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Joana Vasconcelos, Britannia, 4, 2014

Picture: Courtesy of the artist

ART

A trip in Joana Vasconcelos's Time Machine

Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos has taken over Manchester City Gallery in a characteristically maximal manner



BY LOUISA BUCK

MARCH 28, 2014 07:00

Joana Vasconcelos is an artist who likes to make an impression. Her calling card to the international art world was a colossal five metre high chandelier made from more than 25,000 tampons which she showed at the 2005 Venice Biennale, hanging in the entrance of the city's historical Arsenale, the most masculine of military spaces. A few years later she was back again, with "Contamination", an immense textile extravaganza of soft tentacles and polyps that dangled, clustered and climbed throughout the grand central hall of the Palazzo Grassi. And then last year, Vasconcelos scored her Biennale hat trick by representing her native Portugal with a floating pavilion made from a Lisbon ferryboat clad in traditional blue and white ceramic tiles and containing a crocheted grotto illuminated by a multitude of twinkling fibre-optics.

Now Vasconcelos has taken over

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Joana Vasconcelos, Tutti Frutti, 2011

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Velvet.)

Other dramatic pieces in the temporary exhibition galleries include a 1960's Morris Oxford bristling with flashing toy rifles and filled with squeaky (and squeaking) soft toys; a Bell helicopter festooned with extravagant plumes of pink ostrich feathers and sparkling with Swarovski crystals, and a humid, steamy "garden" of three immense lotus-like blooms made from multiple steam irons in the yellow, red and green of the Portuguese flag which form synchronised petals that slowly open and close, each hissing out jets of vapour with a sultry malevolence. This is feminist art shot through with a sense of



Joana Vasconcelos, Bond Girl, 2014

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humour and a hefty dose of absurdist hedonism. Crochet and cushions are made monumental, tools of servitude mutate into Venus Flytraps and the ridiculously, magnificently girly Lilicoptere had her debut in Versailles as the artist's impression of how Marie Antoinette would travel if she lived today.

Less spectacular but arguably more subversive is the way in which Vasconcelos has also infiltrated the gallery's permanent collection, slyly popping up amongst its Victorian paintings, sculpture, designer furniture and ceramics. Here, her wielding of the crochet hook is especially effective in debunking stereotypes and puncturing hubristic macho swagger. On the wall next to Spencer Stanhope's vampish Eve Tempted, the coils of a ceramic Portuguese serpent are tightly encased in a tight, white stocking of lacey cotton crochet; and across the gallery from another salacious image of dangerous female sexuality, William Etty's The Sirens and Ulysses, the curves of his pneumatically tempting trio are playfully parodied in the huge wooly crocheted bump of Vasconcelos's gaily-striped Big Booby # 2.

For let's not forget – and this artist certainly hasn't – that Manchester was also the birthplace of the Women's Suffrage Movement as well as the Industrial revolution.

Joana Vasconcelos 'Time Machine' Manchester Art Gallery, until June 1

JOANA VASCONCELOS

Manchester Art Gallery,
Mosley Street,



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