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CARLOS BUNGA

The practice of Carlos Bunga (born Oporto, 1976) explores the imagery of the city, in general, and its painterly properties, in particular. The dwellings populating metropolitan surroundings inspire the artist's signature-style large-scale site-specific ephemeral architectural-based structures, as well as his lesser known sculptures, drawings, paintings and videos. Informed by modernist visual histories and post-minimalist topics, his projects combine a variety of influences, from Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* to Lucio Fontana's 'tagli' or from the Gutai group's actions to Gordon Matta-Clark's approach to 'anarchitecture'. Mining traditions of painting in the expanded field, they have recently become a quest into the experience of space by evoking archetypal configurations of the house.

Having trained as a painter, Bunga's interest in architecture emerged during his undergraduate studies. For instance, as part of his student research, he used to attach groups of textured monochromatic paintings - almost all in white - to derelict buildings of the small Portuguese town in which he lived while at college, in order to document the effect that weather, pollution and other agents had on them. Understanding the permanent transformation of edifices, its façades as a symbol of that alteration and the role played by time in this process, he established the intellectual framework in which his work has been grounded. His experiments with video reveal the path that he would follow in a series of short clips recorded his performances consisting of close-ups of his hands disassembling a model of a house as in *Construction* (2002), or slashing its partitions and pulling it out from the soil. A collection of drawings, from 2006, depicting generic architectural contexts or easily identifiable New York constructions - like museums - culminates his examination of this topic. Indeed, after sketching the motif with a delicate line, he gently erases most of it, rendering the shapes into shadows, a metaphor for the interplay of presence/absence in the built environment.

From the *Serralves Project* (2003), presented at the Oporto Serralves Museum, that marked his debut, to the *Milton Keynes Project* (2006) in his last exhibition at the Milton Keynes Gallery, Bunga's installations demonstrate a particular vocabulary and methodology. First he studies the location, both from a functional point of view and in historical terms - this starting point is highlighted in the work's specifications, which refer to the gallery in which they occur. Then, over days or even weeks, he gradually changes it, using corrugated cardboard - initially both used and new, now just unused - and packing tape to create several planes or volumes that cover the pre-existing elements. Next, he paints the inside and outside of the new construction with industrial paint, the former with many pastel colours, the latter with standard white. Finally, he decides whether to demolish the arrangement or to leave it intact; if he chooses to knock it down, a common resolution in the earlier works, he does this by cutting into the construction at sensitive points and by crashing his body against its interior partitions, always aware of what parts would fall or remain standing.

The *KursaalProject* (2004), produced for Manifesta 5, in Donostia-San Sebastián, is Bunga's most notorious work, kicking off his international career. In formal terms, it had similarities with the *Serralves Project*, which precedes it as, after the assembly and destruction of the architectural-based structure, only a makeshift wall hanging on the gallery's perimeters remained, along with the pieces of corrugated cardboard that once made up its pavement now resting on

the ground. However, the works distinguish themselves by the fact that this action happened prior to the opening of the show at the Serralves Museum and as an opening event at Donostia-San Sebastián, here he did not remove the pieces of corrugated cardboard, leaving them abandoned in the interior of the gallery. By disclosing the pastel coats of paint that composed the interiors of the arrangement - converted into several chromatic surfaces - and by staging a ruined site, the artist well demonstrates his attention to the relationship between pictorial problems and the decay of the urban landscape.

Among other installations, the *Elba Benítez Project* (2005), the *Culturgest Project* (2005) and the *Milton Keynes Project* (2006), although anchored in Bunga's trademark language, constitute different developments in his *modus operandi*. His installation for Madrid's Galería Elba Benítez suggested a labyrinthine construction, which collapsed following the artist's incisions and actions, the remains of which were subsequently removed allowing the viewer to walk into a multi-coloured environment. While keeping the maze-like feature, the *Culturgest Project* relayed a dialogue between the gallery's architectural attributes and the artist's construction through its occupation of the space of the gallery and the decision to keep the construction intact. At Milton Keynes Gallery, a subtle intervention devised a construction with an open morphology, in which the absence of the floor cut out along the skirting-board made the walls continue vertically. The beholder thus contemplated a sequence of white walls containing some entrances and windows, the interior of which comprised a cluster of red, blue, green and yellow monochromes, to further give the space a transcendental dimension.

Given the nature of the *Culturgest/Oporto* gallery, the *Culturgest Project* distinguishes itself from the other projects. Here, the white cube's pristine traits are replaced by a profusely ornamented 1930s building belonging to the Caixa Geral de Depósitos, the major Portuguese bank, to symbolically convey the power that this organisation possesses. By relating to the original architecture without obliterating it, the artist reveals what is concealed within the cultural apparatus of its edifice. Situating his oeuvre in the public realm, gives further meaning to Bunga's aesthetic interventions.