

SculptureCenter

Teresa Burga: Mano Mal Dibujada



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Teresa Burga: Mano Mal Dibujada
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SculptureCenter

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Teresa Burga

Ruba Katrib

Precise in her methodology, Teresa Burga notes in the margins of her drawings the day and time she starts and finishes them. Ever since she started working as an artist, in the 1960s, she has taken a playful approach toward systematic processes. Critiquing the labor arenas traditionally assigned to women, such as housework and childcare, she interrogates the role of women in her home country of Peru (whose experiences are shared by many throughout the world). While questions of femininity and authorship inform Burga's content, they also frame the production of her art. By appropriating the artwork of children in her intimate circle, she has subverted the customary female role, and by outsourcing fabrication in the 1960s—unusual in the Lima art scene at the time—she has distanced her work from her hand.

The gesture of detachment from authorship is most notable in Burga's 1968 series *Prismas*. Groups of sculptures, each composed of differently shaped and scaled wooden blocks painted on all sides with graphic images, are adjusted and reconfigured. The meaning of the work is altered in each display. The *Prismas* sculptures reference furniture and children's toys, a recurring theme within Burga's work. The imagery on their facades ranges from abstraction to representations of people and animals. The incorporation of signs fragments the objects' meaning; accumulated symbols, both linguistic and visual, fall continuously in and out of an imagined order. When Burga originally conceived the sculptures, she hired out the labor to carpenters and other craftspeople, a gesture tied to the concept for her work—the workers, like the viewers, become collaborators in realizing its vision.

The flatness of the images on the *Prismas* sculptures reflects Burga's interest in the language of documents. Images cover three-dimensional forms, turning them into a mode of representation aligned with the diagram or illustration. Burga brings a systematic and bureaucratic approach to complex material related to gender, play, childhood, identity, and expression. In a series of works not included in the exhibition, she quantified elements of herself and other Peruvian women through biological and psychological information: in *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe, 9.6.72* (*Self-Portrait. Structure. Report, 9.6.72*), 1972, she used the chemical composition of her own blood as well as images of her face; and in *Perfil de la mujer peruana* (*Profile of the Peruvian Woman*), 1980–81, she used statistics derived from a survey sent to middle-class women age 24 to 29. The works in Burga's exhibition at SculptureCenter build on this concept, showing not only the explicit engagement with information but also the gaps in meaning that arise from bureaucratic documents. Although the works in the show are expressed in the pop art language she used in the 1960s—such as the life-size cutout sculpture of a dancing woman from 1967—Burga continues to address the fluctuating and intangible aspects of social and biological life, whatever the aesthetic shifts in her work.

In more recent drawings on view, Burga directly interrogates authorship. Since about 2012, she has been making drawings from newspaper photographs of street scenes, compiling her observations of daily life in Lima in

imagery of dilapidated architecture. *Escombros totales (Total Debris)*, 2013, *Untitled (Casona semi-desmoronada) (Crumbling House)*, 2013, and *Graffiti*, 2012, depict buildings in various stages of disrepair. The cataloging of types of destruction, abandonment, and vandalism points to the changing landscape of the city, while Burga's methodology permits her to analyze the drawing process itself as well. In a newer series of drawings, focused on people shopping in the markets of Lima, she unites the source photography and her drawing by framing them together. She continues to record in the drawings' margins the time they took and the date they were completed. The side-by-side display offers a direct comparison between the supposed verisimilitude of the photograph and the inventiveness of the artist's interpretation. This strategy of compare-and-contrast connects these works with a recent and ongoing series of drawings copied from drawings by the children of family and friends. Burga's titles include the names of the original authors, their ages, and the years in which they made the drawings. Burga's careful rendering of the handiwork of children reinforces her critique of the heroics of authorship.

