

nara roesler

carlos bunga



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b. 1976, Porto, Portugal

lives and works in Barcelona, Spain

Carlos Bunga creates process-oriented works in various formats: sculptures, paintings, drawings, performances, video, and above all in situ installations, that refer to and intervene in their immediate architectural surroundings.

While often using ordinary, unassuming materials such as packing cardboard and adhesive tape, Bunga's work involves a highly developed degree of aesthetic care and delicacy, as well as a conceptual complexity derived from the inter-relationship between doing and undoing, between unmaking and remaking, between the micro and the macro, between investigation and conclusion. Straddling the divide between sculpture and painting, Bunga's deceptively delicate works are characterized by an intense study of the combination of color and materiality, while at the same time emphasize the performative aspect of the creative act.

Bunga's works on paper, which are closely related to his sculptures and installations, often involve overlays, whether of compositional elements in the paintings or sheets of translucent paper in the drawings. The analytic/descriptive result, like a photographic double-exposure, mimics the dual experience of memory and imagination underlying the sculpture.

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cover exhibition view *Occupy*, 2020. Moca Toronto, Canada

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selected solo exhibitions

- *Habitar Juntos*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2024)
- *Carlos Bunga: Performing Nature*, Centre d'Art Bomba Gens, Valencia, Spain (2024)
- *Reassembling Spilt Light: An Immersive Installation*. Sarasota Art Museum, Sarasota, USA (2023)
- *Against the extravagance of desire*, Palácio de Cristal, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain (2022)
- *Something Necessary and Useful*, Whitechapel, London, UK (2020)
- *Carlos Bunga, Architecture of Life*, Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (MAAT), Lisbon, Portugal (2020)
- *Capella, La Capella dels Àngels*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona, Spain (2015)

selected group exhibitions

- *Manifesta 15*, Barcelona, Spain (2024)
- *Coreografias do impossível*. 35th São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
- *Meia Noite*, Bienal de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal (2021)
- *Gigantisme*, Pôle d'Art Contemporain de Dunkerque, Dunkerque, France (2019)
- *Quote/Unquote. Entre apropriação e diálogo*, Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia (MAAT), Lisbon, Portugal (2017)
- *The State of the Art of Architecture*, Chicago Architecture Biennial, Chicago, USA (2015)

selected collections

- Fundação Serralves, Porto, Portugal
- Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA
- Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal
- Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona, Spain
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, USA
- Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection, New York, USA
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Pérez Art Museum, Miami, USA
- The Museum of Modern Art MoMA, New York, USA

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nomadism

Bunga defines himself as a “nomad,” a citizen of the world, a palimpsest of cultures, a planetary being. By establishing various relationships, the nomad subverts established hierarchies. Rather than pursuing agreement, they embrace contradiction; permeable and open, they are in a continuous state of transformation, with no wish to impose a new rhetoric. The condition of being a refugee and a migrant is inherent in Bunga’s family history. Still, the migrant is subjected to a context of domination: the domination of their body, their routes, their detachment, and their homes.

Nómada XII, 2008
pencil, magazine clippings
and adhesive tape on paper
43,2 x 35,5 cm
16,9 x 13,7 in





The nomadic figure reappears throughout Bunga's poetics. His representations of human bodies with animal extremities merging into architecture emphasize his understanding of architecture as a product of human, non-human, and sometimes inhuman relationships, as seen in the *Homeless* series.

Arquitectura Humana II, 2014
paint, pencil, and
tape on paper
40,5 x 29,8 cm
15,7 x 11,8 in

→
Homeless #1, 2021
acrylic paint on
chromogenic printing
30 x 40 cm
15,7 x 11,8 in





In *Minha Primeira Casa foi uma Mulher* (My First Home Was a Woman), Bunga presents a drawing of a pregnant woman whose head is a house. This figure represents the artist's mother, who was a refugee in Portugal during Angola's war of independence in the late 1970s. Although displaced from her country, culture, and many material references, she carried her family within her own body. Her womb, in this case, became a shelter for a child.

