

Forma contenida

**Álvaro Albaladejo, David Bestué, Christian García Bello,
Mercedes pimiento, Antonio R. Montesinos,
Leonor Serrano Rivas**

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Forma contenida (contained form) brings together a selection of works by six artists born between the late seventies and early nineties, who, through their approach to sculpture, tackle issues of relevance to architecture. In their work, however, architecture is conceived more as a cultural practice than as the art of projecting and erecting buildings *per se*. In other words, in this exhibition architecture is understood as a mesh of modes of doing and saying, a set of technologies and discourses pertaining to a specific culture which generate a series of paradigms or historically specific categories. Throughout the show we are reminded of the constant suspicion with which sculpture views architecture. It is not by chance that all of the artists participating in this project came of age at the time of the post 2008 economic crisis. The so called "Great Recession" established a new context of precariousness amongst the middle classes which is echoed by this generation of artists through the notions they have developed relating to space and inhabiting it. The broad range of critical strategies set in motion by these artists in relation to architecture includes: a critique of specific urban models, a questioning of the relationship between body and architecture, and the recuperation of vernacular forms, as well as the invention of new specialities. For these artists the scale of sculpture is that of the body, face and hand, while its emphasis is on the relationship between sight and touch. This is why in their work architecture appears always as a fragment, a sign, or a ruin, subject to a number of temporal breaks, such as fiction, assembly, process, ornamentation and performativity. All of these subvert the idea of a Euclidean space determined by continuous and homogeneous time, which, still today, defines the ways in which we think and inhabit space.

David Bestué presents three sculptures which establish a tension between art nouveau and industrial elements. His goal is to question playfully the identity of Barcelona, a city turned into a brand on the basis of a class fantasy. Barcelona's definition as a city defined by Catalan modernism only exists in the imaginations of a still-affluent bourgeoisie and of a globalised tourism market. In *Coup de fouet y muelle* (whip and spring) (2015) David Bestué establishes a relationship and a contrast between, on the one hand, a so-called *coup de fouet* —which in French means "whiplash"—, a modernist motive, which, through a dynamic open curve, expresses the exuberant vitality and strength of growing plants, and on the other hand a common spring, an object which embodies exactly the opposite of the modernist plant-whip, a technical

mechanical force driven by a principle of return to self. The *coup de fouet* and the spring oppose each other in terms of form, but also in terms of technique, as nothing is more opposed to the organic fire-fuelled torsion of the forge than the anonymous curves of industrial production. Between both ways of thinking of form and force one finds a missing link of sorts in the figure of Antoni Gaudí, in whose works both worlds merge coherently, yet paradoxically. In this piece David Bestué reveals, both critically and comically, the hidden tension between both realms. Something similar occurred in *Red 1* (net 1) and *Red 2* (net 2), both of which were included in the *Miramar* (2019) in Póls, and which draw on fragments of art nouveau, both literally and metaphorically. The nets bring together these ruins —remnants of friezes, balusters, windows and lampshades, among other things— as if they were rescued from a wreckage, while by extension raising the idea of a sort of sieve of material history. By turning the net into a container, Bestué also proposes a notion of sculpture in permanent metamorphosis —as the net's volume is different every time it is assembled.

Antonio R. Montesinos explores through his work the manners in which we have interacted historically with space and territory. Two of his projects can be seen in this exhibition. In *Miles de kilómetros de cemento blanco* (thousands of kilometers of white cement) (2019) the houses of the white villages of the Costa del Sol and other parts of Andalusia are his subject matter. As in Barcelona, in the South of Spain tourism has also transformed the way people live —white-washed walls, arches, lattices— into clichés; which is why in this project the author has drawn up a catalogue of construction items. This collection reveals the manner in which the identity generated by architecture over centuries may find itself reduced to a set of interchangeable signs. However, as the artist's subsequent investigation shows, both fantasies, that of origin and that of the touristic brand, inhabit a world of timeless identities, where mishmash and metamorphosis are absent, and in which there is no room for the murky and muddled processes of appropriation and modification by the popular classes that makes up history. *Take Care of the Collection* (2019), the second project included in *Forma contenida* (contained form), is a product of Montesinos' artist residency at the Andalusian Centre for Contemporary Creation, C3A, in Córdoba. It is composed of a set of concrete sculptures-flowerpots based on the diagram of hexagonal cells which organises structurally the museum itself, and which originates in a distribution of space based on criteria relating to security and control. The flowerpots contain different breeds of plants and are interconnected by a drip irrigation system which keeps the soil damp throughout the exhibit. It is through the simple yet effective gesture of introducing plants into an institution, that the ideas of security and control are subverted. This occurs by means of an anarchical letting-things-be, as well as by the care that is taken of beings of differing nature, and between natural beings and artificial elements.

