

***We Belong To Each Other* | Saelia Aparicio, Charles Benjamin, Asta Gröting, Andrés Izquierdo, Peter Klein, Maria Lira, Lin May Saeed, Maria Taniguchi, Marianna Uutinen, Ming Wong**

**Curated by Chus Martínez**

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One of the most amazing traits of art –and the virtue of artists–is giving space in love. Loving as the act of creating “a moving sea between the shores of our souls” as poet Kahlil Gibran once wrote. These are hard times to be naïf, and yet the need to stay humble, sincere and open as the conditions to safeguard freedom and possibility. We are constantly trapped in our paradoxical longing for intimacy and independence. This is a diamagnetic force– it pulls us toward togetherness and simultaneously repels us from it with a mighty magnet that can rupture a relationship and break a heart. That is why now, exactly now, exhausted and a little bit scared but mostly only anxious. It is crucial to give space in love, to be generous, to stay openhearted. It becomes an act of superhuman strength and self-transcendence. Can we do this? We cannot, or not alone. But art can.

A group exhibition is like a family reunion; an opportunity to gather works and individual ways from very different generations, with very different experiences of life, of hardship and of the hope life demands. Why the title, *We Belong To Each Other*? The ultimate expression of a bond between people is the desire to stand guard over the solitude of each other. To defy antagonism and indifference is probably the biggest task of our social futures. Continually providing opportunities to each other; rhythmically interrupting each other’s periods of feeling sad or lonely or irrelevant. The artists presented in this exhibition do not know each other; they have never worked together. And yet, they all believe that our need for togetherness exists alongside our need for separateness. They believe in art as a force that helps to find happiness in union. Despite humanity’s infinite distances, art continues to create ways in which we can grow alongside one another. Learning how to neighbor, learning to better understand cheerfulness and joy. That’s what this exhibition is all about.

Why are these artists together? And does their work have anything to do with joy? Every one of us relates things differently. Exhibitions are made to conceive and ignite relations. It all started with a feeling:

joy is a notion that affects all of life but has a philosophical and a cultural dimension that is quite unexplored. There have been certain moments in history--the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century--where the question of life, drive, passion and politics has been crucial. We are in a moment that could be read as the opposite of this collective activation of forces and desires. Even in war, we seem unable to deactivate the impulse to center our feelings and attention upon ourselves. And yes, I want to talk about joy amidst a time where self-centering is an act of protection and a tactic to retain the freedom nullified by the mean circumstances we are experiencing. Because joy appears naive to many, I want to defend it as aspirational and anti-capitalist. In direct opposition to any totalitarian impulse, joy serves the task of reconnecting and reactivating a very damaged social tissue. All these artists commemorate and repeat--through their practice--the transformative act which is becoming more and more distant: the act of being there for one another. Joy declares the need to endure and enjoy the mutually exclusive traditions, trends, and individual positions. To find a way to de-radicalize, to find a path to say goodbye to violence, to exchange and transform is joy. There is nothing utopic about it. Joy is anchored to generosity. All the artists here are generous. That's it. That's what brings them together in my mind.

Chus Martínez.

## Artists Biography

**Saelia Aparicio's** works refer to the way in which humans and nonhumans relate to one another. She rejects the modern ontological, social, and political assumption that humanity is superior to all other inhabitants of the earth. Many live now with the certainty that humans are not at the center of life, and yet, it remains difficult to establish the premises to act differently. This is where art becomes important. Aparicio's work insists on the force and the power of acting. By *acting*, Aparicio refers to a need to understand the ways we "distribute" a dynamic energy and behavior within the networks that conform our social systems. The primary function of her sculptures and installations is to act and assist humans in also acting. Aparicio is also interested in art as morphic, mutable, fluid, elastic, taking on an agency of its own. And with this agency, they aspire to become organic. They are not now, but they dream of being alive someday. In that sense, her works are about the problems the inorganic matter has and endures and the problems organic life faces. These are different problems and yet they cannot be separated. And so sculpture appears like a great ground to think about how human and nonhuman coexistence is possible, and what new relationships can be built which would break free from traditional forms of relating. Fantasy,

therefore, is as important as form, or composition, or matter. All there is, is there to relate. Once we relate to one another, we become a hybrid of togetherness. Her work welcomes this chain reaction of inter-relations that never ends and never leaves anyone or anything outside or untouched.

