



Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics



The Show.

The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) present the Getty PST ART: *Art & Science Collide* exhibition ***Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics***.

Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics, revisits the collaborative artistic practice of the late Beatriz da Costa (1974 - 2012) as an investigation into art-making, technoscientific experimentation, activism and politics, through the lens of our contemporary moment. The exhibition surveys da Costa's unique art practice of inter and un-disciplinary public participatory interventions, workshops, and critical writing, all which emphasize the ongoing social struggles for sustaining life and her approach to obtaining ancient and non-academic forms of knowledge. The exhibition and accompanying catalog is an exploration on da Costa's deep reflections on life and death, health and wellness, environmental issues, cancer and chronic illness, social issues, and interspecies cohabitation.

(un)disciplinary tactics is curated by LACE's former Chief Curator/Director of Programs Daniela Lieja Quintanar, with Curatorial Assistant Ana Briz.

LAMAG and the DCA are grateful to our friends at LACE for their collaboration and presentation of the PST ART: *Art & Science Collide* exhibition ***Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics***, which provides expanded new and exciting programming for our communities.

The Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery is a facility of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.

Land Acknowledgement.

It is important that the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery prioritize respect for both the historic culture and the contemporary presence of indigenous peoples throughout California, and especially in the Los Angeles area. To that end, and particularly as a public and civic institution, we acknowledge that our gallery resides on what was historically the homeland of Kizh, Tongva, and Chumash peoples who were dispossessed of their land.

If you would like to learn more about the land you are on please visit this [link](#).

The Artist.



Installation view of *Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics*, presented by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles.

Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

Beatriz da Costa (b.1974 - 2012) was born in Berlin, Germany, with roots in Goa, India, where her dad was from and later moved to the United States in 1999 as a student at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was an interdisciplinary artist who worked at the intersection of contemporary art, science, engineering, and politics. Her art practice combined artistic and scientific strategies and methods that often were collaborative and collective driven. She was a co-founder of Preemptive Media, along with Brooke Singer and Jamie Schulte, and an important collaborator of the influential Critical Art Ensemble. In her solo and collective work, da Costa focused on using art as an entry point to scientific concepts and ideas like amateur scientific, biological microorganisms, interspecies collaborations, and social and environmental justice, to critique institutional systems that hold scientific knowledge and advancement in technology.

A defining feature to da Costa's art practice was her interest in interspecies collaboration from microbes (***Transgenic Bacteria Release Machine, 2001***) to pigeons (***PigeonBlog, 2006–08***) as an effort to decentralize a human-centered hierarchy in exchange for

The Artist.

a more holistic worldview. Her interest in these ideas reconsidered how artists could help facilitate and “collaborate” with microbes; da Costa believed that exploring these processes could foster the opportunity to learn with and from, other cellular and biological lifeforms. Throughout her life, even after being diagnosed with Stage IV metastatic breast cancer in 2009, she remained active in the arts, creating numerous artworks that addressed alternative approaches to scientific knowledge and wellness.

da Costa attended Carnegie Mellon University where she was an exchange student in art. She served as Associate Professor of Studio Art at the University of California, Irvine, and was a founding member of their Arts Computation Engineering (ACE) interdisciplinary graduate program. She was a Ph.D. student in the History of Consciousness program led by her mentor Donna Haraway at UC Santa Cruz. In 2008, she co-edited with Kavita Philip, her colleague at the University of California, Irvine, *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, arguing that the political challenges at the intersection of life, science, and art are best addressed through a combination of artistic intervention, critical theorizing, and reflective practices.

The Artwork.



PigeonBlog, 2006–08

Mixed media installation,
projection

Installation view of *Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics*, 2024.

Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

The original 2006–08 multimedia, interdisciplinary installation ***PigeonBlog*** was a collaboration of artists, homing pigeons, computer engineers and pigeon caretakers. *PigeonBlog*'s intention was to study air quality and pollution in Southern California, one of the top ten polluted regions in the country, in collaboration with homing pigeons. She worked with Cina Hazegh and Kevin Ponto to design and create scientific equipment small enough to attach to a pigeon like a backpack to collect data on local air quality.

