

**MCA Collection
Handbook**

The background of the page is an abstract composition of soft, blended colors. A large, irregular shape in a warm orange hue dominates the left and center, overlapping a lighter, pale pink area that covers the right side. The bottom edge shows a darker, more saturated pink wash. The overall effect is a minimalist, artistic design.

Maria Fernanda Cardoso

Born 1963, Bogota, Colombia. Lives and works Sydney.

Woven Water, Submarine Landscape I (2003) exemplifies many of the ideas that Maria Fernanda Cardoso has explored since the late 1980s. Born in Bogota, Colombia, Cardoso has been based in Australia since 1997, where her work – across sculpture, installation, video and performance – has become known for its use of unconventional and idiosyncratic materials.

Woven Water, Submarine Landscape I is a sprawling web of dried starfish suspended from the ceiling to form a tessellating series of pentagonal fractal clusters. Like many of Cardoso's installations of the early 1990s, it is made from animal remnants linked together to create an abstract geometric volume of stylistic simplicity and evocative formal complexity. Many of her works from this period employ elements from the natural world – such as shells, dried fish (including piranhas) and fish scales – illustrating Cardoso's interest in the byproducts of the tourism industry as it responds to the insatiable demand for exotic merchandise.

Other works made prior to this time feature dried insects and reptiles (including flies, lizards, frogs and snakes) skewered on metal structures that are wrought into geometric shapes such as arcs, circles and spheres. These works draw attention to the brutal beauty of the natural world, the patterns Cardoso uses evolving from organic order and also reflecting the way that these patterns have been adopted and adapted through industry. Their stylistic simplicity alludes to the rigours of 1960s and 1970s minimalist art (which Cardoso experienced at firsthand when she studied in the United States of America in the 1990s) and to the repetitive rhythm of ornamentation in pre-Colombian pottery and gold work.

Colombia, both past and present, has played a key role in Cardoso's practice. Until recently, Latin American artists were located on the margins of the art world. Cardoso's work reflects on the realities of life in Colombia, particularly the transience of existence when surrounded on a daily basis by death and violence. She is also interested in pre-Colombian art and colonial religious art heritages, which for most Colombians are encountered in the country's archaeological museums or colonial churches – institutions that function in the same way as art museums in other parts of the world, providing people with direct experiences of art, much of it funerary in purpose.

Another work first developed in the 1990s is *Cardoso Flea Circus* (1994–2000), a series of performances, videos and installations for which Cardoso trained 'cat fleas' to perform acrobatics, tightrope walks, the tango, weight-lifting and other earth-defying feats on a small futuristic stage. Like the artist's earlier formal explorations of the natural world, the flea circus is situated at the intersection of art, science and perception. It is also a parody of artistic skill, as well as of the world of science and that of the 'nerd' artist.

More recently, Cardoso has worked with animal penises and female reproductive organs. Her *Museum of Copulatory Organs* (2012) features electron microscope scans of magnified insect genitalia, as well as exquisite sculptures of invertebrate genitalia in glass, bronze, resin and nylon. These works examine the intersection of art and science: the artistic context revealing the marvels and complexity of the biological world to new audiences. Like *Woven Water, Submarine Landscape I*, *Cardoso's Flea Circus* and *Museum of Copulatory Organs* reveal her sustained interest in research processes that are analytical, critical and playful. Her work is informed by her study of historical, literary, scientific and philosophical texts, and her empirical observations of the natural world.

Rebecca Coates

Woven Water, Submarine Landscape I 2003
preserved starfish, galvanised steel wire
dimensions variable
Purchased with the assistance of Geoff and Vicki Ainsworth, and donors at the 2005 Bella Dinner, 2006
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