

WHY ARE YOU HERE ?

An interview with
Lara Favaretto
by Mariana Canépa Luna

Mariana Cánepa Luna: **Let's begin with misunderstandings. What do you think are the most common misconceptions writers and critics make about your work?**

Lara Favaretto: **When they stick labels to the work, but the worst is when they don't even look carefully or save time just absorb comment that other people have already made. Sometimes I have been pigeonholed as 'the circus and parties girl'. It's like analyzing hardcore cinema by reducing it to 'the one in which they fuck and that's it', erasing the sensational star system from Cicciolina up to Moana.**

MCL: **Giorgio Verzotti has referred to your practice as consisting of 'initiatives' and not 'works' – do you understand what he is getting at?**

LF: **I could think of initiatives in the sense of cultural, religious, sportive and military initiatives. It has been a long time since that piece was written. I've always tried to sustain the possibility of destroying the form and reducing the work itself to a common object, as well as how it's possible to make an exhibition without making one – projecting and encouraging its use in order to obtain the acceleration of its obsolescence.**

MCL: **Your performances, installations and objects are often made involving others. You sometimes set seemingly impossible or futile tasks for people to do. This for instance happened in *Doing* (1999), for which you asked three guys to turn a piece of marble into dust, something that took three months for them to do and you then presented as a 54 minute soundtrack of their activity. How did you continue to convince these guys to do this – they must have moaned about the pointlessness of their task? And with this piece were you trying to evoke the absurdity of certain human activities, or were you more concerned with faith in the impossible and the power of collective action?**

LF: **I got them involved by telling them my ideas, offering them as if they were material for discussion and letting them fly in every direction. I allowed all the people who attended to potentially take part in this project. They were all important and everyone could collaborate, even if with a minimal contribution. They all contribute by making me keep a distance from my own previous work, in order to produce a different outcomes each time.**



Doing, 1999

MCL : What are the compromises that you make when collaborating with others?

LF : They are not proper compromises – just types of variations that don't really distort the works' ideas, but only their external appearance. A funny compromise occurred when I was about to realise *Mondo alla Rovescia* (World upside down), in 2002, for which an all-male group of boar hunters got together to lift a donkey, and decided to call their wives together to discuss the validity of my proposal. The ladies granted authorisation on the one condition that the donkey had to be female – not a jack but an ass! They thought that it could be a pornographic image.

MCL : In that work you gathered a few men to turn the popular saying about impossibility 'when donkeys fly' (in English it would be 'pigs might fly') into a reality. Are there other sayings would you like to 'disprove'?

LF : I don't like idiomatic phrases or popular sayings. The one you refer to had been used to mock me, so I used it. I prefer to believe all the stories that I'm told, though I'm not really interested in them in themselves. I like to be surprised, and the best stories to me are the ones that still remain astonishing. The most beautiful stories I've ever heard were the ones I came across while living with the lower caste, the so-called 'untouchables' in Rajasthan, or stories from gypsy dwellings, but that's their business. I endear myself to the things I hear around me, mostly the things that are told spontaneously and enlightening the day or give a chance for the dead to fall in love.

MCL : In your recent Frieze Commission you sent out a letter inviting the Queen of England to visit the Frieze Art Fair (*Project for Some Hallucinations*, 2007). The letter in which she declines the invitation was pinned to a tree inside the fair. What kind of arrangements would you have made if the Queen had accepted?

LF : Very Few! After an official inspection by the Royal Staff everything would have followed the Royal Protocol. My work stopped before that, with the very possibility to project an apparition, a 'platonic' intervention, a Goliardic visualization, or a confrontation with the appearance of a movie star from early cinema. It was an objectless hallucination, a kind of sentimental investigation that was projected to appear yet be autonomous in denying itself. The failure was long-awaited and foreseeable, and was highlighted at the fair by the sound of applause, that put an end to the great daily spectacle as everyone was heading for the exit.



Mondo alla rovescia(The Upside-down World), 2002



MCL : In the context of that commission you said that ‘when one listens to the narration of an idea that is so powerful it ultimately does not matter if it’s ever realised’. Can you tell me another such idea or story?

LF : Don’t you think it’s like that? I think that if very few words can describe a work, just enough to capture the work’s physiognomy, it could end up being even stronger than the work itself. The border is really subtle. Telling a story also means suspecting deception and trying to improve it, waiting for it to suddenly unravel, and having fun as much as I have. A story I haven’t understood is: ‘I’ve been studying disguises for a long time now. I am hired to shadow one of the most important people on the American political scene. I am currently based high in the Tora Bora caves.’

MCL : The comical and the satirical haunts almost every work you have made. Compressed air tanks [‘Platoon’, 2005], for example, that look like an army of incorruptible custodians, have party blowers fixed to them as if they are poking their tongues out. Does this sharp sense of humour also exist in your personal life?

