

# VideoDanzaBA Festival: Almost Three Decades of Pioneering the Field in Latin America

By Silvina Szperling, Mauro Cacciatore, Mariel Leibovich

## Abstract

Created in 1995 by director Silvina Szperling, VideoDanzaBA is the first festival in Latin America dedicated to the promotion, dialogue and education in the field of screendance. Based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Festival has shown in its 28 years of existence hundreds of works from most corners of the planet, where Latin America has grown as a specific force in the field, gaining representation on screen as a diverse multicultural scope, both artistically and as a production and circulation network, such as REDIV (Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza/Ibero American Network of Screendance). In addition to its screendance competition, VideoDanzaBA has welcomed artists from all over the world to participate in its Education Program and academic Symposium. Some of these scholars' writings were included in the book “Terpsícore en ceros y unos. Ensayos de Videodanza” (*Terpsichore in zeroes and ones. Essays on Screendance*; Szperling, Temperley comp., Guadalquivir, Buenos Aires, 2010).

Through its history, VideoDanzaBA has depicted materials that document the artistic and political production of underrepresented communities in the field (women, indigenous people, LGBT+), comprising a wide scope of dance styles (contemporary, classical, hip hop, folklore, regional dances, tango). This paper will be an attempt to reconstruct this history in connection with the genealogy of the field of dance and technology in Argentina.



## Introduction

The VideoDanzaBA International Festival (VDBA), from Buenos Aires, is a pioneer in the regional screendance field. Since its beginnings in 1995, it has been an important platform for the circulation, education, discussion, and development of networks regarding artistic manifestations around the body-technology axis, in a broad sense. Throughout its history, it has become a platform for the dissemination and professionalization of the screendance field. VDBA's activities sought to promote screendance produced by local and regional artists, to provide multidisciplinary mentoring for the implementation of viable projects, to build networks, and to bring art closer to the community. With an emphasis on international exchange, the festival developed artistic residency plans with foreign organizations to promote research and artistic cooperation, in a framework that always encouraged diversity. Its educational initiative was aimed at both professional development and community outreach, and its programs included live performances, screenings, exhibitions, lectures, and special activities.

The history of VDBA is directly linked to the role of Silvina Szperling, her professional background, and the beginnings of screendance in Argentina and Latin America. Szperling, founder and director of VideoDanzaBA, has become a precursor in this genre with her first work, *Temblor* (1993), considered to be one of the first Argentine screendance pieces. This article is the result of a dialogue between the Festival's historical archive and a series of interviews and talks with Silvina, with the purpose of systematizing the information and enriching it with all that is linked to the sphere of the memory, anecdotes, and emotions that can be derived from the oral history. As a whole, both materials are intended to give an account of the historical background of VDBA, addressing its first actions, the emergence, growth, and development of each one of its areas, with the aim of understanding how the process of building its own identity took place, and also the factors that led the Festival to say goodbye in 2023, twenty-eight years after its foundation.

## Context and background: the seeds of VideoDanzaBA

In order to account for the local and regional implications of the Festival, it is necessary to briefly contextualize the socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions of that time. The '90s in Argentina were marked by a brutal neoliberalism whose main policies implemented were the privatization of public companies, trade liberalization, decentralization of the State, reform of the Public Administration, a marked reduction in public spending and an increase in foreign debt, among other issues. In specific terms, this translated into a lack of support for cultural activities in general and for dance in particular. In addition to these factors, it is important to remember that we are facing an era marked by a certain isolation in technological terms: the Internet did not exist, nor did the pre-eminence of the digital world.

At that time everything was analog, therefore, the materials were video cassettes that traveled by postal mail. In some developed countries they worked in film or high definition, as in professional television, but these were technologies that were not yet available in Argentina. Even in the field of video art, which had already a longer history, artists also worked with home cameras, which were also difficult to access, not everyone had one. Both the geopolitical and social context at a national scale, and the technological status and difficulties of access to media, put the artists in a very precarious situation.

An example of this situation is the fact that in 1993 the National Secretary of Culture wanted to organize a Festival in which Jorge Coscia<sup>1</sup> was to be a member of the jury, but no works were submitted: the call for entries was declared void. Part of Coscia's production as a filmmaker was linked to musical movies in which dance played a leading role, among them *Cipayos* and *Canción desesperada*. Faced with this absence of screendance productions, Coscia proposed setting up a Screendance Workshop for Choreographers at the recently inaugurated National Library (Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno). The course lasted three months and was free of charge. The attendance was approximately fifty people, so two different classes were offered. Coscia's pedagogical thesis was very pragmatic: he insisted that it was easier to teach the basics of cinematographic language to choreographers and dancers than to teach dance to audiovisual producers. The workshop became a production motor, since each person had to make a final exercise. The first Argentinian screendance productions came out of this course, by Silvina Szperling, Margarita Bali, Paula de Luque and Melanie Alfie.

The four resulting pieces were supervised by Coscia, who acted as production assistant, technician, and executive producer, among other roles, as needed in each case. The following year Szperling, who was a teacher at the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center (*Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas*, a venue dependent on the University of Buenos Aires), received a proposal to make an exhibition of the four videos produced at the end of the screendance workshop: the reception from the audience was overwhelming. The situation of dance at that time in Argentina was really critical, due to the economic crisis mentioned above, and that is why the video appeared as a simpler possibility of production and circulation (especially compared to the costs of touring a dance company).

### **From North to South: ADF / BA**

Within the migratory movement resulting from the crisis during the '90s, it was very common for Argentinian artists who traveled abroad to remain living in the place that they arrived to, and only in exceptional cases did they return to Argentina. Since video has an independent circulation, unlike a stage work that implies the travel of a large amount of materials and people, video as support for a dance piece was used as a facilitator for artists who were established abroad to exhibit their own work in Argentina. Likewise, for artists living in Argentina, video worked as a facilitator for exhibiting their work abroad.

