

THE CONTI PROJECT

AGATHE SIMON

An imaginary character

The Conti Project is a tribute to the famous French-Argentine novelist and explorer Gabriela Conti (1974-2010) – who does not exist. Gabriela Conti is the invention of artist Agathe Simon, who verified the socio-historical verisimilitude of her character with numerous experts.

An immersive multimedia cycle

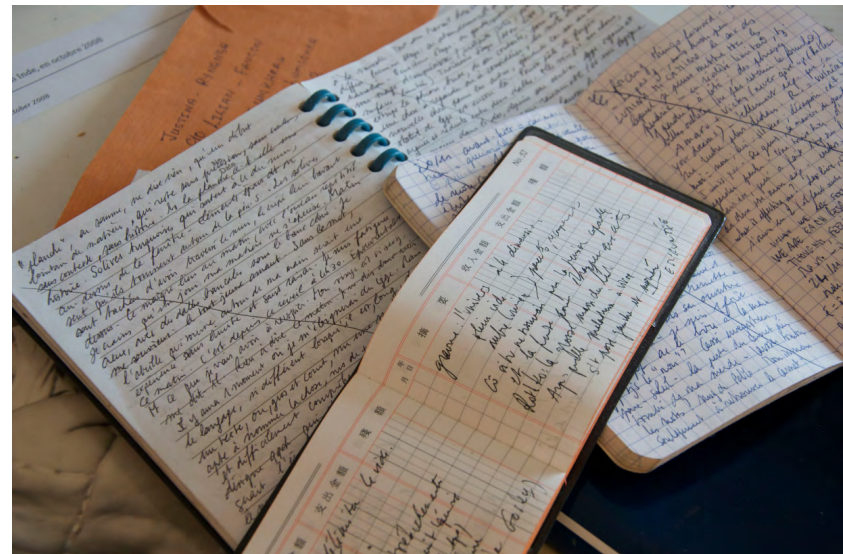
Since 2013, this immersive multidimedia cycle has been unfolding the fictional Gabriela Conti through films and videos, solo and group performances, novels and travel stories, 5.1 sound installations, a podcast, a radio play, an installation of 120 archives, film photographs and online micro-fictions. By developing tributes in different territories, *The Conti Project* questions the imaginary and critical dimensions of our times.

The partners

Agathe Simon began *The Conti Project* during creative residencies in Antarctica at the invitation of the Argentine government (2014), then in the Arctic on the sailing ship Atka (2016).

She developed this project in partnership with the French Institutes of Argentina, Algeria, Sweden and Finland, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the 'Maison de la Poésie' de Paris, the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university, France Culture, the

'Cité Internationale des Arts', the 'Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris', the polar sailing ship Atka, the Concordia base (Antarctica), the University of Paris, the University of Aix-Marseille, the University of Cergy-Pontoise, the Tonband festival (Sweden), the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, Audiorama & MDT (Sweden), the Visby International Centre for Composers (Sweden), the Udine Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (Sweden), Art Museum of Udine (Italy), the Kanneltalo, Heino, Aarni and Huuto galleries (Finland), Canal Algérie, the Médiathèque Musicale of Paris, the 10th arrondissement of Paris, the CDG gallery of Rabat (Morocco).



Manuscripts of Gabriela Conti © Édith Girval





Agathe Simon is a Paris-based artist and researcher.

Further to her Ph.D. degrees in French literature from Sorbonne University and in music from the Paris Conservatory (CNSMDP), she has travelled a decade around the world for artistic projects, creation residencies and research stays. She has also carried out initiatic journeys in Central Africa, Peru, and Antarctica.

Since her return to Paris in 2017, she has been the artistic director of the The Group production company. Trained at the Fémis Documentary Workshop (National Institute for Professional Image and Sound), she is the founder and head of the documentary workshops and the film workshops at the Sorbonne University. Since 2023, she has been an associate researcher at the ACTE Institute (Arts Creations Theories Aesthetics) at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

www.agathesimon.com

Artist statement

Agathe Simon explores how reality disconcerts us. Interested in the relationship between humans and their environments, she questions science, myths and narratives to create an imagined desirable future. She develops immersive multimedia cycles, including film and video, sound and performance. She is currently creating three cycles: *The Conti Project* (since 2013), the *Shamanic Cycle* (since 2015), and *Cosmos* (since 2022).

