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LATAMesa

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MATERIAL NARRATIVES OF PERSONAL CARTOGRAPHIES

FROM *THE* EDITOR

LATAMesa is a curatorial initiative founded in 2023 by Carolina Orlando and Pilar Seivane with a clear mission: to build and sustain a strong network among Latin American artists and art professionals based in London. Our objective is to foster connections among individuals rooted in Latin American identities, diaspora communities, and supportive structures. At our core, we prioritise collaborative work and embrace notions of community and solidarity.

Our recently launched editorial section is dedicated to featuring and showcasing one artist each month, amplifying Latin American voices in the process. We believe in the power of fostering a space for conversation among individuals, opening new discourses, and delving further into the professional art practices within LATAMesa's artistic network.

Caro & Pilar

LATAMesa's founders



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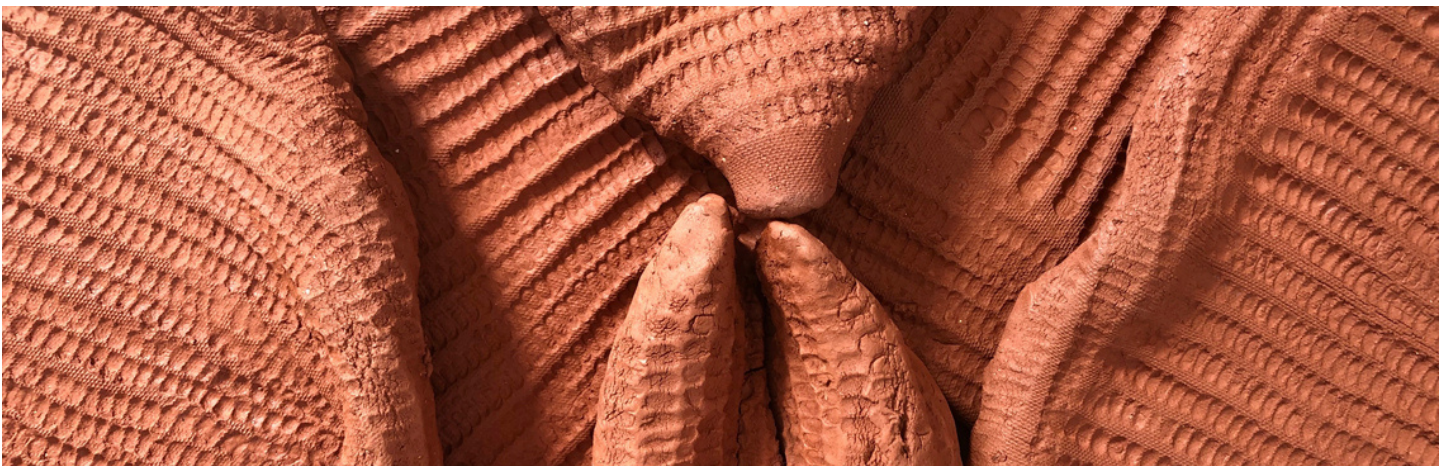
LUCÍA PIZZANI

Material Narratives of Personal Cartographies

In conversation with **Lucia Pizzani (b.1975)**, Venezuelan artist based in London. She has a diverse academic background with a BA in Communications Studies, a Certificate in Conservation Biology from Columbia University, and an MFA from Chelsea College of Art and Design.

Her recent solo exhibitions, such as *Merunto: In the House of Spirits* at Bosse & Baum London, *Manto* for Madrid Gallery Weekend at Galería La Cometa in collaboration with Cecilia Brunson Projects, and *Tiempo Membrana* at Hacienda La Trinidad in Caracas with Abra Caracas, reflect her international presence. Notable commissions and residencies include Launch Pad Lab (France), Casa Wabi (Mexico), and Magasin III (Sweden).

Pizzani's practice, spanning performance, sculpture, photography, and painting, explores materiality, the body, ecology, and the entwined narratives of women and nature. With an interest in weaving stories from various Latin American territories, Lucia's works embrace hybridity, making each piece a nuanced, timeless narrative. Join us as we talk with her in her studio at Gasworks, London.



Coraza at Fundación Marso CDMX, Oaxaca clay imprinted with corn.
Photo by Raúl Raya.



Lucía Pizzani at *MERUNTÖ: In the House of Spirits* at Bosse & Buam.
Photo by Damian Griffiths

LATAMesa: Throughout your career, you have had the opportunity to study and train in different countries, first in Venezuela, then in the US, and finally in the UK, specifically London. How did those times, spaces, and diverse cultures influence your work? Could you share your experiences as an artist during your various residencies and elaborate on your contributions to each of them?

