

PERROTIN

Cristina BANBAN

*Shadowplay,
A body of emotions*

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Cristina BanBan

A BODY OF EMOTIONS

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Interview by **HANNA PALLOT** Photography by **AARON KIRK** Fashion by **ORNELA QORRI**
Make-Up by **JESSI BUTTERFIELD** at Walter Schupfer Management using Sothys



The painter Cristina BanBan is well known for the shaped, strong, present, half-naked, half-clothed women she depicts on large-scale canvases. If the female body has long been a subject of objectification in any arts, the Spanish-born, New York-based artist asserts once again women’s place, beauty and cultural legacy with her new show *Lorquianas*, which was first presented last spring at El Centro Federico García Lorca in Granada, Spain, before taking place in the Parisian Galerie Perrotin this September. Moving between nudity, symbols, figuration and abstraction, BanBan creates dialogue between cultures, generations and gazes, where emotions remain the heart of her actions and reflections. Together we sailed on the different topics that make her body of work a generous, emotional and outstanding one.

When and why did you start to focus on the female body?

I’ve been painting all my life. I started when I was five. The female body became my main subject when I was living in London, around 2016, probably because it helped me translate my own emotions. It became like an auto-reflection and a visual diary. I would say I use the body as a tool to translate emotions.

There is a fluctuating tension between figuration and abstraction in your paintings. How do you explain this and the way it evolves?

Over the years, the woman figure has been consistent. But then, the way I wanted to portray certain scenes has been changing. There was a time my paintings were more narrative-driven. I used realism to tell stories. I would portray a woman in a park in a very predictable way, because I had a specific idea and knew how to translate it. Then, I got bored with that and started to just focus on the actual painting in a more conceptual aspect, using basic ways such as texture, composition, or colours. In that period of time, my figures became more like a universal woman, a symbol. This way, my paintings became more abstract, using the tension between figuration and abstraction to tell stories. With the show *Lorquianas*, I came back to realism and figuration, using more recognisable symbols, also because the aim of this show was to create a dialogue with Federico García Lorca’s work.

The first time I saw one of your paintings, I immediately thought about Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*. If we can see the influence of modernist figuration in your paintings, women’s look at naked bodies is obviously different from men’s. What do you think about the “female gaze” in paintings?

I believe all paintings are political. There is always a dialogue between who paints and what they paint. Whether it’s intentional or not, you’re always saying something. I didn’t start painting with the goal of making a statement, but the fact that I’m a woman painting women opens that discussion. I think we can talk about a non-objectified way of representing the female body, but I like to leave that open to interpretation. Personally, it’s about understanding the complexity of our emotions and our bodies, and trying to portray the most honest impression of how beautiful women’s bodies are.

Plus, the women you paint are very present, because of the scales and the shapes you use. What do they claim?

They occupy the whole painting, the whole space, which makes them powerful, confident, and true to themselves. These are the values I want to represent with these women.

As a woman who paints, how do you find your space in the contemporary art market?

I prefer to consider myself a painter rather than a woman who paints. Of course, when you go to museums and institutions, the majority of painters are still men. But in the contemporary scene — at least here in New York — it’s becoming more balanced. More and more women are having solo shows. The most important thing for me is to be seen as an artist.

Let’s talk about your upcoming exhibition. The one you’re about to present at Galerie Perrotin in Paris follows the one you opened last May in Spain, *Lorquianas*. How did you think about these two exhibitions?

I was invited to Granada to visit the Centro Federico García Lorca and see the archives of Lorca’s drawings and writings. I read his poems and plays, and again, what interested me the most were the strong female characters and their stories. So, I decided to focus on them. Since the idea was to create a dialogue with Lorca’s work, I chose to represent archetypes like the Venus, the Nun, or the Virgin. I included symbolic elements — clothing, Spanish veils, and so on — to bring these characters to life. That’s why I returned to a more figurative approach. I thought it would be interesting to bring this work to Paris, especially in the context of Art Basel, which is so international. It’s a way of expanding a part of Spanish culture and showing how the themes in Lorca’s work still resonate today. The show at Perrotin will be an extension of *Lorquianas* — I’ll replicate much of the original exhibition, but I’ll also expand it to fit the gallery’s space.

What do all these characters say about your cultural legacy? Do you feel close to them?

That’s a good question. They’re a mix of real and fictional women. For example, there’s a painting called *Luto y Ajuar*, which portrays an older woman sewing the *ajuar* — the trousseau that young women traditionally prepare for marriage — while a younger woman, almost like a revelation, appears naked except for a black headpiece and heels. For me, it’s about reflecting on generational differences. It speaks to a Spanish culture I didn’t personally live in, but my mother or grandmothers did. I relate to it more as a witness.

Indeed, there is something very strong and beautiful about transmission between women. Listening to you makes me think about the notion of “sisterhood”. In your paintings, women seem to stand together with a certain pride. You’re right. I don’t know how it is in France, but in Spain, there’s a strong sense of family and tradition. After living in New York for five years, I see how different it is here — much more individualistic. That contrast made me realise how important it is to have a circle of friends, a sense of sisterhood. I think we all need that, as part of being human, to live a happy life.

Do you sometimes think about going back to Spain?

That’s my mother’s dream. [*Laughs*] I’ve been thinking more and more about having two bases — one here and one in Barcelona. When you grow up in the Mediterranean, you never really forget it.

Definitely not! Has living in New York influenced the way you experience things?

I see myself as an ambitious person. In New York, you’re constantly surrounded by other people’s work, ambition, and energy. The city gives you this momentum — this hunger to evolve and work hard. It definitely affects how I experience life. Artistically, it’s amazing. You’re exposed to so much, from institutions like the Met and MoMA to gallery openings every week.

In the middle of all that, what actually inspires you the most?

Honestly, it’s emotions — being connected to them, channelling what I’m going through and what I observe. That’s what guides my painting. Painting is a way of life for me. For some people, identity is shaped by what they read, the music they listen to, or how they dress. For me, painting holds that place. It’s who I am — and that’s something really beautiful.

How do you feel when you paint?

I feel safe, and also powerful. It’s a space I control, and that’s a good place to be. These days, there’s a big focus on healing through meditation or self-reflection. For me, painting is my way into that — my own form of connection and healing.

One last question. As you mainly paint naked bodies, when do you feel “naked”?

Big question. In terms of work, I feel exposed when my paintings are out in the world, especially at an opening. Or when I talk about my work, like now. In my personal life, I guess I feel naked when I face challenges, especially in relationships. Those moments when you have to question yourself, rethink how you act or how you think — that’s when you feel naked. I think we feel that way when we’re forced to reinvent ourselves to become better — our higher selves.

Cristina BanBan is represented by Galerie Perrotin.

Her solo show Lorquianas will be on view at Galerie Perrotin Paris Marais, from October 18th to December 20th, 2025.









