

Touring Exhibition

# Degrow



BENE BERGADO

CURATOR: JUAN LUIS MORAZA



AZKUNA ZENTROA  
ALHÓNDIGA BILBAO

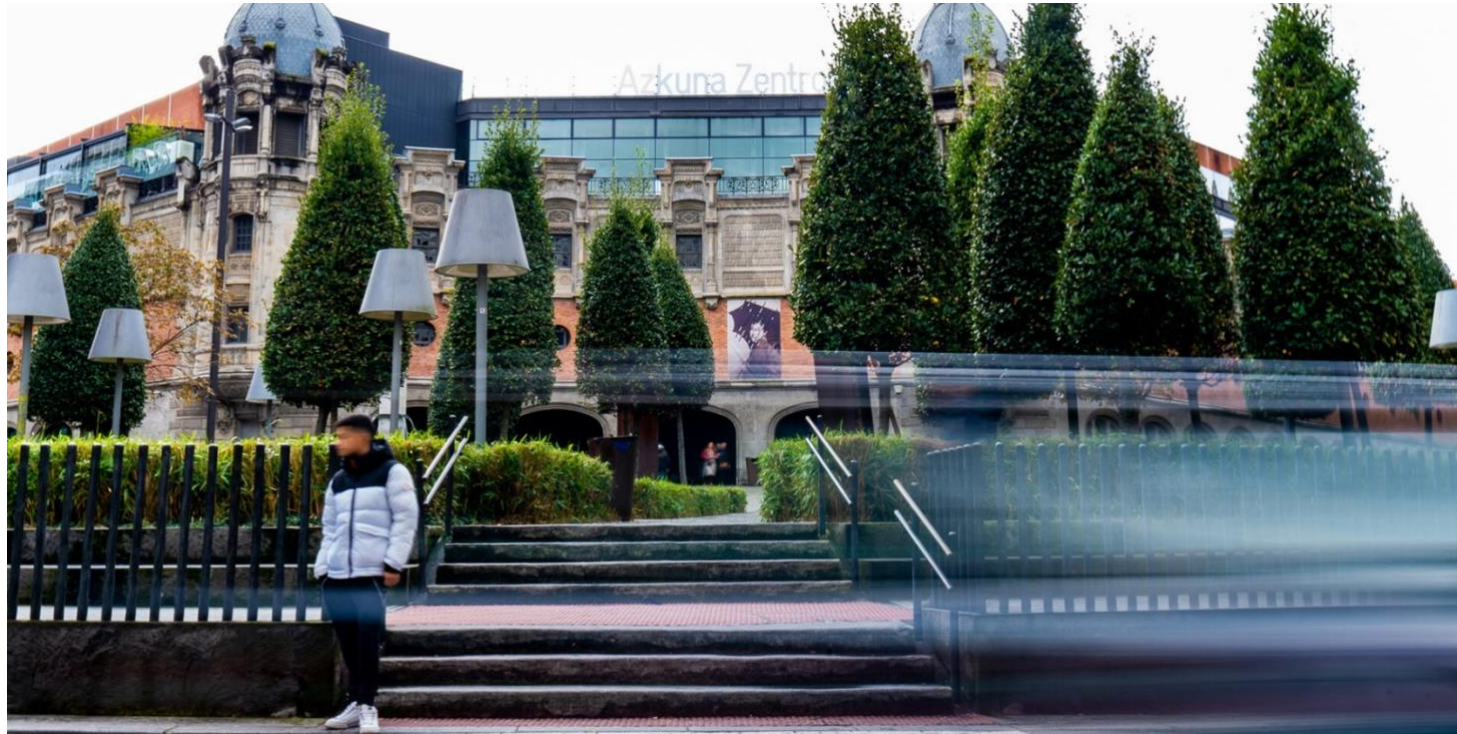
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# AZKUNA ZENTROA

