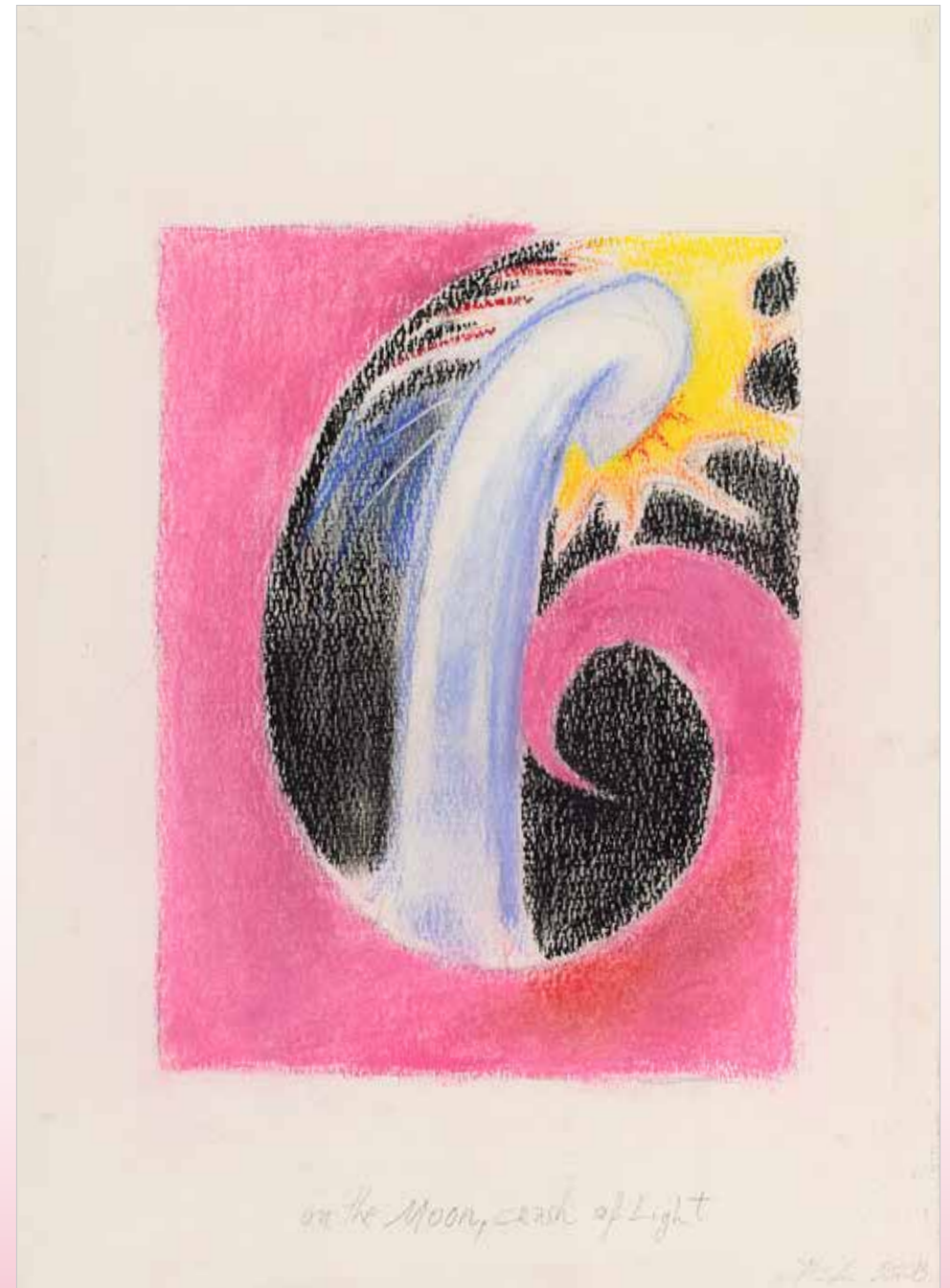


E R O S



R I S I N G

VISIONS OF THE EROTIC
IN LATIN AMERICAN ART



↑Fig. 2:
David Lamelas
On the Moon, Crash of Light, 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14¹/₈ in. (51 × 36 cm)

Cover: Fig. 1:
David Lamelas
At Sunrise, 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14¹/₈ in. (51 × 36 cm)

E R O S

R I S I N G

VISIONS OF THE EROTIC
IN LATIN AMERICAN ART

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EROS RISING: VISIONS OF THE EROTIC IN LATIN AMERICAN ART features works by Artur Barrio, Oscar Bony, Carmelo Carrá, Feliciano Centurión, David Lamelas, Carlos Motta, Wynnie Mynerva, La Chola Poblete, Tadáskía, and Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro, ten artists whose practices challenge conventional modes of imagining the erotic experience.¹ Focusing on works on paper, this exhibition draws a tentative chart of different territories, generations, and embodied experiences to explore how artists have given visual expression to sensations, feelings, and ideations that are essentially irrepresentable and ungraspable. The astrological aura in the title and the immediate reference to “visions” point to an open and winding investigation that, more interested in imagination than in determination, defuses the rationalistic protocols of academic research in order to approach what appears as immeasurable and, therefore, indefinable.

This inquiry found its launching pad in three recent and mesmerizing pastels by David Lamelas in the collection of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA): *At Sunrise* (2015) (Fig. 1), *On the Moon, Crash of Light* (2015) (Fig. 2), and *Lluvia de estrellas* (Meteor Shower, 2015) (Fig. 3). Their titles point to the celestial bodies above us, sources of delight and wonder for our kind since before time, when they emerged from the “general conglomeration of matter composed of disparate,

incompatible elements,” as Ovid describes Chaos.² If Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* presents the dawn of life as a sensuous struggle, Lamelas reminds us, through the thickness of pastel, that constellations are just a snapshot of an ongoing, never-ending cosmic intercourse. These visions of lovemaking, however, barely resemble our most canonical representations of sex. Here, the sun, the moon, and the stars are not discrete figures which then turn to more or less turbulent embraces. We only get a glimpse of them, an explosive tease. We can intuit their presence due to the overlay of colors and shapes, more mirage than razor-sharp silhouettes. These celestial bodies do serve, though, as background and as companions for the true *dramatis persona* of this series: an insidious tongue, mushy and sumptuous, constantly growing, unrolling, fearlessly licking infinity, while always curved at the tip. The tongue: this fascinating organ responsible for the world we taste and swallow as matter and for the world we approach and regurgitate as language. In this series, the tongue is now blue, then black, and later veers into hot pink. A smooth member that, in its unfolding, echoes multiple forms in the earth, in the oceans, in our imaginations, and in the cosmos at large; that becomes a flower, then a hand, then a spring, then the spring, and then transformation itself; and now it’s a wave, a hill, a patch of snow, a comet, the moon...