Lucía Pizzani: Yes. In my case, the deepest imprint comes from my homeland, Venezuela. I spent my formative years there, moving to New York at the age of 23. I also lived in Paris for a couple of years while growing up. I remember vividly from those years the feeling of anxiety from missing my country. Given the crisis in Venezuela, returning was nearly impossible. I went from being a migrant to something akin to an exile. Now, the situation in Venezuela has improved a lot, and it is easier and less dangerous to visit. In fact, I was able to return last year after 7 years of absence.

My practice is significantly informed by the rich culture of Venezuela, by its syncretism present in music and religion. I believe you can tell when you look at my work that it comes from many places, and this stems not only from my Venezuelan roots but also from the condition of being a migrant. As you mentioned, I lived in the US, where I studied Conservation biology at Columbia University. Then, I moved to London in 2007, completed a Master's in Fine Arts at Chelsea College of Arts, and I have been living here now for almost 15 years. I would say each place I've lived so far has contributed with distinct elements to my work.

This is also the case when doing residencies. I conduct extensive research beforehand, familiarising myself with the locality through literature, Google Maps, and other resources. However, it is only when you are there and engage with the local people that you are able to immerse yourself in the landscape. My work often revolves around plants, organic materials, and the environment, reflecting my background in biology.

I actually started my artistic journey in my thirties. Prior to that, I was involved in projects for an environmental organisation in Venezuela, focusing on endangered species and working with rural and indigenous communities across different regions—from the Andes to the Amazon. This engagement with diverse ecosystems and communities profoundly impacted me.

To round up, yes, my work is definitely shaped by the experience of inhabiting multiple locations. The influence can be seen in the themes but ultimately in the materials that I use. For example, some of my sculptures feature English clay imprinted with Mexican corn or incorporate pine cones from a London forest. I often leave traces of my experiences, like imprints of dry seeds from Venezuela or solar prints created during my travels.



From *Acorazadas Series*, collage.



From *Acorazadas Series*, collage.



Performance *Solsticio Compartido*.
Contemporary Sculpture Fullmer curated by Jenn Ellis.
Photo by Sebastian Gili.

LATAMesa: How did you find the experience of coming back to Venezuela after so long? Did you find it very different from what you remembered? Did this affect your production in any way?

Lucía Pizzani: In a way, many things stay the same, and nature still remains powerful. I was impressed and mind-blown when I returned because I hadn't experienced the full breadth of a tropical country in so long. Macaws can come to your balcony for a morning coffee. I had nine macaws at once. Then you have all kinds of birds, insects, sounds, and smells. It's truly overwhelming. At the same time, you have a crisis that's been ongoing for such a long time, lots of poverty and inequality. I believe the worst has passed, but the situation is still complex and the future still uncertain.



Ser de Moriche, 2023 at
MERUNTÖ: In the House of Spirits at Bosse & Buam.
Photo by Damian Griffiths

LATAMesa: You just touched on this, but allow us to expand more about your exploration with materiality. The way you source and research materials from various places it's an intriguing approach that naturally creates connections and narratives of intersecting trajectories. For example, as you mentioned, the use of Mexican corn or British clay. This approach delves into a history of colonialism, trade, and migration. But it might also be a way of telling your own personal story and cartography. To what extent do you draw from the physical and emotional distance you've encountered in your own life?

Lucía Pizzani: Yes. One example is the *Acorazadas Series*, where I worked with imagery taken from books of national parks in Venezuela. These particular collages are embedded with a deep sense of nostalgia because I wasn't able to return for so long. They express the longing to be there. While growing up I spent time in some amazing places such as Choroni, El Avila or Turuga – where my father lives – a rainforest one hour away from the city, with ancient trees, toucans, and all kinds of biodiversity. You can go through a rainforest to suddenly find yourself on the sea, the Caribbean Sea. For this series, I placed myself in these beautiful, crazy landscapes of Venezuela and covered myself with the armours of its animals.

This also reflects the idea of the ‘second skin’ that is very present in my work. It’s about protection and notions of vulnerability. How do you feel when you are in a country, or you are from a country that is almost in a permanent state of violence? The idea of the second skin allows me to play with these aspects, but it is also related to some ideas present in ancient history. Like when I went to Mexico and learnt about a deity called Xipe Totec, a god of life. The ritual for its devotion involved a priest wearing the actual skin of a defeated warrior. They would do this just at the beginning of the cropping corn season to mark the start of the corn harvest. So, I started to incorporate corn into the clay. But also, corn is crucial for the Americas because it’s our bread. When I relate to materials, I also relate to their symbolic power and what this material means for a population. It’s not only in Venezuela because corn has a lot of stories for the Mayas, for example, in *The Men of Maize*, and how supposedly humanity, when made out of corn, finally thrived and succeeded. So, it’s something that unites a lot of Latin American countries. These are the things I tend to look for: powerful symbols.

