



## MEDIA CONTACT

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### **Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts launches year-long research season dedicated to the work of Chilean artist, poet, and filmmaker Cecilia Vicuña**

**The Wattis will devote an entire year to reflecting on the questions posed by Vicuña's work through intimate public and private reading groups and a series of to-be-announced public events**

**San Francisco, CA—Tuesday, September 22, 2020—**This September, the **Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts** embarks on a year-long research season dedicated to the work of Chilean artist, poet, and filmmaker **Cecilia Vicuña**. The research season, [\*Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind\*](#), runs from September 2020 through August 2021. The Wattis will use Vicuña's work as a point of departure—opening up various questions and themes connecting other artists and ideas to Vicuña's work—for a series of public reading groups, lectures, performances, screenings, and other events featuring prominent artists and thinkers.

Running alongside but separate from the Wattis Institute's exhibition programming, each of the Wattis' year-long research "seasons" creates a community around a broad set of themes and subjects as they relate to the work of a single artist. *Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind* is Wattis Institute's seventh research season; past seasons featured Joan Jonas (2014–2015), Andrea Fraser (2015–2016), David Hammons (2016–2017), Seth Price (2017–2018), Dodie Bellamy (2018–2019), and Trinh T. Minh-ha (2019–2020).

Through the lens of Vicuña, whose work grapples with themes related to the turmoil (and glimmers of hope) of our present moment, the Wattis will ask questions through research, events, and programs over the next year, including: *What role does art play in revolution? Can art make a difference? How can we use art as a tool to better understand the world and ourselves? Is art ever enough?* Themes that arise in Vicuña's work that the Wattis will explore include collective memory, ecofeminism, colonialism, language, dissolution, extinction, exile, dematerialization, regeneration, and environmental responsibility.

The research season opens on September 28 with the first of four monthly, small-scale public reading groups (September 28, October 19, November 23, and December 14). A series of public events connected to *Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind* will be announced at a later date.

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At the culmination of this year's research season, the Wattis will release two publications: a book conceived with Vicuña and the third issue of the Wattis' new annual reader, [A Series of Open Questions](#).

*Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind* is co-curated by Jeanne Gerrity and Anthony Huberman and is supported by an Innovation Grant from the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation.

### ***Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind*: Public reading groups**

*Cecilia Vicuña is on our mind* opens with a series of small-scale public reading groups—September 28, October 19, November 23, and December 14—opening up a virtual space for in-depth conversation around Vicuña's work. Each meeting is led by a different invited guest who assigns a selection of readings and leads an open dialogue with participants.

Space in each reading group is limited. To reserve a spot in the reading group and receive PDFs of the texts, visit [wattis.org](http://wattis.org).

- [September 28](#): Artist and Wattis Curatorial Fellow **Jenni Crain** hosts a reading group titled *Whose footsteps are these? Where have they gone?*. This first conversation will consider cycles, courses, and constructions of time as forms of measure and mark making; of control and erasure; as threads of continuity coalescing bodies, beliefs, landscapes—sharing, pollinating, living, an amalgamation, the life force.
- [October 19](#): Art historian **Mia Liu** hosts a reading group titled *What is permanence anyway?*, which considers the theme of transience in Vicuña's *precarios* and *quipus*.
- [November 23](#): Artist **Ricki Dwyer** asks *Can our materials be our witness?* and leads a discussion reflecting on the ways Vicuña uses materials as a record of her engagement with “the life force.”
- [December 14](#): Writer and curator **Brian Karl** hosts a reading group titled *What are the “red threads” that help make new rituals make sense?*, which explores some of the unpredictable intimacies generated by Vicuña's interactive performances, as well as by the near-field focus of her videos.

### **About Cecilia Vicuña**

Cecilia Vicuña (b. 1948, Santiago, Chile) is an artist, poet, and activist currently based between New York and Santiago. Since the 1960s, the artist has contributed a radical perspective on the relationship between art and politics through her writing and art practice. Feminist and sociological methods, as well as Indigenous culture and natural materials, imbue her work.

Vicuña's body of work spans many disciplines, including performance, painting, and installation, but she is perhaps best known for her enveloping skeins of soft wool (*quipus*) and fragile, temporary sculptures (*precarios*). *Quipus* refer to an

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intricate system of knotted cords used by pre-Columbian Andean cultures for accounting and record keeping in the absence of a written alphabet. This concept has motivated much of Vicuña's fiber-based art since the mid-1960s, and her *quipus* evoke Indigenous knowledge systems severed by colonial regimes. *Precarios* are small, found object sculptures composed of organic materials and plastic debris, and they are often punctuated by moments of bright color. Like her poems, they conjoin insignificant objects in unexpected and revelatory juxtapositions.

Vicuña moved to London and Bogota before settling in New York after Augusto Pinochet's CIA-backed military coup overthrew Salvador Allende, Latin America's first democratically elected Socialist leader, in 1973. She now divides her time between Chile and New York.

