

BOGOTÁ / COLOMBIA

## Beatriz González

### Casas Riegner

Beatriz González is perhaps the most prolific painter in Colombia. In five decades she has covered the history of the country, inspired by that endless source of images that is the printed press. Since the beginning of her career, works like *Los Suicidas del Sisga* (The Sisga Suicides) drew inspiration from that source.

González's latest solo exhibition, "Reiterations," not only included a decent group of new paintings but also offered a compilation of press archives as well as some of her earlier works centered on two themes: the place and representation of indigenous peoples, and forced displacement.

González based her narrative on tragic events. The first of which was the death, in December of 2014, of eleven people from the Wiwa community located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The victims in question were killed by lightning that struck and completely destroyed the dwelling that they were occupying. Aside from the deaths, there were another 20 persons injured. One of the images of such tragedy was published by the *Diario del Magdalena* periodical, included in the show alongside a selection of press clippings collected about the event. That image was chosen by the artist as the central motif of the paintings and drawings on display. The image depicts the strange state of the burnt house, which was reduced to a few somber piles of wood darkened by the fire as result of the electrostatic discharge.

Beatriz González created two series of small size drawings and paintings based on this image, copying the original composition as a motif subjected to several variations and modifications. *Historias Wiwa 1* (Wiwa Stories 1) is a pastel and charcoal drawing where González united three images—all taken from the press, including the aforementioned photography from the *Diario del Magdalena*—and rearranged them vertically, one on top of the other, in the following order: on top, a nebulous almost abstract form rendered with black charcoal and firebrick pastel; in the middle, the already mentioned remnants of the house; at

**Beatriz González.** General view *Reiteraciones* (Reiterations) and *Wiwa I Stories*, 1981 – 2015. Pastel and charcoal on paper. Photography: Oscar Monsalve. Courtesy Casas Riegner.



the bottom, the enigmatic silhouettes of six characters in darkness, achieved through soft charcoal applications over the melancholic dark lilac predominant thorough the entire composition.

González used the image to produce one of the three types of wallpapers displayed in the exhibition; rough digital prints that replaced her memorable serigraphies. *Historias Wiwa 2* (Wiwa Stories 2), an oil on paper work from 2015—like all the “new” works appearing in the exhibition—represents an equally simple motif: the vertical ascent of eleven silhouettes of the victims from the Wiwa community—identifiable because of cotton fabric clothes, bags and long hair—through a winding road. Also extracted from a newspaper, the image is just as dark as the previous one. It was used by Beatriz González to create another wallpaper in which the predominant motif—the sinuous vertical road—acquired a coarsely ornamental quality through repetition and serialization.

Interestingly, the image is similar to others presented by Jaime Ávila in his recent exhibition titled “Lost City” at the Galería Nueve Ochenta during the end of 2015. Like Beatriz González, Ávila was also interested in the peoples of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, true survivors of all forms of violence, past and recent—at the hands of the Spanish Monarchy, the Catholic Church, the Colombian state, guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and drug cartels—implicitly painted by González as enigmatic symbols of spirituality, the respect for life and nature.

The second part of the exhibition employed the same visual strategies. It thematically centered on the Venezuelan government’s massive expulsion of Colombians in 2015. Images of exodus and exile have been frequent in the work of this artist and, in this occasion, border issues become once again present: thus, one of the paintings is called *Reiteración Imposible* (Impossible Reiteration). González presents four oil paintings featuring characters carrying their belongings on their shoulders as they cross a river, and a frieze taken from another work titled *Zulia, Zulia, Zulia*.

A third section of the exhibition consisted of archival material and works created between 1981 and 2005 selected to showcase two motifs: wallpapers from different decades, on the one hand, and the images of Colombian leaders alongside representatives from indigenous communities, on the other—a theme that also encompassed the marginalization and various forms of violence to which those peoples are subjected.

In sum, it is possible to observe his most recent artistic production a progressive simplification of form(s), it is as if she was trying to reduce figurative representation to its most minimal expression—patches that turn out to be persons, traces that represent lumber—in order to offer images that, as the formalist before Pop Art would have wanted it, work because of their expressiveness and symbolic power. Once again, one must admire the ethical nature, quality, relevance and staying power of González’s work. She is an artist who, as we mentioned in the beginning of this review, has painted the face of a country that has been too stubborn and indifferent to avoid repeating the same mistakes and, thus, change the course of its history, at a time when the possibility of achieving lasting peace is within reach.

SANTIAGO RUEDA

## Juliana Góngora

### Flora ars+natura

Contemplating a work by Juliana Góngora generally involves touching its surface with the tip of one’s nose. Wanting to get every detail, viewers must poke around because the tiniest of points contains a wealth of meaning. Góngora has specialized in the miniscule through an explora-

tion that does not solely involve a different perception of the space but also of time, given that time passes differently for the enormous and for the small. This is the reason physicists must choose between studying atoms or stars as each category is ruled by a different set of equations.