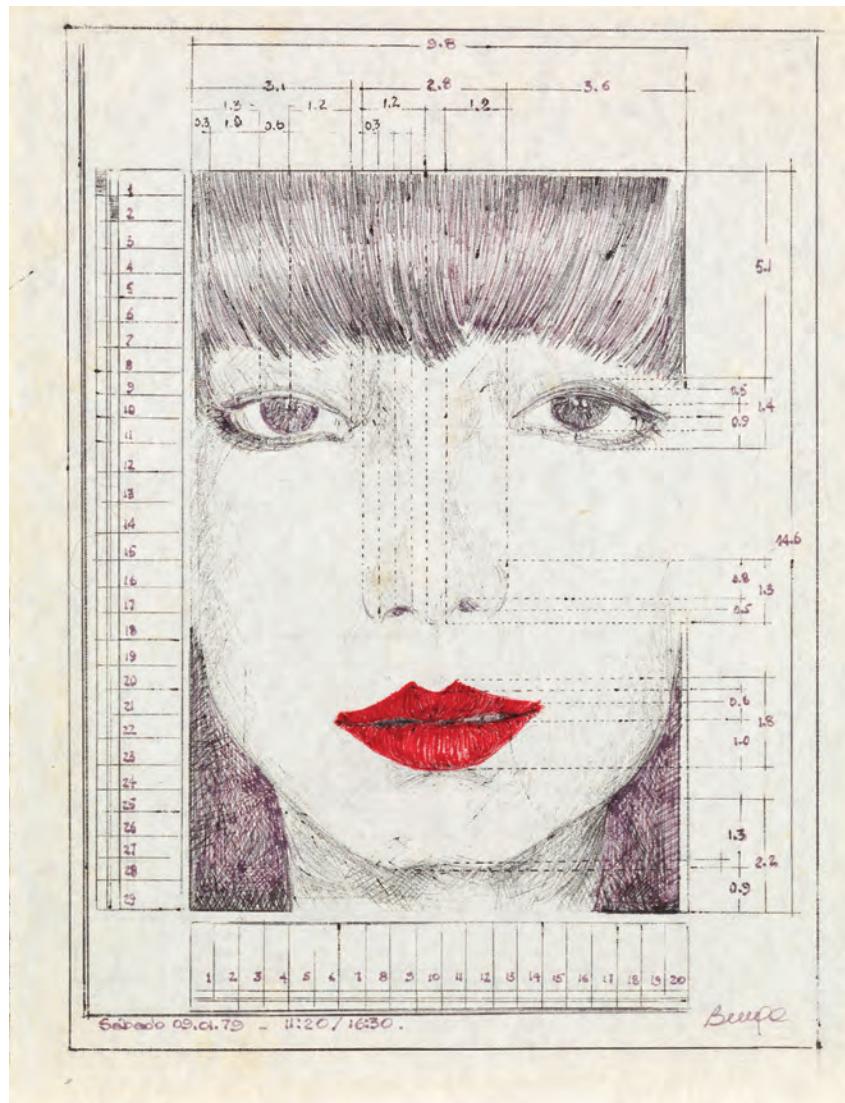
While elevating the kids' drawings to the status of artworks, Burga plays with their subjects. Studying the perspectives of 7- and 8-year-olds, in her painstaking copying she never produces an exact replica. In the process, she reverses the relationship of the artist and fabricator that informs her sculptures by becoming the artisan who "completes" the ideas of the children whose drawings she duplicates. But her interpretations turn her drawings into something else entirely: the colors shift, the angles change, and elements are added or removed.

In addition to serving as the representation of a representation, the copied drawings are Burga's way of working through accessible and intimate material, whether public—such as newspaper clippings—or personal, as with family drawings. The idea that one image begets another is central to her proposal. The title of her exhibition refers to a body of work that began with a suite of nine drawings called *Mano mal dibujada (Badly Drawn Hand)*, 2012. In this series, Burga traced the lines of her own hand, topped with bright red fingernails, showing it from a variety of angles and capturing its creases and blood vessels. As indicated in their marginal annotations, the "badly drawn hands" drawings were proposals for outdoor sculpture. The potential for a future iteration of the works noted within the works themselves is a conceptual gesture: each object can be read either as a drawing or as a blueprint for a monument to the octogenarian artist's hand.

A few years after making the drawings, Burga had the sculptural versions made. Modestly scaled rather than monumental, each standing a little over a foot high, the series of nine steel sculptures is being shown in its entirety in this exhibition. This dimensional translation of the drawings reflects Burga's commitment to ideas and to the evolution of their form. Concepts and images unfold in Burga's work over time without ever being fully closed or finished. Her working process reflects her challenge to the fixity of artistic authorship. Revisiting, rethinking, and remaking her works, Burga turns the source material she examines into an expansive study of artistic subject and method.

