

A surreal painting by Thaddaeus Ropac. The central figure is a person wrapped in a bright yellow shawl, seated in a small, curved boat. The boat is surrounded by large, flowing, organic shapes in shades of purple, pink, and brown, resembling liquid or fabric. The background is a complex, swirling pattern of dark brown, blue, and yellow, with a single onion floating in the upper center. The overall style is expressive and dreamlike.

Zadie Xa
Rough hands weave a knife

12 April—26 May 2024

Paris Marais

Thaddaeus Ropac

London Paris Salzburg Seoul

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For her first solo exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac, Zadie Xa presents new works spanning diverse mediums that reflect on ideas of interspecies communication and transmutation, world-building and symbols of protection and power. Born in Vancouver, Canada, and now based in London, Xa draws upon her Korean heritage and its rich mythological tradition across paintings and textile works, as well as a group of four bronze sculptures, which represents a new facet of her practice.

This exhibition at the Paris Marais gallery will be the artist's first in France. Tying it to the art-historical landscape of its surroundings, Xa cites Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau, painters of the Parisian Symbolist movement in the late 19th century, as inspirations for her new group of paintings. 'I've always been interested in semiotics and signs and symbols', the artist explains, but the fantastical pastoral scenes in these new works betray this particular influence. Across expansive landscapes that span monumental, and, in some cases, polyptych paintings, Xa combines memories of the Pacific Northwest, where she grew up, Korean landscapes studied through photography and historical painting, and fictional elements into composite topographies that recall the dreamlike world-building achieved by science fiction and fantasy artists like Frank Frazetta: another important reference for the artist. As she explains: 'this amalgamation of different spaces into something desired but abstract is a visual reflection on metaphysical ideas of homeland': a reformulation of landscape through diasporic experience.

Surrealist women artists such as Leonora Carrington and Leonor Fini were also central to Xa as she conceptualised the exhibition for the way they mined the potential of dream, fantasy and the unconscious to envisage new societal possibilities. The foxes, crows and seagulls that weave in and out of the exhibition are

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drawn from the artist's urban reality, while other characters – cloaked figures with birds' heads or feathered tails – are imagined hybrids. For Xa, animals carry abundant allegorical power, just as they do in Korean folklore and mythology, which also offer the artist a rich pool of creatures and characters with which to people her paintings. Through these metamorphing figures in which the animal and the human are placed in direct communication with one another, Xa harnesses the symbolic power of animals across cultures and traditions to highlight particular human traits and behaviours, or, like Carrington did before her, to express particularities of women's experience of the world. 'I feel like those symbols hold genuine power and magic when placed within the ecosystem of my work,' says Xa.

The four sculptures on view were created in collaboration with the artist Benito Mayor Vallejo, with whom Xa has worked closely since 2006. They also represent concentrations of talismanic power within the symbolic visual language that runs throughout the exhibition. Three are based on characters from performances the artist presented at the Venice Biennale (2019) and at the National Gallery, London (2021), and reference Korean funerary dolls, which would traditionally be carved in wood and placed on the casket to accompany the dead on their journey to the next world, providing protection, care or entertainment along the way. Xa's reimaginings of these figures – an orca on human legs beating a drum, or a nine-tailed fox performing a handstand on human hands – come alive against the backdrop of the paintings to give the exhibition a sense of lyricism and movement. A fourth sculpture is made up of intertwined creatures, including a *haetae*: a Korean mythological animal often placed at the entrances of civic buildings to protect them, and to judge and refuse entry to the wicked. Here it is placed at the beginning of the exhibition, as if to guard the space. Cast in bronze, the sculptures take on an imposing new weight and a scale within Xa's practice.

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Like in her recent solo presentations at Whitechapel Gallery, London (2022–23) and Space K, Seoul (2023), textile is an integral part of *Rough hands weave a knife*, emerging both through the multicoloured patchwork frames that surround some of the paintings and through stand-alone works made from irregular scraps of linen and denim. In them, Xa draws on the visual language of European and American Modernist geometric abstraction, as well as on the Korean *bojagi* patchwork tradition. Their palette is centred around the five Korean elemental colours: red, blue and yellow, as well as shades of black and white. Bringing together these pools of reference, Xa bridges the gap between practices considered ‘art’ and those considered ‘craft’, challenging the established hierarchical relationship between them. The title of the exhibition, *Rough hands weave a knife*, originated when the artist noticed the roughness of her own hands during the physically intense process of making the works on view. The titular knife is an extension of the symbolism of power and protection that runs throughout the exhibition, but also nods to modes of manual creation, particularly within domestic spheres, similarly reflecting a valorisation of the manual work involved in artistic practices that draw on craft traditions.

