

# One Day of Domestic Rituals

An exhibition by Larissa Marangoni

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## One Day of Domestic Rituals

*Juan Castro y Velázquez*

Daily life anywhere in the world manifests a brutal economic duality: opulence and misery. The extreme degree of either condition — even when its causes are of a temporal nature — is marked by solitude (in the sense of isolation), a universal constant. Larissa Marangoni works in the tropical port of Guayaquil, Ecuador, an overpopulated city evidencing such deep and drastic social contrasts.

Marangoni's long and sincere interest in the lives of pious persons as a source of inspiration is proven in her installations on the lives of Saint Catherine of Siena, the Mirabal Sisters of Santo Domingo, the brilliant Mexican writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Narcisa de Jesús, a lay sister of Guayaquil's own coastal region who lived in the first half of the 20th century and has been proposed for canonization. In each case, these installations reflect the isolation and loneliness these exceptional individuals had to adjust to in their passage through life. Marangoni elaborated and researched their lives from both historical and hagiographic points of view.

At her last show at the Central Bank Museum in Guayaquil, she exhibited a totally new vision. In *Weapons of War*, Marangoni centered her artistic exploration in the sensations of attack and defeat, and gave them shape in a series of minimalist sculptures, an installation, and a video of circular structure. With that work, Marangoni, as an artist and as a woman, entered into a new phase of investigation into the duality of life and death.



For the Hallwalls show, the artist searched for a theme that would reflect an everyday domestic reality. She found it right in front of her studio, in a shack where indigent people live. The video footage, shot by Larissa from a strategic, hidden location, is a document of real poverty. The installation imaginatively recreates this unsettled and unsettling world.

Art historically, this domestic and universal drama, as depicted by the artist, brings to mind the early 17th-century paintings of the French brothers Le Nain (known for their paintings of peasant life) and a great number of other works of the Flemish-Dutch school. For a conceptual artist such as Marangoni, however, this subject matter is used for more than either a purely aesthetic or merely documentary purpose.

In the video, an old woman roams in a lot full of trash and dirt. There is not a piece of comfortable furniture in the lot, only a makeshift bench of scrap wood. Her only companion is a dog, apparently full of fleas from its constant scratching. The woman pokes the trash with a long stick as if it were an extension of her hands and arms. The old woman cooks on the floor and climbs a trash pile to pick up objects she has stashed in an adjacent wall.

As in a theatrical performance, the woman repeatedly enters and exits, always carrying plastic bags, as if going on endless trips carrying a suitcase. At lunchtime, her son joins her. Together, they sit on cement blocks in the sidewalk. Lunch does not last very long, but it is the only time the family—consisting of mother, son, and dog — are together.



(continued from inside panel)

The mechanical device the artist has designed for the installation is an abstract recreation of the action documented in the video, and therefore represents the duality between primitivism and modernism. Suspended from the mechanism by ropes, a number of bags are dragged across the gallery floor from one side to the other and back again, in a continuous, absurd trip to nowhere. In the middle, a wooden suitcase containing miniature furniture made of balsa wood and painted blue symbolizes the contents of an unrealizable dream. With these few elements, Marangoni dramatically reproduces one day in the life of a roofless woman.

The intention of the artist is not merely to document poverty in society, but to recreate the sensation of silence that comes from turning a deaf ear to the clamor of a chaotic world. It is

also an approach to understanding the human concept of house and home. In both the video and the installation, the observer participates in a daily domestic ritual. Of course, the work of a contemporary artist like Larissa Marangoni — whether in Ecuador or the United States — reaches a limited audience, and in its silence and simplicity can't hope to compete with the noisy barrage of commercial, mass-media images to which we are subjected in every waking moment of our lives. Art of this kind is cryptic and less easily understood, and therefore the only one capable of universal greatness.

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Juan Castro y Velázquez is an art critic in Guayaquil, Ecuador. He writes for *El Universo*, the Ecuadorian newspaper. His most recent published work is a book about Ecuadorian painter Manuel Rendón Seminario.

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