In 1994 Szperling was awarded with a grant from the American Dance Festival (ADF), which had a very strong level of exchange with Argentina. At that time, they had an International Choreographers' Residency (ICR) program in which choreographers from different countries lived together in the same house on Campus at Duke University, sharing common activities, as well as integrating themselves in an exchange with all participants of ADF. Margarita Bali<sup>2</sup> and Susana Tambutti<sup>3</sup> were already periodically attending ADF with their company

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Coscia (1952-2021) was an Argentine filmmaker and politician. He graduated from the Centro de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (CERC), currently the Escuela Nacional de Experimentación y Realización Cinematográfica (ENERC), which belongs to the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA). His career as a director includes the feature films *Luca vive* (2002), *Canción desesperada* (1997), *Comix, cuentos de amor, de video y de muerte* (1995), *El general y la fiebre* (1992), *Cipayos (la tercera invasión)* (1989), *Chorros* (1987), and *Mirta, de Liniers a Estambul* (1987).

<sup>2</sup> Margarita Bali is a choreographer, teacher, and pioneer of screendance in Argentina. In 1975 she founded, together with Susana Tambutti, the company Nucleodanza from where they created multiple works. Originally trained in Biology (California), she later turned to the visual arts, incorporating video work into her dance works.

<sup>3</sup> Susana Tambutti is an architect, choreographer, teacher, and researcher. She co-directed Nucleodanza (1974-1996). She is currently a Consulting Professor (Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, UBA), Associate Professor in

Nucleodanza. There was a growing relationship and interest of the directors of ADF in Argentine dance production. That year, after a visit to Buenos Aires by Stephanie Reinhart (co-director of ADF), they decided to invite seven Argentine choreographers to the festival, including Mabel Dai Chi Chang, Mariano Pattin, Brenda Angiel, Laura Veiga, among others. This group was joined by Susana Szperling, who lived in NYC and got a scholarship at the Young Choreographers Program to attend, and Marcelo Isse Moyano who traveled as a Scholar.

Silvina's 6-week scholarship was a video apprenticeship, her purpose was to study screendance and to be an assistant to Douglas Rosenberg.<sup>4</sup> In one of the interviews conducted for this article Szperling mentions that, upon returning to Argentina after that experience, she had her first idea as a producer:

I had managed to travel with the support of the Argentine Foreign Ministry, and I thought: "It costs the same for a country to pay a scholarship to an Argentinean to study screendance in the USA, than to pay an American professor to come and teach classes to everybody."

Following the initial impulse of the video exhibition held at the Rojas, the project to create a screendance festival began to take shape. On the recommendation of Graciela Taquini<sup>5</sup> – pioneer of video art and "artistic godmother" of VDBA– Szperling contacted Rodrigo Alonso<sup>6</sup>, who at that time was a student of the Bachelor of Combined Arts at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires, and belonged to the faculty of General Theory of Dance, whose head was Susana Tambutti.

As part of the Festival's proposal, Douglas Rosenberg was invited, by means of an economic aid from the ADF, to cover his travel expenses and fees, beginning a south/north relationship that was very beneficial. This bilateral relationship also highlighted the economic inequalities between the two festivals, which impacted on the availability of technologies. Highly qualified

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General History of Dance (Department of Movement Arts (UNA). Member of the Academic Council of the Doctorate in Arts (UNA). She is Director of the Specialization in Contemporary Dance Trends (UNA), of the Research Institute of the Department of Movement Arts (UNA), and of the Academic Section of the International Performance Biennial (Argentina).

<sup>4</sup> Rosenberg is well known for his work in screendance. He has articulated the field both through his films and his theoretical writing. He is a founding editor of the International Journal of Screendance. He is the author of *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* and editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, which was awarded the Oscar G. Brockett Book Prize for Dance Research. He is well-known for his collaborations with choreographers including Molissa Fenley, Sean Curran, Ellen Bromberg, Joe Goode, Li Chiao-Ping, Eiko and Koma and others. His film *My Grandfather Dances* with choreographer Anna Halprin was awarded the Director's Prize at the International Jewish Video Festival in Berkeley, California.

<sup>5</sup> Graciela Taquini is an Argentine artist, curator and teacher who has developed most of her artistic production in the area of single-channel experimental video. She is a referent of contemporary art and new media. She has been producing artistic work since 1988, receiving different awards, among them the Konex Platinum Award in Video Art (2012). She has been nicknamed "the aunt of Argentine video art" for her early participation and interest in that discipline. She is a full member of the National Academy of Fine Arts. Her recent endeavor is *Legado.ar*, a network and archive of Argentinian female audiovisual artists.

<sup>6</sup> Rodrigo Alonso is a professor and independent curator. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), Argentina, specializing in contemporary art and new media. Professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), Universidad del Salvador (USal), and Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA), Argentina. Invited professor at important universities, congresses, and international forums in Latin America and Europe.

international professors and artists were invited to teach courses, train people, and help to produce. Szperling says:

In the case of Douglas Rosenberg, I asked him to bring his camera and he brought ADF's professional camera, which was a giant BetaCam, which is like a backpack. We are not talking about a camcorder where the camera and the recorder were together, but the camera was one device and the recorder was another. As it turned out, he was stopped at customs and we had to take steps to get an authorization to release it. The feeling was as if we were importing technology when, in fact, we were importing knowledge.

In this way, the workshops became a way of transferring knowledge and, at the same time, a space for production: works were created there in the same way as in Jorge Coscia's first workshop, but now, in a more organized and sustained training instance, that allowed access to a growing community, and achieve greater development.

### **VDBA 1.0 - Outreach and Education**

The emergence of the Festival is the result of the encounter between the need to produce and to promote an art form that was still new in the country. An exponential interest was generated by this language, both in local creators and consumers. The first years of VDBA were marked by the import of knowledge and the training of artists, as well as by the possibility of accessing material that could not be found anywhere else.