Latest news

In this year 24, Agathe Simon :

- has been named laureate of an ADAGP grant for artistic research time,
- has been awarded an immersive creation fund by the French national cinema center (CNC),
- has presented a new piece of *The Conti Project* at the Michel Journiac gallery of the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university.

2013-24 Partners (selection)

Argentine Foreign Ministry, Bogliasco Foundation (Italy), C.N.R.S. (the largest French governmental research organisation), 'Cité Internationale des Arts' (France), Danish Art Council, EMS – Swedish Performing Arts Agency (Sweden), French Institutes of Algeria, Argentina, Morocco, Finland, and Sweden, Paris Poetry House (France), 'Les Frigos' (Parisian alternative art venue), Ministry of Culture (France), Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Udine (Italy), Museum of Non-conformist Art (Russia), Nocturne Halifax Art Festival (Canada), Swedish Arts Grants Committee (Sweden), USF International Artists Residencies (Norway), Yeonhui Art Center (South Korea).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. THE CHARACTER OF GABRIELA CONTI
2. THE PERFORMANCES
3. THE BOOKS
4. THE FILMS
5. THE SOUND INSTALLATIONS
6. AN INSTALLATION OF 120 ARCHIVES

THE CHARACTER OF GABRIELA CONTI

Gabriela Conti (1974-2010)

Fictional Novelist
Photograph: Agathe Simon



A legendary figure of early 21st century literature, the first woman of Argentine nationality to reach the South Pole, Gabriela Conti was invented by Agathe Simon, who ensured the socio-historical likelihood of her imaginary character with several experts.

Agathe Simon has developed the existence of her imaginary character Gabriela Conti across various territories: from the Paris' Poetry House to an Algerian television channel, from a Swedish concert hall to a Parisian town hall, from an Italian museum to the Concordia base in Antarctica.

Biography of Gabriela Conti

Online micro-narratives

In complicity with France Culture (France's number one Cultural radio station)

Biographie de Gabriela Conti

Gabriela Conti
(1974 – 2010)

Gabriela Conti est une figure majeure de la littérature du début du XXI^e siècle. De nationalité franco-argentine, elle fut récompensée par le *Premio Literario Buenos Aires* en 2000 et par le Grand prix de littérature contemporaine en 2001. Elle est notamment l'auteur de *La Belleza del exilio* (Ediciones Mañana, 1998), *Verdades* (2000), *Les Vérités* (Éditions Claudine Béal, 2001), *Les Nuits de San Telmo* (2003), *Le Sixième Continent* (2007).

Sa famille est marquée par l'exil. En 1943, les parents de sa mère fuient la France nazie pour s'installer à Buenos Aires. En 1978, suite à l'enlèvement de sa mère, Gabriela est envoyée à Paris pour échapper à la dictature argentine.

Outre ses romans, Gabriela Conti est connue pour ses voyages à travers le monde, notamment en République centrafricaine, au Pérou et en Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée. En 2009, elle est membre de l'Expédition 2048, en Antarctique. Le 7 février 2010, deux jours avant son décès tragique, elle devient la première femme de nationalité argentine à atteindre le pôle Sud.

By developing the hagiography of an nonexistent person, *The Conti Project* questions the imaginary and critical dimensions of our time. To do so, it diverts the codes of museography, public homage and filmic narration, by proposing a fiction that has all the appearances of reality.

Conti's biography notably unfolds thanks to certain online micro-fictions which help spread the fiction on [Facebook](#), France Culture's national radio website, as well as the [blog of Cecilia Conti](#), the novelist's sister.

THE PERFORMANCES

Creation in extreme environments

Performed podcast, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university, Paris, 2024
Stereo, 58'



Invited by the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university for its new podcast #1257, Agathe Simon talks about her experience of creating in extreme environments, including Antarctica, the Arctic and Central Africa.

She dedicates this episode to Gabriela Conti (1974-2010), the famous Franco-Argentine novelist and explorer whose 50th birthday would have been celebrated in November 2024. In collaboration with Gilles Lecerf, the podcast's host, she discusses Gabriela Conti's connection with the University of Paris 1 and reveals some of her creative secrets. This performance is part of the multi-media cycle The Conti Project, created as a tribute to this imaginary writer.