**Saelia Aparicio** (b.1982, Spain) lives and works in London. She completed her MA in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art in 2015. In 2019, Aparicio won Generaciones 2019, one of the most prestigious awards for emerging artists in Europe, and was commissioned by the Serpentine Gallery to make the film 'Green Shoots' for their General Ecology symposium and research project, 'The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish with Plants' in London. Her works was shown at the Kunsthau Hamburg, ICA, London and at the Liverpool Biennale. Upcoming solo exhibitions include MUSAC, León, Spain, and she is taking part of the one year program of the Open School East, Magate, UK, as leading artist.

Her multidisciplinary work dwells on ideas of the organic, establishing analogies between corporeal and social mechanisms. The body is a malleable source of wonder and horror for Aparicio in her practice that spans large-scale mural drawings and

sculptures that often feature modified found objects and mouth blown glass. Humour, and anaesthetic style inspired by comic books and cartoons, belies a concern for the bodily impact of daily life, the environment, disease and age.

The work of **Charles Benjamin** is about painting. And yet, it is not about painting. He paints and at the same time reflects on all the problems and circumstances -of culture, mostly, but also politics and identity-that affect this very medium. Can painting or the act of paint help to evaluate the imperialist and colonialist dimensions of the Western, particularly the European, culture? Most probably no, and this is sad and this sadness goes into Benjamin's work. Can painting or a painter grapple with the still big influence of Cartesian thought and treat it as complementary to other ways of thinking creating a new substance? No. Or perhaps, but there is no way to be sure, and this uncertainty goes into the work, too. Can painting--especially as a male painter--escape the annoying conceptual verbalization that surrounds the practice and which in fact neutralizes any sensorial experience? Umm... most likely not. And this thought also goes into the work. The main task of painting is to fight even if the fight does not become visible or understandable and fighting means to embrace the greatest importance of all counter-Eurocentric movements in their continuing fight

against an ongoing colonization of people's minds. Yes, I do think Charles Benjamin's work deals with this.

**Charles Benjamin** (b. 1989, Stockholm) lives and works between Birsfelden, Basel and Berlin. His work has been exhibited at Artemis Fontana, Paris, at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg and Kunsthalle Lissabon.

**Asta Gröting** has inverted the lexicon of monumental sculpture. Instead of using scale and matter to draw our attention to materiality and the presence of the objects, she conceives a new role for it: to talk about absences. An absence, an invisible dimension and a gap are not the same thing, but they are related. Sculpture is assumed to create a new presence, not to revolve around what is not there. And yet, no other media is so eloquent in showing the in-between, or showcasing atypical emotions and elements, like organs and micro-organisms that otherwise we cannot see. So much is invisible to us, that it seems worth monumentalizing this very aspect of our human condition. The abstract is a fascinating subject. It compels us in so many ways to articulate, to find words, to describe, but sculpture may relieve us from that effort by making the abstract present. What is not there, physically, is probably a source

of joy or anxiety. These days more the second. Like phantoms, gaps and absences highly distress our minds and bodies. Rendering their otherwise intangible presence is not only an artistic achievement for sculpture, but also an act of healing.

Another dimension that is present in Asta Gröting's work is intimacy, a mysterious energy that ignites a closeness that nourishes empathy. But intimacy is a delicate flower; it gets hurt easily, it decays fast. Sculpture, however, can offer a shelter, a permanent home to host and keep the sense of intimacy alive. Sculpture has the power to capture this feeling and sustain it, making it more robust and able to face the onslaughts of life. Well, this, of course, cannot happen without a serious sense of humor, since laughter and irony help the artist to refresh her efforts of keeping certain sentiments alive, again and again.

**Asta Gröting** (b. 1961, Herford) lives and works in Berlin. She has had solo exhibitions at Centre Pasquart in Biel/Bienne, Kleinplastik Triennale, Fellbach; KINDL - Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Kunstraum Dornbirn, Austria; ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologien, Karlsruhe; n.b.k., Berlin; Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz; Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; and MARTa Herford. She has participated in numerous large-scale international

exhibitions, including Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris, James-Simon-Galerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, 22nd São Paulo Biennial, the 8th and 14th Biennale of Sydney, and the 44th Venice Biennale. Gröting is a professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig.

