

A photograph of a woman lying on her back in a field of purple flowers. She is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved dress with a ruffled, textured bodice. Her arms are crossed over her chest, and her legs are bent at the knees. The background is a lush green field with some trees and a path. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an outdoor setting.

nara roesler

brígida baltar
(1959–2022)
to make the
world a shelter
nara roesler new york

opening
march 9, 2023



**brígida baltar (1959–2022):
to make the world a shelter**
luis pérez oramas

Brígida Baltar's untimely passing last year changed the impetus of this exhibition, transforming it into an elegiac celebration of her unique oeuvre. Arguably one of the finest Brazilian artists, Baltar kept herself devoted to uncompromised poetics, embracing her life and body with her aesthetic ambition to grasp the world as an extension of her intimacy. Dealing with the notion of shelter, the nostalgia of both home and origin as grounds for ceaseless metamorphosis, her work was as eloquent as subtle in her will to exist against the backdrop of a futile culture of hyper-exposure. Subtilitas (subtleness) and long-lasting processes, meditations on the entanglement between human body and nature; interiority and intimacy of domestic actions transformed into poetic acts; emphasis on the existential temporality of art; repeated, stubborn trials to grasp the ungraspable, the fleeting matter of worldly accidents (mist, dust, fog, salty sea air) that she kept in pristine and uncanny crystal-like objects; longing for her untrammelled body are constituents of a unique, unparalleled oeuvre surely destined to become among the most significant artistic legacies at the passage between XXth and XXIth Century Brazilian art.

cover *Casa de abelha* [Bee house], 2002

Brígida Baltar's portrait, 2000s.

Brígida Baltar centered her initial research on the longing experience of home. While living in a house located in the Botafogo district in Rio de Janeiro, she accomplished her seminal works in the early 1990s: notably through the analogy between home and honeycomb as a generative matrix for nourishment and life, leading her towards small performative interventions that were photographed, featuring her own body. These initial actions unfolded into an encompassing body of work as she was forced to abandon the house.

A major anchoring repertoire of actions and objects followed, mostly based on the dust collected from the briquets of the original home. Baltar produced countless drawings on paper, site-specific installations, and sculptures using the dust drawn from the briquets of her former house. It was, therefore, a first step within an embracing poetics focusing on marking the trace of her home into the larger, outer world, as if by disseminating the material dust that constituted its solid presence the artist could signal the possibility of an expanded field for the notion of shelter.

To make the world a shelter, to find the imprint of her body in the unlimited outer space of the world became Baltar's primary poetic impulsion, the matter of her constant building of fables and visual wonders. Reliquary-like tactics unfolded allowing the artist to cancel the nostalgia of origins—the lost state of happiness—by

disseminating the multiplying collected fragments of her home as matter for her art, transforming those relics in diverse and different bodies, through an unlimited exercise of poetic transfiguration, a 'conceptualism of affections' as labeled by curator Márcio Doctors. Brígida Baltar thus devoted herself 'to the search of a kind of ideal space, a desacralized post-paradise, a stage of action and motion events (...) a place with no going back, pure singularities with no return', in the words of her peer artist and friend Ricardo Basbaum.

The centrality of her body potentiated her oeuvre as an encompassing, almost universal presence of femaleness. Assuming the fullness of mimesis, Brígida Baltar approached all media—video, installation, photograph, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, ready-made, textile—in order to experience the unlimited possibilities of associations and analogies, delving into a full repertoire of hybridity and collision of forms, notably in ceramics, weavings, drawings and sculptures: crustacean-like shell shapes take the rough and sublime appearance of body parts; an actress drags across the sand as a crab, sheltering herself underneath the earth; carefully sculpted accumulations of dust adopted the shape of the mountains surrounding the landscape where she lived, resembling the 'morros' (hills) of Rio de Janeiro, etc.