[Online podcast \(season 1 – episod 3\)](#)

Conti & Journiac, A Creative Friendship at Saint-Charles

Collective performance & video-performance, Galerie Michel Journiac, Paris, 2023
Video HD, stereo, 36'20



On the occasion of Journiac Days 2023, this event celebrates the 30th anniversary of the meeting between the French visual artist Michel Journiac (1935-1995) and the Franco-Argentine novelist Gabriela Conti (1974-2010) – who does not exist. Thanks to various pieces and archives, Agathe Simon looks back on the fruitful and complex ties – both friendly and artistic – that developed between the two artists, at the time when the exhibition space of the Centre Saint-Charles (Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne University) – the future Michel Journiac Gallery – was created. But this conference, taking place in this very gallery, is disrupted by students who dispute the existence of Gabriela Conti, Agathe Simon, and even Michel Journiac. This collective performance questions the constitution of myths and the colonization of the imaginary, with the complicity of Lou Calmette, Lilas Djeddou, Marin Lacroix, Anaïs Pedro, Grace Rabet and Karen Raharisoa.

Tribute Evening to Gabriela Conti, Paris

Collective Performance, *Maison de la Poésie* (Poetry Center), Paris, France 2020

Photographs: Frédéric Petit



On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of her death and the publication of her posthumous novel, this evening was organized in homage to the imaginary Franco-Argentine novelist Gabriela Conti. This collective performance brought together art historian and curator Paul Ardenne, choreographer and star dancer at the Paris Opera Jean Guizerix, Professor of Latin American literature at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University Hervé Le Corre, sound documentarian and honorary president of Addor Irène Omélianenko, Agathe Simon, as well as Cecilia Conti, actress Marine Béhar, and the Cabeceo duo.

[Trailer](#) (English subtitles) | [Long Version](#) (in French - password: 200229)
[Excerpts](#) with Agathe Simon (English subtitles - password: MPP_EN)



Gabriela Conti

Solo Lecture-Performance, University of Aix-Marseille, November 2017
Video: David Béchu



The lecture-performance *Gabriela Conti* is a tribute to French-Argentine writer Gabriela Conti (1974-2010) – who never existed.

By evoking the life and work of this imaginary novelist, Agathe Simon progressively hijacks the codes of Academic lecture, diverting it toward a fictional world. This lecture-performance was recently presented at the University of Paris, the University of Aix-Marseille (France), CY Cergy-Paris University, the 'Cité Internationale des Arts' in Paris, the 'Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris', the Musical Library of Paris, the French Institute of Algiers, the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative (Canada), and several Parisian libraries.

Tribute to Gabriela Conti, Antarctica

Collective Performance, Concordia Base, Antarctica, 2016
Photograph: All Rights Reserved



Agathe Simon coordinated from Paris this collective performance realized in complicity with the Concordia base, in Antarctica. For the six years of Gabriela Conti's death, the Concordia team writes on the weather balloon a tribute message for the famous French-Argentine explorer who died at the South Pole: « Gabriela Conti, We Remember, Concordia Base, 09.02.2016 ».

Tribute to Gabriela Conti, Stockholm

Collective Performance, Audiorama & MDT, Stockholm, Sweden, 2015
Video: Magnus Bunnskog



At the occasion of the vernissage of the *Antarctica* exhibition in Stockholm in March 2015, Agathe Simon proposes to the head of the French Institute of Sweden to pay public homage to the imaginary writer Gabriela Conti.

Other testimonies are performed by Lara Szabo Greisman (Cultural Attaché of the French Institute of Sweden), Magnus Bunnskog (Swedish composer), Robin McGinley (English curator) et Tatiana Stadnichenko (Student at the Royal Academy of Arts).

Tribute to Gabriela Conti, Paris

Collective Performance, City Hall of Paris' 10th arrondissement, 2015
Video: Hadi Moussally



In complicity with Parisian elected representatives, Agathe Simon organized an official tribute for the 5 years of the death of famous French-Argentine writer Gabriela Conti (1974-2010) – who never existed. In the form of speeches given in the City Hall of Paris' 10th arrondissement, this collective performance took place on February the 9th, 2015, during the vernissage of the *Antarctica* exhibition.

