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The notion of threshold is present in several areas of knowledge, evoking the idea of transition, passage. Such crossings, transpositions and hybridizations — whether physical or metaphorical — are central to Anna Bella Geiger's work.

Geiger (née Waldman) is recognized as one of the most important and prolific artists in Brazilian art. Born to Polish-Jewish immigrants, she brings deterritorialization and questions about places of action as a constitutive part of her personal geography: an experience that opens up a fertile field for reflection on the diaspora, the encounter with otherness, and the ways of thinking about language itself.

For the artist, mapping and transposing means transforming Geography into a place of art. Geiger makes it possible, through an imaginary tracing of meridians and parallels, to reflect on the regional, the local and the global, the present and the past, the interior and the exterior, the self and the other. Many of her works deal directly with the complex notion of space, sometimes subverting cartographic conventions, sometimes challenging the imaginaries that hierarchically organize territory and society.

*Anna Bella Geiger — Limiar* [Threshold] presents around sixty works and documentary photographs related to the artist's teaching practice, which unfold across five major conceptual axes: spaces, creation-proposition, language, deterritorialization-transposition, and political imagination. Geiger's trajectory, which began in the 1950s and remains intensely fertile, is explored transversally across these axes, highlighting thematic recurrences, the use of multiple languages, the exploration of shared spaces for experimentation, and the constant questioning of the status of the artwork and its political role. This exhibition seeks to explore such passages and thresholds in the artist's vast production, through emblematic works from different periods — from 1962 to 2024.

The exhibition opens with the series *Situações-limites* [Limit-situations] in which, over black-and-white photographic fragments, the artist replicates the handwritten phrase "Imagination is an act of freedom." Created in 1974, at the height of the civil-military dictatorship, these works echo the repression and authoritarianism of the time while announcement at a new future. Their relevance is reaffirmed today by calling on us to imagine common futures on this Earth.

By exploring a wide range of languages in her work, Geiger proposes games of invention-creativity, inviting the viewer to reflect on the world around them and on our capacity to imagine new realities. The artist's first solo exhibition held at a Jewish Museum, these thresholds also suggest powerful connections with Jewish history and culture, including notions of polysemy and cultural transit.

The exhibition *Anna Bella Geiger — Limiar* invites us, ultimately, to an urgent and challenging exercise of political imagination in times of crisis. A threshold that, the artist suggests, can only be crossed in constant movement.

PRISCYLA GOMES AND MARIANA LEME

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It is an honor for the Museu Judaico de São Paulo to organize Anna Bella Geiger's first solo exhibition in a Jewish institution.

By presenting the work of one of the most relevant Brazilian artists, MUJ invites us to celebrate a trajectory spanning seven decades of vigorous production, marked by reinvention and criticism of physical and symbolic territories.

The Jewish and daughter of Polish immigrants, Geiger grew up among languages, cultural references, and geographies that never completely settled down. In part of her work, this experience seems to overflow in the way the artist mobilizes fragmented cartographies and unstable edges, inhabiting — as curators Priscyla Gomes and Mariana Leme propose — the threshold between words and things.

Geiger's disposition towards the thresholds of language also takes us to the threshold of her own identity, as Jewishness, intrinsically linked to the notion of displacement, can be understood as an eternal *becoming*, a permanent process of turning into, as formulated by the psychoanalyst Betty B. Fuks.

In her book *Freud and the Invention of Jewishness*, Fuks suggests that the Jewish experience is built on crossing, wandering, and the absence of a fixed territory. The Freudian creation of psychoanalysis, for example, would be inseparable from this existential structure. The same could be said of part of Geiger's poetics, whose works — especially her reordered maps — manifest a restlessness that dialogues with this Jewish way of being: a being in transit, who interprets and reinscribes the signs of culture and belonging.

The exhibition, held in partnership with the galleries Mendes Wood DM and Danielian, invites us to explore an artistic thought that is attentive to visible and invisible borders, to the silences of history, and to the places where identity is frayed in order to be remade.