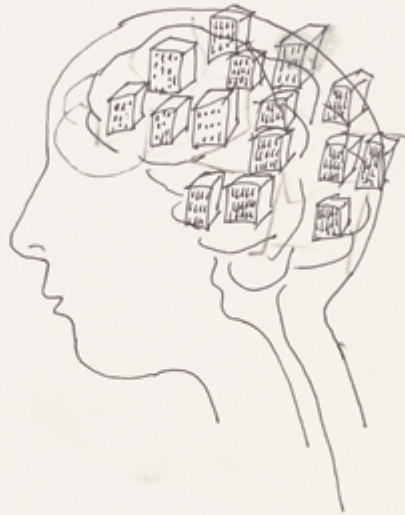
←
Homeless #2, 2021
acrylic paint on
chromogenic printing
30 x 40 cm
15,7 x 11,8 in

*A minha primeira casa
foi uma mulher*, 1975, 2018
paint and pencil on
vegetable paper and paper



city

“In my work process, I feel closer to a bird building its nest than to an architect. I don’t possess academic knowledge of architecture, but rather a kind of knowledge and intuition that emerge from the experience of creating installations with my hands—installations that engage in dialogue with space. It’s a knowledge born from curiosity, from the desire to learn through observation, repetition, and, above all, through error. I try to understand the world through accumulated experiences, through feeling—and this connects me with non-humans, with nature and animals.”



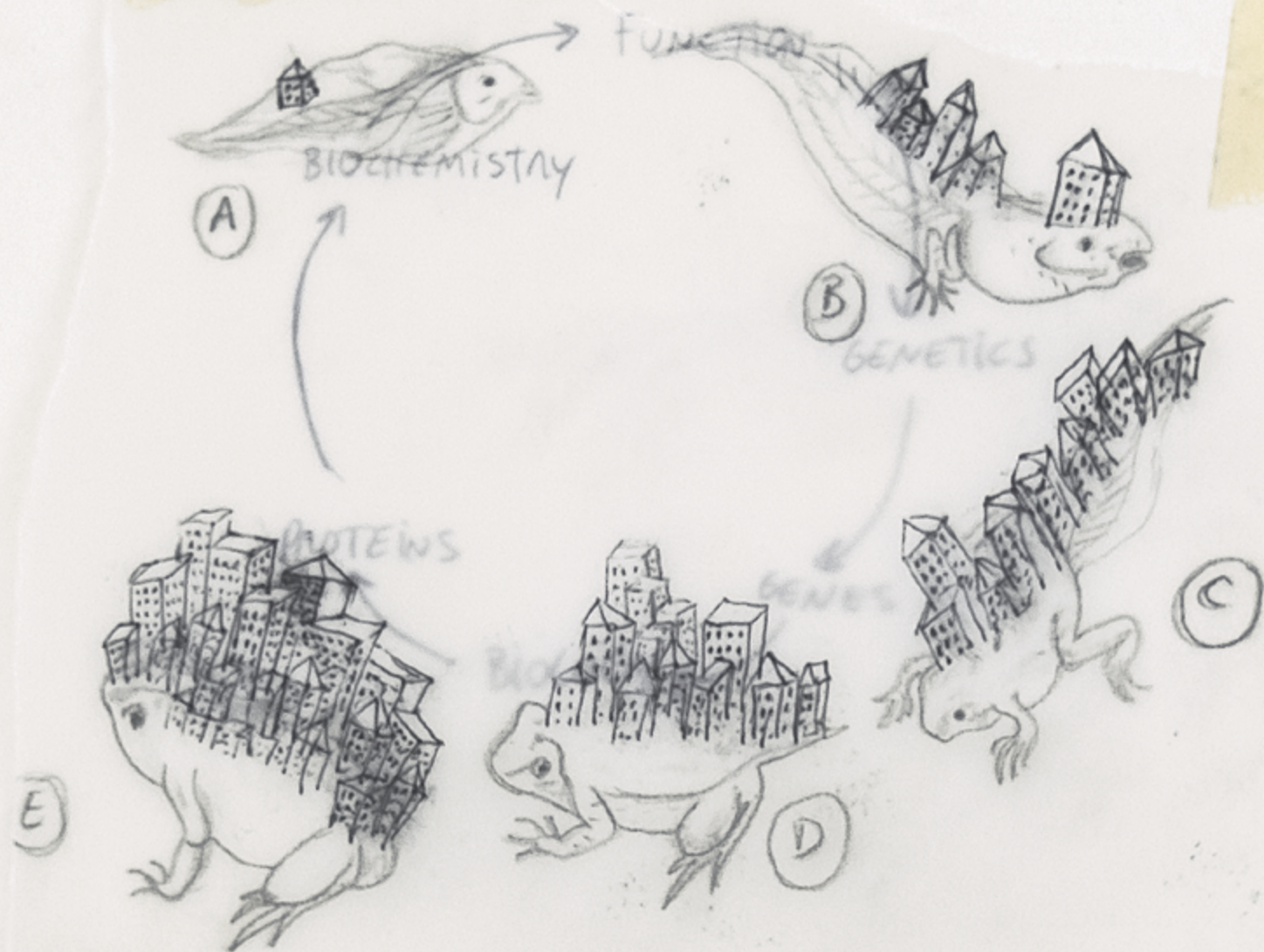
Urbanismo mental, 2006
pencil and paint on paper
28 x 21 cm
11 x 8,2 in

