

Leonor Antunes and Amalia Pica

MARC FOXX

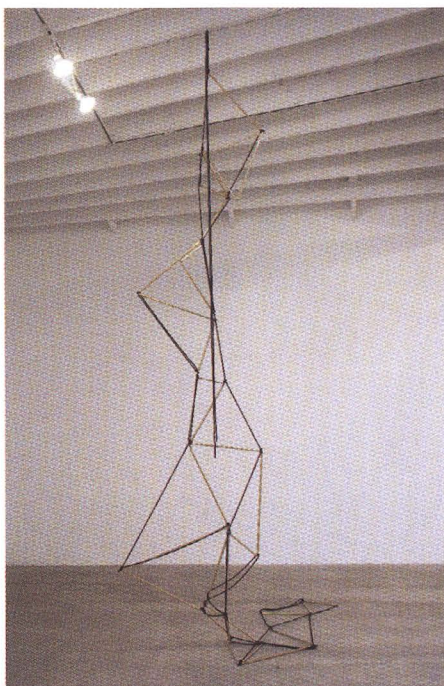
The conceptual impulse behind artmaking typically manifests itself in either indulgently labored or stoically restrained gestures. This two-person exhibition, featuring the work of Portuguese-born, Berlin-based Leonor Antunes and London-based, Argentinean-born Amalia Pica, presented both approaches to Conceptualism as ways to investigate ideas about the organization of and communication across space. Although mounted as two solo shows occupying the same gallery, “Alongside” revealed that Antunes’s and Pica’s respective convictions and formal assertions are not unrelated.

On the east side of the gallery, one first encountered four long hanging sculptures by Antunes, delicate nine- to thirteen-foot-tall constructions of black rope and brass pipes that are part of her 2010 “Chain of Triangles” series. Like a slackened cat’s cradle or a broken rope ladder, each sculpture emulates a path of geographic triangulations running from one European city to another based on late-eighteenth-century cartographic diagrams, copies of which Antunes provides in the gallery along with a text on the origins of the metric system. *Chain of Triangles (from Paris to St. Saturnin)*, 2010, for example, is hung from the ceiling by a knot that—as the original maps make plain—signifies Paris. From this point, knotted rope strung through sections of brass pipe forms the angles depicted in the two-hundred-year-old map. The abstract path sharply juts out between points representing the French cities of Orson and Vouzon; hanging below this, the path from Meri to Saint Saturnin is slung across the gallery floor. A similar sculpture rendered in miniature—it measures just over three feet—hung in the west gallery. In each of these structures, Antunes balances formal complexity with the intricacy of her well-researched subject matter; yet these limp and tousled arrangements of pipe and rope lack the exactitude demanded of geographic triangulations. Through this incongruity, Antunes seems to comment on the futility of empirical desires to measure, chart, and possess fictional territories.

In a similar move, Pica’s “Spinning Trajectories,” 2009, an arrangement of six Spirograph-like drawings on graph paper, displays the absurdity of precise systems of measurement; here, looping lines made by a colored marker affixed to a toy top evade the spatial segmentation of the graph paper through a chance operation akin to a child’s game. Pica’s other four works included in this show share with late 1960s and early ’70s Conceptualism an interest in the systems and devices of communication, while taking cues from the political yet lighthearted gestures of contemporary artists, such as Francis Alÿs and Minerva Cuevas. *Reconstruction of an Antenna (As Seen on TV)*, 2010, for example, is a life-size antenna assembled from found scraps of wood, metal, and wire. As a neighboring plaque explains—referring to Afghanistan’s popular reality television show *Afghan Star*—the construction functions as a kind of monument to the desire for media in third-world countries. In contrast with such political statements, a nearby sculpture featuring a slide projector with eighty images of the artist using semaphore to spell out the title of the work—a long string of ridiculous words that begins with “babble, blabber” and ends with “yada, yada, yada”—embodies the heroic effort of saying nothing at all.

While both artists’ works are undoubtedly in dialogue—a cool conversation about use and uselessness, and quantifying the world around us—Antunes and Pica articulate their ideas through nearly contrary means. If Antunes creates formal presence around a rich but singular source material, Pica builds her forms from a variety of subjects and narratives. What resonates from one artist’s practice to the other’s are the dexterous ways each deals with space and changing notions of space. In this sense, Antunes’s and Pica’s works convincingly perform sculpture.

Leonor Antunes,
Chain of Triangles
(from Paris to
St. Saturnin),
2010, rope, brass,
dimensions variable.



—Catherine Taft