

# Dia:



**Liliana Porter: The Task**

June 21, 2024–May 26, 2025

**Dia Bridgehampton**

The Dan Flavin Art Institute  
23 Corwith Avenue  
Bridgehampton, New York

## Liliana Porter: The Task

A prominent figure in the early Conceptual and feminist art movements, Liliana Porter contests the spaces between reality and fiction across a variety of media. Central to her long-standing research is the subject of time—which she perceives as nonlinear and dislocated—manifest in the artist's early prints and photographic works from the 1970s, later images and installations incorporating found objects and collected statuettes from the 1990s, and, most recently, her films and plays.

For Dia Bridgehampton, Porter presents a newly commissioned iteration of the series she refers to as *Forced Labor* in which she creates “situations” using figurines and assorted trinkets, employing differences in scale to stage absurd tasks and scenes—such as a woman attempting to sweep a towering mound of dust or a tiny worker trying to fix a life-size clock—against blank backgrounds. The relationships between the miniature characters and other components may evoke political and social connotations or arouse personal and sentimental associations within a viewer. This openness in interpretation is heightened by the placement of the situations in an isolated, nonspecific space devoid from context, which has the effect, in the artist's words, of removing “the temporality of the thing. And for some reason, then you see more. . . . It's like there's no interference between you and the thing, because [there is no] other information but the thing itself.”<sup>1</sup> This white space may be described as an interchangeable all-space, what Michel Foucault named as “heterotopias” or “counter-sites”—locations that are “outside of all places” where “all the other real sites that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Task* (2024) is a sprawling landscape of situations set on wood plinths along the perimeter of Dia Bridgehampton's first-floor gallery. On two facing platforms, entities from incongruous realities and time periods engage with one another, converging onto a simultaneous plane: green army-men, a capsized three-mast sailboat, a figure in front of a Renaissance portrait, and a full-scale chandelier are brought together in a tangle of black rope. Porter also incorporates decommissioned Dan Flavin lightbulbs and a thread of tulle the color of one of his signature fluorescent-light works in a nod to his permanent installation on the second floor. By placing these objects from different spheres in various, unexpected formations, Porter disrupts the conventional linear understanding of time with “the idea of making simultaneous dissimilar times, or the awareness that the coherence of the line is an illusion and, in reality, everything is totally dislocated like our memory”<sup>3</sup> where “things are not in order. . . . They are all together things from our childhood, things that we imagine, history, real heroes or imaginary ones.”<sup>4</sup> In *THEM* (2018), a theatrical work constructed similarly to her installations and screening in a room off the gallery entrance, the artist joins the inanimate objects with a live cast. Co-written and -directed with Ana Tiscornia, the play was initially presented at the Kitchen as part of Porter's survey, *Other Situations*, at El Museo del Barrio in New York and includes a series of 15 short vignettes of disjointed narratives.

Porter's strategies of conflating temporalities can be traced to her early works, a selection of which are on view here, wherein layers of representational planes are collapsed and remade. In *Untitled (geometric group)* (1973), three black-and-white photographs of elemental shapes—a sphere, cone, and cube—hang on a wall, each superimposed with a drawing of a pedestal that bleeds out of the photograph onto the surface below it. In *Untitled (self-portrait with square)* (1973)—the most recognized work in this series of black-and-white photographs—a portrait of the artist is taken against a white background and features the lines of a rectangle drawn directly on the right side of her face, framing her eye socket and continuing onto the wall behind her. This piece may also be read alongside the work of other feminist artists in the 1970s who were employing their own image as subject matter to ascribe political agency to the representation of their subjectivities, such as Ana Mendieta and Anna Maria Maiolino. Another early work, *Geometric Shapes* (1973) is exemplary of Porter's engagement with the notion of the real and the represented. Here, the cone, cube, and sphere (this time made of wood) have their respective shapes drawn on their surfaces with shadowing that gives them their own volume. By overlaying media Porter challenges the hierarchies of reality, contending that drawn forms exist just as much as the objects presented. Porter notes that she is invested in "the question of analyzing what is the substance of things, what is [their] essence. . . . My concerns are not [the] formal concerns of a painter, but more concerns that could have been [of] a writer or something else. That's why probably I like [Jorge Luis] Borges."<sup>5</sup>

Like Borges, whose writing is an important reference for Porter, she believes in the power of the prelude, the "imminence of a revelation" where aesthetic and political potentialities reside.<sup>6</sup> By creating unexpected scenes—across media—that are both humorous and intriguing, Porter employs, almost as a sort of conceptual trap, playful strategies to reflect on political and otherwise contentious subject matter, as well as philosophical questions concerning time, reality, and representation.