Teresa Burga: Beyond Time and Place

Miguel A. López



In recent years, the work of Teresa Burga (b. Iquitos, Peru, 1935) has aroused interest and enthusiasm internationally. Her work has been shown at events such as the Venice Biennale (2015) and the Istanbul Biennial (2011), and solo exhibitions of her work have been presented in cities such as Berlin, Mexico, Trondheim, Buenos Aires, and Stuttgart. However, the attention it deservedly receives today was not always there. Until 2010, most of her work was kept in cardboard boxes, in closets, and in her backyard. Much of this material, spanning the 1960s and 1990s, was not seen at the time it was produced and remained out of the public eye for years.¹ When the first and only major survey of her work took place in Lima—presenting much of this previously unseen work for the first time—Burga was seventy-five years old.²

Burga's projects, diagrams, and drawings were relegated to obscurity for several reasons. In the first place, her work challenged local artistic conventions and bet instead on experimentation with architecture, science, and alternative technologies, leading to its dismissal as a mockery of the artistic canon. Second, it was produced during a politically turbulent moment in Peru, when there were few opportunities for the display of certain artistic languages: as of 1968, the country was under a nationalist military regime that privileged representations of indigenous aesthetics as a form of social vindication in opposition to the violence of the oligarchy. And third, Burga was an artist who spoke openly of her own experience as a woman, questioning masculine hegemony and its regime of the gaze, which meant that she had few interlocutors, and that, for most of the time, local art criticism did not have the critical tools to interpret her work.

In the 1960s, along with Gloria Gómez Sánchez, Burga was one of the only two female founders and members of the avant-garde group Arte Nuevo (1966–68)—a collective that advocated an aesthetic renewal (pop art, happenings, environments, and experimental practices) beyond the modernist discourses of abstraction and expressionism. Both artists introduced a pop art repertoire that escaped the prevailing male canon. Burga's works proposed the representation of gender from a female point of view: they examined the confinement of women to the domestic space and used fashion codes to parody sexist depictions in the media. When Burga started creating these works, it had been only about a decade since women had achieved juridical and political equality—they gained the right to vote in 1955, making Peru the penultimate country in Latin America to acknowledge women as individuals with the full rights of citizenship.³

In the 1970s, Burga introduced two important elements in her work that would accompany her to the present. On the one hand, she chose drawing as a privileged medium, and on the other hand, she began to indicate the place and time of everything she produced. She wrote the date but also the exact time—in hours and minutes—that it took her to create her works. Her drawings reproduced images taken from the media: magazines, newspapers, brochures, and advertisements. To Burga, drawing was a way of analyzing the representations that surrounded her, but also an opportunity to introduce the rhythms of productiveness against the competing pragmatic

demands of life: daily chores, paying the bills, household shopping.

The return of Burga's work to the public stage through a 2010 retrospective in Lima gave an important thrust to her return to art-making after a twenty-year hiatus. Since 2012, she has been making drawings in strident colors, with pencils and markers, that evoke several of her graphic exercises from the 1970s.⁴ In these new works, the artist has also begun to establish a dialogue with the spontaneity of childhood aesthetics, copying news reports found on the Internet but also drawings made by the young children of relatives and close friends. Without tracing these images, Burga replicates the figures' poses, the colors, and the words. The artist explores the early developmental phase when language is constituted, revealing that stereotypes related to familial and societal roles are already in play at that point. At age eighty-two, Burga implicitly invites us to make a comparative analysis between her images and children's drawings, connecting two moments in life in which people's agency and self-determination is usually dismissed: childhood and old age.⁵

In the five decades since the 1960s, Teresa Burga has shown a relentless passion for imagining ways to represent her own existence. Her current images do not make concessions; they engage aesthetics that have been described by some as excessively feminine, inappropriate, decorative, amateur, naïve, and kitsch. Burga again makes explicit the asymmetrical relations in which women must live and work. The asymmetries that determined her historical exclusion a few decades ago now reappear to remind us of the potency of a body of work that has always gone beyond its own time and place.