Lamelas unveiled for us what we are tempted to call *cosmic eroticism*.

But we do not want to reach climax so soon. Let’s take a breath and rewind.

**

A TALE OF
TWO MOTHERS

**

IN 1967, *MUNDO NUEVO*, THE INFLUENTIAL Latin American journal published in Paris, devoted its sixteenth issue to “*erotismos*.” The plural served as a declaration of intent sustained throughout the hundred pages of motley texts and interventions by artists and writers including Roland Barthes, Leonor Fini, Octavio Paz, and Severo Sarduy. In her conversation with Emir Rodríguez Monegal, the publication’s director, Argentine artist Fini offered a reflection on painting that challenges long-standing assumptions and delimitations:



↑Fig. 3:
David Lamelas
Lluvia de estrellas (Meteor Shower), 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14½ in. (51 × 36 cm)

I see that I always paint erotic paintings, but...is there any painting that is not erotic? I would like to know which paintings are not erotic. Even Fra Angelico is erotic because eroticism does not depend on theme at all. It can manifest in the way in which a sleeve, a foot or a shadow is drawn; the way in which colors are placed right next to each other.³

Avoiding more conventional definitions, Fini locates eroticism not in the scenes or acts depicted on the canvas, but in the way in which this portrayal is concocted—not in content, but in form. She thus centers the encounter of traces and shapes, colors and contrasts, and the sensuous appeal these elements can surely have. Fini naughtily references Fra Angelico as definite proof: even religious images painted by a Dominican friar, all prudish and chaste, hide in plain sight unknown sensual pleasures. She has a point: we don't need to experience full-blown Stendhal syndrome to realize that gaudy tones and inflamed volutes can produce excitement, the type of pleasure in looking that Freud called *scopophilia*.

A few years later, art critic Marta Traba shared a very different perspective on the matter. Reflecting on the work of Cuban artist Zilia Sánchez, Traba wrote an essay titled “El erotismo y la comunicación,” published in the Puerto Rican journal *Zona de carga y descarga* in 1972. Her point of departure is exactly the opposite of Fini's: not only is there art that is not erotic, but also, art in general has progressively abandoned its erotic potential, becoming over-cerebral and cold in the process. Traba refers explicitly to abstract art, to Op art, to kinetic experiments, and to conceptual art of the '60s and '70s; according to her, all of them had arrogantly moved away from eroticism.

The “artistic territory” has grown cold progressively and man [*sic*] can no longer live there, at least not out in the open. He shuts himself up, then, in caves/coteries and transmits from there the signs of a language that becomes more and more hermetic... Art has turned into a cryptography for officiants, which the very officiants have begun to reject, not knowing what to do with it.⁴

Having abandoned one of “the most effective ways of reconnecting modern art with man [*sic*] and reality,” art has cleared the way for the expansion of pornography,

“a big animal” that “conquers the immediate support of the audience.”⁵

It is clear that Traba is thinking through oppositions and binaries. First, we have erotic art vs. non-erotic art. Then we have eroticism vs. pornography. Binary thinking, as has been observed over and over, tends to be moralistic; that is, it doesn't seem to be capable of seeing beyond good and evil. Thus, when an argument is structured around the opposition of two poles, one of them tends to represent all that is good and pure in the world while the other is a concentrate of all the things that the writer fears, despises, or disdains:

Pornography works on the surface of sexual interests, while eroticism offers a mediated, rich and complex approach, turning these interests into expression values....

Eroticism is an artistic structure, and pornography is a product of the market....

Eroticism creates viewers; pornography makes addicts.⁶

This compendium of precepts, a distribution of praise and condemnation following crystal-clear lines, couldn't be further from the pan-eroticism championed by Fini. Serving dominatrix rectitude, Traba paradoxically succumbs to the square coldness she denounces in abstract and conceptual art. For its part, ready to find and enjoy the erotic wherever it occurs—in the furious crimson of a Renaissance cape or in the geometric hallucinations of Op art—Fini's stance feels more in tune with the generous roundness of Traba's prime example: the undulating surfaces of Sánchez's work.

Sánchez is part of a distinct Latin American lineage working with “strong and splendid erotic contents”⁷ that comprises Cuban artists Agustín Fernández and Wifredo Lam and extends to our day—including the artists in this exhibition, who in various ways confirm Traba's enthronement of the erotic without giving in to the critic's strict exclusions. Indeed, *Eros Rising* clearly shows that eroticism “substantiates a new relationship between man [*sic*] and the energies of the body” and “supports the expansion of these energies to the whole visible world, animate and inanimate.”⁸



↑Fig. 4:
Tadáskia
Untitled, 2021
Charcoal, oil pastel, and nail polish on paper
20 × 23¼ in. (51 × 59 cm) and
17¼ × 24¾ in. (45 × 62 cm) (diptych)

GIVING FORM
TO ECSTASY

SURE ENOUGH, WHAT WE SEE in the works in this exhibition is not a representation of sexual experience as an intelligible encounter between two human bodies, but an inquiry into the depths and the complexities of erotic experience and the transformative energies it can unleash. While some pieces tension, break, or fragment human or humanlike figuration, others engage forms of other-than-human life to create bacchanalian landscapes reminiscent of the wild audacity of myth. And there are still others that imagine the erotic intimately and freely flirting with abstraction, or as a cosmic encounter, an opportunity for tapping into the primordial flux of life as creation.

Whatever the location and the range of Eros they present, these works of art embrace its ambiguities and apparent contradictions: the erotic experience is material so long as it is spiritual, transcendent in its immanence, limited and expansive, individual and uncontained by the self. Through its intricacies, it becomes a pedagogic platform, an instance of (un)learning of our limits and of invention of new forms of life. It thus disrupts the tired dualities of one/another, subject/object, inner/outer, leading us to a state for which we have no proper words. This is the state that the radical tradition of thinking on sexuality and eroticism triggered by French writers Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris has called *ecstasy*, linking the experience of losing the limits of the self through intense sensual pleasure and pain with the projection of the self to other dimensions, and to the experience of being outside oneself, as in mystic or substance-induced trances.⁹ Bataille and Leiris set the tone of an anthropology of ecstasy that will insist, from then on, that intense erotic, mystic, or hallucinatory states border the ungraspable, the ineffable, the inexpressible. These experiences of intense and integral encounter with the material and transcendent being, which overcome the categories that order the world as we have inherited it, will only find their inexact and refracted form in art and in poetry.

