

Mystery of Living Things

We are delighted to present yet another exhibition born from the meeting of different ways of creating.

Situated within a territory shaped by the history of the Brazilian shipbuilding industry and the legacy of the Mac Laren Group, this project brings together seemingly unlikely forces. Just as engineering transforms matter into structure, art transforms perceptions and memories into new ways of understanding the world.

We live in a society driven by speed and productivity. For this reason, we feel compelled to reaffirm the importance of presence, observation, and imagination as essential elements in the development of new perspectives and the construction of innovative futures.

There is a profound affinity between the act of creating a work of art and that of building a vessel. Both require vision, technical expertise, sensitivity, and the courage to navigate uncharted territories. The presence of an artist residency within one of our industrial port complexes reinforces our conviction that creativity is a force capable of connecting us as a whole, breaking down the divisions fostered by a society that too often tends toward segregation.

I believe that art carries within it a powerful capacity for healing, opening gateways for meaningful encounters among us. By transforming individual experiences into shared visions, it strengthens bonds, awakens empathy, and expands our ability to see new horizons.

For us, investing in culture is, above all, investing in a healthier and more enduring human evolution.

Eduardo
Founder-Director, MECA Institute

Mac

Laren

There are forms of knowledge transmitted through observing birds, listening to the wind, working the land, and following the shifting of light. Knowledge that does not accumulate as information, but rather sediments in experience, in the body, and in the relationships that sustain life and its mysteries.

Throughout the artistic residency cycle of the MECA Institute, held between 2025 and 2026, the artists Ana V. Lopes, Anna Livia Taborda Monahan, Caio Pacela, Julia Gallo, Mayra Carvalho, and Yaka Huni Kuin, came together. Their works collectively form a field of relationships between beings, materialities, memories, and cosmologies. The exhibition *Mystery of Living Things* emerges from the questions and restlessness that move each of these artists in their research processes — questioning things that do not yet have language.

Birds, fish, eggs, crabs, whales, rivers, lands, viscera, designs, machines, winds, and horizons appear as forms of thought that challenge divisions between human and non-human, matter and spirit, science and enchantment. The exhibition occupies this borderland: between the visible and the invisible, between dream and wakefulness, between distinct bodies, between forms of knowledge that modernity frequently insisted on separating.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the border as a place of continuous transformation, a region where multiple worlds coexist without needing to reconcile into a single reality. As the author writes, "Borders are physically present wherever two or more cultures meet." The border does not become the limit, it becomes a zone of contact, friction, and creation.

Ilha da Conceição, Guanabara Bay, the shipyards of Niterói, the rivers of the Acrean forest, and the territories traversed by the artists also form an affective cartography where distinct geographies remain connected. Rather than locating fixed identities, these landscapes reveal journeys, encounters, and continuous transformations.

The horizon imposed by the presence of Guanabara Bay, visible from the paths and studio windows of MECA Institute and of this museum, runs through the exhibition as an insistent presence. Skies observed at dawn or dusk, shifts in light, birds in flight, and atmospheric states reveal an expanded temporality. The horizon ceases to function as a line of separation and becomes a surface of imagination, a space where perception moves beyond what can be immediately named.

The materialities present in this exhibition — charcoal, coffee, encaustic wax, steel, buriti straw, clay, pigments, and collected soils — are imbued with histories, displacements, affects, and temporalities. This approach finds resonance in the reflections of Maya K'iche' intellectual Gladys Tzul Tzul, for whom life is sustained by a communal web of relationships among people, territories, ancestors, and practices of care. In her writings, she states that "Communal work is the social energy that animates life in community," shifting the understanding of land as property toward understanding it as relationship. Land, in this context, is neither landscape nor resource: it is the condition of collective existence, shared memory, and commitment between generations.

The works gathered here also insist on the cycles of existence. Nourishment, hunting, growth, decomposition, and death appear as inseparable movements within a single continuum. This echoes the thinking of Lorena Cabnal, an indigenous Xinka thinker and activist who proposes understanding body and land as inseparable spaces of memory, resistance, and the production of life. "For indigenous women, the defense of the territory-land is the very defense of the territory-body," Cabnal asserts. This statement runs through the reality of three indigenous artists in the exhibition and illuminates the fact that landscape and embodiment appear as continuously implicated in one another.

