

# Daniel Steegmann Mangrané

## A Leaf Shapes the Eye

Exhibition from 16 November 2023  
to 20 May 2024



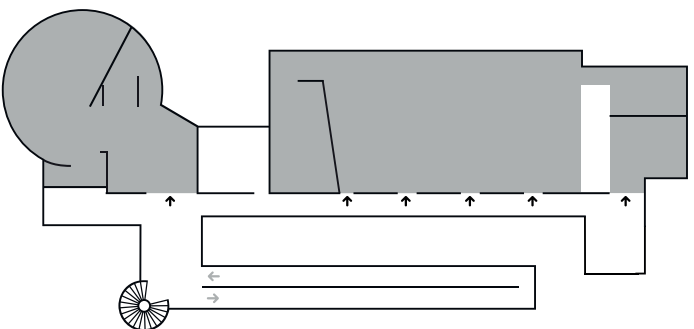
Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, *La Pensée Férale* (detail), 2020

*Art has the capacity to reconfigure our relationship with the world. I like to do my shows not as conclusions, but as points of departure: the important thing is not the exhibition itself, but what happens when you exit the museum and confront reality again.*

Daniel Steegmann Mangrané

## **Meier Building**

Level 2



'Eu era gases puro, ar, espaço vazio, tempo' (I was pure gases, air, empty space, time). This verse by the Brazilian poet Stella do Patrocínio encapsulates the concepts of impermanence and transience that are integral to Daniel Steegmann Mangrané's (Barcelona, 1977) artistic practice.

Drawing upon biology and new anthropological discourses as conceptual frameworks, Steegmann Mangrané proposes a holistic worldview in which there is no distinction between humans and their environment, and where relationships between all elements are in constant flux. His work questions the colonial dualisms such as culture and nature, subject and object, reality and dream, while also engaging with the subjectivity and social agency of non-humans and non-living elements.

Having lived in Rio de Janeiro for two decades, Steegmann Mangrané understands the rainforest as more than just a place, but as a living being that embodies the complexities of our contemporary world, whether they be environmental, political or social, and serves as a metaphor for the delicate balance and interconnectedness of all things. Climate change further reminds us that we are all part of the same organism and entangled within a complex network of relationships of mutual transformation.

Similarly, the artist's work is greatly influenced by Brazilian Neo-Concrete artists. Like them, Steegmann Mangrané considers sensory engagement as a socio-political and democratic entry point to artwork, dissolving boundaries that attempt to compartmentalise our experience of the world and transforming the exhibition from an inanimate object-to-be-seen into an ever-changing entity experienced with our bodies and all our senses.

Overlooking the atrium of the Museum, the sculpture *Systemic Grid 126 (Window)* (2015) literally transforms the visitor's way of seeing. The sculpture appropriates the concrete and glass easels by the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914–1992), in this case using distorting hand-blown glass with geometric incisions. The sculpture is not so much *something to look at* than *something to look through* – an idea constantly reviewed in Steegmann Mangrané's practice.

The first gallery presents two foundational works that have accompanied Steegmann Mangrané throughout his artistic career and continue to serve as a basis for developing ideas for future works. *Mesa con objetos* (Table with Objects) (1998 ongoing) is a site of research that evolves with each presentation and which is composed of intervened organic elements, models and other experiments. *Lichtzwang* (1998 ongoing), translated as 'Light Duress' for Paul Celan's book of poetry published in 1970, is a series of watercolours on graph paper. The artist worked on these exclusively between 2000 and 2003 as an intense exercise in structure, form, colour and permutation. Working within a defined grid, each is a variation on the preceding one.

Distributed throughout the exhibition is *Eu era gases puro, ar, espaço vazio, tempo* (2016), words spoken by Brazilian poet Stella do Patrocínio, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and spent the last three decades of her life in a mental hospital in Rio de Janeiro. Do Patrocínio talked about the limitations of the physical body and the desire to become one with the environment. Her speech was recorded by the artist Carla Guagliardi and published as a book of poetry by the poet and philosopher Viviane Mosé titled *Reino dos bichos e dos animais é o meu nome* (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name. Azougue, 2001).

Also permeating the spaces are seven floor-to-ceiling light filaments that form *Breathing Lines* (2020/2023). Like a living organism, the lines react to their surroundings. The intensity of their glow is in part a reaction to the sounds of the flute from the audio piece *Quebreira* (Exhaustion) (2013) and in part to the outdoor meteorological conditions such as temperature and humidity.

Representation and reality are intertwined in *Morphogenesis Cripsis* (2013/2023), an expansive mural along the corridor walls, made from the repetition of lines in the shape of four twigs, which are also incorporated into parts of the mural, hiding in plain sight. This way of merging with the

environment echoes Do Patrocínio's poetry, as well as French philosopher and sociologist Roger Caillois' (1913–1978) anti-Darwinist critique of mimesis as a survival strategy and his notorious proposal of mimicry as a desire to dissolve into the world.<sup>1</sup>

Overlaying the mural and extended along the corridor is *La Pensée Férale* (2020), seven photographs taken in the Tijuca National Park in Rio de Janeiro, one of the most biodiverse and endangered rainforests in the world. Peering at us from tree trunks and the forest floor is the eye of an Indian pariah dog, lending an immediate subjectivity and sense of perception to the forest. The social agency of nature is reinforced in the accompanying texts by the Brazilian philosopher Juliana Fausto that reflect on a possible re-worlding.

Four entrances give way to (*Paisaje de posibilidades*) ([Landscape of Possibilities]) (2016/2023), an otherworldly environment embraced by blue, above and below, with the colour intensity changing throughout the day and months based on the amount of daylight entering the space. The topographic floor piece is host to other works as well as to visitors who move, sit or lie on its surface, creating an acute sense of awareness of our surroundings and bodily movement.

