

# Beatriz Milhazes

## *Maresias*

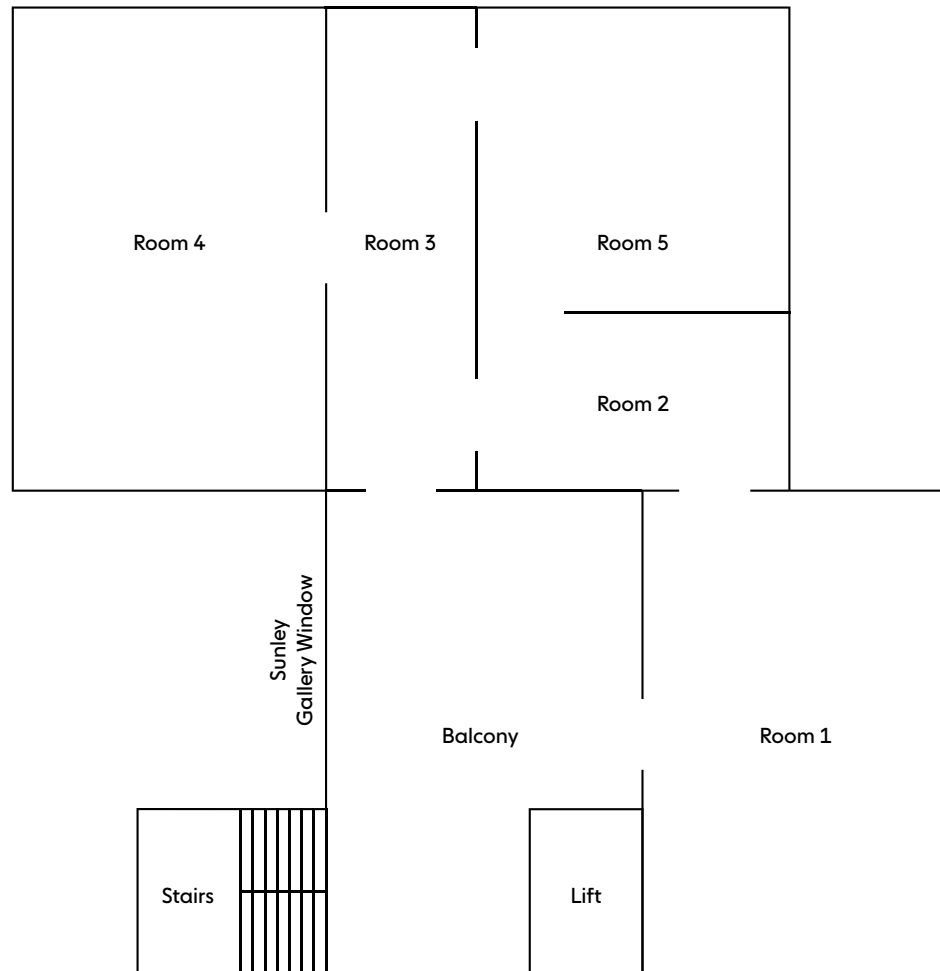
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Turner  
Contemporary

# Beatriz Milhazes

# Maresias



Clore Learning Studio  
(Portfolio X RISE UP. CLEAN UP  
and Children's Art Library)

Beatriz Milhazes (b.1960, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is widely recognised as one of the leading abstract artists working today.

Milhazes emerged in the 1980s as an essential figure in the Brazilian art movement *Geração Oitenta* (1980s Generation). Embracing painting as a form of energy and expression, the artists associated with this group represented a vital shift away from the austere Conceptual art of the previous decade. In the context of military dictatorship, their work also signalled levity, exuberance and the first steps toward freedom that would come with the end of the regime in 1985. Today, Milhazes is known for intensely colourful, large-scale abstract canvases that present energetic contradictions. These works are characterised by a careful and deliberate composition that have the appearance of spontaneity. They also have slick surfaces that conceal the small details of cracks and layers, which signify the importance of history and memory to her painting process.