In the last decades we have seen how the language used by a generation of younger artists in Spain has transformed. How? I would say artists, among them being **Andres Izquierdo**, have a growing interest for the properties of the materials they use. They are also interested not in scale or solidity, but in its contrary: delicacy. Andres Izquierdo insists that his works evoke the possibility of touching the sun with our eyes, sensing the ephemeral character of the materials he uses—wax for example—with our skin. Can color touch us? It can. The works have a very direct symbolic and even spiritual dimension. They are not metaphors but symbols. They introduce a symbolic language that may write the history of the future differently. The "sun" pieces, as I call them, are there to create a relationship with us. Like the real sun, their function is to produce energy, a dynamic flow between the pieces and us, between the works and all that exists around them. His language invokes poetry. It explores the ways in which our attitudes toward nature are mirrored in and

influenced by *poetry*, and not only by life sciences or the media. In the works, one can discern a resurgent vision of humanity in harmony with the rest of the natural order. To do so, we need to recall mentalities and feelings that art, poetry, meditation and spiritual reflection have historically identified, interpreted, and celebrated. Andres Izquierdo addresses a wide range of issues surrounding nature and our place in it, posing them within a cultural tradition: art and the enjoyment of art in an exhibition context. The aspiration? To find a way to illuminate the relationships between culture and wilderness, imagination and landscape, and science and poetry. These suns provide us moments of recognition with nature - moments engendered by, and in turn engendering, meditations on why love is fundamental to life.

**Andres Izquierdo** (b.1993, Madrid) is an artist and designer living and working in Madrid. His work was shown in exhibitions in London, Milan and Madrid.

Both **Peter Klein**'s biography -born as a German in Romania, educated in Bucharest and Munich and in "exile" since the eighties in Switzerland-and the subject matter of his work seem especially relevant today. Borders that do not necessarily overlap with the identities of the inhabitants of a place, cultural shifts and aesthetic research constitute

the basis of a deeply moving artistic production. Also, displacement is to blame for his almost invisible presence in the exhibition programs. Peter Klein rooted his life and his practice in a small community in the mountains of Switzerland, where he has been active as an artist and as an art teacher, though not necessarily seeking to be part of exhibition programs in the Swiss centers. For this reason, this presentation constitutes a unique opportunity to see his work while also bearing witness to a belief and respect for "the rural" that has been so present in our conversations since the pandemic.

His artistic language is simple. His work shows a strong belief in form and composition as the two main tools to structure an image. Pigment, then, reinforces the message that we normally project onto the canvas. Color means mood. Form means structure. A structure that refers to the self, to the possibility of standing, to the question of being taken care of, being hosted. Home may be a flower and the house may be a burden. Inverted forms and proportions urge us to revisit the categories and notions of belonging that, over centuries, have been imposed into us. We, as individuals and communities, share certain beliefs that hold us together. What if all we believe disappears one day? We know this is the reality of many millions of individuals whose homes have

vanished, their lives and experiences swept up into another community's dreams.

**Peter Klein** (b. 1953, Schässburg / Sighișoara, Romania) moved to Bucharest in 1968, where he attended the Institutul de Arte Plastice Nicolae Grigorescu. In 1973 he emigrated with his sister and parents to West Germany. He studied painting with Günter Fruhtrunk at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich and graduated as "Meisterschüler".

Subsequently, he completed a pedagogical training with a focus on psychology and philosophy. In 1984 Peter Klein moved to Switzerland with his wife Ursula Klein. They settled in the Valais mountain village of Ernen in 1990 with their children Lena, Flora and Emil Michael Klein, where Peter Klein continued his artistic work until he went blind in 2019.

In the late 1980s, Peter Klein was head of the painting studio at the Stadttheater in Bern, where he trained theater painters. During his time in Valais, he was a teacher of design and art at the St. Ursula Mittelschule in Brig.

Peter Klein exhibited his works rarely, the few exceptions took place in Kassel in the 1980s and in 2014 together with Flora and Emil Michael Klein in the Kunstverein Oberwallis, among others. *Blumen*

*blühen, wo bist du?* at der TANK was his first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland.

I have always been fascinated by artists who painted stones -Kurt Schwitters, Andrea Büttner, **Maria Lira Marques**. It is difficult to explain the reason, but I assume the simple gesture of painting directly on the surface of a stone activates this fantastic time dimension possessed by geology -the stone-and the assumed eternity of art. Two times meet so simply, just by a hand painting on a stone. But they also bring closer those prehistoric engraved, or scratched elements (signs, figures, writings) on rocky surfaces in open-air rocks, caves, decorated menhir, boulders, and slabs. Suddenly, we feel we do understand what was in the minds of prehistoric populations. Aboriginal, indigenous and first nation people master the languages that the stones speak. Indigenous peoples of Brazil have used stones to help with strength, health, and good luck. They have created a language that speaks to dreams and spirits through stones. These stones then serve the purpose of attracting good spirits, warding off evil ones, and ushering in success and luck.

