OLIMPIA VELASCO: FOREST CLEARINGS (BELL-VER)

09.10.26-07.02.27

Curatorial text

Radicant

Olimpia Velasco has created a site-specific installation inspired by the ideas of sphericity and beauty described by María Zambrano in Claros del bosque [Forest Clearings].

Olimpia's close connection with the forest, a place of refuge from harm, is central to her life, a constant and something deeply desired.

The installation is the result of paying intense attention to the forest's sonic and visual fabric. Working from photographic sequences through a non-hierarchical process of notation, the artist paints threads as if weaving, then places them within hoops. By turning the idea of the clearing on its vertical axis, the resulting spheres invite us to leap out of the vicious circles that entail losses of experience.

These works operate on multiple scales and are as interdisciplinary as ecological interactions.

Olimpia Velasco activates the white cube as a heartbeat of the forest, a place for the sense of smell amid aromas, for listening among languages and for forms of care without control.

The artist celebrates María Zambrano's idea that "beauty tends towards sphericity".

Who gives thought to harm? Olimpia does, at the vertices and corners of the white cube—absent from the forest clearing—by introducing a tactile, biological weight: sacks of seeds camouflaged against the gallery floor, just as the history of the Earth is concealed within the rings of trees.

Between threads of light and tree rings, the different levels of the forest emerge.

Art has long been exploring new forms of exchange, a transversal critique of poetic reason as a possible future for our new relationships with objects and the world. As volumes upon the Earth's crust, we acquire dimension through infinite relationships of kinship or tenderness.

Artists such as Olimpia Velasco draw atlases of the wisdoms of generosity, a kind of preventive optimism in the face of fatalism about our species, grounded in ecofeminist culture.

Chantal Maillard recalls Zambrano's relationship with Miguel de Molinos's quietism. Christa Wolf and María Zambrano drew Cassandra and Antigone out of the necropatriarchal mode, returning them to a relationship with the ancestral and poetry, with a radicant idea of exile.

This installation intensifies both the aerial and subterranean layers of the forest and the infinite collaborations taking place within it. It reveals an intensified listening to the forest and its clearings, situating itself as radicant, somewhere between Spinoza and Nicolas Bourriaud.

"One doesn't pass from the possible to the real, but from the impossible to the true" is a phrase by Zambrano that has even been used in political campaigns. It too is radicant.

"My roots grow as I move forward: I'm a nomadic tenant who keeps forging paths," Olimpia says of herself. She seems to be speaking from the perspective of plant neurobiology, aware that plants remember, communicate and make adaptive decisions.

The revelatory quality and duration of listening, together with the necessary stillness, keep her practice from becoming fossilised, in that the unnecessary is never formalised and has no place.

I discover references among the works, not the other way round. A multiplicity that doesn't forget the one-to-one: Anna Tsing's collaborative survival, Valerie Trouet's studies of tree rings, the new modes of exchange proposed by Kojin Karatani and the poetic reason with which Zambrano wrote her life of exiles.

Velasco's concern spreads like poetry, expanding the experience of a world in which the human species becomes gentle, taking on all the colours of the forest.

Forests' capacity to regenerate depends to a great extent on communities that grow symbiotically with their roots, enabling fungi and trees to exchange nutrients.

Around three quarters of fungi are "dark taxa", species known only through their DNA sequences because no physical specimens have been found.

These revelations seem to illustrate what moved Zambrano, in her house in the forests of the Jura, to write *Claros del bosque*, as well as what inspired Olimpia's reading of it.

Each work in her practice has fed on those that came before it; from the outset, nothing has existed in isolation. The distance between works is measured by her drawings, which appear as skins of an interstitial nature.

Olimpia has a kinetic relationship with her works, making each decision about weight through feeling, perhaps because her material approach is that of a draughtswoman.

New reports from the forest, listened to and drawn.

Mycorrhizal networks are determined by a few very simple and elegant rules. How do fungi manage to control the shape of their networks? The rules they follow require only local information about what is happening nearby, not about what is happening across the network as a whole. If one growing tip encounters another one, another end of the network, the two simply fuse.

Claros del bosque, published in 1977—some years after the death of Araceli, the sister Zambrano had cared for and made a priority—is a text of exile, but a situated one, anticipating the end, the criminal writing of thought, the thinker's paranoid crown and suspicion as a way of life. It is a text in which we recognise the concerns and enigmas of recent ecofeminism.

Is there a white cube for the Earth's crust?

In my early conversations with Olimpia, I felt that she had edited, drawn, weighed, listened to and breathed in the conditions of the forest, cultivating "respectful engagements with different disciplinary practices" and making a diffractive reading her own, as proposed by Karen Barad.