Mercedes Pimiento's works featured in this exhibition are also the result of her residency at C3A. *Poros Técnicos* (technical pores) (2020), the project presented in the gallery takes as its starting point the museum's infrastructure. The building designed by the studio Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos contains a number of hollow gaps which surround the rooms of which it is composed. This system results in a porous, yet acoustically sealed, structure. The specific installation created by Mercedes Pimiento in the museum was made up of two parts: a modular system of tubes, which made the museum's structure visible, and a series of membranes and resonators to be activated by visitors. While the copper tubes spread across the museum's concrete walls, piercing the so called "technical pores" and creating the impression of a parasite structure penetrating the insides of the building, the cement and fibreglass membranes partially hide the walls and allow sound waves to spread more easily. On the other hand, the resonators, which are also made of cement and copper, are a number of hollow ovoid-shaped objects interacting with the tube structure as well as with the building. They are designed to absorb a specific frequency within the human voice's spectrum, which they subsequently release as heat. The piece is all about inventing new forms of interaction between architecture and the body through sculpture, as well as thinking about how buildings may stop being neutral and may start to affect visitors and be affected by them.

Christian García Bello directs his gaze to the vernacular architecture of Galicia and certain materials that are part of its geography. His work lies half-way between archeology and poetic fiction, his goal being to show us how a rooted way of life is inseparable from the forms and materials that surround and constitute it. In his pursuit he sheds light on our historical relationship with architecture and landscape, both of which make up the territory. In *Seteira* (2019), the artist takes as his starting point the primitive *saetera* (arrowslit) of the Galician *hórreos* (traditional Galician granaries) —a *saetera* is a narrow window-opening whose main function is ventilation, although its etymological origin relates to an opening allowing *saetas* (arrows) to be shot. García Bello grants volume to the opening by unfolding it, and displays it horizontally as if it were a lying body. This work highlights circulating air and contact between the inside and the outside, between landscape and humans. Two more works, *Ornamento y presagio (Arquitrabe)* (ornament and omen (architrave)) and *Ornamento y presagio (Encuentro)* (ornament and omen (meeting)), created in 2018 and 2021, take the ornament as a starting point for their approach to that concept of architecture. The ornamental is not understood here as a specific realm of objects or functional category (decoration), but rather, as a *modus operandi* or force, a way in which to think the relationship between spectator and artwork. The ornamental impregnates space with rhythm, in other words with time, and, by organising space, builds a meaning that is clear to the body and senses. The *Ornamento y presagio* Series conceive sculpture as an assemblage based on fragments and vestiges, which, although they may appear to be archeological findings or remains, are in fact fake fossils,

inventions based on the poetics inherent to the materials.

Álvaro Albaladejo's work also revolves around the capacity of the ornamental to "animate itself" and act upon the spectator. In his case, however, the ornament's goal is to destabilise perception by means of an unorthodox relationship between difference and repetition. The ornament operates as an hallucinatory technology which throws the eye against its limits, provoking, not only oddness, but also experiences close to vertigo and disorientation. This centrality of the physical dimension of vision states that there is no such a thing as a neutral position from which to approach what is visual, and, furthermore, that the undisturbed dimension of everyday distant observation is itself historically conditioned. For Albaradejo, ornaments operate in general as devices whose purpose is to attack the eye. Ornaments pertaining to architecture, or standing in its periphery, such as obelisks, cornices, undersides of balconies, or gargoyles, whose shape or location threatens or disturbs our gaze, stand out as ornamental motifs. Three works developed over the last three years are displayed in *Forma contenida* (contained form). *Ozymandias* (2018) is an obelisk made of blued iron which lies horizontally, and whose thermochromic enamel surface makes it change colour depending on ambient temperature. *Gris tormenta* (gray storm)(2020) finds its inspiration in the motifs of balcony undersides. It consists of a horizontal structure from which an inverted cactus hangs, the spines of which are scattered across the surface threatening to fall into the spectator's eye. For the present exhibition the artist has crafted a new sculpture made of two gargoyles, *Canalones*, —a term which is to be understood here, not as a grotesque figure, but as the end piece of a pipe jutting out from the wall. The gargoyles are made of plaster and potassium permanganate, a chemical formula whose high degree of instability make its surface and colour change throughout the exhibition.

Leonor Serrano Rivas' artwork usually takes as its point of departure a historical element such as an idea, a book or an object. From it, the artist develops a process of interpretation based on both research and free interpretation. Her end goal is to unlearn in order to discover and open up spaces for resistance. The logic of dreams plays a key role in this process, resulting in the accumulation of layers and strata that make up Serrano Rivas' work, the exhibitory space and the spectator being amongst these. The artworks included in *Forma contenida* (contained form) belongs to a cycle called *Between the Nose and the Mouth* developed between 2016 and 2019 as an examination of the relationship between architecture and body through the idea of "ornament". The cycle is made up of a site-specific performance bearing the same name, a number of sets of sculptures, and an installation. *Forma contenida* (contained form) brings together components of two of the sculptural series which constituted *Between the Nose and the Mouth*, namely, *Made their Bends Adornings* and *Without Equivalent Proportions*. At the core of the *Between the Nose and the Mouth* cycle lie two treatises in which architecture is conceived as a rhetorical

force capable of communicating a number of aesthetic and moral values. Leonor Serrano Rivas' investigation shows us how these ideas, grounded in beauty and character, cross effortlessly from philosophical treatises to everyday life, and in so doing end up expressing themselves in the submission that architectural forms impose on our bodies. The performance translated architectural codes into gestures and sounds within a given space, London's Chisenhale Studios, while the sculptures queried, in a manner that could also be called performative, the relationships of power which underly notions of beauty, proportion, or harmony, and organise the spaces of everyday life.

Javier Sánchez Martínez,
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