Guy Brett, a key author on Brazilian modern art during the XXth Century, recognized Brígida Baltar's work as one of the most significant artistic bodies in the wake of Helio Oiticica's and Lygia Clark's legacies. For Brett, indeed, Baltar brought back the notion of poetic shelter (Clark) to the realm of natural life, framing it within the very limits of everyday experiences. Moreover, also following Brett, Baltar's entire oeuvre echoes Oiticica's notion of Mundo-Abrigo (World-Shelter), significantly accomplished through a voluntary strategy of laterality, consistent with the artist's will 'to criticize the contemporary world of productivity surplus, which allows little room for daydreaming, for contemplation...'

Having gone at the end of her life through the struggle of illness and the violence of medications, Brígida Baltar continued to map her body in the world as much as she was, inevitably, experiencing the world being mapped on her own body. Her last weavings depicting the abstract shapes of blues on her skin are moving testimonies of the power of art to overcome the limitations of existence, elegies of her body's glare and poignant manifestoes of her poetic readiness to accept the wholeness of living. In her own terms, 'a whirlwind of desires': abstract residues of life, silent music for a glorious wound.



Brígida Baltar
Feminino, 1994
closet and earth
190 x 90 x 70 cm
74.8 x 35.4 x 27.6 in



'I performed intimate actions in the house I lived in, using materials like bricks, mortar, or paint peels, during the 1990s. I opened holes in the wall and stored drips in glass jars. The house became a laboratory for my work that was being formed through reflections on the body, memory, and identity constructions. At this moment, I started to extend such experiences into nature, incorporating its own architecture. Thus, I moved furniture to the gardens and hung large pieces of raw cotton from a tree, a work I called *Skin*. I placed a used dresser directly on the earth and put soil all over it, inside, between drawers and crevices. There it remained for a while and was photographed. For me, it became a fertile place, a place to house seeds. I saw the earth as an element that had always been related to its primitive qualities and feminine polarities.'



Feminino, 1994/2021
closet and earth
edition of 3
190 x 90 x 70 cm
74.8 x 35.4 x 27.6 in

Torre [detail], 1995
photograph
9 pieces of 11 x 7.5 in
9 pieces of 28 x 19 cm



‘When Guy Brett says that connections can be made between my work and that of Clark and Oiticica, it goes like this: (...) ‘Such connections refer especially to the notions of dwelling and habitation... Each of them [the projects], metaphorized a different experience of being in the world, alone or in the company of others, as a constructive core of sensory pleasure, contemplation, and creativity, proposing a kind of mythical place for feelings, for action, for creating things and building one's own inner cosmos.’ For me, this description fits well with the Tower Project, which I created in 1996. While using the bricks of the house, I built a space to exist in. A space of recollection, of renunciation, of reflection, a kind of laboratory for the self. The *tower-space*, is also a temple, an alley, and a cave, on top of the mountain, or in the middle of the desert. A space to create and to make things happen’.*



Torre, 1995
photograph
9 pieces of 11 x 7.5 in
9 pieces of 28 x 19 cm

From the mid-1990s, Brígida Baltar turned to her own house as a source of inspiration, finding in it the thematic and materials to develop a body of work that she would continue working with for decades to come. From her home, the artist experienced and developed ideas around the house's structure, its relationship with the body, inhabitation, and intimacy, engaging with and employing the building's physical elements to materialize her propositions.

Torre [detail], 1995
photograph
9 pieces of 11 x 7.5 in
9 pieces of 28 x 19 cm



‘When I employ the brick’s dust in my work, it’s like a process of deconstruction. I like the idea of transforming the rigid matter of a brick into something so malleable that it could be taken as something else and also go anywhere. A mobile house, able to travel around’.*



Home [Casa], 1997/2013
240 glass bottles filled
with brick dust on wood box
120 x 68 x 7 cm
47.2 x 26.8 x 2.8 in



Brígida Baltar at her
home-studio, 2000s



In works such as *Horta da Casa*, from 1996, the artist planted herbs and spices into bricks. Following this process, Brígida Baltar began to investigate concepts of disappearance, or dematerialization by challenging the concept of owning a home as a fixed, stable, localized matter.



