

ART SEEN: How Patricia Piccinini's transgenic 'homeless' creatures came to Vancouver

Patricia Piccinini's hyperrealistic animal-human sculptures have found temporary resting space in rooms on the second floor of the Patricia Hotel. The art exhibition is curated by Marcello Dantas from the Vancouver Biennale.

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Vancouver, BC: SEPTEMBER 10, 2018 -- Hyper realistic transgenic human-animal sculptures at the Patricia Hotel in Vancouver, BC Monday, September 10, 2018. The sculptures, by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini is opening Friday and is part of the Vancouver Biennale. *JASON PAYNE / PNG*

It's because of the connections of Marcello Dantas (<https://bit.ly/2O5BGdU>), one of the senior curators for the Vancouver Biennale (<https://www.vancouverbiennale.com/>), that an exhibition of Patricia Piccinini's works (<https://www.imcurious.ca/>) is opening Friday, Sept. 14 at the Patricia Hotel.

Dantas was curator of the phenomenally popular exhibitions of Piccinini's works in Rio de Janeiro two years ago. ComCiência (<https://bit.ly/2x5uvvH>) was seen by 444,425 people, making it one of the top exhibitions of contemporary art in 2016. Taken together with two other exhibitions of Piccinini's works in Brazil that year, her transgenic creatures were seen by a total of 1.4 million people.

Piccinini's process starts with drawing her transgenic creations. The drawings are translated into hyper-realistic sculptures with a team that includes a 3-D modeller, sculptor, painter and Peter Hennessey. (<http://www.peterhennessey.net/>), her husband, production manager, and artist in his own right.

I asked Dantas a series of questions by email. His responses have been edited. He was in London and plans to be in Vancouver Friday, Sept. 21 to see Curious Imaginings (<https://www.imcurious.ca/>).

What was your role in Patricia Piccinini (<https://www.patriciapiccinini.net/>)'s exhibition ComCiência?

I was the curator and I developed the project with Patricia. I also gave it the title which in Portuguese is a word play with consciousness and science. Her work is about the border, the fringe between science and surrealism.

How successful was the exhibition?

It was the most visited contemporary art exhibition in the whole world in 2016 according to the Art Newspaper in London. In overall exhibitions, it was second place. It brought an entirely new crowd to the museums where it was shown. In three venues, we topped over 1.4 million visitors.



The Comforter by Patricia Piccinini is in the Vancouver Biennale exhibition Curious Imaginings at the Patricia Hotel. Photo: Jason Payne *JASON PAYNE / PNG*

How did you translate your involvement in that exhibition into bringing Piccinini's work to Vancouver?

I was curator of the previous edition as well and I felt that the Vancouver Biennale (<https://www.vancouverbiennale.com/>) was lacking more immersive experiences. I proposed using an unconventional space in Vancouver for that.

I am very fond of Downtown, East Hastings and Gastown. As we were driving by I saw a hotel named Patricia and I said, 'That is a sign.' I immediately thought that a 100-year-old hotel with the creatures inhabiting the rooms would be a fantastic experience.

I explained it to Patricia and she immediately grasped and loved the idea. Then we only had to convince the hotel owners who turned out to be very receptive to the idea.

Why did you think her hyper-realistic transgenic sculptures would work being displayed in hotel rooms?

I think hotels are interesting spaces. I live most of my life in them. They more or less look the same. However, very different, weird people inhabit those spaces, each day changing the subject in each room.

Patricia's creatures belong to a world of their own. They seem homeless. So if they are to travel the world, they would need to stay in hotels – and that is how a hotel would look like with them in. They open our imagination to the fact that we don't really know who slept on that bed yesterday – and how much we fantasize about it.

How did Patricia Piccinini respond to the idea of having her work displayed in a hotel?

She loved it. Patricia has an unusual mind, extremely creative, multicultural, a bit eccentric, but very loving and sweet. She is from an Italian family, was born in Sierra Leone in Africa and moved to Australia, the land of the most wild animals.

Patricia understands that her work needs to connect with less conventional audiences and she is committed to it.

How do you think her work changes by being placed in a more domestic setting compared to the 'white cube' of a traditional art gallery?

I think her work grows on those spaces. In Brazil, we created an apartment with furniture for some of the creatures and it worked beautifully. She did a similar project in an unconventional space in Tasmania which also worked very well. 'White cubes' are not good for imagination.

Marcello Dantas (<https://bit.ly/2O5BGdU>) is senior curator (Latin and South America; Asia-Pacific) Open Air Museum for the Vancouver Biennale.

Patricia Piccinini (<https://www.patriciapiccinini.net/>), 's Curious Imaginings (<https://www.imcurious.ca/>), a Vancouver Biennale exhibition, opens Friday, Sept. 14 and continues to Saturday, Dec. 15 at the Patricia Hotel. Details and tickets at [imcurious.ca](https://www.imcurious.ca/) (<https://www.imcurious.ca/>).



Girl with Owl by Patricia Piccinini is in Curious Imaginings at the Patricia Hotel. Photo: Jason Payne *JASON PAYNE / PNG*

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looks really interesting! Can't wait to see it.

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