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Courtesy of Galerie Agnès Monplaisir © David Altun

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Agnès Monplaisir

The French art dealer Agnès Monplaisir has made her name discovering international artists, with a predilection for those from Latin America, and for championing their work in her Parisian gallery and in art fairs.

Agnès Monplaisir has been in love with art ever since she was a teenager. The Parisian gallerist, owner of the eponymous Galerie Agnès Monplaisir, knew that from then on she wanted to work in the art world and with artists. Today, she is a highly respected dealer and has a serious programme representing a roster of international artists, many of which hail from Latin America.

Born in Paris, Monplaisir opened her first gallery in 1987 at the young age of 18. It was a tiny, 26-metre-squared space in the Bastille district. Four decades later, she has a large, 500-metre-squared gallery in Paris's upmarket Saint-Germain-des-Près.

Over the years, she has dealt in Art Deco furniture and objects as well as contemporary art. But in the last decade, she has been concentrating on contemporary art, travelling frequently to discover artists and present their work in fairs. As her father comes from St Lucia in the Caribbean, Monplaisir has a particular sensibility for artists from this part of the world.

Agnès Monplaisir's stable includes Olga de Amaral, an 83-year-old Colombian artist known for her large, abstract textile pieces layered with gold that Agnès Monplaisir first exhibited in 2012. Amaral's groundbreaking, mixed-media wall hangings appropriate

the tradition of textiles in a three-dimensional, sculptural way whilst translating her cultural roots as well as the traditions and myths surrounding gold. Agnès Monplaisir also represents Brazilian artist Nadia Taquary, whose work incorporates African influences and the history of slavery; the late Polish artist Igor Mitoraj, whose gigantic sculptures representing parts of the human body, often refer to Greek mythology, symbolise the fragility of mankind; French artist Daniel Hourdé whose pieces range from figurative, outdoor bronze sculptures to silver-plated bronze candelabra; and Brazilian painter Cabral whose abstract paintings are vibrant and dramatic. Collect speaks with the gallerist about her passion.

You opened your gallery at the age of 18 in Bastille. Today, you have a large space in Saint-Germain-des-Près. How has your role as a gallerist with regard to your artists changed over the last two decades?

Initially, I was extremely involved in promoting my clients and developing my catalogues. Since then, the world has changed drastically. It feels much smaller and the pace is much faster. I travel constantly, which is why I've had to learn so many languages, including Russian, Portuguese and Spanish. I've also adapted to new technologies. To compete in today's market, I need to be everywhere and to have a strong presence online.

How has your personal taste evolved?

Through my work becoming more international, my tastes have become more international too. I'm more receptive to artworks from diverse cultures, finding beauty and art wherever I travel.

How do you select the artists that you represent?

I select artists with unique perspectives of the world as I'm fascinated by culture and history. There's a sincerity and honesty in the work my artists produce. I'm drawn to the way many of them blend influences of past civilizations, natural beauty and the modern age. Because they're from different cultures, they all offer their own unique interpretation and vision.

How would you describe the visual identity of your gallery's programme and the kind of art that you're attracted to?

I'm passionate about art that moves me in a special way and am attracted to artists that I have a personal affinity with. What I'm attracted to in much of the art I represent is the unique sense of place and cultural identity that is linked simultaneously to the past, the present and the physical world. In this way, the exhibitions and individual works that my gallery presents can be visually diverse in terms of place, materials and medium. But they all return to this aesthetic of place and the ability to transport those who view them. The pieces we exhibit don't exist in a vacuum, but rather in the larger context of the culture and history experienced and known by the artist. Fortunately, my collectors appreciate my vision and insight. I have a great following and am constantly asked my thoughts on collections and artists.

You've said that your interest in artists from Latin America is linked to your father's Saint Lucia origins. When was the first time that you visited this region and how did it influence your outlook on art?

I have been visiting the Caribbean and Saint Lucia since I was a young girl, especially to the area where my father was born. It possesses a natural,

captivating beauty and I'm intrigued by the intersection of people, geography, music and art. For me, Saint Lucia was a window into a new world perspective and the works of the artists I represent also serve as windows for those who view them.

How did you discover the Colombian artist Olga de Amaral (pictured right) and the Brazilian artist Nadia Taquary and what do you like about their work?

