

# Ana María Rueda: El Caos sensible

The background features several overlapping, hand-drawn dashed lines in various colors: green, yellow, orange, and pink. These lines form complex, looping patterns that resemble chaotic trajectories. Small, solid-colored markers (a green triangle, a yellow rectangle, a pink square, and a pink rectangle) are placed at various points along the lines, suggesting specific points of interest or transitions within the chaotic system.



*The Sensitive Chaos* is the first comprehensive exhibition dedicated to Ana María Rueda, highlighting the evolution of her multidisciplinary work of more than forty years, from her early 1980s paintings to new environmental pieces created for this show. The exhibition, named after Theodor Schwenk's 1962 book, explores Rueda's engagement with nature's fluid forces, reflecting his ideas about the rhythmic patterns of water and air as foundational to life's interconnected systems.

Rueda is recognized as a leading contemporary Colombian artist whose work examines the connections between the human body, earth, territory, plants, and landscapes. Her work centers on reciprocity, interdependence, vulnerability, and resilience, creating visual ecosystems that question our place within nature's changing dynamics.

Her oeuvre often evokes organic textures and processes, featuring layered surfaces reminiscent of soil, roots, or flowing liquids. Rueda transforms everyday materials like gauze, clay, wire, branches, and plaster into powerful metaphors for interdependence and fragility. Spanning her early *Water and Earth* paintings from the 1980s, photographic series such as *I am also the Other* (2011), and immersive installations like *First Drops of Water on Dry Grass* (2023), her inspirations draw from rivers, stones, gardens, and natural cycles.

*Consonance* (2025-2026), created for this exhibition, reinterprets a series of flags, a symbol traditionally associated with conquest, ownership, and authority, decorating them with flowers as a natural and gentle gesture. Through this intervention, Rueda encourages viewers to find harmony in diversity, seek unity, and recognize the connections that sustain us all.

Through these works, Rueda addresses the possibility of renewal and healing after rupture, revealing beauty and subtle resistance in response to loss, environmental fragility, and erasure. These themes align closely with Schwenk's philosophical perspective.

Schwenk's book, based on Goethean observation and Steiner's anthroposophical principles, argues that water and air display rhythmic patterns such as spirals, meanders, vortices, and oscillations. These are not random but archetypal forces shaping biology, geography, and cosmic rhythms. This view of nature's "sensitive chaos" connects conceptually to Rueda's work, where fluidity and sensitivity are central.

Rueda's layered, translucent installations, reflect the sensitive membranes of skin, earth, and territory, capturing traces of contact and movement, similar to Schwenk's descriptions of water flows. Water, represented in her work through metaphors, river imagery, and material qualities, appears as a living element that envelops, shapes, and connects all forms.

This exhibition honors Ana María Rueda's decades-long artistic dedication to nature's vital energies—a commitment rooted in observing what Theodor Schwenk termed the "sensitive chaos," that paradoxical fusion of order and disorder. As ecological collapse accelerates globally, *The Sensitive Chaos* operates as both an aesthetic experience and an urgent call to action, inviting viewers to realign with the cyclical, self-organizing rhythms that sustain all life.

Eugenio Viola  
MAMBO Artistic Director

Ana María Rueda  
Colombia, 1954



My first—conscious—artistic quest arose from the idea of infinity that the image of the horizon evoked in me. I painted that line separating the sky from the earth obsessively until, after a long time, I felt the need to break it with the verticality of a tree's silhouette. That is when I began to take an interest in essential images that contained a symbolic and archetypal dimension and that, through their universal meaning, allowed me to explore ideas beyond simple representation. Thus, drawing on the primordial elements of nature—water, earth, air, and fire—I sought images that would generate metaphorical connections and correspondences related to the human being; on the one hand, with a focus on the sacred in nature, which emphasizes the existential bond between human beings and their environment, and on the other, based on my interests in interpersonal, ethical, and social relationships, as well as the impact of society on the environment.

My constant concern has been how to give shape to these interests and allow them to become part of my work. For me, being an artist isn't just about what happens when I'm in the studio; it's about the way I live, the way I relate to people, the people I choose to be close to, the way I appreciate them, and the empathy I build through my interest in their realities. These connections are the common ground between many of my ideas and the driving force behind the art I create.

As an artist and a Colombian, I feel compelled to engage with the social complexity of my country. Living in the city—so far from the battlefields, yet so close to them—I have felt a very strong need to address certain aspects of this reality that concerns us all.

Meeting the people I have been working with over the past few years has led me to reflect on what “the Other” means to each of us.

