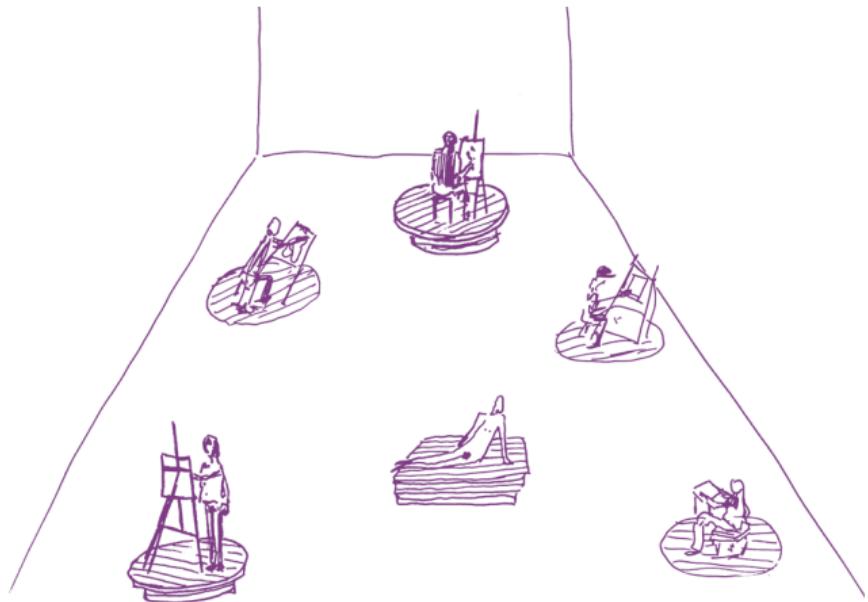


INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

LAURA LIMA
THE
D R A W I N G
DRAWING



27 January – 29 March 2026

INTRODUCTION

Across the ICA's Lower and Upper Galleries *The Drawing Drawing* brings together a concise selection of works by Brazilian artist Laura Lima (b. 1971, Governador Valadares, Brazil), spanning her dynamic, boundary-defying career.

The exhibition shares its title with a site-specific installation commissioned for the ICA's Lower Gallery. This new work hijacks the traditional life-drawing class, challenging the ideals of canonical Western aesthetics: mastery, faithful representation and institutional authority. In Lima's version, in which a life model and artists slowly, randomly, orbit one another on mechanised platforms, the position of subject and object is always in question. *The Drawing Drawing* is an acceleration of a truth that has become a tenet of the artist's practice: everything moves. All entities – whether animate or inanimate – are constantly changing. Or, in her words: 'the matter of all things vibrate, rust, smell, breathe, age, and transform'.

This installation is accompanied by other key works that trace the development of the artist's oeuvre. Through tentative materialisations (one of her earliest, in ice, from 1993/2026, for example) and pared down components (a solo ballerina from *Balé Literal*, 2023/2026), she established her core artistic ideas. These culminate in *The Drawing Drawing*: art as an unstable triangulation between objects, living beings, and the conditions of a site. The works presented at the ICA prioritise process over outcome, showing that Lima begins with philosophical inquiry rather than specific form. This approach leads to unpredictable, generously poetic, often funny results that by unsettling our habits of seeing and acting, are also fundamentally political.

Lima grew up in the countryside of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais during the 1970s and '80s, a period marked by dictatorship, inequity and instability alongside political and cultural repression. Raised in a household where critical ideas were actively debated, she developed an early interest in the structure of reason and the construction of meaning. As a teenager, she moved to Rio de Janeiro, where she enrolled at the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage and later earned a degree in philosophy from the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Grounded in this intellectual formation, her practice is led by ontological and epistemological

questions like: Where does meaning lie? What influences how we interact with one another? How does perspective shape reality?

This artistic method yields works that are difficult to categorise and often surprising in form and duration. They unfold as a living web of relationships between viewer, site, material, and time. An inventory of her mediums reads like a child's absurdist holiday packing list: clothing, cotton thread, red jelly, a hammer, ice, makeup, a hat, live chickens, amethyst, spoons, among others. Where the work appears is likewise hard to predict: it has occurred on a beach, in a forest, at a street intersection or across a dinner table. Equally, it is temporally elusive: some last minutes, other years, or even decades. Indeed, openness is the governing logic of any single piece, rendered in a continual state of flux. As such, curators and art historians have struggled to label her practice. Some have described it as an 'instance' or a *tableau vivant*. In addition, Lima rejects 'performance' or 'performance art'. She concedes that *instauração*, a Portuguese word coined by the Brazilian artist Tunga that evokes something *between* performance and installation, comes slightly closer to the mark. Another descriptor she has toyed with is *vivção*, a term that does not translate neatly into English, but conjures lived experience with an emphasis on embodiment, duration, and temporality.