*Maresias* is Milhazes' first exhibition in a public gallery in the UK for over twenty years. It traces the evolution of her artistic approach over the past four decades. Organised chronologically, each room explores how Milhazes interweaves the local and international, historic and contemporary, combining references to Brazilian contexts and heritage with elements influenced by Western abstract painting.

The exhibition highlights nature as an enduring and increasingly important theme in Milhazes' work. This is echoed in the title *Maresias*, which refers to the salty sea breeze that is part of Milhazes' everyday life in the coastal city of Rio de Janeiro, where she lives and works.

A note on the titles: in the late 1980s, Milhazes began to use descriptive titles in her works. They are poetic and meaning does not always translate directly from Portuguese to English. Where Milhazes has found an English translation that evokes the same meaning, we have included these below the original title.

# Room 1

The late 1980s and 1990s marked a profound breakthrough in Milhazes' approach.

In her early paintings, Milhazes incorporated collaged elements such as fabric and paper cut-outs. In 1989, she developed her 'monotransfer' technique in which she draws and then paints her own motifs onto individual plastic sheets which are then carefully transferred onto canvas. By layering these pre-painted motifs, she effectively adapts the concept of collage to painting. Monotransfer also allows her to create a smooth surface which enhances the intensity of colours, while retaining a deliberately painterly quality in the work, as the process leaves marks and residues. It is a technique she continues to use today.

It was during this period, against a backdrop of political change in Brazil, that Milhazes looked to the Anthropofagia movement of the 1960s. Inspired by poet Oswald de Andrade's 1928 manifesto, this movement viewed Brazilian culture as a potent result of assimilating and transforming the various cultural traditions brought to the country through colonialism, digesting and reimagining them to create a distinctively Brazilian aesthetic.

Reflecting this idea, Milhazes' canvases celebrate a myriad of influences. There are forms and motifs borrowed from Catholic iconography and Baroque colonial architecture, Brazilian modernist architecture, and floral fabrics sourced from markets and Rio's Carnival Parade. At the same time, the inspiration she finds in Brazilian and European modernist artists is also clear: vivid colour palettes employed by Henri Matisse, the geometric abstractions of artists such as Sonia Delaunay and Piet Mondrian, and the compositions of Tarsila do Amaral became, and remain, important influences in her work.



## Room 2

Milhazes describes herself as a scientist, generating new works by creating a 'chain reaction'. Rather than approaching the blank canvas with an entirely new set of ideas, she introduces just one or two new elements. A new colour, motif, or form brings fresh energy to otherwise familiar elements of her compositions. Over time, new directions evolve.

The two canvases in this room are characteristic of this way of working. *O Leme* (2002) belongs to a group of works made in the early 2000s in which Milhazes began to experiment with stripes. She was inspired by a New York exhibition of the artist Bridget Riley, whose geometric abstractions pioneered the Op Art movement. Milhazes said "her straight lines are so full of life" and "her paintings, together, give rise to a samba". By layering the lines with concentric discs and alternating colours, Milhazes created her own kaleidoscopic effect.

With *O Sol de Londres* (2003), Milhazes incorporated the rosette within an explosion of highly stylised flowers – as well as peace symbols, mandalas, love hearts and fruit – in a joyful yet ambiguous reference to psychedelia, hippie culture and Pop Art. The idea to contain these forms within a hundred coloured squares to create what she has described as a "monochromatic but quite active background" came from collage which – as the works in the next gallery show – she had returned to with renewed focus earlier that year.



## Room 3

“I think artists are like vampires. We are always observing, collecting visual information from the world around us. However, the way we use information is what sets us apart.”

Collage – the layering and combining of disparate elements onto the same surface – has been integral to Milhazes’ approach since the outset of her career. In the 1980s, she incorporated paper cut-outs, fabric, and lengths of ribbon into her paintings on canvas as seen in some works Room 1. The introduction of her monotransfer technique (the layering of individual dried painted transfers) in 1989 allowed her to continue the basic principle of collage but with forms of her own making.