This interspecies collaboration was a community-based data gathering initiative. It involved pigeons wearing miniature custom-built do-it-yourself electronic devices with sensors to detect air quality and pollution levels as the pigeons flew across the city. The sensors were programmed to send the data to an online server in real-time. A graph that used mapping software showed the various levels of pollution in different Southern California regions. Anyone who logged onto the website could immediately see the pollution levels. The project was an example of the interdependency that humans have for animals and how pigeons have the ability to adapt to the urban environment.

The Artwork.

One of the goals was to raise awareness about pollution and its serious health consequences. It utilized the idea of “citizen scientists,” that is, participating in the production of scientific knowledge with everyday people, while actively collaborating with scientists and communities through political activism. Additionally, *PigeonBlog* considered the roles of animals that are used in technoscientific ways, and kept in mind the ways humans could respect and protect animals.

***PigeonBlog* website:** welcometolace.org/pigeonblog-2024



***PigeonBlog*, 2006-2008**

Mixed media installation, projection

Dimensions variable

Installation view of *Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics*, 2024.

Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

Discussion Prompts.

Beatriz da Costa used her art practice to engage communities and to communicate important issues about the environment, nature, animals, pollution, climate, science and art. Her collaborative work addressed the responsible use of natural resources and environmental sustainability.

1. Beatriz's favorite subjects in school were art, technology and science. What are your favorite subjects and why? How can you combine the two?
2. Interdisciplinary means the combination and use of different subjects like art and science to research a topic. (Un)disciplinary means the bypassing of a discipline's rules and standards, challenging pre-established ideas and standards of what an academic discipline or subject can or cannot be. What might be some advantages and disadvantages of working in this way?
3. Beatriz was interested in raising awareness about human and animal relationships. What are some social injustices you have observed and how would you use art to raise awareness of that topic?
4. How does *PigeonBlog* relate to the environment, climate, science, nature, collaboration, computers, science, and how humans treat animals?
5. Have you seen other examples of animals being used to gather scientific data? Talk with a friend about that experience.
6. What are examples of respectful ways in which humans can treat animals that assist them?
7. What can we discover from nature, animals, and birds that can help us learn about ourselves and the world at-large?
8. How can unconventional and imaginative forms of thinking, studying, and researching help our communities?

The Artwork.



***The Delicious Apothecary*, 2012–13**

Medicinal wooden cabinet with glass jars of cloves, saffron, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, goji, flax seed, cayenne, cumin, nutmeg, and fenugreek

32 x 24 x 6 inches

The Delicious Apothecary, 2012–13,
Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary
tactics, 2024.

Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

The Delicious Apothecary is a multidisciplinary artwork that consists of a wooden spice cabinet with various spice bottles known to have cancer fighting properties, a website, and e-book. The e-book and website contain a hybrid location-based shopping guide, an anti-cancer cookbook and illustrations of the molecular processes involved in the anti-cancer capabilities of certain fruits, vegetables, and spices. The intention of the website and e-book was to be a resource for cancer patients, their families and individuals interested in preventative health, and to provide a set of healthcare measures to help people stay healthy and prevent illness and disease.

The maintenance of sustaining a healthy life was a reoccurring theme in da Costa's artwork guiding her to make artworks like *The Delicious Apothecary* that could present and circulate knowledge on how to prevent life-threatening diseases like cancer. Living with chronic illness and being diagnosed with cancer at 14 and later again at 19, before it recurred terminally in her mid-30s, da Costa passed away in 2012 after a long battle with cancer which halted the full realization of this artwork. *The Delicious Apothecary* was completed by da Costa's friends and family after her death and was part of the *The Cost of Life series*, a group of installations and community projects that included: *Dying for the Other* (2011), *The Life Garden* (2011), and *The Anti-Cancer Survival Kit* (2012-13).



The Delicious Apothecary, 2012-13

Medicinal wooden cabinet with glass jars of cloves, saffron, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, goji, flax seed, cayenne, cumin, nutmeg and fenugreek

32 x 24 x 6 inches

Beatriz da Costa, *The Delicious Apothecary*, 2012–13, Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics, 2024.
Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

Discussion Prompts.

The Delicious Apothecary featured spices and herbs to encourage viewers to consider their healing benefits and health.