The disparity in experience between a war lived through firsthand and one glimpsed from cities through television screens prompts immense

reflections on indifference and on the subjective perspective each person may bring to the same situation depending on their consciousness and their place in the world.

I have undertaken this approach to people in a personal way, but also through certain philosophical analyses that explore interpersonal, ethical, and social relationships.

How can I approach these situations in a respectful and analytical way, while allowing intuition and the senses to shape the pieces I create?

I have worked interchangeably in painting, sculpture, and photography, always seeking to present each distinct series within a specific site-specific installation. I generally treat my images as part of a whole in which each piece is interconnected.

The most important thing for me is to understand. Not to explain, but to comprehend.

In my latest works, I explore once again the concept of vulnerability and the strength within it; how the intimate becomes collective; how what appears fragmented still holds the possibility of being woven together again.

My materials lend themselves to illustrating this ambiguity: gauze, translucent paper, wood, ceramics, threads. Elements that appear delicate and fragile, yet also reveal an unexpected strength. It is within this tension between what fragments and what is rebuilt that my work unfolds.

The art I create is an important process for clarifying my ideas: it evokes an image, reminds me of my thoughts on a specific subject, brings me closer to my spirit, and reveals aspects previously unknown to me.

Ana María Rueda



## Caosmosis

This large wall presents a wide selection of early paintings (1979-1996) by Ana María Rueda. The three series, *Horizons*, *Flora*, and *Resonance*, configure a panoramic overview of the first years of her artistic production, beginning in France through the subsequent development of her work after her return to Colombia in 1980. In all three, an emphasis on the primary elements of nature (earth, fire, air, water) emerges as a means for spiritual reflection. In this body of work, the image is understood as existing beyond the conceptual: they reverberate, they stay with the viewer and acquire new meaning according to the innerworld of each individual. As such, a responsibility with the audience prevails; despite Rueda's engagement with the subject of the Colombian conflict and climate catastrophes, her commitment is to abstain from saturating the social imaginary with more violence.

In *Horizon* (1979–1981), Rueda obsessively paints the line that separates earth and sky as a metaphysical meditation on the primary elements that touch and thus create the world—earth and air, above and below—together evoking for the artist an ever-expansive sense of the infinite. This series thus marks both the consolidation of an underlying metaphysical order in Rueda's practice, while also setting the stage for an eventual rupture upon her return to Colombia in 1980.

In *Flora*, paintings of dead trees, seeds, and flowers appear following the artist's return to her country of birth: in the 1980s, the Colombian civil war was entering a moment of reintensification, precipitated by the boom of the illegal drug trade.

The life she was returning to in Bogotá was now radically different from the one she had left ten years earlier: the ubiquitous poverty and violence seemed to be reflected in the circulating images of ecological catastrophe, the result of a new global order yielding to boundless consumption. However, the ravaged trees, seeds, and flowers, unmoored from any specific context or ecosystem, not only reflect the desolation of a future without hope: the seeds—ever suspended in a state of potentiality— and sprouting branches mark a possible path to renovation. *Flora* is a meditation on the possibility of healing and reconstruction, emphasizing the infinite cycle of life.

*Resonances*, shown for the first time at the gallery Garcés Velásquez in 1989, was originally conceived as a single grand installation of paintings where the repetition of natural motifs and the color white, in the artist's words, "create a visual echo in space of the intangible, the transparent, the mercurial." For the first time in Rueda's oeuvre, the expressive force of a color bearing a spiritual symbology appears as one of the primary motors of the work.

*Flora*

1988

Acrylic and oil on  
canvas

58 5/8 x 48 1/4

149 x 122.7 cm.





*Horizon*

1980

Watercolor on paper

17 5/8 x 23 5/8 in.

44.9 x 60 cm.



