

Curated in conversation with Giulia Civardi and Lavinia Filippi, London.

The Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation is proud to present *Portals*, the debut exhibition by Paola Bay. The project stems from the long-term friendship between Nicoletta Fiorucci and the artist, who over the years shared various practices and ceremonies that helped build their spiritual journey. *Portals*, brings Paola's diverse series of paintings together to reveal their energetic potential. With the ongoing environmental damage and the advancement of AI, whose consequences are crucially impactful but still hard to foresee, creating a space where to sense that there is no distinction between humanity and the environment we inhabit is even more timely. Paola's paintings act as a kind of technology: her richly coloured visual journeys open doorways to self-discovery, inviting us to be present, transcend the boundaries of the physical, and connect deeply with the essence of both ourselves and nature.

Profoundly interested in Western Philosophy since her early school years in Italy, Paola approached philosophical and religious studies with a focus on Buddhist, Hindu and Sufism spirituality. In the past two decades, she developed a unique language of abstraction rooted in nature by actively engaging with Indigenous communities in Tibet, Nepal and Mongolia, as well as Bolivia, Brazil, Namibia, New Zealand and North America, who fondly gave her the title of 'Elder Grandmother'. In particular, Paola developed a longstanding bond with the Mamos, Spiritual Leaders of the Arhuaco community, living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the North of Colombia. This research and first-hand experiences ignited a deep connection with the natural world, leading Paola to explore these linkages and relationships in her vibrant, symbolic paintings.

Through a meditative process, Paola incorporates sacred geometry, symbolic keys, and codes, infusing her works with hidden meanings and energies to be read differently by each viewer. Each piece is carefully brought to life by applying various techniques such as Islamic illumination, sacred calligraphy, Japanese Sumi-e painting, Persian miniature and the Nepali traditional Paubha mandala painting. Paola layers pencil, paint, gold and silver leaf, go-fun, natural pigments and ink to make her unique aesthetic language, creating a transcendent body of work that reveals the invisible forces within the physical realm and beyond.

The exhibition revolves around three main subjects: Chakras, Love, and Soul. Within these arrangements, the separation between worlds dissolves, offering a moment of expansion. Paola's meticulous creations serve as gates in which the energies are channelled, enabling viewers to align and communicate with the environment, the universe, and our inner selves in a multidimensional, systemic way.

During the exhibition live events including a Gong Bath, a ceremony with the Mamos—spiritual leaders of the indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada De Santa Marta in Colombia—and other meditative practices were held at the Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation in London, UK. The display design has been realised in collaboration with Martino Gamper.

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