

David Bestué
ROSI AMOR

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Sabatini Building: Floor 1 and
Floor 0, Sala de Bóvedas

Fisuras Program



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Cover

Transition from meat to wood, 2017

Resin, sawdust and meat flour

In *ROSI AMOR*, his contribution to the Fisuras Program, the artist David Bestué (Barcelona, 1980) conducts a material and formal investigation on the basis of three sculptural techniques: laser cutting, molding, and the reuse of elements from different periods. Bestué evokes three different places – the districts of Las Tablas and Vallecas in Madrid, and the monastery of El Escorial – which correspond in their turn to the notions of the entrepreneurial, the popular, and the historical. In the first room of the exhibition area, a number of pendulums made of methacrylate and other materials imitate the cold and unfeeling aesthetic associated with power. This material and technical aesthetic serves as a counterpoint to the *resin poems* shown in the second room. These are a series of domestic items made out of resin and organic and inorganic materials from many different origins. In the Sala de Bóvedas, the artist has accumulated elements from the past with no hierarchy or order, rather like a junk room or a looted crypt where different historical times are mixed in a sort of jumbled memory. Finally, a bench and a street lamp allow visitors to relax and observe a number of oranges scattered over the floor.

The exhibition is complemented by *00.00h*, a sculpture located outside the museum that is activated for a short time at the stroke of midnight.

**“Because things that have been other things have undone
their own being”**

A conversation between David Bestué and María Salgado

1.

m – Your work starts from poetry at several levels. Let’s talk now about at least three of them: (1) the objects you term *resin poems*; (2) your constant references to poets in the Iberian tradition; and (3) the summoning up of historic moments that some of your pieces bring about in a manner you call “poetic”. Let’s begin with the resin objects.

d – I work with the idea of “poems without words”, according to my own reading of Stéphane Mallarmé, César Vallejo or Haroldo de Campos. My intention is to take language to the physical dimension through material. In a previous work, *Metal Sculptures* (2012), I enclosed a series of substances inside some iron “cases” that functioned for me like metal calligrams. In the new works I present in *ROSIAMOR*, resin allows me to give the material any form I want. In the meantime, while I was preparing this exhibition, I read *Poesia como coisas* (‘Poetry as Things’, 1983), a study by Marta Peixoto of the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto. The book was fundamental in enabling me to imagine these works, on the one hand because it describes a type of composition based on a reduced selection and permutation of symbolic elements (knife, clock, bullet), and on the other because it explains how the Brazilian poet worked with words as if they were objects, minerals. Peixoto quotes a line by Cabral de Melo Neto that says: “let the light word weigh as much as the thing it names”.

m – It strikes me that your *resin poems* make that rather metaphorical line more “literal” by making it possible for some forms or contours of objects in the world typically associated with certain words to contain substances that actually have weight, if we agree here to assign the quality of “more literal” to the physical object that acts as the specific referent of the conventional and generic meaning of the noun it is generally associated with. In any case, what interests me is how the substance filling the form molded by a physical object that is the referent of the word which names it (“bucket”) is obtained through the pulverization of another physical object that is at the same time the referent of another simple word (“cypress”), which establishes between the two – form and substance – a sort of transfer of meanings that we could very simply call a metaphor (“cypress bucket”), and which here once again becomes rather “more literal” in the sense previously assigned. Incidentally, in several of the pieces in this set of works, like that “earth table” which is moreover “Monegros earth”, there are more than two terms in play, and the semantic displacement is multiplied centrifugally (like the “*Banana Stool with Garlic Back and Delphi Garlic*”) or centripetally (“*Sea Water Table Supported by Two Fish Legs, a Ship’s Branch and a Piece of Moguer Cloth*”), broadening the contexts of sense where your poems might operate. It seems to me that this multiplication and the tension between literalness and “metaphoricity” enriches the semantic movements of these “poems without words” by comparison with other examples of visual or “objectual” poems of the eighties and nineties, which functioned more unidirectionally. In this respect, I find virtuosity in the way you managed to translate the two dimensions of those graphic schemes for *Metal Sculptures* into three dimensions. I think the operations of translation and metamorphosis are powerfully present in your work, not only between lexis and objects but also between living and dead substances (“*Transition from Meat to Wood*”, for example), liquids and solids, and so forth. Your pieces lift and cross planes like a coffee grinder.