March 2017

Miguel A. López is Chief Curator of TEOR/éTica, San José, Costa Rica

Translated by Max Hernández Calvo

¹ In 1968, Burga received a Fulbright scholarship that allowed her to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). After her return to Lima, in 1971, she had two solo exhibitions in Peru, in 1972 and in 1974. Her last project presented publicly at the time was *Perfil de la Mujer Peruana*, 1980–81, co-created with Marie-France Cathelat.

² The first and only review of her work in Lima was co-curated by Emilio Tarazona and me at two ICPNA (Peruvian North American Cultural Institute) galleries. The exhibition was titled *Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10*. The following year, the show traveled to the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany, with the additional co-curator Dorota Biczsel. This exhibition was the beginning of the internationalization and global rediscovery of Burga's work. See Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona, eds., *Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10* (Lima: ICPNA, 2011).

³ See Cecilia Blondet and Patricia Oliart, "Las mujeres y el género," in *En el umbral del milenio: Investigaciones preparatorias para la conferencia*, ed. María Fort Brescia and Moisés Lemlij, vol. 4 (Lima: Comisión de Promoción del Perú, Seminario Interdisciplinario de Estudios Andinos, 1999), 37–68.

⁴ One of the first series of drawings Burga produced after that hiatus was *Mano mal dibujada* (*Badly drawn hand*), 2012, later included in the group exhibition *Puddle, pothole, portal* organized by Ruba Katrib and Camille Henrot at SculptureCenter in 2014.

⁵ For a more in-depth analysis on this subject, see Miguel A. López, "Off Beat: Teresa Burga's Chronodissidences," in *Teresa Burga. Estructuras de aire. Structures of Air*, ed. Miguel A. López and Agustín Pérez Rubio (Buenos Aires: MALBA, 2015), 38–49.



Teresa Burga, *Untitled*, 1966. Mixed media on plywood. 72.6 x 48.2 inches (184.5 x 122.5 cm).
Collection Museo de Arte de Lima



Installation view.



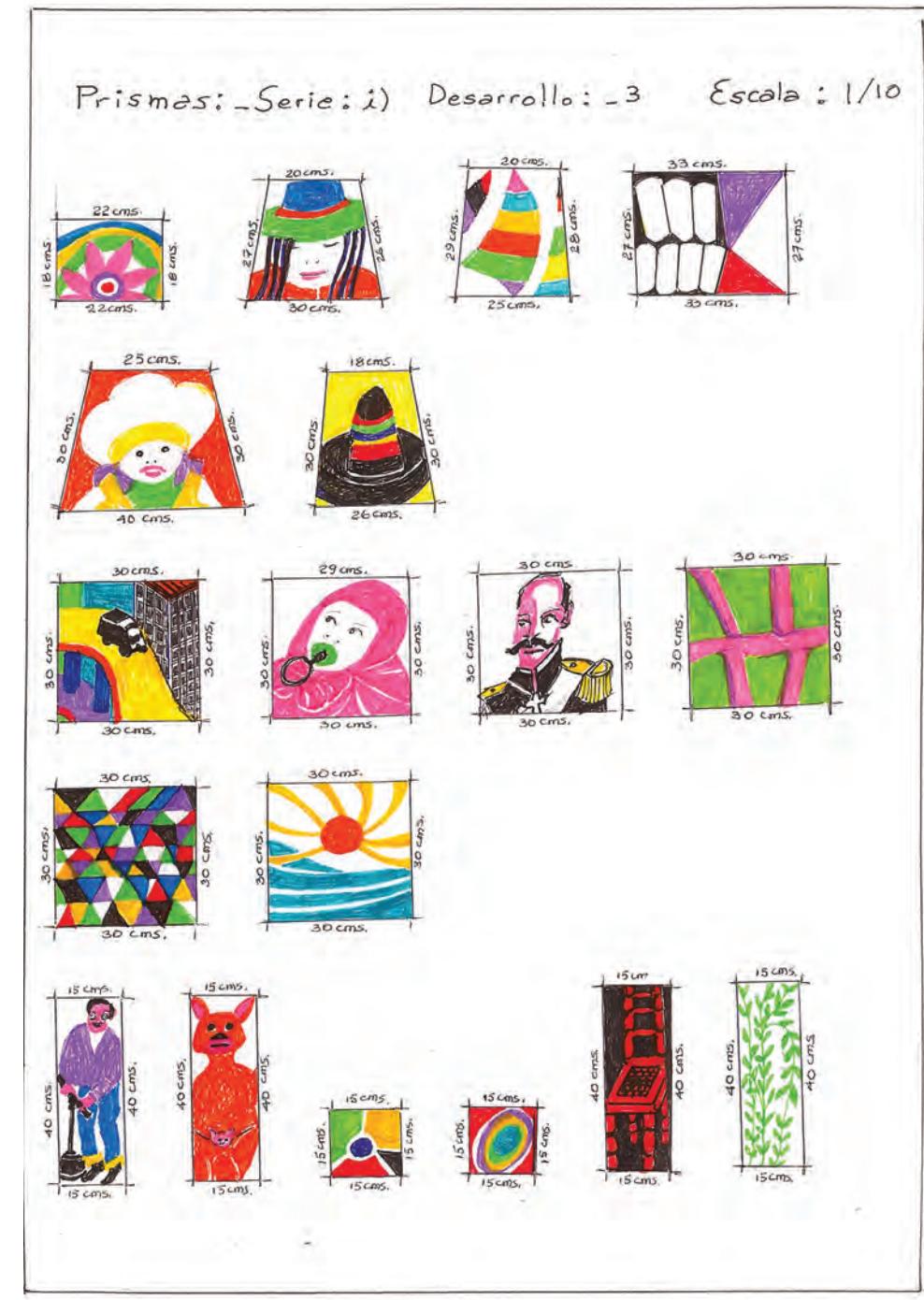
Installation view.



