

# EXHIBITION GUIDE



Teresa Burga  
**The Tightrope Walker**

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26.11.22 – 28.05.23

Hall 1

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# Credits

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Title: ***La equilibrista***

Artist: TERESA BURGA  
Iquitos, 1935-Lima, 2021

Curators: Janneke de Vries, Helena López Camacho

Dates: November 26, 2022 – May 28, 2023

Venue: MUSAC. Hall 1

Co-organized with:



Related activities:

**GUIDED TOURS**

**Inaugural guided tour/ June 4, 2022**, At 6 p.m.  
With Helena López Camacho, curator

**Thematic guided tours/**  
**November 27, December 4, 2022, March 5, April 2,**  
**April 23, May 14, 2023**  
At 6 p.m.

**Simultaneous guided tour in Spanish Sign**  
**Language/ January 13**, At 7 p.m.

**Guided tour for families/ January 15**, At 12 p.m.

**MUSEUM TALK**  
With Agustín Pérez Rubio, independent curator and  
Helena López Camacho, curator of the show  
**March 9, 2023/** At 6:30 p.m.

# Teresa Burga

## *The Tightrope Walker*

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*The Tightrope Walker* is Peruvian conceptual artist Teresa Burga's (Iquitos, Peru, 1935-Lima, Peru, 2021) first solo exposition in Spain. The project, carried out in collaboration with Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Bremen, Germany, brings together more than 100 of her works created between the 1960s and until the final years of her career.

Rooted in her context and culture, Teresa Burga has developed a work which integrates both modernity and tradition in a formal aspect. It includes drawings, sculptures of a pop nature, installations, murals, visual scores or diagrams and schemes for the execution of installations and performances. Thanks to the basic principles inherited from conceptual art, a strong social commitment and criticism of Peru's colonial heritage, the social and political reality of the country and the situation of women underlie her work. She realised this through the reflection of people (often women) and of the customs and traditions of her surroundings (streets and local markets). Therefore, to read her works as a sociological and political map and as defenders of women's rights and feminist principles has not been in vain.

Burga began studying architecture, but after two years she discontinued this line of study for the Plastic Arts at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. As a student of the Art Institute of Chicago between 1968-1970, she was nourished by the new American avant-gardes of the time (Pop Art, Op Art and conceptual art); she, alongside other local artists, became part of the Nuevo Arte group in Peru, which gave rise to the modernisation and entrance of new languages and movements in the context of her own country and Latin America.

On returning to Peru in 1971, her artistic suggestions were met with strong criticism and rejection. In both 1972 and 1974, Burga had two major solo exhibitions at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPN). After these, with the exception of a new exhibition in 1980 and despite her promising career, her work remained unnoticed and

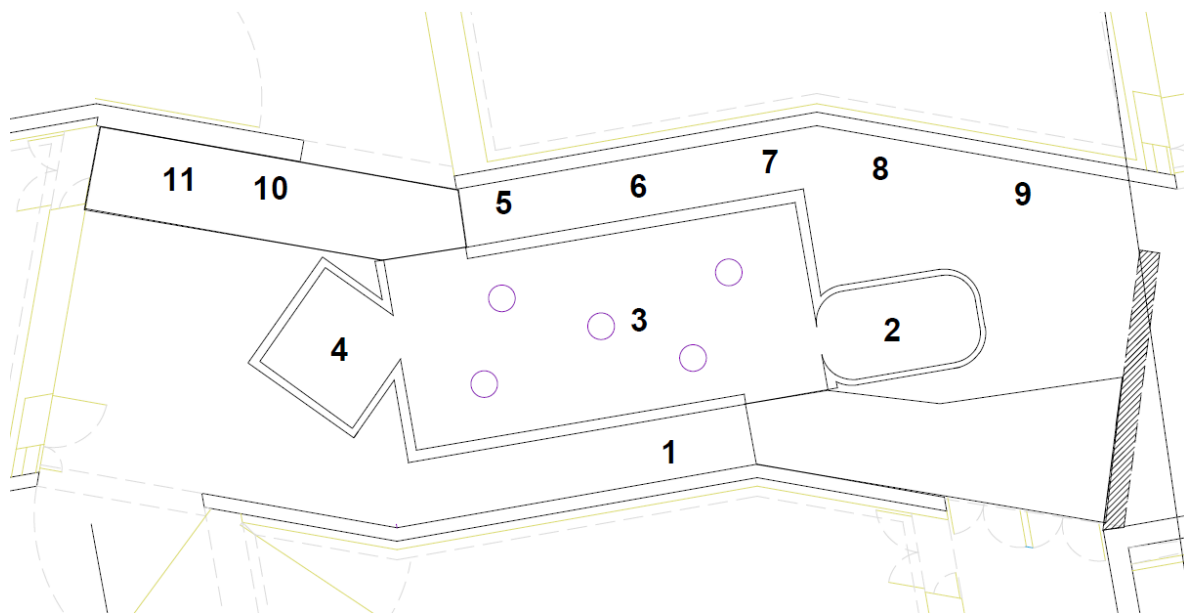
outside the national art circles. It wasn't until 2010 that she returned to the limelight, thanks to the initiative of young critics and historians, with new, monographic exhibitions.