LF : Of course it could be like sticking your tongue out, but above all that it is a firing squad, a betrayed or beaten army that remains standing still. It’s as if they were all in their uniforms during a forced break. They exist in order to function, and they are classified as consumer goods or common objects. It’s tragic!

MCL : When Mikhail Bakhtin analysed the literature of François Rabelais, he described the carnival as a time when legal, political and religious authority disappeared or was suspended temporarily. The carnival signalled a liberal period where every joke was possible. You have developed works around what you call the ‘gift of the day’, staging unexpected parades [‘Treat or Trick’, 2002-6] or borrowing the language of celebrations [‘Confetti Canyon’, 2005 or ‘Tutti giù per terra’, 2004]. What are you trying to liberate?

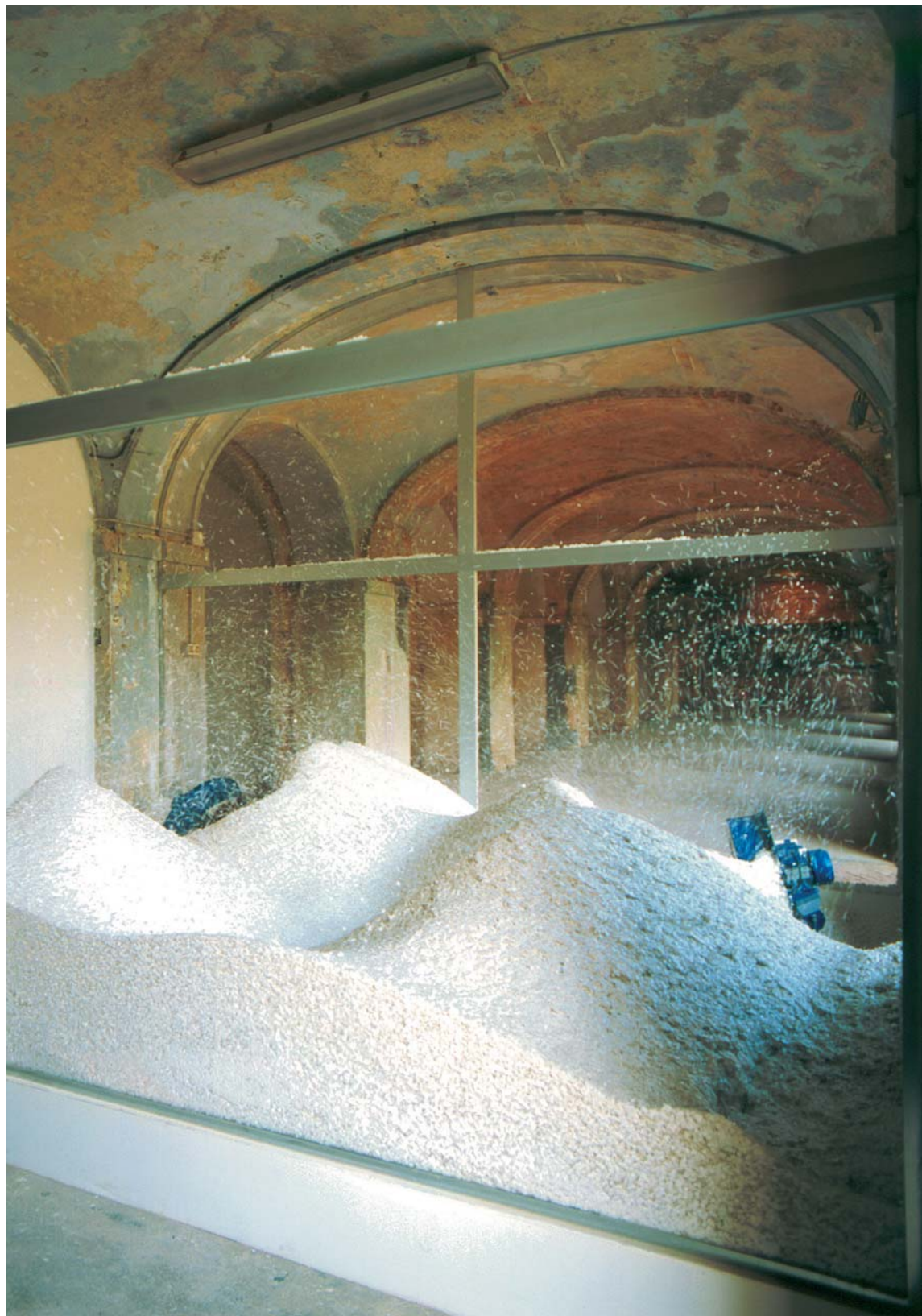
LF : It’s like leaving a ‘back soon’ sign and coming back upset. I love jokes, it’s like a deal with the Dark Man or the Wild. I’m working on a project with him, and the fact that it is far better destroying than creating. For those who don’t know him, he stands curved-backed as if he were ashamed of something, he hardly answers questions yet he has no discretion regarding his own questions. It seems that he can’t wait to go back to his world, and I cannot blame him.





