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At 94, Artist Isabella Ducrot Is a Rising Star

Interest from collectors has been "rapid and ecstatic" ever since the nonagenarian's name went global.



Isabella Ducrot in 2022. Photo: Dino Ignani/Getty Images

As galleries rush to diversify their rosters, there has been a recent trend for “discovering” great women artists very late in life. In some cases, however, it was not just the art market’s torpor that held these women back. Many suppressed their artistic sensibility until the decades of managing a household, supporting a husband, or childrearing were over. One such revelation from recent years is the 94-year-old Italian writer and artist Isabella Ducrot, whose long harbored fascination with textiles only had the chance to flourish when the artist reached her sixties.

It didn't take long for Ducrot's work to catch the art world's attention, so naturally do her joyfully effusive, soft collages catch the eye. This is largely due to their bold, sometimes surprising use of contrasting patterns and fabric textures, often enhanced by paint. The artist works in series, producing various stylized takes on a simple theme, such as her "Profusions," vases overflowing with the bounty of late spring, or the "Tendernesses," two figures wrapped in up in an affectionate embrace.



Installation view of Isabella Ducrot, "Profusione" at Consortium Museum, Dijon in 2024. Photo: Rebecca Fanuele, © Consortium Museum.

Even as Ducrot gained recognition in Italy, exhibiting in its national pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993 and 2011, it wasn't until she was spotted by the Cologne gallerist Gisela Capitain in 2019 that her name went global. Last year, Ducrot received her most sweeping institutional moment to date at Le Consortium in Dijon, France, while also seeing her works line the catwalk of Dior's spring 2024 haute couture show held at the Musée Rodin in Paris. The former director of the Whitney Museum, Adam Weinberg, is currently planning a major retrospective at the Madre museum of contemporary art in Ducrot's hometown of Naples.

Currently, a series of Ducrot's "Profusions" flower arrangements are on view at her London gallery Sadie Coles's Kingly Street location. Coles discovered the nonagenarian artist on Standard Oslo's booth at Art Basel in 2022, later spotting her large-scale *Homage to Mishima* installation in the same fair's Unlimited section. She began working with Ducrot in 2023. "There is a joyful and energetic poetry in Isabella's work and Sadie never would have guessed that it was made by a [then] 92-year-old artist," said a spokesperson for the gallery. Since 2024, Ducrot has also been exhibiting with Petzel Gallery in New York.



Isabella Ducrot, *Profusion V* (2024). Photo: Katie Morrison, © Isabella Ducrot, courtesy the Artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.

New works from the “Profusions” series now on view at Sadie Coles are priced within the €10,000 to €20,000 (\$10,450 to \$20,900) range. So far, Ducrot’s works have rarely resurfaced on the secondary market. Only three have appeared at auction, at Rome’s Finarte in 2020, before she had gained a more international profile. Of these, only one actually sold: *Fake fragment* (1985), fetched €6,990 (\$7,284) at the auction house’s location in Rome, where Ducrot has lived for six decades.

The artist is originally from Naples, where she was born in 1931. Some of her earliest memories are of sheltering from the bombing raids of WWII in the nearby seaside town of Sorrento. She and her family returned to a city in ruins. A lengthy bout of tuberculosis in Ducrot’s late teens would define her early adulthood, with the taboo surrounding the disease forcing her to retreat into bedrest, during which time she became an avid reader.



Installation view of Isabella Ducrot, “Profusione” at Consortium Museum, Dijon in 2024. Photo: Rebecca Fanuele, © Consortium Museum.

At around age 30, Ducrot escaped the highly conservative culture of Naples for Rome, where she met her husband of 58 years, Vittorio Ducrot, founder of a travel company. Though she had shared with him some early writings and textile designs, the realities of married life for a woman residing in Italy's elite circles of the 1960s meant that these pastimes were largely put to the side.

Instead, with clients and friends, the pair travelled extensively across Asia and the Middle East and Ducrot was able to develop her fascination with fabrics by visiting local bazaars to build a collection of rare or exceptional pieces, including Egyptian cotton believed to be from around the 9th century and a 17th-century Tibetan prayer shawl.



Installation view of Isabella Ducrot, "bad flowers" at Galerie Gisela Capitain in 2024. Photo: Simon Vogel, © the artist and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

It wasn't until the 1980s, when Ducrot was in her fifties, that a few confidantes encouraged her to take up art-making again. One of her earliest commissions, a screen produced from a patchwork pattern made of mixed materials like silk and linen, was for her friend's clothing boutique. By her sixties, when she told the *New Yorker* that "life, for women, begins," Ducrot was actively pursuing long dormant interests, including returning to university to study philosophy, which would inform her many published essays on art, and establishing her studio with an assistant and manager.

Ducrot still goes daily to her studio in Rome's magnificent Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, where she also has an apartment. This is just as well, since demand for her work is only growing. "The interest has been rapid and ecstatic," said the spokesperson for Sadie Coles. "Every time we show her work at the gallery or at art fairs and other occasions, she gains more acolytes."