

**Claudia Pagès Rabal**

**FEUDAL  
HOLES**

**English**

**CLAUDIA PAGÈS RABAL**  
**FEUDAL HOLES**

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mumok

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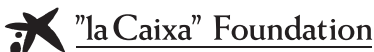
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Claudia Pagès Rabal (born 1990 in Barcelona) is a visual artist and writer. In her video installations, performances, sculptures, and drawings, she often addresses knowledge domains and themes relating to the protean history of the Iberian Peninsula, global migration movements, territorial appropriation and control, as well as the cultural diversity and mix in the Mediterranean region. Pagès Rabal's work is centered on condensation: the complexity of spatial, temporal, visual, and textual layers unfolds in the combination of seemingly contradictory and asynchronous elements and their multifaceted entanglements.

## **HISTORY OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: TERRITORIAL BORDERS**

In the exhibition *Feudal Holes*, Claudia Pagès Rabal expands on her longstanding research into the Silk Road, the legendary network of trade routes that stretched from Central and East Asia to the Mediterranean region, transporting not only goods but also capital in the form of knowledge for centuries. The artist's research transports museum visitors to the so-called Hispanic March (Marca Hispánica), a historical border region established by European Carolingians at the beginning of the ninth century after the conquest of Barcelona (801) as an administrative and protective zone against the expanding Emirate of Córdoba (al-Andalus). This Christian-Frankish borderland was not isolated, rather it engaged in intensive exchanges with the neighboring Arab and Imazighen territories. The region was marked by a remarkable diversity of cultures, identities, and religious denominations. The historical context is the Islamic expansion to the Iberian Peninsula, which took place in 711 onward by predominantly North African troops led by Arab elites. These territories remained under their rule, with shifting borders and social structures, until 1492. As a military buffer zone between what is present-day Spain and France, the complex history of the Hispanic March vitally shaped the cultural identity of Catalonia—the autonomous region where the artist lives and works. In this area, where the volatile territorial borders, conquests and reconquests, cannot be clearly distinguished from one another, where Muslims were equally subject to Christian rule as Christians were to Muslim rule, the social entanglements have had a lasting impact on European cultural and intellectual life and continue to resonate to this day.

## **WATCH TOWERS: OFFENSE AND/OR DEFENSE**

Claudia Pagès Rabal's installation *Feudal Holes* in mumok builds on the exhibition *Five Defence Towers*, an exhibition that was on show at London's Chisenhale Gallery in early 2025. The starting point in London was research on five prominent defence towers that adorn the landscape of Catalonia. These structures for (self-)defence were constructed in different phases and repurposed over the centuries, which prevents them from being ascribed a specific provenance and drew the artist's attention. "I'm interested in these towers because all the stories around them are very vague.

They are said to have been used to fight against the Saracens and to defend against them. But on closer inspection, you see that they were actually built before that time. This means a clear collapse of the narrative: Do the towers belong to one side or the other? Or perhaps they served to defend both?" says Claudia Pagès Rabal. While the artist developed a five-act theater piece for *Five Defence Towers*, recounting the silent settler violence and its contradictions and ambivalences in a script from the perspective of the towers, she explores the remains of a sixth tower in the video work *Feudal Holes*. With the help of a drone, she penetrates the interior of the Torre del Moro de Castellnou and exposes moments of surveillance and control in its architectural form. The discrepancy between the verticality of the tower and its horizontal representation on digital applications such as Google Maps builds a thematic and formal anchor point.

## IMAGE MACHINES AND PERCEPTUAL LOOPS

"*Feudal Holes* are forms of topographical control strategies that trap viewers in a loop," states the artist about the eponymous video objects developed specifically for the exhibition at mumok. "I don't believe we are returning to an earlier feudal system, but when I look at what is happening in the world today, we are in a hole of violence for which we have not yet found a new word. Both sculptures show how the camera enters and exits the hole of the tower. It has something sexual, it is violent and penetrative, definitely object." The convex shape of the constructions derives from mathematical figures like the Möbius strip, a non-orientable surface with no discernible inside or outside. The image carriers of the two video sculptures, flexible LED displays mounted to metal structures, bulge outward and form surfaces with a hole in the middle that engulfs the surroundings. They rise from the floor of the exhibition space much in the way that the tower dominates the landscape near Barcelona. In *Feudal Holes*, the artist constructs "image machines" for impossible forms of cartographic representation. Each object opens up its own perspective: either its distinctive shape prevents the viewer from seeing the bottom of the hole, or it transforms the flat, map-like image into a kind of three-dimensional space or enclosure.