Pascal Bonafoux, a friend who used to write my catalogues and who is a specialist of Van Gogh, Caravaggio, and Rembrandt, gave me Olga de Amaral's books after returning from a trip to Bogotá. This was nearly eight years ago and it was an emotional experience for me. I was astounded by the true beauty of her works and recognised the history of the people, mythology and the references to sacred art and symbols. There were also references to gold and the richness of the earth. Olga de Amaral is such an extraordinary artist and woman. When I first visited her, she was kind enough to share her perspective on philosophy, art and culture. I was introduced to Nadia Taquary and her work three years ago in a museum in Salvador de Bahia. Her work references the African influence in Brazilian history and culture and her large pieces feature symbols of this colonial history. The precious wood she uses, for example, comes from the old, broken houses of this colonial time. The African amulets are constructed with gold or silver, referencing the history of slavery with particular regard to the mining industry.

How have you developed their careers and supported them beyond the walls of your gallery?

For Olga de Amaral, I realised an exhibition at the Louise Blouin Foundation in London in 2013. I have produced a book on her work that has been translated into Spanish, English and French. And I've brought her work to Rio and São Paulo. Through our gallery, she has graced the covers of *Modern Painters* and *How To Spend It*, the magazine of *The Financial Times*, and has been named as one of the 25 most-sold Latin American artists. This is the result of our tireless commitment to sharing her unparalleled talent and unique work.

Another example is my French artist Daniel Hourdé, whose work I have also brought to Brazil. We organised an exhibition of enormous bronze sculptures of the human form in the streets of Ouro Preto, an historic, colonial town of Brazil, during one of its most important festivals. The second component of this exhibition, comprising drawings of diverse bodies and forms, was presented in the Museu Casa dos Contos in Ouro Preto. Both parts of the exhibition were later shown in the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro, where we had 65,000 visitors in three weeks! We're repeating



Courtesy of Galeria Agnia Mompalao © Diego Amaral

Olga de Amaral



Daniel Howard

this exhibition this year, expanding the scope to Salvador, São Paulo and Fortaleza. Even those in my original team of artists from when I was 18, Pablo Reinoso and Luis Tomasello, rose to great success. I always work hard to promote and support the artists that I represent because I'm very passionate about their work.

What were the last trips that you made in order to discover an artist's work or to visit the studio of one of your artists?

The last trip I made was for Cabral in São Paulo. Cabral is a fabulous artist that I represent and one of the most important expressionists working internationally today. His use of material, gesture and colour are very violent and unique. In the series titled 'Fala D. João', Cabral honours the Portuguese King D. Joao II (1481-1495) and his determination to develop territorial and maritime expansion. This was part of our September 2015 exhibition in Paris.

What have your experiences at SP-ARTE in São Paulo and at Art Rio been like?

SP-ARTE continues to be a beautiful experience that keeps me going back year after year. It's a very professional art fair and its director Fernanda Feitosa is ambitious and worldly. She has been working tirelessly to grow and develop the fair,

working with Rodrigo Moura, director of art and cultural programmes at Inhotim, to curate the 'Solo' section. He is fantastic and asked me to collaborate by realising a solo show for Olga de Amaral. For the edition last April, I had two booths, one with the more contemporary works by Olga and the other with her works from the 1970s.

At ArtRio in September, I presented the French duo Todd & Fitch and Olga de Amaral. Todd & Fitch already had a large international following and we were excited to be bringing their work to South America for the first time. They create wonderful pieces that defy classification, using the techniques whilst simultaneously exploring light and texture. So I thought their work would be complementary to Olga's.

What is your vision for the future of your gallery in terms of participating in international fairs and collaborating with galleries as well as museums abroad?

My dream is to create a retrospective exhibition for Olga de Amaral, who is more than 80 years old, and show the trajectory of her work throughout her life. Nearly all of the major museums around the world (including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la

ville de Paris] have acquired a piece of her work. Regarding the fairs, I would like to participate in Art Basel Miami Beach as well as Frieze New York and The Armory Show and Art Basel Hong Kong.

Have you thought of opening a second space?

I've already opened a space in the north of Brazil [paintings by some of her artists are on view in Lara Hotel in Fortaleza]. In the coming years, I have plans to open in London, New York and São Paulo where I'm already active in these locations myself or through communication and partnerships.

What else would you like to do?

I'd like to expand into the world of fashion. Right now I'm designing my own perfume and I'm going to start working on a line of jewellery.

Galerie Agnès Monplaisir represents:

Olga de Amaral, Marco Coelho Benjamin, Igor Mitoraj, Todd & Fitch, Cabral, Jim Amaral, Nádia Tuquary, Juri Sarmento, Daniel Howard, Eugénia Grandchamps das Raças, Girolamo Ciulla, Manuela Zervoudachi, Do König Vasiliadis, Stephen Sumner and Hermann Albert.

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Cabral



Nádia Tuquary