



Dora Jeridi in her studio
Photo: Antoine Schneck

MEET DORA JERIDI, THE FRENCH ARTIST WHO LEFT A CAREER IN ACADEMIA FOR THE THRILL OF A BLANK CANVAS

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The color red has been used as a visual shorthand for the conditions of life for about as long as humans have been depicting it. No hue more effectively limns the contradictions of existence. Red is for viscera, blood, and birth; red also makes for great gift-wrapping. [Dora Jeridi](#), who traded a nascent career as a political historian for painting in her late 20s, cannot get enough of it.

The use of the singular is inaccurate, however, as not one but many reds are the chromatic scaffolding of the now 38-year-old French artist's latest body of work, on view at Marianne Boesky through Oct. 17 for her first solo show with the gallery. Some canvases boast broad swaths of carmine, oxblood, and plum; others just a scratch of crimson. When I visited Jeridi's studio in Brooklyn—she moved to New York from Paris three years ago—in August, the artist referred to the color family as the “protein” of her paintings. The hue is a helpful, almost necessary, anchor for the viewer. The series in her exhibition “[A Burnt Child Loves the Fire](#)” is an exercise in cacophony—a citation binge of everything from MCM design and John Galliano's Dior to Basquiat and Velásquez—

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that's both jarring and cathartic. Some works seem as if they could almost collapse with the intensity of their ingredients, but Jeridi wrings an almost giddy resilience out of them. Their history has just begun.

Below, we discuss Jeridi's evolving relationship to French taste, her daily tug-of-war with the canvas, and why she's still attached to figuration's potential.



Dora Jeridi, *The Golden Spitter*, 2026

What was the last thing that you saw, heard, or felt that made you want to paint?

Draperies. [I was looking specifically at the] Galliano collections when he was working with Dior. All those very vibrant colors and shapes, very bold textures. I wanted to do something with that because drapery is a very classical, recurring pattern in painting. It goes so well with my obsession, which is always to marry my classical background and my contemporaneity. When I paint, I try to create something that is both elegant, graceful, and raw, a bit aggressive, with a bite. The Galliano interpretation of drapery [was] exactly what I'm looking for because Galliano is so bold and so subversive. But at the same time, the Dior maison, it's French elegance—there's nothing more classical than that.

What does a typical day in the studio look like for you? How do you like to work?

If I can, I love to arrive very early because it always takes me an hour to start working. There's a lot of fear and anxiety between me and the canvas, so it takes some time to gather the courage. I haven't achieved a good routine I feel at ease in; every day is a struggle. I know it's easier for me to stay longer at the studio in the evening. I have more energy when the night comes in and I know people won't text me.

How do you know when you're ready to finally confront the canvas?

I know that I have a deadline when all the paintings must be done, and in the meantime, it's a living body. There are things that I cannot rush. It has its own pace, and I cannot force it. It's like tides within myself. When I arrive at the studio, first I take my coffee, I eat something. Then I change my clothes. I look at what I have to do. I prepare the palettes and stuff. And then it's like, *Oh, the tide is here, it's time to go.*

Where does a painting usually begin for you? With an idea? With an emotion?

What I'm trying to carry is a sensation. It's not something I choose; it's the way I express [it]. A painting starts with a vision, and it can take time to come. The vision comes from a lot of images that [I] see, and then it rearranges itself in [my] mind like a dream.

How would you describe the vision for this show?

I wanted an interior that was warm and had the elegant vibe of the mid-century. I was looking at a lot of interior design magazines. When I work, there's always this sensation of warmth that I'm trying to keep, because it's a good balance with the violence that I can convey. If something is just aggressive, it's a turn-off. Here, [*points to a diptych*] I knew I wanted something comfortable. Within this frame, tragedy happens. My style is quite theatrical; I was looking for a stage, like a set designer.

Are there any plays or set designs that have particularly inspired you here?

I love [*theater director* Romeo] Castellucci because he manages to bring violence and something very subversive onto a stage in a very elegant way. There's something very Italian [to it]. But for me, [with these interiors] it's [really] a mix. You take a little bit of [Paolo Sorrentino](#)'s world. You take a little bit of [David Lynch](#). You take a little bit of Pina Bausch. Bergman also.

I'm also drawn to [these mid-century interiors] because [they] bring me back to my childhood. It's funny, this year was the first time I made the connection to the interior of my grandmother's house. She passed away three years ago. After she passed away, I came to New York, and I feel like this year is the first time her memory is coming back to me as a heritage.

