

Cecilia Vicuña

La Migranta Blue Nipple

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New York



Cecilia Vicuña, *La migranta*, 2024

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La Migranta Blue Nipple

In 1977, I decided to cross the Amazon by land. I was living in Bogotá and wanted to visit my cousin Barbara who was exiled in Rio de Janeiro. I traveled by bimotored airplanes, boats, buses, rafts and trucks, whatever means I found to go across the giant rivers and a half-built Trans-Amazonian Highway. During that two-month journey, some of the poorest people of Brazil opened their homes to me and offered hospitality. I learned about the sacred world they inhabited and of rituals they practiced that offered protection from colonial violence.

The paintings gathered in this exhibition recreate, in oil, the original drawings I made on brown wrapping paper, with chalk and pastel, upon returning to Bogotá in 1978. To my knowledge only five of those original drawings and a handful of photos have survived. The original set included around 30 large drawings.

Today, as the Amazon rainforest is going up in flames, its people and animals are suffering, I bring back my own version of the *Orixás* goddesses of the Afro-Brazilian pantheon I first met on the shores of the Solimões River in 1977, to invoke their help in the struggle to restore the forest.

If we are to survive the current violence and dehumanization in the world and create peace for all, we need to migrate to a new state of mind and soul.

Lehmann Maupin is pleased to present *La Migranta Blue Nipple*, the gallery's second solo exhibition in New York by Cecilia Vicuña. Born in Santiago, Chile and based in New York City, the visual artist, poet, filmmaker and activist presents a series of new paintings, a selection of her "precario" sculptures, and a suite of drawings. The exhibition, encompassing all three floors of the gallery, also includes the first US presentation of Vicuña's monumental quipu, *NAUfraga* (2022), since its premiere at the 59th Venice Biennale, as well as a new film based on unseen footage shot while in Athens, Greece participating in Documenta 14. The works on display are informed conceptually by the principles of "Arte Precario," or Precarious Art, the artist's own autonomous aesthetic system that foregrounds ephemerality, intangibility, and that which disappears. As an artistic corollary to the instability and shakiness that abounds in our political climate, Vicuña's precariousness allows her to grapple with issues ranging from immigration to environmental destruction. At the same time, her syncretic visual vocabulary prompts speculation on alternative possible futures, or worlds capable of realizing political, feminist, ecological, and conceptual reparation.

The title of the exhibition, *La Migranta Blue Nipple*, makes reference to Vicuña's personal experience with migration and to the brutal treatment of migrant and immigrant communities that she has witnessed while living in this country. Visitors to the exhibition will first encounter a series of paintings completed this year that recreate, in oil on canvas, drawings Vicuña made in 1978 but which have since been lost or destroyed and only exist in the artist's memory and in limited photographic documentation. In 1975, after having been in London in self-exile following the violent military coup d'état in her homeland Santiago de Chile, Vicuña settled in Bogotá, Colombia. Two years later, she traveled from Bogotá to Rio de Janeiro, across the Amazon to visit her cousin, where she encountered the sacred world and living rituals of the local Indigenous and mestizo Afro-Brazilian peoples. In response to her journey she made 30 drawings in chalk and pastel on brown wrapping paper. Many of these works contain references to *Orixás*—deities worshiped in the Yoruba religion which Vicuña learned of during her time crossing the Amazon—combined with popular culture images collected from her dreams, from popular songs, from common phrases, and other vernacular sources such as common insults made in her native Chile. Her new paintings bring these original drawings of hybrid *Orixás* back to life in forms that embody mermaids (*Iemanjá*), Pachamama (Incan earth mother / mother of space & time), Santa Bárbara (mother of the home), La música latinoamericana (goddess of Latin American music),

Flora (goddess of fertility), and San Martin de Porres (patron saint of social justice, racial harmony, and mixed-race people), among many others.