Updating and situating this radical tradition, Argentine poet Néstor Perlongher wrote exten-

sively on sexuality and eroticism from his exile in São Paulo. His essay “Poetry and Ecstasy” is especially interesting in this context. Published in 1990, it discusses the possibility, or impossibility, of explaining with words of this world the overwhelming and disarming experience of ecstasy. Perlongher stresses from the beginning of his essay the clear discordance between the trancelike states he is examining and “the bland rococo of our university departments and academic journals.”¹⁰ Sociology, anthropology, art criticism, and the like cannot do justice to experiences so deep and self-shattering. Poetry, on the other hand, might have the chance of giving voice to the obscure movements of desire.

We will argue similarly that the artists in this exhibition have sought to offer visual form to the mysterious abyss of eroticism. Now, Eros, eroticism, and sexuality have been objects of visual representation since the beginning of time. In a way, the history of these representations coincides pretty much with what is called the history of art. We could say, then, following philosopher Herbert Marcuse and others, that Eros has been rising since before the dawn of civilizations. No doubt about that. But please note the plural, dear reader. And concede that, in certain contexts, some civilizations have received more attention, and study, than others. In this sense, *Eros Rising* wants to honor the trailblazing efforts of a number of Latin American artists, poets, and writers who initiated exciting departures from modern colonial ways of representing desire, sensual pleasure, and sexuality—departures that become palpable in the warm and deep universe of Wifredo Lam; in the strange objects and practices dreamt up by Lygia Clark and Tunga; in the rhythmic undulations of Zilia Sánchez; in the *quipus* by Cecilia Vicuña; in the unbridled sensuality of Reinaldo Arenas; in the dark baroque of Severo Sarduy; in the mesmerizing images of Jaider Esbell and Daiara Tukano; in the lyric volutes of Martín Adán and José Lezama Lima. They are all trailblazers of distinct erotic imaginations, open both to our most obscure drives and to the dreamlike liaisons we might establish with what surrounds us and with what looms above us. It is our contention that the artists in this exhibition belong to these fiery lineages, and that the same dangerous liaisons and drives that arouse their precursors pierce through their works.



↑Fig. 5:
Artur Barrio
Composição erótica (Erotic Composition), 1967
Graphite on paper
12 5/8 × 8 7/8 in. (31.4 × 22.5 cm)

FROM RADICAL
FIGURATION
TO ABSTRACTION
AND BEYOND

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR devilish task, our artists had to imagine and rework their own cunning strategies, offering in the process a series of unique and varied takes on the matter. For the sake of brevity, we could identify two main approaches in their work: one that makes use of the archives of radical images treasured in myths, in fantasy, and in pornography; and another that recuperates and overcomes the traditions of formalism (and Informalismo) and that mobilizes resources that resemble those of abstraction. However, we are not trying to reproduce here the age-old battle between figuration and abstraction. If anything, we would like this opposition to be disproved. After all, the works in this exhibition teach us that renouncing the categorical instruments we inherited can help us go further, to deeper and more delicious places.

Interestingly, all these works seem both to confirm Fini's insight that all art, no matter its theme, can be scintillating, sensual, erotic, and to refute Traba's strict mapping of that realm of our experience. Indeed, different works in the first group draw unapologetically from the source Traba had condemned to the sterile hell of Western market capitalism: porn. In the works of Centurión, La Chola, and Motta, for instance, the graphic exhibition of body surfaces and sexual organs, so typical of pornographic photography and video, is informed, mediated, and shaped by references to Christian demonology (Motta), Greek mythology (Centurión), and Andean lore (La Chola), an entanglement that brings obscenity closer to blasphemous and magic inscriptions or cave paintings than to mere display. If these artists engage in porn—and some would claim that they do—then they engage in what can be called *sacred porn* (Amen!), a seemingly contradictory term that highlights the intersection between eroticism and subversion at the heart of this show.

Most works in the second camp, for their part, revisit the abstract tradition Traba had dismissed as cold and cerebral. Indeed, we can find in the works of Mynerva, Tadáskia,

and Vitorino Brasileiro a familiar and playful commitment to lines and shapes, to instances of chromatic contrast, to irregular geometry and informal assaults. But these pieces are more clearly “irrigated by eroticism” (in Traba's words) than those of their predecessors, and distinctly affected by submerged Latin American perspectives and sensibilities.

Let's resume our tour.

Born in 1946 in Buenos Aires, David Lamelas is best known as a conceptual artist working with film and photography as his preferred media, and for his innovative take on installation and sculpture. As a result, his forays into painting and drawing have not received the attention they deserve. The works in *Eros Rising* can help correct this imbalance. They are a testament to his long-standing commitment to “mere figuration” and to his equally defining fascination with everything cosmic. Lamelas's body of work includes numerous small pieces on paper devoted to orbits, comets, suns, and moons. And it is noteworthy that his first short film, *A Study of Relationships between Inner and Outer Space* (released in 1969), concludes with six interviews focused on the greatest news story of its day: humanity's first physical encounter with the moon. If this was a shared fascination, Lamelas's articulation of it was unique, and his interest remains unabated in the present. Indeed, the title of his film could be used without further ado to catalog the pastels included in this exhibition. Inner and outer space: the echoes and correspondences between the micro- and the macrocosm have been obsessively explored by alchemy, astrology, and a whole encyclopedia of subjugated knowledges consigned to superstition. Revisiting the submerged perspective of sympathetic magic, these pastels figure movements and explosions across the universe as sensual encounters of the third kind: comets lick their way to the firmament, the sun burns with desire, and stars ejaculate instead of simply exploding (*Figs. 1-3*). Lamelas reimagines the Milky Way as a tapestry of pleasures, a galactic echo of our innermost desires and fantasies. *Cosmic eroticism*, we beg to insist.