In this exhibition, we celebrate not only the power of Anna Bella Geiger's work but also the presence of her Jewishness — not as a theme, but as a field of forces, as a way of questioning the world, as the expression of a constant threshold that refuses to define itself or to be defined in the name of freedom.

FELIPE ARRUDA

Executive Director, Museu Judaico de São Paulo

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Part of the first generation of her family born in Brazil, Anna Bella Geiger has always been marked by restlessness and curiosity, by the pleasure of drawing, by the sense of adventure and freedom, and even by the duty to transgress.

Her parents, Polish Jews, came to Rio de Janeiro fleeing an increasingly difficult economic situation for the Jewish population in Poland after the First World War. In their luggage, they brought the utopia of socialism and the value of modernity.

Living among slum-dwelling children, socialist Jewish immigrants, and even Nazi Germans present in the country during the Estado Novo regime, Anna Bella grew up circulating through different realities, overlapping times and territories.

The Vargas dictatorship, with its open anti-Semitism; the tension imposed by the Second World War; her time at the French Lycée; and her years of study at Fayga Ostrower's (1920-2001) studio, among other experiences, offered her a strong experience of Brazilianness and foreignness, integration and threat.

With a long-living trajectory in Brazilian art, Geiger has turned freedom to imagine and displacement — political, existential, territorial — into the poetics of her work. Her body of work, endowed with multiple languages and multiple themes, supports and formats, is neither fixed nor can it be reduced to any predetermined identity or unity.

This wandering, borderline, decentralized character appears here as a singular mark of the artist. A mark of restlessness, of non-subordination to ideological or aesthetic canons, of neither personal nor political conformity. A non-conformity that, we could add, is also Jewish.

ILANA FELDMAN

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## TIMELINE OF JEWISHNESS

### 1921

*My parents are Polish. They got married in their hometown, Ostrowiec, and my father came first, in 1921, to learn the language and to see if there was anything that would match his profession. My mother came the following year. When she arrived, she loved it because there was no cold weather. All of my father's other siblings and cousins, except for a few who stayed in Poland and died in the Holocaust, almost all of them went to the English side, to Canada.*

### 1933

On April 4, in Rio de Janeiro, Anna Bella Waldman is born, daughter of Jacob Icek and Golda Waldman

Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany; Dachau concentration camp opens; Jewish businesses are boycotted, and local anti-Semitic laws are introduced

### 1935

Nuremberg Laws strip German Jews of their citizenship and ban marriages with "Aryans"

### 1937

Getúlio Vargas' coup d'état and the beginning of the Estado Novo; Degenerate Art Exhibition is organized by the Nazi Party, in Munich

### 1938

"Night of Broken Glass" marked a massacre against Jews in Germany and Austria

### 1939

Outbreak of World War II

**1941**

Beginning of the Nazi mobile killing units, the Einsatzgruppen

**1942**

Brazil enters World War II on the side of the Allies; Wannsee Conference, convened by Nazi leaders, coordinated the "Final Solution" to exterminate the Jews of Europe

**1943**

*There was a synagogue on Tenente Possolo Street (...) I would go with my father and mother in the evenings (...) and at the meeting I remember once or twice someone would show up, not from the concentration camp, but someone who had managed to escape from Poland through Germany and had arrived in Brazil; and they would tell us if there was any news. It was always horrible news.*

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

**1944**

ABG begins studies at the French Lycée

Mass deportation sends Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz; Paris is liberated from Nazi rule

**1945**

End of the Estado Novo; liberation of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau; suicide of Adolf Hitler; end of the Second World War; creation of the UN

**1947**

Foundation of MASP

**1948**

Foundation of MAM-RJ and MAM-SP; creation of the State of Israel

**1949**

ABG begins her studies at Fayga Ostrower's studio, where she remains until 1953

**1950**

At the age of 17, ABG makes her first appearance in an exhibition, at the then-called Salão Nacional de Belas-Artes, RJ

**1951**

First São Paulo Biennial

**1953**

ABG participates in the 1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Abstract Art at Quitandinha Hotel, RJ

