

Fall 2019

# ART PAPERS

43.02



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Strategies  
of Response

United States	\$ 10
Canada	\$ 14
United Kingdom	£ 8
European Union	€ 9



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[photo: Alan Seabright;  
courtesy of the artist  
and the San Francisco  
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# Strategies of Response

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Simone Leigh, *Jug*, 2019, bronze, 84.5 × 49.6 × 48.7 inches [photo: David Heald ©2019 The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; courtesy of the artist and Guggenheim Museum, New York]

filmmakers, and activists. The artworks on view redefine femininity in a way that centers the experiences of black women, and the exhibition, as a whole, testifies to the value and power of a collective female force. Beyond its more conventional exhibitionary elements, *Loophole of Retreat* brings together black female creatives from across disciplines and mediums to contribute to the conversation, adding layers of meaning to the objects on view. Leigh's work takes up space—physical and metaphorical—and in return provides space for black women to assert their autonomy and subjectivity. Through the lens of Leigh's exhibition, the rounded walls of the Guggenheim echo a loophole by providing a space for often marginalized narratives and defining femininity through solidity, strength, and resilience.

LONDON  
Delfina Foundation

Review  
Claire Phillips

## Accumulation by Dispossession Asunción Molinos Gordo

April 30 –  
June 22, 2019

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Asunción Molinos Gordo, *Accumulation by Dispossession*, installation view, 2019 [photo: Tim Bowditch; courtesy of the artist and Delfina Foundation]

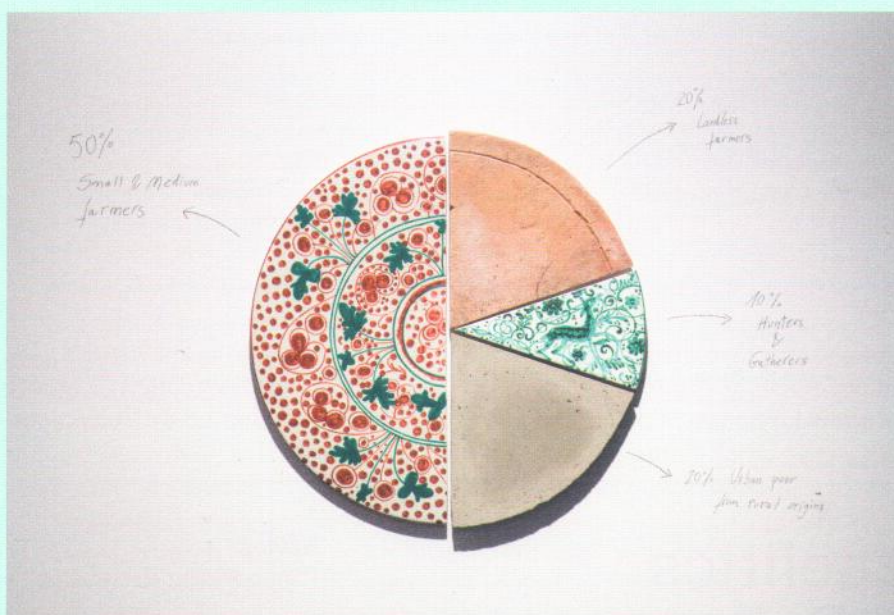
Across the spectrum of artists working today, there are those who confront political and social injustice, and those who avoid it. Former Delfina resident artist Asunción Molinos Gordo is firmly a disciple of the former approach.

Molinos' work focuses on rural life—the charming ideal of a farmer tilling his fields, set against the new reality of megafarms, genetically modified crops, and mass industry. For Molinos, who grew up in a tiny village of fewer than 100 people in northern Spain and whose father is a farmer, disenfranchising the peasantry raises a frightening concern. She wonders, in the words of Bob Geldof, how to feed the world.

At Delfina Foundation in central London, Molinos turned her attention to the global food economy, challenging who decides what gets planted, where it's sold, and for how much. Geographer and Marxist scholar David Harvey first mooted this theory in his 2003 book *The New Imperialism*, suggesting that for power and wealth to fall into the hands of the privileged few, there are many who have to be stripped of theirs. Grounded in research undertaken during her Delfina residency in 2014, Molinos

addressed the underlying problem, raised by Harvey, in an exhibition of artworks as varied in their mediums as the stories they had to tell. And as Molinos showed, dispossession can come in many forms. It isn't simply the physical eviction of farmers from their land, as in Zimbabwe under the dictatorship of Robert Mugabe; dispossession can manifest itself in the loss of reputation or social standing.