Invested in the complexities of language, as both a poetic and a philosophical exercise, she will trace a term, scrutinising its conventions, implications, and histories. Over the course of her career, she has developed a personal artistic glossary that forms the logical spine of her practice, including entries such as 'philosophy of nothingness', 'non-functionality', 'emptiness', and 'failure'. Most critical to this exhibition is the artist's concept of *person=flesh*, where straightforward instructions are used to treat animate beings as material elements (alongside objects, sites, and social conditions). Often drawing on the surreal or absurd, she initiated this body of work in 1994 with *Vaca* (Cow), in which she led a cow from its pasture onto the beach in Ipanema (one of Rio's most affluent and prestigious neighbourhoods), defying unwritten social norms.

Through its engagement with the body, organic forms, desire, and the social constructs, her practice can be seen as an inheritor of experimental Brazilian art,

particularly the Neo-Concrete movement of the late 1950s and early '60s (exemplified by Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape). There are, by contrast, key conceptual differences, for instance Lima does not physically participate in any of her works. While Neo-Concretism explored the body as a site of subjective experience, Lima treats human presence as matter alongside any other material. This non-hierarchical view of all matter posits an affinity with non-human elements, like animals and our shared environment. The utopianism of this earlier generation is also largely absent from the artist's work, which is shaped by the economic stabilisation, growing consumer culture, and the acceleration of mass media in 1990s Brazil. The artist's practice also embodies a more nuanced form of hope than that of her predecessors: one that favours plain, exposed truths over attempts to instigate change, acknowledging transformation as a constant to be perceived rather than pursued.

A useful model for this nuance, which has been a touchstone for the artist, is outlined by the French philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman in his essay *The Survival of the Fireflies (La survivance des lucioles)* (2009). In this essay, Didi-Huberman responds to writer and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 claim that 'fireflies', his metaphor for fragile forms of cultural and political life, were being wiped out by mass media, consumerism and authoritarian power. Didi-Huberman disagrees. He argues that these small, vulnerable sparks of creativity and defiance persist, though under threat, and can still be glimpsed in brief flashes rather than grand displays. Because they do not fit the logic of authoritarian power, which favours dominant narratives, constant visibility and singular truths, they tend to appear at the margins and require a different kind of attention to notice.

Like Didi-Huberman's fireflies, Lima's work appears in fragmented, dispersed gestures and finds meaning in contingent relationships. Instead of asserting authority or spectacle, it resists a singular viewpoint and unfolds at the periphery, rewarding careful perception over attempts to control it. This depends on our openness to recalibrating and tuning our attention. Through this mode of engagement, the artist's work solicits both epistemological questions – how we see and understand the world – and political ones, asking where hope might be found in times of crisis.

In a moment once again marked by rising authoritarianism and renewed demands for certainty and singular narratives, Lima's practice proposes another way of seeing – one that is grounded in awareness, exchange, contingency, and play. Small forms of imagination and resistance can be found, but they require attentive perception, a willingness to look in the margins, and a politics that values the fragile and the fleeting.

– *Andrea Nitsche-Krupp*

LOWER GALLERY



The Drawing Drawing, 2026

Mechanised platforms (wood, metal, motors, electrical components, wheels), life model, paper, pencils and pens, still-life display, ICA visitors

Laura Lima's new commission for the ICA co-opts a life-drawing class – long central to Western artistic training and its ideals of mastery and faithful representation. In Lima's version, the classroom is composed of independent mechanised platforms programmed to glide slowly and unpredictably through the space. One platform holds a nude model (or occasionally, a still-life arrangement), while visitors are invited to step onto the others, take up a pencil and paper, and draw. Drawings contributed by participants will be displayed over the course of the exhibition.

The platforms' chance-based movements echo the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus's atomist theory, which holds that reality is made of atoms that constantly move, interact and respond, forming the universe through random movement. Epicurus saw this unpredictability as the basis of free will: deviation allows for interaction and choice. This idea has long informed Lima's work, which proposes meaning emerges from encounter, rather than a predetermined intention. Like Epicurus's swerving atoms, *The Drawing Drawing* is dynamic, unexpected and relational.