Another one that I use a lot is the snake, also present across all sorts of different cultures in the world. People worship it as it symbolises healing and transformation in how it changes the skin. So, it’s this same idea of the skin that I was telling you about, and the possibility of transformation that the immigrant experience involves, it puts you into a position of adapting. The snake’s skin symbolises the shedding of human skin, which eventually turns into dust. Did you know that 80% of household dust is actually made up of human skin? However, unlike humans, the snake sheds its entire skin in one go. This is why, in Greek mythology, the goddess of health was often depicted with a snake on her arm. The double helix of pharmacy and DNA, to mention another example. There are many connections, across time and cultures.

Another example; I produced a whole body of work for the exhibition at Bosse & Baum called *MERUNTÖ: In the House of Spirits* earlier this year. The name comes from the Pemón, indigenous people of Venezuela. *MERUNTÖ*, means “the energy that comes directly from the sun that makes everything alive on Earth”. I found it beautiful and poetic. Also how one word condenses such a whole concept. I felt using this word was a way of keeping the language alive and disseminating it. I was using a lot of photosensitive ink for the work shown in this exhibition. It was almost like cyanotypes, but I was doing them on a specific day; the day of the solstice, as a homage to the sun. I feel like this explored something particular and local, but that it can connect different cultures. This tension in my work goes both ways.

Anyways, *MERUNTÖ: In the House of Spirits*, had a lot of landscapes, images, and even seeds that I brought from Venezuela. This show was like a re-encounter with the utmost abundance of life. That, for me, was the feeling of going back.



From *Orchis Series*, 2011



Coraza at Fundación Marso CDMX, Oaxaca clay imprinted with corn. Photo by Raúl Raya.

LATAMesa: You have delved into female histories with your work in the past. I'm curious if the idea of a 'second skin' can be explored more particularly in relation to the female body, perhaps from a feminist or political standpoint?

Lucía Pizzani: Yes, when I began my artistic work, I had two main concerns, or areas of interest. Firstly, a deep engagement with the body, influenced by my mother being a choreographer and visual artist which exposed me from an early age to participate in her video works and enrol in dance classes for years. At the same time, it is of course, nature. This led me to adopt a research-based practice, often interweaving both aspects into my projects. An illustrative instance would be my exploration of the suffragettes' attack on Kew Gardens, documented in the project titled *Orchids*. The suffragettes set fire to the Orchid House to demand voting rights. As I delved deeper into this, I discovered that the Greek origin of the word 'orchid' means testicle. I found this intriguing: how a flower that visually resembles female genitalia is named after a male reproductive organ? The term 'orchid' was assigned due to the tuberos, less visible part, reflecting the influence of a deeply patriarchal society. In my work, I often seek out forgotten histories of women and try to bring them back to light. Although, I also use myself a lot. I touch on my personal experiences, such as exploring motherhood and the experience of being a woman. I put my own skin into the artwork.

LATAMesa: Yeah. I'm also thinking of that video-performance with raw clay: *La que viste la Piel*

Lucía Pizzani: I used to do mostly video and photo performance. But in the last two years, I've started to do more live performances. It's always very research-based and site-specific. I have also been collaborating with different musicians and singers.

In one project, for example, I responded to Maya Attoun, an artist who passed away last year. She had a fantastic, beautiful exhibition at Magasin III, in Stockholm. So, the challenge was how to create a dialogue with her work in a respectful way. We had lots in common. We were almost the same age, we both have kids of the same age. The starting point of her project was a volcanic explosion, something that I have always found attractive. I had worked around volcanic landscapes in the past with my cocoon fabric suits. The cocoons embody the idea of transformation, and they were mirroring the volcanic landscape, which is in permanent change. For the performance at Magasin III titled *Lava*, I ended up working with black sand and glazed ceramic sculptures. I used sounds from the Archive Lares. Some of the sounds I selected were from a recording of the 70s of people from the Sierra de Perija singing, calling out animals by imitating their sounds. The work, therefore, included the voices of people from half a century ago, the work of a late artist, all in conviviality.



Photo performance *Cuencas*, 2013,
at El Cercado, Isla de Margarita

LATAMesa: Your work strongly conveys many elements of pre-Columbian cultures. How and when did the inspiration for these cultures begin? How do you interpret many of these cultures' spiritual and general cosmovision around nature in your practice? How does this relate to your previous commitment to your ecological activism in Venezuela and your work with indigenous communities?

