

CLAUDIA FONTES



ARTIST STATEMENT

I am after the poetic and political potential that emerge from making things. I see my work as being a mediator of the multiple agencies involved in the making, be them historical, natural or cultural, while challenging the practice of representation.

While being a young artist in Argentina and in The Netherlands, the postcolonial political and artistic scene I was immersed in made me develop a keen interest in history and strategies of decolonisation that involved collaborations with others. My early work responded to a need for understanding how things come to be, how materials behave and what interactions I could foster between my own agency and that of the materials and people I was encountering.

This notion of 'other' expanded very quickly to embrace logics of co-existence beyond the human, and to frame my work into a post-human perspective.

At the moment I am fascinated by how creative transpositions amongst language systems, animals, plants, raw materials and man-made objects facilitate endless opportunities for exploring the idea of distributed authorship.

CLAUDIA FONTES

THEATERSCHLAG (Coup de théâtre)

Documenta fifteen, Kassel, Germany, 2022

[*Theaterschlag*](#) was Claudia Fontes's specific contribution to [*The Book of the Ten Thousand Things*](#), a collective project she spearheaded as the founding member of La Intermundial Holobiente for [documenta fifteen](#). The installation was placed in the compost-heap area of the Karlsaue Park in Kassel.

In "Theaterschlag", a theatre backdrop painted on traditional stage gauze with traditional scenic techniques hangs from two balloons filled with helium –the most abundant gas in the atmosphere. The scene painted on it reproduces a fragment of the landscape surrounding it. The portion of landscape represented in the painting appears solid or fading into the background depending on the visitor's point of view and movement, the sun's trajectory, the clouds, and/or the wind's behavior.

"Theaterschlag" is an act of devolution to the landscape of its own representation.



Theaterschlag for The Book of the Ten Thousand Things

Theatre gauze painted by scenic artist, helium balloons, ropes, trees, landscape and wind.

Theatre drape 600 x 2000 cm. Installation bird's view in the Karlsaue Park, Kassel, documenta fifteen, 2022



Theaterschlag for *The Book of the Ten Thousand Things*

Theatre gauze painted by scenic artist, helium balloons, ropes, trees, landscape and wind.

Theatre drape 600 x 2000 cm. Karlssaue Park, Kassel, documenta fifteen, 2022



Theaterschlag,

Habitat for *The Book of the Ten Thousand Things*

Theatre gauze painted by scenic artist, helium balloons, ropes, trees, landscape and wind.

Theatre drape 600 x 2000 cm. Karlsaue Park, Kassel, documenta fifteen, 2022



Theaterschlag for The Book of the Ten Thousand Things

Theatre gauze painted by scenic artist, helium balloons, ropes, trees, landscape and wind.
Theatre drape 600 x 2000 cm. Installation bird's view in the Karlsaue Park, Kassel, documenta fifteen, 2022



Theaterschlag for *The Book of the Ten Thousand Things*

Theatre gauze painted by scenic artist, helium balloons, ropes, trees, landscape and wind.
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FOOTNOTE / NOTA DE RODAPÉ

33rd São Paulo Biennial – *Affective Affinities*, 2018

Footnote was Claudia Fontes's response to Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro's invitation to act as artist-curator for the 33rd São Paulo biennial.

For this work, Fontes placed porcelain ornaments depicting animals on the roof of her house. These were dropped and smashed by a family of seagulls who nest on the roof. The artist collected the fragments created from the breakage and covered them in cotton muslin with the help of a team of forty women. Their brief was to conceal the shape while describing it by sewing around it.

Each fragment was then associated and labelled with a word from the detective story she commissioned from writer/ translator Pablo Martín Ruiz, which contains clues of the curatorial thinking behind the exhibition. *Footnote* can be read as the poetical translation of a fictional story. Both the detective story and *Footnote* can be seen as two sides of a coin, in which analytical thinking meets poetry.



Footnote

Detective story and porcelain ornaments broken by five birds into more than 5500 fragments, covered in cotton fabric sewn by hand.

