

Art in America

Carlos Bunga

SANTA MONICA,
at Christopher Grimes

by Danielle Sommer



Cardboard doesn't spring to mind as the most evocative of materials, yet Portuguese-born artist Carlos Bunga makes it one. Originally a painter, Bunga (who now lives in Barcelona) has been experimenting with crossovers between painting and sculpture for more than a decade, typically relying on mass-produced materials. For a solo project at the Hammer Museum in 2011, the artist resurfaced an entire interior wall of the museum's lobby with sheets of cardboard, taped at the seams and painted light blue, pink, yellow and green. Bunga's recent show at Christopher Grimes reprised this esthetic approach to a more intimate end.

The exhibition consisted of two parts: a slide show of the surfaces of Bunga's paintings in the back room (*Skin*, 2012) and a site-specific, sculptural installation in the front room (*Future Anterior*, 2012). The latter work was the more compelling—a 12-foot-tall, 25-foot-long cardboard structure that nearly filled the gallery. At first glance, its rectangular shape, as well as Bunga's low-tech construction methods and materials, including exterior paint (one half is bright blue and the other a cool white), called to mind a supersized Caribbean shanty.

Alexander and Bonin

The installation outgrew this association, however; the more one engaged with the work, the more it appeared to be a meditation on the fragile cathedral of memory. For one, the artist created it by piecing together many small parts—a relevant metaphor for the way memories can be made and remade. Bunga built the blue and white sections of *Future Anterior* separately. He stood the individual sheets of cardboard side by side, taped them together at their seams (adding short flanges for balance), and then taped the entire base of each arrangement to the floor for extra support before painting them. The final steps were to cut both halves away from their taped foundations and to unite them as one object underneath the skylight in the middle of the room.

Bunga's interest in the intersection of past and present was evident in various ways, including the dulled appearance of the paint on the cardboard and the weathered look of the cracked and peeled paint on the glossy packing tape. In addition, the remnants of the foundation ran parallel to the structure, like a worn-down ruin, with stubs jutting out of a mass of tape and paint.

Visitors could choose whether to circle around the sculpture or to pass through one of four narrow openings (one per side). The process of entering and exiting the space was slightly uncomfortable. The slimness of the openings, as well as the fact that the installation was not secured to the floor, made collapse entirely possible. Plus, going into a structure with a white exterior and emerging from a blue one had a disorienting effect. However, when inside, the experience of being separated from the main room and contained within a new space, which Bunga left unpainted, established a feeling of intimacy and calm.

Not unlike memories, *Future Anterior* presented a series of unresolved dualisms: imposing and fragile; insistent yet quiet; vast but snug.

PHOTO: View of Carlos Bunga's installation *Future Anterior*, 2013, cardboard, tape, glue and paint; at Christopher Grimes.