

**City of Sand**  
**David Bestué**  
**10.6.23-22.10.23**

Curated by Marta Sesé.

Fabra i Coats:  
Centre d'Art  
Contemporani

Ajuntament de  
**Barcelona**





A huge storm washes up tins and plastic from the past forty years onto the sand of the beach. These materials reached the sea in many different ways, perhaps through the drains, now materially more sophisticated than hundreds or thousands of years ago. The remnants of a mediaeval well, now in a construction sack in the storeroom of a museum, hold different vestiges that make it possible to discover the daily habits of people who were here long before we were. Close to Estació de França, a series of excavations carried out below sea level, for the construction of housing, uncovered fragments of a mediaeval boat, which have now been turned into a museum piece. At a junction beneath the Ronda de Dalt ring road, close to the Vall d'Hebron Hospital, piled in a corner, are large pieces of concrete that were once part of the Olympic Archery Field, designed by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós for the Olympic Games. In the centre of Barcelona, on Paradís street, a mill wheel embedded in the ground marks the highest spot —just over 16 metres above sea level— of what was the Roman city, mount Tàber. David Bestué, who had all these references at the forefront of his mind when conceptualising this exhibition, sees this wheel as an element that devours everything, crushing the city, turning it into sand.

For *City of Sand*, David Bestué proposes a shift in the way we look at the city of Barcelona. Understanding it as material and symbol, the artist contrasts the projected dream idea of city —ambitious urban projects in model form or the conception of the city from a viewpoint of progress and technological advances— with popular and counter imagery —in the shape of images in the press, revolts and cries that go against the grain, set out in newspapers, which become shared impressions in the collective subconscious of all those who inhabit the city. In a way, Bestué builds a contra-history out of what can be found on the fringes, using the scraps, remnants and debris.

Rather than constructing new imagery, *City of Sand* establishes a framework for playing with the troubled, disturbed times —the un-lived and recent pasts, the presents and the futures to come— so as to find the *seeds* from which imageries of the city —and sculpture— can be harvested, like a place of possibility and strength. Although in many cases he works with deconstructed materials, using objects pulverised to grade zero, his sculptural work is compositional and propositional. In an analogy with poetry, which is continuously referenced and has accompanied Bestué throughout his career, his conception of time —the summoning of historical times— through sculpture can be linked to that of Juan Ramón Jiménez's through writing: “[...] a writing on time, a memorial fusion of ideology and anecdote, with no chronological order; like the never-ending

string of my life, unravelled backwards”.<sup>1</sup> The exhibition brings together new and recently produced work that integrates, in its formation, material elements connected to the city that, somehow, capture its most effective and poetic life. There are also works of diverse authorship that have been loaned by various institutions and that, in one way or another, bear the collective image of Barcelona.

On the ground floor, elements from pasts not lived by the artist are displayed. Bestué brings together, without hierarchy or order, a series of objects and materials that, as a whole, form a sort of (broken) museum of curiosities, in which different historical and undefined times are mixed together. It is not about specific forms of the past, but about the past in its unpolished form. Two triangles —a reference to Ulrich Rückriem’s granite wedges installed in Pla de Palau— made of shredded newspaper, of city waste, welcome us; an account with the last sample collected of *Stachys maritima*, a plant that grows and lives on sand dunes and which is now extinct in Barcelona; and a reel of rope made from shredded palm trees, which refers to the textile origins of the factory where the exhibition is being held. All coexist, together with other elements, beneath lighting provided by a re-creation of Montjuïc’s Font Màgica lighting system and an MBM-2 wall light.

The images, rarely seen before in Bestué’s exhibitions, despite being continually present in his work processes and publications, take centre stage on the first floor. We are in a timeframe that spans, approximately, from 1979 to 2011, from the first democratic city council to the *end* of an era and the beginning of a new political paradigm with the 15M movement. Bestué has made a sweep of all the editions of the *La Vanguardia* newspaper from this period. This exercise —contrary to the inertness of sculptural material— is a way of working with time, with facts, bringing them to the present. The four projections —*destruction, models, contra* and *threads*, the latter understood as a way of spinning themes that remain constant throughout this enormous reading— are at odds with the set of models, which are representative of the projected, ambitious, ideal city. Thousands of images that reflect a kind of change in the city’s mood, as well as a loss or disfigurement of its image. The rhythm of the projections is also accompanied by music, composed by Hidrogenesse, a popular song that points to some of the events that form part of the imagery.

