

At 98 Years Old, Painter Luchita Hurtado Is Just Hitting Her Stride

by LOUIS WISE

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CREDIT: LAURE JOLIET

Luchita Hurtado seems to have known every great artist of the 20th century, from Frida Kahlo to Marcel Duchamp, but it has taken her nearly a century to be known as one herself. At 98, though, this is finally changing, with her first-ever institutional show due at [London](#)'s Serpentine Galleries this summer. Yet the sunny-minded Hurtado, Venezuelan-born but living in Los Angeles since the 1950s, says she has been fine with the wait. "I'm glad I'm sharing now," she says in her bright, plant-filled studio in Santa Monica, "because I never felt before that I needed to share. It was the other way around: I worked to please myself."

Hurtado's dreamy, colourful canvases tend to resist definition. Whether you call them surrealist or magical realist or even tribal, they reflect her deep concern with nature and the indigenous cultures she has encountered in a life that has been action-packed. She has led a nomadic and sociable existence, roaming from Venezuela to [New York](#) to Mexico to Los Angeles, picking up three husbands and having several children on the way. She also made a variety of intriguing friends, including Duchamp, who once, in conversation, gave her a spontaneous foot rub. It was chaste, she swears, but it seems to sum up her intimacy with the great and good, having long lived in an artistic milieu.



“Life has dropped me in the lap of these things,” she insists with a smile. “I had nothing to do with it.” With her pictures, however, often painted late at night, she was more private and more determined. “It was like a diary,” she shrugs - which also explains why she hates labels. “What I’m doing is my life, and my life is not one thing. It’s unforeseen, and I like it that way.”

It was only when curators were clearing out the studios of her third husband, the painter Lee Mullican, a few years ago, that they noticed some unusual paintings from a different hand, signed with the initials LH. Before then, her last solo show had been in 1974 - now they are gathering at a steady pace.

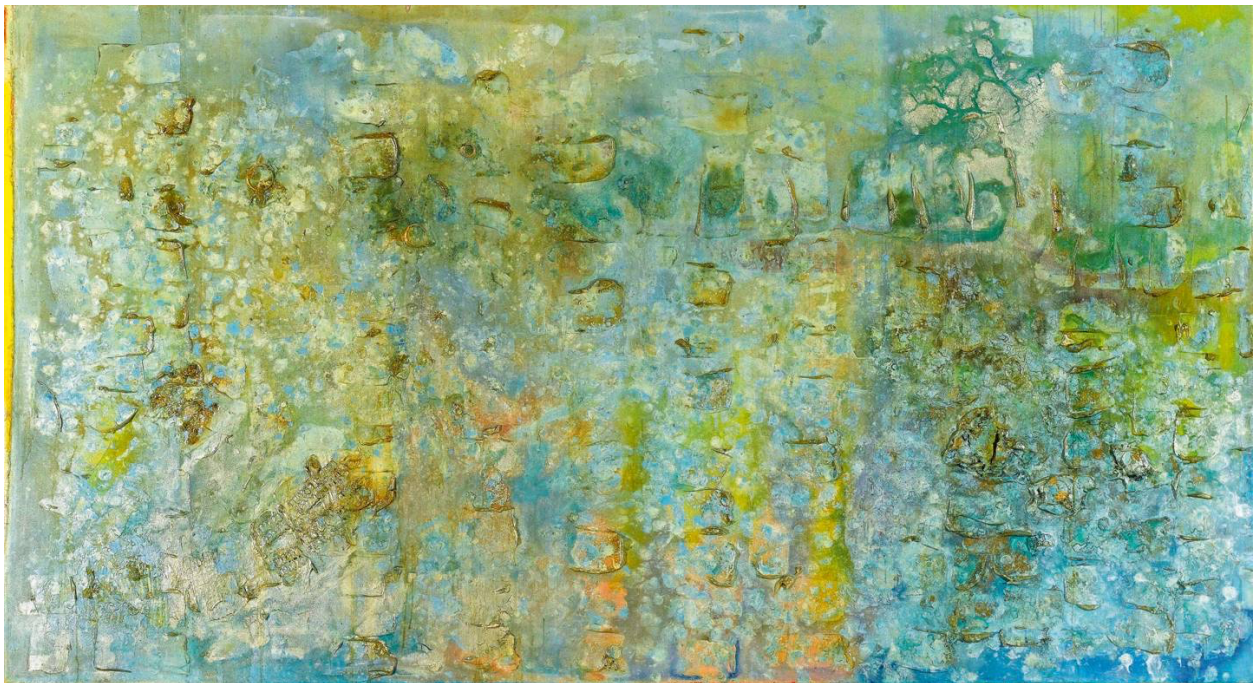


And she is nowhere near stopping: Hurtado visits her studio every day, and is already planning for her 100th birthday, which falls late next year. What keeps her motoring is her natural good humour, which has helped her with life’s hardest moments - including losing a son, aged five, to polio. But she prefers to look at the light rather than the dark.

“I was told by an aunt, ‘If you ended up in jail, you’d have a great time, too,’” she laughs. “I never tried it, though.” Could she spend her 100th birthday in jail, then? “No way,” she cries. “That’s not acceptable! I’ve grown up.” Although she does sound intrigued by the idea.

Three more exhibitions by leading – and age-defying – painters to see this year

Frank Bowling



Frank Bowling’s career is full of firsts, be it as the first living black British artist to enter Tate’s collection, or the first black artist elected to the Royal Academy. But his next – an overdue retrospective at Tate Britain – is an achievement of which he’s especially proud. “I’ve been waiting a long time for this,” says the Guyana-born 85-year-old. It’s some understatement: he moved to London in the 1950s, eventually studying art alongside David Hockney. He has a ball with painting, pushing it “to the extremes”. His huge abstract canvases never hold back in terms of palette or execution. “Paint can surprise you,” says Bowling, who believes he is still producing some of his “best and most complex” work. “Its possibilities are endless.”

Frank Bowling will show at [Tate Britain](#), London SW1, from 31 May to 26 August.

Howardena Pindell



When Howardena Pindell has her first solo show in the UK, British art-lovers will discover a powerful voice, a woman who has distinguished herself in America as an artist, a curator and critic. Since moving to New York in 1967, the Philadelphian, now 76, has produced a varied body of work, from beautiful abstracts to furiously political pieces, dwelling on her experiences as a black female artist. “It has been a rollercoaster experience,” she says of her five decades in the art world. She is “stunned” by the upsurge of interest in her work, and grateful. “For years I considered it under the radar; a message tossed out to sea in a bottle.”

Howardena Pindell will show at [Victoria Miro](#), London W1, from 5 June to 27 July.

Huguette Caland



Adventure runs throughout the life and work of Huguette Caland. Ever since the Beirut-born artist left her home, husband and three children to go to Paris in 1970, she hasn't held back, producing a wild array of paintings, drawings and mannequin sculptures – even kaftans for Pierre Cardin. They are “independent, bold and playful”, explains Anne Barlow, director of Tate St Ives, which is hosting a retrospective of Caland's work in May. The artist, now 88, has returned to Beirut, but her ethos – erotic, mysterious and determinedly feminine – remains. “I didn't ask permission,” Caland has said. “No one grants freedom to others. You take it.”

Huguette Caland will show at [Tate St Ives](#), Cornwall, from 24 May to 1 September.