



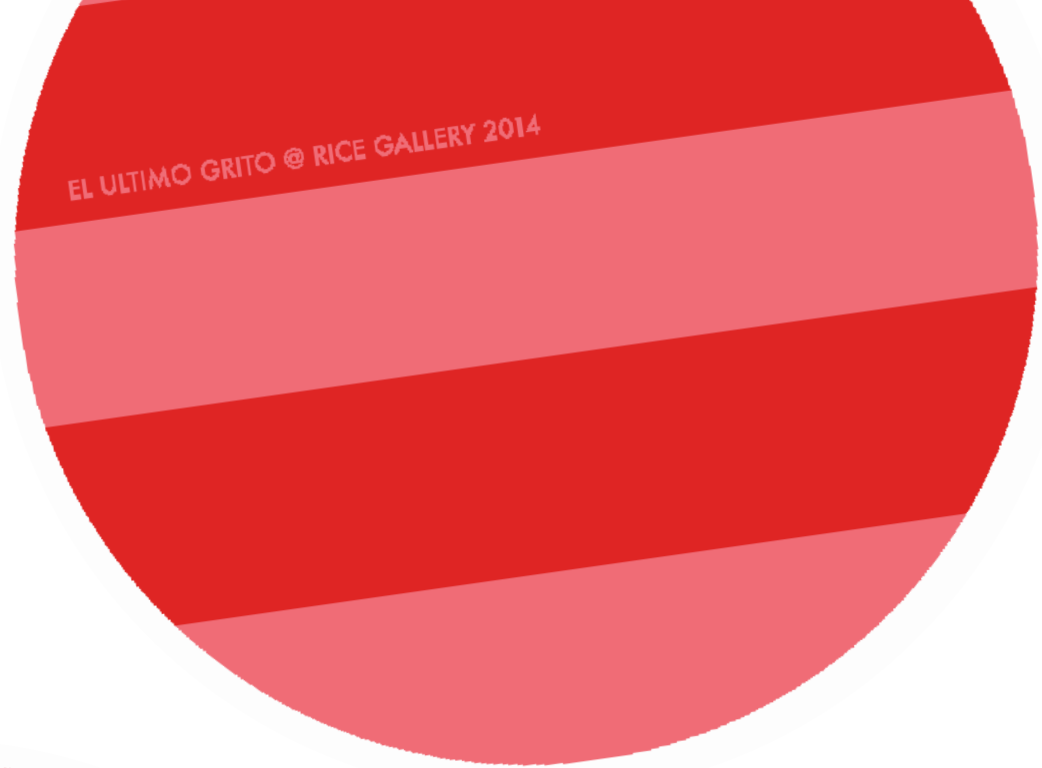


**EL GARDEN OBJECT**  
**ULTIMO**  
**GRITO**

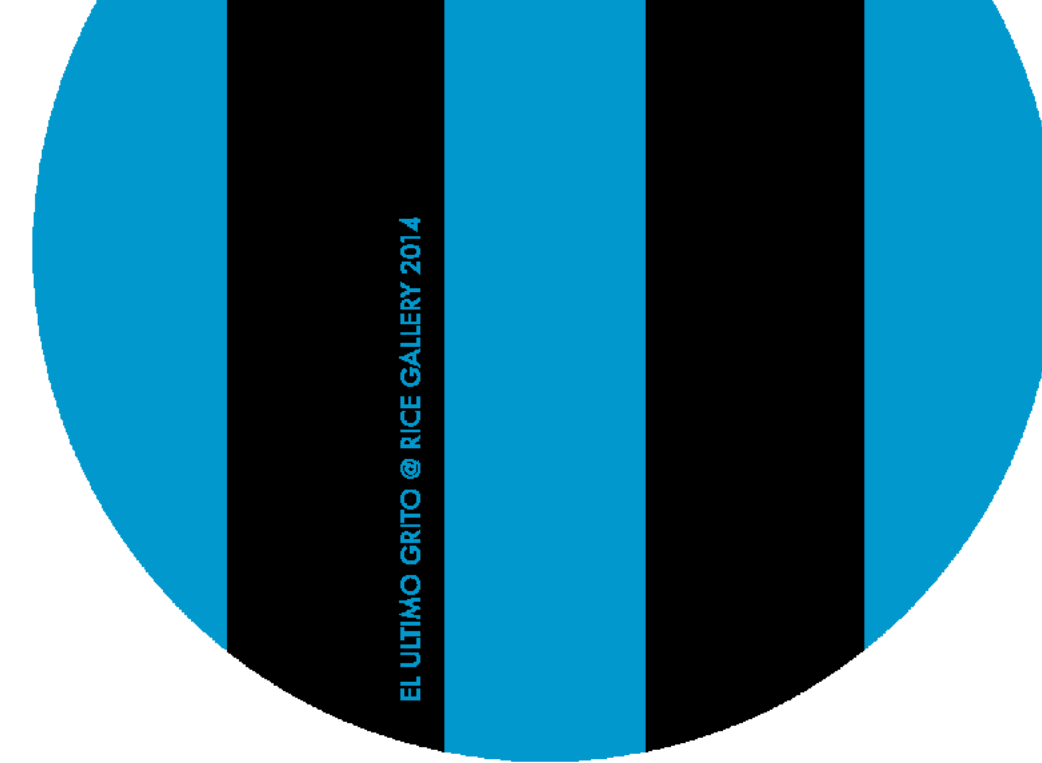
Rice Gallery



**EL  
ULTIMO  
GRITO**



**GARDEN OBJECT**  
23 January - 16 March 2014



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## FOREWORD

There are those rare occasions when you see a work of art and are changed in an instant. This is what happened to me while strolling through a design exhibition at MoMA several years ago. Along with many other objects on a floor-level platform was a bright, red plastic stool that obviously was a place for sitting, but also oddly creature-like. Protrusions suggestive of ‘hands’, ‘feet’, and ‘horns’ allowed the stool to be flipped and rested four different ways. *Mico Multi-use Stool* (2006) was my introduction to the work of the London-based design studio El Ultimo Grito, and I never forgot the immediate sense of refreshment, of tangible change, that I felt in the encounter.

Thus, I was thrilled when Josh Fischer, Rice Gallery Assistant Curator, discovered in a design blog a series of photographs of an installation done for the 2013 Abierto Mexicano de Diseño Festival by El Ultimo Grito —the Spanish-born husband-and-wife team of Rosario

Hurtado and Roberto Feo. Over the course of a few days in a public plaza in Mexico City, Hurtado and Feo, along with their daughter Elba and a team of volunteers, built a lanky, snaking wooden armature that sprouted legs and tall, mushroom-like spires. Enveloped in thick layers of bubble wrap secured with packing tape, a lumpy, vaguely anthropomorphic-looking edifice emerged. Lastly, the structure was covered completely with a durable “skin” of Grito-designed orange and black