From right to left on the photograph: Mr. Rémi Feraud (Mayor of Paris' 10th arrondissement), Mr. Éric Algrain (Deputy Mayor for Culture), Ms. Lea Vasa (Deputy Mayor for Sustainable Development), Ms. Agathe Simon, Ms. Cecilia Conti (Gabriela Conti's sister) and her husband.

Tribute to Gabriela Conti, Algiers

Solo Performance, « Canal Algérie » TV
Algeria, 2014



Invited for a live broadcast on "Canal Algérie" TV, Agathe Simon presents the life and work of Gabriela Conti (1974-2010), hijacking the codes of television interviews, and diverting it toward a fictional world which she clandestinely introduces into the Algerian audiovisual landscape.

THE BOOKS

Books by Gabriela Conti

Novels and accounts attributed to a fictional writer

Texts: Agathe Simon



For *The Conti Project*, Agathe Simon has written and published two novels (*The Truths*, on the theme of witchcraft in Central Africa, and *To Live*, an ironic and fragmented world novel), as well as a series of travel stories (*The Still Collection*).

She attributed these three texts to Gabriela Conti, thus allowing her literary incarnation.

THE FILMS

Antarctica, Looking for Gabriela

Fictional Documentary, HD, Stereo, 52'
Video: Agathe Simon

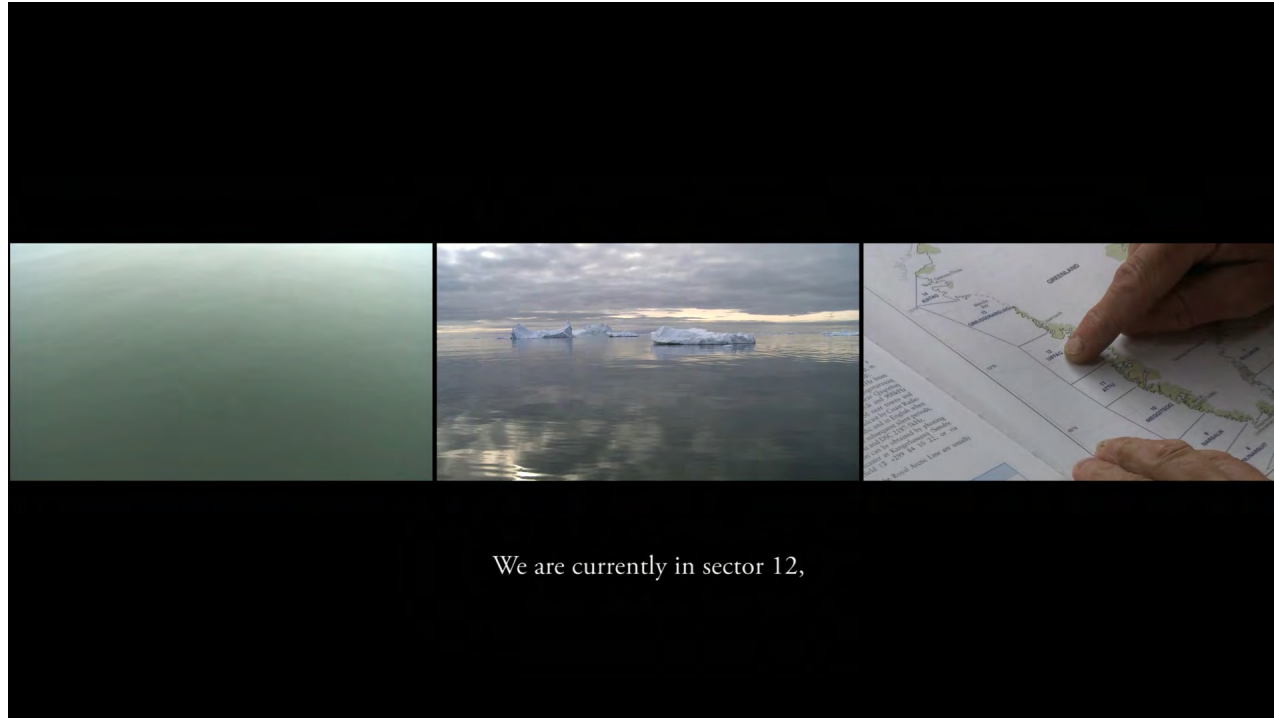


Antarctica, Looking for Gabriela is a 52 minute documentary, filmed in Antarctica. It is directed by the video artist Cecilia Conti, as a tribute to her sister, Gabriela Conti (1974-2010), the famous French-Argentine writer and explorer.

