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Water Participates

Recent Works by Florencia Sadir

by Miguel A. López

Florencia Sadir's most recent project takes the meanings and memory of water as its point of departure, as a resource under continual threat from contamination and its effects, the privatization of indigenous territory, the voracity of extractive industries and climate change due to the use of fossil fuels. Over the past few years, her work has focused on earth and fire. Much of her production is composed of fired clay which takes the form of spheres, bricks, tiles and blocks that she uses to construct sculptures that evoke the poetics of the landscape where she lives and the multiple life forms that inhabit its clayish soil, surrounded by light and rock formations. Her creative practice dialogs with the craftwork of pottery and ceramics from Salta and other towns in the valleys of the Calchaquíes, a mountain chain in northeastern Argentina, bordering on Chile and Bolivia. The artist has learned from the techniques and crafts present in this Andean territory for hundreds of years, and also about the possibilities for developing crops in a terrain that is largely uncultivated.

At the beginning of this year, as part of her residency at the Fundación Ama Amoedo Residencia Artística (or FAARA, located in José Ignacio, Uruguay), the artist visited San Carlos in the southern part of the country. San Carlos is also the name of the small town in the province of Salta, Argentina, where she lives and works. The significance is not limited to the coincidence in the name, but extends to the fact that in both locations, the practice of artisanally produced bricks is kept alive. During this time, Florencia dedicated herself to experimenting and learning about the qualities of the clay from this area, mold creation, firing techniques and construction usage in accordance with the location's specific needs.

Simultaneously, her visits to the Atlantic coast, where the residency is situated, led her to investigate the water currents that flow to converge with the sea. This focus on the movement of water, its presence and absence, was already a concern in her everyday life, taking form in questions regarding what type of link we establish with a natural resource that we humans tend to take for granted. One of the common threads that runs through this exhibition is the Calchaquí river, which springs from the Nevado de Acay mountain in Salta, and runs from north to south, changing names along the length of its course, until flowing into the Río de la Plata and finally into the Atlantic Ocean.

It is over 3,000 km long, making it Argentina's longest river. The image of waters from a nevado (snow-capped mountain) in Salta, close to her home, bathing the coast of Uruguay activated an emotional inquisitiveness that led her to explore different meanings of the water course and the coincidence of brick production in both San Carloses in this new exhibition.

Soon after the residency, Uruguay experienced an unprecedented water crisis that left the city of Montevideo without potable water for several months. This activated new connections with everyday life on her soil, where she also lacks access to potable water. The water in her town—unsafe water, contaminated with heavy metals—cannot be used for drinking or cooking, which has very concrete effects on people's living conditions and health. This muddy water, as well as the question regarding what sort of water each of us has available to them lies at the center of many of the pieces featured in the exhibition.

The principal piece is a large sculptural serpent made of bricks placed horizontally on a sheet of water. The dark bricks making up the animal's body have inscriptions that evoke signs from ancient writing or fragments of geoglyphs, figures delineated by prehistoric cultures on plains or the sides of mountains. The serpent is a regular inhabitant of both the Calchaquíes valleys and the humid ravines and shorelines edging bodies of water in Uruguay—as are frogs, toads and lizards—but the serpent is also a being with mystical qualities from several indigenous perspectives in the Americas, ranging from the Navajo people to the Maya and Aztec civilizations, in addition to many Amazon communities. They are understood to be vehicles for spiritual and cosmic communication, and as symbols of multiple forms of rebirth. The muddy lagoon upon which the serpent is placed refers us to the fact that the water that is not digestible for humans is the habitat for many forms of life that pre-date us and will survive after we have gone.

In another work, Florencia has drawn cartographic representations on a group of large roof tiles partially marked by smoke. One of these is the image of a spiral seen from directly above, suggesting a serpent's movement. Others present maps where north and south are inverted, in addition to the place where the Salta River begins, along with where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Another sculpture is made of small metal containers—which she uses to collect rainwater—that she has situated beneath a slow drip, creating a sort of tick-tock that reminds us how little time is left

before an imminent lack of water (so called water stress), given that forecasts predict that by the year 2050, 40% of the world's population will be affected.

Florencia has also done a series of drawings in which she narrates the production process associated with the exhibition, her personal feelings in relation to brick production, cultivation carried out on a daily basis and some of the symbols present in the ceramic pieces. One of these portrays the kilns where the bricks have been placed, exposed to intense fire. Another observes the wind's role in fertilizing plants, not only moving seeds from one territory to another, but also feeding the oceans. This germinating force knows nothing of national borders and the artificial limits imposed from a human perspective.

