

JUAN ARAUJO

'CLOUDS AND SHADOWS ON MARS'

curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas and Stéphane Verger

National Roman Museum, Palazzo Massimo, Largo di Villa Peretti 2, Rome

From March 29 to June 30, 2024, 09:30 AM - 7:00 PM. Closed on Mondays. Open on Easter and Easter Monday.

The National Roman Museum - Palazzo Massimo is pleased to host *"Clouds and Shadows on Mars"*, the **first solo exhibition in an Italian museum institution of the Venezuelan artist Juan Araujo**, one of the most prominent figures on the international art scene.

The exhibition, **curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas and Stéphane Verger** and realised in **collaboration with Galleria Continua**, is **designed specifically for the museum** and, in particular, to engage in dialogue with the Roman frescoes in its collection, challenging the conventional notions of time and space.

Araujo's inclusion of **references to the solar system** in his works acts as a reminder of the temporal and spatial vastness that transcends human civilisations. By contrasting these **celestial representations with the museum's historical heritage**, removed from its original context and placed in a palace, Araujo invites the public to reflect on the **fleeting nature of human existence and the perennial nature of the universe**. This interaction between the distant past and the present, between classical art and modern abstractions, offers a new perspective on our place in the cosmos and in history.

The rooms of the Palazzo Massimo **offer visitors the chance to discover the works of Juan Araujo amidst the museum's permanent exhibits**. These works, paintings on canvas or sheet metal, frequently set up as assemblages and displayed on modern stands, are intended to **interact with the museum's collection**, acting as a means for the interplay between ancient and contemporary art, through unexpected encounters and nuances that transcend any linear chronological

understanding of art. *"(...) Perhaps there is a specific resonance between ancient frescoes and my works: I often work by erasure, erasing images, so that some of my paintings function as "ruins" of images, for example my "Morandis cancellato". **Ancient frescoes are inevitably erased, and erasure is an inspirational material for me,**"* the artist remarks.

Juan Araujo masterfully handles the art of painting and his works are frequently based on reproductions found in art catalogues and books, magazines, newspapers, scientific reports or similar. Araujo **challenges the temporal nature of images**, showing their multi-layered dimension, suggesting connections and allegorical contrasts between their iconic nature and **their verbal language**. An emblematic example is the work that serves as the title for this exhibition, *"Clouds and Shadows on Mars"*. It refers to a dramatic image depicting a **war scene during the ongoing conflict in Palestine**, together with a description provided by NASA of a reproduction of the **planet Mars**; finally, it indicates the name of the ancient **god of war, Mars**.

By presenting images in which different temporalities collide, Araujo's work suggests that **there is no single, real, present time, but instead a fluid, extended present that bears traces of the past, made up of both remembering and forgetting, of ruins and erasures**. *"The exhibition suggests that Antiquity and Modernity belong to an extended temporality that appears as a unified whole, revealed in fragments, as if they were sentences left unfinished in a dialogue, brief moments, here embodied by my work, within the*

rooms of the museum. In choosing this title, I also wanted to bring the real world, with all its strength, into the exhibition," says the artist.

Araujo's subjects include **references to contemporary Italian culture** such as **Pinocchio**, the films of **Michelangelo Antonioni**, the paintings of **Giorgio Morandi** and the photographs of **Luigi Ghirri**. "I love those two Italian artists. And I find it beautiful that Ghirri worked on Morandi, taking photos of his studio, for example. I looked at their works and created paintings inspired by them," Araujo remarked. Ancient mythology is conjured up through oblique and dreamy perspectives: the work of **Cy Twombly** and his character depicted in a melancholic pose, or of **Hypnos** and **Apollo**.

One of the **most emblematic new paintings in the exhibition is "The Eclipse"**. "Perhaps all of my works, or at least the ones chosen for this exhibition, work like small eclipses: images superimposed on other images, language superimposed on images, modern objects interfering with ancient paintings; like the astronomical telescope against the Livia garden: all small eclipses, **subtle eclipses strategies that could bring about a new poetic level of meaning**. Suddenly by blinding something, even in a fragmentary way, it is possible to see better(...)," the artist explains.

Juan Araujo is also renowned for his works that bring to life **images of modern architecture and tropical landscapes**, as well as views of planets with names that resonate with ancient deities: **Saturn, Jupiter, Pluto, Uranus**. Modern astrophysics has shown us that when **we look at the stars in the sky, we get the visual resonance of catastrophic and seminal events that happened millions of years ago**, barely catching the tremors from the origin of the universe. Looking at the planets is therefore similar to looking at our distant past in the fragments preserved in this museum. Clouds and shadows on Mars, ancient frescoes and sculptural fragments, metamorphosis and erasure, as well as dreams and abrupt awakening from the furore of history, shape Juan Araujo's refined poetic paintings.

Juan Araujo was born in 1971 in Caracas, Venezuela. He currently lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal. Juan has exhibited widely internationally, including solo exhibitions such as *"Measurable distances of space and air"*, PEER, London, UK(2019); *"Mineirianas"*, Inhotim Center for Contemporary Art, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2013); *"A Través"*, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2008). His work has also appeared in numerous group exhibitions and biennials including *"Southern Geometries, from Mexico to Patagonia"*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France (2018); *"Healing and Repairing"*, Bienal de arte contemporânea de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal (2017); *"Roberto Burle Marx: Brazilian Modernist"*, Jewish Museum, New York, USA (2016); *"United States of Latin America"*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, Michigan, USA (2015); *"The Interior is on the Outside"*, curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Casa de Vidrio, São Paulo, Brazil (2013); the Aichi Triennial, Nagoya, Japan (2010), Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, São Paulo (2009); Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates (2009); Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2007); São Paulo Biennial (2006); San Diego Museum of Art (2005) and American National Society, New York (2005). Araujo was included in the group exhibition *"25 Years"* at the Stephen Freedman Gallery, London, England (2020). His work can be found in public collections including in the Tate Modern, London, England; Museum of Modern Art of New York, New York, USA; Jumex Collection, Mexico City, Mexico; Inhotim Center for Contemporary Art, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas, Venezuela; Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Caracas, Caracas, Venezuela; Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela; Art Now International Collection, San Francisco, USA; Fundación Mercantil, Caracas, Venezuela; Cisneros Collection, Caracas, Venezuela and the Berezdivin Collection, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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