Table with glass, 120 x 750 x 92,3 cm. Installation view at the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo

2018



Footnote

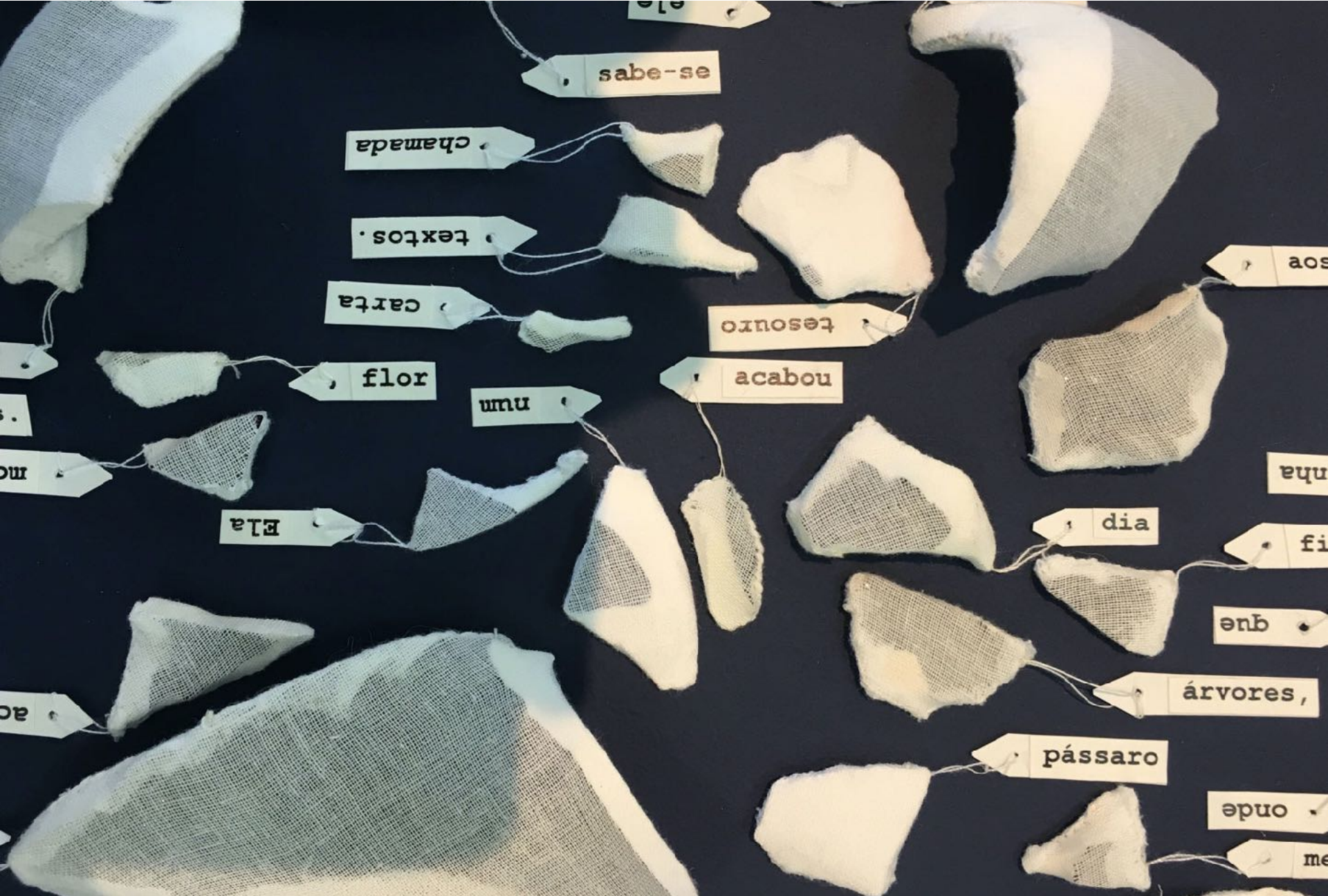
Detective story and porcelain ornaments broken by five birds into more than 5500 fragments, covered in cotton fabric sewn by hand.

Table with glass, 120 x 750 x 92,3 cm. Installation view at the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo

2018



Footnote, 2018
detail



Footnote, 2018
detail



Footnote, 2018
detail

THE HORSE PROBLEM

Claudia Fontes at the Pavilion of Argentina, Venice Biennial 2017

The installation shows a bullet-time frozen scene in which a horse, a woman and a young man are trapped in an infinite causality loop for which fear is the cause and the symptom at once. The horse's fear of being trapped in the building creates an avalanche of rocks travelling into his direction, the shadows of which form a mirrored image of himself, albeit exploding. The whiteness and smoothness of the material give the scene the quality of an apparition as if the characters and their circumstances existed in a parallel temporality. The audience, as onlookers, complete the narrative.