Architecture is a central element in Carlos Bunga's work—not simply as a formal medium, but as a field of knowledge whose original purpose is to shelter people, while also grouping, classifying, atomizing, and standardizing its citizens. These are spaces conceived as stages for human relations, imbued with emotions, new encounters, and memories that are constantly shifting and under tension. In this sense, both architecture and the city form part of the artist's poetics. His interest, however, lies less in their fixed structures and more in their living aspects: ephemeral, mutable, and dynamic—just like the people who inhabit them.

Metamorphosis (2010) illustrates all the stages of a tadpole's development until it completes its cycle and becomes a frog. Along the creature's back, urban clusters emerge—evolving and growing more complex in tandem with the animal.



Metamorphosis, 2010
paint and graphite on paper
37 x 29,5 cm
14,5 x 11,4 in





The increasing gentrification of cities and the dominance of market-driven logic over citizen well-being are also important concerns in Bunga's practice. In 2009, he inserted a pile of bread at the center of a drawing of clustered buildings, emphasizing the idea that urban space is treated as a commodity—something often meant for immediate and predatory consumption. This critique, at times tinged with sarcasm, is also present in *Architecture* (2006), where a group of loosely sketched figures urinate on the word "Architecture."

Architecture, 2006
pencil and paint on paper

drawings

For Carlos Bunga, drawing is a medium that amplifies ideas and thoughts—a democratic space of freedom in which the artist can envision new universes. Through simple and economical gestures, his drawings evoke a wide range of themes and sensations. As critic Inês Grosso notes: “Drawing is for him a conceptual language and also a meditative, political act and a space for particularly energetic criticism. His drawings represent an attempt to extract and explore hidden or repressed thoughts, ideas, concerns, emotions, and memories. (...) In this way, his drawings are not a means to a specific end (...) they have become a space of freedom, free from the functional and architectural constraints imposed by physical space.”





ruins and fragments

A recurring element in Carlos Bunga's three-dimensional work is the presence of ruins and fragments—traces of what once might have been a complete structure. In the artist's own words: "The objects are almost always presented in a fragmented state, in the process of decomposition, in which there is always a missing part. They are structures that deal with absence, emptiness, or remnants that reinforce other notions, such as the power of suggestion and potentiality."

Using precarious materials such as cardboard, plywood, glue, and adhesive tape, Bunga constructs fragments of spaces and architectures marked by the passage of time, leaving it up to the viewer's imagination to envision a possible whole.

Planos Verticales
Entrecruzados, 2010
cardboard, paint and wood on
Carrara marble pedestal
76,5 x 42 x 120 cm
30.1 x 16.5 x 47.2 in



Suspended Frames, 2020
 latex paint and glue on frame
 169 x 36 cm



Absence # 4, 2010
 acrylic and steel on wood
 13,5 x 22 cm
 5.3 x 8.7 x 6.3 in

surface

Although he trained as a painter at university, the two-dimensionality of the medium quickly became a source of frustration for the artist. In his own words: “I trained as a painter, I studied painting at university, but I have a problem with painting because the two-dimensionality of the medium is very frustrating for me. It’s a frustration that comes from the fact that I always need to think about and work with space—not just remaining on the surface of the painting, but breaking through that surface and being inside it.”



Casa No 17, 2002
latex, pen, glue, vegetable
paper and cardboard



One of his first pictorial gestures to overcome this frustration involved painting interventions in abandoned or ruined buildings, revealing an early interest in architecture. As he recalls, the experience felt like a “reverse ready-made”—instead of appropriating elements from the site, it was the environment that ended up appropriating his work, which was ultimately “swallowed” by the place it inhabited.