## ALHÓNDIGA BILBAO

Society and Contemporary Culture

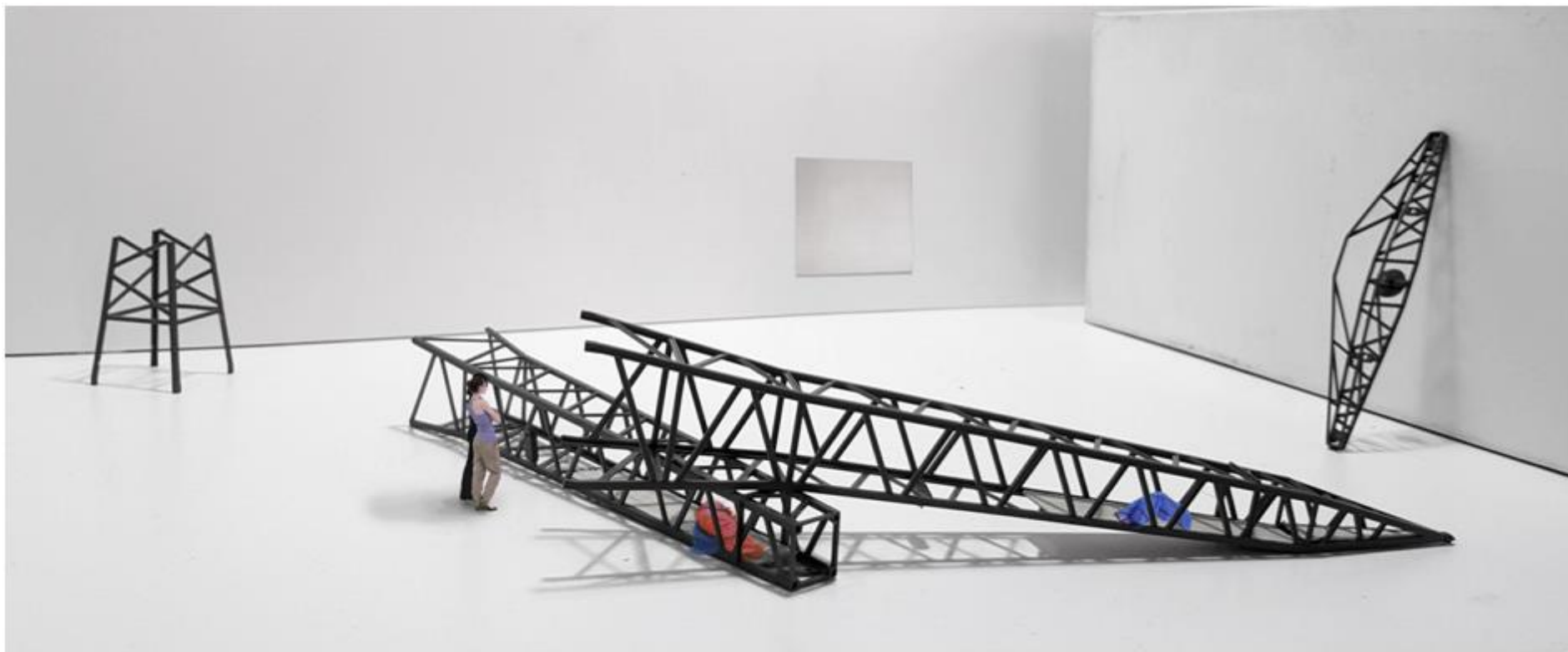


Azkuna Zentroa is a Society and Contemporary Culture Centre in Bilbao with a local and international perspective and open to dialogue with different communities of audiences. It is the place to live culture as a practice, as a process, and as a space for experiences.

In order to reach all types of audiences, we work with people, artists, agents and artistic communities, likewise with hybrid and multilateral programming models that favour the day-to-day dimension of that which is contemporary. We pay special attention to current creation in Basque and to feminist perspectives in art, with mediation and education as a way to generate critical knowledge and transform society through art and artists.

# degrow PROJECT PRESENTATION

Exhibition at Azkuna Zentroa: from 29 June 2023 to 7 January 2024



ELECTRIC PYLON MODEL OF THE "BURNT EARTH" INSTALLATION LOCATED IN THE CENTRAL EXHIBITION HALL.

Under the title "Degrow", sculptor Bene Bergado presents a specific exhibition project for the Azkuna Zentroa Exhibition Hall.

The artist proposes the infinitive "degrow" against the exponential growth and unlimited production and consumption in today's society due to fossil fuels. This call for action runs through the exhibition curated by artist Juan Luis Moraza. The artist warns: "Degrowth is going to be inevitable albeit as an option or due to the collapse we're heading towards."

The exhibition installations and sculptures dialogue with the need to decelerate via awareness of limits in order to adapt ourselves to a forthcoming future of low energy and inevitable life changes.

As a large diagram that articulates different codes and systems, "Degrowth" shows the dynamic strain between art and what it is about: its artistic processes and more explicit themes, as explained by the curator.

Thus, the installation "Tierra Quemada (Burnt Earth)", which consists of an electrical tower fragmented into four pieces turned into shelters or habitats, stands out. Likewise, focus is placed on the installation "Generador (Generator)", which "in the form of works created by the artist since the 1990s to date, piled up in a warehouse, it operates as a battery that generates the intensity of a work whose wealth and complexity engages us to an awareness of what is real", as explained by the curator.

**degrow.** (infinitive; Latin *decrescere*; IE root. *de+Ker*). Wane or diminish. // **2. SOCIOL.** Current of thought that realizes the impossibility of an economy of unlimited and exponential growth dependent on a planet with limited resources. Degrowth decouples social welfare from economic growth, and suggests "living better with less". It proposes a regular and controlled reduction of consumption and production to avoid the depletion of natural resources. Learn to produce value and well-being by reducing the use of matter and energy in order to promote the regeneration of the planet. // **3. PSYCH.** Personal containment derived from awareness of limits as opposed to the consumerist desire that encourages the dissatisfaction of always wanting more. // **4. ANTHROP.** Relating to a notion of prosperity based on a redefinition of the idea of wealth understood as intellectual, ethical and aesthetic satisfaction: a growth based on relationships, coexistence and experiences. // **5. POLIT.** A new sort of cooperation between the global North and South that avoids the ever-growing economy of inequality between classes and countries. // **6. GEO.** Referring to the rise in river flows and floods, the process whereby water flows back into the river.

# CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

(Juan Luis Moraza)

*"Most people think mankind has progressed in the modern industrial era due to its limitless knowledge and inventiveness, which is nothing more than a dangerous half-truth. All progress is due to special energy subsidies and therefore, it will evaporate when such subsidies are cut. Knowledge and inventiveness are the means for applying energy subsidies when they are available, whereas development and preservation of knowledge also depend on the power developed." (Howard T. Odum: Environment, Power, and Society for the Twenty-First Century)*

## a. ABOUT THE TITLE "DEGROW" (DOWNTURN).

Using a verb as the title already indicates a procedural vindication, a confirmation of the prevalence of transformations on bodies and flows on consistencies. It is from this procedural radicalism that growth logic suspension is formulated. The title appeals for action and a programme via a non-personal verbal format. Thus, the generic nature of the infinitive is paradoxical when used in this case in relation to growth, since "infinitive" in Latin brings to mind a "limitlessness" responding to the fact that it does not express mode, person or number. The Latin term "infinitivus" was a translation from the Greek ἀπαρέμφοτος ("meaning nothing further") for, lacking other morphological marks, the infinitive only reveals the semantic content of the verb. Thus, the infinitive "degrow" is put forward as a polemic expression in relation to unlimited growth, i.e. degrowth in infinitive as a suspension against unlimited growth. Therefore, if the infinitive is a heading, an impersonal signature, the works are a personal gerund.

## b. TREATMENT: MANUFACTURING PROCESSES.

The manufacturing processes particularly in sculpture intensely treat the material physicality of the real. That is probably why in the work of a sculptor there is a clear awareness of a limit which cannot admit excessive whims in its imaginary. Furthermore, the radical procedure also requests a suspension of the theoretical independence of the symbolic. Thus, the experience of limit is not only a creation process condition but also a vital experience.

Create as you live: the search for personal congruence requires a commitment where creation is a personal way of life supported by the experience of limit, both in terms of responsibility regarding cultural and natural legacy received as an inheritance, and as a legacy debt. This is the poetic nature of artistic creation (poiesis).

Art is about life, but intensified by a perspective, filtered by a unique way of feeling, thinking and acting. For art is less an interpretative proposition than an activity, a way of acting in what is real. For what art is about, art is less important than what it is about. For art, what it deals with is less important than art. When art stops worrying about what it is about, its self-absorption distances it from life. When art is oppressed by what it is about, it becomes indistinguishable from social meanings, thereby

losing its poetic excellence and transforming potential. It is the dynamic tension, the "what" and "how" that intensifies and complicates the experience, granting works with a unique quality, a degrowing contribution.

