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Artist Tatiana Trouvé makes monuments from memories
She uses objects to preserve vanished lives in her new shows at Paris's Centre Pompidou and Gagosian

Laura Rysman



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What we see of art is the final perfected object — rarely are we permitted to know the secrets of its making. On a recent visit to Naples, however, the artist Tatiana Trouvé allowed a peek behind the curtain. While finalising preparations for her solo shows in Paris at the Centre Pompidou and Gagosian, she led me around her workshop at the Fonderia Nolana.

The foundry is a block of a building behind security gates in an outlying industrial district, but inside its hallways are lined with copies of ancient Greek sculptures and artisans power-sanding

plaster statues. Trouvé walks past woodworking and marble-carving ateliers to a garret. Here, her bronze and stone sculptures crowd every surface, waiting to be assembled into compositions.

“This place is like an extension of my studio,” she says, her dark hair pulled over one shoulder in a long braid. Born in Italy and raised in Senegal, Trouvé has lived and worked in the Paris area for more than 25 years.

Marcello Del Giudice, whose family has run the Fonderia Nolana for four generations, hands Trouvé multicolour packets of patinas for her bronze pieces. “With Marcello, I can explain something I have in my head and he’s always ready to develop new methods to make these strange pieces,” she says. “It requires a deep relationship of trust and complicity.” They experimented with a direct cast of a dead ferret, she says, after she found one lifeless near her Paris studio. With Del Giudice’s help, it was “reborn in bronze”.



The Fonderia Nolana in Naples which produces pieces for Trouvé

Trouvé first arrived at the Fonderia Nolana in 2018 with an “expansive and impossible plan involving a fountain”, yet Del Giudice immediately agreed to produce it. The foundry collaborates with numerous artists — Camille Henrot, Nico Vascellari and Ugo Rondinone among them — who “push us to develop ideas requiring methods that might not yet exist”, says Del Giudice. “The artists make our work more dynamic and, frankly, more interesting.”

Trouvé’s installations incorporate books that have influenced her and which Fonderia Nolana recreates in marble — Fernando Pessoa, Paul Valéry and others rendered shrine-like and eternal in stone. The marble isn’t cut out of new stone from earth-damaging quarries, but from centuries-old tombstones that are removed from cemeteries and tossed out periodically to make room for the new dead.

“I wanted to reduce my environmental impact as an artist,” she says. “And the old stones add more layers of stories to the stories I’m creating.” Portions of dates and inscriptions remain visible on the book covers, beside their newly chiselled titles. “They’re like portraits for me,” she

says, showing a metre-wide slab bearing a name and “1912” in Roman numerals, the next to be carved into books. “The person is no longer there, but there’s a representation of their life.”

For Trouvé, memories are the building blocks of her multi-material installations, incorporating tokens of her own remembrances alongside those of long-gone strangers. There’s a tenderness for existence that pervades everything from her salvaged tombstones to the immortalised dead ferret. “All of these objects carry my affection,” she says, indicating a row of bronze castings of well-used soap bars. “Each soap reflects the shared work of many people and many hands that have dirtied themselves here. I want everyone to see these invisible hands behind the work.”



'Notes on Sculpture' (2022)



A detail from 'Notes on Sculpture' © Tatiana Trouvé. Courtesy the artist/Gagosian. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn (2)

Around her, prickly thistle blossoms cast in as-yet-unpolished bronze lie on a sawhorse table, a furrowed traveller's bag carved in solid green onyx sits on a wooden pallet, marble books are stacked on a chair. She gathers a handful of the metal flowers and places them on the stone bag, part of her process of creating mises-en-scène combining sculptures in a collage of solid symbols, which she calls "Guardians" and describes as "sculpture treated like drawing". A marble edition of Mathilde Larrère's book *Rage Against the Machisme* joins the bag and flowers. Made of the materials of classical sculpture, these ordinary objects are reframed as monuments.

Among the many works in the Pompidou exhibition, Trouvé is covering the sprawling gallery floor with a multi-layered drawing of ways of navigating the world, from the scent trails of wolves to the landscape dream chart of Australia's indigenous Warlpiri. She is also mounting a series of 56 drawings she created during the first Covid lockdown, when she covered a newspaper's front page from each day with meticulous line drawings — a diary of anxiety and frustration sketched in pencil.

Alongside the new drawings, three sculptures from her Guardians series will inhabit the space. In these installations, Trouvé places books and abandoned objects on chairs to represent an imaginary, just-vanished human — a life unseen signified in the objects a person has touched and perhaps cherished. She details one: a cheap garden chair with an abandoned hoodie and books, all made of marble, with Luigi Pirandello's *Uno, Nessuno, e Centomila* (One, No One and One Hundred Thousand) peeking out.



'The Guardian' (2022)



Detail from 'The Guardian' © Tatiana Trouvé. Courtesy the artist/Gagosian. Photo: Florian Kleinfenn (2)

These “Guardians” are keepers of memories and much more, according to Trouvé. “I wanted to make sculptures that were kind, sculptures that could protect other works.” It is a way of repaying the artists who paved a path for her, she says — Alighiero Boetti, Eva Hesse and others. Trouvé herself worked as a guard at the Pompidou decades ago, watching over the art and, in case of emergency, leaving a book on her chair as a sign of life in the room. “It was like leaving my ghost behind for the visitors.”

The Pompidou show marks her second solo outing at the museum; the first, in 2008, followed her winning the Prix Marcel Duchamp. In 2020 she was awarded France’s Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for her contribution to culture.

“With a museum exhibition, you write a piece of your history,” says Trouvé, who is looking forward to this new chapter. The nearly 15 years since her last show at the institution have changed the outlook for her and others once referred to as “female artists”. Previously, she says, art characterised as inferior was often derided as “women’s art”, and as recently as 2000, a collector informed her that he was interested in her work but “didn’t collect women”.

Now, happily, more attention is given to balancing representation. “It’s not that women have suddenly become better artists,” Trouvé says, raising one of her spiky bronze flowers like a torch. “It’s that the way of looking at women’s work is finally changing.”

‘The Great Atlas of Disorientation’, Centre Pompidou, Paris, to August 22, centrepompidou.fr

Gagosian, Paris, to September 3, gagosian.com