His primary pictorial “support” is often cardboard—a material that evokes simplicity, precariousness, and disposability, yet is also highly resilient, commonly used in boxes, packaging, and wrappings. In the words of curator Iwona Blazwick: “This humble but versatile material offers Bunga the possibility of defining a zone between painting and sculpture, where he manipulates its associative qualities of involvement, protection, and ephemerality.”

Untitled - Model #13, 2002
latex and adhesive
tape on cardboard

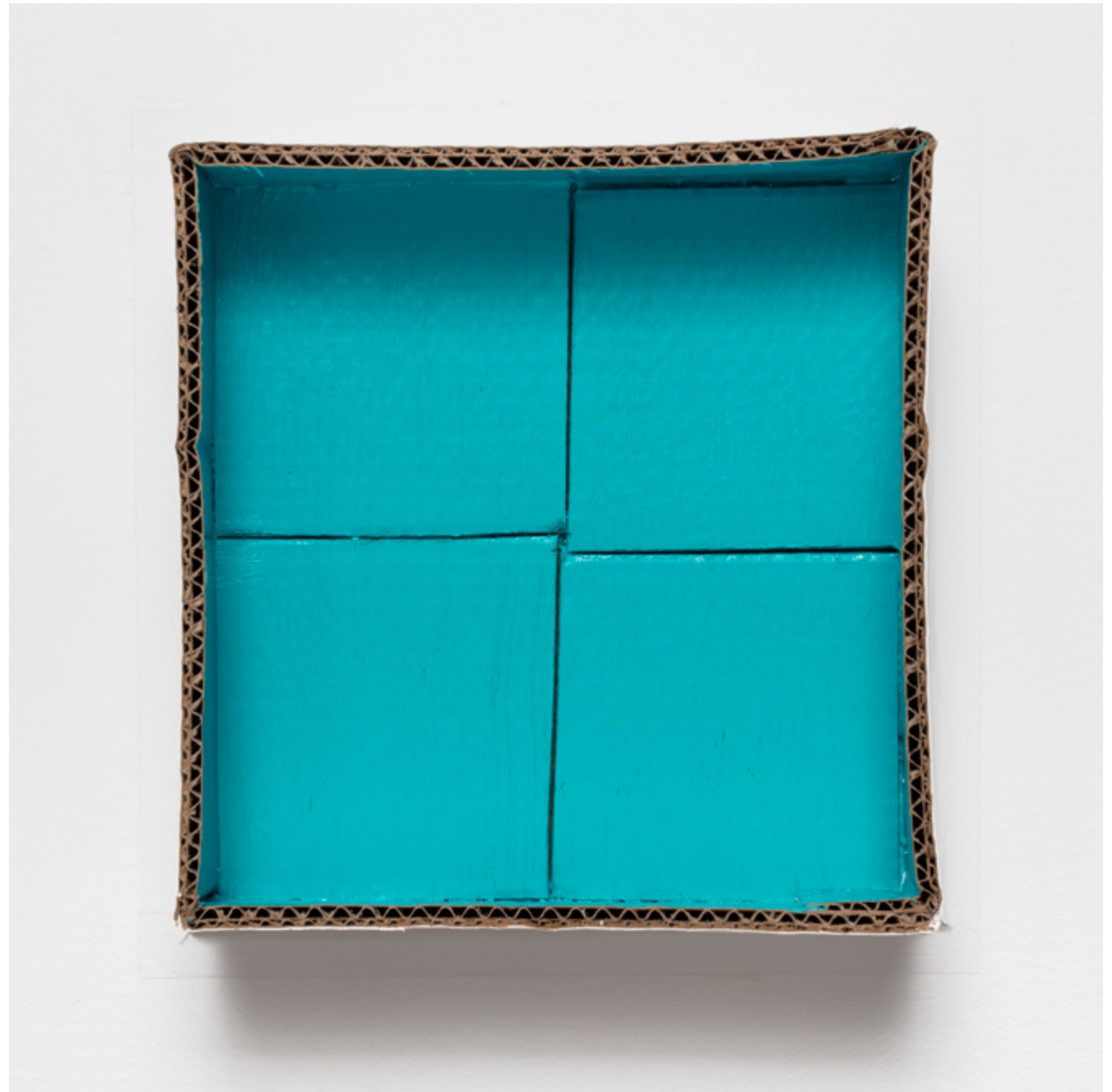
→
Three legs coffee table, 2020
latex, glue and cardboard on table
94,5 x 58,5 cm
37.2 x 23 x 23 in



