

# 2024 THIRD Annual Forum Report: Flavia Pinheiro's Mimosa

By Amelia Groom

*How can we keep ourselves alive? Should I play dead in order to survive?*

*Mimosa pudica* is the scientific name for a plant with pink flowers and green, fern-like leaves that shrink and fold in on themselves when touched. Carl Linnaeus named it with the Latin *mimus* for 'mime' (characterising the plant's capacity for responsive movement as "mimicry" of the sensitivity of animals) and the Latin *pudica* for 'bashful,' 'modest,' 'shy,' or 'shrinking'.

Throughout her THIRD research fellowship, Flavia Pinheiro has been thinking and creating with the mimosa, working across performance, video, images, text, and scores to explore botanical sensitivity and the violence of colonial systems of classification. She relates to the *mimosa pudica* not only through its capacity to move and respond to touch, but also through its capacity to withhold movement – to curl up and claim privacy and protection through the withdrawing of appearance.

She writes: "After being displaced and captured in greenhouses across Europe, the plant stopped reacting, PLAYING DEAD. Being inadequate, anesthetized and trapped in categories, I also stopped dancing..." What power lies in the refusal to appear? In the ability to move between expression and withdrawal as a form of rest and as a means of protection?

For the presentation of the project at the THIRD Annual Forum 2024, Pinheiro staged a series of performances called *Playing Dead*:

Transformed into a fantastical embodiment of the mimosa, she enters a small confined space between two glass doors on the fourth floor of the DAS Graduate School building. Trapped in this sterile zone of confined exposure, the mimosa being offers a dance sequence as a sarcastic "thank you" to Carl Linnaeus for rendering her legible to modern science through separation and fixed identification.

Pinheiro repeats a choreographed sequence of obedient elegance, but, gradually, the soundtrack and the movement begin to glitch. The European dream of confined purity comes undone, and the mimosa begins to break out – out of the fixed choreographed sequence and, eventually, out of the confined space between the glass doors. Affirming, with exuberance, that the plant's being cannot be fully and finally encapsulated by the European colonial project of enclosed identification and classification.

Pinheiro (dis)appears in a brilliant costume by Marc Andrade: Bubblegum pink vinyl knee-high platform boots paired with a forest green fishnet and botanically elaborated bodysuit. Foliage

sprouts from the legs; fronds unfurl from the fingers. The netting extends over the whole head, with bursts of pink, bejewelled tendrils blooming out of the face. A body of botanical erotics: outlandish and uncontained.

There were 4 scheduled performance slots throughout the day of the THIRD Annual Forum 2024. In the time between the performances, Pinheiro lay facedown on the ground, withdrawn into stillness, as the LED screen above read *PLAYING DEAD*.

The performances were accompanied by a triptych of video works documenting the development of Pinheiro's research over the last two years, and a presentation of *Playing Dead: Lessons of Tenderness and Violence with Mimosa Pudica*, a new publication made in collaboration with Lego de Sosa.

Pinheiro also shared her research notebooks, giving visitors the opportunity to read from her working notes – part of her ongoing thinking on plants, touch, and lessons that might be learned from the mimosa:

*Survival technique: curling up / shrinking down. Hiding out Playing dead*

*Defense tactics*

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*Collaborating with mimosa through learning techniques of delicacy, tenderness, repetition, remembrance, somatic practices*

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*Violence of touching: when those who have nothing are profit for those who have everything*

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*Plants as:*

*Immediate participation in the world. Plants participate in everything they meet. Life as a complex exposure - continuity total communion with the environment. Plants are the world. They cannot separate.*