Burga was one of a group of female artists who, at the time, did not receive due recognition, despite being pioneers in their field. Not until recently has she been studied and recovered as part of modern historiography. The current exposition therefore serves to bring her work closer to the Spanish context and restore the figure of this singular Peruvian artist, whose work united the discourse and plasticity of Western and Latin American conceptual art and whose most significant works have been collected by museum galleries.

The exhibition takes its name from one of Burga's drawings made in 2020 which depicts a woman navigating between two points with perfect balance. A piece which could well be considered a self-portrait of the artist herself who knew how to navigate the difficulties and the rejection of most academicist art while remaining faithful to her beliefs. The show takes drawing as its central concept. Strokes and lines of apparent simplicity and of enormous expressive strength manifest themselves in different mediums, styles, and formats. From the more expressionist paintings and more commercial designs of her early work to the prism-shaped, pop-inspired sculptural objects produced in the 1960s, the exposition includes the largest presentation to date of the artist's work on paper, as well as the museum-specific production of a large-format mural painting conceived in the 1960s and produced for this project at MUSAC. The self-portrait installation *Untitled (Heartbeat Machine)*, 1970-2018, which includes an electrocardiogram and the sound of her heartbeat, and the series of drawings and sculptures *Mano mal dibujada #8* [Poorly Drawn Hand #8] (2012-15), as an embodiment of the criticisms that accompanied her throughout her life, contribute to the physical and symbolic presence of the artist in the exhibition space. She died in 2021 at the age of 86, having achieved the recognition of international cultural critics.

# Works in exhibition

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- 1** Paintings, Collages, Linocuts, Woodcuts (1966-1968)
- 2** *Untitled (Heartbeat Machine)* (1970-2018)
- 3** *Untitled / Prisms (B, C, D, G, I)* (1968-2013)
- 4** *Wall drawing after Insomnia Drawing 32* (1990-2022)
- 5** Drawings [From the Series *Copies of Children Drawings*] (2013-2016)
- 6** Drawings [From the Series *Market Stalls*] (2016-2017)
- 7** Drawings [From the Series *Cuzco peasants*] (2019-2020)
- 8** Drawings [Architecture and Society] (2017-2020)
- 9** Drawings [Woman] (2012-2020)
- 10** *Untitled/ The Tightrope Walker* (2020)
- 11** *Mano mal dibujada #8 [Poorly Drawn Hand #8]* (2017)

# 1

## Paintings, Collages, Linocuts, Woodcuts 1966-1968

Linocut, woodcut, collage, mixed media, tempera and felt pen on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

Burga initially studied architecture, a course she would leave after two years to pursue a degree in plastic arts at the Catholic Pontifical University of Peru, which she would graduate from in 1965. In 1960, she travelled to Paris with her family as her father was appointed Peruvian naval attaché in France, which allowed her to tour Europe in 1961-62, study French, and take drawing classes at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris.

Her work from this period prior to her time in the United States, where she would come into contact with the American avant-garde, is strongly influenced by her early training. Nevertheless her ties to the Arte Nuevo group (1966-68) and her trips to Europe did see her take on new means of expressions that differed from more traditional and academic techniques.

The streets, the public space, architecture, and its inhabitants were some of her most favoured themes in this period. Alongside experimenting with techniques such as collage and linocut, vivid colours, abstract compositions bordering on expressionism, and formal elements such as grids and checkerboards, which have remained in recent works, started to make an appearance. Prominent pieces in this set of works include *El Barrio* [The Neighborhood] (1966), linoleums of an imagined Lima that Burga made on her return from Paris as she found a declining and changed city. Others, such as *Imágenes I-III* [Images I-III] (1967) also stand out. In these she uses designs reminiscent of the commercial and advertising world that was so sharply booming in some countries in the '60s

## 2

### ***Untitled (Heartbeat Machine)*** **1970-2018**

Ballpoint pen on paper. MDF-object with 40 LED-lights, heartbeat recording cardiogramme in loop. 6'02"

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

In 1968, a Fulbright Program scholarship allowed Burga to move to Chicago to continue her training at the Art Institute of Chicago until 1970. Her time in the U.S., which was at that time the undoubted centre of the art world, put her in contact with the avant-garde of the day. Pop Art, op-art, conceptual art, and installations were some of the movements and languages she became familiar with and started to experiment in.