The point of departure for this image was the hidden presence of the horse's exploitation in the exhibition space and its materiality: wood, bricks and iron could only have been made and put together by horse-power in the times the Arsenal buildings were built.

Fontes also took into consideration the history of La Biennale di Venezia as an institution that still perpetuates the XIX century tradition of national representations, and the history of representation of her own country. She took the 1892 painting *The Return of the Indian Raid*, by Argentinean artist Ángel Della Valle as a key reference for The Horse Problem, since it was the first artwork commissioned to an artist with the specific purpose of culturally representing her country as a nation abroad. The painting depicts the violent takeover of lands from the indigenous people in the 19th Century as Argentina was forming as a nation state. The artist borrowed from the painting those characters who were in a passive role -a white horse and a white captive woman-, and set them into action in her own installation, reallocating roles amongst them.

By ruling out racism, patriarchy and speciesism, *The Horse Problem's* narrative offers in a flash possible reinterpretations of history, and a chance to construct alternative narratives for our future as a species.



The Horse Problem

Sculptural installation

Marble dust and resin, wall and shadows.

Size of space 500 x 4700 x 1000 cm

Human figures are life-size. Horse and shadows approximately 500 x 600 cm

Argentinean Pavilion, Arsenale, 57a Venice Biennial, Italy, 2017.



The Horse Problem, 2017

Installation view at the 57th Venice Biennial, detail



The Horse Problem, 2017
Installation view at the 57th Venice Biennial, detail



The Horse Problem, 2017

Installation view at the 57th Venice Biennial, detail



***The Horse Problem*, 2017**
Installation view at the 57th Venice Biennial, detail

FIELD WORK

After moving to England, Fontes started working in porcelain extracted from English quarries in an attempt to appropriate a piece of England for herself. This action resulted in a group of small-scale sculptures, resembling collectable china figurines.

These type of pieces work in Fontes's creative system as frozen stills from a film that runs in parallel to the tangible world.

The situations they depict were collected in her mind while walking in nature in the English landscape.

She understands them as reminders of actions or states of mind that will sooner or later inform future work. She considers them to be fieldwork, mood data collected from the wild, albeit not scientifically, but in connection with emotional affinities.



The beginning of landscape, 2016

Porcelain, unique piece.

9 x 19 x 60 cm



Exhale, 2014

Porcelain, unique piece

6.5 x 27 x 22 cm



Listening, 2015
Porcelain, unique piece.
12 x 23 x 14cm

FOREIGNERS

Foreigners is a series of 40 small white figurines, which Fontes began to make in response to the English landscape that surrounds her and to her cultural understanding of it as a foreigner. They depict processes of metamorphosis and hybridisation amongst the creatures she shares this particular bio-political system with: trees, plants, rocks and fungi.

The figures are made of English porcelain and are the size of her hand.

The choice of scale, material, and the care and control exercised in their fragile construction are an attempt to denaturalize and question the validity of the word "foreigner", used popularly in England in a pejorative and discriminatory sense.