In many cosmologies, flying beings participate in complex systems of communication between worlds. Birds write in the sky through movement, produce sonic inscriptions on the wind, and draw invisible choreographies across the landscape. In Mayra Carvalho's sharp bird sculptures, in the protective animals evoked by Yaka Huni Kuin, in the choreographed drawings of Julia Gallo, in the hybrid beings created by Anna Livia Monahan, in the animic ceramics developed by Ana V. Lopes, and in the gestures of faith present in Caio Pacela's research — flight appears as a language connecting humans, animals, rivers, elements, and ancestral lineages.

The research gathered in *Mystery of Living Things* draws close to the reflections of Gloria Anzaldúa, Gladys Tzul Tzul, and Lorena Cabnal — three key references for contemporary indigenous, feminist, and Latin American thought — because it refuses to understand knowledge as an exercise in separation. Instead, it presents ways of knowing grounded in relation.

Between sky, water, fire, and earth, this exhibition proposes a radical attentiveness to mystery. Not mystery understood as something that needs to be deciphered, but as something that remains alive precisely because it never fully reveals itself.

Catarina Duncan

Mystery of Living Things exhibition brings together a body of work developed by the artists during the second year of the MECA Institute's residency program: Ana V. Lopes, Anna Livia T. Monahan, Julia Gallo, Mayra Carvalho, Yaka Huni Kuin, and Caio Pacela. The works assembled here are traces and unfoldings of a shared period of time, in which singular artistic inquiries were continually shaped by the presence of others. The residency operates as an architecture of encounters, where distinct processes coexist, intermingle, and mutually transform one another.

This residency cycle was marked by the presence of Indigenous artists from different peoples—Karajá Iny, Guarani Mbya, and Huni Kuin—whose practices expand our understanding of territory as both the material from which we are made and to which we belong, and as a contested space traversed by borders, power relations, and mechanisms of exclusion. The awareness of a planetary existence that extends beyond the human constitutes one of the central axes of this exhibition. The works presented here invite reflection on the interdependent relationships between species and on the bonds of kinship that connect us to all living beings.

It is within this horizon that Ana V. Lopes's series *From the Coast to the Bay* unfolds. The artist revisits the geography of the state of Rio de Janeiro through the lens of the Atlantic Forest, tracing the flows, presences, and transformations of the fauna and flora that connect the Costa Verde region to Guanabara Bay. Her perspective shifts conventional boundaries to reveal a living landscape, constituted by ecological, affective, and historical relationships of the Guarani Mbya people that persist beyond territorial divisions imposed through colonial disputes.

Daughter of Iban Huni Kuin and a member of the Makhu collective, Yaka Huni Kuin develops a practice deeply informed by the knowledge systems of her people, articulating the healing processes of forest medicine, ritual chants, and ancestral narratives. Her paintings function as visual translations of this knowledge, making visible stories transmitted across generations. Through the proposition "Paintings for Land," the artist redirects attention from artistic production toward the conditions of existence of the Huni Kuin people, affirming the ethical principle of the inseparability of art and life. Yaka highlights how the preservation of culture, memory, and land constitutes both an aesthetic and political practice.

For the Karajá people, "Iny" is the name by which they identify themselves and refers to the beings shaped from clay at the bottom of the river. This origin narrative inscribes humanity within a relationship of kinship with the earth and the waters, affirming a condition in which territory, body, and memory cannot be conceived separately. It is from this understanding that Mayra Carvalho develops a practice in which land is not merely the place where life unfolds, but the very substance from which life emerges. Clay, earth, coffee, metals, and soils collected from different territories are mobilized by the artist in the construction of sculptural forms that evoke elemental beings and ancestral cosmologies. Her works arise from the observation of the sky and the cycles of transformation that mark the passage between day and night, bringing earthly matter and celestial dimensions together within a shared sensory experience.

MECA's proximity to the sea establishes a particular attentiveness to aquatic beings in dialogue with the large-scale structures of the shipyard. From observing these animals and the

complexity of their forms and modes of relation emerges the body of paintings by Anna Livia T. Monahan. In her works, natural cycles and relationships among marine beings intertwine with the dimensions of sea, sky, and land in compositions that evoke organic structures and states of continuous transformation. Her paintings operate as transitional spaces in which nature, imagination, and perception intertwine as possible materializations of mystery and revelation.