Her relationship with the Arte Nuevo group and her journeys to Europe led Burga to start to move away from more traditional artistic forms towards more conceptual ideas.

The '70s were a decisive time in her career. Over this period, she produced a body of work in which she intermixed artistic language with science and technology and in which the abstract idea won out over aesthetic concerns.

*Untitled (Heartbeat Machine)* is a self-portrait created using medical records and data, and is far removed from more figurative and plastic styles. Burga recorded her heartbeat and combined it with an electrocardiogram taken over the course of a year. The diagram and blueprint for the production of the piece complete the installation.

### 3

## ***Untitled / Prismas [Prisms] (B, C, D, G, I)*** **1968-2013**

5 Set of diverse elements  
Painted plywood

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

*Untitled / Prismas [Prisms]* is a set of sculptures envisioned as separate installations that Burga created in 1968 before she travelled to Chicago. In subsequent years —2013— she continued to develop them, starting from drawings that contain the instructions for their manufacture. One of these installations is made up of a total of 52 prisms split into 7 groups of shapes —of which 5 are on display in the hall— which depict over 300 colour motifs inspired by traditional Peruvian culture.

The aesthetic, the formal elements, and the colouring evoke pop iconography. In them, the random of choice of colours, the element of play in the deconstruction of shapes, and the multiplicity of possibilities in the arrangement of the prisms enable the creation of compositions of infinite forms.

These forms are based on a series of drawings made in 2012, in which Burga opens out the faces of the prisms, the outlines of the drawings, and the scale of colours as instructions for their subsequent assembly. This idea once again chimes with the precedence of the idea in her work and with the hybridisation of languages – Pop art tied to pop culture and conceptual art as a more intellectual rational trend – in her work.

## 4

### ***Wall drawing after Insomnia Drawing 32*** **1990-2022**

Wall Drawing  
Faber-Castell Polychromos N° 199 on wall

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

This installation, made specifically for the project in the MUSAC, belongs to a group of works that Burga started in the '70s and continued working on into the '90s. In them the artist fashioned hypnotic patterns using intertwining and expanding grid-like geometric figures to create optical illusions.

Their origins lie in the Op-art that she came into contact with on the American scene and during her studies in the Art Institute of Chicago between 1968-1970. Yet they are also linked to her insomnia which the artist herself acknowledged and led her to create automatic patterns in an effort to overcome her wakefulness and manage to fall asleep. Burga herself started this series of small-scale works on paper, which she would then transfer into mid and large format wall installations featuring the same compositions. She allowed others to produce and transplant onto physical mediums her most conceptual ideas and visions, in a questioning of the concept of authorship and what is likely to be accepted as a work of art.

## 5

### **Drawings [From the Series *Copies of Children Drawings*] 2013-2016**

**L:** crayon, felt tip pen and ballpoint pen on paper

**R:** felt tip pen, fineliner and pencil on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

Drawing was a part of Burga's career from the very start to the very end. She always kept pencils and papers at hand, which allowed her to draw ceaselessly. Many of these works are in fact copies of drawings by children that the artist replicated as a way of retraining her hand after an accident in 2013. Drawings under which she noted the title of the piece and the name of the boy or girl who did it and their age. This is accompanied by a detailed and thorough noting of the dates, hours, and minutes she took to make these copies, which she started to do in 1974 and continued to do so until her last drawings.

Burga thus rejected the concept of authorship, emphasised the importance of copies and replicas, and firmly chose to highlight the working process over the finished piece. Time, subjective and immaterial, takes a central role in her compositions, as does manual labour, the craft that underpins the resulting drawing. She contrasted and paired childhood and old age, just as drawing was a lifelong companion of hers.

## 6

### **Drawings [From the Series *Puestos de mercado* (Market Stalls)] 2016-2017**

**Up:** Felt tip pen and ballpoint pen on paper

**Down:** Color print on paper

Teresa Burga Estate / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

*Puestos de mercado* [Market Stalls] is a series of works that Burga made using images taken from local newspapers and the internet. Everyday scenes from the streets of her native Peru in which shopkeepers and customers pose unaware and walk between stalls of clothes and footwear, fruit and vegetables.

