

# Cinthia Marcelle

## A Conjunction of Factors

Exhibition from 15 July 2022 to 8 January 2023



*Background Giant*, 2006 © Cinthia Marcelle. Photo: Frederica Sabino



Driven by a desire to disorganise the hierarchies and binary oppositions that pattern our daily interactions, the interconnected layers of Cinthia Marcelle's practice develop a consistent concern with reimagining the dynamics of collectivity. Marcelle is known internationally for creating evocative site-specific installations in locations including New York, Porto Alegre, Sharjah and Vienna, but *A Conjunction of Factors* is the first exhibition to offer a perspective on her production as a whole. Across her work, similar gestures are performed at radically different scales. Materials change shape, travelling across installations, photographs and moving images. Motifs recur in different configurations. Series of works do not begin and end, but recede and emerge, and may be shown together or held in reserve like a pack of cards to be played in a game of association. Featuring works dating from 1999 to the present day, and combining powerful moving image works and photographs with large-scale installations and subtle spatial interventions, *A Conjunction of Factors* brings into focus the distinct aesthetics of Marcelle's work – from her creation of a poetics of accumulation, multiplication and repetition, to her use of atmospheric mise-en-scènes, together with materials and colours that recall specific locations and contexts.

The exhibition begins with ***Déjà Vu***, an intervention within MACBA's central atrium that serves as an invitation to follow the multi-faceted and associative logic that binds Marcelle's work together. A column of coins, stacked inside and atop a glass, is placed on a shelf to the left of the entrance to the ground floor gallery. To the right, these elements are seemingly repeated but subtly reconfigured. They appear again as visitors enter the exhibition, where a corridor presents a choice of two routes. Each one leads to half of the two-part installation ***The Family in Disorder***. Described by Marcelle as a rupture in her practice, this iteration is pivotal to the exhibition in MACBA's ground floor galleries designed in collaboration with the São Paulo architectural studio, Vão.

Visitors turning to the right will encounter a dead end: a black-carpeted room divided by a neatly stacked barricade made of bulk quantities of the materials Marcelle commonly uses. Turning to the left, they will find a large open area that contains a different installation made with the same materials. Subverting the author-spectator relationship, this work is the endeavour of a group of students and art professionals who gained collective and creative agency by occupying the space, at Marcelle's invitation, prior to the exhibition's opening. By taking this route, visitors can continue through a series of five small spaces, where ***Fountain 193, To Come To*** and ***Crossing*** – a trilogy of three films shot from above against the red earth of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais – are book-ended by a set of works that articulate an imagined journey between rural and urban territories.

The films Marcelle makes as a solo artist and as a duo with Tiago Mata Machado involve collaborations with non-professional actors. As well as providing their collaborators with a setting and some suggested actions and intentions, the artists encourage them to feel the strength of the gestures they are asked to perform. To produce ***Fountain 193***, Marcelle orchestrated a fire-engine to drive a perfect circle into the ground, while emptying water into the centre to form an inverted fountain. To make ***To Come To***, she asked the operator of an earthmover to plough the infinity symbol. Performing tasks similar to those they usually do, but with different motivations, their experience of work becomes akin to creative labour.

Static camera shots lend Marcelle's films a stage-like quality that draws attention to their settings and the moving ensembles within them. In ***Crossing***, this

effect is enhanced by the different colours worn by four sets of four musicians. On entering the scene via separate paths, each group plays an isolated instrumental section from *Avante Camarada!* At the intersection, they unite and mingle, achieving a harmonious rendition before dividing again. From **Crossing**, visitors can turn to access the central space where the series **Conjunction of Factors** is displayed. The people portrayed in each diptych are known to Marcelle, either as acquaintances, close friends or even family members, and the passage between two images lends a semblance of narrative. The gestures she encourages them to act out, combined with the title of each work, transform her collaborators into performers of roles that they do not normally play. The true jobs of those portrayed may be deduced by how they are dressed, but their actions suggest an emancipatory re-ordering of how class, race and labour typically interact.

A separate gallery, accessed from the central atrium, displays **Stay**, a work made with Jean Meeran during Marcelle's residency in Cape Town. The experience of working with Meeran in South Africa was important to Marcelle's sense of identity as well as her artistic development. In Brazil, where mixed heritage is often still taken as a generalised and culturally white national identity, the fact of Marcelle's own ethnicity was largely unspoken. In South Africa, however, this perception shifted. In **Stay**, Meeran captures Marcelle engaged in acts of camouflage. Using coloured sheets and items of clothing, she attempts to recede into the background of the city's streets, walls and market stalls. A more effective disguise, however, proves to be her own appearance. Serving as mask and bearer of identity, it allows her to disappear amongst other passengers heading by bus to the townships.

**On Air**, the exhibition's final large-scale installation, takes the form of a radio station and a carpeted stage, setting the scene for the collective restaging of two plays. The first is *Sortilégio* (1951), written by the prominent Brazilian scholar, poet, activist and dramatist Abdias do Nascimento (1914–2011), who founded the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theatre) in 1944. Evoking real relationships between social hierarchy and race while occupying a place between legend, religion and everyday life, *Sortilégio* is a moral fable whose main protagonist alienates himself in the pursuit of a higher social position. The second play is *Une Tempête* (1969) by the French-Martinican poet, author, politician and co-founder of the négritude movement, Aimé Césaire (1913–2008). Set in

the Caribbean, Césaire's critical adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* recasts Prospero as a white coloniser and slave master, while giving greater centrality and voice to the perspectives of Caliban and Ariel, who are portrayed as Prospero's black slaves and colonised subjects. Visitors within the gallery are invited to access an online platform, where, instead of delivering scripted dialogue, they can add a link to a song to be broadcast on stage. The choices they make will overlap with and interrupt those made by others who are accessing the platform both remotely and onsite. This distanced interaction between decisions, people and places will result in an ongoing, unpredictable, conflictive and cacophonous re-staging.

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Exhibition organised and produced by MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

**Curated by:** Isobel Whitelegg

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## Publication

*Cynthia Marcelle. A Conjunction of Factors* includes a selection of works by the Brazilian artist from the late 1990s to the present, together with an essay by curator Isobel Whitelegg. Bilingual edition in Spanish and English.

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**Prior to the opening,**  
Thursday 14 July, 7 pm.

## Visits

Fridays, 6 pm. Conducted by pli-é collective, a research and curation group formed by Eva Païà, Marina Ribot Pallicer and Angelica Tognetti.

Visits in Catalan and Spanish. Consult the relevant programme at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat). Included in the entry price.

## Accessible visits

Visits for the hearing or visually impaired, available by prior request to [educacio@macba.cat](mailto:educacio@macba.cat).

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## Let's talk...

Thursdays in October at 6 pm. Complete programme at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

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## Opening hours

Mondays, Wednesdays,  
Thursdays and Fridays,  
11 am to 7.30 pm  
(from 25 June to 24  
September, 10 am to 8 pm)  
Tuesdays, except public  
holidays, closed  
Sundays and public holidays,  
10 am to 3 pm

Saturdays, from 4 to 8 pm, free admission thanks to Uniqlo

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