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The Artist Sculpting a Terra-cotta Forest

Setsuko Klossowska de Rola's exhibit in Rome, plus a fashion designer's collaboration with West Elm and more recommendations from T Magazine.

Caitie Kelly

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An Arboreal Exhibition at Gagosian Rome Image



*Left: Setsuko Klossowska de Rola in her Paris studio, 2022. Right: Setsuko's "Raisin III" (2022).
Left: © Wim Wenders. Right: © Setsuko. Photo: Thomas Lannes. Courtesy of Gagosian*

Rome's Villa Medici exerts a singular pull on the Tokyo-born artist Setsuko Klossowska de Rola. The wife of the French painter Balthus spent 15 formative years living in the Renaissance palazzo in the 1960s and 1970s during her husband's tenure as director of the French Academy in Rome. "It was the golden age of cinema, and I had the chance to meet some fantastic film directors — Fellini, Visconti ..." she recalls. It was also where she began to paint. Now based in Switzerland, Setsuko, 80, will return to Italy this month for "Into the Trees II," an exhibition

opening at Gagosian's Rome outpost on Sept. 8. Her "Roman period" paintings, precisely observed still lifes of domestic objects, will join newer works depicting oak, magnolia, citrus and fig trees and rendered in enamel-glazed terra cotta, bronze and wood, as well as paintings and works on paper completed in Switzerland. The terra-cotta trees only strengthen the Rome connection, as they were created in her studio at Astier de Villatte, the Paris-based ceramics label co-founded by Benoît Astier de Villatte, whom Setsuko first met when he was a baby in a pram at Villa Medici. Such coincidences amuse Setsuko, who sees magic everywhere she looks. "Old, dried-up trees can sometimes have new branches, a new renaissance," she says of her primary subject matter. "That vitality is incredible to me." *"Into the Trees II" is on view Sept. 8 through Oct. 29, gagosian.com.*