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Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

1887—2058

Edited by Emma Lavigne, with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

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Even in today's art world, characterised as it is by the extremely fast, dense dissemination of information and by apparently global careers, it is by no means rare for important contemporary artists to enjoy a very different reception in different countries. In each case we may speculate why this happens. Could it be that centuries-old cultural influences continue to have an effect on contemporary art, which by definition is really international (and which today is indeed often proclaimed globally)? Is it possible that beneath the surface of their international appearance, contemporary works nonetheless bear more of the cultural idiosyncrasies of their countries of origin than we imagine? In spite of everything, could there really still be something like the 'Englishness of English Art' – or maybe the 'Polishness of Polish Art', or the 'Spanishness of Spanish Art' and so on – as Nikolaus Pevsner, a German immigrant in England, observed in the middle of the last century? Even if mention of such aspects is rarely made – at most when a work raises the subject itself – everyone who is reasonably familiar with a particular work, with the culture from which it comes and with the cultures of other countries, nonetheless knows that such things can still play a part in its acceptance or non-acceptance.

During the past twenty-five years, almost since the beginning of her career, the art of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has been shown in as many places throughout the world, from Paris via London and Stockholm to New York, Saint Petersburg, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo, as seems to be typical for the first generation of 'globally' thinking and acting artists. It is therefore all the more surprising that in Germany her work has scarcely been presented, except for an early museum exhibition in Krefeld and at the sculpture projects in Münster. It would be going too far to ascribe this fact to a traditional prejudice against French art, which in Germany has been frequently accused of lightness, of an apparent lack of structure, even of transience, not to mention superficiality. Indeed, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster does not make it easy for viewers who would like to find themselves homing in on a clearly delineated image or a precise statement. Even if, in her '*apparitions*' ('appearances') in particular, she focuses attention in her named

performances on iconic personalities of recent times, her staged, three-dimensional images nonetheless defy any form of definition. Instead, she works with often minimal means of suggestion and seduction which lead the viewer into an atmosphere which may possibly be revealed only gradually. It is an art of situations and moments, not of firmly established images and pithy statements. Her element is the transitory, the constant fluctuation between memory and presence, between mood and psychology, between literature and dream. Although the art of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster – as the title of the exhibition indicates – may refer to things and ideas that lie in the past, or in the future, she nonetheless expresses a very contemporary attitude to life. The omnipresent media inter-connectivity and the reawakened awareness of the diversity of the sensuous and intuitive adoption of the world after the rationalist age of modernism are essential prerequisites for the work of this artist.

When the possibility of our taking part in a 'retrospective' crystallised out of the discussion with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster on the subject of a major exhibition in the Kunstsammlung, it represented – and not least for the artist herself – a very particular sort of challenge. How is something like that possible in the case of an oeuvre which consists of spatial installations, films and sounds which in each case appear to lead into quite different worlds? What can a 'retrospective' mean when linear development and thematic coherence are of secondary importance, as they are here? On closer inspection, however, it was actually only logical that the artist should therefore understand her 'retrospective' as a whole as a new spatial work that she has laid out like an open *parcours* in which visitors should not so much pass through a handful of individual stations of the work as that they should allow themselves to be carried along to some extent by the milieu and by the diversity of the oeuvre. The title of this undertaking may describe a period of time, but this, however, is not the one in which the works on view were created, as is usually the case. Rather, it points to the fluctuating time dimensions in the individual works themselves, to the times and moments in the past, present and future which are her points of departure and reference. And it indicates that all these points in time,

oscillating freely, link up with the time frame of each visitor.

We are very grateful to Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and to our colleagues at the Centre Pompidou for making it possible to present in Düsseldorf (where incidentally DGF, as she is generally known, studied briefly at the Academy of Art in the 1980s) this unusual insight into and overview of the work of one of the most important artists of her generation. Although most of the works exhibited in the Centre Pompidou and in K20 are identical, their spatial arrangement in the two locations is of necessity – and fortunately – very different. This permits not only the artist to take a broader view of her work. Our special thanks are therefore due to her personally for accepting the challenge of this dual presentation and for working untiringly to find the best solutions for the numerous new situations. We are no less grateful to Bernard Blistène, the Director of the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle at the Centre national d'art et de la culture Georges Pompidou, and of course to Emma Lavigne, the curator of the exhibition, who developed and implemented the discerning concept for the exhibition and the catalogue in close contact with the artist, as well as to Elia Biezunski, who assisted her.

