

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE

ARTIST ILANA SAVDIE CREATES NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN PAINTINGS FOR UPCOMING EXHIBITION AT THE WHITNEY



Opening July 14, Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions presents new work that dismantles ideas of binary identity and embraces performance as a transformative tool.

New York, NY, July 6, 2023 — *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions*, opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art July 14, 2023, spotlights emerging powerhouse Ilana Savdie and her explorations of performance, transgression, identity, and power through vibrant and intense large-scale canvases. The artist's striking new paintings and black-and-white drawings, which are foundational for her paintings, will debut at the Whitney and were created specifically for this exhibition.

Referencing a range of subjects like the history of abstract art, folklore, human anatomy, microbiology, horror, and pop culture, Savdie creates complex and unruly abstractions by

seamlessly juxtaposing varied fragments, vivid color palettes, and unexpected textures. The artist expertly applies brilliant, intense hues—bile greens, oozing yellows, and delicate washes of pink—in thickly-laid brushstrokes of acrylic, oil, and scaly beeswax. She subverts and distorts representational forms throughout her work to create surreal encounters that blend reality and myth.

“The new exhibition, *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions*, represents our ongoing commitment to emerging artists in the early stages of their careers who are adding a specific point of view to current discourses in contemporary art,” says Marcela Guerrero, the DeMartini Family Curator at the Whitney. “Through a type of abstraction still very much rooted in the body, Savdie creates paintings that speak to power dynamics, fluid identities, and transgression, without compromising her impeccable formal technique.”

In Savdie’s paintings, the clinical and the folkloric intersect through the radicalization of the body, drawing parallels between the legacies of oppressive political climates and the natural forces at play in the biological world. Inversion, excess and mimicry as modes of subversion are explored through the evolutionary strategies of the parasite/host/predator/prey dynamics, disrupting the notions of binaries as fixed.

The artist’s inquiry into forms of resistance and protest through mockery, exaggeration, and the grotesque are influenced by her experience growing up around the Carnaval de Barranquilla. Savdie is particularly drawn to the Marimonda, a figure from the Carnaval known in folklore to mock the so-called elite. Savdie is interested in the transformative power of performance and sees the trickster in both folklore and in nature as an invaluable agent of change.

“It has been thrilling to work with Savdie on her first solo museum exhibition. For this new body of work, she has materialized beguiling abstractions on canvas and paper that boldly convey our tumultuous times,” says Angelica Arbelaez, the Whitney’s Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow. “Throughout our collaboration on *Radical Contractions*, we have seen how Savdie’s artistic acuity and ambitious approach to texture, form, and color makes her one of the most exciting rising talents of her generation.”

“This new body of work comes from a desperate need to interrogate cultural and social anxieties through my own visceral responses. The paintings explore the familiar, the alien, the uncanny and the seductive and what it means to exist in a perpetual state of unresolve,” says artist Ilana Savdie. “I’m interested in how longing, desire, and failure can be recategorized as weapons of the weak and this work is in a way a dissection of that impulse.”

Savdie combines soft, blurred textures with areas of thick brushstrokes of acrylic, oil, and beeswax to create dreamlike illusions grounded with recognizable yet distorted figures. The Marimonda appears in her painting, *Tickling the Before and After (Cosquilleo Interior)*, 2023, slipping in and out of forms. This character is quick-witted yet disruptive; its provocative ethos is represented through expressive colors, forms, textures, and material techniques.

Drawing from art history and horror in her paintings, Savdie cites Francisco de Goya as another major influence. In particular, Goya’s etching *Aguarda que te unten (Wait till you’ve been anointed)* from his biting satirical *Los Caprichos* series inspired her recent painting, *Baths of*

Synovia (Baño Sinovial), 2023, an abstracted, colorful version of the metamorphic scene in the Spanish artist's print. Goya's image depicts a faun and a one-eyed woman restraining a billy goat attempting to fly, covering the creature's unsettling human foot in ointment. Responding to the theme of transformation, Savdie recreates Goya's vision with winding shapes that fluctuate as they ascend toward a plane of deep blue beeswax.

The biological world is also a consistent focus in Savdie's work as a metaphor for the turmoil of oppressive political climates. In *Pinching the Frenulum (Frenillo Pellizca'o)*, 2023, Savdie compares the turbulence, silencing, erasure, and violence the vulnerable experience in the face of power grabs to the response of prey resisting predators in nature. Abstracted forms merge and blend to create riotous excess in the painting, a scene of constricting biomorphic forms impossible to untangle from one another, suggest an unlikely escape from the predator.

Co-curated by Marcela Guerrero, DeMartini Family Curator, and Angelica Arbelaez, Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions* will be on view July 14–November 5, 2023, in the Museum's Lobby Gallery. This space is accessible to the public free of charge, and often highlights the latest emerging talent and innovation in American art.

About the Artist

Ilana Savdie (b. 1986) was raised between Barranquilla, Colombia, and Miami, Florida, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Drawing from the history of abstract art, folklore, human anatomy, horror, and pop culture, Savdie creates uncanny abstractions considering how power structures can be resisted, transgressed, and dismantled.

Savdie received an MFA from the Yale University School of Art and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. She participated in the 2022 Emerging Artist Residency Program at Horizon Art Foundation, Los Angeles, and was a fellow in the NXTHVN Fellowship Program in New Haven. The artist has also been the subject of solo exhibitions, including *In Jest* at White Cube, London (2022); *Entrañadas* at Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles (2021); *Swimming in Contaminated Waters* at Deli Gallery, New York (2021); and *Loose Bodies* at ltd Los Angeles @ VACATION, New York (2018).

The artist's work is represented in prominent museum collections, including the Burger Collection, Hong Kong; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Free Public Program

A free virtual and in-person program is offered in conjunction with *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions*. More information about these programs and how to register will be available on the Museum's [website](#) as details are confirmed.

PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at whitney.org/press or contact:

Meghan Ferrucci, Publicist

Whitney Museum of American Art

(212) 671-8346

Meghan_Ferrucci@whitney.org

Whitney Press Office

whitney.org/press

(212) 570-3633

pressoffice@whitney.org

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Generous support for *Ilana Savdie: Radical Contractions* is provided by the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation.

Additional support is provided by the Artists Council and Jackson Tang.

ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30

am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. COVID-19 vaccination and face coverings are not required but strongly recommended. We encourage all visitors to wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth throughout their visit.

Image caption:

Ilana Savdie, *Baths of Synovia (Baño Sinovial)*, 2023. Oil, acrylic, and beeswax on canvas stretched on panel, 120 × 86 in. (304.8 × 218.44 cm). Courtesy the artist. © Ilana Savdie. Photograph by Lance Brewer

###