These works came after the series of copies of children's drawings and on the formal level share the fact that they are copies of photographs or drawings by other artists, as well as having a prominent detailed record on their base of the dates and time taken to make them, highlighting the process.

Burga did not make exact copies, but in the act of reproducing she chose the details that she found essential and helped her reflect the surrounding social reality.

A reality that she copied with no desire to change it and in which the strength of her brushstrokes and the liveliness of colours. The artist never stopped watching and capturing her surroundings, which she transferred into her drawings and came to represent an interesting sociological map of the time.

## 7

### **Drawings [From the Series *Campesinos cuzqueños* (Cuzco peasants)] 2019-2020**

Felt pen and pencil on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

In 2019, Burga began to work on a series of pieces in which Cuzco peasants and Peruvian girls are the protagonists. The artist took on an introspective vision in this set of works that connects with the traditions and more rural circumstances of her native Peru. Most are three-quarter and full length portraits in which the figures are smiling and wearing dresses made from the handcrafted fabrics of the country. Both naïve and sketch-like in style, in these portraits of girls from Cuzco Burga depicts young indigenous women from the Andes in Peru, dressed in traditional clothing.

Teresa's focus lays on people and that is why she neutralised and even avoided drawing the background or surroundings of these people. There is a certain sense of homage in these portraits that Burga made in the final years of her life with a certain pride in her roots.

As in her previous drawings, Burga noted next to the title the time she took to make them, emphasising the process alongside the result.

## 8

### **Drawings [Architecture and Society] 2017-2020**

Felt pen and pencil on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

The artist made this collection of works in the final years of her life. A period in which she set aside more installation-focused ideas to concentrate on paper, on what she had at hand and was easily transportable. She never stopped watching and capturing the surrounding reality. A reality from which Teresa extracted the details she deemed most meaningful, in which there is an implicit critical vision of Peru at the time. Abandoned mansions, fires, street protests, evicted women, window cleaners and other trades, scenes of football, and handover ceremonies are some of the motifs that Burga depicts.

In short, a sociological map bearing witness to the times - in which social inequality is a constant - which Burga took with a certain air of decline. In her humble drawings the artist denounced and shone a spotlight on these realities, adding to them the dates they were made on as testimony of the events and the personal time she spent on producing them. Burga did not solely speak of external matters. In these final works, she put herself into the scenes, as in those titled *Dibujos viendo mal* [Drawings Seeing Poorly] or *Dibujos viendo mal* [Drawings Seeing Poorly] which Burga did between 2017-18 when she suffered some sight problems that she was eventually able to recover from.

## 9

### **Drawings [Woman] 2012-2020**

Felt pen and pencil on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

Women are a prominent theme in all of Burga's work. In 1981, she made one of her most famous pieces on this theme, *Perfil de la mujer peruana* (Profile of the Peruvian Woman), produced in conjunction with psychoanalyst Marie-France Cathelat in which she used sociological, psychological, social, cultural, religious, economic records and surveys to provide a broad statistical display which led to a group portrait.

This work was followed by many others focused on women that were of a hybrid conceptual nature and featured a large amount of analytical data. Her drawings, however, took on a more natural and improvised tone. Burga portrayed Peruvian women in traditional clothing but also showed women from all over the world and Peru who were far removed from traditional archetypes and male company. These portraits speak to us of empowered, independent women free from prejudice. Naturally portrayed women in which she constantly pointed to some of features criticised by more conservative society: red lips, revealing clothes, descriptions in the titles such as *Femme fatale*, women in groups wearing carnival masks. It is no wonder that her work has been interpreted as feminist. Burga was the first to suffer from being a woman in the world of art and the Peru of her time. Only two of the nine members of the Arte Nuevo group were women, for example, and Peru was the second-last country in Latin America to recognise women as citizens with full rights and they did not have the right to vote until 1955.

# 10

## ***Untitled (La equilibrista)* [The Tighrope Walker] 2020**

Felt tip pen and pencil on paper

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlín

The drawing *Untitled (La Equilibrista)* [The Tighrope Walker] provides the title for and best embodies Burga's project on display in the museum's galleries. A piece in which the artist depicts a woman balancing on a rope dressed in a light bathing costume and holding an umbrella that helps her in her challenge. Under her feet is a checkerboard or grid pattern, a constant feature in the artist's work which is linked to her early training as an architect and her visual perception of her surroundings, as well as the influence of Op-art, and a series of drawings she undertook in the '70s, the *Insomnia Drawings*, in which hypnotic patterns flood the compositions and are named so precisely because they were made during the nights of insomnia that Burga suffered from.

