

# MEANDERING

ART, ECOLOGY, AND METAPHYSICS

EDITED BY SOFIA LEMOS

*SternbergPress* ✨



ANA MARÍA MILLÁN

From Liquid to Watery, 2022–23





Ana María Millán  
*Becoming Riverine*, 2022  
Five color prints on satin  
150 × 150 cm (each)  
Commissioned by TBA21–Academy

Ana María Millán's practice draws links between the politics of animation, digital cultures, and gaming. Using the traditional methodologies of role-playing, she develops new narratives and soundscapes to create games at the intersection between fiction and criticism that rely on humor, interconnectivity, trust, and chance.

As part of *Meandering*, Millán developed a live action role-playing game (LARP)—a form of gaming where players co-create a fictional narrative represented by real-world environments while interacting with each other in character, for the convening “An Ocean without Shore.” Between 8 and 11 November 2022, the artist worked with local gamers, cultural practitioners, program guests, and TBA21 staff to co-create a series of avatars that addressed the experiences of human and non-human life in riverscapes threatened by extractive industries.

Departing from the artist's gaming methodology and pedagogical experiments, the participants co-wrote a script for a digital animation that bridges the Colombian Pacific Coast with Andalusia attending to the crossovers between shamanism, colonialism, and digital cultures. Moving through views of dense, dried vegetation—from the mountaintop to delta—the script combines ecology with political history in a filmic, fictional style, to engage with the animated lives of oil, gold, water, and sediment.

Based on these, the artist and the players co-created a series of avatars. The animation's focus on the landscape—a recent development in Millán's practice

Ana María Millán  
*From Liquid to Watery*, 2023  
Single-channel video, color, sound, 9 min.  
Commissioned by TBA21–Academy  
and TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art  
Contemporary for st\_age