The numerous persons and institutions who contributed to the creation of the exhibition are listed under a special thank you in the Acknowledgements, which we should like to repeat most emphatically here. We should also like to thank in particular our sponsor. Henkel Beauty Care supports the exhibition with its brand Schwarzkopf. The Institut français has also supported the exhibition in a significant way. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for its commitment. Our thanks also go, moreover, to our business partner Breuninger and media partner Handelsblatt for their generous support. It is self-evident that in such a complex exhibition almost all the staff of the Kunstsammlung were involved in its realisation in one way or another. Our sincere thanks to all of you. We should also like to take this opportunity of thanking in particular Stefanie Jansen as Exhibition Manager, Bernd Schliephake and colleagues for the technical planning, the restorer Otto Hubacek and colleagues, Katharina Nettekoven for acting as Registrar,

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Dr. Marion Ackermann
Director Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Dr. Julian Heynen
Artistic Director at Large

Foreword

The relationship between the Centre Pompidou and the artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster is a close and long-standing one. It was in 1977, at the opening of the inaugural *Marcel Duchamp* exhibition, that the very young Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster first discovered this museum of the future, conceived by its architects, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, as a “machine capable of infinite developments in all kinds of directions”. Twenty-five years later, in 2002, the artist, winner of the Prix Marcel Duchamp, showed her broadened, cosmic vision of the world in the *Exotourisme* exhibition. Two years earlier she had already designed the scenography of *Elysian Fields*, an exhibition exploring the new territories of dreams, conceived by the founders of the *Purple* review with the collaboration of Bernard Blistène.

The Centre Pompidou is now presenting a prospective and retrospective exhibition of some thirty works that form a labyrinth of environments, rooms and passages by this major artist on the French and international scene. Pursuing her on-going dialogue with the Centre Pompidou, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster is occupying several spaces, ranging from the Galerie sud to the museum terraces. Following her exhibition at the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2007, and the spectacular environments she created at the Tate Modern in 2008 and at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid in 2014, this event, unprecedented in its scope, marks an essential stage in the discovery of the richness of an oeuvre composed from a living memory of cinema, literature, architecture and music.

The exhibition *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. 1887–2058* deploys an open-ended chronology in space, from the beginnings of modernity to utopian or dystopic times, projecting the viewer into a series of parallel realities and scenic spaces. Tropical and desert landscapes, portraits and period rooms coexist in this itinerary envisaged by the artist as a fictional residence with multiple entrances. In it, she explores the sensations of interior and exterior, of absence and presence, the notions of identity and fiction, the present moment and the journey in time.

I warmly thank Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster for accepting our invitation and for engaging with great sensitivity and subtlety in a fertile dialogue with the museum, its spaces and its history. I would also like to

thank Emma Lavigne, Director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz, who, assisted by Elia Biezunski, curated this exhibition deploying a spatio-temporal odyssey throughout the Centre Pompidou. My thanks also to Marion Ackermann, Director of K20 in Düsseldorf, who immediately became interested in associating her prestigious institution with this project and who decided to host the exhibition following its showing in Paris.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the museums, institutions, artists and private collectors whose generous loans have enabled us to offer the public this major retrospective of the work of one of the greatest figures in art today.

Serge Lasvignes
Chairman, Director & CEO,
Centre Pompidou

Preface

For several years now, the Musée national d'art moderne has endeavoured to provide a significant programme of exhibitions of the work of emblematic figures of the French contemporary art scene. For the attentive eye, the list of exhibitions shows the diversity of artists' approaches. These events also emphasise our unstinting determination to engage in a dialogue with such artists by making the Centre Pompidou a showcase for singular projects and an attentive platform for all experiences.

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work and the project she has undertaken here lie at the heart of the issues challenging an institution addressing the complexity of modern art history and the diversity of the present. For more than two decades, her complex, sensitive work, subtly combining collective and personal history, has established her as one of the most fascinating artists of her generation. In the Centre Pompidou's exhibition spaces, which she visits like no one else, the artist has found an opportunity for a unique dialogue and reflection in which the heuristic element intrinsic in her art can be fully realised.