In this unpredictable configuration, the subject of any given drawing is always in flux, as the person drawing is in constant motion, so no single perspective is ever fixed. Instead of sustained observation, it presents drawing as a flickering process of attention and action. As the platforms drift, one may choose to remain with an original subject (now out of view) and proceed from imagination or adapt to a new view. Representation becomes a constantly shifting process, shaped by how we pay attention and respond. Lima reflects, 'A certain humour becomes necessary to pass the fragile times in which we are living. How do we delineate the human? What is delineating?'



Ascenseur, 2013/2026

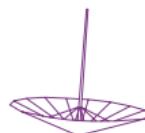
Person's arm, set of keys, wall

First realised in 2013, *Ascenseur* consists of straight-forward elements: an arm, a set of keys, and a wall that doesn't quite reach the floor. The arm (attached, we assume, to a body we cannot see), has been given a simple task: to reach through the gap under the wall and find the keys. Once the task is completed – awkwardly, by chance – the arm moves the keys to the other side of the wall, only to toss them out again moments later and begin the sequence again. As in much of her practice, Lima defines the work through a set of straightforward parameters, sets it in motion, and allows the rest to unfold freely.

Encountering it, you may experience a bodily, intuitive recognition of a common experience: grasping for something just out of reach. You might feel an instinct to assist, or choose to entertain the small perversity of letting the arm struggle. The institutional setting frames the encounter, guiding what we notice and how we respond. (We expect a large white wall in a gallery to display something, so are likely to be surprised by a small, absurd action performed at floor-level.)

With its irreverence and open-endedness, Lima's practice has consistently challenged institutional norms – testing and unsettling museum procedures, administrative logic, and systems of value. Works like *Comida* (2012/2024), involving a future meal, or *Aged* (2004), in which all the staff at Chapter Art Centre, Cardiff, wore prosthetic ageing make-up, baffle conventional collecting and exhibition structures. In *Ascenseur*, the displaced arm in an institutional setting prompts questions of belonging and the viewer's role in social systems.

UPPER GALLERY



Parasol Deux, 2023/2026

Red parasol, metal, motors, electrical components, wheels, sound

Audio composition by Laura Lima and Ricardo Siri

A large upside-down parasol dances through the gallery. It is one of the 'ballerinas' from Lima's acclaimed *Balé Literal*, in which motorised objects, machinery, and everyday artefacts perform an evolving absurdist dance.

The 'ballet' was first installed at a public crossroads outside A Gentil Carioca gallery in Rio de Janeiro in 2019 (amid a distinctly oppressive political climate) and was subsequently realised as a major exhibition at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in 2023; performed for one night in the forest at Brazil's Instituto Inhotim in 2024; and in a smaller-scale presentation at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, in 2025.

The full *Balé* represents an endlessly moving, living organism, sustained by the labour and will of a team of collaborators working under the artist's direction.

In the ICA installation, it is pared down to a single object, distilling the original work's poetic simplicity: a familiar item rendered kinetic, unpredictable, alive. Previously, Lima used a ubiquitous Rio beach parasol; here in London, the solo dancer is a garden umbrella. By repositioning these familiar objects, Lima creates a playful dislocation, inviting us to inhabit space differently and repurpose the ordinary to joyful effect.



Imagenes Congeladas [Frozen Images], 1993/2026

Freezer, plastic trays, ice, various materials

This is one of Lima's earliest works, first installed in her former apartment studio in Copacabana. In this version, an industrial freezer contains trays of frozen water, within which are three-dimensional collages, or as Lima calls them, 'images', consisting of pigments, string, pieces of metal, and other everyday discarded materials – their forms emerging from tentative, gently placed arrangements rather than rigid composition. Visitors may

open the freezer, remove a tray, and view a collage. The ice may at first appear opaque or clouded with frost; the longer you wait, the more you will see. And of course, if left to melt, the frozen forms will collapse.

Imagenes Congeladas takes the familiar notion of photography as a ‘frozen image’ and renders its fleeting, contingent nature, literally. Each collage is dependent on its fragile context – the care of the viewer, the calibration of the freezer, and even the reliability of London’s power grid.

The future of this particular set of frozen images, made for this iteration of the work, is yet to be determined. This sense of precarity speaks to Lima’s sustained engagement with transience and transformation – themes that have continually run through her practice, from *Vaca* (Cow) (1994) to *Ninhos Comunais* (Communal Nests) (2021/2026), in which straw-hat nests are placed in the forest to be claimed by whichever animals find them useful.



The Wrong Drawing, 2084

Raw cotton threads, coal

This is the most recent in a group of woven works Lima began in 2018. Plain cotton thread is woven into tidy ropes, tightly spiraling DNA-like strands, loose chains, and messy fraying knots that wind around each other, partially concealing a chunk of raw coal. These knots form a roiling, three-dimensional drawing, suspended in the air.

