



The Metabolic Age, or How Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos Predicted the Internet with an Egg

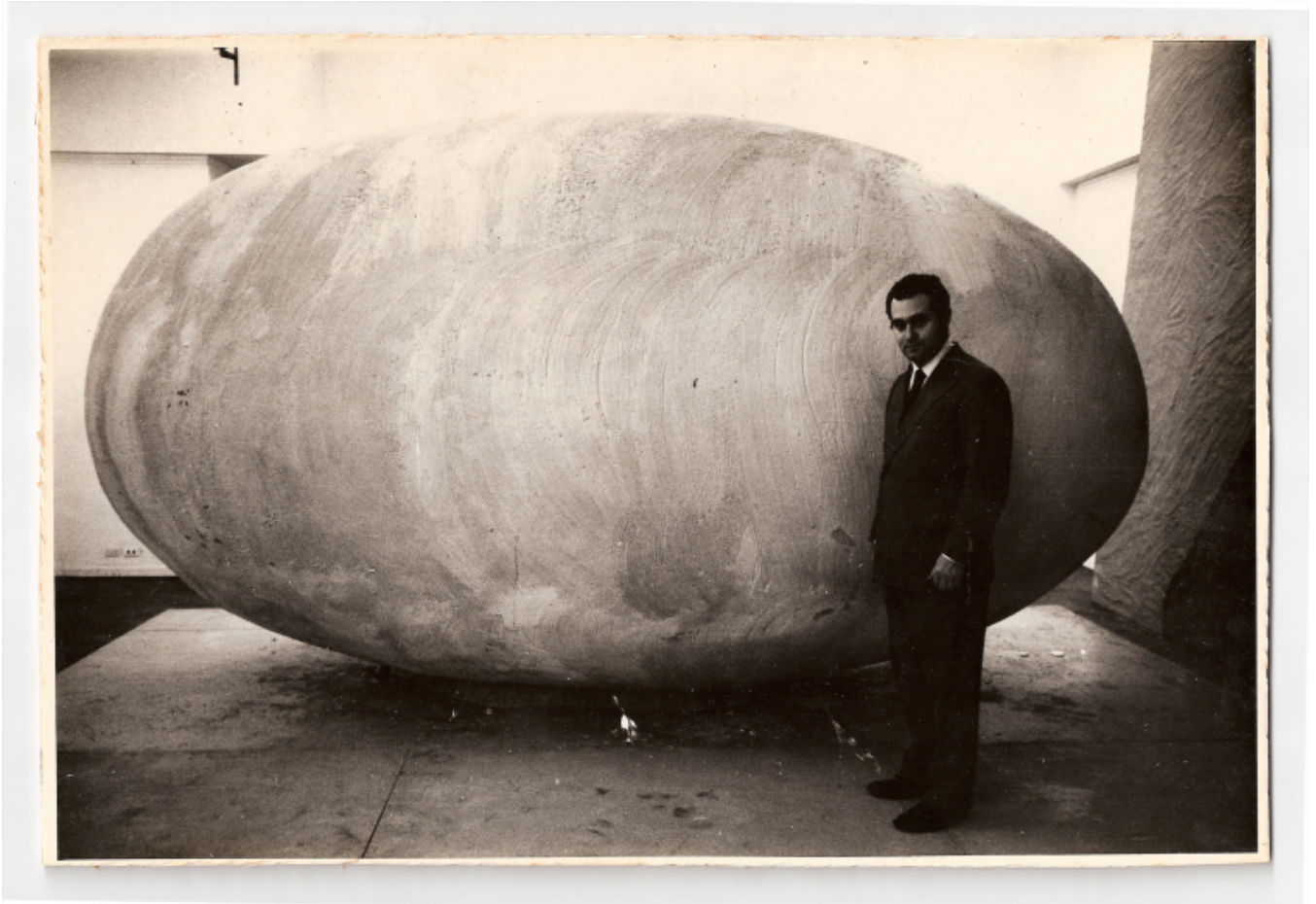
Could an egg-shaped artwork have predicted the internet? Alma Mikulinsky on "The Metabolic Age," curated by Chus Martínez at Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

Critique / Alma Mikulinsky November 24, 2015

First came the egg. At the entrance to "The Metabolic Age," a show curated by Chus Martínez at MALBA (Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires), stands a re-created version of the 1965 sculpture *We, The Outside*, a celebrated piece by the Argentinian artist Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos (1939-1992). Mythical is perhaps a better word, as this gigantic egg-shaped artwork was Peralta Ramos's last, before he renounced artmaking. The original sculpture was exhibited only once at a juried show in Buenos Aires, where it won the first prize. But its success was short-lived, as the plaster object began to disintegrate even before the show ended. Other accounts claimed that the piece met its end when the artist himself destroyed it.¹ For Martínez, the curator, it holds a greater significance, beyond the autobiography of the artist; she argues that *We, The Outside*, which she simply calls "the egg," has predicted the internet, specifically the non-linear, non-hierarchical way in which everything is connected to everything online – from commercials to ideas, philosophical texts to memes. She writes:

"Like the hyperlink, the egg is a symbolic monument to the end of all straight lines, an elliptical form that contains all sorts of curved energies in constant motion and generates an array of connectivities between organic, symbolic, aesthetic, and semantic matter: the origin of life, a new life with a new logic. The egg and the hyperlink belong to the same family. Both announce a different way of surfing the meaning of things." ²

Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos junto a su obra *Nosotros afuera*, 1965..png



[1] Federico Manuel Peralta Ramos next to his work *We, The Outside* (Nosotros Afuera) 1965. Courtesy of Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

In "The Metabolic Age," then, the re-created *We, The Outside* is a symbol and a metaphor, a theoretical tool and a conceptual opportunity, as well as just a thing in itself - a really big egg, awkwardly positioned as an obstacle at the entrance of the show. Martínez calls it a spaceship, which Peralta Ramos had simultaneously inhabited and traveled to uncharted territories; his future - our present.

The show is as ambitious as it is small, consisting of works by eight artists active from the 60s to the present. Some works are deeply entrenched in contemporary visual culture, such as Petra Cortright's sexy cowgirls and strippers, who dance against a backdrop of computer-generated images depicting deeply artificial pastoral landscapes. Some, like Jon Rafman's video *Popova-Lissitzky Office Complex*, travel back in time in order to test the utopian desires embedded in early 20th-century art in corporate spaces.

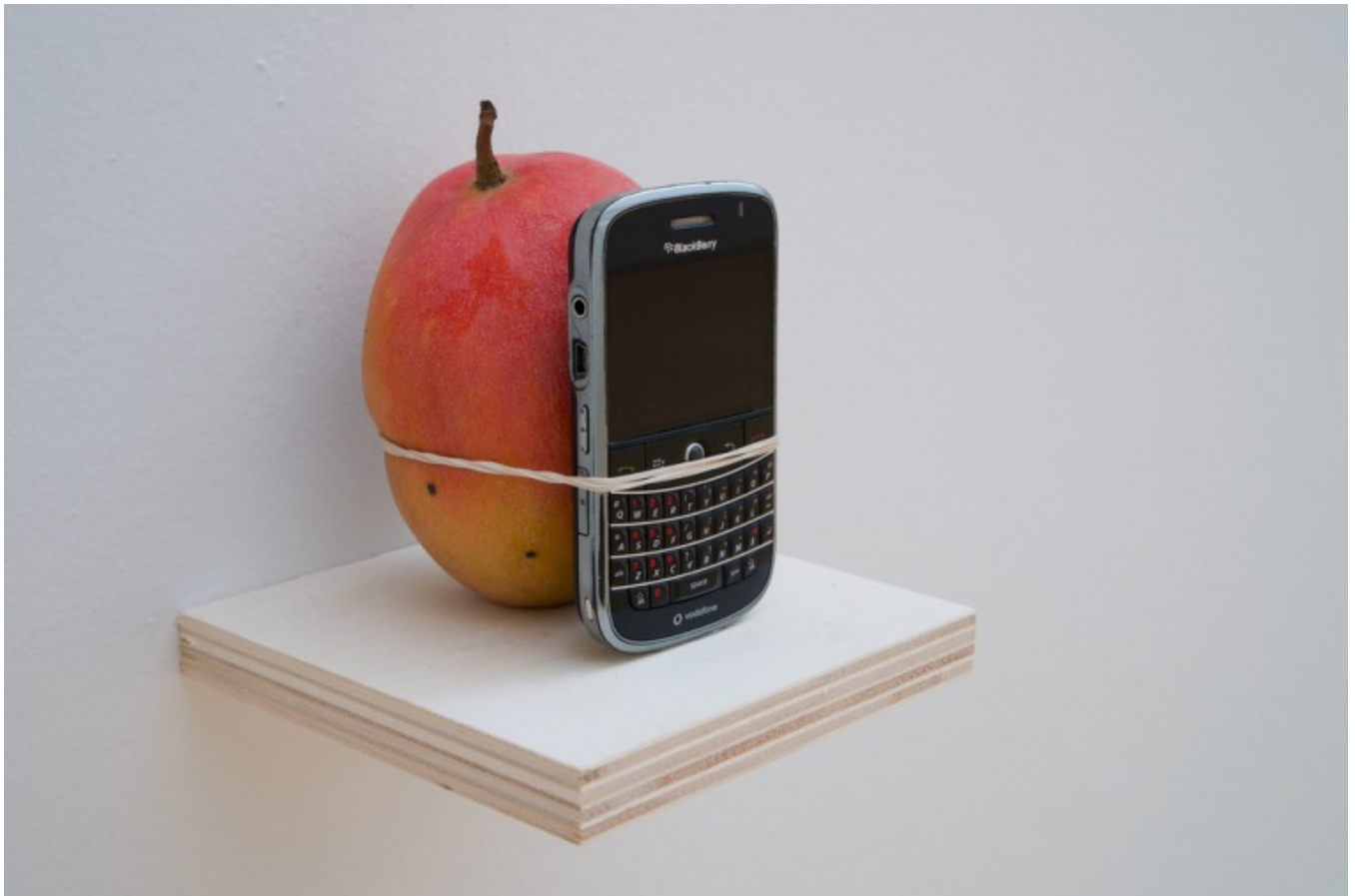
[Petra-Cortright.jpg](#) [2]