### C. WHAT IT IS ABOUT: ENERGY & LIMITS

Personal growth, industrial growth, financial growth... Human imagination, set on the Indo-European KER, will have associated the lineage to its youth (*koros*), maturation (*de-koros*), creation (*Krê*, *sortu*), natural growth, and cereal (*keres*). Growth is a consubstantial factor to the replicating impulse of organic matter. Suffer, expire, lack, are developments of the *crescendo* of mortal matter *creare*. Evolution is the product of limiting interactions between different factors and agents. And planetary biomass is developed under the pressure of multiple mutual synchronic selections resulting in specific reciprocal adaptations. Life inevitably only exists under certain conditions.

When the *sapiens* (-165,000) included art in their skills, cognitive revolution of the *sapiens sapiens* was inaugurated (-70,000): active and contemplative, playful (*ludens*), versatile (*creans*), co-operative (*assessor*) and responsible (*suadens*), they enjoyed a plausible yet non-idyllic life. They lived in small nomadic communities collecting, hunting, imagining interpretations of the world and establishing symbolic correspondences and values. For them, the planet was a fascinating suspicious incommensurable being of whom they felt themselves to be creatures and from whom they obtained their knowledge and gratitude. Their awareness of limit resulted from the fragility of their balance in the competitive networks and co-operation among species reciprocally limited. The wealth of this life form would have enabled a demographic extravagance leading to stable settlements, intensive exploitation of resources (including production intensification via agriculture, cattle farming and industry), coupled with the need to accumulate, preserve and defend assets and own territory. Therefore, diet would become less diversified, causing new diseases, less rest time and greater dependence on environmental factors. In safer and more predictable environments, mental skills go wild revealing their creative dispositions and darkest nooks. Conscience, as a parallel existence to life, will eventually polarize knowledge towards instrumental reasoning, as the flight from difficulty becomes a drive for power over the real, eluding biological deficiency to become a cultural dominion. *Sapiens* comes from *homo re-sapiens*, *eludens* (-12,000/+2022).

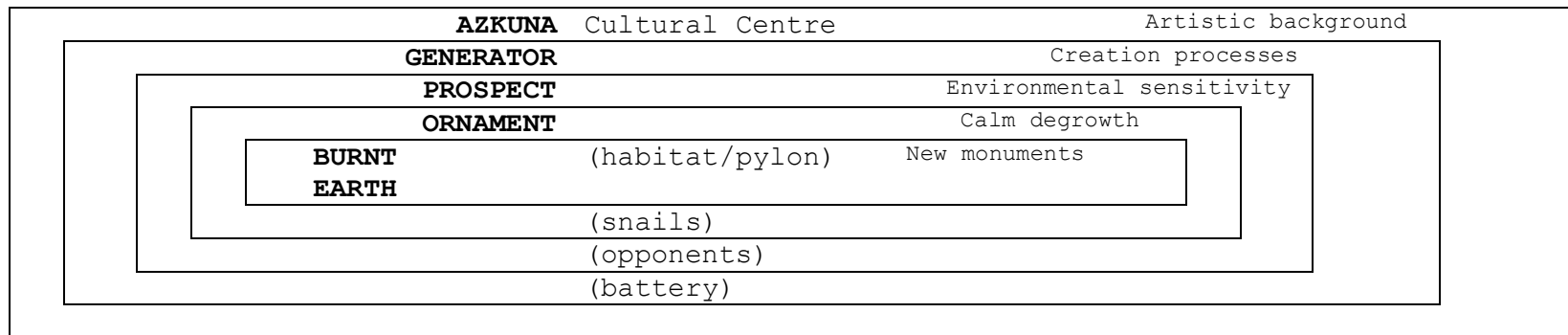
Thus, human conscience will have intensified the experience of memory and anticipation, interpreting vital processes according to fantasies of order, eternity and infinity, compensating the evidence of decomposition and limitation characterising what's real. Hence, conditions enabling the existence of real things (physical, organic, perceptive and cognitive structures) will be interpreted as limitations (physical, organic, cognitive). In the most influential human cultures, protection against insecurity and uncertainty of existence will progressively transform into a struggle via perpetuation, proliferation and supremacy. Once the real is turned into an adversary limit, human imagination and cultural symbolism will be applied to the technical development of implementing the unlimited. Within the fragile balance of a limited planet, a life model based on a source of unlimited energy predetermines the collapse. In other words, an error of calculation ignores the second principle of thermodynamics, whereby energy inevitably dissipates the more



operations are carried out<sup>1</sup>. The sociality that has evolved in hegemonic cultures is the result of a growing and accelerated proliferation of a social imaginary and real technologies that supply the fantasy of the unlimited, the immediate, and the unconditional; they advance by force of habit without paying attention to the miscalculation that reduces the environment to a resource through a productive logic of intensification and development.

The issue of growth limits has aroused growing interest for the last half century, since the impact of human civilisation on the state of the planet has become unerringly manifest, both locally and in planetary terms -as far as it has been acknowledged that the consequences of success are also the causes of failure, and as far as the fantasy of unlimited growth is faced with the insurmountable limitations of what is real-. However, what is currently acknowledged as pernicious effects of human development can be estimated in relation to a series of identifiable trends and behaviours in human nature capable of interpreting collapse as the moment for sustainable development of the collapse.

Yet, when faced with its own inertia, cognitive split, fragmentation of knowledge, division of interest and fantasy of rights without responsibilities, globalised human culture deals with highly compromising challenges entwined with its lack of limit awareness and its worship of the sacrosanct of growth, development, and acceleration. Moreover, it reproduces these principles in the belief that development intensification can magically resolve the contraindications of development.




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<sup>1</sup> Mathematician and economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen associated each economic, matter and energy flow to an entropy, the increase whereof means loss of useful resources. E.g., raw materials used to build a PC are fragmented and disseminated throughout the planet, making it virtually impossible to reconstitute original minerals. As regards the energy used to manufacture the components, it has dissipated forever.

# ABOUT "DEGROW"

(Bene Bergado)

For me, the DEGROW project involves delving deeper into issues raised in previous projects. Moreover, biographical and ideological aspects merge more than ever in this project. In some way, going back to the past brings consistency to the present.

What is the reason for unlimited growth in production is a question I have asked myself since I was a child. To think that if a company wants to do well it needs to grow exponentially year after year, inevitably leads to collapse.