Guided by the principles of interdisciplinarity and immersivity, Xa views every exhibition as a work of art in itself, and as a continuation of the universes created in previous exhibitions. Each painting is linked to the others through unexpected visual resonances or repetitions, while several of the characters voyage between paintings and even across mediums, slipping in and out of sight as the visitor moves through the exhibition to give an impression of non-linear time and of multiple parallel yet connected universes. As Xa explains, the exhibition has at its heart ‘my indulgence in my desire to illustrate new worlds’, situated at the intersection between near and far, real and fantastical, lived and longed for.

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Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view,
Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa & Benito Mayor Vallejo
The Earth Remembers Everything.
Act Accordingly, 2024

Bronze

55.22 x 37.60 x 47.93 cm (21.74 x 14.8 x 18.87 in)

(ZXB 1016)



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55.22 x 37.60 x 47.93 cm (21.74 x 14.8 x 18.87 in)

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Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
Vancouver Shoreline, 2024
Sewn fabrics and wooden rod
130 x 170 cm (51.18 x 66.93 in)
(ZX 1051)





Zadie Xa
Pulgasari. May you always be protected, 2024
Oil on linen
180 x 400 cm (70.87 x 157.48 in)
(ZX 1053)



Zadie Xa
Rough hands weave a knife, 2024
Oil on linen
200 x 180 cm (78.74 x 70.87 in)
(ZX 1059)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
*Buffalo Gals, Won't You
Come Out Tonight, 2024*
Oil on linen
200 x 180 cm (78.74 x 70.87 in)
(ZX 1046)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view,
Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
Tricksters, Mongrels, Beasts, 2023
Oil on canvas
Triptych 240 x 600 cm (94.49 x 236.22 in)
(ZX 1040)





Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa & Benito Mayor Vallejo

Underworld Kin: Fox, 2024

Bronze

67 x 45.19 x 32.90 cm (26.38 x 17.79 x 12.95 in)

(ZX 1013)



Zadie Xa & Benito Mayor Vallejo

Underworld Kin: Fox, 2024

Bronze

67 x 45.19 x 32.90 cm (26.38 x 17.79 x 12.95 in)

(ZX 1013)



Zadie Xa

Resilience: 4 Ways of Knowing, 2024

Oil on linen with sewn fabric

200 x 180 cm (78.74 x 70.87 in)

(ZX 1044)



Zadie Xa & Benito Mayor Vallejo

Underworld Kin: Orca, 2024

Bronze

70.22 x 54.59 x 31.14 cm (27.65 x 21.49 x 12.26 in)

(ZXB 1014)



Zadie Xa & Benito Mayor Vallejo

Underworld Kin: Orca, 2024

Bronze

70.22 x 54.59 x 31.14 cm (27.65 x 21.49 x 12.26 in)

(ZXB 1014)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view,
Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa

Sewn Seeds, 2024

Oil on linen with sewn fabric
200 x 180 cm (78.74 x 70.87 in)

(ZX 1043)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa

*Passages via moonlight
and non linear time, 2024*

Oil on linen

Diptych 180 x 360 cm (70.87 x 141.73 in)

(ZX 1047)





Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
4 the Women of Iodo, 2022
Machine-stitched fabric, photo-printed cotton,
mother of pearl buttons, copper bells on hand-dyed linen
126 x 136 x 37 cm (49.61 x 53.54 x 14.57 in)
(ZX 1016)



