



Galería Elba Benítez

**CARLOS BUNGA**

*Luces y sombras*

November 2022 - January 2023

“The difference between temporary and permanent is not clear.”

Sol LeWitt

A cutting from a tree, successfully transplanted, becomes another tree, a different tree, an entirely autonomous tree; and yet it remains, essentially, itself. An especially well-known instance of this phenomenon is the sacred Bodhi tree (*ficus religiosa*) under which Buddha was seated when he attained enlightenment nearly 2,600 years ago in Northern India; although that tree no longer stands or exists as such, branches were cut and transplanted elsewhere, one of them becoming the still living and growing *Sri Maha Bodi* tree in Sri Lanka. But as wonderfully symbolic as this is in this particular context, it is not unique to Buddhism or bodhi trees or — almost any tree can be propagated in this fashion, and moreover, the process can continue indefinitely. Each new tree is not a ‘child’, it is not born from a new seed that has been germinated, it is not the product of reproductive mixing. But on the other hand, beyond its matching DNA, it is not a faithful replica of the original either: it will adapt to its new site and new environment, it will grow into different shapes and configurations, it will evolve and propagate in its own right. It is the same tree, and it is also not the same tree. It is a paradox; it is also something of a miracle; it is nature.

Carlos Bunga’s current exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez, titled *Luces y sombras* (Lights and Shadows) follows, metaphorically, a similar pattern. The exhibition is a direct outgrowth of Bunga’s recent major exhibition at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid. That exhibition (which was titled *Contra la extravagancia del deseo* and closed last September) consisted of a large-scale installation, created *in situ* out of cardboard and packing tape by Bunga in the glass-and-steel 19th-century exhibition venue. While very much anchored in the materiality and aesthetics so characteristic of Bunga’s practice, *Contra la extravagancia del deseo* also wove together numerous conceptual strands and references: these included Spain’s colonial history as embodied by the Palacio itself, which was originally built to exhibit flora and fauna transported (with dismal results) from the Philippines; Bunga’s own family history as refugees from post-colonial Angola to Europe; and the harsh realities of current global migration, much of it due to the displacement caused by the disasters of climate change.

As is often the case with Bunga’s installations, *Contra la extravagancia del deseo* was designed to be impermanent, and thus was dismantled when the exhibition closed in September of this year. But rather than leaving it in the admittedly fertile realm of memory and experience, Bunga converted it into a starting point for a new body of work based on and growing organically from it. This new body of work includes drawings that Bunga executed on site in the Palacio de Cristal; other drawings, more reflective and interpretive, executed after de-installation; photographs; a video of a performance in the exhibition space; and a publication deriving from Bunga’s research into the lesser-known aspects of the Philippines Exhibition. It is this body of work (along with physical remnants from the earlier installation) that forms the bulk of the current exhibition *Luces y sombras* at the Galería Elba Benítez.

As a result, the continuation from the earlier exhibition to the current exhibition takes place on various levels at the same time. On the literal level, physical elements have been retrieved and re-contextualized. On a generative level, a work in one format has spawned numerous other works in other formats. On a conceptual level, the ideas and references that drove the earlier work continue to play an active role in the formulation of the later works. But on yet another level, the very process of evolution that has led to *Luces y sombras* exemplifies a fundamental aspect of Bunga's entire artistic process-based practice. Bunga's work is everywhere driven by the relationship between making, unmaking and re-making and by the creative tensions between imagination, creation and memory. In *Luces y sombras*, the same concerns are again the driving forces, in the concrete work on view and also in a more 'meta' level, representing an essential, continuing aspect Bunga's practice, something that carries over like a transplanted tree that has taken root and flourished, that exists in a different context and different configuration, and yet that still entirely itself itself. And it will, presumably, not end here.

George Stolz

Carlos Bunga (Porto, 1976; lives and works in Barcelona) 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 is characterized by an intense study of color and materiality and a highly developed aesthetic sensibility. Straddling the divide between sculpture and painting, Bunga's practice involves a great deal of conceptual complexity, while at the same time it emphasizes the performative aspect of the creative act.

Carlos Bunga has had solo shows at Palacio de Cristal of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid, 2022), Schirn Kunsthalle (Frankfurt, 2022), Secession (Vienna, 2021), Glynn Vivian Art Gallery (Swansea, 2021), MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art (Toronto, 2020), Whitechapel Gallery (London, 2020), MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art (Toronto, 2020), MAAT - Museo de Arte, Arquitectura e Tecnologia (Lisbon, 2019), Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) (2018), La Capella dels Àngels of MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2015), the Museo de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Bogota, 2015), the Museum Haus der Konstruktiv (Zurich, 2015), the Museo Amparo (Puebla, 2014), MUAC Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (Mexico D.F., 2013), the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (2012), Fundação Serralves (Oporto, 2012), the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, 2011), the Miami Art Museum (2009) and MARCO Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo (2009), among others. Bunga was invited to participate in the 29th Bienal de São Paulo (2010), the Trienal de Arquitectura de Lisboa (2010), the 14th Biennale Internazionale di Scultura di Carrara (2010) and Manifesta 5 (San Sebastian, 2004). Bunga was awarded the International Art Prize at Grand Rapids (Michigan, 2013) and was short-listed for Artes Mundi 6 Prize (Cardiff, 2015). In 2023, he will open new projects at Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, Valencia (Spain) and the Sarasota Art Museum.

*Luces y sombras* is Bunga's sixth individual exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

With the collaboration of:

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Carlos Bunga, *Nómada Palacio de Cristal intentando escapar de su historia*, 2021 (detail)

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