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Sarah Cascone  
Karen Lamassonne: *Ruido/Noise*  
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## Studio Visit

# Peek Into the Filled-to-the-Brim Studio of Karen Lamassonne as She Celebrates Her First Institutional Surveys in New York, Medellín, and Berlin

The artist's first institutional survey show opens at the Swiss Institute in September.

Sarah Cascone, July 26, 2022



Karen Lamassonne. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Colombian American artist Karen Lamassonne, who rose out of the male-dominated Bogotá and Cali art scenes of the 1970s and '80s, is finally getting her first institutional survey show. "Ruido/Noise" opens in September at New York's Swiss Institute and travels to the KW Institute in Berlin and the Museum of Modern Art in Medellín.

She was also part of Colombia's Calwood film movement, editing, art directing, and storyboarding at the Cali Cine Club. That cinematic influence translated into her paintings and into *Ruido (Noise)*, an installation Lamassonne dreamt up in 1984 but will realize for the first time at the Swiss Institute. It features paintings of women illuminated by the glow of television monitors playing experimental video shot during a New York City winter.

This maximalist approach is reflected in the artist's Atlanta home and studio, in which nearly every surface is covered with artworks in various media. Where the walls aren't filled with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, there's a salon-style hang featuring her own paintings of women, often in the nude; works by friends and mentors such as David Manzur and Luis Ospina or purchased while traveling internationally; and vintage film posters.

Artnet News spoke with Lamassonne about how such overwhelming surroundings only serve to fuel her creative drive.



Karen Lamassonne's studio in Atlanta. Photo by Allison Thorpe, courtesy of the artist.

**Can you send us a snap of the most indispensable item in your studio and tell us why you can't live without it?**

I can't really think of anything that is indispensable other than my hands, and then of course the desire to work in the studio, otherwise I would probably be out working in my garden. I work in many media from watercolor, photography, or crayon to embroidered tapestries, so I will always move on to something else. Change it up.

**What is a studio task on your agenda this week that you are most looking forward to?**

Select six music CDs to listen to and insert them in the player.

**What kind of atmosphere do you prefer when you work? Do you listen to music or podcasts, or do you prefer silence? Why?**

I listen to music of all kinds, which I can hear over and over until I get around to changing the CDs or putting a playlist on. It keeps the audio momentum going in my brain. Sometimes I will even put an old favorite film on. I don't necessarily have to be alone—I have been known in the past to work while there is a party going on.



Karen Lamassonne painting in 1979. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Who are your favorite artists, curators, or other thinkers to follow on social media right now?**

Social media is an amazing communications tool. I use it often to get in touch with family and friends and many of them are artists, writers, curators, fashionistas, and galleries are all over the world. So it is quite nice to be able to see the news they have and to add some of my own. It is a fabulous new realm for a view into what's going on in the world. It would be difficult to name favorites because there are so many. It can be quite addicting!

**Is there a picture you can send of your current work in progress at the studio?**

My current work is intervening photo prints from my archive. I am using the photographic prints mounted on illustration board or watercolor paper using paint washes with oil pastel or water-soluble crayons to intervene the photo. I work on a few at the same time.



A work in progress by Karen Lamassonne. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**When you feel stuck while preparing for a show, what do you do to get unstuck?**

Have a shot of some good tequila and go work in the garden. Having my hands in the earth grounds me, like a reset.

**What trait do you most admire in a work of art? What trait do you most despise?**

I admire when a work moves me and keeps my attention. I dislike if a work doesn't do anything at all for me when it's too complicated to understand.

**What images or objects do you look at while you work? Share your view from behind the canvas or your desktop—wherever you spend the most time.**

I presently live in my studio in Atlanta so my work surrounds my life, or my life surrounds my work... and in many ways it always has. I have been traveling a lot and of course I have a "portable studio" that I take with me.



Karen Lamassonne's studio in Atlanta. Photo by Allison Thorpe, courtesy of the artist.