d – For me, material is more important than form. As a sculptor, I neither model, nor touch, nor carve. There’s barely a trace of me on my pieces. The classical sculptor worked with very few materials (clay, stone, plaster or bronze) because the important thing for him was the form, whereas for me quite the opposite is the case. For the decoration of the Façade of the Nativity of the Sagrada Familia, the architect Antonio Gaudí wanted to include examples of the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds, and so in many cases used molds of actual palm-trees, geese or men. His reasoning was that the best way to show “God’s work” was to make direct copies of the real world. This is an extreme example of the idea of representation I’ve tried to apply, although in my case I obtained the molds from objects I’ve found on walks in Vallecas. Afterwards I filled those molds with pulverized materials from multiple origins. Matter is important to me, since it is the survival of the past, brought into the present by any object. In the *resin poems*, what I do is liquidize



*Blood motor on sand bench
and bone and marble cups, 2017*
Resin, sand, blood flour, and
marble and bone dust

matter, pulverize it. When grinding down an object, I atomize its substance so that it suddenly acquires a new body just after it disappears. Because they are things that have been other things, they have undone their own being.

m – I wonder why the forms of *Metal Sculptures* are abstract while these resin poems are figurative.

d – There are several reasons. One is that the *resin poems* refer, albeit distantly, to the still life of the Spanish Baroque and its austerity. Another is that the transformation of figurative elements accentuates the idea of metamorphosis. Finally, the dissociation between form and material enables some apparently familiar objects to take you a very long way. They're like a bolt of lightning. That a board on two trestles should transport you to Los Monegros, for instance. Or that some bits of broken glass should speak to you of a ravine.



2.

m – The last piece you mention not only links “breakage” and “ravine”, the fall and the sound of breaking glass, but also introduces a proper noun into the equation, with the specificity of a place. This is the ravine of Clamores, mentioned by María Zambrano in “*Un lugar de la palabra. Segovia*” (“A place of the word. Segovia”, in *España, sueño y verdad*, 1965).

d – Working with material restricts you to the inert world. It’s hard for sculpture to introduce intangible things like emotions. That’s why I’ve tried to identify a series of specific places that might generate a particular frame of mind. Cuelgamuros is not only a historically marked place, it’s also a source of unease. Toledo isn’t the same as a beach in Majorca. I want to capture the emotional life of the country, and since I can’t pulverize a feeling or a gesture, I bring specific elements to the resin that are able to transport them.

m – In fact, you don’t bring the substance only from places that are, let’s say, historic, like the Valley of the Fallen or El Escorial, but also from landscapes produced by the imagery of the Iberian poetry of the first third of the 20th century. The Moguer of Juan Ramón Jiménez, the old elm of Antonio Machado’s poem (“A un olmo seco” [“To a Dry Elm”], *Campos de Castilla*, 1912), and those titles it’s impossible to hear without recalling verses by Gerardo Diego or Lorca: “cypress bucket with pathway handle”, “nail of tooth and lip of carnation”, “coffee, milk and sugar grill and newspaper padlock”.

d – Yes, I’ve also made use of Góngora, the Alfanhuí of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio (*Industrias y andanzas de Alfanhuí*, 1951), Enric Casasses and María Zambrano herself. They’re all authors who have helped me configure a sort of emotional substratum of the country.

m – I see a risk in the last thing you’ve just said. As a poet and a Peninsularist, I find the idea of the ‘country’ highly problematical,

as I do the notion of the continuity of a literary history linked to a national territory, because it is generally placed at the service of the history of the State. History seen from below, and poetry too, has more to do with ruptures, new beginnings and discontinuities, with secret assignations between distant generations who seek each other out because they need one another, and also with intergenerational confrontations, and with exiles, abandonments and journeys, with the construction of alternative cultures that reconstruct other post-national narratives and archives in their turn, as Germán Labrador explains very well in his book *Culpables por la literatura. Imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968-1986)* (2017).