**1954**

Suicide of Getúlio Vargas; outbreak of the Vietnam War

ABG moves to New York, where she attends Art History courses at New York University and the MET Museum

**1955**

Kassel's first Documenta

**1956**

ABG marries geographer Pedro Geiger

**1957**

ABG graduates in Anglo-Saxon Languages at the National Faculty of Philosophy (now UFRJ)

**1962**

*I went to Cuba to receive the engraving award. When I left Itamaraty, things were already bad. It wasn't a dictatorship yet, but everything was a bit strange. And the woman at Itamaraty said: "Anna, I'm not going to stamp your passport, because you're going to Cuba". It's incredible how she thought. This was still 1963, but Itamaraty was already well informed.*

ABG receives the first prize from Casa de las Américas in Havana, Cuba

**1963**

Foundation of MAC-USP

**1964**

ABG is part of the Brazilian Art Today exhibition at the Royal College of Art, London

Beginning of the military dictatorship; creation of the National Information Service (SNI); promulgation of AI-1

**1965**

ABG participates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> American Engraving Biennial, in Chile

**1967**

ABG participates in the 5<sup>è</sup> Biennale des Jeunes Artistes, Paris, and in the 9<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial, and exhibits visceral engravings in RJ

Promulgation of the "Constitution of the Dictatorship"

**1968**

Promulgation of AI-5; Prague Spring; student revolts in Paris

**1969**

General Emílio Médici becomes president; DOI-Codi and Oban are founded

ABG goes back to living in New York with her family and presents a solo exhibition at Columbia University

ABG returns to Brazil and participates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Panorama of MAM-SP. ABG and other artists promote a boycott of the São Paulo Biennial

**1972**

ABG creates the Activity-Creativity course at MAM-RJ

**1973**

ABG teaches courses at MAM-RJ

**1974**

ABG participates in the international exhibition *Perspectiva 74*

General Ernesto Geisel takes office

**1975**

ABG presents the solo exhibition *Situações-limites* [Limit-situations] in the Experimental Area of MAM-RJ

Vladimir Herzog is murdered

**1979**

Amnesty Law is enacted in Brazil

**1980**

ABG inaugurates the solo exhibition *Local da ação* [Place of action], in RJ

**1981**

ABG participates in the 16<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial

*The Torah didn't occur to me when I started making the Rrolos-Scrolls. I started the Rrolos-Scrolls on tracing paper; I bought a three-meter roll and started drawing and tracing little maps all over it until I finished it. Then I cut them, and said, "Where am I going to put this?" So I started rolling them up; you roll them up and leave a surviving part to be seen. Then I started using the lead scroll; I made a cliché that says Esther to say that this is the book of Esther, which is the first book of the Bible. (...) But the parchment, everything is found in scrolls.*

**1984**

ABG presents a solo exhibition at the Brazilian Centre, London; she teaches a course at the University of Texas, Austin

Diretas Já [Direct Elections Now] Movement

**1985**

ABG is part of the jury of the 8<sup>th</sup> National Visual Arts Salon

**1985**

End of the military dictatorship

**1988**

Promulgation of the new Federal Constitution

**1991**

End of the USSR and the Cold War

**1994**

ABG participates in the Bienal Brasil Século XX and in exhibitions in Beijing and New York

**1997**

ABG participates in the 1<sup>st</sup> Mercosur Biennial and the 6<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial

**1998**

ABG exhibits at the 24<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial

**2000**

ABG presents a solo exhibition at the Brazil-Argentina Cultural Center, in Buenos Aires, and is part of the Women of the World exhibition, in New York

**2002**

*If I do not allow myself to think in a Manichean way in relation to other issues in the world, I accept it even less in relation to the territory of art. What I mean by this is that there can be no room in art for fundamentalism, because its issues must be incorporated exclusively into an aesthetic field, with its own laws. (...) Breaking with one's own dogmas requires humility and a certain belief in the utopian sense of art. The only possibility of art is to be experimental, and the only condition of the artist is in fact to act experimentally.*

