



Gabriel Chaile, installation view at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, “The Milk of Dreams,” 2022. Photo by Roberto Marossi. Courtesy of La Biennale di Venezia.

GABRIEL CHAILE’S COLOSSAL CLAY SCULPTURES ARE ALIVE WITH ANCESTRAL HISTORY

BY EMI ELEODE

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Drawing inspiration from everyday tools, [Gabriel Chaile’s](#) towering clay sculptures of anthropomorphized pots and clay ovens are majestic and grounded, possessing a quality that’s ancient yet modern, as if originating from another time and place. “It inspires me to know that I can produce forms that can give a new meaning in the world, a new perspective,” Chaile said in a recent interview with Artsy.

The Argentine-born artist has become known for his use of found objects, organic materials, and clay to create unique works through a postcolonial and anthropological lens. At the 2018 launch of Art Basel Cities Week in Buenos Aires, Chaile’s nearly 10-foot-tall clay and mud sculpture *Diego (Retrato de Diego Núñez)* (2018) doubled as a wood-fired oven with which Chaile offered empanadas. The groundbreaking installation highlighted the importance of rituals around food and community, while furthering the artist’s international recognition.

Mere months after participating in the 2021 New Museum Triennial “[Soft Water Hard Stone](#)” —where he presented his colossal sculpture *Mamá Luchona* (2021) honoring the precolonial Indigenous cultures of Argentina—Chaile is exhibiting a large-scale installation at the 59th Venice Biennale. The international exhibition at this year’s Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani and titled “[The Milk of Dreams](#),” reflects the world we live in while envisioning a cosmos where humans aren’t the primary species in charge. On view in the Arsenale portion, Chaile’s adobe creations dance in the otherworldly.

Art, as Chaile described, makes it possible for “utopias of change to exist in a world that is not only thought by and for humans.” His installation of five sculptures is the result of his research process, which he calls *La Genealogía de la Forma* or “genealogy of form.” For this body of work, Chaile concentrated on his family genealogy. Each of the oven

vessels represents a member of his family: his mother and father, his paternal grandparents, and his maternal grandmother, Rosario Liendo. The matriarch's dedicated sculpture serves as the installation's centerpiece.

Growing up, Chaile's parents would tell him about their lives, the experiences of friends and family members, and the history of Argentina. Through his sculptural practice, Chaile translates these oral stories into physical forms, interpreting and recording ancestral knowledge and narratives that have been overlooked or violently suppressed by Spanish colonialism and its aftermath. "I like intense stories, those that by their strength remain engraved in what we call memories," Chaile said, "and those that are not heard because of their simplicity, or because they do not participate in the center where the story is being woven."

Chaile continued, "The colonization process did not end with the declaration of independence of the new state called Argentina. It continued systematically with the educational and 'civilizer's' plan to create a united Argentina; to erase what was called barbarism." These colonial processes that continue under different names is what the artist calls genealogy of form. He described Argentina as a country that has become known for trying to embody Europe, and in its eagerness, "violently extinguished thousands of voices, generating oblivion and lack of interest in memory."



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This layered history was also felt in Chaile's education. He first studied visual arts at the National University of Tucumán, a public university, before he was awarded a scholarship to attend Torcuato Di Tella University in Buenos Aires, one of the most expensive private universities in Argentina. Chaile regarded the experience as a strange one. He felt that he did not learn much at the latter university besides networking. "There, I realized how the power of many things is sustained through the network of contacts that elites pass on through time," Chaile said. In stark contrast, Chaile referred to his time at the National University of Tucumán, and in his hometown of Tucumán in general, as his "great formative years" of learning in every sense, due to the environment's autonomous and multigenerational art scene.

The intersection between art, politics, history, and ecology is present throughout Chaile's transformative and symbolic practice. "I'm interested in the language of synthesis for its ability to reach the sensitivity of anyone who stands in front of the work," Chaile said, explaining his gravitation towards simple forms, charging them with information, stories, and struggles.

Like cultural memories connecting the past with the present and future, Chaile's work involves a visual anthropological and archaeological aspect. He draws inspiration from the craftsmanship and ingenuity of pre-Columbian Indigenous communities that lived in northwest Argentina. "Those forms are my references, but I don't look at them with nostalgia,"

Chaile explained. "When I look at them, I find that those communities are still alive in my face, my skin, and in many people that we look alike."

In times of great challenges around the world, it often feels like we're living outside our bodies. Chaile's work offers us a way of reimagining community and healing that gives the disempowered a chance to be seen and heard.