As stated by Margarita Mediavilla, one of the main reasons for the unlimited sense of our capacity for production and consumption in our developed societies is the quality and versatility of the fossil fuels that we have been able to extract at the pace we have wanted. They are ideal energies for growth and have allowed us to develop an economic system with no concept of limit: capitalism.

Faced with this logic of capitalism based on a continuous and unlimited growth, fed by the most complete and powerful energy known to man, i.e. oil, the planet has become a mere supplier of resources that is no longer capable of regenerating at the unbridled speed of our consumption. We live wastefully, squandering with complete disregard for the resources nature has conserved for millions of years. This way of living has led us to a global crisis in which we are facing a depletion of natural resources: raw materials and fossil fuels, the fragmentation and destruction of ecosystems, and high levels of pollution on land, sea and air.

The degrowth thought current proposes controlled regular reduction of production in order to establish a new relation of balance between mankind and the planet earth as humanity's sole option for survival based on frugality and self-limitation. It can be summarised as "living better with less".

We are living in times of frenzied consumerism coupled with an obsession for economic wealth, in a world where millionaires are envied, and with a population blinded by the dazzle of enormous luxurious. Consequently, degrowth is not considered an attractive discourse *a priori*, since it undoubtedly deals with an ideological proposal requiring austere habits as well as large doses of empathy and solidarity.

Consumerism has become a new religion for millions around the world and this consumer addiction, added to financial fundamentalism, sustains an economic model that devours natural resources. Compulsive consumption of goods is the main cause of environmental degradation.

Yet, degrowth is not going to be an option but rather a need imposed by the devastating impact of economic growth.

The inevitable energy transition we are heading for with renewable and technological energies that cannot be stored (such as liquid fuels) nor grown, are energies limited by the territory and compete with it.

The enormous difficulty for a true transition is that our society and industry are moulded by fossil fuels, essentially oil, as the great energy bargain, according to Margarita Mediavilla.

The current socio-economic system is incapable of reacting to the energy shortage, for it refuses to accept that new energies cannot be based on exponential growth and immediate benefit, which is the basis of capitalism. The economic system is adapting itself based on poverty and economic crisis.

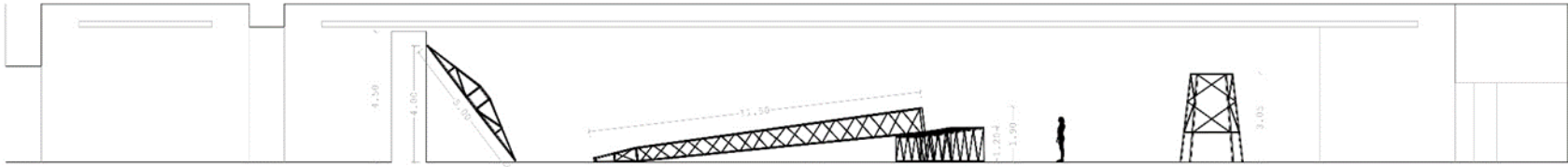
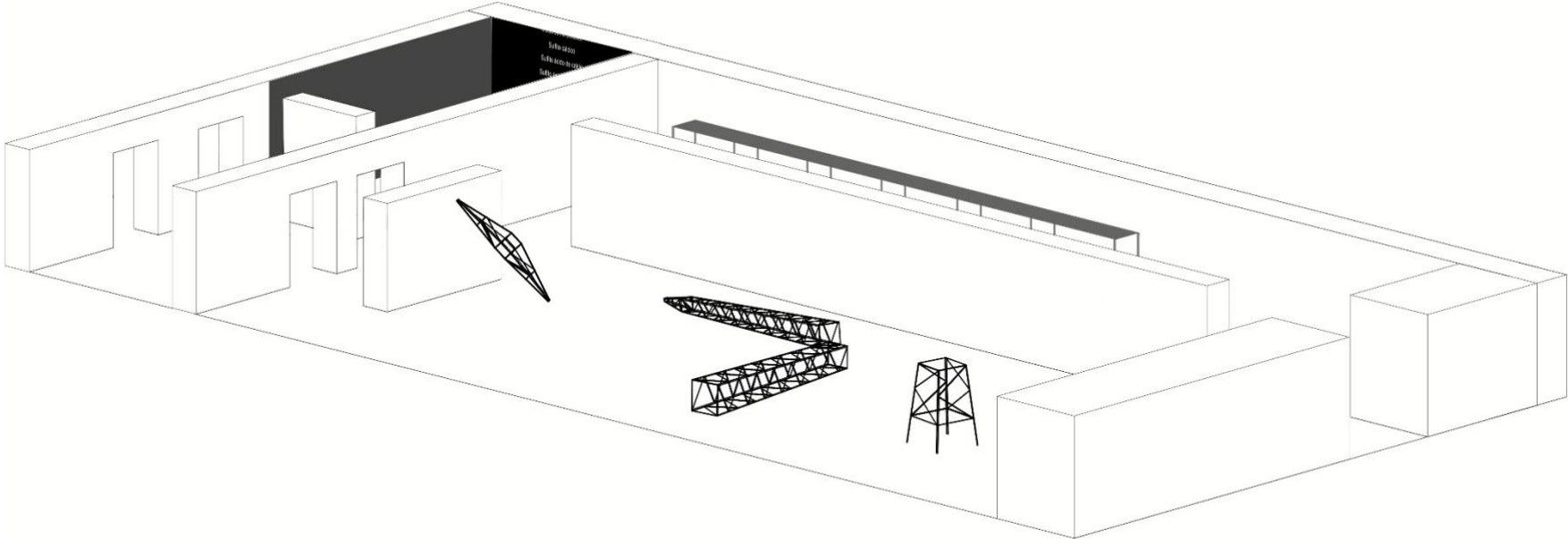
We are heading towards a world of low energy and inevitable life changes. Although technology can help, radical socio-political changes are required, where art and artists with our integrating work processes can at least show and make visible some paths to wean off and dismantle habits of superfluous excess.

Quoting Isabelle Stengers, "We are terribly under-prepared to deal with what is happening." The motto "live better with less" aims to liberate us from an economic model of scale, competitiveness and urgency that makes us dependent. It is intended to change this social imaginary where those of us living midst the luxuries of affluent societies always want more, and those who do not live in these affluent societies, would like to do so. The idea of wealth should be redefined to be acknowledged as a moral, intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction, as an awareness of the limits of what is real, and as the assumption of our responsibility as authors of the future. This "degrow" exhibition aims to convey that which is intrinsic in artistic creation, i.e. responsibility for our own life, responsibility for what we do and what we convey with it. Artistic creation rehearses this feeling of being and becoming capable, taking responsibility for and assuming the consequences.

