



Clarissa Tossin, *Ch'u Mayaa (Maya Blue)*, 2017, HD video, color, sound, 17 minutes 56 seconds.

## Clarissa Tossin

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Based in Los Angeles for the past decade, the Brazilian artist Clarissa Tossin makes sculptures and videos in which she places architecture and site at the center of investigations into exchanges that are at once cultural and economic. On first glance, Tossin's recent show "Maya Blue"—featuring sculptures from the series "The Mayan," 2017–18, and "*Encontro das Águas*" (Meeting of Waters), 2016–18—could easily have been mistaken for an unorthodox post-Minimalist display of anthropological artifacts. In *New Grammar of Form #1*, 2018, from the latter series, for instance, woven baskets in the style of the Amazonian Baniwa indigenous tradition, but made from Amazon.com delivery boxes, were laid on the floor or hung on the wall. Suspended from the ceiling in soft netting, inside or next to these baskets, were true-to-scale terra-cotta sculptures of commodities such as Coca-Cola bottles, iPhones, and a printer. The series as a whole refers to the confluence of the Solimões and Negro Rivers by the city of Manaus in Brazil. The same waters that move these products, which are made in local manufacturing plants, nurture places where local craft traditions such as pottery making and basket weaving still survive. Tossin learned from the internet how to produce the baskets

in the Baniwa style, and in the same spirit she intertwines and comments on the opposing realities of site- and community-specific indigenous artisanship and today's globalized cultures.

In *Coatlicue*, 2018, a sheet of fake snakeskin was draped over a wooden brace attached to the wall. Over this faux skin lay a silicone sheet with imprints of decorative elements taken from the Mayan—the ornate former movie palace in Los Angeles that lends its name to the series the work is part of. A long braid made from synthetic hair presided over the top of both sheets. Beneath them, on the floor, two plaster feet pointing left and right were dyed to look like terracotta. Tossin's choice of materials echoes the pastiche nature of the iconic LA theater, while addressing the appropriation and decontextualization of Mayan culture and style. The ensemble resembles a totemic body, presumably that of the eponymous ancient goddess Coatlicue. This was not the only representation of body parts in the show—hands protruded from the wall in *Glifo Introductorio Modificado* (Modified Introductory Glyph), 2018, while the silicone that the artist used in several other works in the series resembled skin. Silicone sheets serve as a metaphor for the porous give-and-take the artist establishes in these works, reminding one how, independent of era, people and the societies they form are the greatest vehicles of transmission, responsible for a culture's perpetuation or demise.

Set on the grounds of another Mayan Revival building in Los Angeles, Frank Lloyd Wright's 1921 Hollyhock House, the video *Ch'u Mayaa* (Maya Blue), 2017, was shown on a big screen in a separate area at the back of the gallery. Just over seventeen minutes long, it depicts a dancer—dressed in a leopard-print bodysuit and sneakers, at times also wearing a translucent tunic in tones of yellow and blue—performing a dance based on poses and gestures taken from ancient Mayan artifacts. Here, the iconic American edifice plays the role of an ancient Mayan building perfectly. Tossin thus shines a light on the underacknowledged modern appropriation of pre-Colombian forms. Blue is the hue of the most enduring Mayan pigment, and under its aegis Tossin's exhibition encapsulated the enduring dynamics of power and appropriation at play in the development of culture.

— Camila Belchior