

MEET LAUREN CLAY, THE ARTIST BEHIND THE TRIPPY WINDOW DISPLAYS AT HERMÈS LIAT TOWERS

Clay, known for her marbled paintings and sculptures, tells us about her first art installation for Hermès



New York artist Lauren Clay tells GRAZIA Singapore about her surreal window installation for the Hermès Liat Towers store (Photo: Kristen Wasik)

Often, visiting an Hermès store can give you the delightful impression that you have stepped into a different dimension. In fact, an Hermès store feels less like a store than a space for exploration: it is filled with vibrant examples of how the French luxury brand is dedicated to artistry and ingenuity in a way that seems almost alien in today's luxury landscape. That feeling of encountering something out of the ordinary is currently embodied in the window displays at Hermès's Liat Towers store, showcasing a surreal art installation by New York artist Lauren Clay.

In Clay's art installation, titled *The Traveller*, Hermès ties defy gravity. The brand's belts and bracelets are intertwined with curling white tendrils. In the store's main window display, an Hermès silk scarf floats weightlessly near a twisting staircase. Throughout, you will find hypnotic pastel swirls—the results of paper marbling, one of Clay's preferred artistic practices along with creating sculptures by hand.



'The Traveller', an art installation by Lauren Clay, is now on display at the Hermès Liat Towers store (Photo: Hermès)

These are Clay's interpretations of Hermès's theme of the year, "The Spirit of the Faubourg", which celebrates the brand's first flagship store in Paris, located on 24 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Elements of the store—the aforementioned staircase, the wrought-iron balustrade—are reimagined in Clay's dreamy art works for the Hermès's Liat Towers store. The window displays also mark Clay's first project with Hermès (and hopefully, it's not the last: can you imagine her marbled paintings on a silk scarf?).

"It's a huge honour to be invited to collaborate with Hermès," says the Brooklyn-based artist, who flew down to Singapore for the first time for the unveiling of her window installations. "I come from a family of craftspeople and artists—my mother is a ceramicist, my father is a photographer, and my brother is a carpenter, woodworker, and woodcarver. We all share a love for beautiful, handmade objects and a deep appreciation for craft. So, I'm inspired by the level of craftsmanship and attention to detail that goes into Hermès creations."

Below, Lauren Clay tells GRAZIA Singapore how her otherworldly window displays for Hermès's Liat Towers store came to life.

What were your first experiences with paper marbling like?

Lauren Clay (LC): Early in my career, I primarily created sculptures from paper. I started by painting the paper in solid colours, but then I taught myself how to marble it for a specific series of sculptures. I became captivated by the intricate, detailed patterns produced through marbling. The complexity and depth of the marbled designs ignited a desire in me—I wanted to immerse myself in that world. Shortly after mastering marbling, I began creating large room-sized installations with digitally printed wallpaper, enlarging sections of the marbled paper. I love how the marble patterns distort the walls. When I'm marbling, as I lay the paper on the surface of the liquid marbling solution, it captures the dimensionality of the liquid holding the paint. If there are ripples, the paper captures them, creating a spatial effect in the final print. Blurring the viewer's perception between real and illusionistic space is a fundamental aspect of my work.



Clay is known for her marbled paper works—as seen in the backdrop of her Hermès window display (Photo: Hermès)

What went into creating your window installation for the Hermès Liat Towers store?

LC: The theme for this year's windows is "The Spirit of the Faubourg". For this installation, I aimed to capture some of the architectural details of the Hermès Faubourg store in Paris. While studying the store, I fell in love with the marble staircase that curves throughout the space. I knew I wanted to create an illusion of depth and space beyond the window. I began with sketches—around 20 ideas that only my husband saw—before selecting one to develop further. Collaborating with the Hermès production team allowed me to realise my drawings in a sculptural, architectural way. I worked closely with them to plan the installation. All of the sculptures were made by me in my studio in New York and shipped to Singapore for the installation. The architectural details—such as the stairs and arched walls were built

according to my drawings by the production team. It was a really fun experience collaborating with them.

