

The Retirement

by PILLAR
Quintero

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Pilar Quinteros engages with the stories, images, and imaginaries through which people construct their world.

For many years, the Chilean artist has been developing sculptures, interventions, and installations made from simple, ephemeral materials such as cardboard, paper, or wood. Her works are often created on site and built by the artist herself. The physical process of making is as important as the finished form.

Pilar Quinteros understands construction as a way of making ideas visible and exploring the boundaries between imagination and reality.

Her practice is grounded in the observation that much of what we take for granted is ultimately human-made: buildings, monuments, urban landscapes, historical narratives, or cultural symbols. For Quinteros, these constructions are neither permanent nor immutable. The artist is particularly interested in those moments when they become fragile, disappear, or are reinterpreted. The fragility of the materials she uses points to this impermanence.

Pilar Quinteros' sculptures often appear monumental, yet remain vulnerable – like the stories they tell.

For the exhibition «Bündelbanden. Karton packt aus», Quinteros has created the new work «The Retirement» (2026) that references one of Basel's most iconic figures: the basilisk. This mythological creature, half rooster, half serpent, has for centuries served as the guardian of the city, its gates, and its waterways. The monumental basilisks on Wettstein Bridge in particular long shaped the cityscape. Yet their history is marked by relocations, losses, and attempts at return. Three of the four figures were removed and placed elsewhere; their original context was lost.

Quinteros engages with this history without simply reconstructing it. Her basilisk hovers beneath the roof structure of the studio at the Basel Papermill. The exhibition space is located in a former paper mill in the historic papermaking district of St. Alban. On the exterior wall facing the Dalbedych, the medieval mill canal, the shadow of an old waterwheel is still

visible today. Inside, traces of different uses overlap: medieval building fabric meets industrial interventions such as the massive steel beams of the later factory structure, from which the sculpture is suspended. Between these temporal layers, the basilisk appears to hover between flight and suspension, held aloft by cords and magnets.

Its appearance deliberately diverges from the dragon-like form commonly associated with the basilisk in Basel – on fountains, coats of arms, logos, or tattoos – where it often appears as a powerful, defensive, and threatening figure. Quinteros returns to earlier mythological descriptions and presents a hybrid creature between bird and reptile. As a result, the basilisk appears less as a ruler or protector and more as a mutable being that resists any fixed classification.

At first glance, the sculpture appears to be made of metal. Its copper-toned surface recalls historical monuments, presenting the basilisk as a monumental relic. Only on closer inspection does it become clear that it is made of cardboard – the material at the centre of the exhibition, circulating daily in large quantities through the city. The apparent heaviness gives way to surprising lightness. The monument reveals itself as a construction, the powerful guardian as a fragile apparition.

It is precisely in this interplay of illusion and materiality that a central concern of Pilar Quinteros' work becomes visible.

An accompanying audio piece gives the basilisk a voice of its own. Speaking in the local dialect, it recounts its return from exile, earlier staged rescue performances, and an existence that has detached itself from its former role. It no longer guards bridges or rules over waterways. Instead, it speaks with calmness about ageing, the loss of meaning, and what it means to be a visitor.

The installation connects local mythology with cycles of material, memory, and transformation. Here, the basilisk no longer appears as an unwavering protector, but as a figure in transition. Surrounded by cardboard, from which workshop participants shape drops, waves, rain, and other water forms by hand, it itself becomes part of an ongoing process of transformation. These elements recall its original role as guardian of the waterways, as well as the history of this place, whose existence has been tied to the force of water for centuries.

At the same time, the work reflects the constant transformation of cities and their symbols. What remains of a legend when its material carriers disappear? How do meanings change when stories are passed on, reinterpreted, or forgotten?

At the end of the exhibition, the sculpture is to be destroyed in a collective action and transformed into paper. From the cardboard of the basilisk, a large, blank sheet will emerge. This final gesture makes visible what runs through Pilar Quinteros' work:

the idea that every form is temporary, and that every ending is also the beginning of new stories.

Benedikt Wyss, Curator

Pilar Quinteros (*1988 in Santiago, Chile) has been living and working in Basel for the past three years. In autumn, she will become a neighbour of the Basler Papiermühle, moving into a studio at the GGG Atelierhaus just a few hundred metres upstream from the museum. She is currently completing her Master's degree in Fine Arts at the Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW. Her work has been exhibited internationally.

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