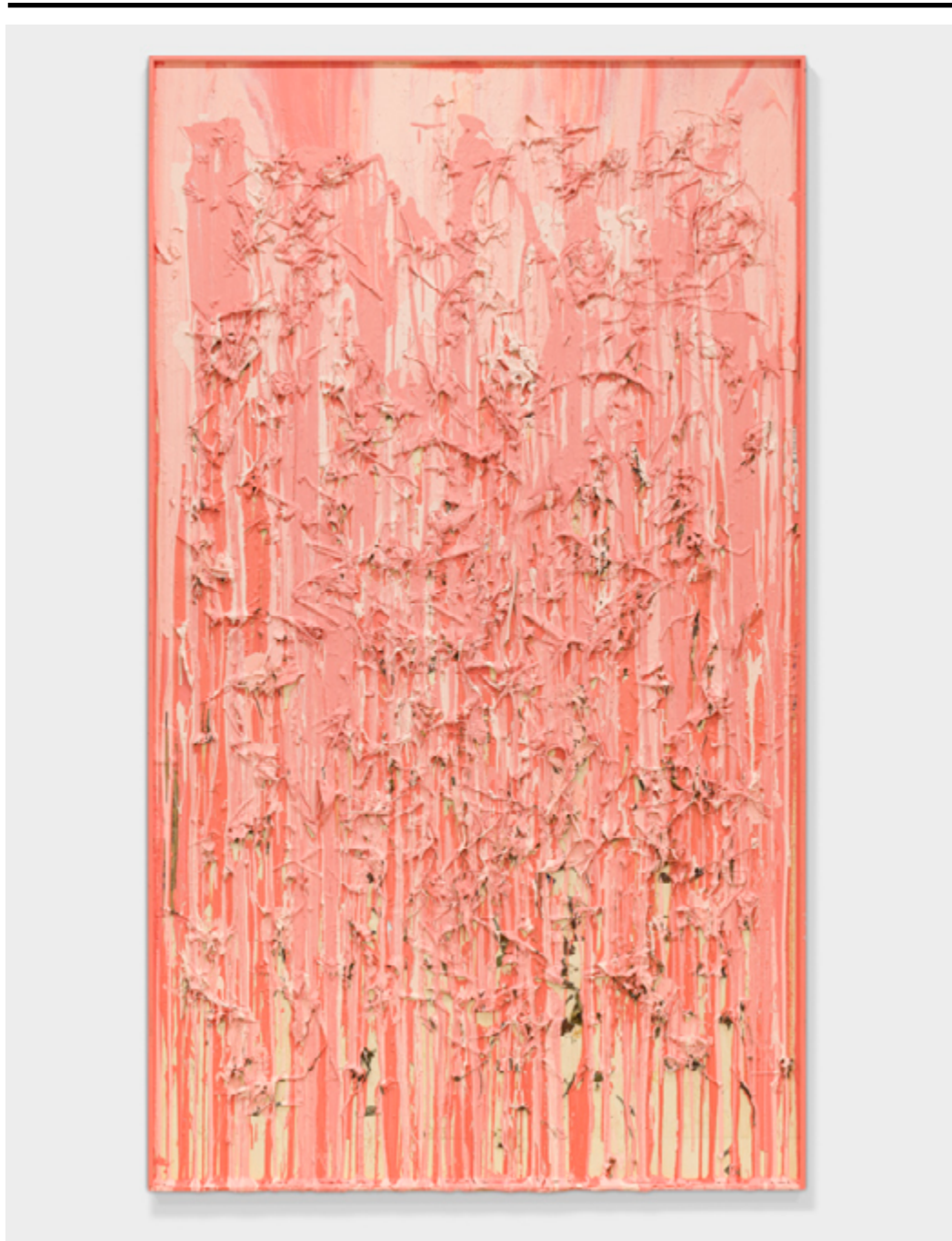
Color is another striking element in Bunga's work. While sometimes bright and vibrant—recalling the façades of vernacular architecture—his application is often discontinuous, worn, or cracked, with gestures that evoke the unfinished and the transient.