CONFETTI CANYON, 2001-2005

Performance view: Ecstasy: Recent Experiments in Altered Perception',
curated by Paul Schimmel, MOCA, Los Angeles, 2005



U. 62 *Tutti giù per terra*, 2004 Installation view



MCL : You give part of yourself in the *Gifts of the Day* series, these are signs of great generosity on your part. But as it has been said in Marcel Mauss's book *The Gift*, giving creates a debt to be repaid, and in a sense gifts are really never free. What are you hoping to receive?

LF : Maybe I don't even like presents. I always get them without necessarily asking for them and I feel they are somehow an old-fashioned tradition. I wouldn't like to disturb the dead, but I'd like to talk about the shared economy with Bill Gates, Alain Touraine, Ronald McDonald, Gérard-Francois Dumont, Louis-Marie Jourdain, Johnny Cash and Hamid Karzai, and someone from the Aal al-Bayt foundation. I'd like to know who would eventually hope to receive Eduard Reitz after giving us amasterpiece like *Heimat*, Yasujiro Ozo after making *Dernier Caprice*, Samuel Fuller after *The Naked Kiss* or Chris Marker after shooting *La Jetée*? Probably, they would expect only to go out to dinner with a Kamikaze ...

MCL : You often speak of the joy of the unexpected, of the unpredictable and the spectacular. Celebration is sometimes a roller coaster ride, you have a great time while it lasts but there's disappointment when it's over. Are you not frustrated by sudden ends?

LF : I'm glad that everything ends so that I can start over again! By being in a state of great shock everything remains potentially inexplicable, and there is a resistant space within an impotent mood where the thing is unarmed but still capable of moving you, where a single gesture is unconscious but it excites you, the cast is made with concrete but it hypnotizes you and maybe you remain impotent, dreaming of a Panzer with a proboscis pointing at the ground. It's unarmed, it's a bachelor machine.

MCL : When I saw documentation of the piece you did at Castello di Rivoli *The poor are mad* (2005), the beginning of Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude* came to mind. In the novel gypsies bring all sorts of marvels each year to Macondo, marking a clear event in the town's life that presents a world of new possibilities to the main character. Making the gypsy cart fly as if it was a magic trick – it seems that you are trying to honour an almost extinct sociological phenomena ...

