

REGEN PROJECTS

Elderton, Louisa. "Georgia Gardner Gray Taps Into the Theatre of Stonehenge." [frieze](#) (September 14, 2026) [ill.] [online]

FRIEZE

Georgia Gardner Gray Taps Into the Theatre of Stonehenge

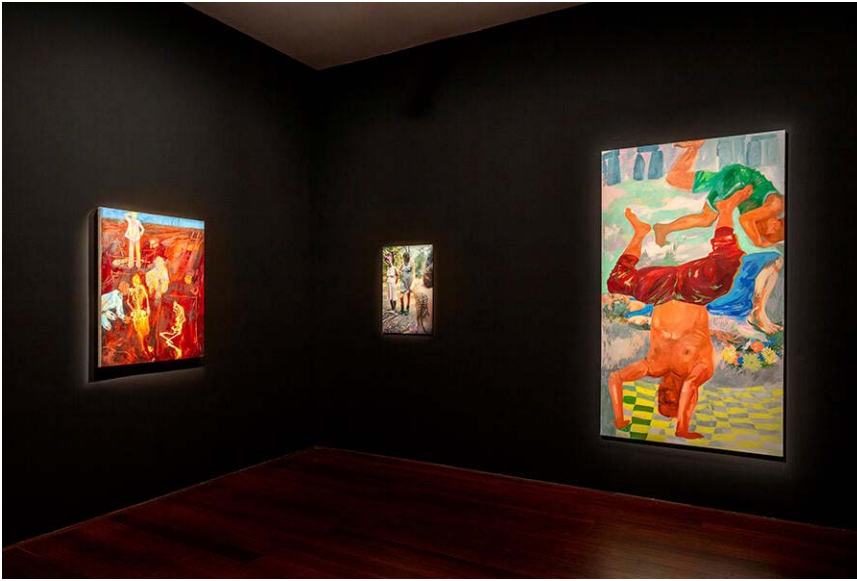
At Museum der Moderne Salzburg, the artist turns the ancient monument into a stage for ritual, spectacle and collective fantasy



When I was ten years old, I fell over a football and smashed my head against concrete. It was gnarly, blood everywhere; I was concussed, the world was spinning, but the worst part was that I missed the school field trip to Stonehenge. I've still never been. In fact, Georgia Gardner Gray's exhibition 'Stones', part of the experimental programme 'GENERATOR' at Museum der Moderne Salzburg, is the closest I've come to this cultural icon – a megalithic circle of sarsen stones from 3100 BC.

Gray is known for her vivid scenographic paintings that allude to social constructs, archetypes and oblique behaviours, in which people often assume oddball and eccentric roles. In 'Stones', they double down in full-blown ayahuasca glory, visualized in a trippy colour palette. A crimson-robed woman with outstretched arms emerges ecstatically from a field of red flowers (*Star Power*, all works 2026); a harlequin makes out with a ghostly apparition, diamond patterns glimmering in bubbles floating nearby (*Kiss*); cottony black bighorn sheep merge with a soft mist of mustard yellow, mint green and candyfloss pink (*Flock*); and smiling skeletons with glowing auras rise from ruddy earth (*Dear Darkening Ground*).

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Georgia Gardner Gray, 'Stones', 2026, exhibition view, Courtesy: the artist, © Museum der Moderne Salzburg and Croy Nielsen, Vienna; photograph: Andrew Phelps

Spatial distortions define Gray's otherworldly compositions here, with great swathes of canvas left unresolved – drifting colour fields of lush, loosely worked pigments. The effect chimes with the indeterminate mysticism surrounding Stonehenge; yet amid this luminosity, Gray's characters enact a melancholic search for meaning and connection, registered in longing or despondent gazes.

The purpose of Stonehenge's construction remains unknown. It may have served as a celestial observatory linked to solstice and equinox, while its early history indicates a burial site. Today, it operates as a stage for ceremony and tourism alike, with spectacle inherent to both. And it is quite specifically this stage and its attendant mannerisms that interests Gray. Across her paintings, Stonehenge can be seen floating dreamily or receding almost entirely from view, with the stones mattering less than the rituals, performances and acts of looking that happen around them.

