

# VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Indrisek, Scott, Katherine Bernhardt, *Modern Painters*, September 2015.



STUDIO CHECK

## Katherine Bernhardt

TEXT BY SCOTT INDRISEK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

BERNHARDT TENDS TO fixate on unlovely objects—things like crumpled cans of Modelo beer or rolls of toilet paper, or ChapStick or bananas. These end up in her large-scale, unabashedly messy acrylic-and-spray-paint canvases, often repeated with the serial density of deranged wallpaper. Recently, she's been thinking a lot about Puerto Rico, where she spent a few months on an unofficial residency—the island has inspired much of the content in her next solo show, "Pablo and Efrain," which opens at Venus Over Manhattan in New York on September 9, and for which she plans to cover the floor in rough coffee bags sourced from a factory based in Ponce. (This past summer, Bernhardt painted an enormous wall mural on the exterior of Venus Over Los Angeles, the gallery's newly opened outpost, and in October she'll have an additional solo exhibition at Carl Freedman Gallery in London.) The artist's Flatbush, Brooklyn, studio—formerly a car-detailing center—is full of tropical influences, as well as piles of Moroccan rugs, which she collects and sells and whose handmade geometric patterns have often found their way into her paintings. A plastic basketball hoop and some toy cars

testify to the presence of Bernhardt's 4-year-old son, a frequent studio companion. Nearby sits a sharply angular and decidedly less child-friendly sculpture by artist Sarah Braman.

Despite being hard at work in New York, Bernhardt is still thinking about the possibilities of Caribbean island life. "I've been about 10 times—I want to move there," she says of San Juan. "The neighborhood of Santurce is available, and open, and cheap. It's all warehouses. It's cool, but not cool." Her most recent trip was facilitated by collector and businessman Alberto de la Cruz, who gave her the use of what Bernhardt calls "the biggest studio I've ever had in my life—it had a skate ramp in it." While she says she has always been influenced by Caribbean-friendly aesthetics, the recent weeks she spent in San Juan led to Puerto Rico's wildlife (and fast food) being sampled quite explicitly into the newest paintings. "It's all tropical," she says of the brash hyper-colored compositions. "There'll be plantains, hammerhead sharks, sea turtles, cheeseburgers, french fries, toilet paper, parrots, palm trees... A crazy jungle." MP

**MIXED-MEDIA COLLAGE**

"Much of the fabric comes from Flatbush Avenue, from by-the-pound thrift stores. There's also postcards and cutouts from fashion magazines, T-shirts, sheets... They're really fun to make."



**CARVED-FOAM SCULPTURE**

"This piece is by Poncillo Creacion: Pablo and Efrain, these twins in Puerto Rico who are performance artists and puppeteers, and they carve foam. They're the epitome of the island—fun, crazy guys making art."



**VINTAGE MOROCCAN RUGS THAT THE ARTIST SELLS**

"Cream with the brown diamond design is from the Beni Ourain tribe. Ones with more color are Azilal. If it's all blue, it's Chichaoua. Certain places make only red ones. Some look like Rothkos. In Morocco, this is their furniture: they sit on it, sleep on it, everything. They're functional objects."



**COFFEE BAGS**

"Alberto de la Cruz, who sponsors the residency in Puerto Rico I just returned from, owns a coffee company. We did a tasting at his plant in Ponce. I'm going to use these to carpet the floor for the installation at Venus Over Manhattan."

**YORUBA KING'S SHIRT**

"With the combs in it, this shirt looks like a Brian Beloff painting. I like how muddy it is, just dirty and awesome. The beadwork is amazing. There are turtle shells, some crazy horn. I got it at Brooklyn Academy of Music's African street bazaar. I want to get a large branch from the park and hang it from that."



**NEW PAINTING**

"Bananas and toilet paper have nothing to do with each other, and that's why I like them together. The shapes also look good formally. It reminds me of some type of Dutch wax fabric."