Tell me about her and how she lived.

She was a biochemist. She was running in her own lab, which was not usual at the time. She had a very strong personality. She also passed on to me a taste for classical music—she had a [grand] piano. She introduced me to Gonzalo Belmonte, my painting teacher. It's only three or four years after she died that I could metabolize what I kept from her, also in a country where I have zero landmarks, where I have to recreate a home... I know it sounds a bit anecdotal and random, but I was looking for an apartment this year because I needed to anchor myself in New York. I had been subletting. So I was preoccupied with the idea of home and transmission, [the importance of being] in a place where you feel who you are. For the first time, I realized how [much] her taste influenced me—mid-century wooden chairs, Norwegian covers and sweaters, beautiful textures, but also quite minimal. Her apartment hadn't changed through the years, but it didn't look like an old person's apartment. [It had] this mix of intellectual and easygoing taste. [So with these paintings there's] the

question of recreating a [domestic] interior, which is also the reflection of my own interiority. Within this interior happen scenes that are tragic.

Where does the tragedy come from?

It's the history of my family. My mom's side is Jewish, so they went through [World War II]. And there was a lot of tragedy happening [on] my dad's side too. And in my own upbringing, there was a lot of tension. I told you I was inspired by Bergman. I think there's something [with] how theater can recreate a space where you have all of those sensations happening, [including things] that are unsayable. It always has been extremely disappointing when I've tried to put words to it. It's a difficult experience because it leaves a gap between what you went through and the person who's listening to you.

I feel like with painting, I can combat the sensation. And that's what matters. It's not the reality of what I went through—I don't even think it's interesting or important. Everybody [goes] through difficult stuff, tragedy in their families. It's rather the sensation of intensity, of something that is maybe not understandable because you're a child, or because there are family secrets you don't understand... That's why I'm still attached to figuration—figuration allows me to have this theatrical, tragic, and sometimes a bit comic aspect. Whereas if I go only into abstraction, I can keep the energy, but the expressivity of faces and the idea of narrative goes away. For me, that's a loss. Even if I know, and I feel, the difficulty of figuration, it's so easy to become literal. But I like the challenge.

I want to go back to what you said a little bit earlier about taste, because taste can be something that paralyzes or stifles you. It can become a very conforming force. I wonder how you start from an appreciation of taste, acknowledge that, and move beyond it or introduce something that challenges it.

The question of taste came up for me when I moved to New York. The presence of taste is so important in France, but when you grow up within this environment, you're not even aware of it. When I was painting in Paris, I wouldn't pay attention to the question of taste in my paintings. I was obsessed with expression. I didn't care at all if it was bad taste. I think that's why I was attracted to New York, because there was this freedom where anything is possible. But, after a year or two here, I realized, *Oh, I'm French, and I miss taste*. I was drawn back to taste in a much more conscious way. I was missing stuff that I didn't even know I would miss. I started to miss the Middle Ages, just enter[ing] a church with stones or sculpture from the Middle Ages. I thought I'd like to create this bridge between the freedom and boldness that the U.S. enables you to have and my heritage. I was lacking something to ground me. When I was looking at draperies, I remembered that I [knew] Olivier Bialobos, the [deputy managing] director of Dior. He bought some paintings a few years ago and we became friends. I thought, *I'm sure they must have archives at Dior*. When I went back to Paris, I asked him, "Do you have archives? I'm missing images of draperies." He said, "Yes, of course. There is a place that's called Dior Heritage." They opened all the archives for me.

It was so meaningful because fashion is [such] an expression of French culture. It made sense, as a French person, to go from classical painting to French fashion. I was so happy to be able to use this material, and at the same time, to make it personal. I was realizing that this is also who I am—I should not try to become American, I should enhance what is already my culture. And at the same time,

what I love [in New York] is that I have the tools here to keep it alive. The risk for me, at least in France, was to museify [that heritage].

I think often in Paris about how much violence the city's classical beauty masks.

Sometimes I would wonder, *Who were the people who built Versailles? Where did they come from? Were they paid? How much?* All of that was built on violence. All the collections of Egyptian [artifacts] in the Louvre or the British Museum—everything that was stolen. All this very good taste had a high price. That is European heritage. But I love antique Greek tragedy, because it shows you that culture is not deprived from violence. They go together. This is my language: I don't want to try to accommodate the viewer.

