Exhibition April 8 – September 4, 2022
Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Cristal

Carlos Bunga. Against the Extravagance of Desire

Autumn Red. Wind, Raind and Movement, 2017. Installation, The Watermill Center
Photo: Ainhoa González

MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO DE CULTURA Y DEPORTE

Much of the work of Carlos Bunga (Oporto, 1976) impugns the concept of architecture as a language of power, questioning established inertias such as order, solidity, or eternity. Bunga voluntarily relinquishes the grandiloquence of traditional materials and opts instead for precarious structures made only of cardboard and adhesive tape.

His installations, frequently figured as non-scale models, introduce temporality to constructive forms, since the dismantling of the installation is already implicit in its montage. The graphic documentation of the process becomes the sole ruin and reminiscence of an architecture that once existed. Such procedures for doing and undoing emphasize both the constant mutability of the artistic process and the performative character of its social interaction. The ephemeral nature of his constructions is inevitably bound up with two circumstantial concepts: time and place. Moreover, his mutating architectures have the ability to deconstruct and resignify the spaces where they are temporarily inserted.

The project that Carlos Bunga has envisaged specifically for the Palacio de Cristal continues this line of research, and furthermore incorporates new layers of reading to a venue that already has many connotations. The Palacio de Cristal ('Crystal Palace') was built by Ricardo Velázquez Bosco in 1887 as part of the complex of buildings erected for the General Exhibition of the Philippine Islands, held the same year. It was built as a greenhouse for housing botanical specimens from the Philippine archipelago, but most of these failed to survive the long sea voyage, making it necessary to rustle up new contents to justify the construction of the building with its innovative iron and glass architecture, the result of technical progress and the availability of the new materials made possible by the all-out industrialization of the 19th century. Projects like this were an architectural triumph begun by Joseph Paxton with his greenhouse for Chatsworth (1837-1840) and his subsequent Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. Among other advantages, the system of construction with prefabricated elements allowed the building to be put together and dismantled very quickly, which suited the intrinsically ephemeral nature of events like the World Expositions, greatly in vogue at that time as trusted indicators of the technological and industrial power of the host nation. Such fleetingness is inseparable from industrial capitalism, which also ineluctably brought with it another antithetical type of temporary architecture that incarnated the greatest perversity of the new era: the slum areas improvised at factory expense to house the population that arrived from the countryside with the hope of a better future in the city.

Bunga directs our attention precisely to all those nomadic architectures made from perishable materials that history has tried

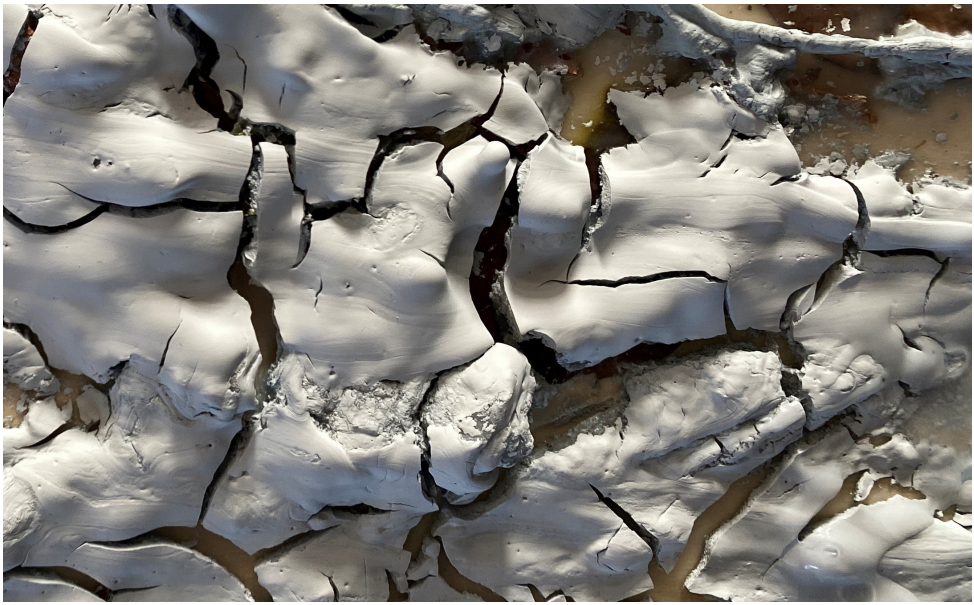
I'm a Nomad, 2019
Pencil, ink and tape on tracing paper and paper