In 2003, Milhazes returned to creating collages with found materials. Sweet and chocolate wrappers, branded packaging, tissues and hologrammed and silkscreened papers are among the materials to feature, from a collection Milhazes has built over many years.

Milhazes sources these materials from her everyday life and travels, and cuts them into shapes influenced by her environment, such as tropical fauna or details of Baroque architecture. In this way, they function as a personal journal of sorts. At the same time, the layering and juxtaposition of references to art, architecture and popular culture reflects her fascination with the ‘high low’: different expressions of taste and pleasure, and the hybridity of everyday life in Brazil.



## Room 4

The early 2000s marked an important point in Milhazes' career. In 2002, she had her first large solo exhibition in Brazil at CCBB – Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, titled *Mares do Sul*. The following year, in 2003, she represented Brazil at the 50th Venice Biennale.

The paintings in this room embody Milhazes' concept of 'chromatic free geometry' that she expanded on during this period. She skillfully balances the structure and order of her carefully planned compositions with a sense of spontaneity, movement and chance. Milhazes' use of circles is integral to this dynamic quality. In her earlier compositions, seen in Room 1, they took the form of ruffles and gilded rosettes. Over time, beadwork, daisies and compass flowers as well as the outline of circles have all become part of her visual language. By creating dense compositions against a background of monochromatic squares or rectangles, she creates the sense that the motifs could keep on multiplying, like cells under a microscope.

The expanded scale of her paintings during this period anticipates Milhazes' developments in public art from 2004. These larger works serve as precursors to her future endeavours in transforming public spaces, captivating audiences with their grandeur and immersive qualities.



## Room 5

Milhazes has long incorporated natural forms into her work. For many years, this stemmed not from a desire to represent nature itself but from an interest in how nature is portrayed in the decorative and applied arts. A flower might be inspired by a patterned fabric, a wave might refer to a detail from mid-century architecture.

Slowly, her approach has evolved. Around 2008, Milhazes began to absorb into her canvases the influence of Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach, Tijuca forest, and the botanical garden near her studio. Whereas her sketches of flora had previously come from references she found in books, over the past ten years she has begun to work directly from nature.

Increasingly, Milhazes takes inspiration from her environment, and especially her interest in the structures and cycles of renewal found in the natural world. Rivers and oceans, petals and branches have become prominent in her work. So too have circles, which she has described as “the core of spirituality”, saying: “they are connected to the breath and speed of the forests, flowers, leaves, animal shapes, the power of the waves, water, oceans, the Earth's rotation, the Sun, the Moon, day, night, sky, light [...] It has to do with the order of Nature. It's both sensible and structured, and that's what I try to show in my work.”

As they evoke the unique environment around her, the works invite reflection on nature's ability to uplift and restore. These themes are also present in the Sunley Window installation *O Esplendor*, which frames the view to the coastal landscape.



## Sunley Gallery Window

Since 2004 Beatriz Milhazes has made site-specific works for buildings and public spaces. Her projects range from window and floor designs to an installation at Gloucester Road Underground station (2005), the façade of the Selfridges department store in Manchester (2004) and a 41 metres-long ceramic mosaic at the New York Presbyterian Hospital (2016). These installations create opportunities to witness the vibrant interplay of colour and form on a grand scale. They are in dialogue with architecture and their surrounding environments.

Here, Milhazes combines natural motifs from the landscape around her in Rio with the breathtaking view from the Sunley Gallery Window, seamlessly blending it with her home horizon, the vast expanse of the ocean, and the limitless sky. Working with the idea of stained-glass but using translucent vinyl, Milhazes transforms the space with colour and light. She is inspired by artist Henri Matisse's paper cut-outs and the windows he created for Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence, France.

By leaving the view partially visible, *O Esplendor* connects with the landscape surrounding the gallery. Its changing weather, the quality of light and the sunsets which inspired JMW Turner encourage us to reflect on our own relationship with the environment.