Foreigners, 2013

Flaxseed paper porcelain

All figures same scale at 20/25 cm height



Foreigners, 2015

Flaxseed paper porcelain

All figures same scale at 20/25 cm height



Foreigners, 2015

Flaxseed paper porcelain
25 x 15 x 10 cm - Unique piece



Foreigners
2016
English flaxseed porcelain
28 x 15 x 10 cm



Foreigners

2019

English flaxseed porcelain

29 x 17 x 17 cm



Foreigners

2021

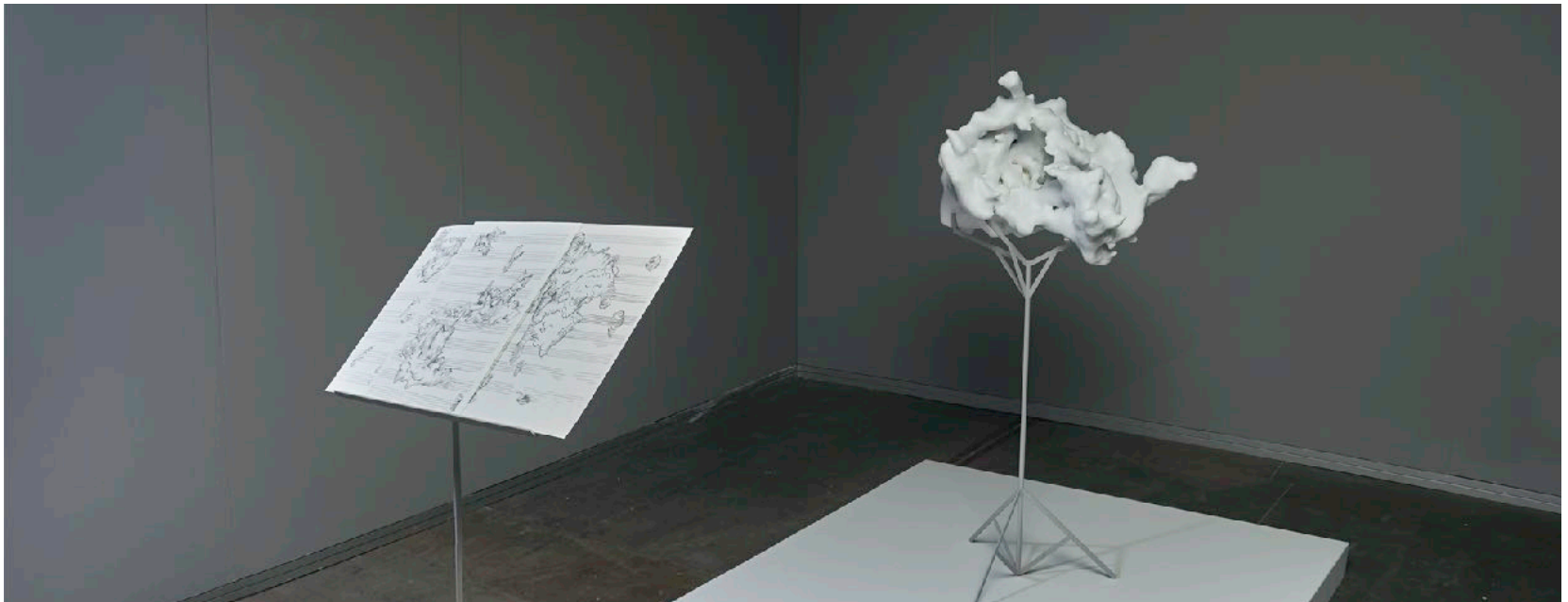
English flaxseed porcelain

26 x 9 x 20 cm

OCCURRENCE

Occurrence is the materialisation of the space in between Fontes's dog and herself while communicating at play. The object was generated by capturing the movement of both bodies in space and translating it into a three dimensional shape. The object has the size of the space you can embrace with your arms.

The installation is completed by several drawings depicting the object from different perspectives; these could be used as movement or sound notation sheets. The viewer becomes the conductor, the interpreter of the sound and movement of a quiet moment captured in a split second.



***Occurrence*, 2016**

3D digital file captured with a hacked sensor and printed in ABS polymer. Ink on paper and metal stands.

Variable measurements / Object 55 x 50 x 70 cm / Drawings 24 x 32 cm



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DECOY FOR ANDEAN CONDOR

Frieze Sculpture park, Regent's Park, London 2011

Taking as a starting point the historical, cultural and natural context provided by the park, Fontes decided to initiate single-handedly an Argentinean Invasion to the British Isles by attempting to attract a flock of Andean Condors to London.

Decoy for Andean Condor stages a symbolic Argentinean invasion of the English Gardens at Regent's Park in London by placing a decoy in the shape and size of a red deer amongst the crown of a Turkey oak tree in the Frieze Sculpture Park. The metaphor of artwork as a decoy is recurrent in Fontes's work. Se has used it before and after this piece as part of a decolonial tactic to unveil feelings of dislocation, menace and helplessness that the proposed scene may raise in viewers, as well as questions on territory, control, and conflict that these feelings may generate in turn: Who is lying in wait? What is being hunted?, and Why?





Decoy for Andean Condor

Polyurethane foam, synthetic rubber, paint and rope - 190 x 214 x 120 cm
Frieze sculpture park, London, 2011



Decoy for Andean Condor

Polyurethane foam, synthetic rubber, paint and rope - 190 x 214 x 120 cm
Frieze sculpture park, London, 2011

TRAINING

A hunting sight-hound is followed by a camera that imitates all his moves while roaming over the Sussex countryside: the pursuing camera tries to catch up when the dog sprints, stops when he stops and dodge trees and obstacles in an attempt at reversing the usual sense of control between dog and trainer. At a point, the dog finally takes control of the point of view, as the camera is attached to his side, and the whole scene becomes chaotic and irrational. The viewers perceive a physical sense of unbalance and loss of control just before being confronted by the animal's stare. It is up to them to decide who trains whom.