Lucía Pizzani: The distance from Venezuela made me value even more the importance of these cultural roots and landscapes. Reconnecting with nature is not just a personal experience but something that relates to the history of humanity. At some point in time, we were all one with nature, and over time, that connection was severed.

The Acorazadas Series, a collection of collages, conveys this sentiment of wanting to be one with nature again, emphasising that nature is a refuge. I worked with pangolin armours, the animal that was thought to be the carrier of COVID-19. I wanted to highlight that nature is typically a refuge, not the source of diseases. Zoonotic processes only occur when humans interfere with nature, by deforestation and destruction of natural habitats.

Going back to the ancestral question, and connecting it with the idea of this distance after I migrated, every object, music or tradition we had in Venezuela I looked at with new eyes. Re-discovering the corners where I grew up. One noteworthy experience occurred during my visits to El Cercado, while my parents were living on Margarita Island. There, there is a community of potters, mostly women, who create ceramics using ancient techniques: no kiln and extracting the material for the clay from the mountains. Inspired by them, I did a series of photo performances where I put myself inside large-scale terracotta vases made by these women potters and tried to make the body an extension of the pot.

Around that time, I also worked with hammocks made from the Moriche palm tree's fibre. These hammocks were like cocoons. I felt the need to connect with these objects, which have been a part of people's lives for generations. Later, during my time in Mexico, I conducted extensive research and familiarised myself with that incredibly rich culture. There, you can feel a sense of pride and witness so many living traditions passed from one generation to the next on a much larger scale than the ones I had observed in Venezuela.



Lucia Pizzani with Seres Vegetales at the Puerto Escondido Botanical Garden (Part of the UMAR University of Oaxaca)

LATAMesa: How long have you stayed in Mexico?

Lucía Pizzani: I have been travelling to Mexico since 2018. My first time there I was invited to exhibit at ZONAMACO for a solo project, but I stayed longer to conduct research, primarily in museums in the city. The second time, I joined a residency program in Ciudad de Mexico called Fundación Marso. I also visited Oaxaca City, and went to see the nearby town where each one specialised in a particular craft. I was specially drawn to San Bartolo Coyotepec the place where they make the famous ‘barro negro’ of Oaxaca. Only to witness it, it is not really a process that can be replicated and it wasn’t in my intent either.

At Casa Wabi, where I stayed during my third year, I worked on a new project for the botanical garden, which is permanently open to the public, called *Seres Vegetales – Vegetable Beings*. I am a research-based artist, and I always like to explore the meanings of words. I learned that Oaxaca means the land of the Guajes, which refers to a seed pot. Any seed pot is called a Guaje, but there are diverse trees that have these pots. For example, in my artwork, I include the Parota tree, which they call the ear tree because of its shape.

I ended up imprinting each sculpture with one plant. The plants in the sculpture garden are made with plants that either have healing properties, are edible, or have some significance. The idea was to generate a dialogue with the visitors. I also did an extension for their children’s workshop at Casa Wabi. I made imprints of each species into a stamp, so they could stamp them onto plates or produce more creative objects or masks. That project was the beginning of a line of research that has continued, trying to represent the spirit of plants.

Some examples of more recent sculptures that come from the *Seres Vegetales* project are the *Ser de Maiz*, el *Ser de Tapada*, El *Ser de Pino*, and even the new solar prints I made in Caracas last summer with Moriche palm branches. It’s this idea of trying to get a closer connection with the vegetal world. We’ve always had a stronger understanding with animals, as flora requires longer times of observation to see change and growth. Nowadays, with new research and long recordings, we can see them move and know they communicate.

LATAMesa: Finally, what are you focusing on now and what's up next?

Lucía Pizzani: I am currently working on some projects for the next year that I cannot reveal yet. However, I am increasingly getting involved with plants. As you mentioned before, my experience as a migrant has made me look into the past and explore what happened through colonial trade and the routes people and plants took together. I have found that plants are a great way to discuss these topics. I am currently working on a commission for a garden and even sowing some corn in my studio. I am just at the start of new things and making a new group of sculptures with human scale. I have also been producing these big totems with black clay. All of this is about what will happen next year. Oh, I will also be going back to Venezuela to do some projects there!

LATAMesa: Where in Venezuela?

Lucia Pizzani: In Caracas and Margarita Island. I'm going back to El Cercado. They just founded a school for ceramics. Some artists have been going there to work, and I want to collaborate with the community. This collaboration is scheduled for the summer of next year. I'm so looking forward to this!

Tactile Botanica Series, 2023
at MERUNTO: In the House of Spirits at Bosse
& Buam.
Photo by Damian Griffiths