[3]Petra Cortright. Vicky Deep in Spring Valley
2012. Courtesy of Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

All pieces share the quality of being incredibly profound as well as utterly stupid. My personal favorite is Wilfredo Prieto's *Look at the Size of this Mango*, where a mango is attached to a BlackBerry device with an elastic band. I am still debating whether it's a waste of a tasty-looking mango or a melancholic statement on the changing categories of humanity – where scale is no longer defined through bodily references but through the technology we use. Martínez tells us that after Peralta Ramos had stopped making art, he used his Guggenheim Fellowship funds to throw a lavish dinner party, and had spent his days scribbling maxims on pieces of paper that he left behind for friends - sentences like “believe in an invisible world, beyond the fars and the nears,” which rings both empty and full of pathos. This principle, of profound silliness and stupid profoundness, which had been perfected by Peralta Ramon, is now everywhere; we are always one click away from the existential misery of Grumpy Cat's Instagram account.

[Wilfredo Prieto. Look at the Size of this Mango](#) [4]



[5]Wilfredo Prieto, Look at the Size of this Mango
2011. Courtesy of Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

In the weeks following my visit to the show I returned again and again to the Metabolic Age website, an integral part of the exhibition and, in my view, its strongest aspect. I left the show energized, excited by the excellent pieces on display and by Martínez's inspired use of the hyperlink as curatorial method, but in hindsight her selections felt more vague than precise. All the artworks included in the show – even the best of them – could have easily been replaced by other pieces illustrating the same principle. Even the egg, so essential to the curator's thinking, was used as the centerpiece and the theoretical starting point of Martínez's previous show, "We, The Outsiders," at e-flux space in New York City³. I would say that this is the point – an attempt to highlight a trait of our culture where everything is interchangeable and everyone is replaceable, as well as a testimony to the force of Martínez' proposal – if it weren't for [the Website](#) [6]. The show's virtual life brings a level of specificity, both in content and in form, which has been lacking in the exhibition. Now I think that the best way to experience the show is not at MALBA but online. Take its structure, for example. All the information – theories, artists' biographies and works, main concepts – is presented by way of a complex diagram whose focal point is the image of the egg. Every route you choose to take, every line or arrow or direction you decide to follow, whether in English or in Spanish, brings you back to the concrete-metaphorical principle of the show, to the elliptical shape of the egg and the motion of the hyperlink. You surf the meaning of things as opposed to delving deeply, moving from one link to the next in a circular motion, an experience that doesn't occur in the actual space of the show.



[Jon Rafman. Popova-Lissitzky Office Complex, 2013](#) [7]



[8]Jon Rafman. Popova-Lissitzky Office Complex
2013. Courtesy of Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

In her excellent curatorial text Martínez positions the decentralized nervous system of the octopus – apparently three quarters of its brain are located in its eight arms – as a new model for thinking beyond “the era of judgment.” The greatest challenge and adventure the show offers is to see art as if you were an octopus – to judge without falling back on the old mechanisms of judgment, to think without a centralized nervous system, to be in constant motion without necessarily being superficial. I don’t know if that is possible, but I would never again eat fried calamari.

The Metabolic Age is on view at MALBA (Museo del Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires), Argentina, between 11.09.2015 and 15.02.2016

- 1. <http://www.malba.org.ar/laerametabolica/teoria/?lang=en> [9]
- 2. <http://www.malba.org.ar/en/evento/la-era-metabolica/> [10]
- 3. ><http://www.e-flux.com/program/we-the-outsiders>

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[6] <http://www.malba.org.ar/laerametabolica/>

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