You began painting at 25 after leaving political history studies behind and failing the Agrégation [exam to become a public school teacher]. What role does failure continue to have in your practice?

Good art is something that is or appears alive. It's very hard to obtain that; most of the time you fail. But if you want to give yourself the most chances to get there, you have to be willing to take risks. If you play it safe, it won't look alive, because there will be this lack of energy.

I have so many accidents all the time in painting, and I know that sometimes I play too safe, and I hate myself for that. That's the core of the struggle: You have to dare to take risks, but it's so scary. Sometimes a painting really doesn't work, so I just turn it upside down and start another painting on top of it. The former failed painting becomes a background for the new painting. It doesn't work as a painting, but it works as a background.

Sometimes there's something that drips too much, or you didn't control your gesture, and you have an accident that's even more beautiful than what you could have expected. You have to have a quality of attention so that you are open to those accidents and to accept to take a new path. I'm not really a fan of having a goal. The goal of life is to live. Today it's very trendy to have a goal, to be the best version of yourself. I prefer the idea of adaptation.

The New York art scene can be very market-oriented. There is this drive to promote yourself, your work, climb the ladder. What has that experience been like for you?

I tend to isolate myself so that this question doesn't come through my mind so much. When I'm working on a show, I stop going to see shows because I need to be in my interiority. It's as if I'm not living in New York anymore because every day I just go from my home to the studio. I don't do anything else. While working on this show, for many months, I have been listening only to nature podcasts about mountaineering, hiking, wild spaces, and animals—very far from the art market. I know that makes me very nervous to listen to an art podcast while I'm working.

So I tend to forget everything else, and go back to what I like as a person. In these moments, I'm not even thinking about myself as an artist within an art world. Because what can I do? I cannot control how people are going to perceive me? If I'm thinking about that, I will just make myself nervous. I lose the point of painting, which is actually a relationship from myself to me. So the way to operate is to extract myself entirely from the art world in New York. I know after the paintings are done, I can finally talk about them.

The thing is to try to avoid being tokenized. I wouldn't like people to say that my art is a "female painting" or [linked to a certain] identity because I think that a work of art is an entire galaxy. If someone asks me, "What is your painting about? What are you trying to say?" if you try to market it, it's as if you were going to someone and asking them, "What is your life about? What's the purpose of your life?" I just live. I love the idea of not having answers. I think that's the contradiction of being marketed in the art world: We close the exploration because we give it a label.

Do you show your work to other people when you're working on it?

Never. It's like a bunker. It's like a diary. This is such a place of vulnerability. I have a lot of painter friends who love to talk about their work in progress; it has never been the case for me. I'm too afraid of showing the work until it's done because I don't know where it's going to go. If we start talking about it when it's not done, the fact that someone is going to put words on it, it's putting like micro labels on stuff that is still open. It's very hard for me to get back to work because now I see what this person has said, and so it gives the work a direction maybe I wouldn't have gone. It kills the petri dish.

Anything that gets put out into the world gets framed, and framed by people who are, inevitably, not you, who create other meaning out of it. How does it feel to have that happen when the work leaves the studio?

I'm fine with the work becom[ing] autonomous. People can say whatever they want about it. We live in a world of language; people are very reassured by language. I understand this need and this desire, but for me, my path has been the opposite. I come from the world of words. The academic background that I have was about putting ideas into words. I went to the limit of that.

I'm a very pragmatic person, so I like to describe things for what they are. I don't need to put a coat of spirituality over things. I love a good description. I'm very wary of general ideas.

You've spoken about color as a solution. We can see a color and have an immediate reaction to it, without words. What color is speaking to you the most today?

I've always been very attracted to browns. The warmth of [the color], the feeling of wood and of nature—I think it's very biological. It soothes you right away. I cannot depart myself from the reds [either]. Sometimes I try to put less red, but it always comes back. There is a fullness to red that I love. It's like a piece of meat. It's the protein of a painting.

We were talking about taste, [and] when you think about the velvet red of a monarch's outfit, there's just a feeling of richness, abundance, comfort, luxury. It's very warm and welcoming, and at the same time, very alive. I'm trying to find a balance between those polarities. How can I find rest within something that is extremely alive? I like the notion of danger, because it's related to this feeling of being alive. You have to have the right amount of comfort within this danger, and I think that's something we are all looking for: the good balance between freedom and security. How can it be dangerous, a bit aggressive, even on the edge of taste and grating, but at the same time, we can find relief in it?