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A shared liturgy: sacred images and modern ruins in Seville and Cordoba

The CAAC and the C3A bring together four artists united by an imaginary world in which contemporary rituals and mutant environments coexist.



At the opposite end of the spectrum from the most mundane of white cubes, the CAAC in Seville and the C3A in Córdoba are two architectural gems brimming with identity. On one hand, there's the Cartuja in Seville, the main venue for the Seville museum, awaiting its upcoming expansion; on the other, the Nieto and Sobejano building in Córdoba, a sober and elegant example of neo-brutalism. Both public centers, under the auspices of the Andalusian Regional Government, are now closing a chapter following the departure of their director since 2023, Jimena Blázquez, and the announcement of a public competition for the new directorship. As a provisional assessment, a final, highly curated series of exhibitions remains, featuring four artists rarely exhibited in major museums, united here by a common framework that brings together sacred imagery, hybrid materials, and contemporary ruins.

Of the four, Cecilia Bengolea (Buenos Aires, 1979) has the greatest international reach and is also the most exhibited in Spain, where in recent years she has shown her work in Madrid at TBA21 and La Casa Encendida. In Córdoba, she brings together textiles, ceramics, drawings, lenticular images, and films as parts of a single ecosystem, pieces that touch and influence one another. For example, *Memorias de lo humedad* (*Memories of the Damp*) transforms furniture covers into a soft, horizontal installation, spread out on the floor like a domestic landscape transmuted into a living organism. *Yurta sin techo* (*Yurt Without a Roof*) shifts this same logic

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toward a suspended textile, offering something of precarious shelter and an organic membrane. Around it appear reliefs with earthy surfaces, small fossil-like pieces, and forms that evoke mutating skins. More than arranging objects in space, Bengolea composes a landscape of relationships between materials and bodies, in which the organic and the digital, nature and technology, are intertwined in a single hybrid and cyborg continuity.

"The noise that inhabits", the exhibition by Cecilia Bengolea in Cordoba. **PABLO BALLESTEROS (C3A)**

The "noise" that gives the exhibition its title could be the subtle tremor present in a modest yet vibrant room, transformed by a precise and effective installation. The video *Return to Bog Walk*, filmed between Jamaica and Argentina, introduces dance, Bengolea's preferred discipline, as a form of transmission and resistance. The result is an open and well-calibrated installation, in which the viewer ceases to be an observer and becomes part of this network of shifting forms and images.

In the neighboring exhibition, Christian Lagata (Jerez de la Frontera, 1986) shifts the focus to everything architecture needs to function but usually conceals: vents, drains, grates, finishing touches, and other functional additions. **Metal of Summer** brings together modest objects, bordering on waste or makeshift repairs: a drum from which a torn metal sheet emerges, black boxes reminiscent of ventilation ducts, plates that create fissures in the floor, and small wooden and metal structures assembled like a rudimentary construction set. Lagata works in an uncertain space where it's never quite clear whether what we see are industrial remnants, mechanical prototypes, or precarious sculptures. Probably because they are, simultaneously, all three.

tive figures gathered around a table beneath a large solar disk, as well as the oil painting of two young people beside a fig tree laden with fruit, demonstrate his mastery of form. Their figures, silhouetted in a thick light, seem suspended in an ambiguous time, halfway between a devotional scene, a classical portrait, and a vaguely *kitsch* reverie.

The C3A brings these pieces into dialogue with the building's concrete architecture, simultaneously cold and warm, like the artworks themselves or metal under the summer sun—an image the exhibition borrows from a verse by Caballero Bonald. There is no intention here to ennoble humble materials or impose a poetics of waste, but rather to remain true to their roughness and their provisional nature. The result is an installation made of assemblages, joints, and fragments scattered in a post-industrial and vulnerable space, where the visitor, like the artist, ultimately discovers a strange beauty.

Leaving Córdoba for Seville, we enter "*The Diaphanous Soul of a Still Morning*," the exhibition by painter Jem Perucchini (Tekeze, 1995), an Ethiopian raised in Italy. This is his first institutional exhibition in Spain, featuring 11 paintings installed in the refectory of the former Cartuja Monastery, home to the CAAC (Andalusian Center for

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Contemporary Art). The space, with its tiled wainscoting and remnants of mural paintings visible on the walls, doesn't seem like a mere backdrop but rather an extension of the paintings' own imagery. Perucchini combines references to the Early Renaissance, Christian

One of the paintings by the Ethiopian Jem Perucchini in the refectory of the Cartuja, headquarters of the CAAC (Seville). **PEPE MORON (CAAC)**

The exhibition is built upon tensions-between the spiritual and the earthly, the visible and the latent, day and night—that Perucchini presents with a studied ambiguity. His figures, emerging from branches and shadows, sustain small, allegorical narratives that are never entirely explicit. His is a meticulous and restrained painting, rich in color and ornamentation, that does not pursue sterile virtuosity, but rather a delicate reinterpretation of tradition from other hybrid genealogies. The installation takes advantage of a similar approach, also marked by a hybridization of sources and a certain ceremonial solemnity, appears in the Outer Chapel of the CAAC, where Donna Huanca (Chicago, 1980) presents a successful work of synthesis. *Mina de Aura* condenses features typical of the Bolivian-American artist's practice, which for years has occupied a unique intersection of painting, sculpture, and *performance*, with distant echoes of the *happening* era. The space of this small Sevillian chapel is transformed by translucent curtains that filter the walls, a white sand floor, and an oil painting superimposed on the Baroque altarpiece as an image that is simultaneously votive and sacrilegious. In front of it, a mirrored steel disc, resembling a ritual font, extends the visual logic of the altar onto the floor. The chapel then ceases to be perceived as a simple enclosure and functions as a total installation, made of fluorescent light, acid colors, and a clinical whiteness.

With her three-dimensional painting, Donna Huanca erects a contemporary altar devoid of gods

In line with other recent works, Huanca again expands painting into space and subjects it to a three-dimensional logic. In Seville, this operation achieves a particularly effective plastic power in this place marked by the city's overseas history, by trade, and by colonial exploitation. In his work, the Baroque and the Andean are not reconciled in a syncretic harmony, but rather intertwined in a seductive, yet slightly aggressive, relationship. The experience is immersive, but also ominous. The result prolongs Perucchini's sacredness in the refectory, although it displaces it toward a more atmospheric and sensory space, ultimately erecting a contemporary altar devoid of gods. It is almost a religious experience. And everything lies in that "almost."