The Education Area of the Festival has been one of its strong and permanent features since its foundation. During the first years most of the activities were practical workshops given by important foreign guest artists such as Douglas Rosenberg, Li Chiao-Ping, Elliot Caplan (USA), Laura Taler (Canada), Becky Edmunds, Liz Aggiss, Billy Cowie (UK), Pascal Magnin (Switzerland), among others.<sup>7</sup>

Over the years, the Education and Extension Area was divided in two: on the one hand, "Professional Training", from which the LAB VD (Screendance Project Development Laboratory, *Laboratorio de Desarrollo de Proyectos de Videodanza*) would later emerge. It was a program in which a dozen Argentinean and Latin American scholarship holders worked intensively for a week on their own projects, advised by five tutors in different specialties of screendance: Dance for the Camera, Direction and Script, Production Design, Soundtrack, and General Project Advice. At the end of the LAB, the participants presented their projects in a pitching session in front of a jury, who awarded the Production Stimulus Prizes, consisting of image and sound post-production services and electronic subtitling by professionals of the highest quality. On the other hand, the area of "Outreach to the Community" was created, within the framework of which, for example, there were activities organized in collaboration with the group Alma, a company focused on inclusive dance directed by Susana Gonzalez Gonz and with the group Danza Comunitaria (*Community Dance*) of Aurelia Chillemi, among other actions. More than 100 people participated in these activities each year, being one of the areas that attracted the most audience.

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<sup>7</sup> The United States, Canada, Switzerland, and France provided funding, along with support from other local funds, such as the National Fund for the Arts and, above all, the Rojas Cultural Center, which made a big bet on the project. At that time, the Rojas represented a very important gravitational center of emerging culture (it is currently celebrating its 40th anniversary). It began as a very modest space of the University, which grew a lot from synergies with party and political movements of the University, becoming a place of reference.

The Festival continued its development, changing venues on several occasions, until 2001, when there was a hiatus in the historical line of the Festival. That year's edition had been held at the Recoleta Cultural Center in August, and already at that time there were signs of serious economic problems, which later led to the social, political, and economical collapse that took place in December of that year, and that culminated in the resignation of President De La Rúa. The crisis led Szperling to live in the USA for a few years, but in 2005, back in the country, she organized a new edition of VDBA, again at the Rojas. Graciela Taquini came up with the idea of celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Festival, so a “curatorship of awarded pieces” was made, where the award-winning works of that first 10 years were highlighted at a Special Screening.

## **VDBA 2.0 - A united Latin America and academic initiatives**

By 2005 the context was very different, other winds were blowing. It was a time marked by a new Latin American geopolitical organization in which MERCOSUR<sup>8</sup> became more relevant and powerful, UNASUR<sup>9</sup> was being planned, and the local Secretary of Culture was closely connected to that of Brazil, whose Minister of Culture was the well-known musician Gilberto Gil. VideoDanzaBA, together with the festivals Dança em Foco (Brazil) and FIVU (Uruguay), which were holding their first editions, created the Mercosur Screendance Circuit (*Circuito de Videodanza Mercosur*) which resulted in the creation of two DVD compilations, and a series of trips and meetings among the members of this network. Silvina says:

We held residencies in which, for example, three artists (one from each country) stayed for two weeks in the cities of the other festivals (Montevideo, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires). The local artist acted as host and facilitator for their colleagues. Tamara Cubas and I also traveled to teach workshops in Rio and Sao Paulo, and this networking that began to happen had to do with a cultural management that sought to expand our circuit collectively, and help each other in management. But the most important thing is that on an artistic level, on an artistic language level, we began to see ourselves in the mirror of our peers. That is: Brazil, Uruguay, and then Mexico, together with other countries that joined the Forum (Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile), had the same production problems that we did, and also many of the same aesthetic questions, which of course are diverse and always characterized by a respect for diversity.

The governments of the region were coming to an agreement; it was the time of the “No al ALCA”<sup>10</sup>, characterized by a great economic growth in Argentina and Brazil, which meant a turn in the modes of production and circulation. This shift allowed for a different type of framework in which, although works, artists, and proposals from the northern hemisphere continued to be welcomed, a greater regional productivity began to emerge. The situation of greater production was strengthened by the growing technological accessibility, the digitalization of contents and then, gradually, by the possibility of circulation through the

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<sup>8</sup> The Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market) is an economic bloc founded in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

<sup>9</sup> Unión de las Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations, UNaSur), created in 2008. South American integration organization, currently composed of six countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela.

<sup>10</sup> The ALCA, Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas, (Free Trade Area of the Americas) was a multilateral free trade agreement, signed in Miami during the First Summit of the Americas in 1994, which included all the countries of the American continent, with the exception of Cuba. It was scheduled to begin at the IV Summit of the Americas, held in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 2005, but the rejection of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela prevented the treaty from entering into force.

Internet. Not only was it easier to have access to certain technologies (which are now an everyday occurrence), but it was also easier to obtain local investment and support from public funds. Thus, a phase of less precariousness began.

At this time, academic initiatives began to emerge with greater depth and dedication, renewing the Festival's research axis. Although in the '90s some actions of discussion had been proposed, they had had little impact at that time; however, those spaces of round tables and conferences were continued, and eventually the “International Symposium of Screendance” emerged. By then, many of the artists who had already been participating in the Festival were also involved in their academic practices, and were in contact with the new generations, thus creating a second wave of professionals linked to screendance.

The symposium had three editions (2006, 2007, 2009) and, as a product of those experiences, the first book edited by the Festival was published: *Terpsichore en ceros y unos. Ensayos de Videodanza*, co-compiled by Susana Temperley and Silvina Szperling (Guadalquivir, Buenos Aires, 2010). The book contains essays by academics who had participated in the Symposium, such as Simon Fildes (UK), Paulo Caldas and Alexandre Veras (Brazil), Oscar Traversa and Graciela Taquini (Argentina), Douglas Rosenberg and Ellen Bromberg (USA), among others, and is the first publication on screendance in Spanish. At the same time, Dança em Foco began to publish in Brazil their first book collection about screendance in Portuguese.