Turning the clearing on its vertical axis, defying the human experience of the clearing and the forest beneath our feet, is a choreography of light. Her experience of weight and of moving with those hoops through and within the forest had Bellver as its first destination.

Title: *Claros del bosque*, 2026
Installation. Set of nine okume marine board double hoops with nylon thread
Dimensions variable

Later, we spoke at length about the safety of the forest.

The cabin's skin was invaded by radio; from then on, all the way to the enthronement of artificial intelligence, harm has accumulated too many monuments in our interiors.

The radicant artist decides to place a hundred sacks of seeds at the entrance to the gallery. They form a cheerfully dismantlable barricade so that, on the day of the opening, visitors also become assistants. The barricade of small sacks will then move into the corners of the floor of the white cube. Olimpia always has a relational invitation ready.

Title: *Semillas*, 2026
Installation. Set of ninety-five sacks made of linen fabric and filled with wheat seeds
Dimensions variable

Once you enter the gallery, however: *do not touch the bolsters*. The suspended bolsters, filled with natural wool and wrapped in linen painted with natural pigments, capture every shade of the forest, from its highest reaches to its subterranean depths. "Thou shall not strike", the forest seems to be saying once again, through the weight of colour and the enigmatic intention of painting. Olimpia's relationship with the weight of the bolsters is the opposite of a blow: it is much more of embrace. We know that embracing, sustaining pressure with another body, has a calming effect.

Title: *Bosque – Bolster*, 2026
Linen fabric, natural pigments, raw wool
Dimensions: 200 cm × 53 cm diameter

The artist spent months researching the material in which to present the sound of the forest. When I see the paulownia wood she chose for incisively carving the aura of sound, I hear the blows of the carving.

Valerie Trouet has a laboratory dedicated to the study of tree rings. She uses tree rings to reconstruct patterns of atmospheric circulation, extreme climatic events including forest fires and the terrestrial carbon cycle.

She uncovers the history of the world in her book on tree rings. Standing before the section of sound carved by Olimpia, I feel displaced from the particular age of the human subject into the age of the world.

The sound piece *Bell-ver*, lasting 5 minutes 25 seconds, will be available for visitors to listen to individually in the gallery and will possess the temporal sphericity of the loop. It is both document and music; neither exists separately, it lives through diffraction.

Bell-ver, 2026
Sound file
Duration: 5 min 25 s

What I valued in Zambrano's *Claros del bosque* was the way it defuses the distinction between intimacy and extimacy.

The final decision in the exhibition project for Es Baluard Museu was to activate *La Partida (acción de peso)* immediately outside the museum. It is the artist's tribute to "her grandmother and those other women who left their villages during the rural exodus to attend to needs that others had imposed upon them. They did not decide, nor were they asked. Many never returned to their villages, now empty: nomadic tenants who moved forward alone with their memories, always in silence, lightening their burden along the way."

A forest clearing, a sphere, a hoop, the thread: these aren't merely matters of sight. The gaze is forest. Trees only reveal their rings when cut. Why, then, should we be able to see the forest? "You can't see the wood for the trees" has always seemed a lie to me

Can thought be given to harm? Olimpia is certain that it can, and I think I understand that this is why she has long been researching mountains, sponges from Lesbos, geodesies, threads and weights.

I would like to include here a brief passage about "inventions" from one of Olimpia's diaries written in 1999:

. . . of inventions, limited duration
Until they inevitably become weight . . .
. . . turn me into water, drink me
And begin another invention:
Return to Greece, fleeing.

Zambrano's writing constantly quotes itself; I find it impossible to understand one book without another, just as happens with Velasco's practice.

Against the commodification of natural elements, Bourriaud sees a "new generation of artists calling for a molecular anthropology that studies human effects on the universe and the interaction between humans and non-humans. Contemporary art reconnects with archaic magic, the witches, sorcerers and shamans of precapitalist societies. Against the devitalisation of the world, art has managed to preserve certain aspects of the social function and spiritual practices of these societies."

I cannot help quoting one of those fragments from *Claros del bosque* that seem like a final commandment and also recall recent self-help manuals:

"One must fall asleep above, in the light. One must remain awake below, in the intraterrestrial, intracorporeal darkness of the various bodies inhabited by earthly humankind: that of the earth, that of the universe and one's own."

A final warning for human activities on the surface.

Beneath our feet lie the networks of invisible ecosystem engineers: arbuscular mycorrhizal (AM) fungi that form trading relationships with more than 70% of plant species, building networks of tubular cells called *hyphae* that extend the surface area of root systems by up to a hundredfold. Taken together, these networks constitute one of the Earth's circulatory systems.

Javier Peñafiel, Bendinat/Berlin, June–September 2026

No artificial intelligence was consumed in the writing of this text.
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