

PREVIEW // ART + EXHIBITS

## Skidmore alum spotlights little-known art pioneer in Tang exhibit

By **Katherine Kiessling**, Staff Writer

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Skidmore College alum and Tang museum curator Ayelen Pagnanelli, left, and Argentinian artist **Cecilia Biagini** at the museum on the Skidmore College campus on May 31 in Saratoga Springs. Biagini's work is featured alongside abstract artist Yente in the exhibit.

Jim Franco/Times Union

Argentinian abstract artist Yente was never afraid to show her hand, said Ayelen Pagnanelli, art historian and Skidmore College alumna. Grooves in celotex, a fiberboard made from sugar cane, and the Incan-inspired sculpture “Object” show the irregularities of hand-carving and accidental drops of glue were left to form small stains on the collaged pages of her book “Vorágine.” But much of the art made by Yente, now recognized to be a pioneer of abstraction, went largely unnoticed during the artist’s life.

Now Pagnanelli, a decade after graduating from Skidmore, has returned to the Tang Teaching Museum and Gallery to curate the largest exhibition of Yente’s art ever shown in North America: “Vorágine: Yente and Cecilia Biagini,” which pairs Yente’s work with contemporary Argentinian artist Cecilia Biagini. The show runs through Sept. 22.

Pagnanelli, who, like Yente and Biagini, was born in Buenos Aires, learned about Yente while researching for her dissertation through the National University of San Martin on the role of gender and sexuality in abstract art from the 1930s through the 1960s. While Yente was a trailblazer, bucking the European conventions in favor of texture, experimental mediums and Hispanic and Indigenous influences, it was her husband, artist Juan Del Prete, who found recognition.

“She wasn’t even interested in the spotlight, and we can argue whether she didn’t want to or that she realized she couldn’t,” Pagnanelli said. “We’ll never know.”

At her husband’s urging, Yente did exhibit in small commercial galleries while she was alive, Pagnanelli said. Yente’s first major showcase came in 2009, 19 years after her death, when the Latin American Art Museum of Buenos Aires featured her in an exhibition. In 2022, the museum hosted a major retrospective on her and her husband, curated by Pagnanelli’s dissertation adviser.

The work of Pagnanelli is a continuation of her undergraduate studies at Skidmore, where she worked in the Tang’s curatorial and education departments while earning bachelor’s degrees in studio art and gender studies. Her research aligns with efforts happening across museums globally to reassess art history and uplift artists that haven’t gotten their due despite their contributions.

“It’s also important to not only think of certain social groups like women and queer artists being excluded from those narrations,” Pagnanelli said. “Rather it’s like adding a piece to a larger puzzle. We have all the marginalized artists but also the marginalized regions.”

## IF YOU GO

### "Vorágine: Yente and Cecilia Biagini"

**Where:** Tang Teaching Museum and Gallery, 815 North Broadway, Saratoga Springs

**When:** Open 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Wednesday and 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday.  
Exhibition runs through Sept. 22, 2024

**Admission:** Free; suggested donations of \$5 for adults, \$3 for kids over 12 and \$2 for seniors

**More information:** [tang@skidmore.edu](mailto:tang@skidmore.edu), 518-580-8080 or [tang.skidmore.edu](http://tang.skidmore.edu)

The Tang, with its academic affiliation, is better positioned to showcase lesser-known artists, said Michael Janairo, head of communications. Unlike its non-academic peers, it doesn't have to rely on star-studded exhibits to sell tickets, a trend he said began with the King Tutankhamun traveling show of the 1980s. "We are going to introduce you to things you may not know," Janairo said. "It's such a great notion that (Yente) is in conversation with the big male figures of abstract expressionism but using techniques that they would never use."

Through her research, Pagnanelli wants to ensure current and future generations of artists understand the history that is in "Vorágine," a tale of a grandfather and grandson embarking on a whirlwind adventure that Yente wrote for her niece and nephew. "For me, it was also a tale of intergenerational dialogue and how that can sometimes be complicated and can sometimes be very fruitful," Pagnanelli said. "In that way, I think of Yente as being part of the maternal lineage of many of the artists of Cecilia's generation."

Pagnanelli met Biagini a decade ago while in New York City, where Biagini now lives, and the curator instantly thought of the multidisciplinary artist for this show. To Pagnanelli, Biagini and Yente are in clear conversation with each other beyond their shared Argentinian roots. Both women refused to adhere to one discipline, exploring everything from substituting paint strokes, thought to be a man's medium, with embroidery (Yente) to an atonal soundscape as part of delicate cascading sculpture (Biagini). Textures, shapes, colors and techniques are echoed and remixed in Biagini's art, from the carved shapes of "Urban Nature" to vivid hues of her tower-like sculpture "Nature of Time." "I'm very pleased to be here," said Biagini while installing her waterfall-like sculpture from the Tang's ceiling. "Working and having my work next to Yente's is a beautiful opportunity."

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