A horta da casa, 1996
spices and herbs
planted on 13 bricks
variable dimensions



Baltar eventually left her original house in 2005, taking bricks and brick dust with her, which she continued to use in her works for years to follow. Using the dust from the bricks, she created drawings of vegetables, plants, landscapes and parts of the female body.



Small almond tree, 2009
brick dust and
PVA glue on paper
38 x 27,5 cm
15 x 10.8 in



each work
Untitled, 2020
brick powder and white glue
29 x 21 cm
11.4 x 8.3 in

Floresta vermelha, 2006
brick dust and PVA glue
drawing on wall
500 cm | 196.9 in (length)

exhibition view
Um céu entre paredes
[*An Indoor Heaven*], 2006
Firstsite, Colchester, UK





Untitled, 2009
brick dust and
PVA glue on paper
32 x 24 cm
12.6 x 9.4 in



Untitled, 2009
brick dust and
PVA glue on paper
32 x 24 cm
12.6 x 9.4 in

'I put myself very freely in relation to the different mediums. At times, photography, as well as film or an image in general is not enough for me, and it's time to dive into the material, into a certain need to work with my hands, to produce objects and to draw. The drawings also form images, and even when abstract, they are impregnated with texture of graphite, the grains of wax pencil, the flaws, the washes of the nankin". Such is the drive, the work goes on opening its paths, even opposing ones at times, and somewhere there will be an encounter, an intertwinement'.*



Untitled, 2009
brick dust and
PVA glue on paper
30 x 23 cm | 11.8 x 9.1 in



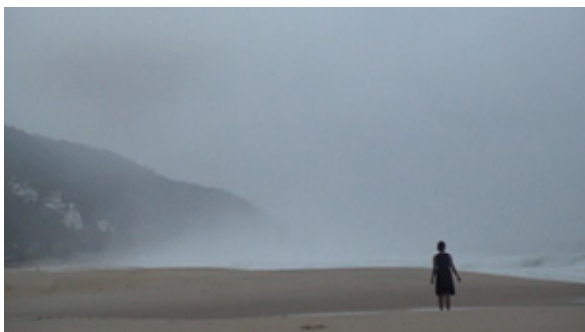
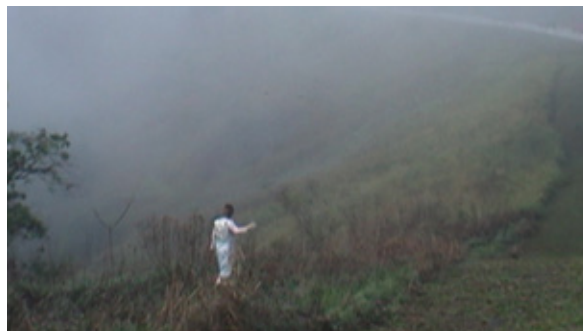
exhibition view
Um céu entre paredes
[An Indoor Heaven], 2006
Firstsite, Colchester, UK

molded brick dust and
brick dust in floor fissures





A coleta da neblina
[Mist Collecting], 1996
action photographic record
40 x 60 cm | 15.7 x 23.6 in



The experience in the house, of selecting, storing materials, keeping dust and leaking water inside glasses, is extended to nature. In *Coletas*, Baltar attempts to capture and collect transient natural substances such as mist, dew and any air humidity in small flasks. Special clothes and recipients are made for this action, which is presented through photographs, videos, sounds and drawings.

Coletas [stills], 2002
DVCAM, mini DV and 16 mm
transferred to SD, color, audio
edition of 10 + 2 AP
15'17" + 12 fragments



A coleta da neblina
[Mist Collecting], 1996
action photographic record
40 x 60 cm | 15.7 x 23.6 in



'A work may generate a series of actions before I really feel that I finished the project. For instance, the first time I collected mist was in 1994. The last photographs were taken in 2005, eleven years later. Surely there were other different works in between, but I needed to keep on collecting. On one hand I felt I could go deeper (...) on the other hand, there was also something experimental that naturally demanded a time to live the work, that is, I would go to the mountains to collect mist and always returned'.*