The development of the academic area was strongly linked to the semiologist Susana Temperley<sup>11</sup>, who at the time of joining the Festival chose dance and screendance as her object of study. Her expertise in academic work strongly strengthened this section of VDBA. At the same time, there was already a greater number of artists who approached screendance not only from their artistic practice, but also from critical thinking linked to academic research.

The Festival continued its development by promoting residency plans with foreign organizations such as South East Dance (UK), among others, to encourage research and artistic exchange. In 2010, on its 15th anniversary, a publication was released about the first two editions of the Symposium, the Education Area added residencies, professionalization and community outreach workshops, as well as scholarships and internships for residents in Latin America. All this activity enriched the usual exhibits: photography shows, installations, multimedia performances, as well as the open call for screendance pieces, works-in-progress, retrospectives, and special screenings.

### **VDBA 3.0 - Between programming, curatorships, and award ceremonies**

Within the framework of the meetings of the Latin American Screendance Forum (*Foro Latinoamericano de Videodanza*), which took place in Buenos Aires (2006), Brazil (2007 and 2009), and Mexico (2011), the issue of curatorship began to be discussed -especially by Brazilian colleagues- an aspect still somewhat neglected. From these meetings onwards, the discussions on this topic were enhanced through conferences, meetings, articles, and in the production team of each festival.

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<sup>11</sup> Susana Temperley holds a PhD in Arts (UNA), specializes in Arts Criticism and Dissemination (UNA), Analysis of Choreographic Production (UNLP), and has a degree in Social Communication (UBA). Since 2007 she teaches Semiotics and Theory of Communication and Semiotics of the Arts in the area of Arts Criticism at Universidad nacional de las Artes (UNA). For more than two decades, she has been devoted to the study of the relationship between dance and technology and its problematics around the languages of contemporary art. She has published articles on this topic in Argentine and international media.

Over the years, a growing specialization became more evident, both at the artistic level and at the festival production level, which marked clearer roles. In this regard, the VDBA team started to ask itself what distinguishes a program from a curatorship, which led to the differentiation of the work of two different juries. At first, the historical pre-selection jury developed curatorial criteria related to the grouping of works, and how to link them in relation to a containing discourse. These discussions were characterized by their interdisciplinary nature, with the participation of Rodrigo Alonso (video art and video dance researcher), Diego Trerotola (film critic), as well as an artist from the world of dance, who changed according to each edition, together with the Festival's director. On a second stage, the second group of jurors was in charge of the decision of the awarded pieces.

Then, the Festival's production team began to take charge of the curatorship in 2017, and gradually perfected the curatorial process until 2023, when a more extensive discussion began prior to the call for entries. Therefore, the curatorial process of that edition was extended for almost a year, and it became necessary to appoint a person to coordinate the team, who was Mauro Cacciatore. We will delve into this experience, and some of the aspects that went through it in the next section, dedicated to the last edition of the Festival.

Although curatorship was not originally included as an axis within the Festival's mission, it emerged in the light of the development of the discipline, taking into account the progress of this language, its evolution, and the question of how a Festival is not only a mere container of what is being produced, but also a producer of discourses. So, for example, one of the decisions taken by the initial team in 1995 had been to exhibit all the material received in the open call, as an attempt of encouraging production in an almost deserted field. It is worth mentioning that in those first editions, special screenings included pieces by Douglas Rosenberg, material from the Goethe Institut, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), among others. Those decisions were based on the desire to promote creation, and to provide artists with tools to develop a critical view (learning by watching) and, based on this knowledge, to encourage local production.

Over the years those decisions changed, and although VDBA was not a thematic festival in the strict sense of the word, from that time on it became a common practice to choose a specific motto for each edition, which sought to be transversal to all its actions. In 2013, for instance, in accordance with the 30th anniversary of Argentina's democracy, the leitmotif “Memory, Body and Image” was the axis around which the artistic proposals were aligned, as well as the academic dialogues and the intervention of the space of our main venue, the Haroldo Conti Cultural Center for Memory, at the former ESMA<sup>12</sup>. The relationship with the institutions that became venues is also an aspect that crosses the curatorial aspect; perhaps the most obvious case is the Conti, a place dedicated to memory, which makes it impossible for the space not to dialogue with the work of the artists in residence, as well as the people who circulated through the Festival during that week.

Expanding on the curatorial aspects, in 2015 the theme focused on the relationship with the natural and urban environment, in particular the preservation of water and other natural resources. The theme that year was “Energies in transformation”. In the 2017 edition, “Falsa Danza” emerged as a proposal by Susana Temperley, academic coordinator of the Festival.

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<sup>12</sup> The ESMA Memory Site Museum is a National Historic Monument, a MERCOSUR Cultural Asset and part of UNESCO's World Heritage List. The building that houses it, the former Officers' Casino of the Navy Mechanics School (ESMA), is evidence of the actions of State terrorism and judicial evidence in cases of crimes against humanity in Argentina.



This curatorial initiative included a section curated by Temperley together with Valeria Martínez, Silvina Szperling and Federica Baeza, and was a project that crossed all the artistic areas and art forms present in the Festival: a photo exhibition, video screenings, stage pieces, lectures, conferences, and critical writings.