## TRACING THE MEDITERRANEAN

Alongside the video sculptures, the artist presents drawings of water maps of the Mediterranean Sea in the series *Agrimensura*. The departure point is a cartographic tracking system developed by the research group Forensic Architecture to broadcast the location of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition ships in real time. It is intended to ensure the safety and protection of the people on board, who are en route to Gaza to break the Israeli naval blockade, provide humanitarian aid, and, last but not least, direct attention to their cause. *Madleen*, *Handala*, *Conscience*: the names of the vessels, whose movements across the Mediterranean can be tracked online on a dynamic

timeline, also appear in the captions of the drawings. "As I trace the ships' progress," explains Claudia Pagès Rabal, "I follow various elements of the map and highlight them: national waters, international waters, coastlines, land and water borders, all the countries around the Mediterranean, where I swim every summer; all of them are participants and accomplices." With *Agrimensura*, the artist develops time machines that not only lead into the past or reveal historical layers—they also depict the present. For her drawings, the artist uses a roll of ultra-thin cigarette paper, which she folds while tracing the outlines of the translucent background: printed screenshots of Mediterranean maps. In contrast to traditional land surveying, a system of symbolic order and linear relationships, her method captures the contours of the sea, its vagueness and edges. Europe, Asia, and Africa all border on the Mediterranean, yet the prevailing image of this region is tainted from a European perspective and reduced to clichés of Mediterranean cuisine and lifestyle. Migration movements, the innumerable drowned bodies, detention camps, and armed conflicts on its coasts remain largely cast aside in this perception. Through the layering of Pagès Rabal's drawings, the interwoven cultural and social spheres become apparent. The permeability of the borders between African-Arab, Asian-Arab, and European countries is almost palpable. The thin paper, its transparency, its fragility, underline this realization.

## **WATERMARKS AND SYSTEM ERRORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

The artist's play with light and with the permeability and impermeability of surfaces continues in the entrance area to the exhibition. Using a laser, Claudia Pagès Rabal projects alternating symbols onto the black basalt walls of the museum. For her, these inscriptions are an attempt to mark the structure of the building with her artistic practice. The projected symbols are watermarks from fifteen-century paper documents that the artist discovered in the collection of the Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades, a former paper mill near Barcelona. They feature hand-drawn dogs, stairs, tools, and everyday objects from a time when the Moors were expelled from Spain and paper production on the Iberian Peninsula was in decline. Watermarks were developed to indicate authorship, authenticity, and family affiliations. These markings on texts, such as contracts securing ownership, can be read as minor lapses, as system errors produced by the paper manufacturers, and not least as a means of subverting social control. The insignia nestle under the layer of legal content, slipping between the lines, only recognizable at second glance: the fine indentations in the paper, making the shapes of the watermarks on their carrier medium brighter and distinguishable—visible—from the surrounding material, only appear when viewed against the light. With her light installation, Pagès Rabal reverses this mechanism. Inverted into positives, she projects the historical signs using contemporary technology whose radiance, in turn, can potentially leave traces on or damage the material. In this way, the artist creates a dialectical relationship between the historical power of watermarks and the physical force of the laser transferring the symbols onto the architecture. Parallel, a sober

voice reads information from the paper museum's archive, accompanying the towers, castles, and dogs that appear and disappear in the glaring light, linking the past and the present.

## **POWER RELATIONS AND SYMBOLIC ORDERS**

In the exhibition *Feudal Holes*, Claudia Pagès Rabal not only gives the stage to historical and contemporary identities that are constructed and marginalized from a European perspective as foreign, different, or "other." In her artistic practice, she reveals the constraints of measuring instruments and one's own knowledge production. She also questions the mediated conditions under which knowledge is produced in the first place and reflects on the apparatuses shaping our perception and interpretation. She deliberately distances herself from academic methods that rely on an alleged neutrality, when not detachment, and thereby cement existing power relations. Instead, Pagès Rabal seeks new methods of artistic expression, processes that break open and displace existing spatial, cultural, and symbolic orders. Her work can be understood as artistic research into landscape, not as a physical terrain but as a culturally and linguistically charged space of experience. Her goal is to transcend the boundaries that determine our (historical) foundations of knowledge and the (still prevailing) power relations inscribed in them.