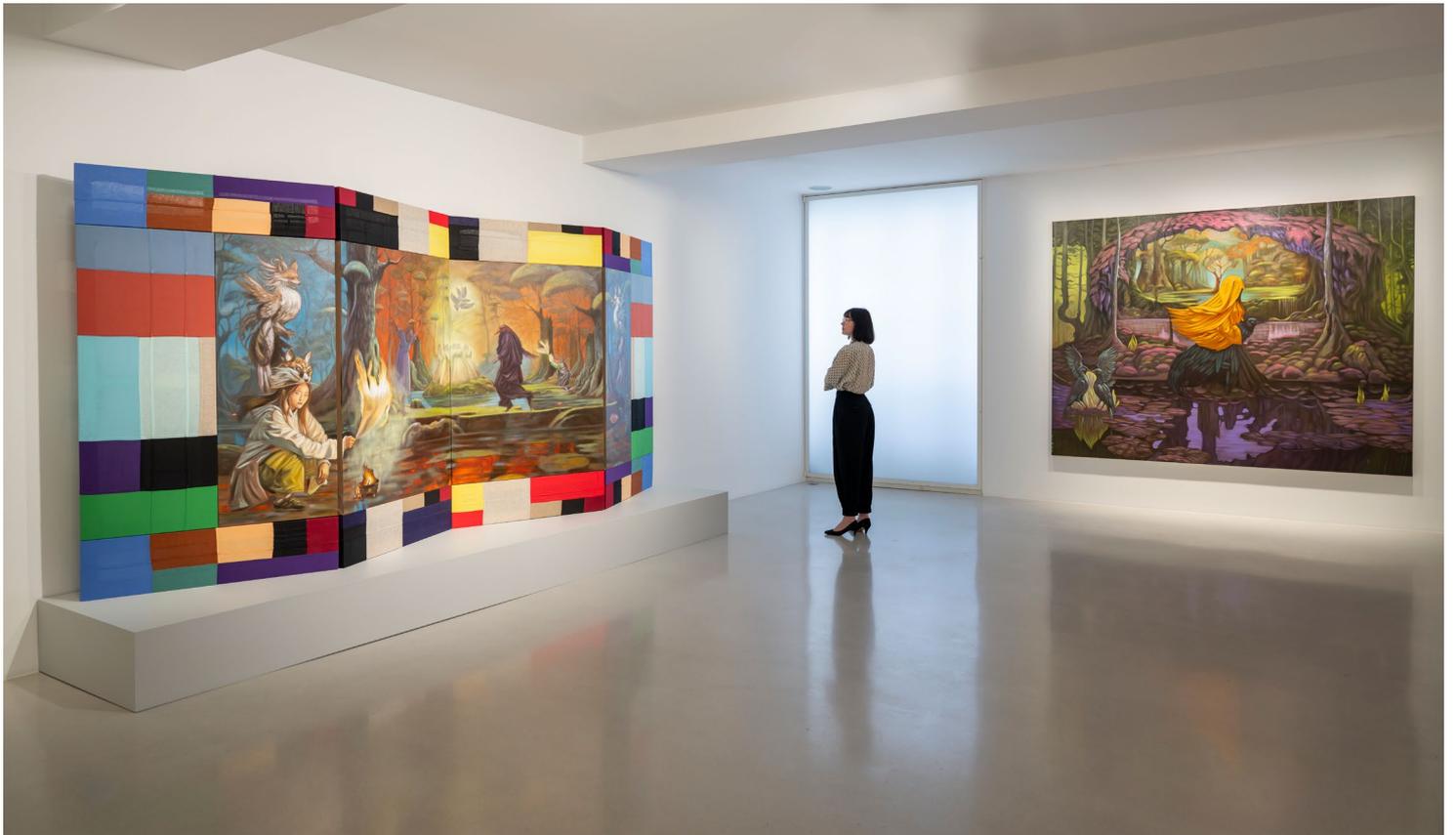
Zadie Xa
*The duty of all birds, all winged
creatures is vigilance. We remember: Seagull, 2024*
Oil on linen
65 x 50 cm (25.59 x 19.69 in)
(ZX 1049)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view,
Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
*Knowledge Seeker,
Soothsayer,
Great Grandmother, 2024*
Oil on linen
200 x 250 cm (78.74 x 98.43 in)
(ZX 1045)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa

*Muscle Memory,
Vision Quest, 2024*

Oil on linen with sewn fabric

Overall 180 x 400 cm (70.87 x 157.48 in)

(ZX 1042)





Zadie Xa
Poppy, 2024
Oil on linen
70 x 90 cm (27.56 x 35.43 in)
(ZX 1055)



Zadie Xa, *Rough hands weave a knife*, installation view, Thaddeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2024. Photo: Charles Duprat



Zadie Xa
Friendship and Birdsong, 2024
Oil on linen
70 x 90 cm (27.56 x 35.43 in)
(ZX 1054)



Zadie Xa
*Transformation,
Remembrance,
Renewal.*, 2024

Oil on linen

160 x 160 cm (62.99 x 62.99 in)

(ZX 1048)

Zadie Xa

About the artist



Zadie Xa trained at the prestigious Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design, Vancouver, earning a BFA in 2007, before receiving an MFA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London, in 2014. In 2022, the Whitechapel Gallery commissioned Xa's largest solo exhibition to take place in London to date, *House Gods, Animal Guides and Five Ways 2 Forgiveness* (2022–23). Other solo exhibitions of the artist's work have taken place at Space K, Seoul (2023); The Box, Plymouth (2022); Leeds Art Gallery (2021); Remai Modern, Saskatoon (2020); De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea (2019); Tramway, Glasgow (2019); and Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku (2019).