d – I identify two Spains. One is that of Philip II, which for me lies at the root of the problem. It's granite, heaviness, hardness, Catholicism, empire, the political past, the desire to homogenize a country and enclose it within itself. Some of the works I present in the Sala de Bóvedas (Vaulted Hall) refer back to that imagery. The descent down the steps to get to that room, located in the basement of the Museum, is symbolically linked with the descent to the crypt of the Royal Mausoleum at El Escorial. There I arranged fragments from different historical periods with no hierarchy, as if it were a rather disorienting archaeological museum. I've tried to treat these ruins without any kind of solemnity. They're forms without substance, shells of the past, that can be manipulated because they're dead. The other Spain, the one that interests me, is the one I've tried to put inside the *resin poems* we were talking about at the beginning. This is a popular and porous Spain that belongs to the district of Vallecas in Madrid. I'm interested in the south of Madrid because I identify it as a space in constant transformation on the material level. It's the city's stomach, with its central market, Mercamadrid, and its refuse tip, Valdemingómez. It's mud, wheat and plaster, the popular memory.

m – Then do you associate the “poetic” with popular culture? What about: “Atocha jam on Cerro Testigo plate on salt shelving”?

d – Poetry brings the direct and subjective testimony of each period, and retains the traces of the collective subconscious. The piece you're talking about is the most imbued with Vallecás of all the *resin poems*. I wanted to introduce Atocha, because it's where the sculptor Alberto and his friends used to begin their walks from the train station to Cerro Testigo. For me, though, Atocha is also the terrorist bombings of March 11, 2004. I've spoken about plaster, Valdemingómez and wheat, but at the end of it all are the bombings. The sacrifice took place in the south of the city. The Atocha jam contained in this piece is the only element in the *resin poems* where the pulverized material, a fragment of brick from the station, has been mixed with natural cluster pine resin so that it will adopt a soft and shapeless form. It is very difficult for the unease, the trauma, or the memories and thoughts we keep in our minds to find release. Quite honestly, I'm not sure whether this evocation of places and events will be fully understood by members of the public from other countries.

m – And what kind of reception do you think your operation on “Spanish imagery” will get from someone living in the Iberian Peninsula?

d – I'm one of various artists who are working on Spain as material, as a symbol that has to be reconsidered from another viewpoint. It's a matter of vindicating various postponed or ignored testimonies that tell us how the country is sustained not by politics but by another kind of magma, a diverse emotional mud. I think the right wing has a very monolithic idea of Spain. They try to unravel the complexity of the territory and smooth out its bumps. In their quest for a supposed efficiency or faith in the future, they propound a normalizing process that views particularities and differences as fault lines.

m – On the subject of the customary practices of that great normalizing and “modernizing” process you mention, which in my view has a great deal to do with the culture born in the developmentalist period, we might go on to talk now of some of the other works you show in this exhibition.



Access stairs to the Monastery of El Escorial's Royal Mausoleum

3.

d – Of course. I also show some works in methacrylate cut with a laser. At first I wanted them to be clocks, but as I've worked on them, they've progressively lost their hands and now retain only the pendulum. They're like incomplete clocks that show only the seconds, as if they were located in a continuous present. For me, they're the prologue to the exhibition, a fairly cold counterpoint to the *resin poems*. If the territory the poems invoke is Vallecas, the one summoned up by these methacrylate works would be Sanchinarro and Las Tablas, recently constructed neighborhoods in the north of Madrid. These districts symbolize power, since the biggest firms in the country are setting up their headquarters there. If you walk through there and look at the façades of those new office blocks, you discover a very technological aesthetic, with fluid solar protection panels, optical illusions and 'pixelated' surfaces. You can tell they were designed on a computer screen. When I was preparing *History of Force* (2017), a piece of research on engineering and construction materials, I realized that when a new technique or material appears, it takes a little time to find its ideal structure, like someone groping their way. I don't think information technology applied to construction has yet found its aesthetic. In the exhibits in this room, then, I've tried to make use of this type of technique. As a sculptor, it's a little frustrating, since the work basically consists of searching on Google for a series of reference images, retouching them with Photoshop, tracing some silhouettes of the desired size with Autocad, and sending them to a firm to be cut out.

m – In principle, these surfaces ought to strike us as more contemporary than the *resin poems* or the works shown in the Sala de Bóvedas, but their aesthetic doesn't appear to have resisted the passage of time from the beginning of the 2000s until now. Why do you think the quality of the present escapes them?

d – Although they're aesthetically very up-to-date works, it's true they seem to hark back to the past, since the forms of the construction bubble identify a period that's now closed.

