

Crèvecoeur

Harriet Thorpe, *Sol Calero, Zora Mann and Shailesh BR*  
at Villa Arson, Studio International, April 2020.

**studio international**

Published 02/04/2020

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## Sol Calero, Zora Mann and Shailesh BR at Villa Arson

Three new solo exhibitions resulting from artists' residencies at Villa Arson explore architecture, place, ritual and introspection



*Shailesh BR. The Last Brahmin, installation view, Villa Arson, Nice 2020. Photo: François Fernandez / Villa Arson.*

Sol Calero: 'They insisted on covering the fissures, but the walls still perspired'

Zora Mann: Waganga

Shailesh BR: The Last Brahmin

Villa Arson, Nice, France

14 February – 3 May 2020

(Please note that due to the nationwide lockdown imposed by the French government because of the Coronavirus, these exhibitions are temporarily closed.)

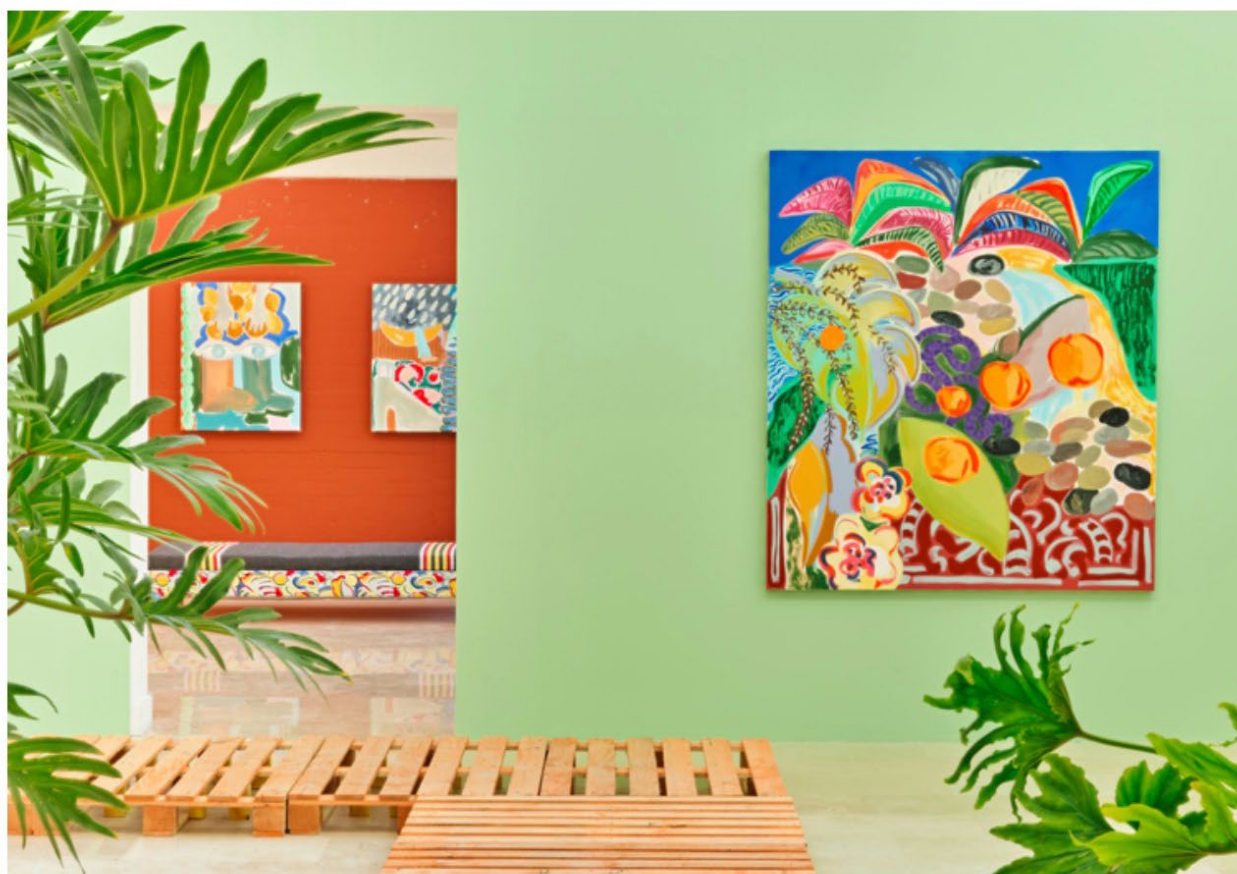
by HARRIET THORPE

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At the Villa Arson, an art centre, art school, library and artists' residence in Nice, a new season of three exhibitions has opened. The solo exhibitions draw from the four-month artist residencies of Sol Calero, Zora Mann and Shailesh BR, each invited to the villa by the director, Éric Mangion, who has spotted the potential of many emerging contemporary artists moving into their mid-careers.

