

## Celebrate Life: A Conversation About “Multihyphenate” at moniquemeloche with Candida Alvarez

BY EMMA RIVA | NOVEMBER 27, 2023



*Candida Alvarez, installation view of “Multihyphenate,” 2023, at moniquemeloche/Photo courtesy of moniquemeloche.*

Candida Alvarez takes viewers back in time through art history and into her own memory in “Multihyphenate,” the artist's second exhibition at moniquemeloche. The work was created at a combination of her Michigan studio, a residency in Arles, France at the LUMA Foundation, and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. “‘Multihyphenate’ is a beautiful word. I saw it first in a Harper’s Bazaar profile of this model,” Alvarez says about the show's title. “It’s kinda sexy! As a mother, a daughter, a professor, a painter, I thought ‘Whoa, I’m a multihyphenate!’”

Alvarez, originally from New York, has taught at the Art Institute of Chicago since 1988 and has exhibited at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Whitney, and ICA Boston across her forty-plus-year career. However, rather than critics, curators, or

Chicago art glitterati, the guest of honor at "Multihyphenate" was none other than Alvarez's mother.



*Candida Alvarez, "Skowhegan #1," 2023, flashe paint on cotton, 25" x 25"/Photo courtesy of moniquemeloche.*

"My mother never got to be a part of my process," Alvarez says, recalling how 2023 was also the very first time her mother got to meet Meloche, view her studio, and really engage with her artistic practice. For the works in "Multihyphenate," Alvarez used iPhone photography of her mother to deconstruct and remake images of her, some inspired by the composition of Raphael's "Madonna in the Chair."

Meloche and Alvarez have a longstanding professional relationship that helped guide the personal, intimate nature of the artwork in "Multihyphenate." "Candida and I had a long discussion as we worked together about whether it's possible to make a portrait of someone through abstraction," Meloche says. Alvarez's work defies the simple definition of abstraction or figuration, and, at this stage of her career, she's less interested in debating those categorizations than the deeper truths behind them. "I never had a name for the kind of painting that I do. Abstraction is just an ingredient. For me, color is alive and sometimes the painting just says 'Nope, I'm green and I want to claim this space,'" Alvarez explains. "Abstraction is a sense of wonder. It's something that's evolving and exciting. I like that within my paintings you can see the layers of their history."



These layers of history speak to a central tenet of Alvarez's work, the "living palimpsest." A palimpsest is a manuscript where one layer of writing has been erased and another written over with some traces of the original remaining. "My residency in Arles was transformative. I felt like I was walking through a palimpsest of history, being there," Alvarez remembers. "Before I got there, I took out all my cosmetics and just brought tubes of paint and dinner napkins to paint on instead. Travel is a zone of curiosity."

"Multihyphenate" greets viewers in Meloche's space with a bright yellow wall and a circular formation of smaller works on yupo paper in "Sunny" (2023), which all came from her residency in Arles. "I kept wondering how place affects the work I make, and that really came out in this exhibition. An ultramarine

blue in Arles is very different than an ultramarine blue in Michigan," Alvarez says.

"Success in my paintings is when I forget where I started. That's when I know something is finished. But at the same time, I'm grateful for everything I've been through. I want to create evidence of a life being lived."

*"Candida Alvarez: Multihyphenate" is on view at moniquemeloche, 451 North Paulina through January 6, 2024.*

*Candida Alvarez, "Mostly Cloudy," 2023, acrylic, paint pen, pencil, gold mica flakes on linen 84" x 72"/Photo courtesy of moniquemeloche.*