

HENRIQUE FARIA | BUENOS AIRES

Marcela Astorga: Territorio vulnerable

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Arquitecturas 2, 2013. Giclée print. 80 x 60 cm. Edition of 5 + AP

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Another Collapse in the City

Since the start of the 2010s, the record of building collapses adjacent to construction projects has risen exponentially despite the drop in recent indices of building activity. Over these years journalistic chronicles have abounded in images of residents facing the worn-out structures that fail to house them. In the scene of collapse what is duly kept separate in usual circumstances lies heaped together: concrete, brick, and bent iron bars engulfs mattresses, furniture, clothing, electrical appliances and even the occasional pet not spared by the catastrophe. These accidents are the symptom of a city which hastily sloughs off its skin. And this symptom disrupts the exchange forms surrounding those coveted square meters.

Today the gallery's exhibition space is populated by various fragments of buildings which we can imagine as bordering on those deep holes recently gouged into the earth. We don't know the origin of these pieces of rubble: we don't if it is a collapse caused by carelessness, a remodeling, or a highly technicized implosion that has led to their current form. Held together by wires, sustained by metal structures, even intervened in by bright prostheses, they rest on their foundations. These shards are affected no more by deterioration, or the action of the climate or of bulldozers. Or, for that matter, by renovations, water erosion or urban vandalism. They are surviving witnesses that Marcela Astorga has chosen to salvage, and in a certain sense to heal, placing them on the perimeters of her minute material explorations.



Untitled, 2017. Cemento, ladrillo, acero inoxidable, MDF. 144 x 63 x 30 cm

At the start of the '90s Astorga was also working with inert sectioned slices of the circuits that kept them alive: beef in its pictorial representation. In

line with investigations like those of Cristina Piffer, and the prior example of Luis Fernando Benedit, she found in the meat industry a key strand for moving through a framework of *imaginaires*, habits, institutions and modes of production. Between the pictorial sensuality of the dead fabric and its sickening small, a dense territory was made visible. To paraphrase Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, in the nation's history of standing cattle we find the tendon that goes through the founding of the State, the integration of this region as a terminal of world capitalism as well as the day-to-day ritual of our meat diet, together with a prolific local lexicon linked to its consumption. We are of flesh.



Arquitecturas 7, 2017. Impresión giclée. 60 x 80 cm. Edición de 5 + PA

Since that inaugural work, Astorga has steadily taken millimetric, concentrated steps: from meat to leather, from leather to hair. In the first years of the new century she was drafting nebulous landscapes, using the tones she obtained from combining strips of raw leather in a gesture of minimal intervention. The soft texture of the cowhide persistently appeared in pieces that were limited to exhibiting, without descriptive detail, the surface of the material subjected to the scrutiny of the gaze. Also in those years she took, from the army remnants market, leather leashes and covered over columns, making outline figures of houses and urban silhouettes. These works began to be the backbone of a subterranean link between the surface of the body and the vast domestic environment that contains us. Another recurrent item were the horsehair bristles she also let fall or cling to everyday objects such as a pillow or a pair of shoes. The bristles continued being projected until they reached the architectural plans of those great machines of vision, the galleries of museums. There,

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the folkloric material hugged the outlines of devices that were feeding the planet-wide expansion of the art industry.



Untitled, 2017. Cemento, cable de acero, madera, MDF. 135 x 120 x 45 cm

At nearly the end of that decade, Astorga had an experience which strongly marked her current explorations. We can imagine ourselves submerged in the penumbra of an abandoned building; there, we've alarmed by the sharp noise of blows on the roof of the ruined structure.

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After a certain impact of sound, we've perceived the fall of concrete, and a small orifice opened up, flooding the area with light, exposing to view its hardened skin. In the series of actions *Óculo* [Oculus], the founding violence of these fractures paradoxically allowed us to understand the anthropological dimension of these settings which are so extremely near to us, in which we pass our hours and find refuge. At the same time the artist made present the everyday catastrophe of a city caving in and being built up again, convulsed by the transactions and disputes that surround the ownership of grounds.



Arquitecturas 1, 2013. Impresión giclée. 60 x 80 cm. Edición de 5 + PA

This project showed once more a certain central procedure in Astorga's modus operandi: execution of some concrete material action that allows for the illumination of an archaeological scene with threads the environment of what lies near us with the vast horizon of collective convulsions. Today these vestiges have been recovered yet they also lie definitively disconnected from their original locations. They are served up to a sustained observation. First they were extirpated, sectioned off, amputated. Now they are preserved, composed, cur(at)ed. Between destruction and their recuperation, the pieces of rubble decide to tell something - a story, perhaps, of the imminence of collapse.

Federico Baeza

Federico Baeza is a Doctor in the Theory and History of the Arts (UBA). He is a researcher, professor and curator specializing in contemporary art.



Untitled, 2017. Cemento, ladrillo, acero inoxidable, hierro niquelado, MDF. 98 x 35 x 30 cm

Marcela Astorga was born in Mendoza and currently lives in Buenos Aires.

The omnipresence of the Andes, its peaks and valleys, light and shadow, thaw and rivers, contrasts and gradations feed her work. As do the abuse of power and the desire for a more just reality.

In 1985 she studied in a part of the design program at the University of Buenos Aires, but chose a less institutionalized training. She enrolled in the workshop of Diana Dowek and resumed painting, deciding to devote herself to visual arts. Between 2001 and 2002 he received the Fellowship for Experimental Theater and a Grant for Artistic Creation from the Fundación Antorchas. She won the Creation Fellowship from the Fondo Nacional de las Artes in 2010.

She was invited to the Madinina Workshop of the Triangle Art Trust in Martinique, to the URRRA art residency in Buenos Aires, and to be a lecturer at the 2nd International Symposium in Visual Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, in Monterrey, Mexico. In 2015 she published, together with Zavaleta Lab, the object-book *Marcela Astorga. Espacio Habitado* [MA: Inhabited Space].

Among the distinguished curators, historians and critics who have written on her work are Marcelo Pacheco, Taiyana Pimentel, Ana Longoni, M. Teresa Constantín, Jorge López Anaya, Rosa Olivares, Gustavo Buntinx, Raúl Zamudio, Ana M. Battistozzi, Viviana Usubiaga, Victoria Noorthoorn, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, and Fabián Lebenglik.

Her work is in the collections of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, the MACRO (Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Rosario), the UADE (Universidad Argentina de la Empresa), the Museo Jumex in Mexico City, the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation in Miami, the Zabłudowicz Collection in London and in other, private collections in Argentina, the United States, Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Italy and the Netherlands.

* Photographs of works *Untitled*, 2017: Gustavo Lowry