In this call to action, the exhibition installations and sculptures dialogue with the need for a deceleration through the awareness of limits and the dynamic strain between art and what it is about: its artistic processes and its more explicit themes.

Hence, "degrowth" is not only the contents or an issue of this exhibition, but also and above all a commitment inherent to artistic experience. The creation processes involve a search for coherence among means and purposes, intentions and realisations, expression and action. My creation processes poetically incorporate the physicality and symbolic background of materials -whether recycled waste or noble recyclable materials, such as bronze-, procedural transparency, formal configuration of works -assuming a transversal artistic inheritance-, emotional and sensitive experiences, biographical resonances, symbolic and reasoning factors, ideological and intellectual positioning... Thus, works of art do not only represent the world but are also a specific channel of action in it. They make interdependence processes present, among people and their ways of symbolising the world, likewise among what is human and the background to which they belong. They reveal a form of responsibility and attention towards life, and a way of intensifying and caring for something specific, something real. In this sense, "degrowth" is an allusion to the containment and co-responsibility inherent to the artistic experience.

# EXHIBITION



ENTRANCE HALL: I.a, I.b.

CENTRAL HALL

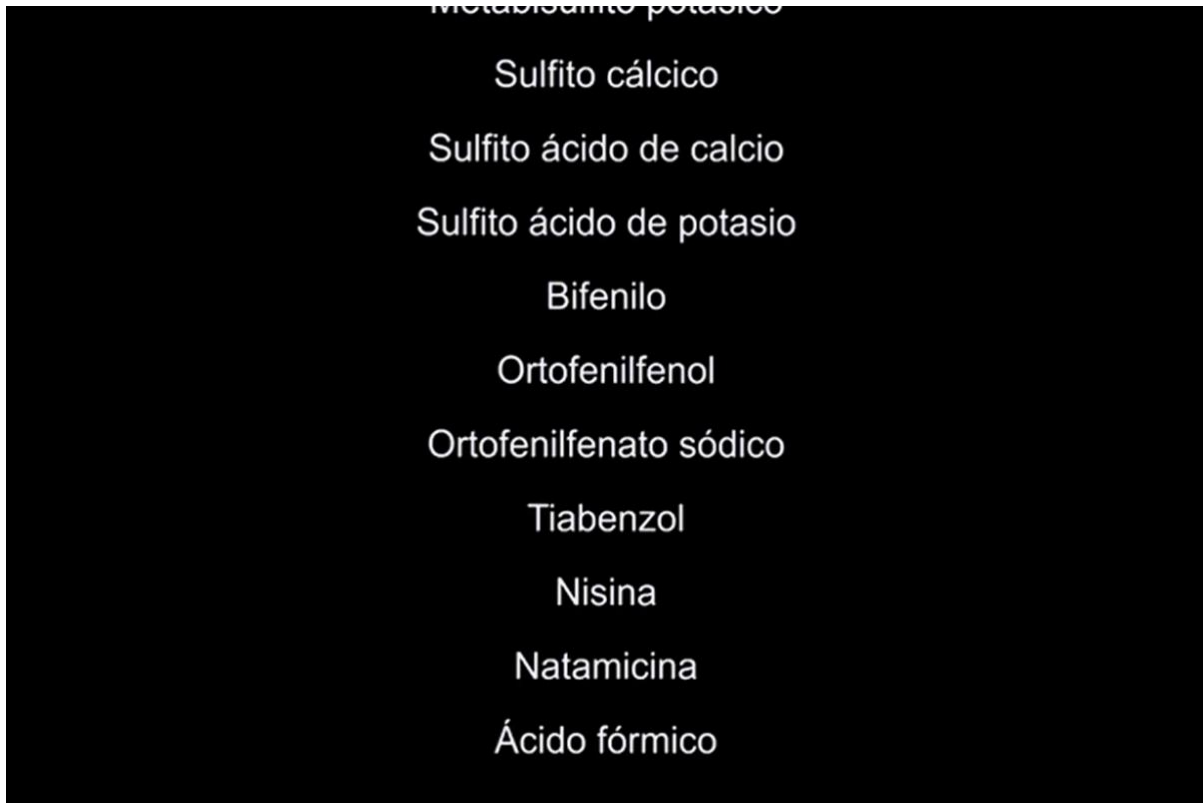
DECREER  
BENE BERGADO  
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MATA SUJANA 2022

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Entrance Hall: I.a.PROSPECTO (PROSPECT).

BLACK-AND-WHITE VIDEO. 11'16''.

Screening of the official list of food additives -colorants, preservatives, antioxidants, thickeners, stabilisers, emulsifiers, Ph regulators, sweeteners, acidifiers, alkalis or bases, anti-caking agents, acidity regulators, flavour boosters, waxes, covering agents, improvers, packaging gases, sweeteners, foam creators- that runs across the screen like film credits. The list includes everything from cyanide to gold... Taken together, it is a list of foods that do not feed, of foodstuffs that do not nourish, and which - in the name of hygiene and safety - have become compulsory constituents of our diet. They are considered to be of a problematic nature in the medium and long term due to the potential consequences on our body.



## Entrance Hall: I.b. ABATIMIENTO DE ENCUENTRO Y ORNAMENTO

The "Encounter and Ornament" installation comprises two dozen plates, some whole, others broken, melted in bronze and enamelled, and a surface made of two virgin linen canvases measuring 365x65cm. This surface is divided by a table tennis net that is not centred, but in an aureus section, conditioning a game of unequal opportunities... and is located on a scaffolding structure. The plates are piled up on this game table, which doubles as a dining table, as if after a confrontation, both sporting and conflictive. They are decorated in 2 colours, some gold and others black, as belonging to two "teams". As a decorative drawing, each plate includes a significant date of my personal and social life. Traces of links, intensities and misunderstandings on canvases as a place of representation, supported by scaffolding as a provisional structure under construction. I include the word "encounter" in the title as an approximation or a meeting, but also as a dispute or a confrontation both sporting and conflictive. Breaking a plate is likewise a metaphor for the loss of innocence and the consequences of the commitment to live. Therefore, each break-up is also a beginning.

