specific world while conceiving your shows?

NA: Rather than Paradise, your last two exhibitions evoke a hospital storage room, with prosthetic-like forms piling up as if assembling new bodies. These industrial components seem burnt out, and you appear to be healing them—covering them in plaster as if their bones need to regrow. Is this an attempt to rehabilitate industry's remnants?

NA: In your exhibition at CIBRIÁN (San Sebastián, Spain), the text referenced “appetite-driven violence,” a term I find compelling. Philosopher Elsa Dorlin, in her book *Self Defense: A Philosophy of Violence*, contrasts *cru* (raw) as a visceral, uncontrollable force with *cruel*, a calculated and premeditated act. How does your practice navigate or position itself within these two poles?

NA: Animals seem to recur in your work, whether more explicitly in furniture-based objects or subtly in abstract forms. I'm particularly reminded of your *Shadow Boxes* series, where silkworm cocoons were encased behind fabric. What role do animals play in your practice, and how do they inform your themes and materials?

NA: This interference with the classification system seems layered, even addressing reproductive violence. Could you elaborate on how this connects to your broader practice?

movie, fully aware that it's a fiction, but then something shifts. You let go of that awareness, and suddenly, you're transported. Your body is no longer self-conscious, and you absorb the images and emotions as if they were real. There's a kind of magic in that—a conscious decision to believe in fiction, to surrender to it. For me, art operates in much the same way. It's one of my favorite ways to engage with fiction: by suspending disbelief and immersing myself in its possibilities.

MM: No, I don't think of it that way. If we think of Paradise on earth as an enclosed garden—a recreation of a fictional concept—then participating in it inherently requires a suspension of disbelief. When people visit such spaces, they come with a certain faith, hoping to find relief or escape. These spaces become temporary autonomous zones, places where you can disassociate from the burdens of everyday life.

MM: For me, I was thinking more about legs in an erotic sense—as vehicles for birthing, reproduction, and sexuality. This ties back to what we discussed earlier about lubricants.

Lubricants are interesting because they're not immediately visible, yet they're essential. They make the machine work more smoothly, helping everything slide. There's something erotic about their stickiness, but at the same time, they carry an inherent violence. They permeate everything without our full awareness.

I wanted the exhaust systems, or escape routes, to emanate this sense of lubrication, almost like they're projecting bodily fluids. There is a sense of care in that—taking what's been abandoned, repurposing it, and giving it a new context.

MM: Visceral, without a doubt. I think this combination plays out in my work. Coming from a background in social sciences, I initially relied heavily on analysis, trying to translate concepts into form. But I found that overly analytical approaches didn't work for me—they felt disconnected and lifeless. Those pieces often ended up being discarded.

Instead, I've embraced abstraction and impulsiveness in my process. It's about following intuitive choices and discovering meaning through making. Often, I don't know why I'm drawn to certain materials or forms until I've worked with them for a while. There's a process of “thinking with” the materials, rather than imposing predetermined concepts onto them.

MM: I don't see rigid distinctions between objects and entities; everything exists in friction and interaction, forming an interconnected ecosystem. My materials—tree resins, animal skins, industrial waste, horse saddles, and factory conveyor belts—reflect this entanglement.

In *Shadow Boxes*, I used taxonomical boxes, which traditionally classify nature, to disrupt rigid categorization. I cultivated domesticated silkworms, whose industrialized existence leaves them blind, flightless, and solely focused on reproduction. After they died, I covered their empty cocoons with silk chiffon, dyed with natural plants. This intervention blurred the strict grid of the boxes, parasitizing their structure rather than erasing it.

MM: At the time, I was thinking about reproductive violence as both a capitalist mechanism—tied to labor—and a deeply personal one. I questioned reproduction beyond biology: what other forms might exist?

The body became a machine, entangled in cycles of industrial, biological, and social reproduction. The taxonomic box mirrored colonial and capitalist divisions—between genders, labor, and nature itself.

Previous page: *She Had Brushed*, Powdered and Burnt Oil, 2024; Stoneware, rattan, found domestic objects, industrial waste, steel, palm, 167 × 188 × 40 cm. Installation view at Arco Madrid. Courtesy: the Artist and BLUE VELVET, Zurich.

Above right, below right: *Buttermilk*, 2024. Installation view at BLUE VELVET, Zurich. Courtesy: the Artist and BLUE VELVET, Zurich.

I was using the silkworms and their byproducts to cohabit with, and ultimately subvert, the rigid classification system. It became an exploration of how structures can be disrupted—not through erasure but through coexistence and transformation.



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Above: *She Had Brushed, Powdered and Burnt Oil, 2024*; stoneware, palm, beeswax, collagen, vellum, industrial waste, stirrups, domestic objects. Installation view at Arco Madrid. Courtesy: the Artist and BLUE VELVET, Zurich.

Left and next pages: *Fueled Oasis Fueled, 2024*; Installation view at Pedro Cera, Madrid. Courtesy: the Artist and Pedro Cera, Lisbon | Madrid.

Mónica Mays in Conversation with Noam Alon, L'Essenziale Studio, April 2025