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Online

CURATED BY  
TINA SAUERLAENDER

ORGANIZED BY  
THE MACKENZIE ART GALLERY

EXHIBITION DEVELOPMENT  
CAT BLUEMKE AND JONATHAN CARROLL

***ECHOES FROM THE FUTURE : SPECULATIVE CREATURES  
AND POST-HUMAN BOTANICALS***

**Artist Laura Colmenares Guerra with curator Tina Sauerlaender**

Laura Colmenares Guerra: Hi Tina.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Laura, I'm happy to talk to you about your installation in, uh, our exhibition. And there we show just a few parts of your very comprehensive work, *RIOS* trilogy. It is based on your artistic research on the Amazon region that you pursued in the past five years, and you have just been completing this project with Part three.

Could you tell us how you became interested in the region and why you wanted to do a work on it?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Okay. Yeah. Well, this started with a hashtag that I saw online. That is the hashtag Amazon. It was.

I started researching what was going on in Amazon, and I started following this hashtag on social media, and I was impressed how the hashtag very easily disappeared. And in between a fight between Macron and Bolsonaro, it just vanished. Well, the Amazon kept on burning, and so I started researching on.

That is the biggest rainforest of the world that extends over 7.8 million square kilometers. And that is home, for millions of people. And it's the most bio diverse place in planet Earth.

And the context of climate change where we are actually the Amazon Rainforest is not only for the purpose that it serves to the planet, but also because of the biodiversity hosts.

Tina Sauerlaender: And how did you approach this complex, big topic?

Laura Colmenares Guerra: It's very much focused on how western societies and or societies that have access to the internet and to social media connect to the territory of Amazon. And what is this relationship that we've created during history of, colonialization regarding the territory, but also like how is it been nowadays, from the point of view [inaudible].

Tina Sauerlaender: And this is resulted in *RIOS*, right?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Yeah. So the first chapter of the tri online application, everybody can consult where, , you have, well, there's a mapping of hashtags and occurrences of hashtags that. Real time related to the Amazon. So it's like a search tool that, I, in order to understand how, we connect to the territory of the Amazon and that gave, uh, to the chapter one pretty reproductions of the topography of Amazon and where I do a specific interventions in the places where

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I know that there are environmental and social threats. And I know data because using georeference information that is established by the Amazonian network of Georeference information that has published a series of data, to specific environmental problem.

And this data is also, let's say, use. So I do interventions on this on the topography of Amazon based on this data and also based on the data, some sort of sculptures that register specific moments of the Amazon in this moment where we're right, right now.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Yeah. And, this is also a part, of Rios, which the visitors see in the exhibition, right?

Laura Colmenares Guerra: Yeah. So what the visitors see in the exhibition is more based on.

To the previous chapters and in *Reverse*, what I did is that I expanded much more further. I led the much more deeper into the environmental and social problem related to the territory of the Amazon by displaying the different, that constitute this problem. And so [inaudible].

**Tina Sauerlaender:** That's an interesting point because if I remember correctly, Rios two consists of sculptures of parts of the territories, and I can imagine, well, it's a guess. I'm asking if what is the difference between installing these projects in a physical space and now, or in, in vr and also now in our show in, virtual reality, what are like possibilities and challenges, of these different worlds and reels?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Yeah, it's challenging from different points of view

because I'm basically all the time dealing with the same sort of data, just that I'm using the data in different ways. So the sculptures, they are fixed objects and, that's why I think of them like an archive, like a sculpture archives moment.

Because, everything is like stopped and done, the data that was applied onto the sculpture, they are stopped in time, by the way, to create them. I, I defined the date where it made a timestamp and that's, they the sculpture was like, brutal exhibition. The data is the data that I have until the dates, but, um, the, the user can really explore in a much more, conscious way. Uh, where are the zones, where there's in fires, where the zones where destruction of oil or minerals, how deforestation advancing. Like the, the user can really explore in depth.

And I think that's, creates some sort of, like living matter. That's the sculptures don't have it's very interesting in that.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Yeah, that's true. Well, and when you, saw, I mean, you evaluated the data and then it became visible basically on the surface of. The map at some point. What did you think about the devastations of fire, of, of erosion of like, the things you're addressing in the different points?

Were you surprised? Were you like angry? How did you feel when you saw the degree of devastation?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Yeah, it's extremely complicated and also, of course, I was talking with somebody and he explained me all the process or how they have advanced in

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marketing process of this data as technology has advanced because it started 10 years ago.

The situation is very critical and, the proposal, for example, the, that is the organism of Indigenous people for the Amazon basin. They launch a campaign that is called 80 times 25, which means protecting 80% of Amazon for 2025. That's in one year and a half. And, for that it'll require a huge effort.

Basically the world to understand what are the changes that need to be done. And that means starting with, a nine shift where the Amazon cannot keep on being seen as a territory able to provide infinite natural resources. The, of the world. That's, that's the, we wanna see territory from the point of view, if it's utility, the utility that territory can give to the, is just be because its amount of, it produces rain, water, et cetera.

So, what really needs to change is this way where you look at the Amazon and it has to happen now. Basically, there's no time to lose.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** No, no. I think, your project gives such a great voice to this, to this region and probably renders it aware to to many people in many exhibitions in the future.

I mean, you just started exhibiting a full project. Yeah. Maybe we can also talk about the reverse three, which is the Oh, reverse, which is the third part. Which you just, finished and, which are both our background images, if I remember correctly. Maybe, you can talk a little about the specific, virtual reality piece that you just finished.

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Well Verse it's, animation documentary.

It's, starts with a long path river where, the problems of the territory are introduced, but also, something that is very important because we tend to think of the Amazon well from the point of the biodiversity.