Training

DVD colour, to be projected on wall - 9:39 min
Brighton, 2011



Training

DVD colour, to be projected on wall - 9:39 min
Brighton, 2011

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PORTRAIT OF PABLO MÍGUEZ

Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires

Reconstruction of the portrait of Pablo Míguez is a public artwork permanently displayed at Parque de la Memoria, a memorial that commemorates the lives and ideas of social transformation of those kidnapped, tortured and killed during the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina in the late 70s. This memorial is situated by Río de la Plata, the river in which the perpetrators dumped unconscious prisoners from military planes, during what they used to call “death flights”. Reconstruction of the portrait of Pablo Míguez sits on the waters of said river.

According to the dictators’s perverse discourse, the “disappeared” were neither alive nor dead, but their existence had “simply” ceased. Following this logic, when kidnapping people the military would steal pictures, documents, and evidence of any kind that could prove the kidnapped person’s existence. Being a visual artist, Fontes proposed to attempt the reconstruction of one of the multiple possible portraits of Pablo Míguez, one of approximately 500 children kidnapped with his/her parents during the military dictatorship.

This attempt at reconstructing an image was done through exercising collective memory building. Pablo’s relatives, friends, and 13-year-old children took part in the said process. The resulting artwork was installed in front of the lookout where the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism ends, his back to the spectators, so that they have to activate the memory of their own “desaparecidos” in order to reconstruct his face. The sculpture’s polished surface reflects its surroundings and makes the image more or less visible in the landscape depending on the weather conditions and the moment of the day.



Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez

Water reflections from the Río de la Plata
on mirror-polished stainless steel

Measurements for the figure: 170 x 50 x 70 cm

Floating on Río de la Plata, coordinates: 34° 32,3660 S / 58° 26,2575 W
2000/2010



Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez

Photo Guadalupe Miles



Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez

Photo Graciela Díaz

BIO

Claudia Fontes is an artist based in England, born and raised in Argentina.

She studied arts at the National School of Fine Arts Prilidiano Pueyrredón in Buenos Aires and Art History at Buenos Aires University. She was awarded grants to develop her practice at Taller de Barracas in Buenos Aires and to be a resident artist at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where she worked under the advice of Richard Deacon, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Joan Jonas, amongst others.

She has been showing her work since 1992. One of the winners of the Parque de la Memoria Award in 1999, her piece *Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Miguez*, is one of the most iconic artworks addressing the last dictatorship's period in Argentina's history. In 2022 she received a life-time achievement award from the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, and a distinction of merit by Fundación Konex, both in Argentina.

Also in 2022, the interdisciplinary collective she founded, *La Intermundial Holobiente*, was one of the *lumbungs* at documenta fifteen with the project *The Book of the Ten Thousand Things*, to be published by Steidl in the near future. She had already participated in Documenta 13 as part of *The Wordly House* in 2012. In 2017, she represented Argentina at the 57th Venice Biennale with her installation *The Horse Problem*. In 2018 she was one of seven artists-curators at the 33rd Sao Paulo Biennial for which she created the section *The Slow Bird*.

In parallel to her personal practice, she has spearheaded the creation of several collective projects and has generated spaces for the development of critical thought, particularly in relation to artist-led culture. Amongst them TRAMA (2000-2006), *The Creature in Between* (2016), and more recently *La Intermundial Holobiente* (2020-ongoing), a collective platform for playful artistic cross-disciplinary research together with philosopher Paula Fleisner and writer Pablo Martín Ruiz.

Her works can be found in the collections of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, MALBA (Museum for Latin American Art of Buenos Aires), MAMBA (Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires), and MACRO (Museum of Contemporary Art Rosario). Her work is also part of important private collections in Latin America, the United States, Europe and Australia.

She is represented by Instituto de Visión. Upcoming opportunities to see her work are a solo show at Instituto de Visión, NYC (September 2023) and a solo show at Centro de Arte Caja de Burgos, Spain (February 2024).

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