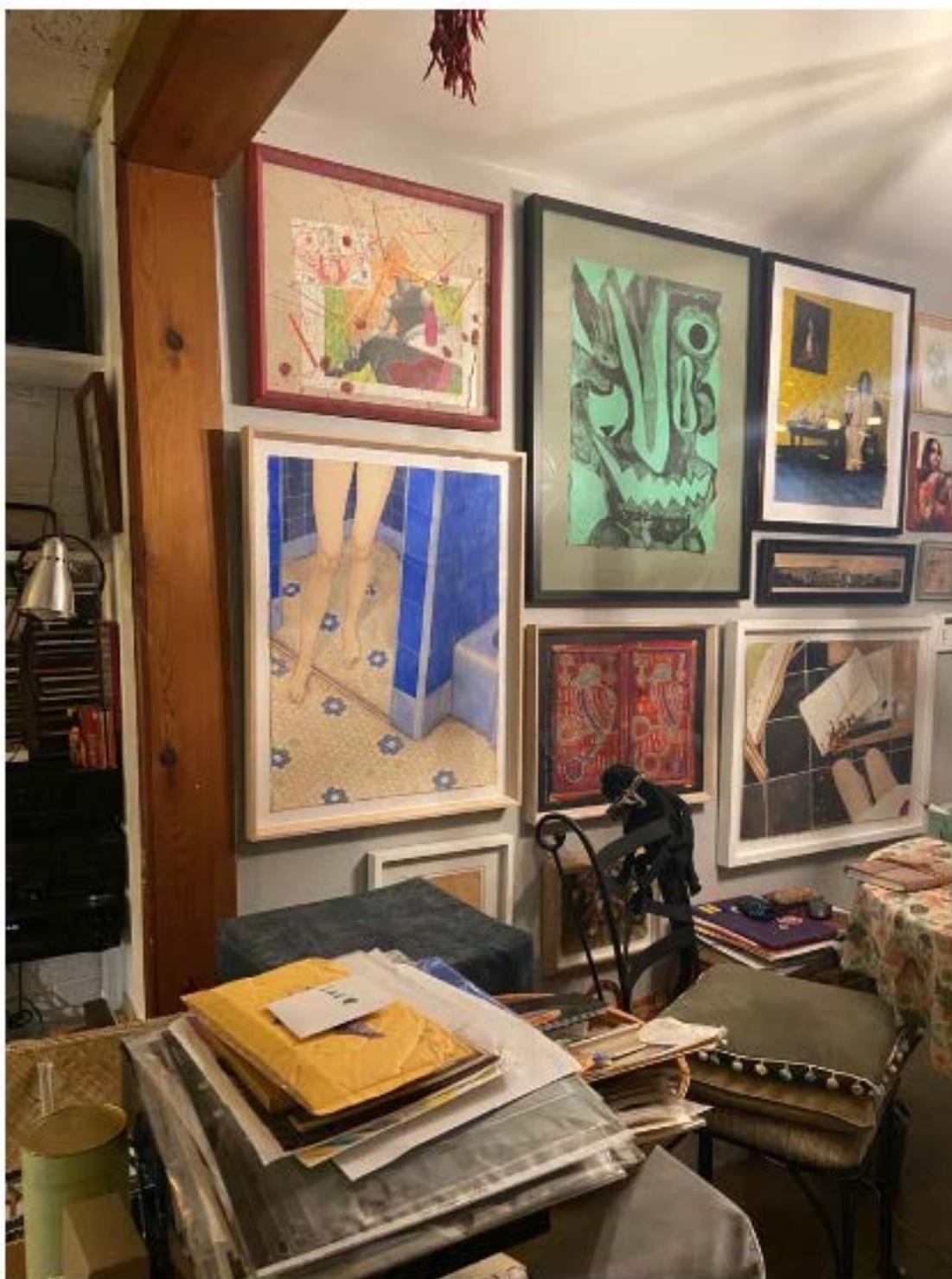
**What is the last exhibition you saw that made an impression on you and why?**

"Alice Neel People Come First" at the De Young Museum in San Francisco. Alice Neel was an amazing woman and artist. She had an incredibly intense life and within her portraits you feel precisely that. She is so moving.

I first saw her work in a solo exhibit at the Whitney in New York I think about 20 years ago and I was really impressed with her work. The quality of her brush stroke, the movement—it's delicious. I really identified with the intensity of her color, shapes and perspective... she painted what surrounded her. When I saw her work again this spring in San Francisco, it was like seeing an old friend that really turns me on.

**What made you choose this particular studio over others?**

I have always had my studio space at home, there has always been that requirement for me. I am sure that this has influenced my work especially since my imagery has been my surroundings, very personal and auto-referential. I bought this house years ago when my son was very young, and I have been here since.



Karen Lamassonne's studio in Atlanta. Photo by Allison Thorpe, courtesy of the artist.

**Describe the space in three adjectives.**

Cozy, colorful, and changing.

**How does the studio environment influence the way you work?**

It's nice being at home because I take breaks, cook or nap anytime. I research and connect with my archive as well. My work really is part of my daily life being very connected. I work as late as I want, which is very often, because my bed is close by. There is no enforced schedule of when I work, it's on me. At present I am not making very large pieces so I have the space. There is also an outdoor area to work which is nice to have.

*"Karen Lamassonne: Ruido/Noise" is on view at the Swiss Institute, 38 St. Marks Place, New York, September 14, 2022–January 8, 2023. It will travel to the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Auguststraße 69, 10117 Berlin, Germany; and the Medellín Museum of Modern Art, Cra. 44 #19a-100, Medellín, El Poblado, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia.*