



**Argentinian artist Ad Minoliti thrives on branching away from the traditional styles of contemporary painting. Their strengths of utilising geometric shapes and creating captivatingly colourful landscapes offer us an entirely new window into the science fiction genre. Their new work Biosphere Peluche or Biosphere Plush, now on view at Baltic in Gateshead until May 22, presents an alternative narrative of acceptance for everyone in contrast to the failures of the 1984 Biosphere 2 science project.**

Also included in the exhibition is The Feminist School of Painting, which converts their work into an active classroom where viewers can participate in workshops that render new ways to imagine painting through a feminist, intersectional and queer lens. The Feminist School of Painting works in collaboration with local activists, academics, artists and writers and provides a safe haven of accessibility for any art style.

### **Could you talk a little bit about queer theory and the influence it plays in your work?**

Queer and feminist theory is a great tool to deconstruct gender and heteronormative systems, as well as binary paradigms that divide our views of the world. These same tools can be used to rethink the construction of visual art as language, deconstruct Western art history, and the bias that underlines the categories and divisions.

### **You discuss in your portfolio how you draw inspiration from the essay A Cyborg Manifesto. What aspects of Donna Haraway's work do you incorporate into your own art?**

Mostly the idea of blurring the borders between categories, to think the potential of ensembles outside the rules, a nonbinary science. Technically, by mixing media into what I call 'cyborg paintings' (design, print and paint), the pieces take metaphors from the feminist cyborgs.

My work conceives an alternative universe where humanity is dissolved into a geometrical Frankenstein that

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feels like devices and mechanisms. Technology is not neutral and I want to imagine a techno dimension where function, quality, taste, goals and other values are subverted from a capitalist perspective.



**Your ongoing project, The Feminist School of Painting, gives lessons on painting, as well as educates viewers about new ways of understanding contemporary art with a new and unique feminist and queer lens. In what ways do you think the contemporary art genre has failed historically in showing this perspective?**

The FSP plays with the figure of the institution but it is really an anti-school: it is an experiment linking different contents that I didn't find in a traditional school of art.

I propose that painting is a mechanism for the digestion of data, a processing platform, and digesting knowledge including handicraft. To think with your hands. Every collaborator is invited to lead the experiment with an underlying format that I developed which includes theory and practice. At the same time, painting is not limited to a technique, it is a visual language that can be manifested with diverse materials.

In past editions, people have used makeup, cleaning products and even writing. I think the school is not unique. Luckily, there are many projects and developments about education outside institutions and academia, many in Latin America. My school is based on the Diana Aisenberg Method. Other referents are Center of Artistic Research (2009-2019), home school by Manuel Arturo Abreu and Victoria Anne Reis, La Escuela del Sur by Sol Calero, and Dark Study by Caitlin Cherry, Nora N. Khan, and Nicole Maloof, to name just a few.

The FSP also is inspired by painting as a social fabric, outside the museum, active, performative, not as a mere product or result of art.

**What are some of the most captivating things you learned from the writers, academics and activists whose works are included in The Feminist School of Painting?**

I'd prefer to invite everyone to navigate the different contents online on the website, for the first one in San Francisco, which is in English, and the second edition is in Buenos Aires, which is in Spanish, and coming soon I will share a channel for the videos documented at third version at the Gwangju Biennale in Korean.

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**What do you think the future of contemporary art will be in relation to queer theory and the way in which this style will be viewed going forward?**

I don't believe that queer art is a style nor a contemporary category, I believe it is timeless as outside of normative timelines. Like feminist art, I feel that is converted into a label by the art system in order to limit its potential but the subversive force of queering art is stronger than mainstream categories because it is about resistance.

**What advice would you give to young kids in the LGBTQA+ community who are aspiring artists and want to break into the industry?**

Personally, I felt it was a big step in my development when I stopped looking for the myths of the industry like mastery, 'fine art' and 'style'. I began to understand how the racist patriarchy builds a facade and tries to naturalize one way of understanding art practice and genres. Reading, linking different fields, and the Internet (from YouTubers to social media groups) help me to look outside my own city.

I discovered that one of the biggest obstacles to rethink was the idea of competition fermented in the universities, market and contests. The individual genius in the crystal tower, that is a lie, all the narratives about great artists are functional to oppression and elitism. Trying to compete for me is a recipe for failure because the game is rigged and not by merit, the industry is not fair. Try to escape this way of thinking by constantly looking for cooperative alliances.

**Can you talk about the Biosphere 2 project and the failures of this thought-provoking science experiment? In what ways does your Biosphere Plush project create an inclusive environment for everyone?**

B2 was founded by an oil tycoon named Ed Bass, and directed at one point by Steve Bannon. It was created to study whether or not humans could create and sustain life in an artificial environment such as space stations. B2's team tried – consequently failing – to isolate eight people (all white cis Americans and one European) for two years. This experiment is a perfect example of the space race being an extractivist, colonising endeavour, enhancing the interests of the already powerful – including major economic and military institutions – and exacerbating pre-existing detrimental processes such as wars, economic inequality, and environmental

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degradation.