Cecilia Vicuña, *Santa Bárbara*, 2024

One of the new paintings, *La Migranta* (2024), features a giant Vanessa Carye butterfly who stands among the dark waters of the Rio Grande and beneath whose wings migrants of all ages journey together. In the reimagined scene, Vicuña renders the love, compassion, and conditions for solidarity among migrants whose arrival in the US is often met with hatred and violence. In another, *Iemanjá, blue nipple* (2024), the artist makes reference to the *Orixá* goddess of love, the mother of the sea, of life, the beginning of fertility, joy, happiness, and wild eroticism. Her blue eyes, nipples, and scales represent the sea breathing in and through her as she holds the stars in her hands, the cycles of nature and life swirling through her. In another work, *San Martin de Porres*, Vicuña depicts the Peruvian saint as a Black man with an Afro wearing a Che Guevara t-shirt. He holds a broom and is surrounded by street animals. Bringing together iconography of cultures and religions from Latin America, Vicuña embraces a syncretic painterly vocabulary, one where mono- and polytheistic religions are intertwined with Indigenous cosmology. What emerges is a series of fantastical beings and hybrid historical travelers whose compassion and understanding—the artist playfully speculates—might guide the “migration” of humanity’s

consciousness away from the supercharged individualism that is all pervasive in contemporary society.

The installation *NAUfraga* (2022), which occupies the gallery’s double height space, synthesizes two foundational aspects of Vicuña practice, the “quipu” and the “precario.” Vicuña’s quipus (translated as “knot” from Quechua) reimagine the ancient Andean system that recorded statistics and narratives through the knotting of colored thread. The traditional *quipu* held existential and social value for communities, and represented a complex system of knowledge with symbolic and virtual dimensions. Addressing this larger paradigm, Vicuña constructs her quipus as poems in space. Her tactile representations of the relationship between the cosmological and earthly realms seek to describe a reality that does not conform to standard perception. Vicuña’s ongoing series of *precarios* are anti-monumental sculptures she began making in 1966 composed of found material often installed in a precarious manner that challenges Western notions of permanence and stasis. *NAUfraga* is a quipu composed of 83 precario objects, 40 dried plants/wood, and 36 fishnets/yute sac remnants suspended in space by thin white threads. Each hanging element is made of detritus collected in the Venetian lagoon, an homage to the ancient fishing tradition and fragility of nature. As Madeline Weisburg explains, “Taken from the Latin words *navis* (ship) and *frangere* (to break), *NAUfraga* suggests the exploitation of the Earth, which has caused Venice to slowly sink into the sea.”

In the lower level gallery, Vicuña will present a new film, *Quipu Womb* (2024), that brings together unseen footage shot in Athens, Greece from when she was participating in Documenta 14. For this exhibition she installed the landmark monumental sculpture *Quipu Womb (The Story of the Red Thread Athens)*, (2017) and performed a series of public and private rituals throughout the landscape. Combining poetry, performance, sound, and the artist’s engagement with the natural and built environments, Vicuña’s film tells the story of the origin of *Quipu Womb* which is intimately linked to the story of the “red thread,” the story of women. The film links two original sources of mythology: Crete and the Andes. Vicuña’s rituals are offerings intended to restore the world’s wounded memory as a way of “turning around the waves of the system” currently leading us towards extermination. The exhibition, *La Migranta Blue Nipple*, invites reflection and contemplation through Vicuña’s multidimensional practice whose return to the spiritual universe of the *Orixás* offers a way to understand and perhaps offer hope for the future.



Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948 in Santiago, Chile; lives and works in New York, NY and Santiago, Chile) integrates practices of poetry, performance, Conceptualism, and textile craft in response to pressing concerns of the modern world, including ecological destruction, human rights, and cultural homogenization. Born and raised in Santiago, she was exiled during the early 1970s after the violent military coup against President Salvador Allende. This sense of impermanence, and a desire to preserve and pay tribute to the indigenous history and culture of Chile, have characterized her work throughout her career.