A coleta da neblina
[*Mist Collecting*], 1996
action photographic record
40 x 60 cm | 15.7 x 23.6 in



A coleta da neblina
[Mist Collecting], 1996
action photographic record
40 x 60 cm | 15.7 x 23.6 in





A coleta da maresia, 2002
photography
edition of 5
100 x 150 cm | 39.4 x 59.1 in



Casa de Abelha [Bee House] unfolded from the artist's research on the concepts of house and shelter. Bee hives were of great interest to the artist, since these structures serve as housing and as means of producing food at once. In this action, Baltar relates the concepts of body and house by making use of a garment made of honey-colored fabric and sewn through a technique known as 'bee house'. This action took place in her house

and in nature, and can be seen through photos and videos that narrate this fable in which honey plays a fundamental role. Brígida Baltar presented the work on the occasion of the 2002 São Paulo International Biennial.

Bee house [*Casa de abelha*], 2002
photograph
40 x 60 cm | 15.7 x 23.6 in



In the mid-2010s the body, always present in Baltar's work, gains a different treatment in response to her lived experiences. The resulting works include a set of embroidery pieces of bruises, blemishes, stray hairs, and sores. In this context, the chimerism of plants germinated in bronze sculptures and embroidery pieces of composite species pick up on the hybridity apparent in previous works. Although they refer to the body, the works reveal delicate textile abstractions and are sewn in very fine lines.



A quimera das plantas
[os cogumelos e a
batata-doce], 2016
embroidery on fabric
60 x 41 cm
23.6 x 16.1 in





Chimera is a legendary mythological monster that combines parts of different living beings into a single organism. The concept, however, has applications in several other fields, among them in oncological medicine, where organ transplants and structures cause parts of different bodies to combine into a single one. Thus, the artist sought to understand this idea in a broader sense, basing herself on a bone marrow transplant which she had to undergo. The artist embroiders vegetal forms onto linen fabric, creating compositions where two different species make up the same organism.

A quimera das plantas
[os cogumelos e a o coração
da bananeira], 2016
embroidery on fabric
60 x 41 cm
23.6 x 16.1 in



This work series, also produced in 2016, focuses on the skin as a wrapping and shelter for the human body, protecting it from the outside world. Both in her works on fabric and in her sculptural works, Baltar does not perceive skin as a smooth surface, but rather as something discontinuous and imperfect, that may also be subject to ephemerality.

An example of how an external action may affect the skin, is a hematoma, which constitutes the focus of this body of work. In order to illustrate this in the form of embroidery, the artist sews them onto strips of fabric on a human scale, embroidering fields of intense color or pronounced textures and thicknesses, which contrast with the rest of the surface. Later, she explored the idea through sculptures, dyeing body parts in different colors, evoking both different tactile sensations and the coexistence of two chromatic fields within a single body.



Os hematomas, 2016
embroidery on fabric
75 x 46 cm
29.5 x 18.1 in





‘Embroidery is a very recent element in my research. The desire to embroider has been with me for some time, especially because embroidery has a different time of execution and I needed to experience this manual work along with time, which is related to the time of treatment, of waiting, of healing, and to all this relationship with waiting and waiting that I have experienced.’

Os hematomas, 2016
embroidery on fabric
74 x 42 cm
29.1 x 16.5 in





Os hematomas da planta, 2016
embroidery on fabric
73,5 x 77,5 x 7,5 cm
28.9 x 30.5 x 3 in





Minha pele sua pele, 2017
embroidery on fabric
40 x 40 cm
15.7 x 15.7 in



Minha pele sua pele, 2017
embroidery on fabric
40 x 40 cm
15.7 x 15.7 in



Minha pele sua pele, 2017
embroidery on fabric
40 x 40 cm
15.7 x 15.7 in



Minha pele sua pele, 2022
bronze with brown patina
edition of 3 + 2 AP
7 x 52 x 40 cm
2.8 x 20.5 x 15.7 in





'In thinking about the sea, and about the word chimera, I discovered that in the depths of the sea all beings are hybrid.'



