

L'Opera
si racconta

CECILY BROWN

A CAPODIMONTE

The Triumph of Death

Thursday, 10 February – 1 May 2022

Cecily Brown at Capodimonte

The Triumph of Death

curated by Sergio Risaliti

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Napoli



Thursday, 10 February 12.30 p.m. – Presentation to the Press and Public

The Triumph of Death, 2019, a monumental canvas by the artist **Cecily Brown**, will be on display at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte from **10 February** until **1 May 2022**. One of the largest works she has ever made, Brown created this extraordinary painting after traveling to Sicily in 2019,

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THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte
Via Miano, 2 - 80131 Napoli
T. 081 749 91 11
capodimonte.cultura.gov.it
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where she visited the renowned mid-fifteenth-century fresco “The Triumph of Death” located in the Galleria Regionale in the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo.

The Cecily Brown exhibition is curated by **Sergio Risaliti** and produced by the **Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte** and the association **Amici di Capodimonte ets** with the collaboration of the London-based **Thomas Dane Gallery**.

The exhibition is part of the cycle “**L’Opera si racconta**”, focused exhibitions that highlight individual masterpieces from the permanent collection, by putting them in dialogue with other works to reveal their complexity and context of creation. From 2017 to the present, a dedicated gallery on the first floor of the museum has hosted these exhibitions, which have featured such works as: Vermeer’s *Woman with a Lute*, Van Dyck’s *Crucified Christ*, Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s *Parable the Blind*, Konrad Witz’s *Holy Family with Saints Katherine and Barbara*, Antonio Canova’s *Letizia Ramolino* (which was restored in the exhibition, allowing the public to follow and appreciate all phases of its conservation) and Francesco Jacovacci’s *Michelangelo at Vittoria Colonna’s Deathbed*, another work whose conservation was supported by the association Amici di Capodimonte ets.

In both the original version and the artist’s reworking of it, *The Triumph of Death* presents Death as an apocalyptic knight atop a ghostly white horse. With great force, this terrifying creature disposes of the living he encounters along his path without the slightest apprehension. One of the most surprising elements in Cecily Brown’s canvas is the symbol of the cross that formally divides the painting into four panels. The cross recalls the Palermo fresco of 6 by 6.40 meters, which was detached from the courtyard of the Palazzo Sclafani after it was damaged by bombs in 1944 and divided into four panels for restoration before its transfer to the Palazzo Abatellis. Unfortunately, the division of the fresco and its detachment from the Palazzo Sclafani walls rendered its margins fragile, causing them to deteriorate over time. Cecily Brown brilliantly integrates this scar into her work and conceptually links it to contemporary concerns about destruction, recovery, and reconstitution.

The exhibition also features a series of drawings made by the artist after completing the painting. These works on paper show us how Cecily Brown’s curiosity and interest in a subject continues well beyond the creation of a single work. The drawings remind both the artist and the viewer that there is always more than one solution to the challenge of reworking iconic works from the great figurative tradition.

“In the drawings exhibited at Capodimonte, the figures vary continuously, with details that either accumulate and coagulate or disperse, while the spectral horse of Death is a theme thoroughly dissected with different colors and uses of line that change with each new invention, calculated based first on this and then on that emotional temperature” notes curator **Sergio Risaliti**. *“Cecily Brown is an artist who knows how to reinvent the relationship between contemporary art and the great figurative tradition without indulging in sterile quotations of the past. She has often stated that she loves to paint moving figures, tension, and violence, but also excitement and color. For her, the boundary between abstraction and figuration is blurred. Her paintings, infused with energy,*

immediately generate empathy in the viewer thanks to her swirling brushstrokes that trace sinuous lines and draw semi-abstract shapes. The result is a harmonious and balanced – yet deep and layered – composition. Bodies, objects, animals, and vegetation blend and merge in a kaleidoscopic dance of colors and brushstrokes of diverse rhythms and directions. The artist always maintains a freshness of inspiration and gestural transcendence, returning to the painting several times or working across multiple canvases to experiment with different compositional possibilities” adds the curator.

“In the ‘L’opera si racconta’ gallery, Cecily Brown’s immense painting – five meters by five, – will be shown for the first time. Almost as large as the fresco in Palermo, its inspirational muse, the work expresses how a single painting can tell the history of painting, and how the artist’s unique and cultured gaze reinvents the history of the Triumph of Death” says **Sylvain Bellenger**, Director of the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte. *“Few works like the fresco in the Palazzo Abatellis deserve the solemn denomination of ‘triumph’. The triumphant Death in the Palermo fresco seems to crush both youth and love. Riding a large white horse with ribs protruding beneath its skin is a skeleton armed with a bow and arrows – a kind of lethal Cupid, with a scythe hanging from his saddle. The horse and rider trample the dead they have slaughtered underfoot, plundering the amusements of richly dressed youths who dance and court each other to the sound of a lute. Cecily Brown, immersed in images and the history of her craft, grasps the work of art and, through the act of painting, transforms the scene into a lively ballet, a joyful, macabre dance where the horse of Death, with a long smile, mutates into a horse in a fantastic circus”* reflects Director Bellenger.

“It is a great honor for me to exhibit one of my works at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, which boasts such an extraordinary collection. Naples is my favorite city in my favorite country, and it’s always a thrill to show my work here. It will be interesting to see The Triumph of Death exhibited in Italy, the same country where the Palermitan fresco The Triumph of Death is located” says **Cecily Brown**.

Cecily Brown was born in London in 1969 and now lives and works in New York. The artist is considered one of the greatest contemporary painters, known for her exuberant brushwork, rich color palette, and the intense energy of her painting. She often finds inspiration in iconic works – such as *The Triumph of Death* – as a tool for exploring contemporary themes of great relevance.

Past solo exhibitions: *Cecily Brown*, Blenheim Art Foundation, Blenheim Park, United Kingdom (2020), *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*, Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples, Italy (2019); *Cecily Brown*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebaek, Denmark (2018); *Triumph of the Vanities II*, The Metropolitan Opera House, New York (2018); *If Paradise Were Half as Nice*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, San Paolo. She has also shown her work at: Museo Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba, Brazil; The Iberé Camargo Foundation, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2018). Other shows include: *Cecily Brown: Rehearsal*, MCA Santa Barbara, CA (2018); *Cecily Brown: Shipwreck Drawings*, the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, United Kingdom (2017); *Cecily Brown: Rehearsal*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY

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(2017); *Madrepora*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2017). Her works are present in the collections of the following museums: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Tate, London, United Kingdom.

Object label:

Cecily Brown

The Triumph of Death, 2019

Oil on linen

535.94 x 535.94 cm.

211 x 211 in.

© Cecily Brown. Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery. Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Information:

Admission: the exhibition is included with general admission to the museum: 12 euros for adults, 2 euros for young adults (from 18 to 25 years old), free for all under 18 years old.

Opening Hours: Monday – Sunday, from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., closed on Wednesdays

Ticket Office: 081 7499130 – mu-cap.accoglienza.capodimonte@beniculturali.it

Website: www.capodimonte.cultura.gov.it

Luisa Maradei Press Office Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte

Via Miano 2 – Napoli

+ 39 081 7499629 / + 39 333 5903471

luisa.maradei@beniculturali.it

Rachel Adams Digital, Press and Communications

Thomas Dane Gallery

3 & 11 Duke Street St. James's, London SW1Y 6BN - UK

+44 (0)20 79252505

rachel@thomasdanegallery.com

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Cecily Brown

Untitled (after the Triumph of Death), 2021

gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper
45.7 x 61 cm
18 x 24 1/2 in.

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