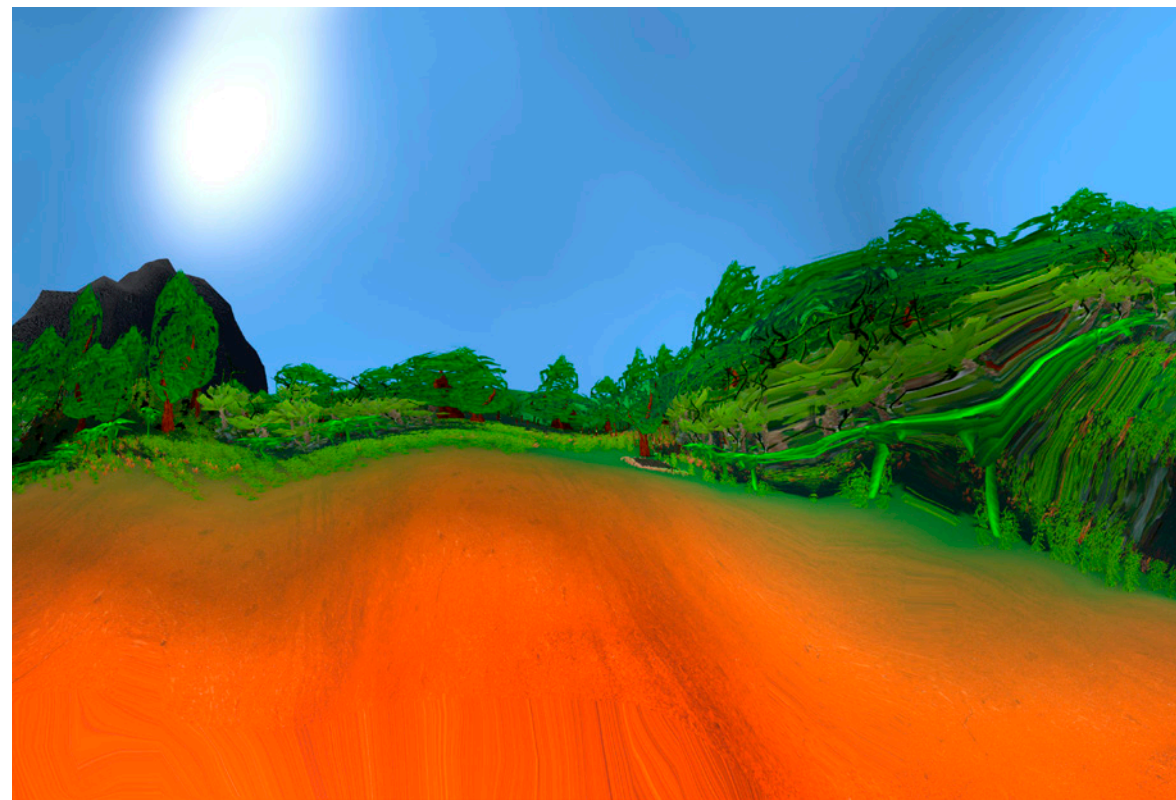
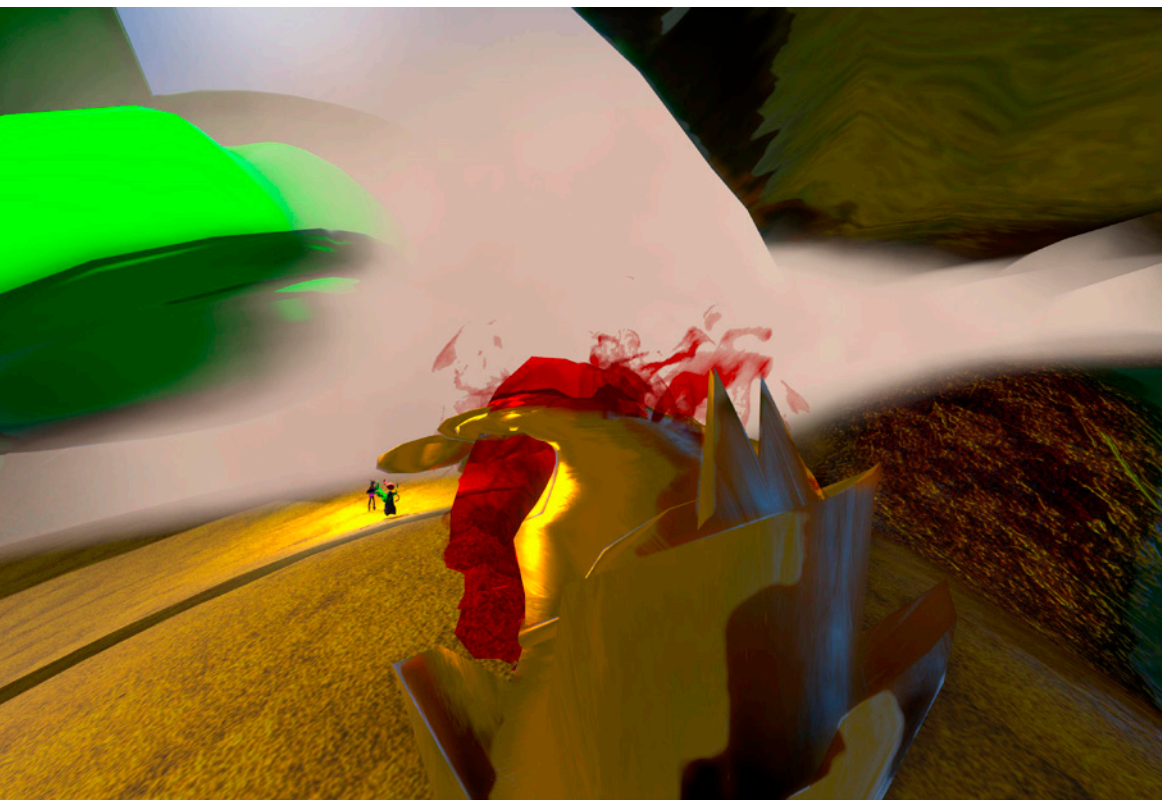
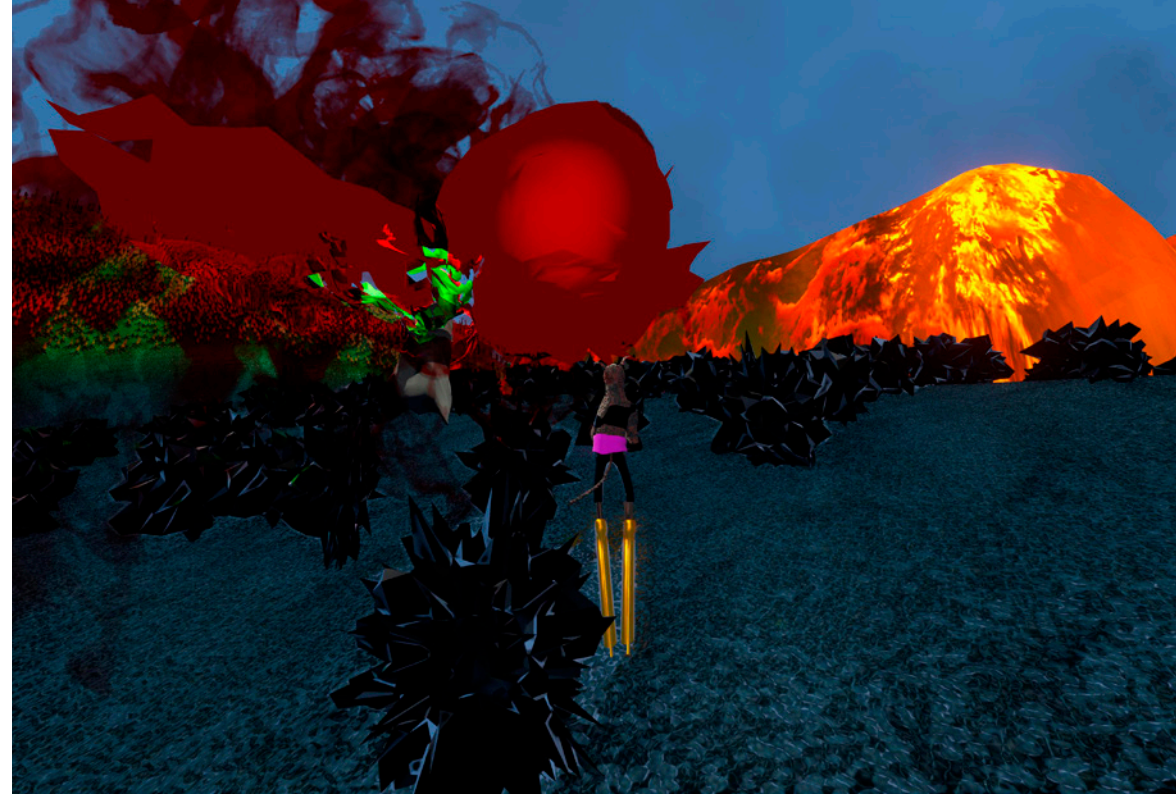
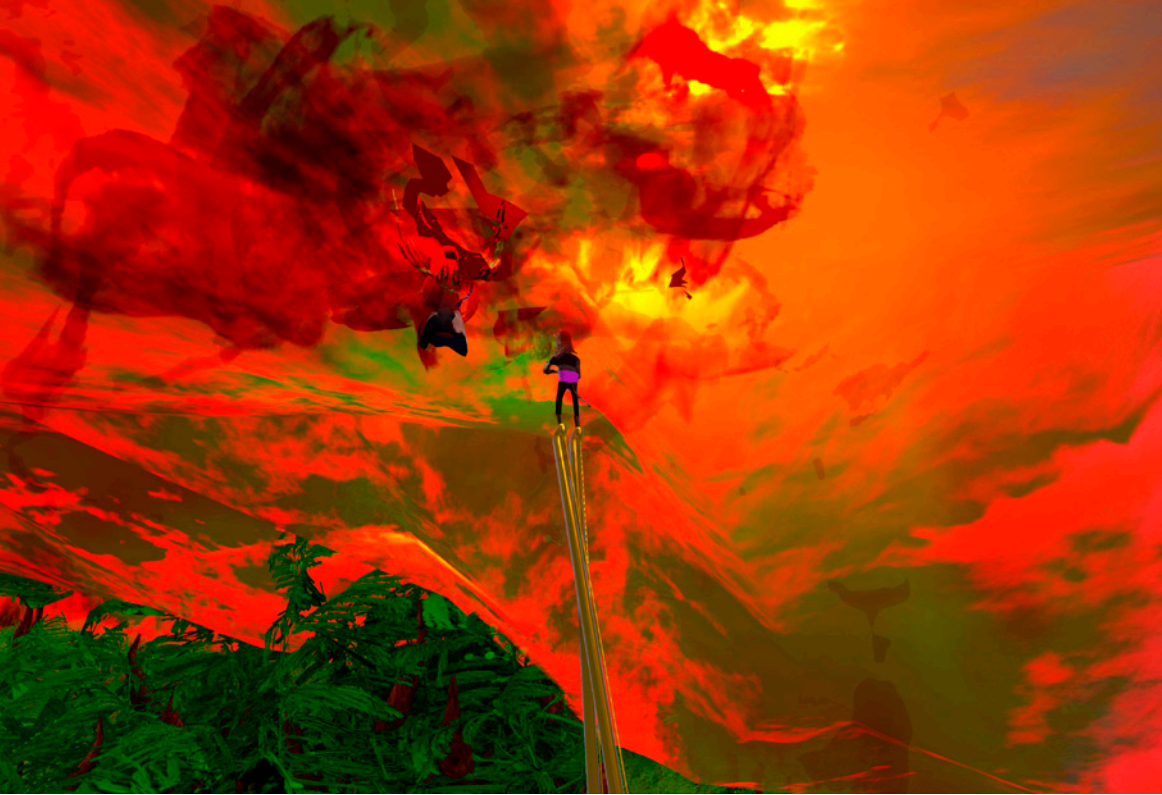
that imagines the avatars as extensions of the environment—enlivens the parallels between timber industries, mining, and the socio-cultural impact of agribusiness corporations on the watershed. Used as props in the game and installed in one of the venues of “An Ocean without Shore,” five flag-sized textiles depicting these riverine critters extended the game's narrative to the scenography of the public program.