Vicuña has shown at major museums around the world, including the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago; the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London; Art in General in NYC; the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London; the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; MoMA New York; and the Witte de With, Rotterdam.

She has published 22 art and poetry books, including *Kuntur Ko* (Tornsound, 2015), *Spit Temple: The Selected Performances of Cecilia Vicuña* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012), *Instan* (Kelsey Street Press, 2001), and *Cloud Net* (Art in General, 2000). She was appointed the Messenger Lecturer 2015 at Cornell University, an honor bestowed on authors who contribute to the "evolution of civilization for the special purpose of raising the moral standard of our political, business, and social life."

[Read a complete biography here.](#)

### **About CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts**

Founded in 1998 at California College of the Arts in San Francisco and located a few blocks from its campus, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts is a nonprofit exhibition venue and research institute dedicated to contemporary art and ideas. As an exhibition space, it commissions and shows new work by emerging and established artists from around the world. Recent solo exhibitions include *Lydia Ourahmane: صرخة شمسية Solar Cry*; *Cynthia Marcelle: A morta*; *Vincent Fecteau*; *Abbas Akhavan: cast for a folly*; *Akosua Adoma Owusu: Welcome to the Jungle* (which traveled to the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans); *Diamond Stingily: Doing the Best I Can*; *Rosha Yaghmai: Miraclegrow*; *Adam Linder: Full Service* (which traveled to Mudam Luxembourg); *Ken Lum: What's Old is Old for a Dog*; *Henrik Olesen: The Walk*; *Melanie Gilligan: Partswholes*; *Howard Fried: Derelicts*; *Laura Owens: Ten*

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*Paintings; Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys: Tram 3* (which traveled to MoMA PS1); *Josephine Pryde: Lapses in Thinking by the Person I Am* (which traveled to ICA Philadelphia and earned Pryde a 2016 Turner Prize nomination); *K.r.m. Mooney: En, set*; *Sam Lewitt: More Heat Than Light* (which traveled to Kunsthalle Basel and the Swiss Institute, New York); and *Ellen Cantor: Cinderella Syndrome* (which traveled to Künstlerhaus Stuttgart). A recent group exhibition, *Mechanisms*, traveled to Secession in Vienna in an expanded form entitled *Other Mechanisms*.

As a research institute, the Wattis dedicates an entire year to reflect on the work of a single artist, which informs a regular series of public programs and publications involving the field's most prominent artists and thinkers. The 2020–2021 season is dedicated to the poet and filmmaker Cecilia Vicuña; past seasons featured Joan Jonas, Andrea Fraser, David Hammons, Seth Price, Dodie Bellamy, and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

The Wattis also hosts an annual Capp Street Artist-in-Residence, one of the earliest and longest-running artist-in-residence programs in the country, founded in 1983 by Ann Hatch as Capp Street Project, and incorporated into the Wattis Institute in 1998. Each year, an artist comes to live and work in San Francisco for a semester, teaches a graduate seminar at CCA, and presents an exhibition. Recent participants include Abbas Akhavan (2018–2019), contemporary (2017–2018), Melanie Gilligan (2016–2017), Carissa Rodriguez (2015–2016), Nairy Baghramian (2014–2015), Claire Fontaine (2013–2014), Ryan Gander (2012–2013), Harrell Fletcher and Kris Martin (2011–2012), Paulina Olowska and Renata Lucas (2010–2011), and Abraham Cruzvillegas (2009–2010). For more information, visit [wattis.org](http://wattis.org).

### **About California College of the Arts**

Founded in 1907, California College of the Arts (CCA) educates students to shape culture and society through the practice and critical study of art, architecture, design, and writing. Benefitting from its San Francisco Bay Area location, the college prepares students for lifelong creative work by cultivating innovation, community engagement, and social and environmental responsibility.

CCA offers a rich curriculum of 22 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs in art, design, architecture, and writing taught by a faculty of expert practitioners. Attracting promising students from across the nation and around the world, CCA is [one of the 10 most diverse colleges in the U.S.](#) This year, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked CCA as one of the [top 10 graduate schools for fine arts in the country](#).

Graduates are highly sought-after by companies such as Pixar/Disney, Apple, Intel, Facebook, Gensler, Google, IDEO, Autodesk, Mattel, and Nike, and many have launched their own successful businesses. Alumni and faculty are often recognized with the highest honors in their fields, including Academy Awards,

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AIGA Medals, Fulbright Scholarships, Guggenheim Fellowships, MacArthur Fellowships, National Medal of Arts, and the Rome Prize, among others.

CCA is creating a new, expanded college campus at its current site in San Francisco, spearheaded by the architectural firm Studio Gang. The new campus design will be a model of [sustainable construction and practice](#); will unite the college's programs in art, crafts, design, architecture, and writing in one location to create new adjacencies and interactions; and will provide [more student housing](#) than ever before. For more information, visit [cca.edu](http://cca.edu).

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