Over the surface of the water, we have the names of the Indigenous people that start appearing. And it's an introduction to these, cultures and these people that haven't had territory for more than 20,000 years. Then afterwards, These parts. There's very documentary parts that explains with the images, with actual footage the real situation, let's say see it from different points of view.

And then there's the interactive map where people.

Is the possibility to indigenous territories and the, and the lens of the, of the indigenous people. And then, yeah, you have ,all the different, social environmental layers that people interact with in VR by rotating on picture that I created. And, and then basically they go back, to the river. That's kind of it.

Tina Sauerlaender: Yeah. I mean, this part particularly takes place in virtual reality. We show an exhibition, videos of it, but not as the 360 versions ss video screens, why did you choose the medium of virtual reality, to finish your project with that?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** In my work, I I like a lot to work with immersiveness and to create really like, spaces, whether physical.

And that hosts a spectator, the framework of

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yeah, from experience. And it, it demands also from the spectator some engagements, because , spectator has to put itself in an accurate position. And that's something that's I think it's important also when you're talking about environmental and social subjects, is to place spectator in conversation between the work, the person, what needs. So I thought that,VR fits in this case, purposes of the project.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Yes, sounds very good and relates of course, also to my intention with our exhibition where the user has to immerse in the space and interact, with your work or with the works in the exhibition.

How will you continue exhibiting the different parts of *RIOS* in the future? And will you also consider mix of virtual and physical exhibitions

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** for *RIOS*? Yeah, yeah, of course. I will definitely consider both, and I consider this project in a way that is modular and also thinking like, okay, how can I make a project that can travel light? That I don't need to eventually show 21 sculptures, but showing one sculpture and the VR project or the app that is anywhere online to be able to, to, yeah, so can travel and not have to spend lots of money in transport. So ideally a mix between physical and virtual. I think it works really well for this project. And it's actually in the core of, of the, of the conception of *RIOS*.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Yes. Sounds great. And are there already upcoming shows you can already talk about?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Yeah, there's an upcoming show in Belgium. Capture number 23. Gonna be also in the context.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Sounds great. Perfect. You have the last words. Is there anything you wanna add about your project?

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** I would say take the time to watch the videos there. There's one that is a little bit long, it's eight minutes, but I think it's worth to the text. One of the things that I like the most, uh, doing my work is writing. And I think this text is nice and enjoy it.

**Tina Sauerlaender:** Thank you so much Laura for this conversation.

**Laura Colmenares Guerra:** Thanks.

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Laura Colmenares Guerra** is a Colombian artist based in Brussels. She has a transversal research-based practice that implies long-term processes of creation. Her work explores the impairment between contemporary western societies and the living ecosystems, the environment and the inhabitants of the planet. This questioning drives her to conceive settings that relate to the politics of landscape and the notions of territory. She explores the constructions of the concepts of nature and natural and language as a foundation medium for reality.

[ulara.org](http://ulara.org)

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

**Tina Sauerlaender** (she/her) is the co-founder and co-director of the exhibition platform and international [collective](#) of independent curators, [peer to space](#) (since 2010). She has been curating and organizing large-scale group exhibitions like [Resonant Realities](#) (Exhibition of the VR ART PRIZE by DKB in Cooperation with CAA Berlin, Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin, 2021), [The Unframed World. Virtual Reality as Artistic Medium for the 21st Century](#) (HEK Basel, 2017), or initiated and co-curated [SPECULATIVE CULTURES. A Virtual Reality Art Exhibition](#) (Kellen Gallery, Parsons/The New School, New York, 2019). She focuses on the impact of the digital and the internet on individual environments and society, on virtual reality in visual arts, and on exhibition making in [virtual realms](#). She is also the artistic director of the [VR ART PRIZE by DKB in Cooperation with CAA Berlin](#). She is co-founder & CEO of [Radiance VR](#) (since 2017), an international online platform and research database for virtual reality experiences in visual arts that includes the [Radiance VR App](#) for VR Art for Meta Quest headsets.

She holds a PhD from The University of Arts, Linz, Austria. The title of her dissertation is *PERFORMING IDENTITIES. Self-Representation in Art from the Renaissance to Virtual Worlds*. In conjunction with her PhD she curated the online exhibition [performingidentities.net](#). She is a lecturer for Digital Art History at the University of Applied Sciences in Bielefeld, Germany. She gave talks on Virtual Reality & Art at re:publica (Berlin), ZKM (Karlsruhe), New Inc (New York), Kunsthalle (Munich), University of Applied Arts (Vienna), Digifest (Toronto), Technical University (Prague) or Roehrs & Boetsch (Zurich).

She is the founder of the [SALOON Berlin](#), the initial branch of the [SALOON Network](#), an international network for women working in art.

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

### *Echoes from the Future: Speculative Creatures & Post-Human Botanicals*

Disruptive human activity threatens the Earth's ecological balance, eradicating biodiversity and shared resources. *Echoes from the Future*, curated by Tina Sauerlaender (peer to space), highlights artists working across diverse media to preserve nature, reveal environmental devastation, and speculate on future life forms. The virtual exhibition features work by artists Aviv Benn (ISR/UK), Laura Colmenares Guerra (COL/BE), Reiner Maria Matysik (DE), Sarah Oh-Mock (DE), Bianca Shonee Arroyo-Kreimes (CAN), Sabrina Ratté (CAN), and Tamiko Thiel (US/DE). In rendering current environmental issues visible within a virtual reality landscape, *Echoes from the Future* immerses audiences in alternative post-anthropocentric futures and speculative ecologies.

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Aviv Benn  
Laura Colmenares Guerra  
Reiner Maria Matysik  
Sarah Oh-Mock  
Sabrina Ratté  
Tamiko Thiel and /p

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