Maria Lira has been making her works in clay on paper, clay that she learned to collect in the ravines around her, like these stones here. Raw

materials in her surrounding areas nourish a work that truly takes its force and matter from earth. Her full name is Maria Lira Marques Borges, and she is heiress and neighbor of the Maxakalí, a nation of those parts of the northeast of Minas Gerais, where she grew up. She mixes the clay from the riverbank with other natural materials, rehearsing very ancient techniques of indigenous and African origins. She discovered her vocation for art in the 70s, and ever since, she has been creating a mythology and a universe made of music, drawing, busts and masks, stones, animals, aimed to tell of a culture and a place; aimed to illustrate this culture through her thoughtfully chosen materials. This mythology does not only reflect the perspectives, the differences, and the suffering of certain cultures and communities due to the abuse of others. It reflects on what we all may lose together, on the violence of wanting certain forms of life to stop existing. It is essential to continue the fight. Together, Lira and her work encapsulate this notion.

**Maria Lira Marques** (b. 1945, Araçuaí) lives and works in Araçuaí. She developed her interest in ceramics and several handicrafts when she was a child watching her mother, Odília Borges Nogueira, building nativity scenes in raw clay. Later, she learned from her neighbor, known as Joana Poteira, techniques for extracting and baking clay. She is

part of a long and fruitful line of artists from Vale do Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais.

Maria Lira held her first exhibition in 1975 at Sesc-Pompeia, in São Paulo, and, since then, has exhibited in several national and international institutions in Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, France, and the United States.

I don't know about anyone as committed as **Lin May Saaed** to the world and the rights of animals. Many have commented in the past about her choice of materials, since she has been realizing a large number of pieces in expanded Styrofoam. You know, that white plastic used in so many circumstances from insulation to packaging. I cannot imagine a better redemption for a material so hard or impossible to recycle that to constantly find a way to keep it far from nature and the Oceans. In this exhibition we have two versions of the same piece, a Pangolin. One is made of Styrofoam, but it has a counterpart made in bronze. A pangolin? Yes, do you remember? We blamed them for Covid.. Between January 2016 and December 2020 a total of 696 pangolins were screened for the presence of viral RNA from five zoonotic viral families using primers specifically designed for pangolin coronaviruses. All specimens from pangolins and civets sampled along the wildlife supply chains between February 2017 and July 2018, and tested with conventional

PCR assays designed to detect flavivirus, paramyxovirus, filovirus, coronavirus, and orthomyxovirus RNA were negative. Her work nourishes itself from ancient storytelling to the new propagation of ideas, narratives and rumors that affect animals but also our problematic coexistence with them. Her politics trespass all her choices—from materials to the subjects—in order to create a context where we see but we also are able to report to the animals. Like here. We are finally meeting a pangolin. Most of us are ignorant to the fact that a pangolin is a mammal, that it mostly eats ants, that it is the most trafficked mammal in the world, that they are in high demand in China and Vietnam. Eight species exist, and despite being protected, are broadly hunted. Why? Primarily because of the use of their scales in traditional medicine and folk remedies.

And so, her work observes and gives form to these cultural circumstances that determine our behavior towards nature. A form that is precise and very personal, realistic and yet the result of a very personal investigation on how to arrive at a visual language able to make each and every creature she creates unique. A visual language that is intended to gain a social and a political eloquence of the ethical and practical task of “reworlding” (of learning how to relate differently to the world)—as Donna Haraway says.

**Lin May Saeed** (b. 1973, Würzburg) lives and works in Berlin. She graduated in 2001 from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where she studied under Luise Kimme and Tony. Her work was subject to solo shows internationally, most recently at The Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, US and Studio Voltaire, London. She has been part of group shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, Museo Castello di Rivoli, Turino, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, mumok, Vienna and Bergen Kunsthall as well as participated in documenta 13.

