

**Mathilde DENIZE**

*Artsy,*

*The Artsy Vanguard 2021: Mathilde Denize*

*December 2021*

Art

# The Artsy Vanguard 2021: Mathilde Denize



Several years ago, Mathilde Denize was about to throw away her old art school paintings to make space in her tiny Paris studio. But before her failed experiments made it to the trash, she spontaneously cut up one canvas and fashioned it into a swimsuit form. “Maybe it was an intuitive gesture,” Denize reflected recently. “My friends said, ‘Oh my God, I want to wear that. Please make a collection!’” With that, she held onto the old paintings.

Denize did not go on to become a swimsuit designer, but rather a rising contemporary artist. From that point on, she began portraying the human figure through assemblage and costume; the turning point would shape her work and career trajectory.

The artist’s debut New York solo show, “Reverse for a Better Move,” opened at Perrotin this past September, featuring small paintings, sculptures, and painted, wall-hung assemblages—many of them in the shape of giant bomber jackets and

blazers. These color-soaked wall pieces feature the odd hand, eye, or pocket that Denize made by cutting up her paintings and applying them to the assemblages as swatches. They also feature occasional found objects, like a big shiny shell.



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Second Hand*, 2021  
Perrotin  
€14,000



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Contour*, 2021  
Perrotin  
€9,000

Denize made these particular works over the past year while in Rome at the prestigious Villa Medici residency. Such high-profile opportunities have come her way increasingly over the past three years, including being featured at esteemed French art galleries and institutions like Perrotin, Galerie Derouillon, Galerie Ceysson & Bénetière, Galerie Pauline Pavec, and the Centre Pompidou, among others. This December, her new works will be featured in a solo show with Pauline Pavec; at Perrotin's Art Basel in Miami Beach booth; at The Artsy Vanguard exhibition in Miami; and at the Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne. And in 2022, Denize will present a solo show at CAC La Traverse - Centre d'art contemporain in Alfortville, France.

One can see why Denize has caught the eye of major dealers and curators. Her fresh, multifaceted interpretations of the human figure are lush and eye-catching, but also deep: They're strange and poetic, and at times, sci-fi-esque. With a background in film and theater, she brings cinematic intrigue to two-dimensional art forms, creating unusual protagonists that pose compelling questions about the body, intimacy, and the nature of art itself.

Denize grew up in the world of film and TV production as the child of set designers. Her father crafted the scenery for the popular French game show *Fort Boyard*. From an early age, Denize absorbed an understanding of *mise en scène*—the careful practice of arranging objects on a stage.



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Figure and Eyes*, 2021  
Perrotin  
€14,000



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Body Reflect*, 2021  
Perrotin  
Contact for price

When she was 19, years before art school entered the picture, Denize studied film and theater. After that, she worked as a waiter in Saint Germain des Pres for five years. In the midst of daily encounters with Parisian personalities, she gained her first real experience with contemporary art by falling in love with an artist.

One day, a friend who was starting art school encouraged Denize to join, knowing that she liked to draw. She agreed and enrolled in the painting program at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, graduating in 2013. “It was really hard,” Denize recalled. “I was trying to do classic figuration and it was a fail,” she laughed. “But outside of school, I had this hobby of going to the flea market and finding some fragment or object and making assemblages, but just at home.”

Eventually, she sent a picture of these assemblages to a teacher who’d said her paintings were horrible. “He said, ‘Okay, this is amazing. This is your work,’” Denize recalled.

The title “Reverse for a Better Move” refers to the critical shift Denize made, from her early days of figurative painting to her current assemblage and costume practice. “They are kind of all the figures that I failed to represent [in painting],” Denize said of her current work, “but they’re more than that, because they are grotesque and like costume or a second skin.”



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Set Up for Future Exhibitions, 2021*  
Perrotin  
Contact for price

The emphasis on costume traces back to Denize’s long-standing fascination with film. She counts the filmmakers Sergei Parajanov and Robert Bresson among her

greatest influences. Parajanov's 1969 film *The Color of Pomegranates*, in particular, has inspired Denize with its masterful construction of narrative through montage rather than dialogue. And some of her sculptural works, incorporating pockets with items hidden in them, are a sort of homage to Bresson's 1959 film *Pickpocket*.

Denize's process is its own sort of intuitive *mise en scène*: She lays out her materials, cuts into paintings that might be from three weeks or 10 years ago, then instinctively pieces them together without any preconceived plans or sketches. Ultimately, the pieces are sewn into place.

Early on, Denize had a friend in fashion who would help with sewing her pieces, though recently, she's been doing it herself. As one might imagine upon examining Denize's handiwork, she's not a trained seamstress—but she prefers it that way. “I think it's better that I don't know how to make a perfect suit,” she said, noting that the inevitable accidents and flaws make for more interesting, expressive work.



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Held Intention*, 2021  
Perrotin  
Contact for price



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Flower Body*, 2021  
Perrotin  
Contact for price

She has continued to experiment with the swimsuit form, as seen in the new work *Contour* (2021): a piece in shiny gold vinyl, lined with a painted canvas that is beguilingly empty, hanging from the wall as though it's being worn by a lithe lady ghost. Other works, like *Flower Body* (2021)—a jester-like jacket with a frilly collar and tapered sleeves, topped with a bouquet of paper flowers—is a compelling cross between costume and sculpture.

Denize's most impressive works are her large wall-mounted jackets, which, in their use of color and form, recall a mix of Surrealism and Cubism. Some of the works, called "Coat Trails," are large horizontal forms with vertical sleeves and a cacophony of swipes and swathes of mauve, peach, purple, jade green, and steely blue.

The more vertical works—some more than six feet tall—suggest blazers seen sideways. Called "Body Reverse" and "Body Reflect," these works more directly turn trippy paintings into sartorial statements. All of the works, in their emphasis on textures and forms that cover the body, invite us to consider the intimate nature of garments, and the way they shape how we see ourselves and others.



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Figure*, 2021  
Galerie Pauline Pavec



**Mathilde Denize**  
*Sweet Legend*, 2020  
Perrotin  
Sold

The works of “Reverse for a Better Move” all relate to the film proposal that landed Denize her spot in the Villa Medici program. With the stipend from the residency, Denize bought a sewing machine to create her costumes and brought it—along with her old paintings—to Rome, where she worked from a studio perched up on a hill, surrounded by spectacular vistas. The forthcoming film, titled *Tell me if it's not new*, features three women wearing costume versions of her assemblages while navigating the ancient city. The piece continues Denize’s practice of incorporating the body into painting, as over the course of the film, the protagonist transforms into a painting.

From a selection of stills that Denize has yet to share publicly, one can see hints of Parajanov’s influence, but also her own mastery of set design. There’s brilliance to the way her bold, eccentric creations are enlivened by the women, and the striking contrasts they make against Rome’s classical patina.

What comes across, too, is the way that Denize is breaking fine art from its traditional box: Her works live somewhere between painting, sculpture, and costume. They escape the confines of the studio and the gallery, walking out into the world. It’s a refreshing reminder that art need not hang on a wall or sit on a pedestal.

## **The Artsy Vanguard 2021**

The Artsy Vanguard is our annual feature recognizing the most promising artists working today. This fourth edition of The Artsy Vanguard is a triumphant new chapter, as we present an in-person exhibition in Miami featuring the 20 artists’ works, including many available to collect on Artsy. Curated by Erin Jenoa Gilbert, sponsored by MNTN, and generously supported by Mana Public Arts, the show is located at 555 NW 24th Street, Miami, and is open to the public from December 2nd through 5th, 12–6 p.m.