For as long as we can remember, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has conceived her work and research as an intimate relationship with the 'spirit of place'. One has to remember her exhibitions in various public and private institutions to appreciate the full scope of works that consciously infiltrate, modify and even metamorphose the spaces they occupy. But one has also to remember the attentive eye the artist brings to the cities she explores, to see and re-see her films and to follow her on her journeys to understand her interest in the worlds that she inhabits. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster is a surveyor of real and imaginary places. One cannot understand her work without seeing it as an aesthetic of the journey rather than the destination. A journey of discoveries, an ability to roam, to reveal, to highlight spaces and places, atmospheres and signs, bodies and voices that she reproduces using both simple and complex procedures. Cinema in all its forms and states has a central place in her work: cinema as a space of memory, as a space of recording, as a place in the construction of every fiction; cinema quoted, summoned and reinvented as a necessary tool (tracking shots, pans, static shots, montages...). Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's art uses

thousands of procedures that she sets up, deploys, exposes and fashions into devices and ways of seeing in complete osmosis with the place itself. It is offered to us in all its demanding richness and complexity. This richness stems from the artist's personal interests, her curiosity, her capacity to play with the unknown in order to find the new and to construct a continuous narrative, a form of labyrinthine structure in which we see her fascination for literature and the writers – J.G. Ballard, Roberto Bolaño, Enrique Vila-Matas – with whom she maintains such a fertile dialogue. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work is complex in the same way as that of Robert Walser, Jorge Luis Borges and also Marcel Proust, who can doubtless be regarded as the original model. It is complex in the same way as the social sciences to which the artist constantly refers. The true rubs shoulders with the fictional. Real places become imaginary. Sometimes furtively, sometimes slowly, mental images superimpose themselves like memory strata on the images caught by her camera. Time past and time future is doubtlessly one of the great subjects in her work.

Demanding, rich and complex are just three of the many adjectives describing a corpus that I would say is profoundly 'inhabited' in every sense of the word. And it will come as no surprise for connoisseurs of the artist's work when at the Musée national d'art moderne they discover a succession of rooms and terraces recreating and revealing, like fragments of 'things seen' and heard, lived or imagined, the world of her research, of the books she reads, of her decipherings, memories and investigations. Proust would call this '*revoyure*'.

To understand and penetrate Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work, to see it, hear it, follow and roam through it, one has willingly to refer to literature. As we know, she is an avid reader and her art, the space that she constructs and that she asks us to both walk up and down in and to meditate on, the environments and characters she invokes, generate fictions that we do not merely contemplate but also actively participate in. In her unique way, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster constructs situations. She solicits and implicates an active spectator. The very principle of 'role play' is often an essential component. Theatre, cinema, subject, actor, scene: Dominique

Gonzalez-Foerster's art evidently touches on the idea of the 'exhibition scenario' (we know this notion's critical fortunes), a crucial subject for her contemporaries and of which she was one of the original protagonists.

The exhibition conceived, therefore, as a film script, as a synopsis, even a storyboard, as an apparatus incorporating different temporalities and flashbacks comparable to those in some of the films and books that feed the artist's imagination. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's art is a consummate art of montage, an art of reminiscence and echo chambers, of variations and punctuations, of changes of scale and place, of histories and geographies, of multiple dazzlings and lights, of climates and seasons. Besides the implicit ties that she weaves with all forms of creation, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's art establishes a constant link with the most experimental practices and claims the heritage of the manifold modernities that she constantly reactivates and restages. In this respect, I would like to stress here the absolutely essential link that the artist has with certain specific formats, and notably her interest in the documentary and the essay, both of which have played such an important role in cinematographic and literary creation.

How could one not see Enrique Vila-Matas, the author of *El viaje vertical* (1999), as an active partner who, confronted with the void of a 'literature that talks about literature', finds in Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work an echo of the true-false novels and intertwinings on which his own work is based? And how could one not see possible similarities between J.G. Ballard's experimental techniques for describing megalopolises, in which his life leads him to *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1996), and the hidden yet powerful thread that leads Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster along the paths of the architects and landscape architects that she constantly explores?

In this game, one should stress the artist's ability to recognise and index the authors and practices, places and spaces, of which her works are echo chambers, producing hybrid, poetic images, interbreedings and narratives in which reality and fiction collide. 'Artist and director', as she describes herself, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster divides her time between Paris and

