

Trees Remember Too: Tamara Kostianovsky and Her Art at Cheekwood



by **Ramon Cisneros** — April 28, 2025 in Uncategorized



An exhibition that speaks the secret language of nature... and of ourselves. Renowned Argentine-American artist **Tamara Kostianovsky** arrives at **Cheekwood** with an exhibition that transforms forgotten canvases into living trees, into bodies, into memory.

Inspired by her childhood in Buenos Aires—among surgeries, butchers, and clothes drying in the sun—Kostianovsky interweaves art, nature, and identity in a way that moves and amazes.

In one of the ancient parlors of Cheekwood Mansion, where the echoes of centuries seem to slumber within the walls, **Tamara Kostianovsky** welcomed us as if opening the door to a secret world.

The afternoon drifted in slowly through the high windows, caressing the fragments of her new exhibition with golden light, and for a moment, time itself seemed to lean in and listen.

Born in Buenos Aires, forged between passion and wonder, Tamara can't remember the exact moment she decided to become an artist. "It was like a rumor in my blood," she says. Since she was a child, art was a natural extension of her being: she modeled ceramics with the precision of someone shaping dreams.

But the real revelation came in the office of her father, a renowned plastic surgeon, where Tamara assisted him during surgeries like someone attending an ancient ritual.

"I saw the interior of the human body as others see a map of the world," she recalls. "The layers of skin, fat, and muscle, the textures, the deep colors... it left an impression on me that lasted forever."

In her account, the surgeries weren't medical procedures: they were **dance and mystery , a secret liturgy where the body opened up like a sacred book .**

Simultaneously, on the streets of Buenos Aires, another vision reinforced that brutal and shocking lesson: the omnipresence of meat.

"In Argentina, meat isn't just food: it's culture, it's identity, it's almost religion," Tamara explains.

Butchers, their knives shining in the sun, carried half carcasses on their shoulders as if they were trophies from a ritual sacrifice. "That image," she says, "is etched in my memory: the strength, the weight, the smell, the raw texture of the meat. Between the surgeries and the butcher shops, an intimate, visceral relationship with the material was forged within me."

In her art, this fascination with the body and the flesh found its outlet in another deeply everyday element: fabric.

Since she was a child, Tamara watched freshly laundered clothes in Buenos Aires, hanging outdoors like makeshift flags.

"It was a spectacle," she recalls, smiling. "The streets looked like stripes of colors and textures hanging in the sun, combining in magical ways, telling us stories of those who wore them."

Those clothes—woven from threads and memories—became the soul of her artistic work. First, she worked with her own clothes, in a kind of sentimental cannibalism; then, needing more material, she began collecting other people's fabrics.

"Fabrics," she says, "contain our genetic information, our cells, our secrets."

Thus were born her first series: layers of fabric that, when superimposed, recreated the texture and tones of living flesh. Then came the still lifes inspired by Baroque art: cows, birds, fruit spilled onto imaginary tables, celebrating life and death in every seam.

Her father's death led her to delve into another realm: that of dead trees. In this new exhibition at Cheekwood, Kostianovsky brings to life sculptures that seem to sprout from the earth itself. And among the fibers of these fabrics, some pieces bear the clothes that belonged to her father, like an invisible thread uniting past and present, flesh and bark.



When asked if her work is a form of environmental activism, Tamara replies:

—"Art has the power to create new worlds from discarded materials. If we imagined a future where we recycled not only materials, but also ideas and emotions, we could save something essential to the planet."

At Cheekwood, the gardens are her new muse:

—"The trees here are monumental. Each species is unique. It's like conversing with wise elders," says Tamara. She adds: "I'm excited to bring my work to the southern United States, where there is also a cult of meat, of the earth, of rituals."

What do you hope Nashville audiences will feel when they visit your exhibition?

—"I want you to find your own reflection in my trees. In the color of the flesh, the sap, the blood... We are part of nature. We are not separate from it. When I work with fabrics, I try to make them look like human tissue, because we, too, are walking trees."

Before saying goodbye, in that room where history itself seemed to breathe on the walls, Tamara left a message for young Hispanic artists:

—"Vocation is a fire we must not extinguish, even if the winds of the world blow against us. Persevere. Our stories must be told. We have not only the right, but the duty, to weave our voices into the great tapestry of this country."

Tamara Kostianovsky 's exhibition opens to the public at **Cheekwood Estate & Gardens** on **April 26**.

A forest of memories awaits, where every fold of fabric holds secrets, where every reconstructed tree speaks softly of ourselves.