Confronting the mysteries between heaven and earth, Caio Pacela's investigation moves through different dimensions of spirituality—from faith to devotional practices, from belief to offerings, and from human relationships with the sacred. Situated between the mystical and the earthly, his work challenges the boundaries between individual and collective experience, proposing a reflection on the ways spirituality manifests in everyday life. With particular attention to gesture, the artist articulates an embodied dimension of religious performativity, in which the body becomes a support for symbolic and spiritual crossings. His actions may be understood as choreographies of surrender before the unknown, where movement approaches a form of listening and a relationship with the invisible.

During her residency at MECA, Julia Gallo lived within the shipyard, immersed in the industrial environment of Mac Laren and in direct contact with machinery, vessels, and the welding and metalworking workshops offered by the program. In her practice, drawing serves as the central axis from which fictional anatomies emerge, giving form to emotional states and challenging the separation between body and soul. Within this context, her works operate as sensitive constructions in which graphic gestures unfold into figurations made of aluminum, questioning the boundaries between interiority and form.

An artist residency is, above all, an exercise in inhabitation. Like a house, it welcomes bodies, thoughts, memories, and desires; it becomes a place where different trajectories meet and where coexistence generates new forms of presence and relation.

Throughout this cycle, the artistic inquiries gathered here were shaped by encounters between people, territories, knowledge systems, and ways of being. Each work preserves the singularity of its own trajectory, yet also carries the traces of a shared experience, revealing that creation is a way of being in relationship with the world and with the many beings that inhabit it.

As visitors move through the exhibition, they are invited to pass through the different rooms of this shared house, encountering in each work a singular way of dreaming and giving form to the mystery of living things.

Bianca

Artistic Curator, MECA Institute

Bernardo

Living Things: Diary of a Collective Process

I have been thinking about my experience as a mentor in the Instituto MECA residency less as a place of direction and more as a space for listening, exchange, and joint construction. Gradually I came to understand that my role there was not necessarily to offer answers or guide paths, but to create conditions for honest, sensitive conversations that remained open to each artist's process. There is something very beautiful in perceiving the residency as a field of encounters: a space where artists, curators, ideas, memories, and territories are constantly crossing through one another.

I have learned a great deal about how to allow ourselves to be affected by one another within this dynamic. There is a strong sense of horizontality in these encounters. At many moments, I felt I was learning just as much as I was accompanying — perhaps even more. The conversations end up functioning as small pauses within the accelerated rhythm of production for exhibitions, of managing artistic careers, and of the external and internal pressures of everyday life. They create a space where it is still possible to think together, to slow down, and to observe what each research is trying to say before it even takes a definitive form. More than accompanying individual research projects, I feel that the residency experience also reveals the importance of the collective. Even when starting from very different universes, the practices end up creating unexpected points of contact: the sea, displacement, memory, living beings, territory, the passage of time, ancestral knowledge, the rhythms of nature. Little by little, these relationships begin to appear not only in the works themselves, but also in conversations, in shared doubts, and in the way one artist begins to look at another's work.

I was deeply moved by my conversations with Anna Livia Taborda Monahan about crossing, contemplation, and landscape. The sea and the island appeared as constant presences, alongside the relationships between Rio and Niterói, Ilha da Conceição and Manhattan (two islands where the artist will be in residency this year), and the birds, fish, and silent movements between memory and observation. At many moments it seemed as though Anna's work was trying to create spaces of pause within the speed of the city. I was particularly struck when she spoke of herons and fish, and of the delicacy of these relationships between beings that coexist in the same space. Gradually, childhood memories emerged — of the landscapes she passed through — along with a very sensitive attentiveness to the small atmospheres of daily life that, in some way, influence her paintings through a play of shadows fundamental to transporting us to a dreamlike and mysterious place. Points of light guide our gaze across the canvas, carrying us into a dream — or into an unknown place where perhaps we have never been, but which, somehow, we can imagine inhabiting. A place where the boundary between memory, landscape, and imagination ceases to matter.

With Mayra Carvalho, the conversation revolved around time. The time of metal, of oxidation wrought by the waters of Guanabara Bay, of wear, transformation, and flight. The dark sheets of metal, the cuts and the scratches seemed to carry different states of duration within them. We talked about birds, flocks, and collective movements through space, and I felt an immense force in the way she brings something as heavy as metal close to a sensation of lightness and displacement. In contemplation, her work holds a particular attentiveness to the atmospheric

shifts of light and to the way light organizes the world around us. Mayra's work invites us to reflect on how a material can be capable of holding the marks of time and memory — as if it were possible to archive a breath, a ray of sunlight, a flight, or the beat of wings.