The 2019 edition was connected to *Merce Cunningham Centennial: the elemental, the unpredictable, the unexpected*, a curatorial project in collaboration with Merce Cunningham Trust and REDIV (Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza) in the occasion of the Centennial of Merce Cunningham, not only an important choreographer in the history of dance, but also a key figure in the history of screendance and dance with technology at large. The project consisted of a curatorial program in the form of kaleidoscopic windows, through which the multiple and possible facets and perspectives of the expanded choreographic work of this choreographer were shown. In the form of thematic diagonals, the works were presented in the form of choreographic films, documentaries, and filmic experiments that were made available to all REDIV<sup>13</sup> member countries. The exhibition was accompanied by an expanded catalog to provide context for the exhibition during the extensive tour of the Merce Cunningham Centennial (2019), as well as to serve as reference material for future reference in university, educational, and artistic contexts. In order to generate an educational and exchange space, workshops on *DanceForms* and *Cunningham Technique* were included, taught by Trevor Carlson (USA) and Mauro Cacciatore (Argentina). As a stage production, the Festivals were offered the presentation of *Not A Moment Too Soon*, a multidisciplinary stage work that integrates dance, text, music, and video that traces the life experience between the choreographer Merce Cunningham and his executive director, Trevor Carlson, who narrates it in the first person as a solo. In addition, on April 16, Cunningham's birthday, the live streaming of *Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event*, a large simultaneous event in three cities, broadcast via worldwide streaming, was accompanied.

This array of activities shows that VDBA has been a Festival that aimed at multidisciplinary, the diversity of formats and to promote an approach to contemporary issues, both artistic and socio-political. On some occasions there have been sections of photographic exhibitions curated by experts such as Karin Idelson and Augusto Zanella. There have also been installations and other types of expanded screendance, but always the focus -for reasons related to the complexities and production costs of such works- has been the exhibition of single-channel audiovisual videos organized in competitive exhibitions: the Argentine competition, the International competition, and in several editions, the Videodanza Minuto competition. In turn, these programs dialogue with special screenings (retrospectives of guest artists, Argentine documentaries, etc.), university and workshop exhibitions, plus all of those grouped in the Living Arts section (multimedia works that integrate live dance with moving images and sound, either scenic, or installation), training activities (workshops, interdisciplinary artistic residencies, the LAB VD), publications, lectures, and conferences.

Regarding programming and awards, it is important to mention that for many years the Festival was not competitive, but later, it began to offer awards again. There was a change in the approach to this matter. Silvina says that:

I thought at the time that a prize without money didn't make much sense. But later, in order to enter the film circuit as an audiovisual festival eligible for funding, you had to

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<sup>13</sup> The Red Iberoamericana de Videodanza, REDIV, is a network of cultural managers, researchers, and artists that works transversally through various projects and actions of curatorship, dissemination, training, management, production and research on screendance.

be a competitive festival. At a certain point I realized that, just as we were advancing in the academic field, in the intellectual authorization, or in the recognition of production, it appeared to me that, although the award was not economic, it was an important recognition in that particular world of cinema. We moved between two areas: at the beginning we were dancers with cameras who made distinctive works, then film students began to collaborate with dance students for their graduation theses. These theses, concretely, implied to gain, not only an audience from the film world, but also critics and theorists. Thus, the issue of hybridity, so typical of our language, began to be evident.

In the '90s video-dance appeared as linked to video art, but later, due to technological advances, cinema began to be digital as well. The most important film festivals started to hold round tables on digital cinema, where there were debates on whether digital cinema was cinema or not. Although screendance artists were beyond those debates, the discussion existed and was the reason why screendance was proposed as an audiovisual language and could be recognized by the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA, *Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales*), which started to support the production of screendance works and festivals through subsidies. This shows that the awards not only imply an economic retribution, but also a legitimization within the film industry, whose modes of circulation, production, and legitimization are different from those of dance and the performing arts. Also, by joining the Argentine Network of Audiovisual Festivals and Exhibitions (RAFMA, *Red Argentina de Festivales y Muestras Audiovisuales*<sup>14</sup>), VDBA began to link up with independent film festivals that were beyond the official circuit and added another award to the festival, the RAFMA Prize.

### **2023 - The last edition**

Curatorship is a practice that obtains its specificity by being conceived as a field of writing. Marcelo Pacheco defines it by “its inherent capacity to remain a terrain of multiple and transdisciplinary experiences without becoming a discipline in itself, remaining a function ‘in between’” (2001, p. 5). In turn, Douglas Rosenberg points to other issues that draw attention to various aspects that enrich the practice:

Curation is not simply a selection. It is a proactive practice, which by nature contains equal parts of academic, scholarly, and teaching components. One undertakes a high degree of responsibility as a curator, not only to the work but also to the culture of that art form in general, its historical origin, its manner of proceeding and its flow of interrelated strands: interdisciplinarity and intertextuality. Curatorship is a platform for strong statements and is quite different from organizing and programming (2021, p. 96).

When analyzing the work of the curatorial team of the 2023 edition of VDBA 2023, integrated by Silvina Szperling, Mariel Leibovich, Marina Andreotti, Sofia Castro, Lola Vazquez, and Mauro Cacciatore as Chief Curator, Rosenberg's words resonate, not only for the necessary differentiation between a mere selection and the proactive practice that he describes as inherent to curatorial work, but also for the focus he places on the responsibility of this task in relation to culture and the origin of the artistic discipline. The viewing of works by the curatorial team during the selection process generally implies the consolidation of a space for questions and

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<sup>14</sup> The Red Argentina de Festivales y Muestras Audiovisuales (Argentine Network of Audiovisual Festivals and Exhibitions) is made up of more than sixty Cultural Organizations and was created with the purpose of establishing and strengthening cooperation links between Film Festivals and Exhibitions.

dialogues that might turn into open curatorial responses. Curatorial practice modifies itself, in its own development, promoting a process in which the way of looking mutates, which generates a complex and rich truss of possible networks of sensitive relationships.

For VideoDanzaBA 2023, the aim was to create a conceptual framework through which to *sieve* the productions, taking into account the idea of *agitation* proposed by this action. The gesture of sifting is also very descriptive of the ambivalence or multiplicity of possibilities faced by this task: a proposal can be related to a program by certain aspects, but also, by inserting it into another program (and placing it in function to a discourse composed of other works), aspects that at first glance were not so noticeable can become relevant. The same work is re-signified in different curatorial contexts, both by the works with which it coexists, and by the physical and symbolic exhibition spaces that house them. Each work generates its own universe, and one of the challenges of curatorial practice is how to put them in dialogue with other pieces, so that these discourses and narratives are enhanced. In this way, curatorship leads to the generation of new relationships and new constructions of meaning.

