

SPOTLIGHT



Colombian Australian contemporary artist **MARIA FERNANDA CARDOSO**, 58, has a prolific international career spanning three decades and 32 countries. She still believes ‘nature is the best artist in world’

David Varga

INTERVIEW BY BRIDGET CORMACK

You’ve bred house flies and trained fleas for previous artworks (your Cardoso Flea Circus toured the world before it was acquired by Tate Modern). Is there a current creature of focus?

I have been filming and photographing the Australian maratus jumping spiders, commonly known as peacock spiders. The male has a tail that is colourful and he raises it and opens it on display for the female; they sing and dance and wave the tail and make sounds. Every year I have to wait for their (mating season) to film and photograph these, what I call, “Australian artists”, with microscopy. They know how to do colour, pattern, gesture, movement and sound. And they are only between 3 and 5mm big.

Sexual reproduction in the natural world is a strong theme in your art. Why so?

It’s the most creative force in evolution. It’s where innovation happens, it’s where change happens and it’s how we can survive; we always need to be genetically slightly different so we can beat the viruses of the world. All that is beautiful and exuberant in life has to do with sexual reproduction; for example flowers and plants, or the peacock tail. There are fish that also make patterns to seduce the

female. Elk’s horns are completely useless but a show of good genes.

People are worried about Australia’s plummeting birthrate. Any solutions in nature?

Nature behaves in waves so you have a period of growth and then you have a period of decline. So I think (the current trend) must be a natural thing. It’s artificial to have this permanent idea of growth. You have to rest and you have to retreat and then you can resume your growth. Our human dream of progress and growth is completely unsustainable ... There was a period where they were talking about zero growth as a goal, trying not to grow (laughs) instead of trying to make more babies.

At 11 storeys high and 335sq m, your mural on the side of a new 36-storey tower is believed to be the largest public artwork by an Australian artist in the Sydney CBD. How are you tackling it?

It was a technical challenge because I wanted to expand my original drawing-painting that I do at human scale. I wanted to blow it up so every expression of my hand and every drop of paint and ink blob would be identical to what I did. I hired this wonderful industrial designer to help me

figure out a methodology for how to do that and they came up with an original method and we figured out how to make a giant template that can be traced on to the wall. I wanted to paint it myself with a team of painters but you have to be on a swinging stage, a platform that hangs like the ones they use for cleaning windows. Even though I got my working at heights permit, my manager was very reluctant to let me go because it’s pretty dangerous (laughs). So I got these wonderful painters who have been climbing up and doing it on my behalf.

What is the inspiration for your mural Ripples and Droplets?

One inspiration is that painting for me is moving fluids around. I basically invented a technique to draw with paint. I invented a way of working with diluted paint that behaves in an interesting way. Not only can you make long and thin lines, it also creates this little droplet, because the fluid gets repelled by the concrete (the surface on which it is painted). I wanted to make these little drops and lines and magnify them so I called the mural Ripples and Droplets.

Ripples and Droplets (in progress) is above and to the right of the Castlereagh St facade of 116 Bathurst St, Sydney.