Installation view.



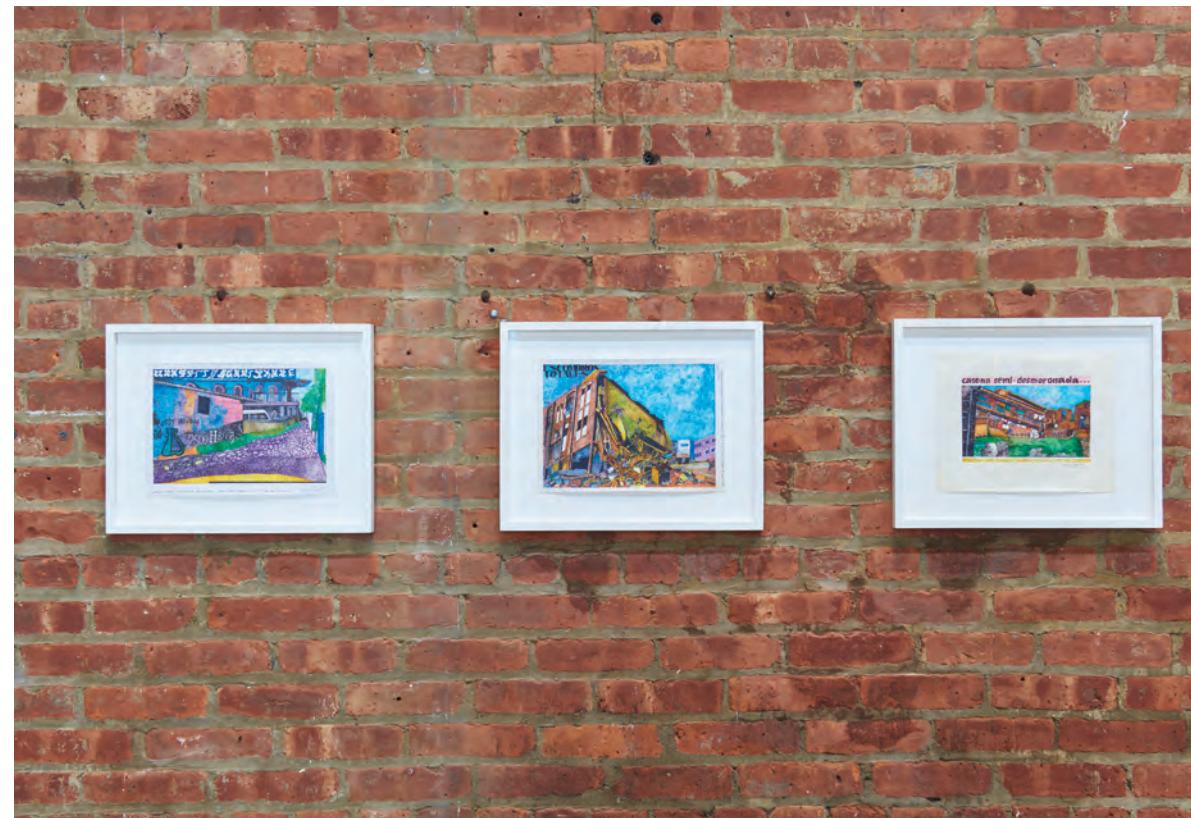
Sin Título, 1967, installation view.