In 2019, Xa was invited to contribute to the performance programme curated by Ralph Rugoff with Aaron Cezar for the 58th Venice Biennale. Recent performances have since been staged by Xa at The National Gallery, London (2021; in collaboration with Benito Mayor Vallejo and curated by Priyesh Mistry), Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2020), and Tramway, Glasgow (2019), with earlier performances taking place at the Southbank Centre (2018; commissioned by the Hayward Gallery), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018), and Serpentine Gallery, London (2016). Xa's work has been featured in numerous international group exhibitions, including those at Copenhagen Contemporary, Denmark (2023); Institute of Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles (2022); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Roma (MACRO), Rome (2022); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2021); The Polygon Gallery, North Vancouver (2021); Arnolfini, Bristol (2019); and MoMA PS1 (2018). She participated in the Jeju Biennale in 2022 and the 13th Shanghai Biennale in 2021. Xa's work is held in the collections of the Arts Council, UK and the British Council; CRC Foundation, Turin; Space K, Seoul; K11, Hong Kong; and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Current & upcoming exhibitions



Ely House, London

Erwin Wurm
Surrogates
Until 13 April 2024

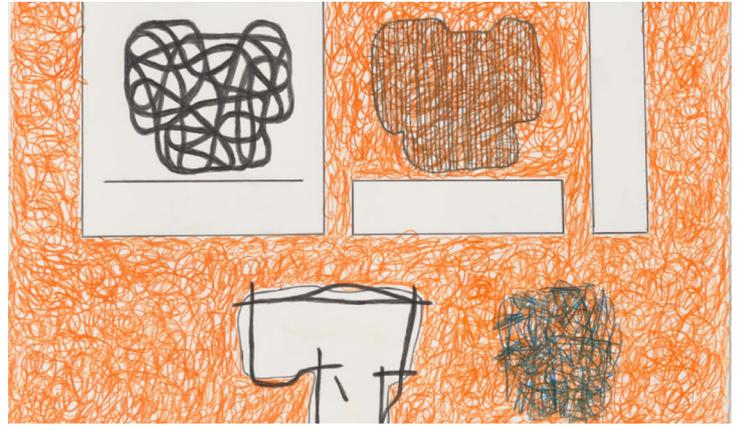


Robert Rauschenberg
ROI
24 April—15 June 2024



Paris Marais

Zadie Xa
Rough hands weave a knife
Until 26 May 2024



Jonathan Lasker
Painting and Drawing
Until 18 May 2024



Paris Pantin

Re-enchantment
Group show
Until 11 May 2024

Current & upcoming exhibitions

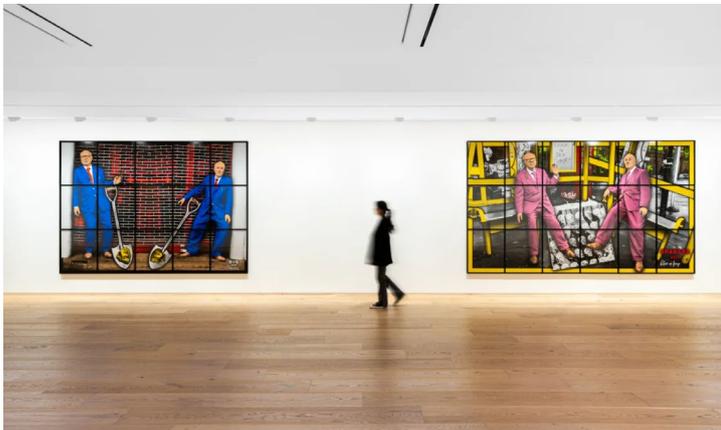


Salzburg Villa Kast

Amos Gitai
War Requiem
Until 11 May 2024



Tony Cragg
New Sculptures
Until 11 May 2024



Seoul Fort Hill

Gilbert & George
NEW NORMAL
URETHRA EXHIBITION
Until 18 May 2024