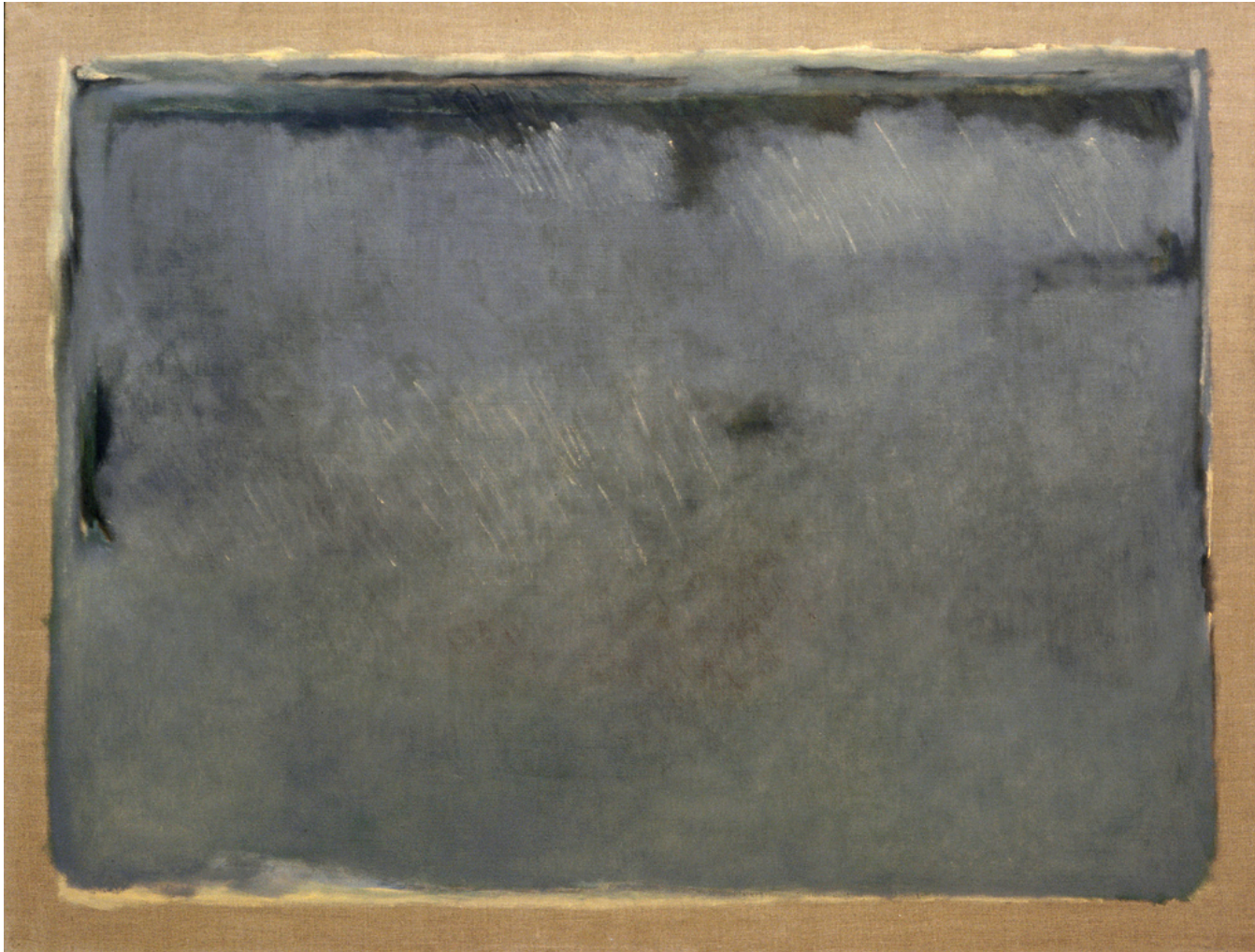
*Horizon*

ca. 1980

Acrylic and oil on canvas

38 3/8 x 51 in.

97.5 x 129.5 cm.



*Horizon*

1981

Oil on canvas

48 3/8 x 68 7/8 x 2 in.

123 x 175 x 5 cm.

*Resonance in red*

1993

Oil on canvas

69 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 52 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

177 x 134 cm.





*Resonance*  
1993 - 1996  
Acrylic and oil on  
canvas  
54  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 54  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
138 x 137.8 cm.



## Consonance

This installation of 22 hand-painted, double-sided flags suspended on tree branches is the central piece of this exhibition.

Commissioned specifically for The Sensitive Chaos, Consonance plays on the typology of the flag—an object with direct associations to power, war, and ownership of the land—and transforms it into a subtle gesture of resistance. In lieu of military emblems or patriotic colors, these paintings combine depictions of flowers with a combination of historical battle maps, marine currents, and stellar constellations.

As an homage to foundational artists from art history, each flower was taken from a historical painting, understood not as ornament, but as an offering of beauty and a symbol of livelihood.

Rueda says: “I appropriate flowers as a tribute to creation, to the wonderful instants that reveal our inner desire for a new world, it’s a calling to carefully observe those things that, more often than not, pass by unnoticed.”

While the ocean currents remain suffused with the strategic schemes of long-gone combats, Rueda proposes a harmonic vision of above and below: nothing moves in war, life, or death without simultaneously moving in water, air, and earth. The two sides of the paintings uphold this message: hanging unperturbed on branches, neither what’s above, below, behind or in front takes center stage. They’re always in consonance.



*Consonance*

2025

20 flags mounted on tree trunks.