The art centre sits at the heart of the sprawling Villa Arson complex overlooking the city and the Bay of Angels, and each exhibit is located in a different space. From an 18th-century mansion grows an organic extension of terraced brutalist buildings and gardens, designed in the 1960s by the architect Michel Marot. The Bosco, a concrete maze of layered streets, plants and patios, is brought alive by the art students who can be found sketching in its hidden corners.

The architecture of Villa Arson finds its way into each exhibition. Central to the exhibition by Calero is the organic decay of the gallery walls where she worked. For Mann, previously an art student at the Villa Arson, the building was a familiar canvas from which to work. The concrete terraces of the complex feature in the first video work of Shailesh BR, who is filmed performing a ritual act on the site.



*Sol Calero: 'They insisted on covering the fissures, but the walls still perspired', installation view, Villa Arson, Nice 2020. Photo: François Fernandez / Villa Arson.*



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### **Sol Calero: ‘They insisted on covering the fissures, but the walls still perspired’**

The Berlin-based Venezuelan-born artist Sol Calero (b1982) started her residency at Villa Arson in Nice with the aim of slowing down after a busy few years of back-to-back shows. “It sounds like a cliché, but after months being here you can really understand why artists move here to paint,” she says of the city that so enchanted Henri Matisse and Marc Chagall.

Calero’s paintings, which depict fruits, plants, objects and sculptures, were already bright, but the two new paintings made during the residency take on a distinctly pinkish glow, just like the sunsets of Nice. These two works join the series *Pasaje del Olvido*, inspired by memories of summers with her grandmother in Venezuela. Gradually, Calero has seen her paintings becoming more gestural, reflecting the growing blurriness of her memories of her Venezuelan identity.



*Sol Calero. Solo pintura II, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 120 cm. Courtesy: Barbara Gross Gallery, Munich (Germany).*



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Often creating interior scenes within her exhibitions, Calero looked to Villa Arson for inspiration when designing the show. “I fell in love with the architecture of the space,” she says of her exhibition rooms, where large windows, stepped transitions and high ceilings create a unique stage for art. Even when rainfall of tropical intensity hit last November and the building started leaking, with pools of water forming on the floors, it didn’t deter her. “Instead of fighting against the elements, I decided to include the problems of the architecture in the show. It was an exercise in trying to listen to what the building wanted to say – which is why the exhibition title translates roughly as: ‘We kept on covering the cracks, but the building was still sweating.’”

Calero worked directly on the exhibition space as if it were a canvas. She uncovered the cracks, removed mould, but preserved the destruction, intertwining her artwork into the fabric of the building. She built a bridge out of timber palettes for visitors to cross the space in case of flooding. She painted the walls to extend the architecture further – colour-matching the exterior red of the villa inside to create the impression of an interior patio and tracing the crisp patterns of light cast on to the walls in sky blue.



*Sol Calero: 'They insisted on covering the fissures, but the walls still perspired', installation view, Villa Arson, Nice 2020. Photo: François Fernandez / Villa Arson.*

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Calero often hangs her paintings on coloured walls, and she has been increasingly using brown over the last few years. It is a reference to the landscapes of Latin America, historical ethnographic images and the indigenous paintings of the Cusco school of Peru, she explains. “Why do we always start with white?” she asks. For her, it is a political question, from which much of her research into ethnography, societal colour blindness and her own Venezuelan identity begins. “When I’m working with colour in art, I’m making a statement. Things can be different if colour is added.”

In the same way that the artists of the Cusco school added bright local colour to colonially influenced Catholic imagery, Calero brings books on South American art to Villa Arson, where none previously existed. Her reading room, which contains 30 books, features natural plants, a shelf-caddy on wheels and a daybed upholstered with Calero’s textile designs and decorated with ceramics made in the Villa Arson studios. After the show, the books will be donated to the library and the plants to the garden.