This drawing, like almost all those done after 1974, has the days and times it was made in recorded on the base. This allows us to situate the work in the artist life. It was produced from 25 to 29 November 2020 in the artist's life, in a critical global period in the COVID-19 pandemic in which the author, like the rest of us, was trying her best to overcome the circumstances. The work could well be considered a reflection of what was to come for Burga who, despite being long silenced and rejected by the cultural world in her country, continued to develop a language and oeuvre free from conventionalism.

# 11

## ***Mano mal dibujada #8*** **[Poorly Drawn Hand #8]** **2017**

Steel and nail varnish

Estate Teresa Burga / Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

*Mano mal dibujada* [Poorly Drawn Hand] is a series that started in 2012 as drawings and crossed over into sculptures in 2017. Burga draws the lines of her own hand, with red nails, from many different angles, outlining only the creases and blood vessels. The power of this series lies in the underlying concept. From a single idea these works end up, just like many of her drawings, produced by others. The motif depicted, the hand, is tied to the criticism that surrounded her until the final years of her career: she was accused of producing works that were too simple, that could not be considered works of art as she did not realize them with her own hands.

This sculpture —humble in like her— is a transfer of drawing into sculpture, the result of her commitment to concepts no matter the physical form they may take. It also represents a fierce criticism of the concept of authorship and conventionalism in the understanding of what an artwork is. Burga stood for these ideas until the end of her life and these works manifest them in response to those who were unable to grasp her vision.

# Biographical note on the artist

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Teresa Burga (Iquitos 1935 - Lima 2021) began her studies in Architecture at the National University of Engineering (UNI), which she abandoned after two years to study Visual Arts at the Art School of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP).

After graduating in 1965, a Fulbright scholarship enabled her to move to Chicago to continue her training at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1968 to 1970. Her stay in the USA, at that time the clear epicentre of the art world, brought her into contact with the new avant-garde movements of the day. During this same period (1966-68), she was part of the Arte Nuevo group in Peru, together with authors such as Luis Arias Vera, Gloria Gómez-Sánchez, Jaime Dávila, Víctor Delfín, Emilio Hernández Saavedra, José Tang, Armando Varela, and Luis Zevallos Hetzel. They are credited with introducing new trends such as Pop Art, Op Art and Conceptual Art in Peru and Latin America.

On her return from Chicago, the artist found in her native Peru a military regime that stifled social freedoms and limited the development of new visual languages. In October 1968, following Juan Velasco Alvarado's coup d'état, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces was installed in the country and remained in power until 1975. During this period, the artist had two major solo exhibitions at the Peruvian-North American Cultural Institute (ICPNA). After them, and with the exception of a new exhibition in 1981, and despite her promising career, her work was left out of the national art circuits, and it was not until 2010 that she returned to the forefront in new monographic exhibitions thanks to the initiative of young critics and historians.

In the latter years of her career, Teresa Burga received international critical acclaim, with many projects developed, including her presence at international events such as the 12<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial (2011) and the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial (2015), or the solo exhibitions held at the Peruvian-North American Cultural Institute (ICPNA) in Lima in 2010, the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart, Germany (2011), the Kunstmuseum

Trondheim in Norway (2013) or the Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires - Fundación Costantini (MALBA) in Buenos Aires in 2015.

Her work is present in important national and international collections in the Americas, such as the Art Institute of Chicago (USA), the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO), the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), the Hochschild Collection, Lima (Peru) and the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires - Fundación Costantini (MALBA) in Buenos Aires (Argentina). In Europe, she is part of the collections of the Migros Museum, Zurich (Switzerland), Pinault Collection, Venice (Italy), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (Germany), Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA), Antwerp (Belgium), Sammlung Verbund Collection, Vienna (Austria) and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection, Vienna (Austria).

# Related activities

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## **MUSEUM TALK**

**With Agustín Pérez Rubio, independent curator and Helena López Camacho, curator of the show**

Dates: March 9, 2023

Hour: At 6:30 p.m.

## **GUIDED TOURS**

### **Inaugural guided tour**

With Helena López Camacho, curator

Dates: June 4, 2022

Hour: At 6 p.m.

### **Thematic guided tours**

Dates: November 27, December 4, 2022, March 5, April 2, April 23, May 14, 2023

Hour: At 6 p.m.

### **Simultaneous guided tour in Spanish Sign Language/**

Dates: January 13

Hour: At 7 p.m.

**MUSAC**

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de Castilla y León



**Junta de  
Castilla y León**