We see this eroticism operating in surprisingly similar ways in recent works by Tadáskia (b. 1993, Brazil), which manifest a Lamelas-like fascination with the wonders in the firma-



↑Fig. 6:
Oscar Bony
Untitled, 1976
Photograph on Ektacolor paper
4¼ × 5½ in. (11.4 × 14.3 cm)



↑Fig. 7:
Carmelo Carrá
Untitled, 1968
Marker on paper
8½ × 6½ in. (21.6 × 16.5 cm)

ment and the force of the elements (Fig. 4). The correspondences do not stop there, though. They reverberate through the titles—*La luna creciente* (The Crescent Moon, 2022), *Quick Journey Night* (2022)—and vibrate in the choice of materials: Tadáskia makes abundant use of pastels, to which she occasionally adds pencil and nail polish, for extra shine. All these echoes point to a deeper rapport in intent: both artists seem determined to bring the stars closer to us, or, better, to reveal a sometimes-forgotten intimacy. Tadáskia took this task literally when, in *Vestindo Estrelas* (Wearing Stars, 2019), she fulfilled the dream of favelada writer Carolina Maria de Jesus of wearing a gown that captured the deep dark dance of the constellations.¹¹ The polyptych *a date there (I–VI)* (2022), in *Eros Rising*, expands on this wavelength. Inspired yet again by the skies, it is part of a series of “movements” the artist chooses to tell apart using numbers. It presents different celestial bodies landing on irregular pieces of recycled paper in earthy tones that go from beige to terracotta; a material encounter of apparent opposites that expresses the ultimate coexistence of Orum (the spiritual world) and Aiê (the physical world) in Yoruba cosmology.

The celestial bodies in Lamelas’s and Tadáskia’s work find a series of earthly echoes throughout this exhibition. Luso-Brazilian artist Artur Barrio (b. 1945, Portugal), much like Lamelas, is known more for his performances and conceptual pieces, in which he employs unconventional materials such as toilet paper, coffee, blood, or meat. Born out of an intense relationship with the ocean, with frequent references to diving, sea crossing, and shipwreck, Barrio’s work often presents the body fragmented, decayed, transformed into fluids, immeasurable. If this appreciation of elements doomed to decomposition seems antithetical to the exaltation of infinity offered by Lamelas, the work included in this exhibition will prove us wrong. Aptly titled *Composição erótica* (Erotic Composition, 1967), this rare drawing intersects rounded and straight lines to create a vision that pays tribute to both landscape painting and geometric abstraction (Fig. 5). Circles, triangles, and ovals overlap with fishes, trees, half-moons, and suns, in what constitutes a graphic snapshot of the ancient belief in the correspondences that tied the whole universe together, connecting the microcosm of the

human body with its earthly home and the macrocosm of the skies and beyond. As the title declares and the drawing confirms, this cosmic connection is eminently sensual and sexual: a body floating on the ocean, between the deepness of the sea and the deepness of the sky, involves, and summons, the elements of all kinds and classes the universe offers as gifts. It works, then, as a redemption of sorts, canceling moral and aesthetic valuations and hierarchies. In Barrio’s world, in the world of eroticism, fish and blood and meat are as precious as stardust.

In our descent from the inscrutable heights of the universe to the lower meanderings of more earthly beings, we must now focus on a series of artists who have worked in intimate contact with the human figure. Or with fractions of it.

The tongues in the prints *Untitled* and *El beso* (The Kiss, both 1976), by Oscar Bony (1941–2002, Argentina), insinuate foreplay, or an insistent and suspended mating call (Fig. 6). A mating call that demands precaution. Indeed, while the open mouths appear to promise a sweet escape, the loud red and pink shades of the tongues, and the even louder rouge on the lips, which are in dramatic contrast to the teeth, forebode turbulence and danger. These mouths are adorned to spectacular heights, as when we say *dressed to kill*. And yes, killing is definitely not out of the question here. And neither are aggression or violence. Bony’s acknowledgment of the close ties and complications between Eros and Thanatos takes the form of a nod to one of their more appealing embodiments in mass culture: Dracula, the irresistible vampire, particularly as he was portrayed by F. W. Murnau in *Nosferatu* (1922). Indeed, the stark contrasting colors, the clash between shocking red and pink and grainy white, evoke the ominous atmosphere of German Expressionism and the even more ominous climate of Argentina in 1976, the year these photographs were produced (and immediately seized by the police).¹²

A decade earlier, Argentine painter Carmelo Carrá (b. 1945, Italy) was able to explore lighter tones. Known for lurid portraits in which Pop reaches its lysergic apotheosis, Carrá has consistently aimed at decomposing his figures through misplacements, distortions, and multiplications that, more than effacing



↑Fig. 8:
Feliciano Centurión
Untitled, n.d.
Graphite on paper
8¼ × 5⅞ in. (21 × 14.9 cm)



↑Fig. 9:
Feliciano Centurión
Page from *Untitled*, n.d.
Graphite, ink, and paper cutout in notebook
8⅞ × 12¼ in. (21.3 × 30.8 cm)

the human form, seem determined to reveal its hidden potentialities. Poet Aldo Pellegrini has called these puzzle-like compositions “documents to the instability of the visible,” adding that they limit themselves to present the real world as seen by someone without prejudices.¹³ This apparent lack of prejudices is particularly pronounced in the untitled drawing from 1968 presented in this exhibition (Fig. 7). A figure stands naked, holding their crotch. If their testicles and mustache could lead us to a prejudiced reading dictated by existing gender norms, any conclusion is suspended by the position of their feet, insinuating a pair of invisible high heels. What is more, the self-serviced pleasure they seem to be deriving from touching their parts is inextricable from the act of concealing them: masturbation becomes disavowal; the signs of masculinity lost in the Mount of Venus adumbrated by their pubic hair. The opening produced by the left arm completes the picture of instability; the upper belly draws a safety pin of sorts as a last barrier against the pervasiveness of the background.

Open and floating bodies are also the terrain of Feliciano Centurión (1962–1996, Paraguay). Centurión is best known for his knitting, blankets, and embroidered prayers, works that writer Ticio Escobar locates in the later phases of his production.¹⁴ But there’s also a first phase, in the mid-to-late ’80s, when Centurión worked on paper—using either acrylic or ink, graphite or marker—creating compositions mostly in black, white, and gray that present shadowy silhouettes and chalk outlines somehow reminiscent of Henri Matisse. *Eros Rising* presents two of these untitled and undated sketches: one situates Adam and Eve in a whirlwind of lines, fish, and birds, and the other represents a sexual encounter between a bull and a woman (Fig. 8). The latter reference is likely the origin story of the Minotaur, as told, again, by Ovid: the lovers depicted are very probably Pasiphaë and the snow-white bull promised to Neptune. And if this is the case, we would then be witnesses to the maculate conception of one of the leading characters of the *Metamorphoses*. Centurión’s fascination with Olympian mythology is further confirmed by a graph sketchbook also in the exhibition (Fig. 9). References to gods, heroes, and monsters abound in its pages, from the birth of Athena to the voyage of Ulysses and his

encounter with the Sirens. Centurión milks all of them for their erotic content, as if myth has opened up for him the possibility of an unprejudiced and fantastic exploration of the human body and its desires.