—Humberto Moro and Liv Cuniberti

## Notes

1. Oral history interview with Liliana Porter, 2012, June 27–28, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-liliana-porter-16121>.
2. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 22–27.
3. Liliana Porter, "Interview," interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in *Liliana Porter: Other Situations* (New York: El Museo del Barrio; Savannah: SCAD Museum of Art, 2021), p. 118.
4. Porter, p. 124.
5. Oral history interview with Liliana Porter.
6. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Wall and the Books," in *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 5.

## Further reading

*Liliana Porter in Conversation with/en Conversación con Inés Katzenstein*. New York: Fundación Cisneros/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 2013.

*Liliana Porter: Other Situations*. New York: El Museo del Barrio; Savannah: SCAD Museum of Art, 2021.

### About the artist

Liliana Porter was born in Buenos Aires in 1941. She studied at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires and Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. Originally trained in printmaking, Porter has evolved a practice that spans painting, drawing, photography, video, installation, and, more recently, theater, the latter often developed in collaboration with artist Ana Tiscornia. In 1964, Porter moved to New York where she co-founded the New York Graphic Workshop with artists Luis Camnitzer and José Guillermo Castillo. In the city, her work was first shown in institutions such as the Jewish Museum in 1964; Pratt Graphic Art Center in 1967; and the Museum of Modern Art in 1973. Between 1991 and 2007, Porter was a professor at Queens College, City University of New York. In 2008, Dia commissioned Porter's first web-based work, *Rehearsal*, for the Artist Web Projects initiative. In 2017, her work was included in the 57th Venice Biennale: *Viva Arte Viva* and *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, which traveled in 2018 to the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and the Pinacoteca, São Paulo. Recent surveys of her work have been presented at Artium Museoa, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo del País Vasco, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain (2017); SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (2017–18), and traveling to El Museo del Barrio, New York (2018–19); and Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France (2023). Porter lives in Rhinebeck, New York.

## Checklist

1. **The Task**, 2024

Figurines and assorted objects on wood plinths  
Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation

2. **Geometric Shapes**, 1973

Wood and graphite

3. **Geometric Shapes with Drawings**, 1973

Gelatin silver print

4. **The Pleasure Principle**, 1977

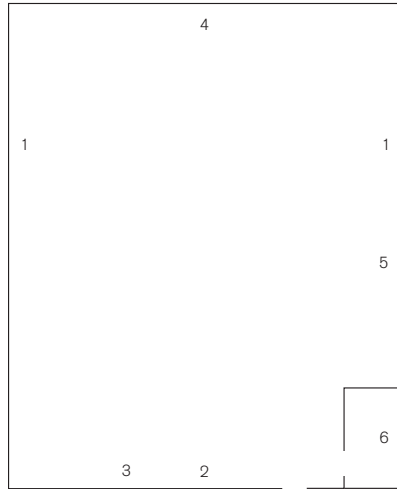
Photo etching on paper

5. **Untitled (geometric group)**, 1973

Wall installation; laminated gelatin silver prints,  
ink, and graphite

6. **THEM**, 2018

Performed at the Kitchen, New York, October  
25–26, 2018; digital video documentation,  
color, with sound, 55:15 min., looped



All works courtesy the artist

*Liliana Porter: The Task* is organized by Humberto Moro, deputy director of program, and Liv Cuniberti, curatorial assistant.

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Cover: Liliana Porter, *The Task* (detail), 2024. Installation view, Dia Bridgehampton, New York, 2024–25.  
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