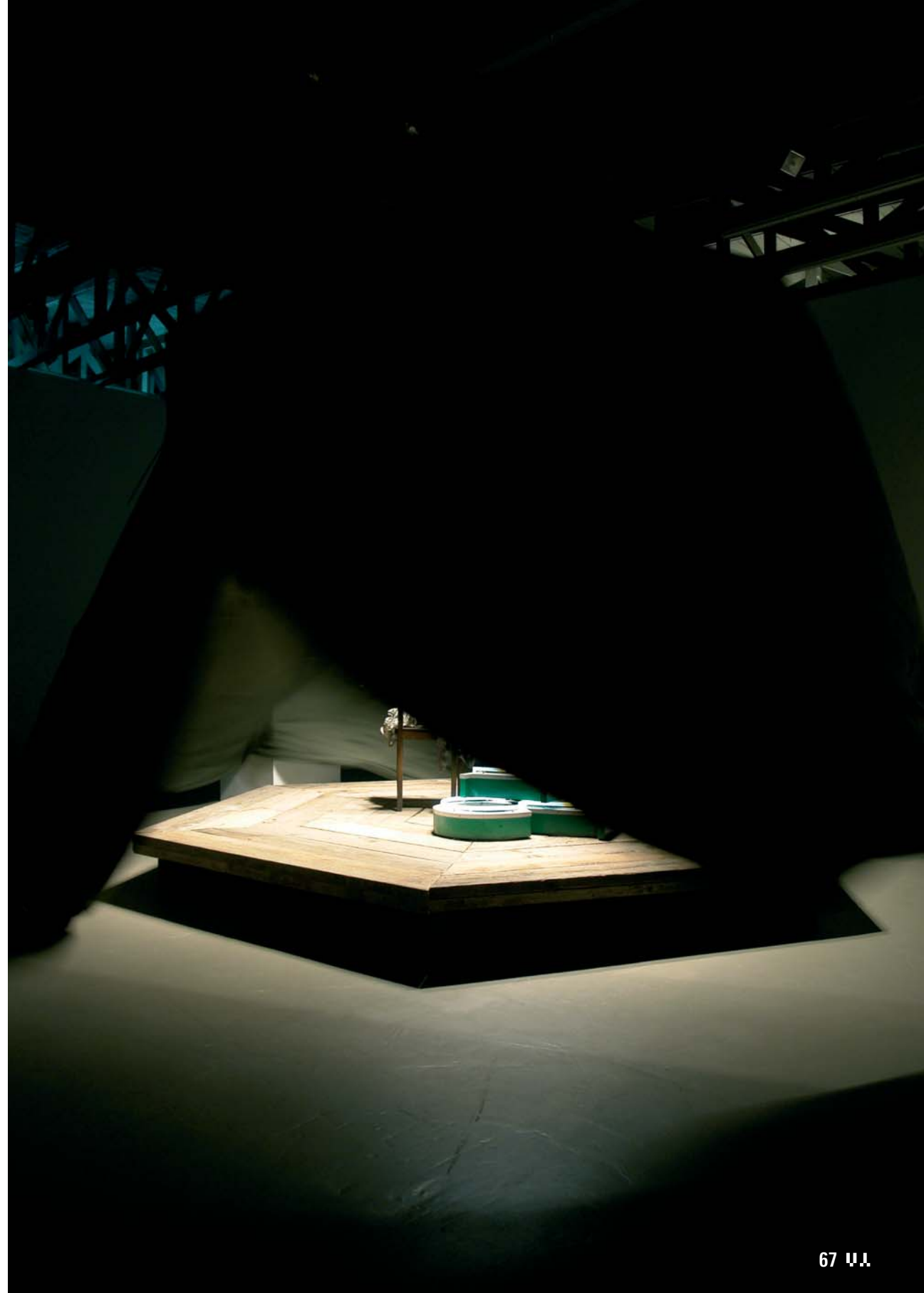
LF : I knew the people of Macondo. They disappear only to re-appear but that's only a trick. They do magic in order to make everyone believe that they're on their way to extinction and they are lucky that everyone believes them. In this way, they become a middle phenomenon and in doing so they become capable of an anomalous and spontaneous evolution that is open to ephemeral illusions. I follow them to learn how to be without anything, even without heroes. I listened to them as they can be whoever you wish, and all of this because of a pure need to survive.

Opposite: [I poveri sono matti](#), 2005
Installation view at Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli-Torino





Cominciò ch'era Finita (it began while it was already over), 2006
installation views at Klosterfelde Galerie, Berlin, 2006





Gummo, 2007
Installation views at Artissima 14
Galleria Franco Noero

MCL : Your sensibility feels more at home with Garcia Márquez's magical realism or the Felliniesque?

LF : Maybe, instead with Vittorio De Sica's grotesque realism, in which a shanty-town is turned into a village feast, where a visit to the cinema is a sunset. *'8 e 1/2' told again*. I also recognize magical realism in Wong Kar-Way, Harmony Korine, Werner Herzog, Aki Kaurismäki, Jim Jarmusch, Olivier Assayas – I'm always seduced by their attraction to what subtraction offers.

MCL : Some of your works seek group action and collective laughter, others are more private and melancholic. For instance, in *Lost and Found* (2005), you bought a lost suitcase in a lost-and-found auction. The suitcase was then placed alone in the middle of a room – is that as an invitation to imagine what could be inside this surprise box or do you see it as an anthropological object that traces someone's memories?

LF : It can contain anything: a time-bomb that will reach zero within one hundred years, Angelina Jolie's pants, One Million dollars, the remains of a corpse, the first forty issues of *Playboy*, the 1000 top ideas of the century... I bought the yellow suitcase in an Italian railway auction, it was one among many. I choose one every year, now even in flea markets, the next-to-last from a garbage dump. I choose from what's inside and I put other things in, I close the suitcase and throw the key away. It would ideally be installed by a passer-by. Another bachelor machine!

MCL : I would like to hear your response to your own question, posed in one of your works, a simple writing on a wall: 'Why are you here?'

LF : It's kind of a provocation by subtraction – the question itself overtakes the answer, leaving you idle and doubtful. The feel is similar to the one you get when you are absorbed in the writing: *whoever reads this is a donkey*. The very moment you have seen it, and read it you already are a donkey.

Lara Favaretto lives and works in Turin. In 2008 she will be artist in residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; the Hayward Gallery, London, and at the Proa Foundation, Buenos Aires, where she will subsequently have solo shows. She will also present work at The British School at Rome and participate in the 16th Sydney Biennial.

Mariana Cánepa Luna is the 50% of Latitudes, a curatorial office based in Barcelona involved in the production of artistic projects since 2005 and co-directed with Max Andrews. Future projects include co-curating the exhibition 'Greenwashing. Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities', Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (28 February–11 May 2008). www.LTTDS.org