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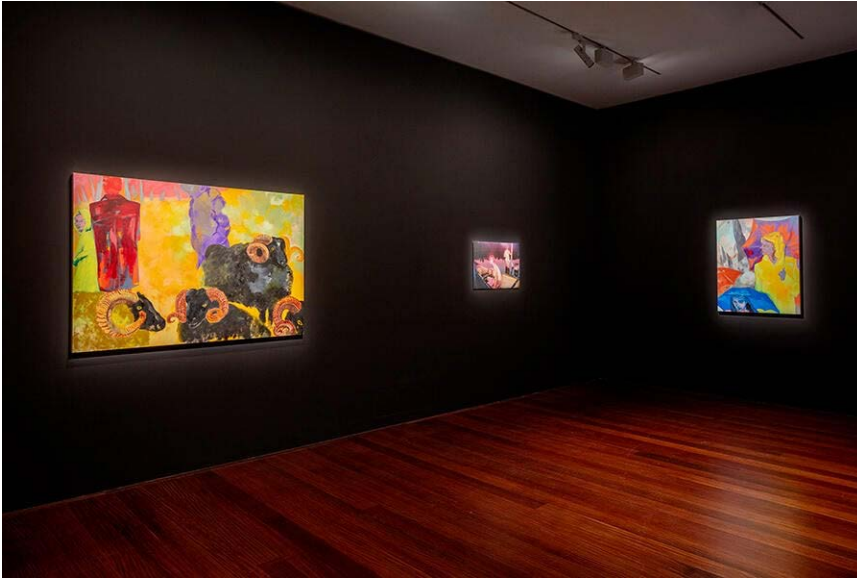


Georgia Gardner Gray, *The Stones*, 2026, oil on canvas. Courtesy: the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London; photograph: Roberto Ruiz

The artist often incorporates performance or plays in her practice, and these paintings too are defined by a narrative quality. Take, for example, *On a Plastic Day*, in which a hoard of people in variously coloured plastic ponchos (tangerine orange, emerald green, lemon yellow) gather beneath umbrellas to watch the sunset through the stones. A chain-link fence in the foreground delimits the scene, casting us as the audience observing these rainbow figures. They echo the monolith's verticality, and though rendered with a dynamic brushwork suggestive of impermanence, their technicolour presence is compelling beyond the Stonehenge grey. This is people-watching at its best.

In *The Stones*, a woman's glassy eyes roll back with epiphanic fervour as golden sunrays burst onto the stone, which sparkles with dappled orange and green. This painting's protagonist is in the midst of some unknowable realization, completing the arc of her own story and transcending the scope of the physical world. We are the sum total of the stories we tell ourselves, Gray seems to suggest – some of which are observable, while others are lived internally.

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Georgia Gardner Gray, 'Stones', 2026, exhibition view, Courtesy: the artist, © Museum der Moderne Salzburg and Croy Nielsen, Vienna; photograph: Andrew Phelps

The exhibition, too, has its own performative choreography. Its two rooms are theatrically painted black and red, while three works from the museum's collection, selected by Gray, enter a dialogue with her paintings. Iris Andraschek's sublime photograph *Curious, nervous, but nothing happens* (2002) captures three despondent punkish women waiting in a forest (for what, we wonder?); Lovis Corinth's coloured lithograph *Bacchantenzug* (Procession of the Bacchantes, 1895) depicts a nude bacchanal sunset frolic, while Leo Zogmayer's bronze sculpture *Keil* (Wedge, 1988) doubles, prop-like, as the exhibition's own stone slab. The effect is less a display than a mise-en-scène, as Gray treats the gallery as a theatre in the round.

Georgia Gardner Gray's 'Stones' is on view at Museum der Moderne Salzburg until 4 October

Main image: Georgia Gardner Gray, On a Plastic Day, 2026, oil on canvas. Courtesy: the artist and Croy Nielsen, Vienna; photograph: Andrew Phelps