Screendance is continuously undergoing a crisis of concepts, practices, and worlds that enable a new possibility of changing the way in which we conceive things. The curatorial team decided to make room for works in which this crisis is present in both the thematic and rhetorical dimensions. This initial approach made it possible to trace a path towards transmedia narrative, a type of story whose plot unfolds through multiple media and communication platforms, and in which the spectators assume an active role in this process of expansion. Finally, in line with the idea of disciplinary crossings and from a perspective that sheds light on the current environmental crisis, it was proposed to work on the idea of composting, inspired by this controlled biological decomposition technique where what is apparently presented as discarded material ends up becoming compost. This decision enabled the possibility of crossing and articulating three scenarios of life: art, technology, and nature.

This edition's on-site program was composed by four curatorial programs that participated in the competitive section, which brought together works from our country and from all over the world, in a creative resonance. Something very particular that happened was that, having received works created from the year 2021 onwards, most of the productions were elaborated around the theme of the pandemic and isolation. In the search to escape from literalism and in the attempt to add a layer of meaning (especially because looking back from the present, despite not being so far back in time, all that dystopian era feels quite distant), it was observed that, within the works selected for the first program, the space of seclusion and intimacy appeared as a key to go through certain processes: to connect with emotions and experiences, to open up to other realities and from there, perhaps, to return to everyday existence. What record of time and relationships does the state of confinement make possible in these works? What forces and emotions operate and are put in tension, in the face of such a situation of emptiness? It is from these questions that the program *Inside Doors (Puertas adentro)* took shape.

The following two programs can be seen as two sides of the same coin, marked by the territorial aspect. In the case of the program *Como el musguito en la piedra* (Like Moss to the Stone), the wink to the well-known phrase of Chilean singer-songwriter Violeta Parra operates as a kick to raise a certain drive for natural life in adverse contexts. In a dual gesture, the program brought together works that draw attention to issues inherent to environmental problems, and to the struggle against man's control and abuse of nature but, at the same time, works that, on the contrary, allow us to show nature in all its splendor. In relation to the latter, we wanted to point out how poetic landscapes can be constructed by presenting human beings in a harmonious bond with nature, melting into it and becoming part of it.

The third program, Territorial Radiography (*Radiografía territorial*), placed in dialogue pieces by artists who work with different social realities and with the everyday life that emerges from them. We included works that fluctuate between documentary research and artistic creation, achieving testimonies that are presented as portraits and allow us to understand the territory, not only as a portion of surface, but also as the space where certain social relations are developed, which, as such, are crossed by cultural, political and economic aspects.

In a gesture almost opposite to the initial one, more towards “the inside”, towards isolation, the program closed with the Ominous Realities - *Das Unheimlich* (*Realidades ominosas – Das Unheimlich*). Here the gaze is opened and the body is proposed in a relationship towards the outside. The ominous alludes to a sensation of loss of familiarity that can appear in the core of the known, although it can also, through a specular inversion, refer to an experience of familiarity that appears in the center of the unknown. In this section we find cities devastated by the worst of modernity, by pandemics, by wars and bombings. The works included invite, on the one hand, to unbridled movement, but also to take a pause and look back to try to understand how to continue.

By organizing and generating exhibitions, not only bridges are built between the works, but also towards the spectators, so that both circulate and meet, enriching each other culturally. The curatorial practice does not only imply the programming of screenings, it is the work of giving meaning and putting in dialogue all the activities of an event from a global perspective. In the case of this edition of VDBA, the task involved a wide range of activities that fostered different types of reflection encounters. The on-site program included, in addition to the four competitive programs, the Special Screenings, in the form of anthological retrospectives, which made it possible to immerse oneself in two extremely dissimilar poetic universes: those of Li Chiao-Ping (USA) and Luiz Bizerril (Brazil).

The program was also expanded and enriched with a set of Special Activities that included, among others, the Pitching LAB VDBA 23 (an instance of presentation of the projects participating in the training area of the Festival) and the panel discussion *The body of the archive* which, with the gesture of looking backwards and forwards at the same time, put in relation two facts of great relevance: the preservation of the VideoDanzaBA archive in ARCA Video and the 30th anniversary of *Temblor* (directed by Silvina Szperling), a pioneer work of screendance in our country, awarded by the National Secretary of Culture. ARCA Video presents itself as an “Argentine experimental video archive” whose main objective is to “facilitate public, remote and free access to works and related information through its website.”<sup>15</sup> At the end of 2021, ARCA received in custody our historical archive, so that it can be cataloged and mediated by other viewpoints, and be available to the public.

In addition to the on-site program, there was also a varied Online Program made up of eight curatorial programs, including the Student Competition and the special program Argentine Screendance Panorama, curated by the Argentine Videodance Circuit (CAV, *Circuito Argentino de Videodanza*<sup>16</sup>). This factor represents an important strategy to multiply voices at

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<sup>15</sup> <https://arcavideoargentino.com.ar/>

<sup>16</sup> Circuito Argentino de Videodanza (CAV) was founded by cultural managers, researchers, and artists that make up multiple festivals and other expressions of academic and formative convergence dedicated to screendance, corporeality and technological mediation in a broad sense of our country. It arises from the motivation to strengthen the language of screendance by encouraging the circulation of works, the promotion of artists, the creation of virtual and on-site corridors and the research, analysis, and recognition of the Argentine screendance scene.

the curatorial level and for the dialogue it enables, not only among the works, but also at the program level. As a whole, all these activities and relationship games invited people to dive into the conceptual, affective and productive links generated by the work of multiple artists, collectives and networks. They also operate as a panoramic shot that allows us to understand where we come from as a screendance community, and how we transform ourselves to move forward. The Festival said goodbye as such with the certainty that everything is in motion and letting go of what is known is a way, perhaps painful, but also necessary, to be able to embrace all that is to come.