In this exhibition I am going to fold the table so that the canvases with the net will be hung on the wall. As a consequence, all the plates will appear on the floor. They will accumulate on the border line between the wall and the floor, as if the table had been overturned.

Table surface 365x130x70 cm.



## II. Side Hall. GENERATOR.

Each artist operates on an initial background, acting in relation to a cognitive, sensitive and symbolic legacy received with an increasing reactive disposition. This background depends on the consideration of a desire. Their own works and those of others exist in their relationships and conductivity. Furthermore, each moment of creation entwines a retrospective perspective with a prospective one. Just like a battery, an artist's background not only reveals his/her processes but also activates the interconnections of those materials, energy condensations which generate new connections for themselves. In fact, the origin of electricity generation comes from observing oxidation and putrefaction processes. Plus the first battery in history was a pile of metal discs made from silver and zinc separated by pieces of fabric, cardboard or leather, dampened with vinegar

Regarding the previous Gliptotecas (I, and II) works, this large shelving is a metaphor and metonymy for the manufacturing process as a generating battery, as a stack and pile.

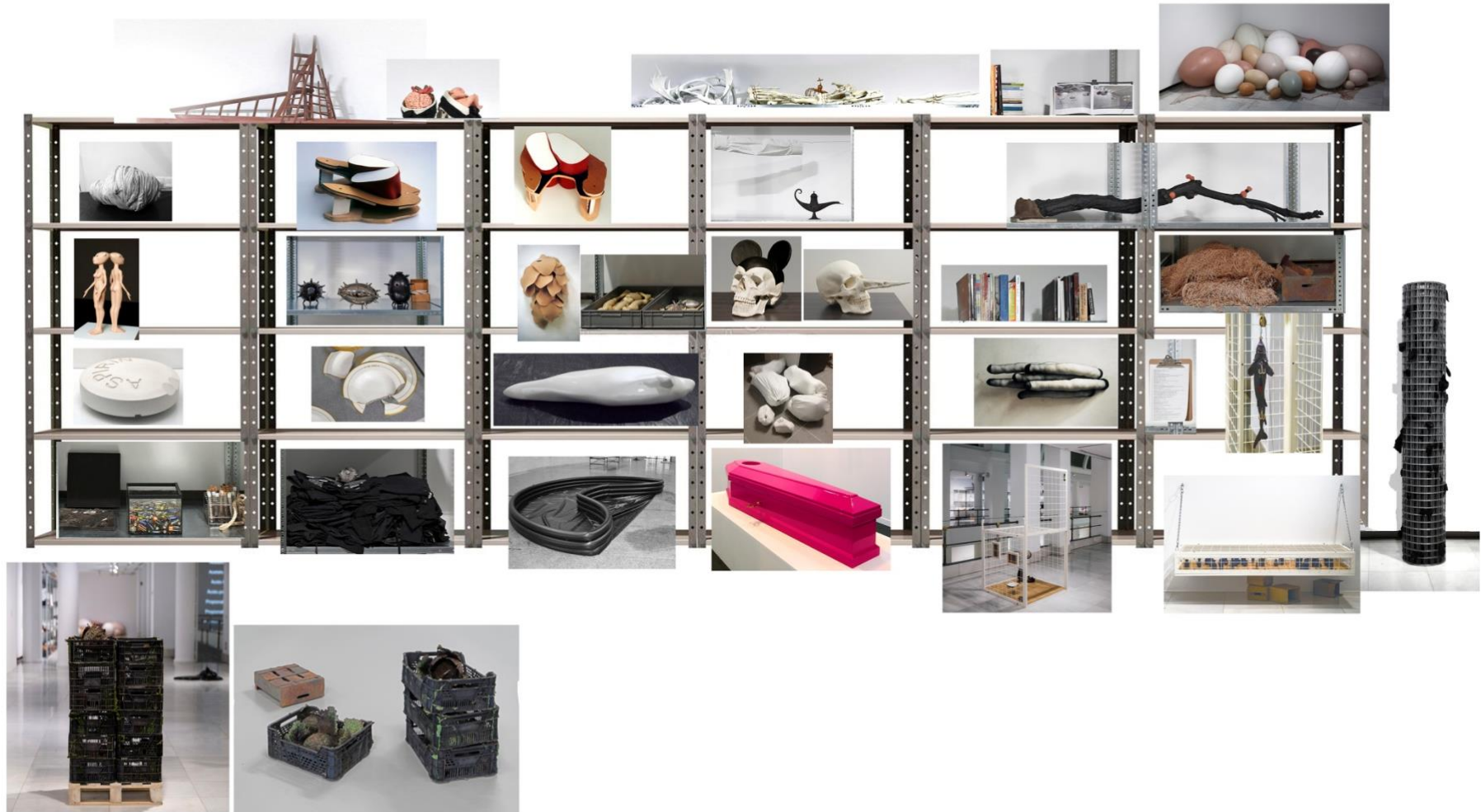
It is not an archive (where order hinders the interaction among elements), nor simply a warehouse where materials invoke their availability, but rather an installation which piles works and materials testing a battery where these elements generate an energy and procedural situation.

20 metre industrial shelving where the works, materials, installations and documents of my entire artistic career are piled up, likewise elements related to the preparation process of this exhibition. Condensation of this entire storage is also an accumulation of what I do and my energy. Some pieces have given way to the generation of others. They are all interconnected. They form layers of what I do in art, which are either superimposed or juxtaposed.

Facing the two previous Gliptotecas pieces, this shelving entails a much greater densification. It is not only intended to show a work, but also to interconnect forms, contents, materials and stages, i.e. an interactive warehouse. It is accompanied by different works on floor and walls.