striped stickers. The wildly patterned, eccentric form functioned equally as design, sculpture, and public seating. The installation had the same playful and inventive qualities as the studio’s *Mico Multi-use Stool* and in addition was responsive to the community and the space in which it was situated. We knew that we must invite El Ultimo Grito to Rice Gallery!

El Ultimo Grito’s vision for *Garden Object* was of an indoor gathering place inspired by a traditional English garden

design coupled with the surreal imagery of Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1500–1505). A narrow wooden framework zigzagged throughout the gallery with arches and mushroom-shaped stalks sprouting from it. On some of these protusions were projection screens on which hummingbirds were shown hovering. Here and there tables emerged as parts of the structure. Sounds of a spring from a Grito-built fountain filled with phosphorescent water (water + quinine) gurgled in the small gallery. This otherworldly universe was created, miraculously it seemed, in six days of intense work by Grito and many helpers.

Screened simultaneously in the RG CUBICLE video space was *Sub-Dogma 13*, a series of 21 two-minute videos by El Ultimo Grito and the research group POI. In each video, a classic film had been edited into a two-minute alternative movie trailer that accurately isolated and summarized the objects, architecture, and settings that formed the backdrop for the movie's action. It was surprising and strangely satisfying to recognize the familiar film referenced in each of the mini-films that Houston filmmaker Peter Lucas called, "beautiful little cinemoems and enticing encouragements for cinematic exploration."