Oil on printed canvas

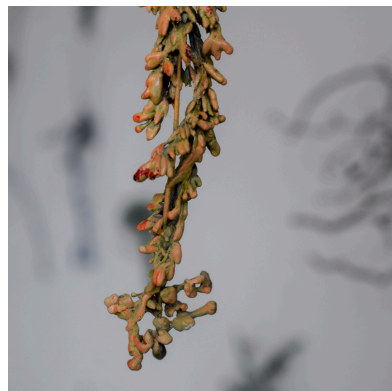
Variable Dimensions



## The Other in the Garden

A constant concern in Rueda's practice has been the reconstruction of a sense of belonging in contexts of forced displacement. This gallery opens with the environmental installation *First Drops on Dry Grass* and the video *My Sky*, two works that draw on the metaphor of the inner garden as a sanctuary of rootedness within one's own psyche. These works address migrants and those affected by tragic disruptions in their lives, offering a poetic image of hope. The series *For I is the Other* shifts the gaze toward those who do belong and who are confronted with the presence of a stranger before whom they may choose either indifference or empathy.

Rueda embeds herself in the ethics of Emmanuel Lévinas, for whom the mere face-to-face encounter with the Other renders us infinitely responsible for them and for the consequences our actions set in motion within the fabric of the human world. The stones, dyed red, symbolize this individual, monolithic pain sealed off from empathy, while the undulating waters evoke the infinite repercussions of every act within their surroundings.



*First Drops of Water on Dry Grass*

2023

Copper, organic fiber and  
acrylic, stainless steel wire

Variable dimensions



*My Sky*  
2023  
Fabric and Digital Video





*For I is another*  
2010  
Photography  
27 ½ x 39 ¾ in.  
70 x 100 cm.



*For I is another (Diptych)*

2010

Photograph on Hahnemühle Matte Fine Art

paper 308 gr

21 5/8 x 21 5/8 in. each

55 x 55 cm. each





## Fire in the Forest

In *Fire*, Rueda works with wood procured from felled trees found in Bogotá and transforms them into vertical sculptures, symbolically restoring the tree's upright position. Using fragments, she reorganizes the pieces to return them to their axis and presence, proposing a gesture of ecological reconstruction. The white hue that covers the forms introduces a key dimension: it points to emptiness and potentiality, to a state of transition in which what has been devastated can project its renewal.

In *Shadowless Forest*, the artist creates an installation of fragmented photographs of wood veneers found in large industrial warehouses. The forest, uprooted and transformed into a repetitive industrial surface, lays bare the material's extraction and exploitation.

The fragmentation found in the different photographs accentuates the loss of unity, while their reorganization in space insists on the possibility for recomposition.

Both works enter into dialogue within this triangular gallery, intensifying the tension between rupture and restitution by virtue of its configuration. The sharp spatial geometry orients the gaze and structures a movement from the recovered verticality of the wood to the fragmented surface of the industrialized forest. Within this triangle, which represents both tension and balance, the works converge in an ecological reflection on loss, but also on the capacity to restore meaning to what has been broken.



*Fire, from the Body Series*

1996

Fire prints on wood and  
casein

90 ½ x 47 ¼ x 4 in.

230 x 120 x 10 cm.



*Fire, from the Body Series*

1996

Fire prints on wood

59 x 38 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4 in.

34 x 24.5 cm.

*Fire, from the Body Series*

1996

Fire prints on wood

59 x 38 5/8 x 4 in.

150 x 98 x 10 cm.





Shadowless Forest  
2013  
Photograph on cotton  
paper and graphite  
Variable dimensions



## The House in Transit

This section of the show gathers installations made between 2022 and 2025; all three reflect on the role memory plays in building a sense of belonging and place, as well as the capacity to rebuild after rupture. *In Between* (2022), *So Many Things to Tell* (2025), and *A White Dream* (2023) address domesticity through the use of objects and materials relating to those spaces, albeit with an unexpected twist: fragile, breakable bricks, plaster floor tiles, and shelves designed to be carried on one's shoulders.

The materials, chosen to enact reparation, emphasize, according to the artist, “the fragile, and the strong within the fragile: the broken that gets repaired, the broken that is remade without being replaced. I’m looking for a language that can communicate fluidity in what’s solid, the concrete in the intangible, a correspondence between the real and the perceived, between what I think and what actually is.”



*So Many Things to Tell*

2025

Ceramic fragments, red gauze thread, magents.

94 ½ x 354 ¾ in.

240 x 900 cm.

A White Dream  
2023  
Styrofoam, iron, and  
acrylic on plaster  
11 x 9 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 in.  
28 x 25 x 28 cm.





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