*O Esplendor* is adapted from an installation at the Long Museum, Shanghai, in 2021. Off-cuts of vinyl will be used this summer in the Clore Learning Studio as part of a programme of children's workshops and activities experimenting with Milhazes' techniques and inspired by her interest in the natural world. View the window from outside the gallery; it will be illuminated in the evenings until 11pm.

## Biography

Beatriz Milhazes was born in 1960 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where she lives and works. She represented Brazil at the 50th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2003); she has also participated in the São Paulo Biennial (1998, 2004); and the Shanghai Biennial (2006).

Milhazes has been the subject of solo exhibitions including Long Museum (West Bund), Shanghai (2021); MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo (2020); Pérez Art Museum, Miami, USA (2014/2015); Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2021); Fondation Cartier, Paris (2009) and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2001).

Her work is included in numerous collections, including Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo; Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo; Fundação Edson Queiroz, Fortaleza; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo Art Museum, Tokyo; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and Tate, London.

She has presented UK public commissions for Art on the Underground (*Peace and Love*, 2005), Tate Modern (*Guanabara*, 2005/2007) and the window façade of Selfridges, Manchester (*Gavea*, 2004).





## Learning Programme

### Lacuna

Teacher and educator exhibition  
preview of *Maresias*.

→ Wednesday 25 May 5–7pm

### Art Rebels

Family workshops inspired by the  
shapes and colours in Beatriz  
Milhazes' artwork.

→ Saturdays and Sundays over the  
summer holidays 1–4pm  
for children aged 5–12

### Colourful Windows

Family workshop led by  
Beatriz Milhazes.

→ Sunday 28 May 3–4.30pm  
for children aged 7–12

### Summer Stories

Sensory interactive storytelling for  
young children. Each week focuses  
on a different book in the Children's  
Art Library.

→ Tuesdays over the summer  
holidays 3–4.30pm  
for children aged 0–5

### Margate Carnival Workshop Week

A mix of music and costume making  
workshops led by GB Carnival in the  
run up to Margate Carnival.

→ 1–5 August, throughout the day,  
please see the website for details.

→ 6 August, Margate Carnival  
For children of all ages.

Booking may be required, please visit  
[turnercontemporary.org/whats-on/](http://turnercontemporary.org/whats-on/)

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Cover  
*O Diamante 2002*  
(The diamond)  
Acrylic on canvas  
250 x 381 cm  
"la Caixa" Foundation Contemporary  
Art Collection  
Photo Vicente de Mello

Room 1  
*Fleur de la passion: Maracujá 1995–96*  
(Passion flower: Maracujá)  
Acrylic on canvas  
119.5 x 202.5 cm  
Thibault Poutrel Collection  
Photo Thomas DuBrock

Room 2  
*O sol de Londres 2003*  
(The London sun)  
Acrylic on canvas  
249.5 x 230 cm  
Private Collection, London  
Photo Sid Hoeltzell

Room 3  
*Os cisnes com vermelho,  
rosa e prata 2017*  
(The swans with red, pink and silver)  
Collage of various papers and artist's  
print cut-outs on paper  
70 x 69.5 cm  
Monsoon Art Collection  
Photo Manuel Águas and  
Pepe Schettino

Room 4  
*Maresias 2002–03*  
(Salty sea breeze)  
Acrylic on canvas  
300 x 267 cm  
TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art  
Contemporary Collection  
Photo Fausto Fleury

Room 5  
*Douradinha em cinza e marrom 2016*  
(Douradinha in grey and brown)  
Acrylic on linen  
200 x 240 cm  
Private Collection (Courtesy  
of Weiler Seiler Fine Art)  
Photo Manuel Águas and  
Pepe Schettino

*Maracorola 2015*  
Acrylic on canvas  
128 x 289 cm  
Private Collection, UK, courtesy  
of Ivor Braka Ltd.  
Photo Manuel Águas and  
Pepe Schettino

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27 May – 10 September 2023

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