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Gagosian to Present New York Debut of Setsuko's Sculptures at Park & 75, Opening on January 15, 2025

Kingdom of Cats Features New Bronzes, Ceramics, and Paintings



Setsuko, *Le chat et l'arbre*, 2024, enameled ceramic, 35 7/8 × 22 1/8 × 22 1/8 inches (91 × 56 × 56 cm) © Setsuko. Photo: Thomas Lannes

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NEW YORK, December 16, 2024—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Kingdom of Cats*, an exhibition of works by Setsuko that represents the first time the artist has shown her bronze and ceramic sculptures in New York. The inclusion of paintings, works on paper, and handmade tables and pedestals offers a material overview of the artist's practice. Opening on January 15, the presentation makes full use of the intimate space at Park & 75, and visitors will also be able to view it from the street.

In her sculptures, Setsuko renders natural subjects with rich, tactile surfaces, uniting organic and constructed elements to represent the symbiosis of life and death. In her gouache and watercolor paintings of still-life and floral arrangements, domestic interiors, and landscapes, she conveys the joy embodied in crafted objects, organic forms, and atmospheric spaces. Combining ancient Eastern traditions with twentieth-century Western ideas, Setsuko interprets the everyday in ways that are at once lyrical and precise.

As the exhibition's title suggests, cats make repeated appearances in the works on view. The lively creatures, of which Setsuko has owned dozens, have cropped up frequently in the artist's practice

over the years, always conveying a sense of agency and animating the spaces through which they move. Cats are important symbols in Japanese folklore regarded as possessing special abilities; the classification *kaibyō* (“strange cat”) includes *bakeneko*, a *yōkai* or supernatural entity with the ability to shapeshift into human form. *Maneki-neko*, on the other hand, are usually depicted as waving figurines empowered to bring their owners good luck. Setsuko’s late husband, Balthus, also referred to himself as the “King of Cats.”

In the delicately modeled enameled ceramic and terra-cotta objects on view in New York, which include *Le chaton et sa mère* (2024), *Le chat et l’arbre* (2024), *L’arbre et la chouette* (2023), and *Le serpent et la vigne* (2024)—all produced at Astier de Villatte’s workshop in Paris—Setsuko represents plants and animals that have made trees their homes. Cats meander around gnarled roots while watchful owls perch in upper branches and snakes wind around imposing trunks. Inspired by Japanese Jōmon earthenware (c. 10,500–300 BCE), Setsuko also evokes the country’s animistic Shinto religion, to which trees are of central significance.

Trees and other plants are also the subjects of Setsuko’s hand-painted bronzes, which include a new large-scale representation of a fig tree with foliage and attendant animals, finished in a dark green patina. In *Le chat et la vie* (2024), the tree’s circular form embodies the cycle of life, a theme reinforced by the subject’s historical symbolic significance—fig trees are often referenced in antique and religious texts. In two other bronzes, *Chandelier (le vigne)* (2021) and *Grand Chandelier (grenades)* (2023), the natural organisms of the works’ titles are refigured as baroque candelabras. The artist also extends her use of terra-cotta in three rectangular palettes shaped from slabs of the material painted with scenes distinguished by a heady mix of classical, natural, and mystical imagery inspired by mythological characters such as Daphne and using color derived from dreams. Setsuko only began employing the highly physical processes necessary to the shaping of bronze and ceramic in 2019; thus, these projects constitute a significant new direction for an artist still eager to experiment with material and form.

The paintings on paper, canvas, and wood in *Kingdom of Cats* are mostly delicate still-life arrangements and domestic interiors. The earliest, *Nature morte avec branches de kumquat*, is from around 1960 and the most recent, *Bouquet de printemps III*, was completed in 2023. *Paysage d’Italie* (2023) is a landscape study representing the loggia of the artist’s former house at Montecalvello, near Rome. In compositions such as *Nature morte avec l’oiseau bleu* (2020) and the luminous gouache *Nature morte sur tissus indiens* (1993), Setsuko invests flattened pictorial spaces with a quiet intimacy, again synthesizing traditional Japanese and modernist European approaches.

Setsuko was born in 1942 in Tokyo and lives and works in Paris and at the Grand Chalet de Rossinière, Switzerland. Collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Exhibitions include *Setsuko et Harumi: hommage à Balthus*, Palais des Nations, Geneva (2001); *Atelier de Cézanne*, Aix-en-Provence, France (2012); *Grand-Château d’Ansembourg*, Luxembourg (2014); *The Life of Setsuko Klossowska de Rola*, Sogo Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan (2016); and *Regards de Setsuko*, Musée national du château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France (2021). Since 2002, Setsuko has served as the honorary president of the Fondation Balthus, and in 2005, she was designated UNESCO’s Artist for Peace.

#SetsukoKlossowskadeRola

SETSUKO

Kingdom of Cats

Opening reception: Wednesday, January 15, 6–8pm

January 15–March 1, 2025

Park & 75, 821 Park Avenue, New York

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