Installation view.



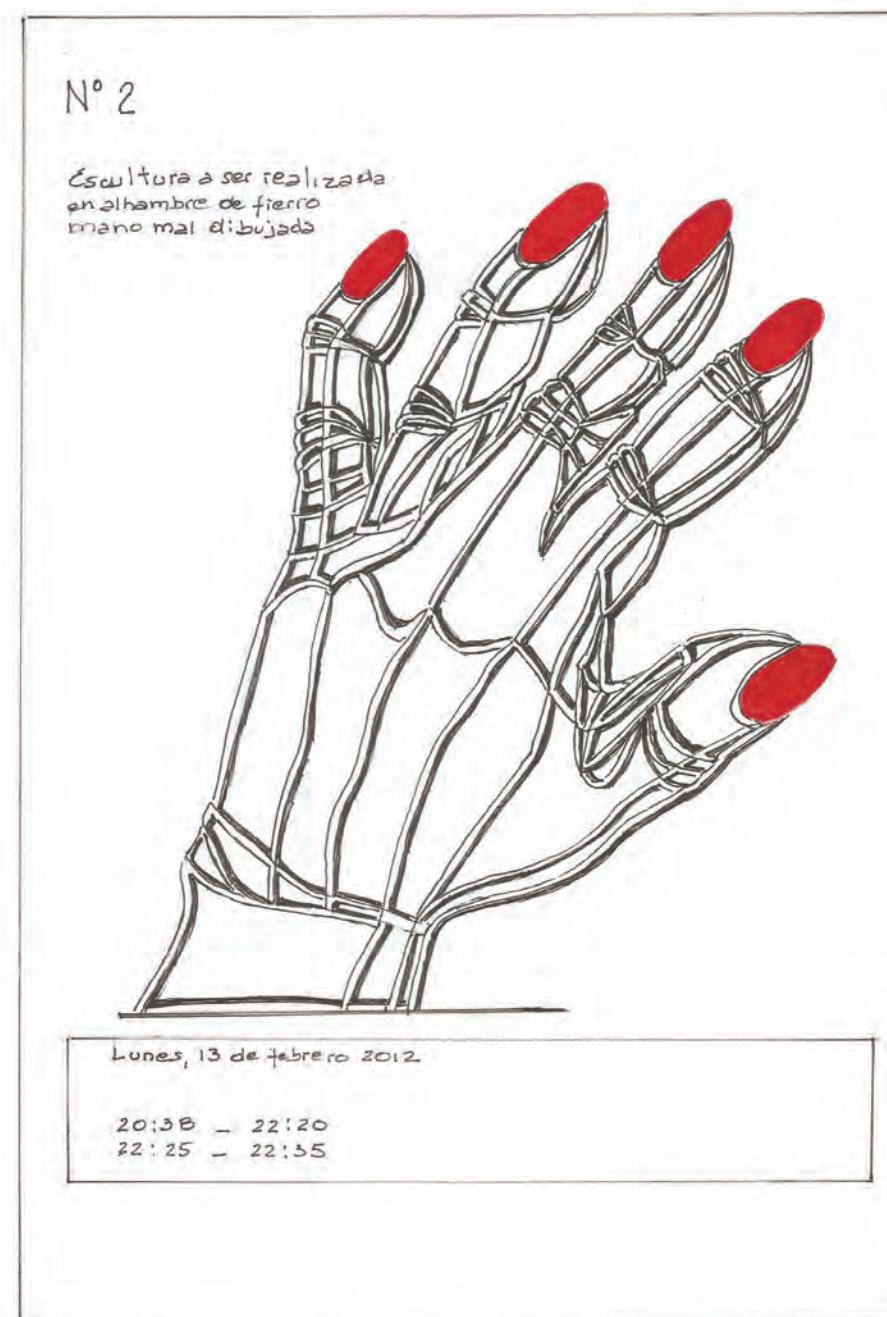


Installation view.