The work of Carlos Motta (b. 1978, Colombia) is another example of creative dialogue with long-standing mythologies, although the pantheon he revisits—and desecrates—is mostly Christian. Through archaeological gestures, fabricated historical reconstructions, and a rigorous engagement of different archives, Motta has built a critical genealogy of our colonial morality while offering clues to the many truncated futures buried in Latin American cultures. In 2019, Motta presented the installation *We The Enemy*, which consists of forty-one bronze sculptures based on representations of the devil drawn from art history. This wicked ensemble offers a glimpse of the prejudices and fears that structure the Catholic moral imagination (and its ensuing repressive ordering of society). Those given to sensual pleasures, especially those deemed *contra natura*, fall very clearly on the side of the diabolic and become *the enemy*, a position Motta reclaims with queer conviction, embracing the sexy aura of insurgence. The piece presented in *Eros Rising* is part of the series of demons Motta drew as a warmup for his final installation (Fig. 10). This particular devil offers his sympathy to the *jouissance* found in body transformation, specifically the transformations explored by dissident sexual subcultures. Flaunting a set of inflamed testicles and a monstrous penis (silicone injection gone awry?), the ultimate fallen angel intrigues and seduces more than terrifies.

Body modification became embodied experience in a recent work by Wynnie Mynerva (b. 1993, Peru). *Closing to Open* (2021) includes a video recording of a medical procedure in which the artist had a doctor “close” their vagina in order to “open” their nonbinary identity. This action was the last step in Mynerva’s ongoing affirmation of sexuality and sexual pleasure, through which they sought to question existing norms and expand the limits of what’s imaginable and doable. Mynerva’s work may be the most blatantly sexual of all the artists in *Eros Rising*, but their pieces make clear that a sex-positive stance can go hand in hand with a critical examination of sexual hierarchies and conceptions. Thus, while embracing some skins and signs



↑Fig. 10:
Carlos Motta
Untitled, from the series *We The Enemy*, 2019
Colored pencil and watercolor on paper
9 × 12 in. (22.9 × 30.5 cm)



↑Fig. 11:
Wynnie Mynerva
Formas de alargar un pene
(Ways to Enlarge a Penis), 2021
Watercolor on paper
38¼ × 29½ in. (97 × 75 cm)

historically associated with women, Mynerva, like their mythological counterpart, sovereignly rejects all connotations of weakness, delicacy, and tenderness. More warrior than muse, they seem to attack the canvas with strokes of fantasy, creating in the process dazzling objects of desire. Tasty to the eye to the point of edibility, their exuberant pieces present humanoid bodies in all shades of pink, orange, and red romping around in torrid scenes infused with a voracious eroticism that echoes the effervescence of Lam’s jungles and the devouring violence of the mythic Maenads. Indeed, in *Formas de alargar un pene* (Ways to Enlarge a Penis, 2021), the watercolor in this exhibition, we encounter a subversive reimagining of the potentialities of the penis and of its typical location, and *raison d’être*, in the sexual scene (Fig. 11). By creating insurgent images, Mynerva finds new myths with the power of informing emancipatory ways of living together.

In similar fashion, La Chola Poblete (b. 1989, Argentina) updates Andean mythology to develop her own subversive narratives. Her compositions present an enigmatic coexistence of characters and forms, and a stunning command of color balance, which pushes to the front a series of black traces and silhouettes. Her pieces are somehow reminiscent of the cave paintings in Lascaux or in the Cueva de las Manos in Patagonia, and, just like their parietal forebears, they encourage us to dispel exhausted oppositions (such as low vs. high) to be able to sense the presence of an unearthly dimension in experiences, contacts, and materials that our colonial modernity has consistently put down and chastised as base and uncivilized. This exaltation is achieved by marrying episodes from her everyday life with signs and symbols that update ancient mythograms, thus evoking Indigenous origin stories and cosmic beliefs (Fig. 12). “They are my love stories, representations of pain,” she explains, “but also a new version of civilization, based on the language of the territories of us Indigenous peoples, who are still here and won’t be further invisibilized.”¹⁵ The painfully personal opens up to a shared, revitalized culture, and then to the cosmic and the spiritual.

This road is well known to Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro (b. 1996, Brazil), who has developed her artistic work by combining her practice

as a psychologist with studies on the cosmology and spirituality of the Bantu people, her ancestors from the Atlantic coast of Central Africa (Fig. 13). Investigating healing as a provisional state of alignment between the numerous lives that simultaneously compose a person, Vitorino Brasileiro creates performances, installations, videos, texts, and works on paper. In her practice, while she challenges the arbitrariness and violence of colonial social categories, she creates spaces and times for building freedom. Among her works, we should mention her outstanding watercolor series of “soma-grams,” in which, creating almost-abstract fluid forms, she connects the possibility of healing through figuration (as proposed by somatic psychology) with warm motifs that echo representations of sacred beings, sea creatures, chimeras, and plants. More recently, her works on paper have included very graphic drawings and writings with charcoal and pastel, as in her romantic-erotic watercolors, with straightforward titles in Spanish, *Me basta mirarte para enamorarme otra vez* (It’s Enough for Me to Look at You to Fall in Love Again) or *Mírame, solo mírame* (Look at Me, Just Look at Me), from 2021. In both Vitorino Brasileiro’s and La Chola’s work, then, eroticism emerges as a crossroads between freedom, insurrection, pleasure, and the sacred.

EROS (UP)RISING:
A FANTASTIC
EROTIC ECOLOGY

ENCORE. *EROS RISING* PRESENTS a selection of works fueled by a form of erotic imagination in which the sensual contact between individuals is not at the center, nor at the front. This relocation and transvaluation entails a reframing of eroticism in which the human body is not the leading man (pun intended). In the exhibited pieces, human bodies, when present, are shown in fragments, or so deeply distorted, merged, interlocked, or expanded that they have come to resemble other-than-human forms of life. *Eros Rising*, then, stimulates us to transcend the imaginary limits of what should or could be a human experience. Destabilizing the category “human” and its historical assumptions, the works in this exhibition do not limit their

endeavors to safe, predictable, and normative modes of imagining the erotic as interactions within the same “species,” engaging, instead, animals, plants, trees, bubbles, rivers, mountains, unnamed beings, and the stars above us. All in a joyful state of ecstatic becoming.