**Claudia Pagès Rabal (born 1990 in Barcelona)  
lives and works in Barcelona.**

Selected exhibitions: *Catalonia in Venice: Paper Tears*, 61. Venice Biennial, 2026; 18th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2025; *Aljub*, Index – The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, Stockholm, 2025; *Five Defence Towers*, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2025; Manifesta 15, Barcelona, 2024; *Scene I. Making landscape*, IVAM, Valencia, 2024; *Typo-Topo-Time Aljibe*, Sculpture Center, New York, 2023; *Uno*, CA2M, Madrid, 2023; *Banditry*, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2023; *Gerundi Circular*, Tabakalera, Donostia, 2022; *Some of It Falls from the Belt and Lands on the Walkway Beside the Conveyor*, Vleeshal, Middelburg, 2022; *Panorama*, MACBA, Barcelona, 2022; *Rats and Roaches*, CAPC, Bordeaux, 2022; *The Living House*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, 2021; *March Meetings*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE, 2018.

She published *her hair* in 2020 with Onomatopée, her first novel *Més de dues aigües* in 2024 with Editorial Empúries, and will launch her new book *Gerund Violence* with Wendy's Subway in 2025. Pagès Rabal was awarded the Ojo Crítico Visual Arts Award in 2022 and has been an artist in residence at Gasworks, London, 2017 and Triangle France, Marseille, 2020.

## LIST OF WORKS

### Paper Works (H × W × D)

- 1 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Conscience, Water*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 43 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 2 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Conscience, Land*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 43 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 3 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Madleen, Land Borders*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 17 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 4 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Madleen, Search and Rescue Zones*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 17 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 5 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Handala, International Waters*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 30 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 6 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Handala, Territorial Waters*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 30 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 7 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Global Sumud Flotilla, Tracing*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 56 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches
- 8 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Agrimensura. Thousand Madleens to Gaza, Sea Depth*, 2025  
Aluminum lightbox, cigarette paper, ink and watercolor pencils  
39 ⅞ × 56 ⅞ × 4 ¾ inches



## LED Video Sculpture Machine

- 9 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Feudal Hole #1*, 2025

Video sculpture: Metal structure, LED screens, video: color, sound, 4:04 min (loop)  
42  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 55 × 55 inches

- 10 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Feudal Hole #2*, 2025

Video sculpture: Metal structure, LED screens, video: color, sound, 2:36 min (loop)  
21  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 59 × 59 inches

## Laser Piece

- 11 Claudia Pagès Rabal, *Watermarks: Towers, castles, dogs, and Laia*, 2025

Laser light, sound  
6  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 9  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 9  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches

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**Claudia Pagès Rabal**

# **FEUDAL HOLES**

**Simply put**

## **Claudia Pagès Rabal**

### **Feudal Holes**

Claudia Pagès Rabal (*born 1990 in Barcelona*) is a visual artist and writer. She makes videos, performances, sculptures, and drawings. Her main themes are the history of the Iberian Peninsula, migration, cultural diversity, and power relations. She combines historical research with reflections on language and raises questions about the state of our society. Her working method is condensation: the artist brings together different times, spaces, and images. This results in complex works with many layers of meaning.

### **History of the Iberian Peninsula: Territorial Borders**

In the exhibition *Feudal Holes*, Claudia Pagès Rabal continues her research into the Silk Road. The Silk Road was a historical network of trade routes between Asia and Europe. The routes were used to transport not only goods but also knowledge. At mumok, the artist leads visitors to the so-called Hispanic March. The name stands for a border region established by Carolingians at the beginning of the ninth century as a protective wall against the Arab territory al-Andalus. Al-Andalus was influenced by Arab cultures and was settled by North African Muslims, who arrived on the Iberian Peninsula in 711 and remained there until 1492.

The Hispanic March was a region between present-day Spain and France that was shaped by diverse interests. It served as a military buffer zone and played an important role for the identity of Catalonia, where the artist lives. The history of this region is characterized by changing rulers and cultural interconnections that continue to influence European thinking to this day.

### **Watch Towers: Offense and/or Defense**

The installation *Feudal Holes* in mumok builds on the exhibition *Five Defence Towers*, which was on show at Chisenhale Gallery in London in early 2025. There, Pagès Rabal focused on five historic defence towers in Catalonia. These towers were once intended to protect Christian Europe from Muslim Arabs.

