



María Frago, *Augurio*
PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARÍA FRAGO AND 1969 GALLERY

María Frago's Sensual Surrealist Paintings Explore Themes of Sexuality and Gender

The Mexico City-based artist plans to embrace her next chapter by experimenting with new mediums

BY JACOBA URIST

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María Fragoso.PHOTO: JORDAN WEITZMAN

“I’m actually in a very weird moment,” confesses artist María Fragoso, from her Mexico City studio. “Right now, I’m moving on to an entirely new body of work. For my second New York solo show, in early 2023, I want to include sculpture, which I’ve never done before.”

The declaration may surprise those following Fragoso’s rapid rise since earning a BFA in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art just three years ago. In that short time, she gained critical praise for her first solo show in New York, at 1969 Gallery last spring, and tantalized visitors with her sensuous, quick-to-sell-out presentation at the most recent Untitled Art in Miami Beach.

Surrealist vessels, saliva, pomegranates, conch shells, and snail slime comprise the world of Fragoso’s paintings and drawings. “Food creates pleasure just as many activities in love or sex do,” she says of the symbols in her work. To wit, bodies are often in erotically charged poses and rendered in lush crimson hues, with echoes of Mexican devotional tableaux and Renaissance nudes.



María Frago, *Seeding*. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARÍA FRAGOSO AND 1969 GALLERY



María Frago, *Augurio*. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARÍA FRAGOSO AND 1969 GALLERY

Although Frago is not from a religious background, Mexico's Catholic culture informs her vision as a pervasive lens through which sexuality, gender, and queerness are filtered. "In the beginning, I had the idea that figures in the paintings were in communion," explains Frago, who photographs friends and makes copious preparatory sketches before each composition. "The ritual emphasizes the importance of the mouth that's visible in many of my works, as is the importance of touch through hands or gloves."

“I want to give myself the time to experiment and play again”

MARÍA FRAGOSO

Augurio, for example, depicts a trio of women, two of whom are spurting water. “Initially, I asked my best friend for just one photo of herself spouting water from the side,” Fragoso recalls. “She sent me five different videos of her doing it over and over. Watching them, I realized there are so many more interesting poses that I could use.”



María Frago, *Pareja en Jade* PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARÍA FRAGOSO AND 1969 GALLERY

With a lightning ascent like hers, another young artist might be inclined to avoid risk. “There’s a big pressure to continuously create a lot, maybe even to repeat yourself because something is appreciated by many people,” she acknowledges. “But I want to give myself the time to experiment and play again.”

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