I thank Anna Walker, Windgate Foundation Curatorial Fellow for Contemporary Craft at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for her insightful talk, *Honing Your "Craft": Improvisation in the Work of El Ultimo Grito*. Walker placed

El Ultimo Grito's work in the larger context of work by other artists who engage unskilled participants and use ephemeral materials, diverging from craft's history of employing skilled labor and traditional materials.

I am beyond grateful and in awe of the amazing El Ultimo Grito for their imaginative installation that combined cutting edge design with an experience that visitors could immediately relate to and enjoy. The opposite of the stereotype of art being pristine and untouchable, *Garden Object* offered each visitor an experience of immediate connection to the installation by way of its humor and playful spirit. Yet *Garden Object* was at the same time a sophisticated design that merged formal ingenuity and functionality as Rosario Hurtado and Roberto Feo repurposed the most ordinary materials to creative ends. The installation proved that the most successful design is not about using the latest tools or most expensive materials, but rather rethinking what is possible with what we already have on hand. To our great pleasure, this is El Ultimo Grito's genius.

Kimberly Davenport  
Director





## ONE COUPLE'S TRASH

El Ultimo Grito's Rice Gallery Installation  
Is Anything but Rubbish

If Dr. Seuss and Antoni Gaudí made a sculpture together, it might look something like *Garden Object*, which was on display at Rice Gallery 23 January - 16 March 2014. It was actually created by the London-based design studio El Ultimo Grito. The designers behind it, husband-and-wife team Roberto Feo and Rosario Hurtado, are Spanish, as was Gaudí, and had never heard of Dr. Seuss until they had their daughter, who was born in London. Seuss would have loved *Garden Object*, however. The installation snaked through the gallery like some vividly patterned, many-legged llama-esque creature with long, curving and arcing necks. Visitors were invited to sit on the creature's back(s), from which little round tabletops grew, surfaces perfect for a laptop or someone's lunch.

The bulk of El Ultimo Grito's Rice Gallery installation was created with bubble wrap, packing peanuts and tape—the kind of cheap materials you can pick up at any Office

Depot or dive for in any office-building dumpster. It took six days to create, a surprisingly short period of time for such a large object. (Most projects for the all-installation-art-all-the-time Rice Gallery take two to three weeks to put in place.) Feo and Hurtado started out with an armature of two-by-fours resting sawhorse-like on low legs made from one-by-twos. They then swathed it in bubble wrap, threw in some packing peanuts and wrapped it all with packing tape to flesh out the sticklike structure into engagingly lumpy forms. The sculpture's legs were anchored to the floor with gaffer's tape in neon colors, creating goofy, duck-like feet.

The final skin was formed through layers of round waterproof stickers adhered over the sculpture's surface. The stickers had optically radiant stripes in blue/orangey red, as well as blue/black and red/pink combinations, and they visually ignited the sculpture with masses of crosshatched lines while providing a sturdy waterproof skin.

El Ultimo Grito did a similar but smaller-scale project that even survived outdoor conditions in a public square in



Mexico City. The stickers for the Rice installation were printed by a local company that normally produces labels for industrial applications, including for use on chemical drums. The finished structures seem durable; Feo told me about an installation they did for a recycling festival in Poland that withstood the weight of two drunken policemen climbing on it. The designers aren't control freaks, and they welcome interaction, even in the construction stage. Passersby helped construct the piece in Mexico City, as well as the one at Rice Gallery.

In the Rice Gallery installation, some of the creature's necks ended in tiny video projectors, while others ended in flat white circles that video is projected onto, images of tiny hummingbirds hovering as if trapped in an alien garden.