The exhibition “Labor,” at Flora Ars+Natura centers on an endangered past: the rural home and, thus, the possibility of farming one’s own land; a way of life that survives only through remnants. In this manner, Juliana Góngora focuses on her grandparents’ home in El Espinal (Tolima, Colombia), a hot town in the middle of the Colombian Andes; she created four pieces that were made of time in the most diverse manners.

A still video shows the interior of a home through a door. Shadows and movements caused by wind are the only signs of time going by; elapses that in El Espinal do not appear to occur. In another place in the exhibition, directly on the floor, a rectangular and flat stone-labor, inverted with lime that gradually eats it, has been rendered purposeless, thus its vertical position on one of the gallery walls.

Across from the stone-labor, resting on a wall, there is a wall made of salt, reminiscent of another one made with *bahareque*, a material used in the construction of peasant houses. The essence of this work, salt is highly charged with symbolism. On the one hand, it was the ancient commodity for trading in the barter system practiced by the indigenous people from the savannah of Bogota—a subject that Góngora has focused on in her earlier work; and, on the other, salt is the element used to preserve meat in warm weather, to stop decomposition, which is in essence the same as to stop the passing of time. If water, which always appears new, is Heraclitus, then salt, which always seems ancient, is Parmenides. In this exhibition, the aged appearance of salt was present in the yellow and brown, Paleolithic, patches that began to appear on the wall’s surface soon after the installation was completed. In addition, the gravitational force eventually made the lower mass of the wall wider than its upper section. In fact, the amazing thing is that that wall-clepsydra somehow managed not to fall apart.

When Góngora was asked about this, she said that a sudden collapse was unlikely because salt likes to remain together, preferably in a solid state, ideally in stones. She then added that, in order to separate it into

**Juliana Góngora.** *Cuja*, 2016. Handmade bed, wooden frame covered with cow leather and bed sheet woven with rice grains and thread. Bed: 70 <sup>55</sup>/<sub>64</sub> x 43 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (180 x 110 cm), sheet: 78 <sup>47</sup>/<sub>64</sub> x 31 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (200 x 80 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist.



the particles that we are used to ingest, it is necessary to combine it with iodine. Thus, she concluded, “the only thing I did was to get it together again.” And Juliana Góngora is well versed in the behavior of particles, tiny stones and miniscule seeds.

In *Ensayos Sobre la Fe* (Essays on Faith, 2012), Góngora placed three hundred sand stones, less than a cubic millimeter each, on top of four meters of spider silk. The work was extremely powerful and delicate and its dimensions were unusual: it was tiny but also vast, light but also heavy. All contradictions that surrounded the issue of scale, since a biped—Góngora—55,000 times heavier than a house spider, decided to take the place of the spider to obtain a result that was unattainable according to our sliding scale; an extremely thin thread holding enormous stones. Working within the parameters of a spider, Góngora was able to transform stones into light objects. To do so, she had to be very patient. The sole act of separating the tiny stones from the sand dust took her several hours. It took place, not without humor, in the waiting area of El Dorado airport.

In this last piece of the exhibition, Juliana Góngora returns to learning about spiders. She reconstructs a memory of her father involving the bed on which her grandfather slept in the home of El Espinal. It was a wooden structure covered with stretched calfskin stitched to the bed with very fine thread from a long weave, which gives the piece the appearance of being very light. The contrast between the loose blanket and the tense skin offers an incredible texture to the piece.

But now, in order to understand the blanket, it becomes necessary to get close, because the weave is filled with grains of salt, organized with the geometric regularity of crochet. The amazed reaction of viewers when they observe the grains is similar to the earlier response caused by looking at the tiny stones of spider silk. What are they doing there? I have no idea, but it is very beautiful and, on the other hand, the blanket could be placed on the soil to generate a new harvest. Indeed, the uneven extension of the blanket is the geography of Tolima on the bed, on the cow skin that belongs to the type of cattle that pastures along the mountains. Both converse about the history of farming and the contemporary agro-industrial reality that has devoured our world. But this is only a miniscule interpretation of work full of meanings. It is a piece that envelops time through the most diverse of flanks; the past of her grandfather, the ongoing action of weaving, and the future that, in spite of it all, is contained in each seed.

**JULIA BUENAVENTURA**

## Jaime Iregui Espacio Odeón

Jaime Iregui has been interested for a long time in creating art that is inserted into public discussions. So much so that during the 1990s he gradually abandoned his work as a painter to develop a network of opinions centered on art; candid opinions that in 2000, with the strengthening of virtual networks, became *Esfera Pública*. For 16 years *Esfera Pública* has been an open forum about art. More than just opinions, the forum has also built an archive of valuable material that collects the issues confronting art, not only in connection with works and artists, but also with respect to censorship, the public space, art education, the art market, galleries, the despair and hope of a “profession” very difficult to practice and conceive.

As I see it, *Esfera Pública* is also important because it puts stock in a person’s opinion; “sending” one’s opinion to “others” establishes an exchange that contributes to the construction of the common. While