The artist says:

*"I'm interested in these towers because all the stories around them are very vague. They are said to have been used to fight against the Saracens. But you see that they were actually built before that time. This means a collapse in the story: Who do the towers belong to? Did they serve both sides? Or perhaps they were used to overwrite history?"*

## Image Machines and Perceptual Loops

In *Feudal Holes*, the artist shows the remains of a sixth tower: Torre del Moro de Castellnou. Using a drone, she filmed the inside of the tower and reveals how architecture is linked to control and surveillance. A main theme is the contrast between the vertical shape of the tower and its flat representation on digital map apps such as Google Maps.

The artist calls her video sculptures *Feudal Holes*. She explains it like this:

*"Feudal Holes are forms of topographical control. They trap viewers in a loop. I don't believe we are returning to an earlier feudal system, but we are in a hole of violence, which we have not found a new word for yet."*

The sculptures show how the camera enters and exits the opening at the top of the tower. It appears violent and disturbing. They have a shape like a Möbius strip, a surface twisted around itself with no clear inside or outside. The videos are displayed on flexible LED panels mounted on metal structures. The sculptures bulge outward and have a hole in the middle that swallows up the surroundings. Like the tower on the landscape near Barcelona, they rise up from the floor of the exhibition space.

Pagès Rabal calls these works "image machines." They show unusual types of maps. Some prevent a view to the bottom of the hole, others transform the flat image into a kind of three-dimensional space or enclosure.

## Tracing the Mediterranean

Additionally, the artist presents drawings from the series *Agrimensura*. They are based on water maps of the Mediterranean Sea. The departure point is a tracking system by the group Forensic Architecture, which follows the location of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition ships. These ships are on their way to Gaza to break the Israeli naval blockade and provide humanitarian aid.

The names of the ships—*Madleen*, *Handala*, *Conscience*—appear in the subtitles of the drawings. Pagès Rabal says:

*"As I trace the ships' progress, I highlight various elements of the map: national waters, international waters, coastlines, borders. I swim every summer in the Mediterranean. All of the countries around it are participants and accomplices."*

The drawings are made on very thin, transparent cigarette paper. The artist folds the paper and traces the outlines of maps. Unlike traditional land surveying, this work highlights the blurred edges and contours of the sea. Europe, Asia, and Africa border the Mediterranean Sea. However, the region is often associated only with Mediterranean cuisine and lifestyle. Migration, conflicts, and drowned bodies remain invisible. Only when the drawings are layered does the cultural and social diversity become visible. The transparency and fragility of the paper enhance this impression.

## **Watermarks and System Errors in the Spotlight**

At the entrance area to the exhibition, Claudia Pagès Rabal continues to play with light and with the permeability and impermeability of surfaces. Using a laser, she projects different symbols onto the black basalt walls of the museum. She attempts to mark the structure of the museum with her artistic practice and leave traces behind.

The projected symbols are original watermarks from fifteen-century paper documents. Pagès Rabal discovered them in the collection of the Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades, a former paper mill near Barcelona. They are hand-drawn images of dogs, stairs, tools, and everyday objects. The symbols date from a time when the Moors were expelled from Spain and paper production on the Iberian Peninsula declined.

The purpose of watermarks was to indicate authorship, authenticity, and family affiliation. When texts such as contracts about ownership were printed on paper, these subtle markings appeared like small system errors produced by the paper manufacturers. They can be understood as an attempt to subvert the social control written in these legal documents.

The fine indentations in the paper that make the watermarks visible can only be seen against the light. Pagès Rabal reverses this mechanism: she projects the historical symbols as positives using modern technology. The powerful laser beam can leave traces or damage on the material. In this way, she creates a tension between the historical power of the watermarks and the physical force of the laser, which writes the symbols onto the architecture.

At the same time, a sober voice reads information from the paper museum's archive. It accompanies the images of towers, castles, and dogs that appear and disappear in the glaring light and form a link between the past and the present.

## Power Relations and Symbolic Orders

Claudia Pagès Rabal is not only interested in identities that are often considered "different" or foreign. She shows how limited our instruments for gathering knowledge are. The artist questions the media we use to share knowledge and reflects on the mechanisms that influence how we perceive things.

Pagès Rabal distances herself from academic methods that claim to be objective and neutral. Instead, she develops artistic approaches that shift and break open existing social orders. Her work explores landscape, not as a physical or geographical place, but as a space for experiencing culture and language. Her goal is to transcend borders that determine both our historical foundations of knowledge and current power relations.