**2005**

ABG presents two solo exhibitions, *Circunvoluções e Outras Memórias* [Circumvolutions and Other Memories], at Paço Imperial, RJ, and *Anna Bella Geiger – Entre o Local e o Global* [Anna Bella Geiger – Between the Local and the Global], at the Pampulha Art Museum, Belo Horizonte, MG

**2006**

Retrospectiva *Anna Bella Geiger – 50 anos* [Anna Bella Geiger Retrospective – 50 years], at CCBB-RJ

**2019**

ABG retrospective at MASP

**2020**

Onset of the Covid-19 pandemic

**2023**

ABG celebrates her 90th birthday and over 50 years in her career

**2024**

ABG solo exhibition at Sesc Copacabana

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The statement “imagination is an act of freedom” summarizes the aesthetic-political universe that Anna Bella Geiger built in the first half of the 1970s. It was in this context that the artist conceived *Situações-limites* [Limit-situations] — a set of four photomontages from 1974 that would lend its name to the homonymous exhibition at MAM-RJ, in 1975. The series investigates precisely the transition zones — those that delimit but also cross from one era to another. The works combine anonymous photographic images collected from magazines or produced in her studio with typed phrases that are repeated with minimal variations. Due to the scale at which the four photomontages were reproduced, there was a challenge regarding the size of the photographic paper — much larger than what was available at the time — which meant that the artist needed an entire roll of Kodak paper, whose photolith film required a proportionally sized development basin.

The verbal and visual repertoire chosen by the artist places the viewer in a territory of interrogations in which each crossing renews questions about form, language, and experience. Words function as triggers that offer directions for reading without imposing definitive meanings. With each work, Geiger invites the viewer to move their gaze from one fragment to another, creating and uncreating meanings within each journey.

By stating that imagination is “an act of freedom”, Geiger shifts the focus from the material object to the mental process: seeing, remembering, fabulating. The series explores the threshold between self/other, inside/outside, word/image and, with this gesture, claims an artistic practice in which experimenting also means resisting.

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The 1970s marked the beginning of Anna Bella Geiger's first video experiments, consolidating her as a pioneer of video art in Brazil. Her first foray into exploring the moving image occurred with *Circumambulatio* (1972), still filmed in Super 8. However, it was with the Portapak camera that the artist began her works in this format. Walter Zanini (1925-2013), then director of MAC-USP, was an important supporter, enabling the exhibition and circulation of her works, considered experimental at the time. In 1975, the artist participated in the first international video art exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.

For Geiger, exploring this poetics expressed a desire to expand the meanings of the support, enabling her to investigate new ways of articulating movement, time, sound, and image. Video thus emerged as a means of exploring a series of ideas and challenging codes of representation. Resembling notebooks and maps, these works expanded the artist's possibilities among different media.

Certain conceptual characteristics persist as central features in her video production, including another experimental nature, with the precariousness of captures, a critical stance towards the sociocultural context, and the rejection of both aesthetics and television narrative conventions. Real-time recordings of banal situations and prolonged actions become deliberate strategies to invite a less passive reception by the public.

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Anna Bella Geiger began her teaching career in 1965, still in her home, where she welcomed young students. Among them were Amador Perez, Fernando Cocchiarale, Ivens Machado (1942-2015), Letícia Parente (1930-1991), and Miriam Danowski. In 1968, Geiger began her work at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ). The Brazilian political context, amidst a civil-military dictatorship, required, according to the artist, that her own practice be questioned and revised, moving away from conventional techniques or supports. In light of this, her proposals began questioning hierarchical teaching and aiming to build an environment of collective discovery and experimentation.

In 1971, Geiger invites Lygia Pape (1927-2004) and Antonio Manuel to join the course-event Activity/Creativity, coordinated by her, whose basic principle consisted in demonstrating that any material — from industrial scrap to debris left by the tides on the sands near the MAM-RJ building, cardboard packaging, plastic, electrical wires, and ropes — could become a poetic instrument of creation, as long as the student's inventiveness was unleashed.