1. Name a favorite food or dish you eat at celebrations, special occasions, or holidays. What is it and why do you eat it on that special day?
2. Describe the taste – was it spicy, sweet, sour, salty or a combination of tastes? How did you feel after eating it?
3. What are the ingredients of the dish? Have you had any of the spices or foods in *The Delicious Apothecary* and if so, what did they taste like?
4. How do the foods we eat reflect and express our cultures, communities, histories and tell stories about our experiences?
5. The artist grew her own edible plants, spices and herbs from her cabinet. How do you think she used spices and herbs to help her when she was ill?
6. What are some foods or spices that you eat to feel better, or to keep you healthy? How can spices, foods and herbs help heal us?
7. How can growing vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices in gardens help the environment? How does it benefit you?
8. How can food be more accessible to all communities? What can be done to help people who have food insecurity or insufficiency? What are the challenges of finding healthy foods?

Art, Writing and Discussion Activity: Draw Your Favorite Food Memory

What you will need:

- Drawing utensils: any or all of the following: pencils, colored pencils, markers, pens, crayons, pastels, eraser
- Any type of paper such as 8 ½ x 11" copy paper or recycled paper
- Access to kitchen cabinets to view foods and spices*

*Please check with a parent or guardian before opening cabinets to view foods and spices or using art supplies.

Art, Writing and Discussion Activity: Draw Your Favorite Food Memory

Step 1: Together with a parent or guardian look at the foods and spices in kitchen cabinets or other areas. *If you do not have access to the foods or cabinet, think about your favorite foods and spices that you enjoyed and ate at a special occasion, celebration or holiday, and if they hold a special memory or meaning to you, your culture, or history.

Step 2: Are there certain spices and flavors that you like - or do not like? Think about the taste - are they spicy, bitter, sour, sweet, salty, a combination of any of these?

Optional: With a parent, guardian or teacher, discuss your favorite foods and spices and how you felt while eating them. What was memorable about that experience?

Step 3: Draw the outline of a plate or bowl covering the entire piece of paper.

Step 4: Create outline(s) of one or more of the foods and spices you like. Add colors to the drawing. *Optional:* Fill the paper with all of your favorite foods that have special meanings to you. Add the utensils you use to eat the food.

Step 5: On the back of the paper, list the foods and write one or two sentences about special memories, why you like these foods and how you feel when eating them. Write the holiday, celebration or tradition associated with the foods and spices.

Art, Writing and Discussion Activity: Draw Your Favorite Food Memory

Optional drawing activity: Draw the shapes of the foods and spices in the kitchen cabinet—or that you can think of in your imagination. Write the names on or underneath each item. Add color to the shapes.

Optional writing and research prompts:

- How can stories be told through the foods we eat?
- Write about the tastes, spices and textures of foods that you like or dislike.
- Are there special memories, feelings or emotions you have when eating certain foods and spices?
- How do the scents of foods and spices affect us?
- How can spices be used for healing and health like how Beatriz da Costa showed in *The Delicious Apothecary*?
- Choose 1-2 spices to research and write a short paragraph on the back of the paper about the health and healing benefits of these spices.

Resources.

- [A Preemptive Study: from public amateurism to community science](#), an ongoing study group
- [The life and artistic practice of Beatriz da Costa](#), a roundtable discussion with Robert F. Nideffer, Antoinette LaFarge, and others
- [Oil Drilling in Los Angeles](#), a talk with Bhavna Shamasunder and Sandy Navarro from L.A. Grit Media
- [A Preemptive Study: from tactical biopolitics to the cost of life](#), an ongoing study group
- Part II of [A Preemptive Study: from tactical biopolitics to the cost of life](#), a discussion with Kavita Philip
- [Artist Leslie Garcia performance and talk at Fulcrum Arts x LACE](#), in conversation with Curator Daniela Lieja Quintanar

LACE - Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions: <https://welcometolace.org/>

Beatriz da Costa: <https://welcometolace.org/lace/undisciplinary-tactics-beatriz-da-costa/>

Getty PST Art & Science Collide: [@pstinla](https://twitter.com/pstinla)

Cover image: Installation view of *Beatriz da Costa: (un)disciplinary tactics*, presented by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles.

Photo credit: ofstudio, Yubo Dong.

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