While living in Chile during the mid-1960s, Vicuña began an ongoing series of small sculptures she calls *precarios*, spatial poems in which she combines feathers, stone, plastic, wood, wire, shells, cloth, and other human-made detritus. These tiny sculptures are often loosely fastened together with string, so the materials appear to have gathered naturally. These works are defined by their fragility and ephemerality: Vicuña initially composed the *precarios* along the ocean's edge, so that they would inevitably be erased by the high tide. Around the same

time, Vicuña became interested in ancient quipus—an Andean method of communication and record-keeping involving the knotting of colored strings. Her first spatial weavings date from the early 1970s, and soon after she began to make her own *Quipus* from unspun wool. These ephemeral, site-specific installations combined the tactile ritual of weaving and spinning with assemblage, poetry, and performance. Vicuña's surreal figurative paintings of the 1970s are more explicitly personal and political in comparison to her other bodies of work, and were created in direct response to the unrest in Chile and her subsequent exile. These paintings refer to the subtly subversive images made by 16th-century indigenous artists in Latin America after the Spanish conquest, when they were forced to paint angels and saints for the Catholic church. In Vicuña's paintings, religious icons are replaced by personal, political, and literary figures, commemorated and mythologized by the artist.

Vicuña received her M.F.A. from the National School of Fine Arts, University of Chile in 1971 and continued with postgraduate studies at Slade School of Fine Art, University College London from 1972-1973. Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at a number of major institutions, including the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2024); the Perez Art Museum, Miami, FL (2024); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile (2023); Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2023); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, AZ (2023); Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom (2022); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2022); Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia (MAMU), Bogotá, Colombia (2022); Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M), Madrid, Spain (2021); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA (2020); Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico (2020); Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Miami, FL (2019); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2019); Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA (2019); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA (2019); Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2019); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA (2018); Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY (2018); the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), Berkeley, CA (2018); Neubauer Collegium, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2018); Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA (2017); Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Santiago, Chile (2014); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile (2014); Institute for Women and Art, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ (2009); The Drawing Center, New York, NY (2002); and the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO (2002).

Group exhibitions and biennials featuring her work include *Chile: Memory and Future*, New York University Gallatin Galleries, New York, NY; *Life Between Buildings*, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY (2022); *The Milk of Dreams, 59th International Art Exhibition*, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2022); *Bodies of Water*, The 13th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai, China (2021); *Minds Rising, Spirits Tuning*, The 13th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea (2021); *And if I devoted my life to one of its feathers?* Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2021); *The Space Between Classrooms*, Swiss Institute Annual Architecture and Design Series, Swiss Institute, New York, NY (2021); *Witch hunt*, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark (2020); *Artistic License: Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2019); *Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960-1985*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2017), Brooklyn Museum, NY and Pinoteca de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2018); Documenta 14, Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany (2017); 18th Sydney Biennale, Australia (2012); *DANCE / DRAW*, Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, Boston, MA (2011); *ONLINE, Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2010); *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2007); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (1997); and *INSIDE the VISIBLE*, Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, Boston, MA, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC, the Whitechapel Gallery, London, United Kingdom, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia (1996).

Her work is in numerous international private and public collections, including the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, (BAMPFA), Berkeley, CA; Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX; Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, FL; Cranford Collection, London, United Kingdom; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; EMDASH Foundation, Berlin, Germany; Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain de Lorraine, Metz, France; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; IVAM - Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain; KADIST, Paris, France; San Francisco, CA; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), Lima, Peru; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), San Diego, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile; National Portrait

Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Miami, FL; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; and Zhuzhong Art Museum, Beijing, China.

Vicuña is the author of 27 volumes of art and poetry published in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Her filmography includes documentaries, animation, and visual poems. Vicuña has received several awards, including the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2022); Premio Velázquez de Artes Plásticas, Madrid, Spain (2019); Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, Santa Monica, CA (2019); Anonymous Was a Woman Award, New York, NY (1999); and The Andy Warhol Foundation Award, New York, NY (1997), and in 2015 was appointed the messenger lecturer at Cornell University.

**LEHMANN MAUPIN**

Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin co-founded Lehmann Maupin in 1996 in New York. Since inception, Lehmann Maupin has served as a leading contemporary art gallery with locations in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. For over 25 years, Lehmann Maupin has been instrumental in introducing international artists in new geographies and building long-lasting curatorial relationships. Known for championing diverse voices, the gallery's program proudly features artists whose work challenges notions of identity and shapes international culture. Today, the gallery has permanent locations in New York, Seoul, and London, as well as team members based in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, and Palm Beach. In recent years, with growing opportunities in new markets, the gallery has opened seasonal spaces in Aspen, Palm Beach, Taipei, and Beijing.

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