

Mariana Castillo Deball

Stringing Beads

21 September – 25 January 2025

DORTMUNDER

The present is built on the ruins of the past. Fragile in itself, it unfolds as a multiplicity of parallel presents, an endlessly overwritten sheet of paper shaped by layered narratives of community: at once interwoven and fragmented, grounded and adrift. As the Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe (*1957) writes, humans are “*custodians* along a chain of solidarity between the generations.”¹

For almost two decades, Mariana Castillo Deball has explored how systems of power shape and transform knowledge. Working at the intersection of art, science, history, and archaeology, she continually examines the institutional structures through which culture and history are preserved and passed on—looking not only at their taxonomies, categories, and grids, but also at their gaps, misreadings, and ideological uses.

Her new installation at Dortmunder Kunstverein takes inspiration from the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel². Combining sculpture, works on paper, and a wall painting, *Stringing Beads* (2025) reflects on the fragility and instability of human existence. Around 250 hand-crafted ceramics are threaded onto a fantastically meandering steel framework—an enlargement of a folded papercut made by the artist. The ceramics, in different colors and orientations, activate and disrupt the grid of the square modules. Some of the hand-sized objects were cast in molds referencing Babel towers and Tarot imagery, while others were shaped on the pottery wheel, together with studio collaborators, reintroducing the rotation movement into the installation.

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OPENING HOURS
WEDNESDAY–FRIDAY 3–6 PM
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY 12–6 PM

BANK DETAILS
SPARKASSE DORTMUND
IBAN: DE37 4405 0199 0001 0781 00
BIC: DORTDE33XXX

TEAM
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: REBEKKA SEUBERT
ASSISTANT CURATOR: LINDA SCHRÖER

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¹ Achille Mbembe, *Die terrestrische Gemeinschaft, Technik, Animismus und die Erde als Utopie*, german translation, 2025 (french original, 2023), p.93.

² The story recounts the origin of multilingualism: In the Bible, the Tower of Babel was a collective project of humankind to build a tower reaching the heavens. Angered by this ambition, God confounded their previously unified language and scattered the people across the earth (Gen. 11:1–9).

KUNSTVEREIN

DORTMUNDER KUNSTVEREIN

The double perforation of the ceramic, known as “kill hole,” removes its function as a container—yet makes it more porous, open to connections with other vessels. Threading these fragile pieces becomes a metaphor for the precarious bonds that hold communities together. Castillo Deball contrasts the linear sequence of threading with the circular motion of the wheel: history both advances and repeats itself. *Stringing Beads* thus creates a cosmos of its own, one that grapples with ruptures in the transmission of stories as well as the cycles of construction, collapse, and rebuilding from fragments. The Greek *kosmos* (κόσμος) means both adornment and world order. Such order is not only material—movement, direction, weight, volume, time—but also relational, made of bonds whose stability is never secure, and which, like Babel, exist in a state of constant making, unmaking and remaking.

Cada Cosa es Babel (2023) extends this inquiry in a wall painting and a series of works on handmade brown, apricot, and grey papers produced in collaboration with papermaker Gangolf Ulbricht. Castillo Deball created linocuts based on early modern depictions of the Tower of Babel a.o. by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1563), Marten van Valckenborch (1595), and Marx Anton Hannas (1676). She then tore some of the prints apart, reintegrating the fragments into new sheets of paper like shards embedded in fresh layers. Reproduction is a recurring strategy in her work: “To reproduce an object is to read and understand it differently.” Here, the paper works resemble archaeological sections, examined in their grid arrangement, while the act of tearing and reintegration mirrors processes of historical layering and sedimentation.

The exhibition is marked by a sense for the ephemeral nature of the idea of wholeness—its possibility of dissolving into fragments any time—and that fragments, in turn, might cohere into a new entity. This tension animates the works, pointing to the generative potential of incompleteness.

*Mariana Castillo Deball (*1975, Mexico City; lives in Berlin and Mexico City) studied at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. Since 2015 she has been professor of sculpture at the Kunstakademie Münster. Her work has been shown at HKW Berlin (2024), Pivô, São Paulo (2023), the Venice Biennale (2022), the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen (2021), and the New Museum, New York (2019). In summer 2025 she will inaugurate a major public art project for the new Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) building designed by Peter Zumthor.*

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TEAM

Curator: Rebekka Seubert
Curatorial Assistant: Linda Schröer
Head of Install: Robert Fernys

The ceramics were created collectively at the Studio of Mariana Castillo Deball with

Silvia Andrade
Elisa Grand
Macarena Cox
Silvia Scandola

PROGRAMME

free access to all events

SAT, 20.09., 4 PM

OPENING

8 PM: DJ SET by PVLM

THU, 25.09., 7 PM

GUIDED TOUR IN DIALOGUE

with Dr. Nico Anklam (director Kunsthalle Recklinghausen)

WED, 12.11., 7 PM

IN FOCUS #8: SCHMUCKPOLITIK

7 PM Introduction Rebekka Seubert

7.30 PM: Talk (german language)

Wann hat Schmuck Macht? Ruth Schneider (Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin, Deutsches Goldschmiedehaus, Hanau)

THU, 27.11., 7-10 PM

SCREENING #28

7 PM Dortmunder Kunstverein: Exhibition Tour

8 PM Kino im U: Alice Rohrwacher: *La Chimera* (2023)

selected by Mariana Castillo Deball

FRI, 12.12., 6-10 PM

6 PM: WINTERFEST & PRESENTATION OF
JAHRESGABEN

8 PM: CONCERT by Razzmatazz

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