### **The day after tomorrow**

In the introductory words to the catalog of the last edition of the Festival, the director wondered whether it might be true that all farewells are sad, and invited us to celebrate the end of this cycle with toasts, laughter and dance steps. “Why not think that the labor transforms and proposes new challenges, and that in the future we will continue to grow artistically, researching, proposing, listening, traveling and producing work, which in turn will induce others to produce their own?” asks Silvina.

If something is evidenced throughout the entire trajectory traced in this article, it is the growth and development of the Festival throughout its life as such. From the zero point of total absence of production, to the development of its own production, the generation of spaces to host those productions, the exchange propitiated, the weaving of networks, the space generated for reflection, the space of militancy generated, and much more. As it was pointed out at the beginning, it is impossible to separate the life process of the Festival from the life process of its *alma mater*. In one of the talks for this article Szperling tells the following:

I became a cultural manager because being an artist was not enough to develop my new career. When I did my stage works I also did everything (promotion, lights, etc). Nowadays the category of *artist-manager* or *artist-et cetera* in the living arts is established, but at that time it was an act of survival, which actually had an echo. If it had been an individual thing of mine, how long would it have lasted? That initiative was projected in time because it had an echo in the community.

There is something of a mission accomplished. In its beginnings the VideoDanzaBA Festival was the first in Latin America, and today there are twenty-five festivals in Latin America, and in Argentina alone there are between eight and ten (perhaps some more, between series and other formats). The expansion of screendance as a language, even its territorial expansion (since these festivals are in provinces such as Misiones, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Buenos Aires, etc.) was driven by people who, in one way or another, were related to the history of VideoDanzaBA, both as part of the staff and/or participants, consumers, etc., and continue their own management work where VDBA's missions are still being fulfilled.

In its origins, at the time of naming it *First Screendance Festival*, the designer in charge of the graphic was asked to include the word “First” because it was very important to point out that it had a projection towards the future. In its journey, the Festival went through many periods of economic crisis: from the neoliberal context of the '90s to the 2001 crisis, the subsequent one in 2015 and recently the time of the pandemic, when many festivals closed: some remained online, others closed and reopened after the pandemic, and others closed for good. In reference to the context in which the Festival bids farewell, its director reflects:

I feel that since there is a generational renewal in the Festival staff, along with such enormous contextual changes and, having other festivals that are channeling the production, education, among many other things, everything is fine. At another time I felt that it would be like giving up, and that the closing of the Festival was going to leave a lack of support for the work, since a screendance series within a much larger festival is not the same as a Screendance Festival, because in the latter there is one axis that is highlighted as the most important. At this moment, I feel that I am freer to relate to the rest of the screendance world without organizing a festival. I continue being a researcher and an artist, and I also recognise that my artistic work has changed, my production is migrating to other scenarios and contexts, but that does not imply that I am going to disassociate myself from screendance, since we are already one. I have an authorship and a way of working that I took to all the places where I went. Far from being absorbed by any type of institution, VideoDanzaBA Festival expanded, opened spaces, generated networks, generated knowledge, and did not turn in on itself. It has allowed space for others to do their own thing, with their own personality.

It is interesting to read this story, and the evolution of these events, as the expansive movement generated by a stone thrown into water. In the same way that the career of its director expanded and mutated, so did the Festival, adding axes year after year, and fostering a transformation that resonates and is replicated in a medium that is also expanding and constantly reformulating itself.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Historical VideoDanzaBA Staff (1995-2023)**

Our interest in publishing this list is to thank and mention all the people who have worked or collaborated with the VideoDanzaBA festival in its 28 years of life. The information on the different editions is what could be obtained to date. Because the reconstruction and preservation of the festival's archive is in its initial stages, in collaboration with ARCA video argentino, there could be involuntary omissions in this list, for which we apologize in advance. We are open to suggestions, modifications and new inclusions from the community of VideoDanzaBA.

#### **First International Video-Dance Festival - 1995**

**Festival General Coordinator:** Silvina Szperling. **Selection committee:** Jorge Coscia, Ana Kamien, Graciela Taquini. **Area Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Guest artist:** Professor Douglas Rosenberg. **Press:** Agustín Aramburu. **Graphic Design:** Geni Expósito.

#### **Second International Video-Dance Festival - 1996**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Jorge Coscia, Margarita Bali, Andrés Di Tella, Douglas Rosenberg. **Guest artists:** Douglas Rosenberg, Li-Chiao Ping.

#### **Third International Video-Dance Festival - 1997**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Oscar Araiz, Fabio Guzmán, Núria Font. **Guest artists:** Núria Font, Dziga Vertov Performance Group (Douglas Rosenberg, Li-Chiao Ping, Ted Johmsom, Patrice Napastek, Pedro Alejandro).

#### **Fourth International Video-Dance Festival - 1998**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Jury:** Graciela Taquini, Jorge Coscia, Susana Tambutti.

### **Fifth International Video-Dance Festival - 1999**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Coordinator:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Advisor:** Graciela Taquini. **Production:** Mecha Lamothe, Santiago Bontá. **Press:** Karina Barrozo, Agustín Aramburu. **Technical coordinator:** Gonzalo Córdova.

### **6th Buenos Aires Video Dance Festival, 2001**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Programmer and Editor of Academic Texts:** Rodrigo Alonso. **Assistant Director:** Marcelo Plorutti. **Coordinator:** Claudia Cuadrado. **Workshop Assistant:** María Eugenia Bustamante. **Production:** Mariana Fonseca, Jorge Riehl, Paulina López Meyer, Gisela Norymberg, Lara Arellano. **Media Library:** Bernardo Coloma. **Institutional and Cultural Relations:** Natalia Margiotta. **Logo photo:** Andrea López. **Honorary Advisor:** Graciela Taquini

### **7th Buenos Aires Video-dance Festival - 2005**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Daniel Rosenfeld and Silvina Szperling. **Guest artists:** Leonel Brum, Tamara Cubas, Becky Edmunds, Mairead Turner, Emma Gladstone, Cecilia Rosso

### **8th Buenos Aires Video-dance Festival - 2006**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Jury:** Daniel Böhm, Rodrigo Alonso, Silvina Szperling. **Assistant Director:** Ximena Monroy Rocha. **Text Editor:** Susana Temperley. **Production:** Betyna Bergara, Marcela Carrero, Tomás Middleton, Cecilia Pugin, Eliza Ribeiro Capal, Claudia Sánchez, Paula Zacharías.