The artist draws the plant combinations used to create natural perfumes, like the ones that have a subtle presence in the exhibition. Florencia records some of these plants, for example the jarilla (larrea), a wild shrub with medicinal properties that lives primarily in the mountainous areas of western Argentina. Another drawing shows a landscape sown with peas, legumes, beans and corn, accompanied by the sun and the moon. There, the seeds resemble teardrops that moisten the earth, making life possible.

This new exhibition by Florencia Sadir is a testimony to stories that hinge on emotional ties and geographic circumstances that are activated to underscore the fragility of earth's water ecosystem. The scarcity of fresh water is a natural phenomenon, but it is also a consequence of human actions. These works remind us of that.

Florencia Sadir

No es el infinito del mar, sino la profundidad del río

Curator Miguel A. López

W—naturae

Olfactory stations by Odor Sudor in collaboration with Julio Azcoaga

Thanks:

To Cecilio Reyes and all the brick cutters of San Carlos, Salta, Argentina.

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FLORENCIA SADIR

(Tucumán, Argentina, 1991)

She grew up in Cafayate, Salta. She trained at the Faculty of Arts at the National University of Tucumán, Argentina where she attended Workshop C.

She participated in the Curadora Residency in 2016 in Santa Fe, Argentina; the URRRA residency in 2017 in Tigre, Argentina and in 2019 she received the Creation Grant from the Fondo Nacional de las Artes and completed the study program at the Flora Ars + Natura School in Bogotá, Colombia, under the direction of José Roca, and in 2020–21 the Arts Programme at the Torcuato Di Tella University in Buenos Aires. She was selected to participate in the 2023 edition of the FAARA artistic residency of the Ama Amoedo Foundation in José Ignacio, Uruguay, under the guidance of Tobias Ostrander, Miguel A. López, and Solana Chehtman.

Her most outstanding exhibitions include *Un lugar sin nombre* (Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, 2018); *Todavía las cosas hacían sombra* (Museum of Contemporary Art in Salta, 2021); *Still Alive* (Aicwwhi Triennial in Tokoname, Japan, 2022, directed by Mami Kataoka); *Florencia Sadir: Ofrenda al sol* (Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, 2022); and *Geometría de humo* (W-galería, 2023).

She has also participated in group exhibitions such as *Trazar sobre el suelo el contorno de la polvareda* (Museum Jallpha Calchakí, San Carlos, Salta, 2021) and *Adentro no hay más que una morada* (Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, 2021).

Her works are part of the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá, and private collections in Latin America. She lives and works in San Carlos, Salta, Argentina.

MIGUELA. LÓPEZ

(Lima, Perú 1983)

Miguel A. López is a writer and curator. In his practice, he focuses on the role of art in politics and public life, collective work and collaborative dynamics, and queer and feminist rewritings of history. He is a co-curator for the 2024 edition of the Toronto Biennial of Art. From 2015 to 2020, he worked as Chief curator, and later Co-director at TEOR/ÉTica, Costa Rica. In 2019, he curated the retrospective exhibition "Cecilia Vicuña: Seehearing the Enlightened Failure" at the Witte de With (now Kunstinstituut Melly), Rotterdam, which traveled to Mexico City, Madrid, and Bogota. More recently he curated "Cecilia Soñar. Dreaming Water" at the Fine Arts Museum, Santiago de Chile; MALBA, Buenos Aires; and Pinacoteca, São Paulo. Other recent curatorial projects include "Sila Chanto & Belkis Ramírez: Aquí me quedo / Here I Stay" at the ICA-VCU, Richmond (2022), "Hard To Swallow. Anti-Patriarchal Poetics and New Scene in the Nineties" at ICPNA, Lima (2021), and "And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers?" at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2021).

He is editor and author of more than twenty books on contemporary art, including *INSITE Journal 6: Common Thread* (INSITE, 2023), *Cristina Flores Pescorán. Predictions* (ICPNA, 2023), *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers? Aesthetic Responses to Extraction, Accumulation, and Dispossession* (Kunsthalle Wien and Sternberg Press, 2022), *Virginia Pérez-Ratton. An Unfinished Place. Building Art Infrastructure in Central America* (TEOR/ÉTica, 2021), *Flavia Gandolfo. De un punto a otra* (MALI, 2020), *Ficciones disidentes en la tierra de la misoginia* (Pesopluma, 2019), *Patricia Belli. Balance and Collapse* (TEOR/ÉTica, 2018), *The Words of Others: León Ferrari and Rhetoric in Times of War* (REDCAT and JRP|Ringier, 2017), *Teresa Burga. Structures of Air* (MALBA, 2015).

He was a recipient of the 2016 ICI's Independent Vision Curatorial Award. Lives and works in Toronto.