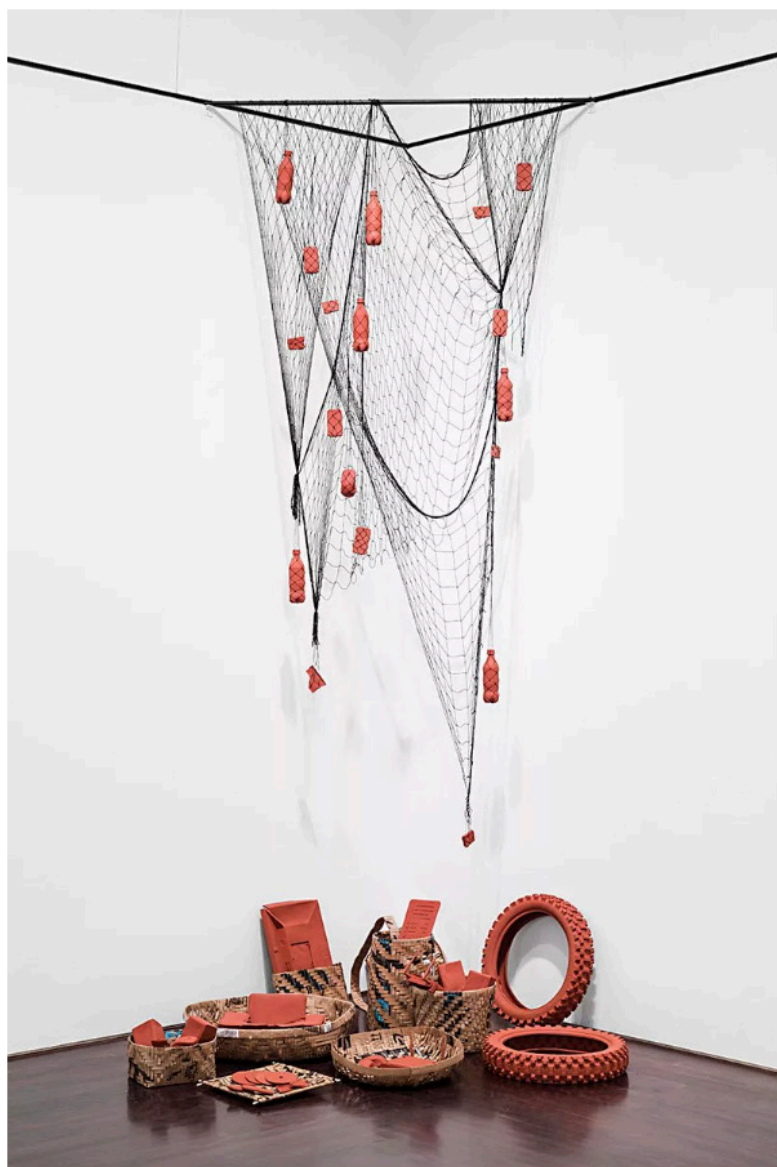


# THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

## “Clarissa Tossin: Meeting the Waters” at the Blanton

The Brazilian artist explores the confluence of globalization’s streams of production through the Amazon

by **Melany Jean**    APRIL 12, 2018



Installation view of *Nova Gramática de Formas, No. 1* and *Nova Gramática de Formas, No. 2* [New Grammar of Forms, No. 1 and New Grammar of Forms, No. 2], by Clarissa Tossin

Ellsworth Kelly’s posthumous *Austin* has been drawing crowds and attention to the Blanton Museum of Art recently, but a visitor could easily miss a small room upstairs, reserved for what the museum calls a “Contemporary Project.” In this long and narrow room, reminiscent of a nave like that in Kelly’s secular chapel, Brazilian artist Clarissa Tossin shows a sampling of her work in “Meeting of Waters,” an exploration of the confluence of globalization’s streams of production and the Amazon River’s streams through Brazilian port city Manaus.

Using the city’s history and geography as thematic starting points, Tossin pulls from the uneasy merging of the Amazon’s tributaries that occurs in the area. The Rio Negro, a blackwater river, meets other tributaries but stubbornly resists mixing, creating a natural phenomenon where the dark water flows in visible separation for miles alongside lighter waters.

The show consists of four works. Most prominent is *Encontro das Águas* [Meeting of Waters]. It flows from the ceiling and runs the length of the room like a processional carpet. The woven vinyl tarp resembles a topographic map, with swaths of dark green and brown interrupted by serpentine bits of sky blue.

*Nova Gramática de Formas* [New Grammar of Forms] Nos. 1-3 are displayed along the sidelines of the tapestry. Industries from the region's past and present are represented in terra cotta: tires signifying the old rubber boom piled alongside symbols of more modern enterprises like keyboards, display monitors, and compact discs, all rendered in rust-colored baked clay. Some are inside woven baskets made in part from what are plainly Amazon.com boxes. Hanging over No. 2 is No. 3, a fishing net with various terra cotta flotsam also signifying manufactured output from the city's industrial park: soda bottles, iPhones, and computer mice.

As a means of commentary on globalization, the uneasy mixing of regionally indigenous modes of creation and provision, such as weaving, terra cotta pottery, and fishing nets, with modern mass production, such as phones, soda, and computers seems at first too gimmicky to be profound. The most explicit connection, the name "Amazon," ties the region's most known landmark to the world's largest online retailer. The connection lands with an inelegant obviousness, but given Tossin's outlook as a Brazilian working frequently in America, the connection is perhaps one she makes more readily in day-to-day life than others might, making its vulgarity intentional.

The way the torrential tapestry overwhelms the room gestures to the inevitable thrust of the Amazon, whose gushing volumetric flow is far and away the greatest of any river in the world; it also points to the seemingly inescapable nature of the company that chose the river as its namesake and industrialization and globalization writ large.

As someone who audibly groaned upon seeing a brick-and-mortar Amazon bookstore but renewed their Prime subscription without hesitation last month, I am not, as most of us are not, inculpable when it comes to the propulsive and often harmful forces of expediency. Personal participation in these larger forces is easy to dismiss as unavoidable. Tossin seems to acknowledge as much in her presentation, but she also refuses to allow the harmful effects to be ignored.