As visitors entered the galleries, the first work that they encountered was a pie chart rendered in shards of brightly colored ceramic and clay. By visualizing statistics, the chart instantly shattered the idea that large-scale agriculture is the way forward: 70% of the world's food



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supply comes from small family-run farms—the kind that American megafarming would be happy to see fade from view. In the accompanying wall text, Molinos explains that there actually is enough food produced to nourish everyone 1.5 times over, but 821 million people do not have enough to survive—the painful irony being that most of them are farmers.





J



K

When it comes to the food chain, only a handful of top corporations decides which mouths get fed, and the powers that be seem just fine with that. In Molinos' exhibition, a humble sketch of an hourglass brought this concept to life. It showed how nourishment filters from producers to consumers via a narrow neck, mediated by kingmakers including trade giants Cargill, ADM, and Bunge, who control 90% of the global grain business.

America and the West's domination of the global food system was made evident through such works as a series of miniature sandbags in toy form, which acted as symbols of humanitarian aid and the new currency of agricultural supplies used to negotiate conflict, demonstrate power, and control nations. A model of a ship—inspired by ones from the era of the World Wars, and painted in brilliant, geometric dazzle camouflage used to confuse foes—made an appearance. Molinos used her model to recount similar stories from the present, of hulls full of grain in international waters, waiting until demand sends prices soaring. Molinos used a painted cardboard box made to resemble the kind you might receive from a food bank to draw attention to recent issues around the control and distribution of food in the UK following the 2008 banking crisis.

Among the multifarious stories from around the world that filled Molinos' show, an Egyptian narrative prevailed. Vibrant, hand-stitched textiles abstracted tales of traditional farmers on the banks of the Nile, their way of life threatened by harassment and by the rise of vast plots of monocrops that stretch into the desert, destined to feed Saudi Arabian livestock. Beneath this dark story lay the complex history of Egyptian farmers, whose reputations have ricocheted from a position among the most revered in their society to the most reviled. In a talk exploring the themes of the exhibition, Molinos explained the farmers' plight, discussing how the less than sympathetic media and government in Egypt have transformed the farmers' identity in modern times into one of cheats and idlers. This rebranding prompted the community to play a key role in the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

Molinos' scrutiny turned elsewhere in Africa, with two Zimbabwean hundred-trillion-dollar notes on display that referenced hyperinflation and the devaluation of local currency on the global food market; then to Jordan, where the tales of peasants are used as subject matter for calligraphy and grammar lessons in public school classrooms. Perhaps the work that required closest attention was a video showing a group of Turkish farmers sipping sweet tea as they lament the strict legislation of seeds. They wonder whether their ancestors had to cope with anything quite as terrible. "Keep quiet and stay in your corner," one farmer half jokes and half warns, darkly.

Writing about Molinos' work poses a conundrum: how to separate her socio-political position from the bare bones of her practice as an artist. There's no denying that the subject of Delfina Foundation's *The Politics of Food* series, tackling the reality of our broken global food system, is a fascinating one. Less clear is whether Molinos' art has the ability to stand the test of time. But perhaps that isn't the role of the artist anymore.

Molinos defiantly argues that culture can reverse the dispossession of farmers, overhaul their reputation, and make their struggles visible. Her simple yet effective and wide-ranging use of materials does just that, forcing visitors to acknowledge a problematic and downright crooked system. When it comes time to question whether art can be a moral compass, Molinos' defiance is like the North Star on a cloudy night.

J K  
Asunción Molinos Gordo, *Accumulation by Dispossession*, installation view, 2019 [photo: Tim Bowditch; courtesy of the artist and Delfina Foundation]

RICHMOND  
1708 Gallery

May 16 –  
June 29, 2019

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## Infrapolitics Alan Ruiz

Review  
Claire Phillips

Infrastructure is where the material and political forces shaping our experience most intimately coincide. It is the fabric of the built environment, from network cables to global shipping lanes, electrical grids to satellite orbits. It is also the wider set of political, social, and legal networks that control, sort, and standardize how we