m – I like to think that the forms of the construction bubble already contained some inkling of the immediate shutdown they were going to be faced with, of their programmed obsolescence. Like the deproblematized verse of that "muesli language", or global standard, which Jacques Roubaud defines in *Poésie, etcétera, ménage* ("Poetry, etcetera: Cleaning House", 1995), they're incapable of triggering a memory of a time "for someone", since they're incapable of making a difference in the language "of someone". The surfaces of the bubble don't speak to us or remind us of very much. I mean that they don't remember us much, although their presence reminds us of neoliberalism at the peak of its frenzy. These forms hardly contain us, they don't produce wonder in us, because they're deprived of strangeness and roughness. The living is broken and strange, it stumbles. Surfaces without folds easily forget us.

d – They're senseless forms because they were made very quickly and without thought. When you go to Sanchinarro or Las Tablas, you realize that a lot of constructions there were built with no affection. When those districts were planned, the dominant idea was utility. Aesthetics was seen as unnecessary. Fighting against that concept is of supreme importance to me, since as an artist I form part of the superfluous zone. The other day it occurred to me that I work in two ways. One is searching for a meaning that seems to be hidden. When I wrote about the work of the architect Enric Miralles, I wanted to reveal the reason behind some of his spatial and formal decisions at a time when several of his buildings were being demolished. I wanted to retrieve a meaning that had become very hermetic, shout out a warning and say: "Hey, you're destroying a world." On the other hand, I'm also interested in breathing sense into the forms that were made during the years of the bubble. You have to make a great poetic effort to understand the reasons for those forms and structures, at the very least as signs of the aspirations of a society at a particular period.



Exhibitor 2, 2016
Artificial stone nameplate and iron structure

m – I like to think of poetic work less in terms of sense than of the power with which it summons, traces back and mixes historical times. Poetry has a freedom history doesn't have.

d – I'm greatly interested in the idea of mixing historical times. It's as though time were just another material, and could also change form or be pulverized. This is exactly what I've tried to do in the first area of the Sala de Bóvedas. I thought of a memory that becomes delusion, which brings me to Ezra Pound. He worked with the ruins of the historical, but also of the psychological. His madness has to do with that of someone trying to put order into the past, as happened also to Aby Warburg. Someone who tries to understand everything and ends up collapsing. Ezra Pound worked as if the texts of antiquity were a storeroom full of materials in bold type.

m – Of course, that's it. The use of return addresses on letters, ideograms, the letters of the Greek alphabet, all that linguistic materiality that lies beyond – or rather, on this side of – themes

and symbols. Substances for molds, if you like. Pound cut and pasted texts literally, or translated them, or made versions of them. He remolded them. For in the end, a line from *The Poem of the Cid* (c. 1200) is a material in itself, not just an idea. It isn't just a piece of information that moves the plot along, it's a unique and specific phrase, and it's the writing with which the oral version of the poem was transcribed to paper, and it's the rewritings whose marks were left behind in a palimpsest, and it's a specific sound in a specific language, or rather in the dialect of a community. A line of *The Poem of the Cid* is a bit of language that's been on the Earth for nearly a thousand years, and when it's included in an early 20th century text, it causes a displacement of spaces and times in the language of whoever is reading it. Words don't travel one by one, nor do they remain identical, but they retain traces from the path of transmission, because they come from concrete worlds – Vallecas, for instance. It seems to me that this displacement of permanently lost historical places and times on the basis of very concrete and localized materials is the way poetry has of linking us with the present, of remembering us.

d – If you like, we can end by talking about the last room in the exhibition. I wanted it to be a very simple space, like a recapitulation of the previous ones. In the centre is a stone bench for sitting down on and resting a little, and scattered over the floor are several oranges made of different materials. The lighting is dim, like twilight, when orange colors start to appear in the sky and the blue becomes more intense. It's a place meant for spending time in, nothing else. A good place for holding a conversation like the one we've just had.

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and public holidays
from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

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from 10:00 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.
the whole Museum is open,
from 2:15 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Collection 1 and one temporary
exhibition are open (check website)

Closed on Tuesdays

Exhibition rooms in all venues will be
cleared 15 minutes before closing time

Related activity

Encounters with David Bestué:

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- February 15, 2018

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