**Maria Taniguchi's** works, even if very conceptual, embody a formal reflection and an emotional relationship to the history of craftsmanship in the Philippines. The works selected here are part of a series she initiated more than a decade ago, in 2008. These works take the form of large-format canvases covered in a conscientious and exact arrangement of hand-painted bricks. The making of these works is a reflection of labor. Actually, a reflection that rehearses hard, mechanical labor. It is this exercise that provides a parameter and a root to her artistic practice. Taniguchi is making art, working, understanding the materials and the perils of the practices that Capitalism performs and art also repeats. Systems and structures do not exist in isolation; they mirror each other. Painting does not exist outside this system of

labor. But it is also true that tradition and method plays an important role in her work, a different tradition and method than what the work of Maria Lara refers to. And it is this that we should be attentive to, to the nature of these differences that exist, to the politics of these methodical processes of creating the brick paintings as an objective of the work. If painting a stone almost immediately recalls an ancient and magical world, painting a brick does not. It refers to time, to tiresome concentration, to exhaustion and mechanical processes that make it almost impossible for the mind to wander freely. And yet, each of these works are so different when observed in detail, like every particle that participates in life is different or every drop in the rain is different. It is this that she explores- the magnificent difference that emerges even if it seems impossible, the energy that defies every effort to control and exploit life. Her work says simplicity is not simple at all and it is not naive either. It wears many faces and it stands for a host of factors. Her work offers us the possibility to engage in a deep observation about the long tradition of designing systems to control in the name of perfection and efficiency.

**Maria Taniguchi** (b. 1981, Dumaguete City) lives and works in Manila, Philippines. She is the winner of the 2015 Hugo Boss Asian Art Award. In 2018 she

participated in the Gwangju Biennale and the Biennale of Sydney, Australia. Selected recent projects include Musée national d'art moderne - Centre Pompidou, Paris; 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane; New Sensorium, ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologien, Karlsruhe; HIWAR: Conversations in Amman, Amman; and Don't You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics, Museum of Contemporary Art (MHKA), Antwerp.

**Marianna Uutinen's** paintings have one common trait: intensity. An intensity that reveals itself through the surface of her paintings. One wonders, was this intensity deep, deeper than the surface and it just emerged now? Or is this intensity a surface intensity that activates itself through the light and the sun and the rest of the world and our presence? I would say that it is a surface intensity, one so powerful that disrupts the very skin of the works, one that is affected by all the conditions existing outside and reveals a life of color as we never have seen before. She is an artist intensely invested in the need to render what one experiences and yet this always remains abstract, like experience itself. The three works present here are marvelous in the literal sense of the word since they are trying to capture the instantaneity of light on canvas and this, is impossible since can only be done once. And yet,

through the intense color and energy of the paintings we do believe that they are constantly changing and reacting to light. They are. We are too reacting to them, trying to also absorb all they have to tell about the energy they perceive. Her works seem to point to the fact that in seeing we see one marvel after another, but we are unable to capture or even understand these constant dynamic phenomena that constitute the weather, the winds, love or just life.

**Marianna Uutinen** (b. 1961, Finland) lives and works in Berlin. Uutinen has exhibited at numerous institutions throughout Europe including Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg; Weserburg Museum of Modern Art, Bremen; the Moderna Museet, Malmö; Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; Ludwig Museum, Koblenz; Malmö Konsthall; and Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. In 1997 Uutinen represented Finland at the Venice Biennale.

**Ming Wong** works expresses its energy through many different languages: painting, performance, video. re-enactment and the embodiment of more than one roles is a characteristic of a work interested and curious about the question: how many perspectives can we take, actually? Now, that the polarization of individual positions is becoming the new normal, it seems so relevant to ask, how does it feel to feel the world through the skins of others. Here

you will find a rainbow. Rainbows have had a special life in times of crisis. The rainbow is a central motive in a very popular book: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum. It tells a story about a young girl who gets lost in the mystical land of Oz. Even if written for children The Wizard of Oz was perceived by adults –at the time and even later–as a parable on populism. The story was an elaborate allegory –with its pots of gold at the end of a rainbow-- for the populist movement and a commentary on the ongoing debates over the gold-standard monetary policy of the times. The cyclone that carries Dorothy to the Land of Oz represents the forces of an economic and political upheaval that transforms the world for the worse. And so our rainbow it is also a marker of a world still at the end of a path of animals that symbolize peace –the doves on the canvas of Charles Benjamin–and the pangolin and its link with covid.

**Ming Wong** (b.1971) lives and works in Berlin. Wong represented Singapore at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 with the solo presentation Life of Imitation, which was awarded a special mention. He has had solo exhibitions at leading institutions worldwide, including Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo; Singapore Art Museum; and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. Wong has been included in numerous international

biennials, including the Venice Biennale; Performa,  
New York; Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary  
Art, Brisbane; Sydney Biennial; Shanghai Biennale;  
Lyon Biennale; and the Liverpool Biennial.