"El Ultimo Grito" roughly translates as "the last word," and according to Feo and Hurtado, the phrase was once used to describe something ultra-fashionable or modern, but is now used only ironically. El Ultimo Grito is internationally known for its humor and quirky and eclectic output. In addition to work like the sprawling free-form *Garden Object*

that inhabited Rice Gallery, Feo and Hurtado have created delicately fabricated objects like *Imaginary Architecture* (2010), elaborate blown-glass sci-fi-looking "architectural models." They have also ventured into children's furniture with *Mico Multi-use Stool* (2006), a bright red multi-legged object that could be a stool, a table or some kind of toy animal. (According to the designers, it hasn't been a big seller.) They have designed clothing, such as a shirt called *The Revolution will not be televised* (2001). A fashion/political statement, it consists of a black T-shirt with three bullet-like holes in it. The black layer can be lifted over the wearer's face to create a ski mask-like hood—the wearer peers through the holes. Text on a white shirt underneath reads "peace." And the quotidian is not beneath them; their 1998 *brainstorming* is a toilet-paper holder/magazine rack. The unconventional studio was awarded the London Design Medal in 2012.

El Ultimo Grito's first environment using bubble wrap and tape materials was called *Griffin Soho*, a monthlong popup shop/showroom on Carnaby Street in London designed for the clothing label Griffin. Feo and Hurtado needed



something large-scale and cheap to build out the empty space for the month. The designers transformed the cardboard and packing trash from neighboring businesses into an all-white, dreamlike environment. They developed the wood/bubble wrap/packing peanut/tape formula and covered it with white stickers to create an organic-looking, otherworldly space, complete with clothing hung on or stretched over the wonky forms.

There is something very appealing about El Ultimo Grito's approach to its installations. It reminds me of building cardboard-box houses as a kid, creating something big and free, with your own two hands. Theirs is a low-tech, handmade effort coming out of a design world in which products are usually finely finished and industrially fabricated. The Rice Gallery installation required almost no tools; a saw, a drill and wood screws were the arsenal. There is a lot of impressive public sculpture and installation art out there, but rarely do you think, 'Wow, I could do something like that at home!' The designers' simple but visually dynamic construction is inspirational rather than aspirational. You could make an extra couch

out of the Christmas-morning trash pile if you wanted. Feo and Hurtado did something similar when they made a temporary move to Berlin and needed a table for their studio: They simply took their piles of cardboard boxes and packing material and made one. It's the kind of thing that seems perfectly obvious when you're a kid but that you forget about when you become an adult. Feo and Hurtado are giving permission to grown-ups to reclaim the improvisations of childhood.

It's really refreshing to see something that is visually interesting and unabashedly fun. El Ultimo Grito's installation straddled design, art and architecture, but the artistic couple aren't the kind of people to worry about labels or genres. They just want to make amazing things, any way they can.

—Kelly Klaasmeyer

Kelly Klaasmeyer is a Houston-based arts writer. This article first appeared in the January 29, 2014 issue of *Houston Press*.