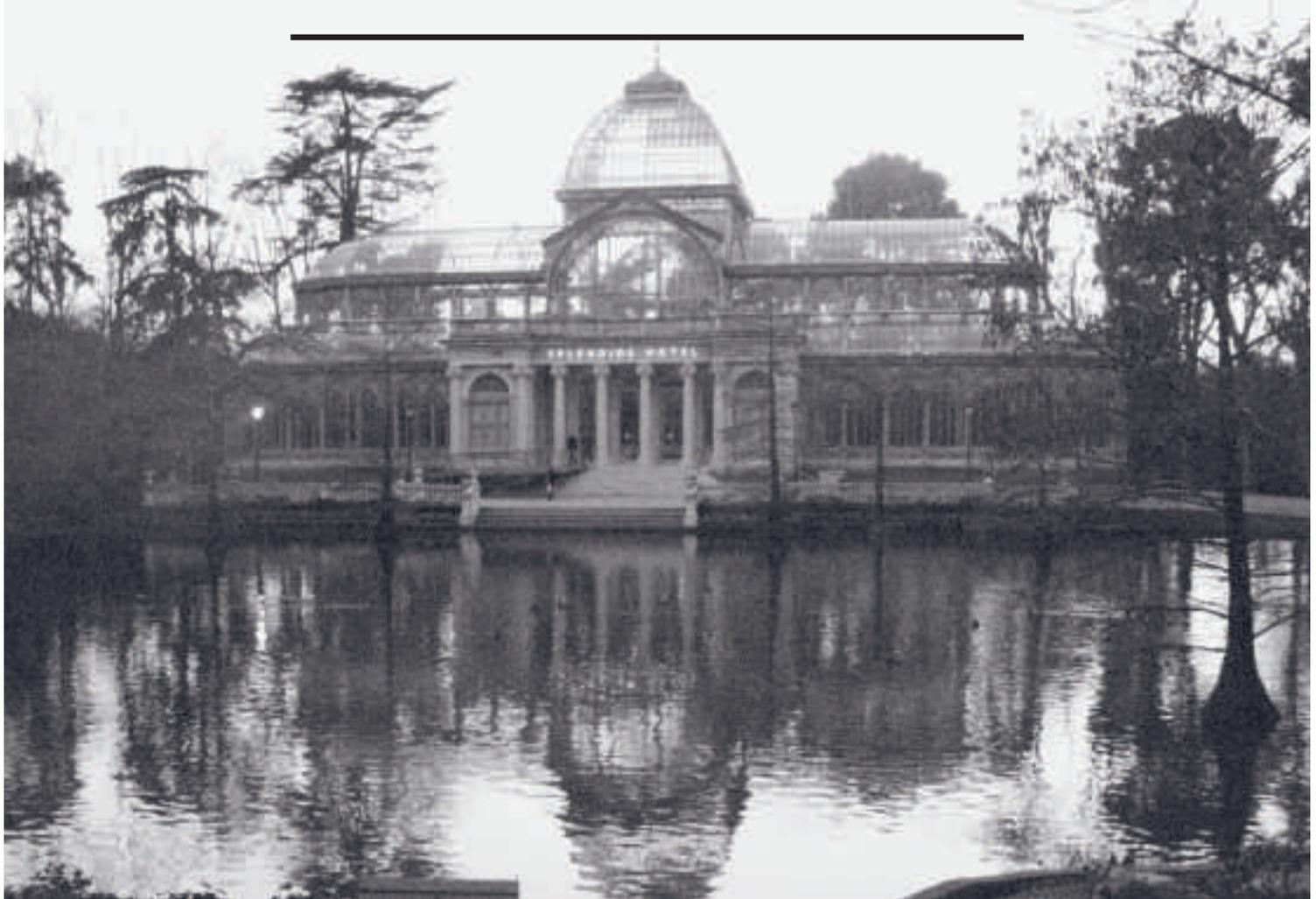
Rio. She says she directs. She creates environments. She stage designs concerts. She says she has 'a dynamic relationship with the past'. Science fiction gives her the tools of a dream future, enables her to combine different temporalities, to bring vanished or buried signs to life as clues, to activate them in the present of the exhibition. Like the tenacious seagull facing the wind in Marguerite Duras's *L'Homme atlantique*, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's art, playing on shifts between real and fictional time, between deserted places and places conveying all utopias, is a place in itself, a vast heterotopia in which chronologies, the living and the dead, friends and strangers, objects and things, existing places and those to be invented jostle with one another. A vast laboratory of practices open to all experiences, an endless inventory of phenomena peopling an amply devastated modern world, sensitive and emotional in the extreme, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's art is a 'crystal image' and conjures the title of a film still to be discovered. Was it before or after, yesterday or tomorrow? We no longer know. The film title? – *C'est arrivé demain* (It Happened Tomorrow).

Bernard Blistène
Director of the Musée national
d'art moderne – Centre de création
industrielle