Intersection Series #2, 2015
latex and glue on
cardboard and wood
25,4 x 24,4
10 x 9.6 x 3 in

→
Landscape #2, 2017
latex and glue on
cardboard and wood
200 x 150 cm
78.7 x 118.1 x 3.9 in







Despite rejecting two-dimensionality, painting remains a fundamental part of his practice: "Painting is, directly or indirectly, present in all my work. It is the foundation of my thinking—a multifaceted place full of layers, perspectives, and smells." She also describes his support as a kind of "skin," which "contains an infinity of entropies, of chaos (...) creating the sensation that our eyes become the lenses of a microscope through which we can observe, up close, a surface full of spatial imperfections.

Construccion Pictorica
Naturaleza #18, 2023

PVA glue, latex paint and
dry foil on plywood
260 x 150,5 cm
102.4 x 59.3 x 2.8 in

→
Novos mapas #2, 2023
PVC glue and latex paint on carpet
61 x 89 x 1,5 cm
24 x 35 x 1.2 in





conservation intent

Western civilization's obsession with the preservation of spaces, monuments, and structures is a recurring subject in Bunga's practice, explored in various iterations within the exhibition spaces where he has worked. For the artist, one of the defining characteristics of civilization is its attempt to control entropy. By using institutional display structures—such as vitrines and cabinets—as supports for his cardboard and adhesive tape constructions, often unevenly painted, Bunga highlights the human impulse to eternalize what is inherently perishable.

intervention carried out in
Capella MACBA, Barcelona, 2015

intervention carried out in Museo
Amparo, Puebla, México, 2014



habitar el color

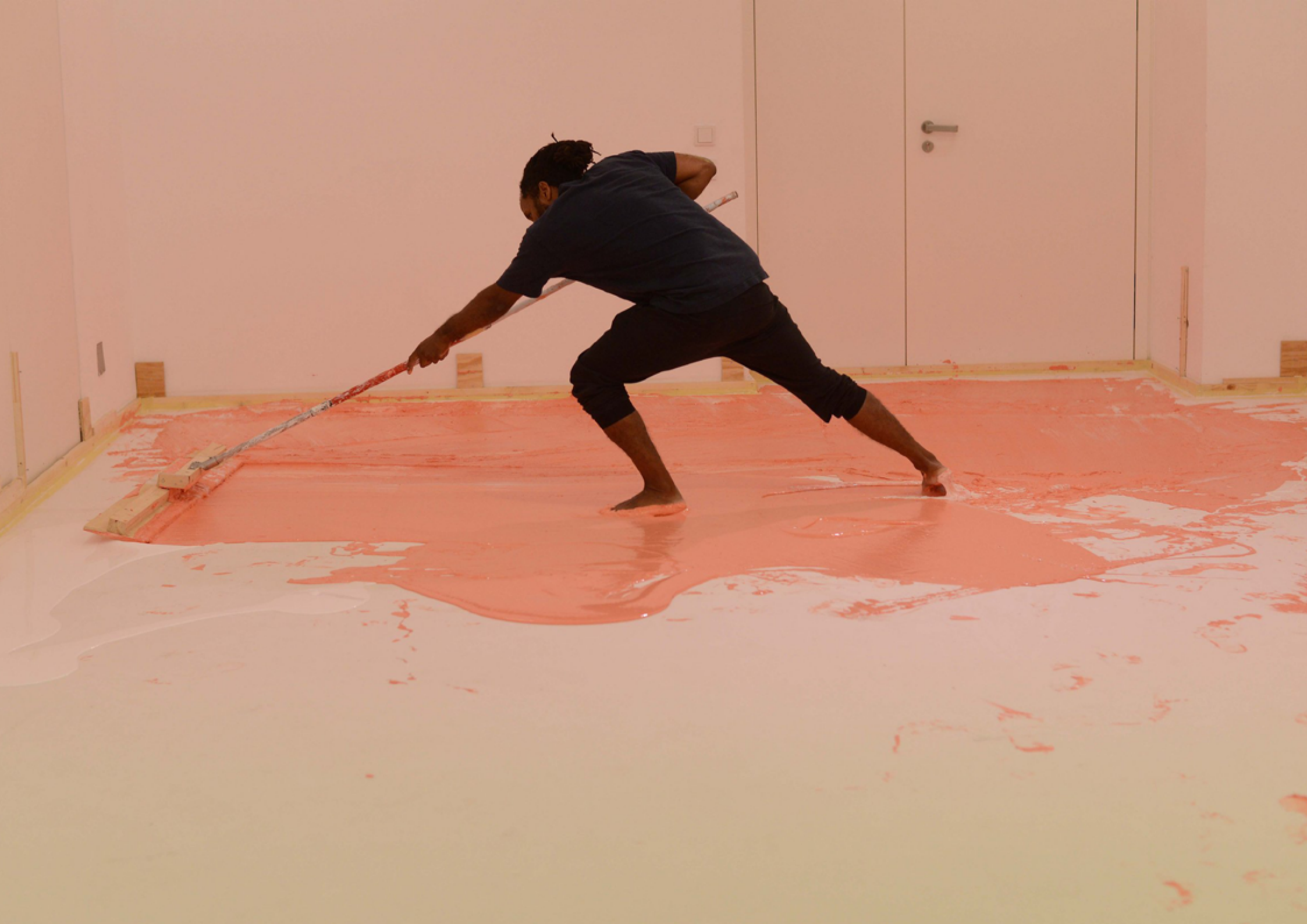
Developed by the artist in 2015 for the exhibition *Desplazamientos Psíquicos* at the Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, and later presented in shows such as *Performing Nature* at Bombas Gens, Valencia, and the 35th São Paulo Biennial, *Habitar el color* is a work in which the artist appropriates the fundamental element of painting—color—and brings it into the three-dimensional, architectural, and, as the title suggests, domestic realm. Whereas in traditional painting color is meant to be seen, here a thick layer of paint is spread directly across the exhibition floor, inviting the viewer to walk through it, to feel it. In this tactile encounter, color is no longer static; it is transformed and deformed through contact, revealing its mutable, ephemeral nature. The result is a work with a strong sensory and participatory dimension.