The open structure of these modules aimed to develop not only manual skills but, above all, sensory perception (auditory, tactile, visual) and the exploration of the unconscious and the symbolic. From these experiences emerged the conviction that teaching artistic practice was, above all, a process of invention in which the teacher acted as a mediator. After leaving MAM-RJ by the end of 1973, Geiger maintained her studio-classroom at home, keeping alive the community of former students who became pioneers of video art in Rio de Janeiro. In the 1980s, the artist began teaching at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts, an activity that lasted for many decades.

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The *Rrollos-Scrolls* constitute one of the most emblematic sets of Anna Bella Geiger's work, in which threshold thinking is also central. This was the format in which books were invented, before they were bound — a change that took place around the first century of the Common Era. The title, spelled with two "r"s, refers to the character Rose Sélavy by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968).

The artist articulates a vast range of materials and images from diverse sources, such as lead topographies engraved by her, encyclopedia pages, reproductions of paintings and maps, pigment, carbon paper, parchment, etc., as in the work *The Book of Ester*. The *Rrollos-Scrolls*, in fact, are polysemic and destabilize organizational principles that are both conventional and arbitrary. In some cases, in addition to the reference to Duchamp, the works establish more direct dialogues with art history — such as a page from a Portuguese encyclopedia from the early 20th century, the black-and-white image of the *Gioconda* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and Yves Klein's (1928-1962) cobalt blue.

The works suggest a certain limitation of literate knowledge, since one cannot see the part of the content that is rolled up. The *Rrollos-Scrolls* seem to materialize a fragmented understanding of the world, in permanent construction and reconstruction. After all, the contents of a book — and of a work of art — are always negotiated, translated, and remade, and their meanings are found in the passages between the subjectivity of the writer and the reader, in the intercultural transit and in the overlapping of different historical moments.

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The *Fronteiriços* [Borderlines] series begins in the 1990s, a unique moment in Geiger's career, when she makes yet another move to expand her material repertoire, in a different support. *Fronteiriços* is made up of iron drawers from old archives that are filled with wax and pigments, a technique known as encaustic, and other materials such as copper foil and wires, and springs.

In this series, the artist develops metaphors about borders and memory, reproducing maps and diagrams, engravings and writings that weave a narrative about the objects and relationships that she creates and crystallizes. This moment of production aims to create a space that merges together geographical reality and the anthropology of the social imaginary, which puts the notion of identity at risk, through the tension of geographical forms in relation to the other elements arranged in the drawers.

Collected by the artist during her wanderings around the city of Rio de Janeiro, the old iron boxes, already used, add an important temporal dimension to the works, placing them on the threshold between archive, graphic representations and the continuous exercise of reflection on history, which always begins from the present.

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## LITTLE SCROLLS

1998-2000

Lead, drawing and engraving on parchment

Artist's Collection

At once sculpture and graphic object, the *Rolinhos* [Little Scrolls] challenge established conventions and arouse the observer's curiosity, inviting them to come closer and discover the layers of meaning contained therein. The hybridism of techniques is a procedure dear to the artist, who in this case combines drawing and engraving in order to compose a kind of historical artifact, in which the parchment holds remnants of times, places, and cultures.

The images that make up the *Rolinhos*, almost always presented in fragments, resemble routes and references to imagined and unreachable territories. On delicate and tiny surfaces, the artist juxtaposes monuments, well-known landscapes from Rio's geography, Leonardo da Vinci's (1452-1519) studies and biblical excerpts. These elements combined lead to clues for disoriented movement. The verbal dimension — in which we read indications such as "LOCAL DA AÇÃO" [PLACE OF ACTION] and "NO PRINCÍPIO" [IN THE BEGINNING], or *bereshit* — does little to help establish a precise point, an indication of the beginning or end of a journey, reinforcing the wandering nature of these small poetic cartographies.