As lambidas do mar, 2017
glazed ceramic
19 x 33 x 74 cm
7.5 x 13 x 29.1 in

'It was through fragments—pieces
of deception—that I discovered
organic forms and learnt about the
power of incompleteness.'



Cacos da decepção, 2018
glazed ceramic
56 pieces of variable dimensions





In reliving her childhood memories, Baltar remembers strolling across Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro looking for perfect shells whilst she remembers finding mostly fragments. It took little for her to realize what she then saw as the power of the incompleteness of organic elements. Thus, Brígida's shells, dyed in deep colors, take on markedly organic forms, as if they were themselves living organisms. Languid, they often resemble parts of bodies, especially female ones, such as tongues, breasts, and genitalia. Just as the body is the main 'shelter' of the human being, the shell also serves as shelter for many marine beings, and it is through this perspective that the artist thinks and relates these elements.

Coletor de mar, 2018
enamelled ceramic
edition of 5 + 3 AP
9 x 11 x 48 cm
3.5 x 4.3 x 18.9 in





A Carne do Mar I, 2018
enamelled ceramic
34 x 25 x 28 cm
13.4 x 9.8 x 11 in



O berro da concha, 2017
glazed ceramic
22 x 25 x 30 cm
8.7 x 9.8 x 11.8 in



Irmãs, 2017
enamelled ceramic
49,5 x 45 x 19 cm
19.5 x 17.7 x 7.5 in





Sob o sol, 2017
enameled ceramics
27 x 18 x 20 cm
10.6 x 7.1 x 7.9 in



Segredos do mar, 2021
bronze with silver bath
55 x 35 cm | 21.7 x 13.8 in

Segredos do mar, 2021
bronze with silver bath
74 x 42 cm | 29.1 x 16.5 in



Segredos do mar, 2021
bronze with silver bath
68 x 39 cm | 26.8 x 15.4 in



brígida baltar

b. 1959, rio de janeiro, brazil

d. 2022, rio de janeiro, brazil

The work of Brígida Baltar spanned across a wide range of mediums, which includes video, performance, installation, drawing, and sculpture. According to curator Lisette Lagnado, through this practice, ‘the artist strives to return to a pre-industrial, childlike and primitive narration.’¹ Baltar's artistic production began in the 1990s with the so-called small poetic gestures, developed in her studio-home in Botafogo, a neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro.

During almost ten years, the artist collected items of domestic life such as the water dripping through small cracks on her roof, or dust falling from the bricks of her walls. This act of collecting subsequently expanded into the streets, giving birth to the *Coletas* series, an attempt of capturing mist, dew and ocean breeze—an ultimately impossible or rather, intangible task.

Brígida Baltar's recent work revisited her older series, as she uses the previously collected brick dust to draw images of Rio de Janeiro, creating pieces that intertwine her past and present works and that do not function as mere representations. Baltar also reflected upon her own biography, producing embroideries related to her body, more specifically her skin.

selected solo exhibitions

- *Brígida Baltar: Filmes*, Espaço Cultural BNDES, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2019)
- *A carne do mar*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
- SAM Art Project, Paris, France (2012)
- *O amor do pássaro rebelde*, Cavalariças, Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012)
- *Brígida Baltar – Passagem Secreta*, Fundação Eva Klabin, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2007)

selected group exhibitions

- *The Fold in the Horizon*, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2022)
- 12th Mercosul Biennial, Brazil (2020)
- *Alegria – A natureza-morta nas coleções MAM Rio*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2019)
- *I Remember Earth*, Magasin des horizons, Centre d’arts et de Cultures, Grenoble, France (2019)
- *Neither-nor: Abstract Landscapes, Portraits and Still Lives*, Terra-Art Project, London, United Kingdom (2017)
- *Constructing Views: Experimental Film and Video from Brazil*, New Museum, New York, USA (2010)

selected collections

- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH), Houston, USA
- Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Museum of Contemporary Art of Cleveland (MOCA), Cleveland, USA

* excerpt from the interview held by Marcio Doctors with Brígida Baltar published in the book *Passagem secreta / Secret Passage*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Circuito, 2010.

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