site specific carried out in Vienna
Secession, Vienna, Austria, 2021





site specific carried out in
Museo de la Universidad Nacional
de Colombia, Bogota, 2015





space

An expressive part of Carlos Bunga's practice consists of site-specific installations. When invited to exhibit in museums, galleries, or institutions, the artist creates works in direct dialogue with the architecture of each space. Rather than relying on preparatory sketches or detailed plans, Bunga builds intuitively—guided, in his words, by “a relationship of trust” with the institutions that host him. His material choices remain consistent with his language of expanded painting: cardboard and adhesive tape. While architectural exteriors often emphasize notions of solidity and permanence, Bunga's interventions seek to expose their opposites—ephemerality, fragility, and the impermanence of the built environment, understood here as another form of human relationship.

site specific carried out in
29ª Bienal de São Paulo, 2010

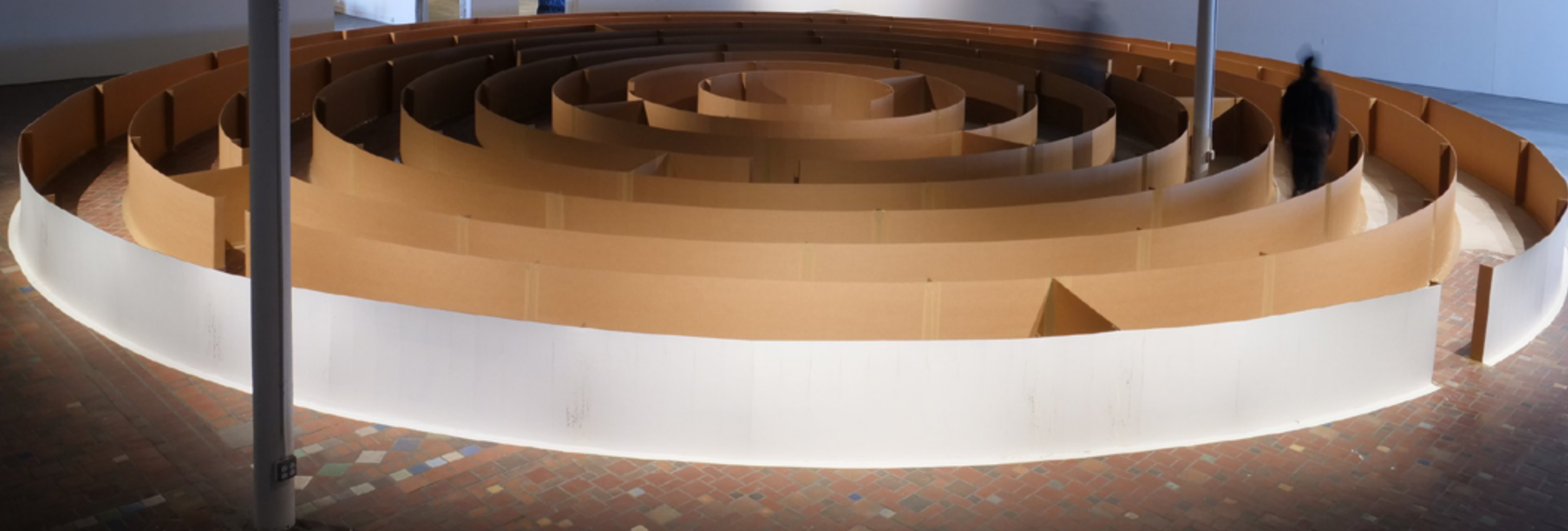


site specific carried out in Palácio de
Cristal, Madrid, Espanha, 2019

site specific of the exhibition
Desterritorialización, 2013
Galería Casas Riegner
Bogotá, Colombia



site specific of the exhibition
Doubled Architecture, 2020
Museum of Contemporary
Art Detroit, USA



As he states: “In my working process, I try to maintain a physical and mental relationship with the space itself; immersed in its history, I seek to create new understandings of inherited legacies. The question of permanence versus impermanence is a contradictory relationship embedded in the structure of the work. It generates more open and ambiguous meanings, enabling a constant questioning of the idea of space—one that only seems real in relation to objects and in the mental constructions of individuals. That’s why I’m drawn to the idea of the house or the city—places with a great capacity to influence our minds, to condition our movements, and to become integral to their ecosystems. Our bodies are inserted into an urban landscape, into a web of interconnected layers. I see the city as a completely moldable and manipulable model. And as part of it, I believe we are deeply vulnerable.”

site specific
*I Always Tried to
Imagine my Home*, 2022
Schirn Kunsthalle
Frankfurt, Germany





installation view at the
exhibition *Capella*, 2015
Capella dels Àngels
Barcelona, Spain





site specific view
Mausoléu, 2012
Pinacoteca do Estado
de São Paulo, Brazil



site specific view
Museo de la Universidad Nacional
de Colombia, Bogotá, 2015

site specific view
Desterritorialización, 2013