No wonder most of the pieces in the show are not focused on social categorization, identity, or identification and do not work as roads toward a better understanding of the self. Indeed, more than responding to the perennial “Who am I?” these works are inclined to explore its Deleuzian counterpart. “Who can I become?” they exclaim, a question that opens spaces for disorder, chaos, and transmutation. Eroticism emerges, then, in this exhibition as a field in which what is at stake is not so much *identity* as *becoming*, a becoming that implies contacts, affinities, alliances, and chemical interactions. Along these lines, it could be said that *Eros Rising*, instead of being ruled by an *I*, is populated by multiple conglomerate *we*'s, composed not only of subjects or humans but of the lifeforms to which humanity can aspire to belong only if it rejoices in its noncentral status—if it accepts its participation in environments that it does not control. In other words, eroticism is here the key to becoming an element in nature, a link in a chemical chain, a speck of stardust in an ever-changing cosmos. This is exactly what Bataille, Leiris, and Perlongher sensed in ecstasy: the desire to stop being what one is, to break from the prison of our individual and social identities, and, above all, to suspend our identification with the political project known as humanity.

This fantastic ecology of life forms, tumultuous and anarchic, echoes the “thousands and thousands of blazing microscopic points, dazzling diamonds gleaming microbes” mobilized by poet Henri Michaux to capture the Dionysian experience, the rupture from the *principium individuationis* that can lead to a sense of universal harmony and to a mystic feeling of unity.¹⁶ Or to its opposite, of course, because the self-shattering experienced in eroticism can also be dissolving and destructive, a possibility this exhibition has chosen to neglect. Indeed, if the works presented here, and the eroticism they imagine, hover intently close to other experiences of oblivion of the self, they carefully avoid the punk nihilism

of certain forms of dissolution and embrace instead their rapport with shared images of religious trance, ritual intoxication, and other forms of ecstasy that hold a direct line to the tightly guarded precincts of spirituality and to our stubborn penchant for transcendence.

Elemental and deep, these dimensions and potentialities of our Eros are not properly framed by recent theoretical explorations around sexuality, gender, and gender identity. How could they be? Let's not forget the discordance Perlongher sensed between ecstasy and “the bland rococo” of academic idioms, or his faith in poetry, in its capacity to speak when words fail us. The pieces in *Eros Rising* share a kindred hope. Which is why, in tune with the turbulent depths of eroticism, they neither use nor affirm known social and political categories. Au contraire, they subvert and contradict these categories as they carry out their own formal, poetic, and conceptual adventures. In their subversions, they remind us that the erotic experience surpasses the rational codes that order the world; that eroticism has always been much closer to our insurgent, conspiring, and subversive drives than to our conforming and repetitive tendencies; that it is a creative and transformative activity fueled by the same powers of the imagination that lead to the creation of art. It is thus not a flight of fantasy to expect that the visions offered by these artists can help us question established ideas of what bodies are, of what bodies can be, and encourage us to invent afresh our desires and our sensual pleasures, way beyond the limits drawn by European colonial modernity.

The stars have spoken. Spinoza needs another Latin American, this time cosmic, update.

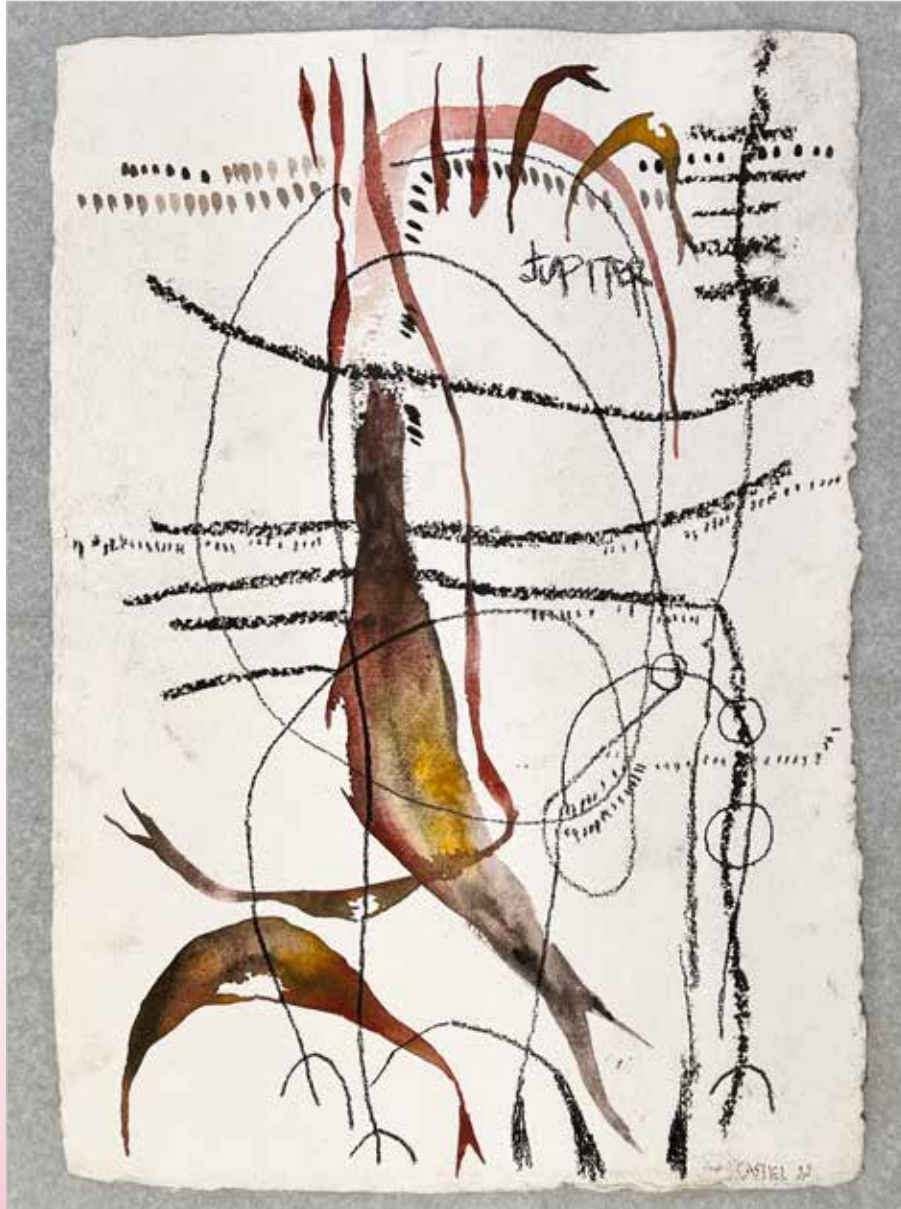
When Eros is rising, we no longer know what a body is capable of.