All of Lima’s *Wrong Drawings* bear a future date: the artist’s estimate of when each work might reasonably be considered finished (as if to say, ‘no, not *this* drawing, come back in 58 years’). In principle, the drawings evolve continuously from the moment they are begun, until the year indicated by the artist. They are shaped and altered by indeterminable conditions such as friction, temperature, and humidity. When complete, Lima notes, ‘It will be possible to see something that is approaching, or that no longer exists’.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Laura Lima grew up in the city of Governador Valadares, in Minas Gerais, Brazil. At a young age, Lima moved to Rio de Janeiro, where she still lives today. She graduated in Philosophy from Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s and also studied at the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage. In 1999, she founded the body Representative-Representative (RhR) and served as its first bureaucratic administrator. Together with Ernesto Neto and Marcio Botner, she is a co-founder of A Gentil Carioca, an artist-run gallery in Rio.

Lima's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions in institutions around the world, most recently at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) (2023); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2018); and Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2018). Recent group exhibitions include participation the Boston Public Art Triennial (2025) and the Sharjah Biennial (2019). Her works are held in institutional collections including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Instituto Inhotim, Brazil; Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo; Bonniers Konsthall, Sweden; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Switzerland; and the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, the Netherlands.

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Additionally, this exhibition would not have been possible without the collaboration of many individuals. Special thanks to Yoann Saura, Augusto Pizzarro, Ricardo Siri, PoloMaker, Solar, Goodman Gallery, A Gentil Carioca, Luisa Strina Gallery and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery. Thanks also to Charly Blackburn, Alex Brenchley, Will Clifford, Lohan Emanuel, Michael Henley, Nicola Leong, Max Pevsner, Dave Ronalds and Joby Williamson.

For a full list of contributors to the exhibition, including life models and performers whose names were not available at the time of printing, please see the website at ica.art.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

**Laura Lima Artist Talk in conversation with curator
Andrea Nitsche-Krupp**
Wed, 28 Jan, 6:45pm

**Film Selected by Laura Lima: *Bacurau*, dir. Kleber
Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles**
Sun, 8 Feb, 2pm

Life Drawing in Motion with artist Tegen Williams
Thu, 19 Feb, 6pm

**Film Selected by Laura Lima: Brazilian programme
featuring *Um Filme para Ehuana*, dir. Louise Botkay;
O túmulo da Terra, dir. Yhuri Cruz; and *Limite*, dir.
Mário Peixoto**
Sun, 22 Feb, 2pm

Members' Curator Tour
Thu, 26 Feb, 6pm

**Film Selected by Laura Lima: *Deus e o Diabo na Terra
do Sol*, dir. Glauber Rocha**
Sun, 1 Mar, 2pm

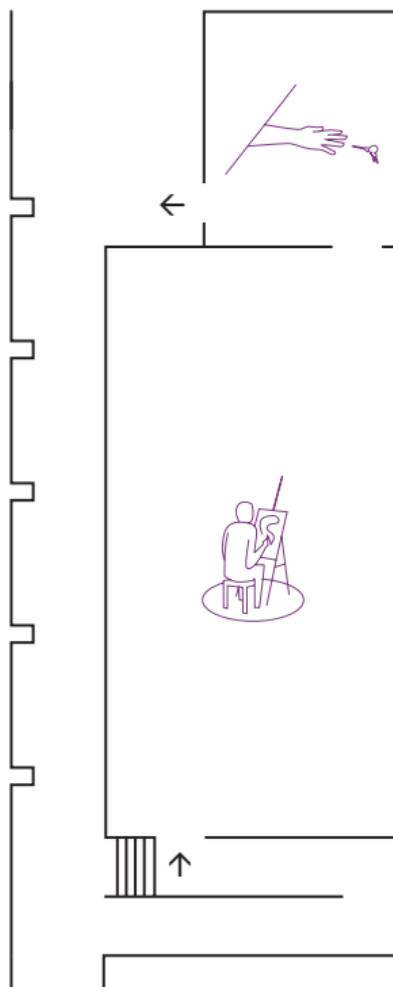
Life Drawing in Motion with artist Tegen Williams
Thu, 12 Mar, 6pm

**Discursive programme in partnership with Rio-based
independent collaborative institution Solar; details to
follow.**
Late Mar (date TBC)

For the full list of events and further information please
visit ica.art

Cover image:
Laura Lima, Artist's note on *The Drawing Drawing*, 2025.
Courtesy the artist.

Lower Gallery



Upper Gallery