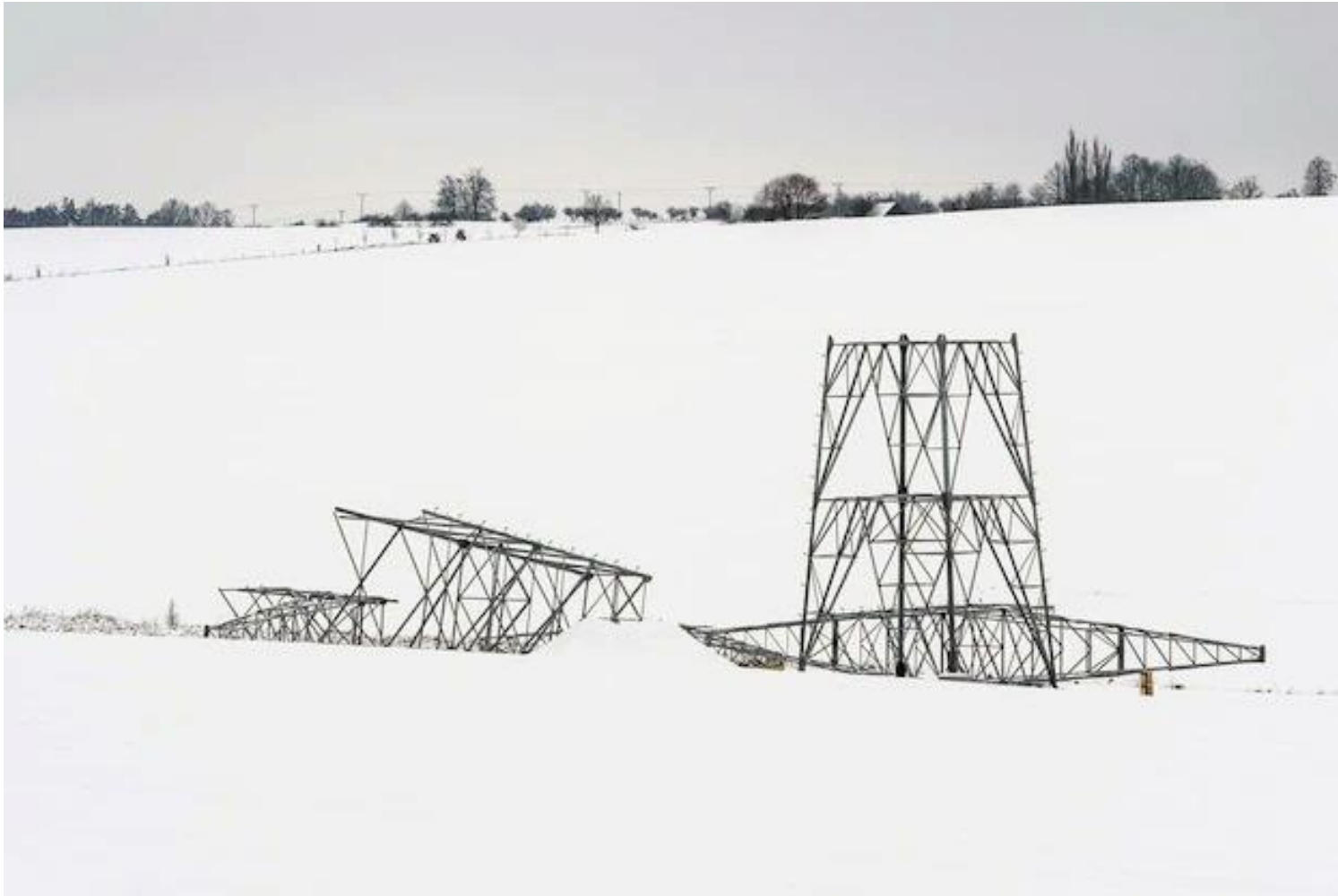
## II- GENERADOR



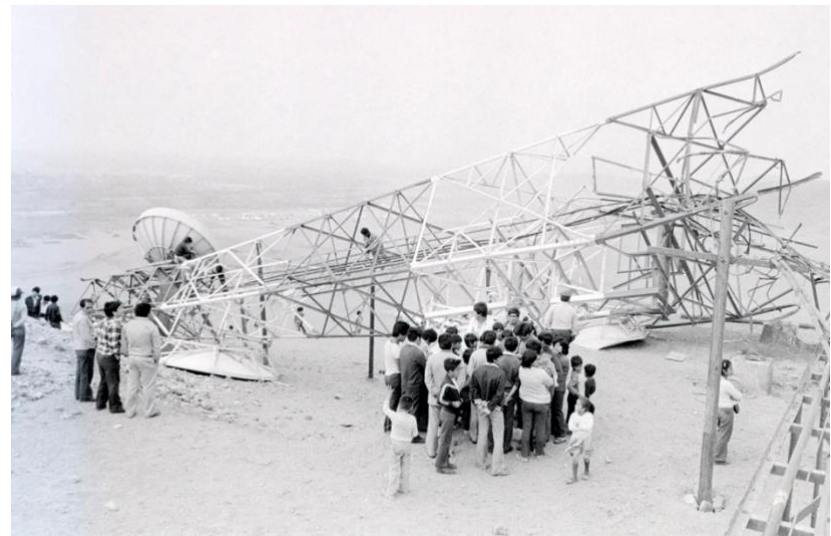
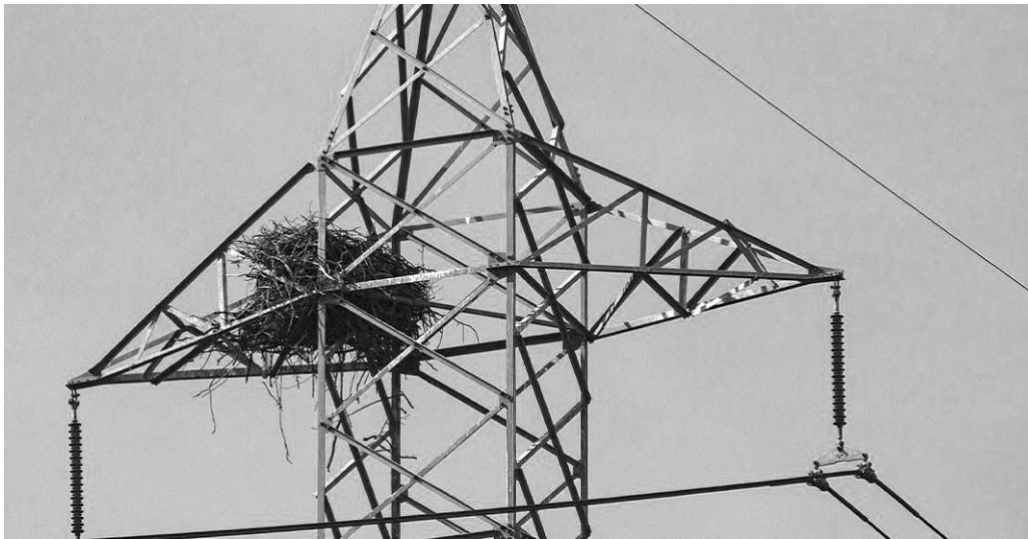


### III. Central Hall. BURNT EARTH.

Even before the appearance of art, the monumental function refers to the creation of an interior limit that provides internal cohesion, likewise real and imaginary organisation of social space. The monumental rhetoric has developed through empiric signs that organise a territory, based on very basic patterns of height, position and separateness: statues, tombs, flags, towers, bells, languages, silos, skyscrapers, logos, etc. grant symbolic strength to culture internalisation. Electric pylons belong to a lineage of these authority signs. They are strictly structural supports, symbols of an empiric symbology which does not sustain a figure but the transmission thereof, energy and information flow, and figures of a new authority without an image.