Bridging the nature-culture divide in a union of oppositions *Elegancia y renuncia* (Elegance and Renunciation) (2011) concentrates the organic and geometric in a single leaf. A cluster of perfectly incised circles interrupt the leaf's veins, allowing the passage of light beamed from a projector. Other works in the space further explore the entanglement between nature and artifice.

*Naranjas naranjas* (Orange Oranges) (2001) invites us into an orange-filtered pavilion (which appears greenish due to the overlap of blue light in a play of perception vs reality) to squeeze an orange and drink its juice, and in doing so transgressing boundaries and becoming part of the artwork, and vice versa.

*A Dream Dreaming a Dream* (2020) immerses viewers into a dark rainforest, its sounds and the life of a stick-figure panther who resides there. A self-generating animation, the panther wanders

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1 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' (1935), *October* 31, Winter 1984.

freely through the rainforest. From time to time the forest collapses and the panther wakes again in the same unreal forest, blurring the line between dream and reality.

Cutting across the space is *Mà atrapant un ocell* (Hand Catching a Bird) (2023), a site-specific curtain with two large organically-shaped cut-outs. Made with chain curtains common in Mediterranean homes, the installation divides the space but is permeable at any point. Passing through them creates a heightened sense of embodiment through the sound and tactility of the aluminium chains.

Rooted in the artist's interest in ecological interdependence and perception is *A Transparent Leaf Instead of the Mouth* (2017–18), a glass pavilion that houses an ecosystem containing local flora and exotic fauna of leaf and stick insects that become one with each other, ecologically and visually.

The concepts of configuration, repetition and transformation derived from *Lichtzwang* are present in sculptural form in *Upsilon* (2013), a modular work composed of three shapes, based on the repetitive movements of the workers on an oil extraction platform, and that can be assembled and positioned in various combinations.

Adopting methodologies of structural filmmaking, *16mm* (2007–11) is an exploration of time and space. The film follows the camera's penetration of the Mata Atlântica rainforest in southwestern Brazil in a single shot, travelling along a straight line at a constant speed that corresponds exactly with the length of film shot, revealing the dense greenery and sounds of the forest.

In an examination of perception and the fragility of the image, the film *Phasmides* (2012) sets a stick insect against different backgrounds, starting with an organic one with branches and shifting to one with white geometric folds that recall the sculptures of the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920–1988).

In a similar exploration, uncanny, phantasmagorical compositions of stick insects, organic and inorganic material inhabit *Holograms* (2021); the three-dimensional images only emerge when viewers are in the right position, requiring us to physically engage with the work.

*Duna económica / Maqueta sin calidad* (Economic Dune/Model without Quality) (2011) reflects on Spain's economic crisis linked to the

housing bubble. The sculpture draws parallels between the economy, collective emotions and the unpredictable behaviour of sand dunes, contrasting geometric order with a suspended dune-like mass.

Reminding us of the planet's impermanence and flux, the composition of the marble fragments that make up *Metamorphing Map* (2021) evokes patterns created by natural phenomena such as continental drift or sand ripples. The marble used is itself a metamorphic rock originating from algae and crustaceans that have been transformed over centuries by heat and pressure.

*A Leaf Shapes the Eye* brings together works that span twenty-five years and is a choreography between space, light, objects and people. Through explorations of the entanglements between living and non-living, the exhibition is a site with which to engage physically, sensorially and intellectually, and reshape our relationship with nature.

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**Exhibition curated by:**

Hiuwai Chu, head of exhibitions at MACBA and João Laia, chief curator of temporary exhibitions at Kiasma, with Piia Oksanen, curator of temporary exhibitions at Kiasma.

**Co-produced with:**

**kiasma**<sub>—</sub>

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## Publication

Through hundreds of images, the artist's book published on the occasion of the exhibition *A Leaf Shapes the Eye* follows the work of Daniel Steegmann Mangrané in chronological order from his earliest sculptures in 1997 to his most recent installations of 2022 in the centrefold, before immediately beginning the same journey in reverse, showing new details and perspectives, and arriving back to his earlier works, thus restructuring the book as a closed cycle that can be started anew. Page after page, the juxtaposition of works and details reveals recurring subjects in Steegmann Mangrané's oeuvre as a whole, and formal connexions between disparate works. Loose inside the book are facsimiles of his annotations and sketches, offering a unique introduction to the artist's universe.

The book is a co-edition between BOM DIA BOA TARDE BOA NOITE; CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian, Lisbon; Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; and MACBA.

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## Guided tours

Sundays at 12 noon

Led by Albert Gironès, Eva Paia and Marina Ribot Pallicer

Free activity. Advanced-booking and further information at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

## MACBA Friends Thursday 11 January 2024

6.30 pm

Guided tour led by Daniel Steegmann Mangrané

Check out our exclusive guided tours for MACBA Friends at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

## CRYPISIS

April 2024

Inspired by animal strategies of camouflage and echolocation, the Institute for Postnatural Studies will present a series of experimental activities, performances and listening sessions, using sound to expand the perceptual and conceptual layers of this exhibition.

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## MACBA app

Read the captions and listen to audio descriptions of a selection of works in the exhibition on the MACBA app. You will also find full details on all our shows and activities, along with videos, curios and practical information for visiting the museum.

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## Opening hours

Monday, Wednesday,  
Thursday and Friday:  
11 am to 7.30 pm (from  
25 June to 24 September:  
10 am to 8 pm)

Closed Tuesday  
(except public holidays)

Saturday: 10 am to 8 pm

Sunday and public holidays:  
10 am to 3 pm

Free admission every Saturday,  
4 to 8 pm

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