*



↑Fig. 12:
La Chola Poblete
Untitled, 2022
Watercolor and acrylic on paper
43¼ × 29½ in. (110 × 75 cm)

ENDNOTES



↑Fig. 13:
Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro
Untitled, from *Série Júpiter*
(Jupiter Series), 2022
Watercolor and charcoal on paper
16 7/8 × 23 3/4 in. (43 × 59.4 cm)

- 1 We use the term *erotic* in the tradition of Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Néstor Perlongher, and others to indicate an experience of sensual pleasure, or imagined sensual pleasure, that leaves the body and the spirit in a state of excitement, titillation, and vibrant expansion. While the sexual encounter proper surely counts as one of the prime erotic experiences, there are instances in which creation, contemplation, work, and even dialogue (all of which might involve other-than-human life) can provoke equally moving, and transforming, states.
- 2 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 5.
- 3 Leonor Fini, “La pintura como exorcismo,” *Mundo Nuevo* 16 (1967): 18. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the authors.
- 4 Marta Traba, “El erotismo y la comunicación,” *Zona de carga y descarga* 1, no. 2 (1972): 11.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 See Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986); and Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 10 Néstor Perlongher, “Poetry and Ecstasy,” in *Plebeian Prose*, trans. Frances Riddle (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019), 154.
- 11 In her autobiographical bestseller *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (Junk Room: Diary of a Favelada) Carolina Maria de Jesus writes that her dream is to wear a dress made of the star-studded sky. Seeking to realize this dream, Tadáskia designed two gowns filled with stars and planets for *Vestindo Estrelas*. She then produced a photographic triptych, posing in pairs with her mother, her aunt, and her grandmother, all of them *wearing stars*, in the series of three pictures.
- 12 As is well known, March 24, 1976, marked the start of one of the darkest and bloodiest periods in Argentine history. The coup d’état against President Isabel Perón established a civic-military dictatorship that deployed state terror as its key political tool and censorship as a strategy to shift the moral and cultural climate in the direction of a Catholic conservatism. Bony exhibited some photographs from this series at Galería Artemúltiple in Buenos

Aires, but while he was trying to sell some copies at his house the police broke in and seized part of the material on the grounds that it was pornographic. After this incident, and the criminal charges he had to face, Bony decided to leave Argentina.

13 Aldo Pellegrini, “El mundo de Carmelo Carrá,” in *C. Carrá: gouaches-dibujos-pinturas* (Santiago, Chile: Galería Central de Arte, 1971), 2.

14 Ticio Escobar, “The Strongest Thread,” in Aimé Iglesias Lukin and Karen Marta, eds., *Feliciano Centurión* (New York: Americas Society, 2020), 17–26.

15 Silvio Lang, “Mauricio ‘La Chola’ Poblete presenta su muestra ‘Tenedor de hereje,’” *Página 12*, June 11, 2021.

16 Henri Michaux, *L’infini turbulent* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 2.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Artur Barrio

Composição erótica (Erotic Composition), 1967
Graphite on paper
12¾ × 8¾ in. (31.4 × 22.5 cm)

Oscar Bony

El beso (The Kiss), 1976
Exhibition print
4¼ × 5¾ in. (11.4 × 14.3 cm)

Oscar Bony

Untitled, 1976
Exhibition print
4¼ × 5¾ in. (11.4 × 14.3 cm)

Carmelo Carrá

Untitled, 1968
Marker on paper
8½ × 6½ in. (21.6 × 16.5 cm)

Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, n.d.
Graphite on paper
8¼ × 5¾ in. (21 × 14.9 cm)

Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, n.d.
Graphite on paper
8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 27.9 cm)

Feliciano Centurión

Untitled, n.d.
Graphite, ink, and paper cutout in notebook
8¾ × 12¾ in. (21.3 × 30.8 cm)

David Lamelas

Amanecer (Dawn), ca. 2014
Pastel and pencil on paper
13¾ × 19½ in. (33.3 × 49.5 cm)

David Lamelas

Untitled, 2014
Pastel on paper
14¾ × 20 in. (36 × 51 cm)

David Lamelas

Untitled, 2014
Pastel on paper
17¼ × 12¾ in. (43.8 × 31 cm)

David Lamelas

At Sunrise, 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14¾ in. (51 × 36 cm)

David Lamelas

Lluvia de estrellas (Meteor Shower), 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14¾ in. (51 × 36 cm)

David Lamelas

On the Moon, Crash of Light, 2015
Pastel and pencil on paper
20 × 14¾ in. (51 × 36 cm)

Carlos Motta

Untitled, from the series *We The Enemy*, 2019
Colored pencil and watercolor on paper
9 × 12 in. (22.9 × 30.5 cm)

Wynn timer Mynerva

Formas de alargar un pene
(Ways to Enlarge a Penis), 2021
Watercolor on paper
38¼ × 29½ in. (97 × 75 cm)

La Chola Poblete

Untitled, 2022
Watercolor and acrylic on paper
43¼ × 29½ in. (110 × 75 cm)

Tadáskía

a date there (I-VI), 2022
Dry pastel, charcoal, and spray
paint on paper
Six drawings: approx. 12 × 16 in.
(4.7 × 6.3 cm) each

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro

Díptico Um (Diptych One), from the series
Boa Morte (Good Death), 2022
Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
27½ × 18¾ in. (70 × 48 cm) each

All works from the collection of the Institute
for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Artur Barrio (b. 1945, Portugal) is a Luso-Brazilian artist whose wide-ranging conceptual work in photography, film, performance, and installation embraces ephemerality and political critique. A pivotal figure of action art and conceptualism in Brazil, he has often employed participatory strategies and nontraditional materials to merge art and everyday life. Foundational pieces such as *Situações* (Situations, 1970) and *Livro de carne* (Book of Meat, 1978) conveyed a distrust in the value of the art object and pointed explicitly to the violence and oppression sanctioned by Brazil's decades-long military dictatorship. Barrio's work has been the subject of many exhibitions, including the 2018 retrospective *Artur Barrio: Experiencias y situaciones* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

Oscar Bony (1941–2002, Argentina) was an Argentine artist whose work ranged from painting to film, and who achieved renown as a photographer later in life. His early conceptual works included *60 metros cuadrados y su información* (60 Square Meters and Its Information, 1967) and *La familia obrera* (The Working Family, 1968), for which he installed three family members on a platform at Buenos Aires's Instituto Di Tella, testing the limits of what could be considered art. His later photographs explored taboo subjects such as sexuality and violence, and embraced experimental techniques. His work was presented in the solo exhibition *Oscar Bony: El mago* at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires in 2008.

