

Julia Isídrez

Mud is Everything

09.10.26 – 10.01.27

Julia Isídrez's practice exists as neither a beginning nor an end. Isídrez is not the first in her lineage to bring new ideas and approaches into Guaraní ceramics, nor is her work the culmination or completion of change. It exists now, in this specific moment, as a living practice, and all living things grow and change with time.

Born in Itá, Paraguay in 1967, Julia Isídrez was raised in a lineage of ceramic practice that stretches back generations, passed from mothers to daughters. Some of the Guaraní techniques that she works with are ancient and are amongst only a few practices that can be traced back to pre-Hispanic times. Ñai'ũpo - a

method used by communities in Itá, Tobatí and Yaguaró, and recognised by UNESCO in 2025 - involves an intimate knowledge of local clay to select the appropriate material. Once gathered, techniques like colombín (coil building) are used to create structure and shape the clay, then hands or a special tool called a tacuara refine the forms. The tacuara is often handed down between generations and is a physical symbol of the knowledge passed from mother to daughter, teacher to apprentice. Once a form has been realised, it is then smoked in outdoor wood fired kilns using different wood and material such as mango leaves to achieve a specific surface quality.

Guaraní techniques have persisted through time because they have remained deeply rooted in a way of being with the world that does not make

binary distinctions such as nature and culture, human and nonhuman, or modern and traditional. The concept of nhandereko (our way of being) captures an approach to existence that is more-than-human - a network of connections between people and other forms of life, ancestors and land - nature as culture.

Colonialism, Franciscan and Jesuit missions and Western schools of thought have all sought out distinctions that separate, they have attempted to define what is art or craft, with craft often being labelled under categorisations that are considered subordinate such as ‘traditional’, ‘rural’ or ‘folk art’. For a long time, and in many cases still across the world, ceramic practices (including Guaraní) have been categorised in this way. The Museo del Barro, in Asunción, has been vital in asserting artists like Julia Isídrez and her

mother Juana Marta Rodas as artists, challenging the modern figure of the artist as individual genius and instead placing emphasis on the transmission of intergenerational knowledge.

The museum emerged in 1979 during the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner - a time when the cultural institutions in Paraguay promoted an image of national identity that was homogenised. Museo del Barro resisted this image, and the pressures of external influences to 'develop' and 'modernise', by signalling to an alternative cultural understanding.

It is not possible to speak about Julia Isídrez's practice without also looking to the practice of her mother and teacher, Juana Marta Rodas. Their practices should also not be understood as being individual in the sense that they are separate or unique to both artists as individuals,

for they often worked together. Historically, many of the ceramic objects created in communities were utilitarian objects such as cántaros (water jugs) used in daily life. Over time, due to the impacts of colonialism and external influence, and the rise in the use of metal, plastic or glass, the use of clay in producing objects declined. Rodas, having learned from her own mother, still produced utilitarian objects – though sometimes decorated with zoomorphic motifs – while at the same time developing a series of forms that were less functional or recognisable. She described these works as dreams.

It is alongside Rodas that Isídrez learned and developed her own forms liberated from utility. The fantastical creatures of her ceramics are chimeras, unattainable beings of Isídrez's imagination and dreams – they sometimes have

many heads, exaggerated rotund forms and great gaping mouths - yet they are also of this world. Made from the mud and all the memories it holds of the earth and the entangled lives it holds.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the support of:

Headline Supporters: Gomide&Co, Olney Gleason, and Jessica Silverman. The Julia Isídrez Exhibition Circle: ANTESALA / Flavia Nespatti, Hanneli Rupert and the Embassy of the Republic of Paraguay to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The accompanying publication *Julia Isídrez Mud* was generously supported by Fundación Itaú.

Exhibition graphics by Waste Studio.

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to all the lenders who have supported us in bringing together this selection of Julia Isídrez's works: Gomide&Co, Olney Gleason, Jessica Silverman, Ary Perez, Fernanda Feitosa and Heitor Martins, Isabel Ralston, Livia Debbane, Jorge Enciso, Cleusa Garfinkel, Elisa Mofarrej and those lenders who wish to remain anonymous; to the contributors to the accompanying publication and live programme, whose ideas and research will offer new viewpoints into Isídrez's practice: Damián Cabrera, María Wills Londoño, Katya García-Antón, Ticio Escobar and Museo Del Barro, Dr. Sofia Gotti, Sophia Mena, Ruby Daley, Dr. Lara Pucci, Irina Razumovskaya and Matthew Chesney; and to Felipe Mujica, Shweta Venkat and Loreto Solis for bringing the publication to life. And finally, a very special thanks to the entire team at Nottingham Contemporary.

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If you would like to use any alternative forms of interpretation, we have a range of accessible versions on our Access Wall beside Reception or alongside the wall text in the exhibition.

RELATED EVENTS

WALKTHROUGHS

Wed 21 Oct, 1pm Curators' Walkthrough

Join Nottingham Contemporary's curators for a tour of our autumn exhibitions.

Wed 2 Dec, 1pm

With Dr. Sofia Gotti, Lecturer in Curating at the Courtauld Institute.

Wed 16 Dec, 1pm

With Sophia Mena, Somos The Podcast founder and host.

12.30 Talks

12.30pm every Tue, Thu, Sat, and Sun, starting Tue 20 Oct

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our current exhibitions.

WORKSHOPS

Sat 31 Oct, 2pm Workshop on speculative design histories by Pina and Biblioteka

An interdisciplinary workshop exploring the design histories of exhibitions and libraries as worldview machines.

Sat 21 Nov & Sun 13 Dec, 1pm

Unearthing: a workshop in story and clay by Ruby Daley

Explore your personal histories and our collective dreams of a life lived closer to clay in this hands-on making workshop.

PERFORMANCES

Fri 13, Sat 14 & Sun 15 Nov, 12pm-2pm & 3pm-5pm

Bar Tango by Beni Bosetto

Join us for this new production exploring the corporeality of love through stage objects and a surreal choreography in which tango dancers

inhabit costumes inspired by animals, plants, and minerals.

CONTEMPORARY X ART HISTORIES

A collaborative strand of programming between the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Contemporary.

Wed 25 Nov, 3pm

Ways of Seeing, Learning and Making: With art historian, Dr. Lara Pucci (University of Nottingham), in conversation with ceramic sculptor, Irina Razumovskaya (Royal College of Art).

Wed 9 Dec, 3pm

Ways of Seeing, Learning and Making: With Backlit Gallery Co-Director, Matthew Chesney.

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here:

