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*Untitled (Vegetation Room X)*, 2002  
resin and bronze powder  
dimensions: 250 x 230 x 245 cm  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

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# Cristina Iglesias

## Untitled (Vegetation Room X)



*Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* belongs to a series of works titled *Vegetation Rooms*. These large-scale environments are constructed from numerous segments cast from the same mould, to resemble various types of vegetation and biological matter, arranged either to line passageways or to create enclosures (or labyrinths). Some works are conceived for the gallery, while other works from this series are sited in public spaces. Each of these 'rooms' are uniquely formed and express a range of textures, colour and light depending on the quality of materials and how they are situated in a space. *Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* is an example of one such constructed space, whose walls, in this instance, are decorated with casts of repeated motifs of marine matter, bamboo, eucalyptus, decaying leaves and octopus tentacles. These decorative forms are magnified to create the illusion of an underwater landscape that the viewer can walk in, whilst almost touching the work as they pass through the space. This installation recalls the dramatic ornamentation of Baroque architecture that plays tricks with perspective. In Iglesias' installation, often what you see is not what it appears, particularly in terms of materials. For example, this installation work might appear as bronze but is actually made from a much lighter substance – resin, which has been lightly covered with bronze powder. Resin is a manipulative material that can mimic the visual properties of other materials and objects. In these ways, organic and architectural references create complex spatial illusions that blur the distinctions between natural and constructed space.

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**Cristina Iglesias**  
b. 1956, San Sebastian, Spain.  
Lives and works in Madrid

Cristina Iglesias is preparing a project for the 2012 Sydney Biennial and a large travelling retrospective exhibition, which will debut at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid in January 2013. She is also working on two important commissions: a garden labyrinth for INHOTIM (Institute for Contemporary Art and Botanical Garden) in Minas Gerais in Brazil, and a work for the city of Toledo in Spain, which will celebrate the city's Christian, Jewish and Muslim cultural traditions, in collaboration with the public art commissioning agency Artangel. She has participated in a number of international exhibitions and represented Spain at the 1986 and 1993 Venice Biennales. She has had solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Berne (1991); the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1994); and the Guggenheim Bilbao (1998). She has exhibited in various international art shows including the exhibition *Metropolis* at the Martin Gropius-Bau, Berlin (1991); the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1995) and SITE Santa Fe's 2006 Biennial.

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## Background to Cristina Iglesias' process

Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Cristina Iglesias' practice also encompasses printmaking, photography and video.

Her practice evolved in the context of developments in sculpture in the 1970s and '80s where greater emphasis was placed on the site and context in which the art work is presented. Iglesias draws on a wide range of influences from architecture, literature and theatre. Other influences include *Arte Povera* and the *Trompe l'oeil* of *Baroque Architecture*.

Drawing on such influences, Iglesias' installations make use of a range of industrial materials and techniques, such as textured concrete, cast iron, glass, resin and braided steel cable. Once cast and moulded, these materials are forged into architectural components, such as decorative facades, screens and walls. Physical structures magnify abstract patterns and textures found in nature, such as plant motifs.

Recurrent themes in her work include water, mirrors, labyrinths, lattices, geometric structures and the representation of artificial topographies (arrangement of natural and artificial features) which are reconfigured in the construction of 'spaces' within a 'space'. In the gallery space this takes the form of a room within a room, often constructed like labyrinths, with walls masquerading as forests and hanging canopies. These maze-like structures direct the viewer to follow a path that enables them to walk around, under and sometimes through the works.

## For discussion

What do you first notice about the materials and scale of this installation?

Are the materials natural or man-made?

How are materials used in this work?

Is the artist appealing to senses other than sight with these works?

What is immediately recognisable in these works?

What is made different by the choice of scale of this installation as you walk through the space?

What types of natural objects are referred to here?

How has the artist used methods of display to enable us to experience the artwork?

## Key words

### ARTE POVERA

Literally meaning ‘poor art’, Arte Povera is a term coined by Italian critic Germano Celant to describe the work of a group of Italian artists in the 1960s who adopted an experimental, anti-establishment approach to their practice, reflecting a broader radical tendency in art in the late 1960s. Their approach involved working with raw, organic and found materials, employing a highly experimental, open approach to process and technique, dissolving the boundaries between the exhibition space and the world outside.

### BAROQUE

(1600–1750) an historical period and artistic style in sculpture, painting, architecture, literature and music spanning the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Baroque painting and sculpture used elaborate ornamentation, movement and energy to express emotion and tension.

### CASTING

Refers to the processes for reproducing individual man-made objects, found objects or objects moulded from clay and/or wax. A mould or impression is built up around the original form and used as the pattern into which the new material (such as bronze) is set. With some methods, such as the use of hot metal, the original work perishes during the casting process.

### CONSTRUCTION

Refers to the process of building a whole sculpture from various components, which may be all the same or of different materials.

### MINIMALISM

Is an abstract art movement developed in the USA in the 1960s which rejected the emotional and expressive tendencies of Abstract Expressionism, emphasising the use of simple, geometric forms and modern materials drawn from industry.

### MOULDING

Refers to the process of taking a mould or negative from an original work or object and then casting a reproduction of the original from the negative mould. Moulding can also refer to the manipulation of pliable materials such as clay and wax to hand-build a form.

### TROMPE L'OEIL

Is an artistic technique, usually associated with the Baroque period, which involves creating an illusion of three-dimensional space, often in the form of a mural, on a two-dimensional plane using perspective and foreshortening.

## Activities

### Recording Material Play

Create playful artworks that explore the relationship between nature and our everyday environments. You could experiment with a range of natural materials and everyday objects that you find in your home and outdoors. For example, you can create wallpaper from cabbage leaves or lampshades from orange peel stitched together. Record in a sketchbook all of the different processes involved in making these pieces, and note the sensory differences made to them over time as they decay (their smell, what they look like or feel to the touch).

### Edible Textures

Iglesias uses a range of techniques to create her installations such as **construction, casting and moulding**. These are very old techniques, which can be explored through a range of inexpensive materials.<sup>1</sup>

#### Relief Textures 1

Collect a range of natural materials such as twigs, leaves, stones, flowers, etc. Make a very basic pastry mix. Roll out the pastry to one or two inches in depth. Arrange your materials onto the surface of the pastry and when satisfied with your composition, gently press down your collected material into the pastry. Once you are sure an impression is made – lift the materials from the pastry. Bake in an oven. When cool eat and enjoy your edible landscape.

#### Relief Texture 2

Follow the same steps as above, but this time substitute clay for the pastry. Modelling clay can be purchased in small bags from art shops around the country. Roll out the clay similar to the pastry. However, this time you are going to build a wall of clay – perhaps two to three inches in height with the clay. You can support this wall by adding extra bits of clay at the back of the wall. Again arrange your objects to create a composition, press gently into the clay – making sure you have an impression. Lift the objects out – careful not to destroy the original impression. You are now going to mix up dried Gypsum plaster or Plaster of Paris. Follow the instructions on the pack. Once mixed to the right consistency, pour your mixture into the relief – careful not to go beyond the height of the wall. Leave to dry overnight. Remove the wall of clay and turn over the block – with the clay side facing up. You should be able to peel back the clay, revealing an inverted or hollow impression of the objects you cast. Seal the clay with a light wash of PVA glue. You can now play more with your relief cast by either painting it with acrylic

paint and/or coating it with glue and sprinkling a range of powered paints or glitter – similar to the way Iglesias’ sprinkles bronze dust onto to her works.

### Arte Povera Research

Arte-Povera (1962–1972) may provide a starting point by delving into the various works and artists involved in this movement, their witty and often political constructions and their use of ‘everyday’ materials and craft techniques such as knitting and sewing – emphasising the hand-made. Suggested artists to explore include: Luciano Fabro, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Jannis Kounellis, Giuseppe Penone, Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti and Marisa Merz. Interestingly, this movement, originating in Italy, emerged during a recession (not unlike today) as the promises of commodity capitalism began to falter. Affected by this shift, these artists moved away from the slick, commercial language that typified American art at this time. The historical context of any art movement more than likely has its roots with the prevailing social and economic order at that time and may provide a starting point in terms of understanding how philosophical, political and cultural contexts affect art and can become a source of inspiration for artists.

## Further Explorations

Allusion to nature, whether real and/or imagined, is a repeated motif in many of Iglesias' works, whereby thick patterns of flora and fauna cover a range of architectural elements such as walls, screens and ceilings. These elements, when forged together, allude to, or suggest, a 'green space', whether they are constructed as an enclosed garden, forest path, suspended canopy, or as plants found floating in river beds or contained in boxes. This is the case in her more recent installation, *Jardin en el Mar* (2012), which was installed on the sea-bed in the Gulf of California and documented over a four-year period by the film-maker Thomas Riedelsheimer.<sup>2</sup>

As well as applying a range of sculptural techniques to create these vast and intricate 'walks' through public and exhibition installations, Iglesias has also made films and presented photographs of miniature models and serigraphs (or screen prints) evoking similar themes. For example, *Diptych (XV-XXII)* (2005), are works based on models of sculptures and constructed from paper, cardboard, tape and photographs. These montages are re-configured as landscapes, which Iglesias then photographs. These images are enlarged and screen printed onto copper panels. Together with the sculptures themselves, the photo-silkscreens create an illusion of spatial depth and help to blur the distinction between natural environment and constructed space even further.

*Pozos I-V* (2011) consists of five large cubes of metal to create a series of 'wells'. The sculptures bring to mind *Minimalism*, however, as the viewer comes closer and looks over the sides of the squares, deep cavities lined with tangled roots and ropey vines are found within each structure. Water swells and settles as if each cube was an actual well. The sound of the water produces a sense of awareness of the present. In *Pozos I-V*, time follows a circular movement, created by the repetitive cycle of flowing water. Aljibes (wells) and fountains were important elements in traditional Spanish and Moorish architecture. They were usually located in outdoor courtyards, surrounded by the inner walls of the building, a practice also prevalent in houses in Latin American and Caribbean colonies. With this reference in mind, *Pozos I-V* blurs the margins between sculpture and architecture, as is often the case in many of Iglesias' installations.

*Garden Piece* (2010) is a variation on the cube concept. In this public art work the piece is located in a landscape and, similar to many contemporary buildings, is covered in mirror-like reflecting glass. The mirrored walls reflect the surrounding landscape. Some of her recent projects in public spaces include the *Hanging Ceiling* that she made in the Conference Centre in Barcelona, a reflecting pool at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp and the new entrance doorway in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, 2006-07, made in collaboration with the architect Rafael Moneo.

<sup>1</sup> Barry Midgley, ed., *The Complete Guide to Sculpture, Modelling and Ceramics: techniques and materials*, Chartwell Books, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.dokfest-muenchen.de/filme\\_view\\_web.php?fid=5119&lang=en](http://www.dokfest-muenchen.de/filme_view_web.php?fid=5119&lang=en)

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## Further reading

### publications

*Cristina Iglesias*, La Fábrica, 2012  
*Cristina Iglesias*, Ediciones Polígrafa, 2010

DC: *Cristina Iglesias*, Köln: Walter König, 2007

Iwona Blazwick, *Cristina Iglesias*, Polígrafa, 2003

Javier Maderuelo, *Cristina Iglesias: Cinco Proyectos (Escultura)*, T.F. Editores, 1996

### websites

[www.mariangoodman.com/artists/cristina-iglesias/](http://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/cristina-iglesias/)

[www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cristina-iglesias-8673](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cristina-iglesias-8673)

[www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/passports-great-early-buys-from-the-british-council-collection/cristina-iglesias](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/passports-great-early-buys-from-the-british-council-collection/cristina-iglesias)