Ana V. Lopes's research brought a very strong relationship with living beings and with the idea of coexistence. Stars, tapirs, turtles, jellyfish, frogs, and bromeliads appeared as presences connected through different temporalities. My first question to Ana V. upon seeing her work was: "What do these beings have in common?" And a simple answer — "they are all present in the Costa Verde," the place where the artist was born — brought me back to my own roots, reminding me of my connection to that landscape and of the importance of preserving not only our affective memory of the places we come from, but also everything they still carry that is alive.

I was inspired when Ana V. spoke of the tapir as a symbol of the forest's return and the regeneration of the land. There is something profound in the way she conceives of the world not as something naturally divided, but as something fragmented by human structures. The force of her work lies precisely in placing non-human beings at the center of the narrative. By displacing the human from the center of the scene, Ana proposes other ways of perceiving territory and the relationships that constitute it, questioning established hierarchies between species and forms of life. Her sculptures invite us to look at these beings with greater attention, reminding us of the importance of preserving not only the animals and plants that inhabit these landscapes, but also the territories themselves that make their existence possible.

My conversation with Yaka Huni Kuin was deeply marked by the relationship between painting, memory, and the forest. She told me that she began to paint on the riverbank, observing the daily routine, her family, and the surrounding territory. At some point she said that it was the forest that taught her to observe, to think, and to paint — and that phrase stayed with me long after our meeting. We spoke about traditional Huni Kuin songs and about how they came to be translated into painting, creating canvases that carry rhythm, movement, and ancestral knowledge. I felt a great force when she spoke of painting as a form of both defense and approach — her work is a way of creating contact, respect, and listening between different worlds. It is a practice that invites us to think and feel art as a tool that connects people, cultures, and traditions.

In the end, I have come to feel that an artistic residency program — like an art exhibition — is built not only through the works presented, but above all through the relationships that arise among all the people involved in the process. This includes the public as well, who affects, transforms, and inspires this collective in ways that are often silent, but deeply meaningful. There is something very precious in the gesture of someone deciding to cross a territory, enter an exhibition space, and share with us what may be today the most precious thing in life: their time, their presence. I like to think of the exhibition as a space of encounter. A place where different sensibilities, memories, experiences, and ways of perceiving the world can coexist and pass through one another, even if only for a few moments. It is this relational dimension that interests me most in the process, and also in the life choice of working with contemporary art — perceiving how artistic and curatorial practices can complement one another, create bonds, and

strengthen more collective, affectionate, and generous ways of imagining, thinking, and existing together.

Danniel Tostes

Exhibition

Mystery of Living Things

Credits**Production**

Instituto MECA

Founding Director: Eduardo Mac Laren

Executive Manager: Giuliana Poli

Artistic Curator: Bianca Bernardo

Production Assistant: Paula Pereira

Communications Assistant: Carolina Higa

Program Mentors: Danniel Tostes, Denilson Baniwa and Jessica Cinel

Mac Laren Group

Gisela Mac Laren

Alexandre Kloh

Guilherme Mac Laren

Carlos Leandro

Marconi Silva

Edemilson Figueiredo

Vanessa Faruolo

Claudilene Kill Caetano

Paulo Cezar Amaral

Vitor Mauro Batista Januário

Levi Pinto do Rego

Agnaldo Melo de Oliveira

Rodrigo da Costa

Marcelo Azevedo

Marcus Vinicius Ribeiro

Introductory Text: Catarina Duncan

Artists:

Anna Livia Monahan

Ana V. Lopes

Caio Pacela

Júlia Gallo

Mayra Carvalho

Yaka Huni Kuin

Visual Identity: Dandara Hahn

Printing and Plotting: X Visual

Photography: Estúdio Quadrante

Audiovisual: Davi Victor

Installation: Jorge Cupim / Los Montadores

Museology: Phelipe Monteiro
Lighting: Josué Anjos / Lighting Designer
Framing: J Alves
Print Shop: Nova Brasileira
Artwork Insurance: Howden
Artwork Transportation: Gustavo Melo
Press Relations: Erico Marmioli

Acknowledgements:

Celso Ribau
Stephanie Ribau
Flavio Ribeiro
Victor de Wolf
Angelica Pimenta
Carmo Johnson Projects
Janaína Torres Galeria
Evelyn Fernandes
Pamela Vitória Ribeiro
Coletivo Makhu
Josué Anjos
Isadora Ganem
Vivian Caccuri
Laura Lima