*Mano mal dibujada No. 1 – 9, 2015–17, installation view.*



Mano mal dibujada No. 1 – 9, 2015–17, installation view.



Teresa Burga, *Mano mal dibujada No. 2*, 2012. Ink, pen on paper. 8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm).
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

- Escombros Totales*, 2013
Felt-tip pen, fineliner, ballpoint pen on paper
8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)
- Graffiti*, 2012
Felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen on paper
8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 1*, 2015
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 2*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 3*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 4*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 5*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 6*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 7*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 8*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Mano mal dibujada No. 9*, 2017
Steel, varnish
16.5 x 14.2 x 3.3 inches (42 x 36 x 8.5 cm)
- Prismas*, 2012
Ink, pen on paper
20 drawings
11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.6 x 21 cm) each
Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez Collection, Miami
- Puestos de Mercado: puesto de verduras*
Lun. 27/02/2017_17:10/24:25 – Mar. 28/02/2017_16:15/21:30, 2017
Felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen on paper; Color inkjet print on paper
8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm); 8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)
- Puestos de Mercado: puesto de verduras*
Lun. 11/02/2017_09:00/13:45 horas – Mier. 13/02/2017_13:30/23:30 horas, 2017
Felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen on paper; Color inkjet print on paper
8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm); 8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)
- Sin Título*, 1967
Acrylic, lace, paper, canvas on plywood
72.4 x 27.6 inches (184 x 70 cm)
- Untitled (1994 – Manuel Zarquiey Rubio, 7 años) 10.06.2014*, 2014
Wax crayon on paper; Felt-tip pen, fineliner, pencil on paper
13 x 8.5 inches (33 x 21.5 cm); 11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.7 x 21 cm)
- Untitled (Brigitte Hagenmeyer – 8 mai 1972), 2013*
Ink on paper; Felt-tip pen, fineliner, ballpoint pen, pencil on paper
8.5 x 10.8 inches (21.6 x 27.5 cm); 8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)

Untitled (Brigitte Hagenmeyer – 1973)

Jueves 12/06/2014, 2014

Felt-tip pen, crayon on paper;

Felt-tip pen, fineliner on paper

8.5 x 10.7 inches (21.5 x 27.3 cm);

8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)

Untitled (Brigitte Hagenmeyer – mayo 1972), 2013

Felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen, pencil on paper;

Felt-tip pen, fineliner, pencil on paper

8.5 x 10.7 inches (21.5 x 27.3 cm);

8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)

Untitled (Brigitte Hagenmeyer, 1977), 2014

Pencil, felt-tip pen on paper;

Felt-tip pen, fountain pen on paper

11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.7 x 21 cm);

11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.7 x 21 cm)

Untitled (Casona semi-desmoronada...), 2013

Felt-tip pen, fineliner, ballpoint pen on paper

8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)

Untitled (Jasmin Hagenmeyer – Julio 1972) Miércoles 30/10/2013, 2013

Felt-tip pen on paper;

Felt-tip pen, fineliner, ballpoint pen, pencil on paper

5.5 x 8.3 inches (13.5 x 21 cm);

8.3 x 11.7 inches (21 x 29.7 cm)

Untitled (John Lerner Ruiz Reátegui – 7 años – 1996), 2013

Crayon, felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen on paper; Felt-tip pen, fineliner, pencil on paper

11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.7 x 21 cm);

11.7 x 8.3 inches (29.7 x 21 cm)

Untitled/Prismas (B), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (C), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (D), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (F), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (G), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (I), 1968/2013

Painted plywood

Set of 5 objects; dimensions variable

Untitled/Prismas (J), 1968

Painted plywood

Set of 7 objects; dimensions variable

All works courtesy the artist and
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