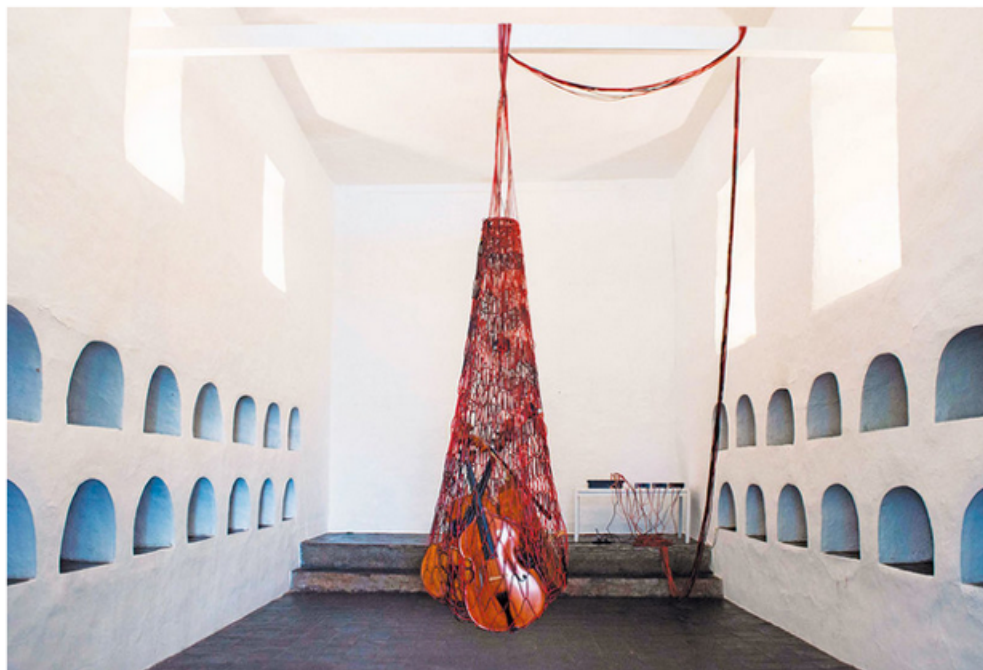




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## All Cities

Basel  
Beijing  
Berlin  
Bogotá  
Brisbane  
Chicago  
Dubai  
Hamburg  
Humlebæk  
Istanbul  
Kochi, Kerala  
London  
Los Angeles  
Lund  
Madrid  
Mexico City  
Milan  
Mumbai  
Naples  
New Delhi  
New York  
Paris  
Philadelphia  
Pittsburgh  
Rome  
Salzburg  
San Francisco  
Seoul  
Toronto  
Various Venues



Cecilia López, *RED*, 2018, audio cables, double basses, sound equipment, dimensions variable. From the 14th Bienal de Cuenca.

## 14th Bienal de Cuenca

CUENCA, ECUADOR

It is hard to determine the Bienal de Cuenca's position within the jet set of contemporary-art biennials. Not only does it take place in Ecuador, which is surrounded by far more established South American art scenes, but for the first fifteen years or so since its founding in 1987, it was a primarily national show dedicated to painting. After opening up to so-called international contemporary art in recent years, it expanded in scale and historical reach. This time around, for its fourteenth edition, the exhibition spread through dozens of venues in Cuenca, addressing the city's pre-Columbian and colonial pasts as well as its geopolitical present. The viewer was thus left with the palpable sense of an inadvertent resistance to the smooth takeover of international contemporary art, which often felt like an intrusion in institutions mostly devoted to other matters.

For the biennial's title, "*Estructuras vivientes. El arte como experiencia plural*" (Living Structures: Art as Plural Experience), chief curator Jesús Fuenmayor found inspiration in one of Lygia Clark's participatory propositions. Clark's 1969 *Estructuras vivas* (Live Structures) reduced the art object to a flimsy net of entangled rubber bands that acted as a dynamic index of sensorial mediation between the various participants pulling and stretching it. In an analogous way, Fuenmayor aimed to question the continued primacy of the object in the circulation and consecration of art and its histories.

In addition, Clark's elastic net served as a metaphor for the city itself, with the venues and artworks as knots that register social, cultural, and political tensions. The artists generally avoided the hackneyed presentation of pseudo-scholarly research so common in politicized contemporary art in favor of subtler mediations between materials, form, and context. Key to many works were issues of site specificity, unavoidable in a biennial whose main sites were a museum in a convent (Museo de las Conceptas), a former psychiatric hospital (Museo Municipal de Arte Moderno), and an archeological museum (Museo Pumapungo).

Sound pieces had a strong presence in the exhibition. Cecilia López's *RED*, 2018, at the Museo de las Conceptas, consisted of three full-size double basses dangling from the high ceiling of the former crypt in a sack of sound cables. In an accompanying performance, the artist manipulated the piece so as to produce feedback effects that counterpointed the ensemble's marked sculptural presence. The subtle shift from object to environment brought into play the materiality of memory, an issue that Ana Guedes's installation *Exodus Maps of Karl Marx's Diaries. Chapter I: Shipwreck Beach*, 2017–18, also addressed. In this work, the wreckage of the *Karl Marx*—one of dozens of ships left to rust in Santiago Beach, Angola—inspired an eerie soundtrack of overlapping ship horns and a floor piece made of wooden planks that faintly allude to the vessel's profile. Following the precedent of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, 1818–19, Guedes deployed the heterodox depiction of a shipwreck in order to expose historical and political fault lines.

Likewise, Luc Tuymans's wall painting *The Return*, 2018, reflected both on representation and mediation. Portraying a scene from the recent revival of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, with figures in lumberjack garb grouped together in a sinister trinity, it seemed to operate in multiple registers at once, alluding not only to the televised image but also to Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*, 1438–45. Anna Mazzei also invoked absent images from art history, with wooden abstract sculptures meant to prop the bodies of visitors into canonical poses such as that of the murdered Jean-Paul Marat as depicted in Jacques-Louis David's 1793 painting. Installed both at the convent and at a medical museum, Mazzei's works connected medical and religious traditions of disciplining of the body.

Outside the Museo Pumapungo, Matheus Rocha Pitta short-circuited the sacralization of ancient ruins and a very different sense of ruins as contemporary catastrophe. His work took the form of a bus parked by the Pumapungo archeological site, with plastic-wrapped stones from different periods lying on the seats and, plastered on the bus's windows, news stories of ruins resulting from disasters as different as an earthquake in Mexico and the fire that ravaged the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro last year. But perhaps it was one of Santiago Reyes's performances, in which he deftly danced to the sound of his own heartbeat while simultaneously controlling its pace, that best exemplified the ethos of an exhibition so attentive to the contradictory temporalities that constitute the present, including that of the art that seeks to intervene in it.

—Sérgio B. Martins

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