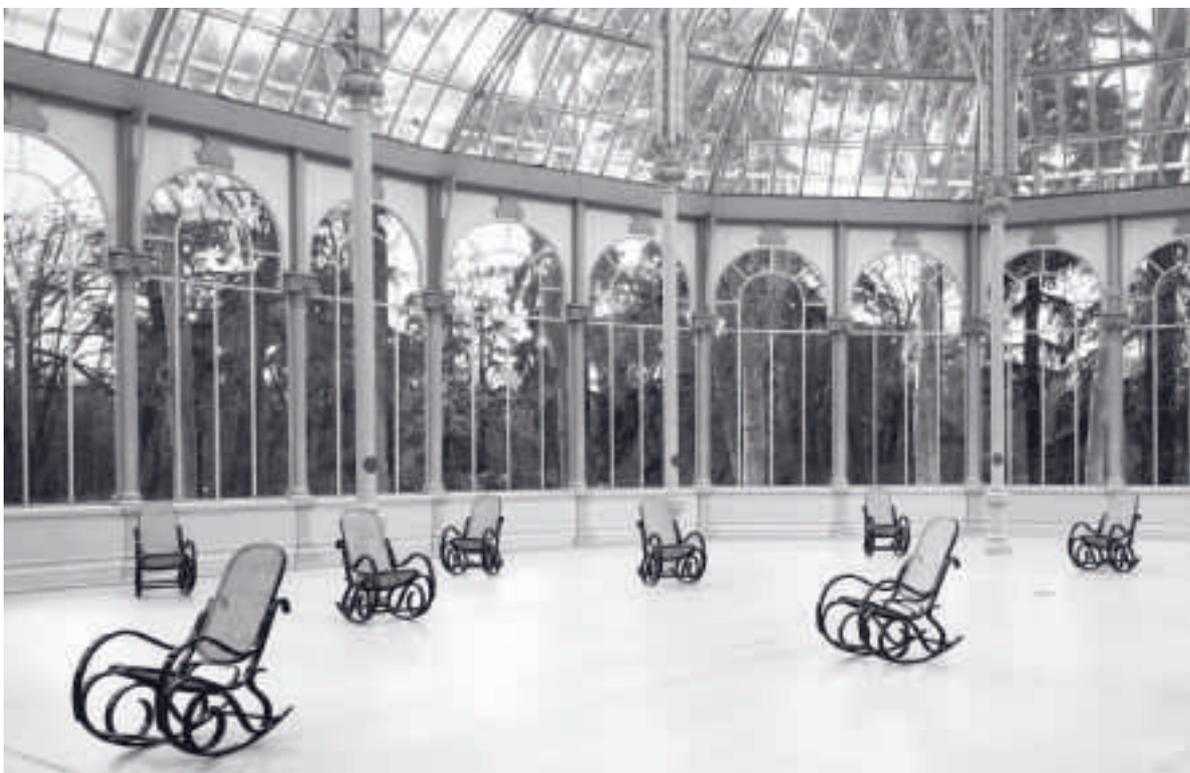
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The terms and expressions describing each work are those the artist commonly uses to describe them. Please refer to the corresponding entries in "Selected Fragments" by Elia Biezunski (pp.189–201), in which Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's key notions are explained in numerous quotes.

1887



Splendide Hotel, environment, Palacio de Cristal, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2014





Splendide Hotel, environment, Palacio de Cristal, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2014



M.2062 (Edgar Allan Poe), apparition, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013



*M.2062 (Edgar Allan Poe), apparition,
Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013*



*Emily Brontë (M.2062), apparition, Fondation Louis Vuitton,
Paris, 2014*



M.2062 (Lola Montez in Berlin), apparition,
Circus Cabuwazi, Berlin, 2014



M.2062 (Lola Montez in Berlin), apparition,
Circus Cabuwazi, Berlin, 2014



Lola Montez in Berlin, film, 3'58", 2015



Otello 1887, film, 25'31", 2015

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster

1887–2058

Emma Lavigne**Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster**

1887-2058

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Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster sagt von sich selbst, sie sei eine „Gefangene der Literatur“. In ihren Rauminstallationen, Videoprojektionen und „apparitions“ (Performances) erzählt sie erstaunliche Geschichten und bedient sich dabei einer bemerkenswerten Bandbreite formaler Möglichkeiten. Der reich bebilderte Band dokumentiert nicht nur eine neue Arbeit der französischen Ausnahmekünstlerin – ein Labyrinth von Rauminstallationen, das den Betrachter auf eine innere Reise durch die Zeit, die Welt des Kinos, der Literatur und Wissenschaften führt –, sondern zeichnet auch die außergewöhnliche Laufbahn der heute Fünfzigjährigen nach, angefangen bei der sensationellen Ausstellung in der Turbinenhalle der Londoner Tate Modern bis hin zu ihren Bücherräumen in der Hispanic Society of America in New York. Aspektreiche Aufsätze von führenden Kunstexperten thematisieren Gonzalez-Foersters Verwendung von Film, Architektur und Musik als Mittel der Selbsterforschung und des künstlerischen Ausdrucks. Ein beeindruckendes und zugleich sehr persönliches Porträt einer Künstlerin und ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit Zeit und Literatur, Identität und Narration.

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