Galería Casas Riegner,
Bogotá, Colombia





action

Given that many of Carlos Bunga's site-specific works are made from precarious materials and exist only for the duration of an exhibition, the processes of creation, research, and documentation are fundamental to his poetics—which often includes performative activations. Due to his interest in architecture as an ephemeral construct, and his consistent use of fragile materials such as cardboard and adhesive tape, Bunga frequently carries out performances in which he dismantles his own structures. These actions involve tearing apart the built forms, sometimes leaving scattered debris behind, other times preserving only faint traces—as if remnants of a ruin. These activations not only highlight the fragility of contemporary urban life but also emphasize the temporal nature of his work, which is inherently subject to transformation over time.

record of the performance
on the site specific
*Against the Extravagance
of Desire*, 2022
Palácio de Cristal,
Madrid, Spain

record of the performance
carried out at the exhibition
I Always Tried to
Imagine my Home, 2022
Schirn Kunsthalle
Frankfurt, Alemania





record of the performance
carried out at the exhibition
Performing Nature, 2022
Bomba Gens Centre D'Art,
València, Spain

choreographic dimension

One of the ways Carlos Bunga relates to and transforms the structures and environments he creates is through performance. In *Something Necessary and Useful*, an exhibition he held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 2020, he was unable to attend the performance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, where he had planned to intervene on a cardboard structure. Instead, he partnered with dancer Dane Hurst and the institution's technical team: together, they deconstructed and interacted with the installation, which was partially dismantled during the performance. This action was filmed and edited by Bunga in collaboration with filmmaker Eva Herzog. From this partnership, two distinct but interconnected works emerged: *From a Space of Circulation to One of Freedom I and II*, which depict the dancer's interaction with the intact part of the structure as well as the process of its dismantling. Bunga has also collaborated with other dancers and choreographers in exhibitions such as *A Sudden Beginning* at MoCA Toronto (2020) and *Performing Nature* at Bombas Gens in Valencia (2023).

show performed
during the exhibition
*Something Necessary
and Useful*, 2020
Whitechapel Gallery,
London, UK





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