This fictional documentary is thus directed by an imaginary character in homage to an imaginary character.

Arctica, Looking for the Invisible

Video triptych, Stereo or 5.1, 10'
Video: Agathe Simon



Arctica, Looking for the Invisible was filmed in the Arctic in May 2016 during a creative residency aboard the polar sailing vessel Atka. *Arctica* follows the artist in her quest for the Invisible. It has been inspired by an Arctic legend mentioned in Gabriela Conti's posthumous novel, *Vivre (Life)*. It also depicts the creative process.

[Video Triptych \(excerpts\)](#)

THE SOUND INSTALLATIONS

Antarctic Music

5.1 Sound Installation, Audiorama Concert Hall, Stockholm, Sweden, 2015
Photograph: All Rights Reserved



Agathe Simon composed *Antarctic Music* with two types of sounds: voices of people from all continents (excerpts from Gabriela Conti's posthumous novel), and sounds recorded in Antarctica in 2014: Sea Elephants, Petrels, Brown Skuas, floating ice on the Antarctic Ocean, landing of Hercules plane in Antarctica, take-off of Kamov Ka-27 helicopter on Chilean Base Frei, Vasiliy Golovnin ice-breaker and its Russian crew.

Antarctic Music

Arctic Music

5.1 Sound Installation

Photograph: ATSUNAI KAMMAK



The sound installation *Arctic Music* was created from sounds recorded in the Arctic in May 2016, with several microphones: two hydrophones (underwater sound recording), a 4-channel microphone, a dictation recorder and a super-cardioid microphone. It comprises four movements.

1. *Inner Arctic* (polyphony based on a sound diary recorded in the Arctic).
2. *Arctic Fragments* (collection of silences recorded in the Arctic).
3. *For the Record* (memories of non-recorded Arctic sounds).
4. *Dreamed Poles* (metamorphosis of a soundscape: floating ice recorded underwater in the Arctic and above the water surface in Antarctica).

Ayahuasca

Radio Play
France Culture, 55', 2015



In November 2008, Guillaume Savage, the author of *Contresens* (1995) and *Memento* (2004), had been living for several months in Peru. He received visits from Gabriela Conti, the famous French-Argentine novelist and explorer, awarded with the *Premio Literario Buenos Aires* and the *Grand Prix de littérature contemporaine*.

Retracing the experience of a shamanistic ceremony in Amazonia, the radio play *Ayahuasca* presents, as though real, these two fictional writers.

[Online Radio Play \(in French\)](#)

AN INSTALLATION OF 120 ARCHIVES

The Conti Archives

Installation, Variable Dimensions, City Hall of Paris' 10th arrondissement, France, 2015
Photographs: Agathe Simon



The installation *The Conti Archives* looks like a Curiosity Cabinet. It features four videos, two sound installations and 120 objects and documents (from the late nineteenth century to today), with labels that specify their inclusion in the imaginary (and very documented) biography of Gabriela Conti (1974-2010).

Each object of *The Conti Archives* installation has been carefully chosen by Agathe Simon thanks to specialists' expertise (antique dealers, historians, writers, French and Argentine journalists, scientists, Antarctic winterovers, etc.), in order to be historically and socially coherent with the life of this imaginary novelist.



Traces of the Invisible

Negative Film Photographs, The Arctic, 2016
Photograph: Agathe Simon



In addition to this installation, these negative film photographs presents Agathe Simon's investigation into the Invisible, following the traces of an Inuit legend quoted by Gabriela Conti in her posthumous novel, *Vivre (Life)*. The photographic films were immersed at the same location where the photographs were shot; their degradation by the Arctic Ocean reveals a balance between the visible and the invisible.