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**EW 18 WITH NEO-CONCRETE TENDENCY**

1981

Oil and acrylics on canvas

Courtesy Mendes Wood DM

Geiger began the *Pier & Ocean* and *Macios* [Softworks] series in the 1980s, a period that marks the end of more than twenty years of civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. The paintings' main characteristic is the construction of a fragmented scene, giving the works a collage-like quality through loose brushstrokes distributed across the canvas, and the use of different colors and textures. The artist, whose abstract experiments date back to the 1950s, revisits compositions that do not necessarily arise from the representation of reality but, at the same time, are anchored in it through the physicality of the material itself. The *Macios*, in turn, invade the physical space, through the padded filling between the canvas and the stretcher.

Both *Pier & Ocean* and *Macios* can be understood as metaphors for a complex and changing reality, reflecting a certain relaxation after decades of repression, torture, and persecution, while also suggesting the volatility of social changes at the time.

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**UNTITLED**

1962

Aquatint, etching and relief

Artist's Collection

The two metal engravings presented here are representative of an important moment early in the artist's career, a period in which she was associated with the so-called informal or lyrical abstractionism. In them, trapezoidal shapes overlap in an expressive gestural register, creating compositions that are at the same time unstable and rigorous.

In 1953, Anna Bella Waldman (still unmarried) was selected to participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Abstract Art, at Hotel Quitandinha, in Petrópolis. Curated by artists Edmundo Jorge (1921-2005) and Décio Vieira (1922-1988), the exhibition became a landmark, presenting the public with the emerging tendencies of abstractionism in Brazil.

Three years after the Cuban Revolution, in 1962, the artist received the first prize at Casa de Las Américas, an important cultural center in Havana, for the ochre and black engraving shown here. Geiger also received an honorable mention at the 1<sup>st</sup> Latin American Engraving Biennial in Chile (1966), and the first prize at the Young National Engraving exhibition, at MAC-USP (1965).

From then on, her work takes on new experimental contours. In 1967, the artist joined the boycott of the São Paulo Biennial after the enactment of Institutional Act N<sup>o</sup>. 5, which further intensified the arbitrary practices of persecution and torture under Brazil's civil-military dictatorship. It is as if "lyricism", affected by the harshness of the times, was forced to go elsewhere.

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## **RROSE SÉLAVY, MÊME**

1997/2025

Newspaper page, photo-serigraph print and collage

Artist's Collection

The enigmatic portrait of a woman, accompanied by camouflage spots, is printed on newspaper front pages. Unlike the graphic representation of space seen in cartography, Geiger here tensions the space of representation: the everyday and banal newspaper becomes a support for contemporary processes of art and the (re)writing of its history. The artist appropriates the emblematic figure of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and, in one example presented here, the newspaper covers reporting the fire that destroyed much of the National Museum, exactly two hundred years after its founding (1818-2018).

In the images silkscreened by Geiger, Duchamp — photographed by Man Ray (1890-1976) — is dressed as Rrose Sélavy, a female alter ego who embodies the expression "*c'est la vie*" or, in English, "that's life". A threshold of gender and authorship, Sélavy was appropriated by Geiger and went on to appear in other wide circulated images: which ones are chosen for the construction of imaginaries? What news stories make the headlines, and which are left out? And which stories do we choose to remember?

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## **AN UNLIKELY GEOGRAPHY**

2023

Softwork, tub TV, LCD TV

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## **CONVERSATION WITH JOSEPH BEUYS IN NEW YORK**

1995

*Uma geografia improvável* [An improbable geography] (2023) is a video installation composed of a *Macio* [Softwork] dramatically lit by a spotlight, a tube television that reproduces only noises, and a LCD TV that plays a conversation between Geiger and one of the most influential conceptual artists, the German Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). The conversation took place in a New York gallery in 1975.

Unlike the *Macios* in the same series, in this case, the irregular-cut fabric expands itself through the space. The artist argues that the unfinished aspect, with exposed seams and threads, aims to make explicit another materiality, in which seams and threads are connected. In the video conversation, the artists talk about interpersonal relationships, spaces of solitude, political-social organizations, states of consciousness, etc., making it clear that artistic processes are also human. The appropriation of a TV, initially broken, completes the installation, transforming noise into a graphic and sound element, at once fortuitous and crucial. After all, chance is an inseparable part of life, of art production, of displacements and transits.