The group's experience also speaks to the colonial continuities shaping the rhetoric of development. Carried out in the seizure of territory through deforestation, damming, and diversion of rivers in Colombia, Spain, and elsewhere for the purposes of mobility, energy, and infrastructure, this rhetoric is often built on the exploitation of vegetal, animal, and human life in order to justify enclosure.

Its soundtrack was developed in collaboration with Berlin-based Guatemalan artist Maya Saravia, with the intention of bringing awareness to the exploitation of bodies in Colombia's cultural policy. As such, the sounds of the marimba—a percussion instrument that has come to express maroon communities' Afro-Pacific identity and West African traditions—are placed in dialogue with the expressive compositions of the twelfth-century Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen, a German Benedictine abbess and polymath, whose play on the interdependence of sound and landscape forms a regenerative gesture towards Columbia's rivers, mountains, mines, and streams.







Ana María Millán, *From Liquid to Watery*, 2023, single-channel video, color, sound, 9 min.  
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Inspired by how rivers bend and curve, connecting entire ecosystems, *Meandering: Art, Ecology, and Metaphysics* unfolds the cultural, historical, spiritual, and ecological trajectories of waterways, reflecting the vitality of water, from source to sea. A diverse group of artists and writers set out to trace river systems from the sierras and forests of southern Spain, to the heartlands of the Americas and the undersurface of the Mediterranean, proposing new routes for collaborative research and knowledge-production.

In newly commissioned texts and a selection of influential essays—including a transhistorical dialogue between the twelfth-century mystic Ibn 'Arabi and the renowned essayist Sylvia Wynter—as well as lyrics, scent, recipes, critical-contemplative writing, and guided meditations, *Meandering* combines rich visual documentation with insights from the fields of art, visual culture, environmental humanities, ecotheosophy, mysticism, critical theory, and decolonial studies. This volume offers a practical and poetic toolset for a dynamic reconciliation between action and imagination to address the pressing social and environmental challenges of our time.

Contributions by Jesús Alcaide, Sally F. Barleycorn, Lourdes Cabrera, Edgar Calel, Federico Campagna, Carolina Caycedo, Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, Elizabeth Gallón Droste, Victoria García Gómez, Francisco Godoy Vega, Brooke Holmes, Lafawndah, Sofia Lemos, Isabel Lewis, Gracia López Anguita, Juan López Intzín, Gabrielle Mangeri, Michael Marder, Ana María Millán, Eduardo Navarro, Carmen Pérez Cuello, Lorenzo Sandoval, Chaveli Sifre, Emilija Škarnulyté, Medina Tenour Whiteman, Rosa Tharrats, Caique Tizzi, and Sylvia Wynter.

There is a special relationship between rivers and imagination. Both bring life to the Earth, mix climates and territories, disrupt hierarchies, and produce the unity of all places. This book is an ode to the power of rivers (and their earthly imagination), which never stop creating.

—EMANUELE COCCIA, Philosopher and author of *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*

*Meandering* is an engaged and meaningful collaborative project that swerves away from colonial history to bravely seek that elsewhere. A beautiful way to pursue living and embodied research practice that meanders with care into the past-present-future, in order to find the gentle and illuminated space of the decolonized beyond.

—MACARENA GÓMEZ-BARRIS, Endowed Professor of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University, and author of *The Extractive Zone*

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T  Thyssen-Bornemisza  
B  Art Contemporary  
A  Academy