How did you select the colours for your window installation? Did you intentionally incorporate Hermès's signature colours?

LC: I felt comfortable experimenting with colour for this project, knowing how much Hermès values colour. I think my colour palette naturally complements Hermès' signature hues. For instance, the scarves feature a distinct, complex colour palette that harmonises well with the pastels I'm drawn to in my own work. I also love the bold, solid colours of their leather goods. In my window designs, I wanted the leather objects to feel like small sculptures embedded within the installation, with their solid colours contrasting against the intricate marble patterns.

You also drew on your own signature colours, which appears across your artworks.

LC: Yes, I have my own distinct colour palette. There's a term in creative fields called "world building", which resonates with me. I often use saturated pastels and medium-value pure colours, and these colours have become an important part of this world I've created in my work.



Clay interprets the Hermès Brides de Gala in a sculpture with her signature rounded forms (Photo: Hermès)

You play with perspective in your art. The window at the Hermès Liat Towers store is at a corner—did this add to your installation?

LC: I wanted to create a genuine illusion of depth in the main window. The staircase wraps through the doorway, flips, and reappears through the window, upside down. Creating this installation felt similar to making a diorama or tableau, which aligns with my background in painting. A window offers a controlled view, much like a painting. Typically, when I create an exhibition for a gallery or museum, I start by making a model of the space and studying its architecture. I usually consider the viewer's path and vantage points as they navigate the space. However, for the Hermès window installation, the viewer has one main vantage point, which, in a way, gave me more freedom.

Did you add any personal touches to your window installation?

LC: The white rounded forms in the Brides de Gala sculpture are a signature element of my work, and I've been using them for quite some time. It was exciting to reinterpret the iconic Hermès Brides de Gala image in my own style by incorporating these forms. The soft geometry of the reigns in the original design really lent itself to this interpretation.

What qualities did you set out to express in your Hermès window installation?

LC: A recurring theme in my work is the feeling of standing on a threshold or being in a transitional space between two worlds. In creating this installation, I was particularly drawn to the idea of a person travelling down the staircase, which not only wraps around an impossible wall but also flips upside down. This creates an uncanny, mysterious sensation of entering another realm. I aimed to capture that dream-like experience of discovery.



'The Traveller' marks Clay's first project with Hermès (Photo: Hermès)

Have you encountered Hermès's art projects and collaborations before?

LC: Yes, I know or follow several artists in New York who have done projects with Hermès—like Serban Ionescu, Jonathan Chaplin, Chris Bogia, and Austin Eddy. Through this collaboration, I also loved learning more about Hermès's history of working with artists and seeing all the amazing windows they've created.

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How do you feel about having the opportunity to collaborate with Hermès?

LC: It's a huge honour to be invited to collaborate with Hermès. It's such a respected and well-loved brand that offers beautiful handmade objects, which I truly appreciate. I come from a family of craftspeople and artists—my mother is a ceramicist, my father is a photographer, and my brother is a carpenter, woodworker, and woodcarver. We all share a love for beautiful, handmade objects and a deep appreciation for craft. So, I'm inspired by the level of craftsmanship and attention to detail that goes into Hermès creations.



Clay appreciates the level of craftsmanship that goes into Hermès creations; she wanted the brand's leather goods to feel like "small sculptures" within her installation (Photo: Hermès)

Do the ideas for your artworks ever come to you in a dream?

LC: Yes. I have been studying my dreams for about five years. I do Jungian dream analysis at the C.G. Jung Institute of New York. It's really fascinating. Some people disregard their dreams and think they're nonsense, but I think dreams are important. The unconscious, and sometimes God, communicates through dreams, often in really poignant images. I've been inspired by my dreams and other spiritual experiences. Often in my work I'm trying to evoke the feeling of being in a dream, rather than referencing specific dreams I've had.

What is the most memorable response that you have received for your art?

LC: I really love children's reactions to my work. They ask really funny questions but also they accept the work so nonchalantly because it fits into their world so easily. I also have a video of my grandmother looking at some of my work, which is very special to me. I think about that a lot.

—PAMEYLA CAMBE