

frieze

Amalia Pica

Q: What is art for? **A:** It's a way of resisting the lack of meaning in things, a desperate attempt to make sense of how random and absurd the world is — and it's also a way of celebrating exactly that.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

I grew up in Argentina in a family that had no connection with art, and in a city, Cipolletti, that at the time didn't have a museum. I was very young when I first saw a full-scale silhouette of a pregnant woman drawn on paper and stuck to a wall in a street. My mum explained to me that it was a way to signal a *desaparecido*, meaning people who had been captured by the military dictatorship and whose whereabouts were unknown. I asked my mum if the figure was her friend who I knew had 'disappeared'. She said it wasn't but it made her think of her. It wasn't until I was in art school that I learnt that *El Siluetazo* (the silhouette) was initiated by three artists — Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel — on 21 September 1983. They didn't call it art but a 'graphic event'; along with the *Madres de plaza de Mayo* (The Mothers of Mayo Square) and other human rights groups, people traced their own bodies onto paper and plastered them around Mayo Square in Buenos Aires. It spread spontaneously. My mum didn't know it was art but it certainly meant something to her and it made a huge impression on me.

What do you like the look of?

Colour and patterns.

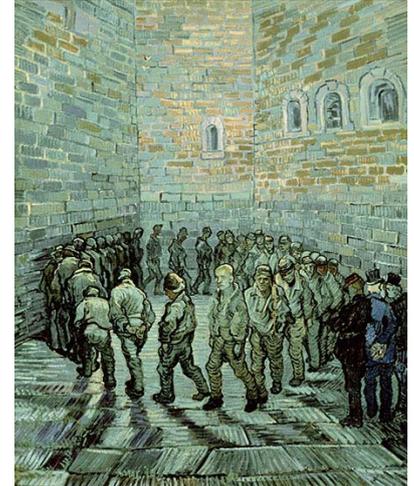
What images keep you company in the space where you work?

There are no images in my studio, not even of my own work. When I finish a piece, I put it away. Sometimes I even conceal images that might infiltrate my space, like those on book covers. However, I also have a study and by the door I have stuck a print-out of an amazing painting by Vincent van Gogh which was emailed to me by my friend Otto Berchem. Van Gogh painted *Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)* (1890) while he was in an asylum in Saint-Rémy. I like the idea of an artist thinking about another artist's work — in this case the engravings of Gustave Doré — in order to deal with his own captivity. It's a very haunting image but it makes me feel very lucky every time I leave the room, which is why I have placed it next to the door. If you could live with only one piece of art, what would it be? One of the stained-glass windows Sigmar Polke did for Grossmünster cathedral in Zurich in 2009, in

About this article

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By *Amalia Pica*



Vincent van Gogh *Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)*, 1890, oil on canvas

particular the ones with slices of agate and lead. I would love to see the light shining through the rocks at different times of the day, but I guess I would need a house first to put it in. Unless, of course, I moved into the church. It'd make a great studio.

What's your favourite ritual?

A party of any kind. I think dancing is always the way forward, and I think we all should do more of it.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

I've had a lot of really odd jobs; I once even sang the numbers for the lottery results on TV as a child. I was very embarrassed but the pay was really good. Whatever else I might do, I would never do that again.

What should change?

Although I would like to say 'the invention of teleportation', I find it unbelievable that we still live in a world with so much poverty and social injustice. It's the first thing that should change. Poverty just shouldn't exist.

What should stay the same?

My life. I love it, and I love how different each day is. And my friends; I love them too. Having the friends that I have is something I am very proud of and I consider it to be my greatest achievement. I hope we grow old together.

What is your favourite title of an art work?

This is something I often think about because titles are hard and important and so easy to get wrong. Mike Kelley's *From My Institution to Yours* (1987) has been in my top title list for a very long time. It often pops into my head and makes me think about how dependent and conditioned we are by the institutions we have invented (not personally but collectively) and inhabit.

What music are you listening to?

Luis Alberto Spinetta. I grew up listening to him. His music was extremely important to me when I was a teenager. It was a huge part of who I was and who I wanted to be. He died a couple of months ago, which is extremely sad; I can't shake it off and have to keep listening to his music. I can't believe he will never release another album. He was a great poet, a great musician and a great artist who continued to make great music until the very end.

What are you reading?

El Diario Argentino (The Argentine Diary, 1953–68) by Witold Gombrowicz. It's an account of the many years the writer spent in exile in Argentina. It's rather strange that it sits on my night table next to the complete poetry works of Jorge Luis Borges because Gombrowicz actually describes in his diary how he was always on the margins of the local literary scene of which Borges was such a big part.

Amalia Pica

lives and works in London, UK. Her solo show at Chisenhale Gallery, London, runs until 15 July. Later this year, she will have solo shows at Modern Art Oxford, UK; BASIS, Frankfurt, Germany; and in 2013 at List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, USA; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, USA. In the past 12 months she has taken part in numerous group shows including 'The Ungovernables: Generational Triennale' at New Museum, New York, USA; and 'illuminations' at the 54th Venice Biennale, Italy.

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