Monumental tradition and negative monumentality. The fall of the pylon: it is not about the scenes of negative monumentality as we have seen in innumerable examples throughout history, with monuments torn down by a population which cannot find its place in what is real nor in those symbolic shapes, or by a counter-power claiming its territory against the imposition of an instituted power. It is rather, here and now, a destitution caused by the very success of an instituted power confronted by its own impotence at managing the complexity and real consequences of its imaginary incontinence. It is not so much the image of self-destruction and lack of limit awareness, it is a catastrophic place where life encounters its habitat, its welfare trap. Above all, it is about a tower that has been voluntarily dismantled, like a new monument associated with a deliberate restraint or dilation, as a symbol of restriction, of the necessary self-limitation for present and future life. The installation is, in effect, a dismantled or partially assembled tower, acting as a support for signs of a precarious settlement: cardboards, sleeping bags, suitcases and other signs of life (parts cast in polychromatic bronze).



This title with warlike origins, which talks to us about winning via the elimination of the means of subsistence and psychological weakening of the enemy, is equally applicable to finances, to the self-destruction of what is valuable in order to prevent engulfment, lose interest for the other party and be left in peace at the expense of losing value.

This installation comprises a C-500 30m high electric support pylon broken into 4 parts. The pylon, which seems to have fallen, has been dismantled, stored, discarded and turned into a habitat or shelter. Inside of it there are areas of parquet flooring with the remains of human inhabitation, like in my "Jaulas (Cages)" series. Scattered around the space you can find pieces of treated cardboard, cut-out fabrics, embryonic forms of beings in the ambiguous process of birth or disappearance... Likewise the remains of food, plates, shoes, excrements and several suitcases, all cast in bronze.

All the foregoing is accompanied by sleeping bags which recall humans in a lethargic, somnolent state or perhaps dead. The chromatic range of these chrysalises coincides with the colour codes used for electric cables.



Código de colores para conductores eléctricos NOM-001-SEDE	
<b>Corriente Alterna</b>	
<b>Conductor</b>	<b>Color del aislamiento</b>
De puesta a tierra (Tierra Física) Art. 250-119	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sin aislamiento</li> <li>Verde</li> <li>Verde con franjas amarillas</li> </ul>
Puesto a tierra (Neutro) Art. 200-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blanco</li> <li>Gris claro</li> <li>3 Franjas blancas o gris</li> </ul>
No puesto a tierra (Fase) Art. 310-110	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colores distinguibles de los conductores</li> <li>De puesta a tierra (Tierra Física) y Puestos a tierra (Neutros)</li> </ul>
<b>Corriente Directa</b>	
<b>Conductor</b>	<b>Color del aislamiento</b>
Polaridad Positiva Art. 210-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rojo</li> <li>Franja roja</li> <li>+ POS +, Positivo, POS</li> <li>+ POS Forro o tubo retráctil</li> </ul>
Polaridad Negativa Art. 210-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negro</li> <li>Franja negra</li> <li>- NEG -, Negativo, NEG</li> <li>- NEG Forro o tubo retráctil</li> </ul>



# PUBLICATION

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication which not only serves as a catalogue and visual register of the exhibition event, but also and above all, as an essay on the issue of degrowth.

To this end, it will include a text by co-narrator Juan Luis Moraza, and a conversation of the artist with Margarita Mediavilla (A Physics Graduate and PhD by the University of Valladolid and lecturing professor in the Engineering Systems & Automation Department of the Industrial Engineering Faculty at the same University. Her research lines are focused since 2008 on System Dynamics applied to energy-economy-environment models (WoLiM, MEDEAS) and the research of transition towards renewable energies in the context of fossil resource exhaustion and climate change. She has been working on the European MEDEAS project (<http://www.medeas.eu/>) since 2016, whose purpose is the creation of a new decision making tool in the EU transition towards a sustainable energy system), together with a documentary archive of fragments and contents comprising an argumentative constellation.

# BIOGRAPHIES



## BENE BERGADO

She graduated in Fine Arts from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) in 1985. After completing her studies, she began her career as an artist with a scholarship granted by the Provincial Council of Bizkaia in 1986. She became a professor at the Bilbao Faculty of Fine Arts in 1987. After 10 years holding this position, she moved to Madrid in 1998 where she lived and worked. Her works have been represented by Espacio Mínimo gallery since 1998. Her most recent solo exhibitions include: *IRREVERSIBLE* (Alcalá 31, Madrid, 2020); *PERSONA* (CENTRO PARRAGA, Murcia, 2018. MUSAC, León, 2016); and *SEÑUELOS* (Espacio Mínimo gallery, Madrid, 2015). Her work is represented in collections such as *COLECCIÓN JUMEX* (Mexico); *ESTRELLITA BRODSKY* (New York); *TIQUI ATENCIO* (London); *DANIEL LEVINAS* (Washington); *ARTIUM* (Vitoria); *COLECCIÓN BANCO DE ESPAÑA* (Madrid); and *MUSAC*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (León).



## JUAN LUIS MORAZA

Sculptor. He has been holding solo exhibitions and participating in group collections since 1980. Tenured professor at the University of Vigo, he lectures on Master's Degrees and Doctorate programmes at several universities. He has curated at Artium, Reina Sofía, Guggenheim-Bilbao and La Casa Encendida, among other places. He is the author of books such as *Corduras* (2007), *Ornamento y Ley* (2007), *Formas del límite* (2006), *MA(non É)DONNA*, *Imágenes de creación, Procreación y anticoncepción* (1993), *Seis sexos de la diferencia* (1990), likewise numerous essays in collaboration books, specialised journals, catalogues and newspapers.

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Director

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