### **9th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2007**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Assistant Director and CVM Residency Coordinator:** Ximena Monroy. **Institutional Relations and CVM2 DVD Coordinator:** Gabu Espina. **Education Area Coordinator:** Claudia Sanchez. **International Videodance Symposium Coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Production Assistant:** JulieAnna Facelli. **Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Trerotola.

### **10th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2008**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Programming and Technical coordinator:** Ximena Monroy. **Institutional Relations and DVDs:** Gabu Espina. **Education coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Education assistant:** Fanny Roland. **Academic coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Production assistant:** Selva Lecot. **Graphic Design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Preselection jury:** Rodrigo Alonso and Diego Trerotola.

### **11th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2009**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **General Coordinator:** Selva Lecot. **General Producer:** Fanny Rolland. **Education coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academic coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Multimedia and Installations coordinator:** Verónica Santamaría. **Guest coordinator:** Carolina Carvajal. **Education assistants:** Mónica Osma Tapias and Mariel Leibovich. **Production assistant:** Mariana Di Silverio. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Blog and video library:** Carolina Marin Rubio. **Graphic design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso and Diego Trerotola. **Photography Preselection Jury:** Augusto Zanela and Karin Idelson.

### **12th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2010**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Fanny Rolland. **Education Coordinator:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academic Coordinator:** Susana Temperley. **Guest Coordinator:** Carolina Carvajal. **Education Assistant:** Mariel Leibovich. **Production Assistants:** Mariana Di Silverio and Julieta Alzaga. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Blog and recordings:** Carolina Marin Rubio. **Web design:** Esteban Agosin. **Graphic design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Press:** Jeankarla Falón Plaza. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Terotola, Silvina Szperling. **Preselection Jury Photography:** Augusto Zanela, Karin Idelson, Silvina Szperling.

### **13th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2011**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Fanny Roland. **Education Coordination:** Mariel Leibovich. **Education Advisor:** Claudia Sánchez. **Academics:** Susana Temperley and Mariana Di Silverio. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Web Design:** Esteban Agosin. **Graphic Design:** María Daniela Orlando. **Screendance Preselection Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Diego Trerotola. **Photography Preselection Jury:** Augusto Zanela, Karin Idelson.

### **14th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2013**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Julieta Alzaga. **Education:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academics:** Susana Temperley. **Editing:** Natalia de la Vega. **Web Design:** Esteban Agosin Otero. **Graphic Design:** Ma. Daniela Orlando. **Communication:** Macarena Blasco. **Video Jury:** Rodrigo Alonso, Claudia Sánchez, Diego Trerotola. **Photography Jury:** Karin Idelson, Augusto Zanela.

### **15th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2015**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Macarena Blasco. **Education:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academics:** Susana Temperley. **Editing:** Joan M. Soriano. **Communication:** Laura Marajofsky. **Live Shows coordination:** Cinthia Konpacki. **Graphic design:** Ma. Daniela Orlando. **Web design:** Maite Guelerman. **Video Jury:** Claudia Sánchez, Diego Trerotola, M. Fernanda Vallejos. **Photo Jury:** Karin Idelson, Augusto Zanela.

### **16th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2017**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer and Associate Curator:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academic Area and Associate Curator:** Susana Temperley. **Press and Communication:** Laura Marajofsky. **Curatorial and Editorial Writing:** María José Rubin. **Institutional Relations and Hospitality:** Manuela Quesada. **Technical Manager:** René Medina. **Live Arts:** Jimena García Blaya. **Education:** María Garona. **Local REDIV coordination:** Mayra Arenzon. **Web design:** Maite Guelerman. **Graphic design:** Primor Design.

### **17th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2019**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Mariel Leibovich. **Academic Area and Publications:** Susana Temperley. **Press and media:** Laura Marajofsky. **Text editing:** María José Rubín. **Management of audiovisual materials:** René Medina. **Production assistant:** Marina Andreotti. **Jury coordinator:** Jimena García Blaya. **Associate curators:** Mauro Cacciatore, Jimena García Blaya, Mariel Leibovich, Laura Marajofsky, René Medina, María José Rubín. **Spot:** Lola Vázquez.

### **18th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2021**

**Online programming - Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Marina Andreotti.



**Tecnodanza (in co-production with Fundación Cazadores) - Director and curator:** Mariel Leibovich. **Residency tutoring and artistic advice:** Silvina Szperling. **Production assistance:** Marina Andreotti. **Photography and audiovisual:** Pablo Linietsky.

### **19th International VideoDanzaBA Festival - 2023**

**Director:** Silvina Szperling. **Producer:** Marina Andreotti. **Curator in Chief and Curatorial Texts:** Mauro Cacciatore. **Curatorial Team:** Marina Andreotti, Mauro Cacciatore, Sofia Castro, Mariel Leibovich, Silvina Szperling, Lola Vázquez. **Technical Production:** Stefano Salvatelli. **Communication:** Mariel Leibovich. **Social Media - PR:** Laura Marajofsky. **Official Competition Jury:** Carla Biasco, Leonel Brum, Susana Temperley. **Students Competition Jury:** Galo Terán, Paola Escoto, Mariana Jaroslavsky. **RAFMA Jury:** Federico Ambrosis, Romina Luz Garay, Eduardo Marún. **REDIV Jury:** Andres Abreu, Denise Matta, Sofía Orihuela. **Pitching Juries:** Leonel Brum, Carolina Fernandez, Diego Trerotola. **Web Design:** Cacique Argentina.

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