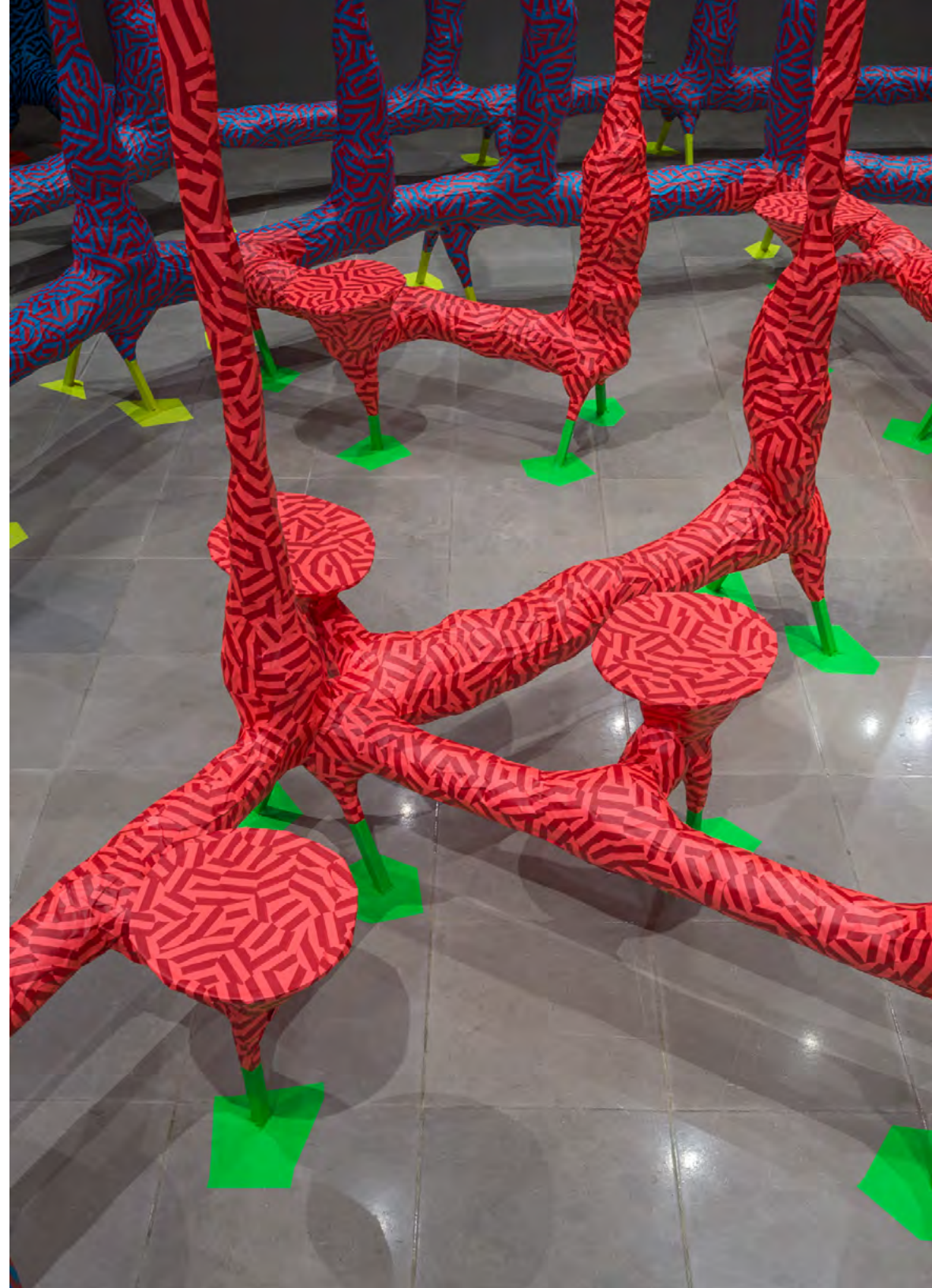


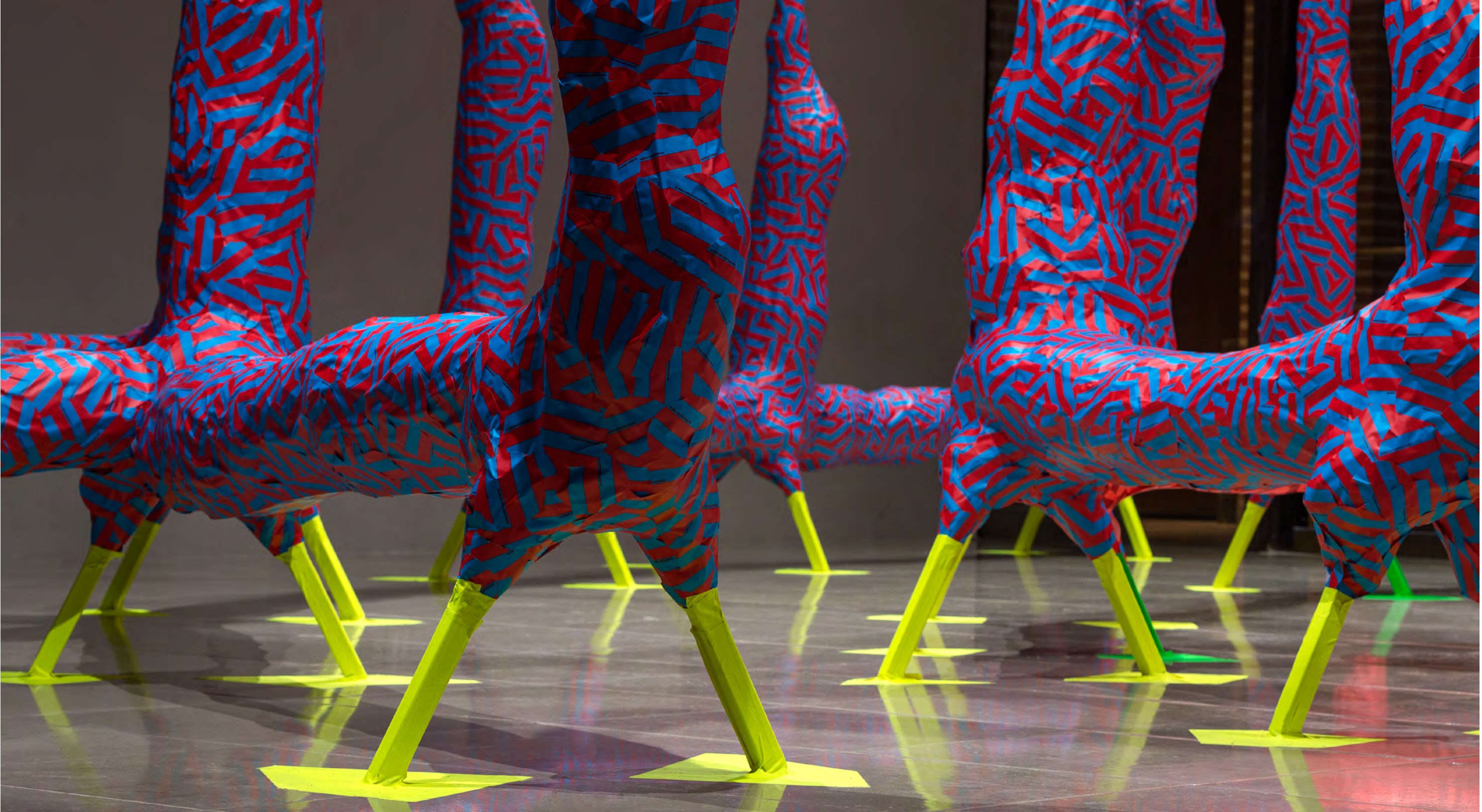
















## ABOUT THE ARTIST

El Ultimo Grito is the London-based design studio founded in 1997 by Rosario Hurtado and Roberto Feo. In 2010, they founded Shopwork and POI, an independent publishing, research, education and design platform. The studio's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. In 2012, El Ultimo Grito was awarded the London Design Medal.

Rosario Hurtado was born in Madrid in 1966. She studied Economics at Alcala de Henares, Madrid before moving to London in 1989, where she studied Cabinetmaking at London College of Furniture and completed a BA in Industrial Design at Kingston University, Surrey. A principal lecturer in the Design Department of Goldsmiths University, London since 1999, Hurtado has taught at the Royal College of Art, London, and the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, Germany. She is co-director, with Roberto Feo,

of the Space and Communications Program at Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD), Switzerland.

Roberto Feo was born in London in 1964 and grew up in Madrid, Spain. He studied Sociology and Social Anthropology at Complutense University, Madrid before moving to London in 1990. Feo studied Furniture Design at London College of Furniture and received an MA in Furniture Design at the Royal College of Art, where since 1999 he has been a principal lecturer in the Design Products Department. Feo is currently a Senior Design Research Fellow at Kingston University, London and with Rosario Hurtado is co-director of the Space and Communications Program at Geneva University of Art and Design, Switzerland.

## C R E D I T S

El Ultimo Grito, *Garden Object*  
Commission, Rice University Art Gallery  
23 January - 16 March 2014

Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at [ricegallery.org](http://ricegallery.org).

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