to ignore by erasing their record. These precarious self-built refuges have been perpetuated until today as an iniquitous consequence of the official narrative. The ephemeral nature of the Palacio lives alongside another very different one, that of the materials employed by Bunga. Similarly, the building's ornamental features share the space with the fragile cardboard used by the artist for his construction.

Bunga consciously vindicates an autobiographical trail as part of the narrative, a personal and private experience that is actually a translation of hypocritical political strategies aimed at concealing lives condemned as residual. Bunga's mother was forced to flee her country, Angola, when she was pregnant with him and his sister was just two. His family was part of the exodus of refugees caused by the Angolan War of Independence (1961-1975), who were taken to Portugal along humanitarian corridors set up by the Red Cross. After a time at a refugee center in Oporto and then at another center that had previously been a prison, they were rehoused in prefabricated dwellings that were provided in 1983 by Portugal's Housing Development Fund for low-income Portuguese families and a small percentage of Angolan refugees. Owing to their perishable materials, the constructions started to deteriorate almost at once, and their unacceptable living conditions led soon afterwards to their demolition. Underlying an apparent act of solidarity is a much more cynical reality geared toward the erasure of politically uncomfortable communities living between the inside and the outside. Bunga learned to adapt to these transitory spaces whose volubility often makes them vulnerable. This way of relating to the world, he says, makes him feel like a nomad in his way of being and thinking.

Bunga opens a new dimension for the experience of a viewer who not only contemplates the work but enters and transforms it. The cardboard structure is like a phantasmagorical metaphor for the excluded and the unregulated that blends in with the Palacio de Cristal itself, giving rise to a hybrid space, changing throughout the exhibition, where this voluble life and its possibilities can be shared. This performative, spontaneous, contradictory, and unstable space will be constructed, used, and destroyed far more easily than conventional architecture.

In the installation, Bunga brings stories outside the spotlight to public attention, as he did in his recent project *Home* (2022) for the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, but he also blurs the boundary between interior and exterior, making the building a participant in the external environment, a constantly changing natural cycle that



Pictorial construction. Nature #1, detail, 2021. Plants, latex and glue on wood

defines and conditions it. Moreover, nature vindicates its space in the cardboard construction and raises its voice through the leaves trapped in the paint. The recollection of the greenhouse it never became is clouded by a dystopian aftertaste wavering between the ruin of nature and its reconquest.

"*Against the Extravagance of Desire*", the artist states, "is an attitude of resistance informed by all the material that surrounds us and takes us farther and farther away from the spiritual essence which ought to reign in our lives. This project is an invitation to think with me of other ways of existing, being and inhabiting amidst the duality we live in."

The work of Carlos Bunga has been shown at such important international museums and art centers as the Museu de Serralves in Oporto (2012), the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo MUAC-UNAM in Mexico City (2013), the Museu d'Art Contemporani in Barcelona (MACBA, 2015), the Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich (2015), the Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia in Lisbon (MAAT, 2019), the Whitechapel Gallery in London (2020), and the Sezession in Vienna (2021). He has also participated in the 29th São Paulo Biennial and at Manifesta 5 (2004) in Donostia-San Sebastián. This project for the Museo Reina Sofía is his most extensive intervention in Madrid to date.

NIPO: 828-22-002-8

MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO DE CULTURA Y DEPORTE

Education program developed with the sponsorship of:

Santander Fundación