Biosphere Peluche explores the opposite direction in times of crisis and rethinking habitat, working as an antidote to B2. It operates as a community centre open to all, instead of a racist and colonial fantasy. It focuses on intersectionality and education, featuring the Feminist School of Painting focused on the landscape, as a place for workshops and lectures, the bookshelves with fanzines and spots for rest and visit a painting show in another format. It wants to invite reflection and different takes on science fiction that include pictorial language, tenderness, humour, caring, and even animal rights.



**Your art frequently uses themes of animalism to express human identity as well as the authority we have over our natural world. What significance do you think this has on your Biosphere Plush project, and how did you choose which animals to implement into this exhibition?**

I don't believe we have authority over a natural world, I don't believe in nature on a different level from human-animals.

I want to step away from the Anthropocene, and including the non-human animals as 'furrries' in my work pays tribute to the fandom and the cartoons that also, with a big queer energy, rethink community and confront and challenge a society that centres its value on hegemonic European beauty and ableism.

**In your portfolio, you quote the author Alison Kafer saying, "As critics of utopian thinking have long argued, the fantasies we imagine reveal the biases of the present. It seems entirely possible that imagining different scenarios and temporalities might help us see, and do, the present differently." Biosphere Plush introduces gripping new utopic universes with a variety of different landscapes. In what ways do these environments reflect these ideas, and how do you think we should do the present differently?**

I highly recommend Alison Kafer's work. Her book *Feminist Queer Crip* is amazing and you can also find many talks online.

I prefer to think of my alternative universe in terms of heterotopia more than utopia or future. From being able to transform the gallery into something else than a mere display of painting on the walls.

I'm very happy with the results that come also from teamwork with Baltic curator Irene Aristizábal and the

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production team, working with Adrienne, Emily and Thomas. The factor of teamwork, of diversification of data, for example, that the space includes so much content between the collaborators, the publications, and even the people that participate in the school can show their pieces at the end. The show of paintings becomes a production or performance of ideas and reflection that is activated by participants.

I don't have the answers, I want to invite people to ask the questions, but we know we must abolish the systems of oppression and recognize how they operate on many levels.



**Why is geometry, as well as the shape of your canvas, so vital in conveying themes of queer theory and feminist theory? What geometric shapes do you think best portray these theories in your works?**

Geometry is for me the best tool to represent and investigate a non-human heterotopia because I can represent bodies or characters that you can relate as animated, without the typical representation of the human body, and also like I said before with the fantasy of the cyborg entity, where the gender theories can be applied to the pictorial language like abstraction and also to rethink the art history and its codes like the frame or the window-frame, the concrete art. I like to make collages of different discussions of modern painting, also from Argentinean art history, like Grupo Madi.

**In what ways do you think queer theory, feminist theory and intersectionality are represented well in the science fiction genre? In what ways do you think they are misrepresented? What would you change about the ways in which these theories are portrayed in sci-fi based contemporary art?**

It is very cool how many video essayists made wonderful analyses on science fiction and media, like Pop Culture Detective, La'Ron Readus, and many others.

I love cartoons like Steven Universe and The Owl House, as new representations of science fiction and fantasy. I wish the industry would stop the whitewashing, the cis-sexism and leave the production to the voices that are still discriminated against from the writing and direction of movies and TV series.

**Some of your most interesting works for me all have a plush jungle aesthetic with a wide arrange of intricate geometric shapes. Is there something about this type of landscape that speaks towards your creative process?**

I take inspiration from cartoons, Hanna Barbera, Disney movies, and vintage illustrations. My backgrounds are

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inspired by the landscapes assigned to childhood. The dreamy forest makes a counterpoint to the way that modern art history portrays geometry or concrete art in the white cube, in the museum, cut out from other worlds. That was a first trial in breaking traditional categories for modern art, for example.



**I noticed on your Instagram you are reposting content about the current billionaire ‘space race.’ As an artist in the science fiction genre who strives for inclusivity and exploration of outer space, other planets and new universes, how should we as a species tackle this fascinating topic?**

I don’t strive for exploration of outer space, and even less at the cost of the only habitat we have. My fiction is not fed by a will to reach a possible future, but as a way to criticise what is going on now. I prefer to see it as a mystery and a potential for imagery.

**As an avid fan of science fiction, a lot of your works reminded me of stories written by Octavia E. Butler. Are you familiar with her work? Do you draw any inspiration from her writing with your own art?**

What I think made Butler very special is that she didn’t frame herself in a genre, she was doing a deep criticism on how we enforce hierarchical thinking that closes the path to violence and extinction. Like Kafer said, we imagine different dimensions to dig deep in the criticism of our reality, trying different scenarios and costumes. I’m very inspired by the interdisciplinary thinking, in the collage as a modus operandi, a queer technique, that broke categories; in the creation of monsters that take you to different visions and feelings, because there is no joy or hope in the way of living that is naturalised now by Anthropocene extractivism.

– Words by Jesse McCeney