

MIT List Visual Arts Center
20 Ames Street, Building E15
Cambridge, MA 02139

listart.mit.edu

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Performance

Tuesday, September 4, 7 PM

Delia Gonzalez will perform with Bryce Hackford for an evening of enchanting sounds and hypnotic electronic beats. The performance will feature music from Gonzalez's 2017 album *Horse Follows Darkness*.

All programs are free and open to the general public. RSVPs are required.

For more information about this event and to RSVP, visit: listart.mit.edu/events-programs.

SUPPORT

Exhibitions at the List Center are made possible with the support of Fotene Demoulas & Tom Coté, Audrey & James Foster, Jane & Neil Pappalardo, Cynthia & John Reed, and Terry & Rick Stone. Additional funding for *List Projects* was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

General operating support is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the Council for the Arts at MIT; Philip S. Khoury, Associate Provost at MIT; the MIT School of Architecture + Planning; the Mass Cultural Council; and many generous individual donors. The Advisory Committee Members of the List Visual Arts Center are gratefully acknowledged.

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[LIST PROJECTS]

Delia Gonzalez

July 31–September 30, 2018



COVER *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 2017
Neon, 47" × 8"
Courtesy the artist and Galleria Fonti, Naples
Photo: Amedeo Benestante



MIT List Visual Arts Center

The Last Days of Pompeii

The birds were the first to be gone, this morning. I bet even the magpies, and the wood pigeons, and the solitary swallow, will have by now flown from the garden frescoes Rufo realized to homage the perfect beauty of flora and fauna: lush plants, with fowls. House of Golden Bracelet, they shall call it. The Vesuvius has started to mumble, not yet to roar. I want to speak with Mamia, the priestess, I wonder where she is. My son sleeps, undisturbed, awake in his vivid oneiric dimension.

Later on. It's about 1 PM, 24 August 79 AD, they will say. Suddenly, I'm hit by the memory of the earthquake that happened on the fifth day of many moons ago. The volcano is getting angrier and angrier at us, disgusted by the architectural bravado of our so-called civilization, it bursts and tiles start falling down from the roofs, human craftsmanship kneeling to the natural touch of the Earth's guts. We thought our buildings were so beautiful. How can Nature not want to preserve something so beautiful?

He is now wide awake. It's 3 PM. It's raining rocks, lapilli, acuminate magmatic stones of millennial importance. A column as high as the skies thrones, adamant, over my land, I wonder whether the gods will see it. Will Apollo intervene, now that his Sun has been phagocytized by a solemn, lugubrious carbon curtain?

5 PM—Livid is the sky, the tension is unbearable, our world is ready to end. Will we be phoenixes? 1 AM—No, it is not snowing. Even the white pumice which has been falling on us for hours is turning gray. It is the miracle of nature. I look at my son, dazed, and I wonder if we will ever be reunited again.

6:45 AM—I'm observing the pyroclastic current running as fast as it was fueled by hundreds of thousands of horses, to get us. 186 mph—they will say.

I surrender, look one last time at all that we thought we had, at all that we always thought we ever wanted.

The arches, the two towers, portal-shaped sculptures erected at the entrance of my house, my temple, they will come with me. And the façade of the Moon, golden leaf shining like pyrite, my protective matriarch carved into marble, an obsessive sequence of delicate circles erupted from the multitude of swirling signs to condense into a wider, singular figure. Satellites merging into one planet. I know this intuitively: I will see them all again. And my son.

One day I will celebrate him with a song, it will be titled *Vesuvius*. The elegant arcades, burgundy, deep red, red so deep in the future they should remember it with a hue of its own.

The lines of Pompeii fall, overwhelmed by the wave of the eruption, the pure power of magma crystallizing this moment forever, a broken instant. All is on fire, all is all over and all has once again begun. Buried in ashes, we will live forever, forgotten as we melt into nourishment for olive branches. Estranged from this Earth on which we were strangers anyway.

Manhattan, a year ago today. I cannot live here anymore. I wish I could move to the Moon, or go hiding in a marble cave—exquisite silence, timeless caress of the passing millennia.

Marble clocks visions. Timeless timing, time lasting forever, clock clock tick tock clocking the clock. What are we doing to ourselves? I died like this before. Nature knows no caprice, but retaliation, yes, for balance must be brought back into the system. And who are we if not a tiny yet presumptuous part of this choreography? Man plans, gods laugh. Nature acts. I thought we evolved. Instead I fear we are just a mutated species, we are *alieni*, meaning we don't belong to our conscience anymore. Who is the stranger now? In the attempt of becoming the alchemists of ourselves we forgot the instinctive wisdom of the witches.

And now finally in Athens, I feel with absolute certainty Plato's truth: obsessed by our shadows, hypnotized by the dangling, flaming, somewhat feeble reflection of our egos, we lost touch with reality, and matter. The swift remembrance of György Kepes's words crosses my mind, suddenly, like the perception of manifold existences I might have, or might not have, lived:

Rapid expansion of knowledge and technical development have swept us into a world beyond our grasp; and the face of nature is alien to us again. Like the forest and the mountains of medieval times, our new environment harbors strange menacing beasts: invisible viruses, atoms, mesons, protons, cosmic rays, supersonic waves. We have been cast out of the smaller friendlier world in which we moved with confidence born of knowledge.¹

Was she the woman in Pompeii? The Tragic Poet? Cave canem or cave hominum? Was she the cypress, the poppy tree, the minute, white flowers of thyme found on the tomb of Mamia in the XVII century? The essence of eau de cologne rapidly sprayed to fill a dense atmosphere? Was she the blind, the visionary? The silver sage? The persistence of the number five? The eternal return, the circle of life, on marble, of her life, of their lives, of all the lives lived and living and to be lived in this universe, this sumptuous never-ending golden circle silhouetting against the purest veins of milky marble just keeps coming back. A perfect shape, recurring over and over, four little black rounds dancing a quadrille. A full moon, Nature polishing our eyes with its shining aura, the pinkness of dawn, indigo dust at dusk, the power of the eternal, and of the ethereal.

Matilde Cerruti Quara

ABOUT THE ESSAYIST

Matilde Cerruti Quara (b. 1991, Italy) lives and works in London. She is a poet, artist and creative director.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Delia Gonzalez (b. 1972, Miami) lives and works in Athens and New York.

List Projects: Delia Gonzalez is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions & Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

1. György Kepes, prologue to *The New Landscape in Art and Science*, Theobald, Chicago, 1956