Carmelo Carrá (b. 1945, Italy) is an Italian-born Argentine artist whose vibrant, pulsating paintings meld surreal imagery with a Pop sensibility. Making use of a saturated color palette, thick outlines, and optical effects, his work has drawn from the realms of dreams and popular culture, encompassing psychedelic and figurative styles. Carrá's work has been shown at Galería Central de Arte in Chile, among other institutions, and belongs to the collections of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.

Feliciano Centurión (1962–1996, Paraguay) was born in San Ignacio de las Misiones, Paraguay, in 1962 and settled in Argentina in 1974. Celebrated for his introspective work, he is best known for his embroidered and painted textiles that engaged with folk art and queer aesthetics, produced using repurposed cloth and often embellished with diaristic phrases. Centurión was part of the group of artists associated with the gallery of the Cultural Center Ricardo Rojas at the University of Buenos Aires in the 1990s and represented Paraguay in the fifth Havana Biennial in 1994. His first retrospective in the United States, *Feliciano Centurión: Abrigo*, was presented at Americas Society in New York in 2020.

David Lamelas (b. 1946, Argentina) is a key figure in the history of conceptual art and experimental film. Comprising film, video, performance, photography, sculpture, installation, and drawing, his complex practice excavates the viewer's perception and critically assesses the mechanisms of cultural production. Central to Lamelas's oeuvre is the notion of time and what people make of it. His work has been the subject of several solo exhibitions, including *David Lamelas, Extranjero, Foreigner, Étranger, Ausländer* at the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, and the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2006), and *Time as Activity: David Lamelas* at the Hunter College Art Galleries, New York (2021).

Carlos Motta (b. 1978, Colombia) documents the social conditions and political struggles of sexual, gender, and ethnic minority communities in his multidisciplinary art practice, challenging normative discourses through acts of self-representation. As a historian of untold narratives, Motta is committed to in-depth research into post-colonial subjects and societies. His work encompasses video, installation, sculpture, drawing, web-based projects, performance, and symposia, and has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the New Museum, New York (2012); the Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg (2015); and the Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín (2017).

Wynnie Mynerva (b. 1993, Peru) lives and works in Lima. Taking the form of sumptuous paintings of abstracted figures, their work centers around gender politics, queer aesthetics, and feminine desire, exploring the dichotomy between masculine and feminine in patriarchal society. Mynerva studied the history of art at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos and fine arts at the Escuela Nacional Superior Autónoma de Bellas Artes del Perú. They have participated in residencies at Fountainhead in Miami, Uberbau in São Paulo, and AMIL in Lima, and have had recent solo exhibitions at Galería Ginsberg in Lima (2019), the Museo Amano in Lima (2020), and LatchKey Gallery in New York (2021).

La Chola Poblete (b. 1989, Argentina) is a multidisciplinary artist who works in performance, video, photography, painting, and drawing. She studied visual arts at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo. Her work addresses the dilemmas of her mestiza heritage, focusing on the figure of the chola, a cultural identity in which the tensions inherent to the Indigenous population—labor exploitation, social marginalization, aesthetic exoticization, commercial circulation—similarly come to the fore. Based in the critical use of stereotypes, her practice presents a sophisticated queer imaginary capable of putting cultural paradigms and gender taxonomies in crisis. Her work has been included in shows at the Centro Cultural San Martín, Buenos Aires (2018); Museo Carlos Alonso, Mendoza (2019); Pasto Galería, Buenos Aires (2021); the Museo Udaondo, Luján (2021); the Centro Internacional de las Artes José de Guimarães, Portugal (2022); and the Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires (2022); among other venues.

Tadáskia (b. 1993, Brazil) is an artist and writer based in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Her work in drawing, photography, installation, and textile mobilizes stories, geographies, and the material and immaterial relations that can arise between the world and living things. Through her practice, she seeks to elaborate the visible and invisible experiences of the Black diaspora, resulting from both familiar and unusual encounters. Tadáskia has

exhibited her work at the Museu de Arte do Rio, the Paço Imperial, and the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro; the Framer Framed in Amsterdam; and Sé Galeria, Pivô, Auroras, and the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo.

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro (b. 1996, Brazil) develops survival and healing strategies for bodies in constant flight, those of the Black and trans populations targeted by a state-sanctioned politics of death. Based on practices adopted from psychology and Afro-Brazilian syncretic religions, her work looks to resignify traumas and turn them into instruments of self-care, fostering freedom from the violence of procedures authorized by state and capitalist health systems. Her practice also involves organizing collective situations for the purpose of sharing healing practices. Recently, Vitorino Brasileiro's work has been presented at Galería Homero Hassena, Vitória, Brazil (2019); the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2020); and the Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2021).

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Mariano López Seoane is a writer, researcher, and curator based in Buenos Aires and New York. He is currently the director of the Graduate Program on Gender and Sexuality at Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero in Argentina. He also teaches Latin American literature, cultural studies, and queer studies at the Department of Comparative Literature at New York University. López Seoane has curated and coordinated public programs for the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, the Buenos Aires International Book Fair, and Art Basel Cities. He has written extensively on contemporary Latin American literature and arts, focusing on the cultures of sexual and gender dissidents in the Americas, Latin American instances of queer studies and queer activism, and figurations of drug culture and drug-related violence in Latin American narrative, film, and visual arts. His publications include the volume of essays *Donde está el peligro. Estéticas de la disidencia sexual* (2022) and the novel *El regalo de Virgo* (2017).

Bernardo Mosqueira is a curator and writer based in New York and Rio de Janeiro. He is the ISLAA Curatorial Fellow at the New Museum. He is also the founder and artistic director of Solar dos Abacaxis, an institution for experimentation in art, education, and social transformation in Rio de Janeiro. Since 2011, he has directed Premio FOCO ArtRio, a national award for emerging artists. Mosqueira previously organized the performance festival Venus Terra and worked as a curator at Galeria de Arte Ibeu. Mosqueira has been curating exhibitions, editing books, teaching, and contributing texts to art publications since 2010, was awarded the Premio Lorenzo Bonaldi in 2017, and cofounded Fundo Colaborativo, the first emergency fund for artists in Brazil, in 2020. His recent exhibitions include *Miriam Inez da Silva* at the Museu Nacional da República, Brasília (2021); *Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro: Eclipse* at the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY (2021); and *Daniel Lie: Unnamed Entities* at the New Museum, New York (2022).

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