The present and the power of the future occupy the upper floor. Illuminated, for the first time, with natural light, this room holds fresh, living materials. A wall, partially covered with the petals of different flowers found in the city, merges with the horizon; sugared pears hang above us; a wishful back, made of city waste such as newspaper, bougainvillea

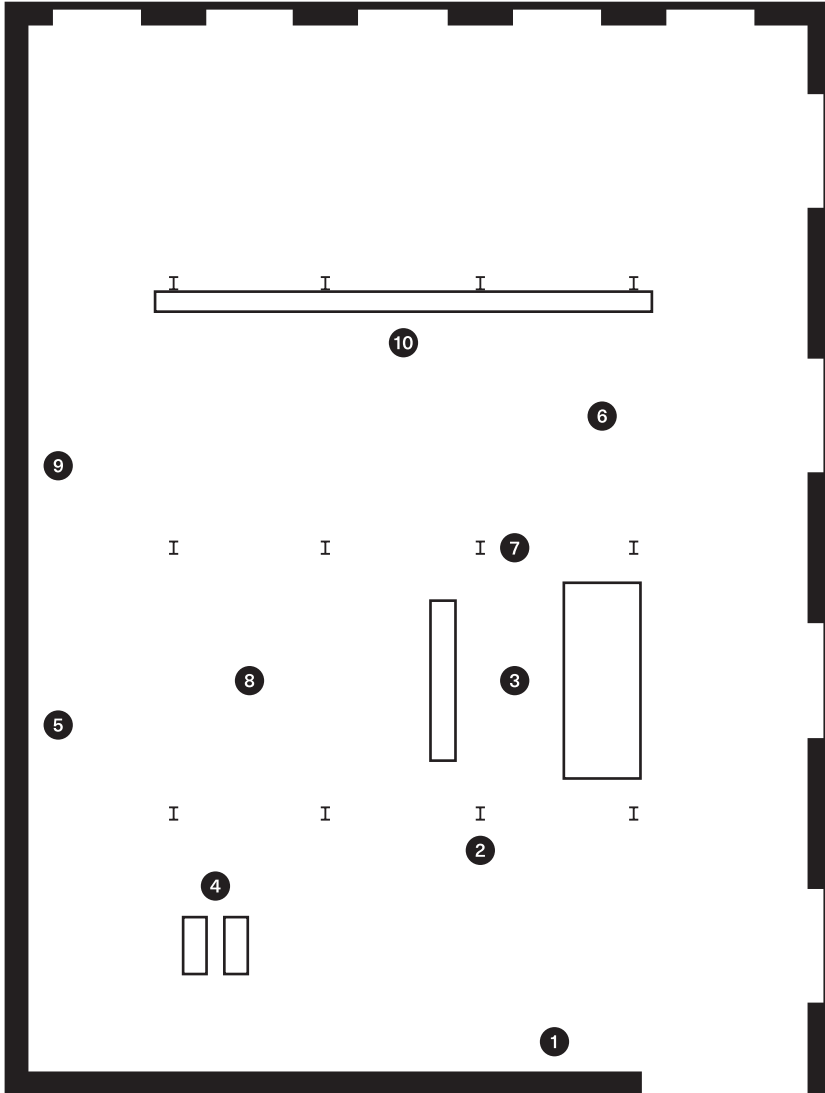
and fragments of stone from a facade; the pillars envelop us in eroticism and desire because, as with the poetry of Olvido García Valdés,<sup>2</sup> Bestué's sculptural research for *City of Sand*, at the same time *retains* (registering, pointing out what is unjust at a time in which we live in a continuous present) and *releases* (projecting desire, pleasure and, why not, a kind of conciliation or optimism for whatever is to come).

For Bestué, the *seed* is an element that revolutionises the environment, transforms reality and makes a future possible, like finding the catalyst for crystallising resin, a detonator.

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1 Letter from Juan Ramón Jiménez to Enrique Díez-Canedo, dated 6 August 1943, explaining the creation of his long poem in prose *Tiempo* (Time). JIMÉNEZ, Juan Ramón. *Cartas literarias*. Barcelona: Bruguera, 1977, pp. 65–66.

2 Olvido García Valdés is a poet whose creations closely accompany David Bestué's current period of research and artistic production. In *City of Sand* and in the exhibition that Bestué will open at the Patio Herreriano in Valladolid next July —both considered part of the same project despite each having specific idiosyncrasies— there are echoes of the poetry and thinking of García Valdés.



GROUND FLOOR

1.

*Net*, 2019

2.

*Box*, 2023

3.

Cement structure and iron bench from the Olympic Archery Field  
Horta-Guinardó District

Cement structure and iron bench that were part of Barcelona's Olympic Archery Field, designed by Enric Miralles and Carme Pinós and built for the Olympic Games. The Archery Field was originally next to the Vall d'Hebron Pavilion. Currently, part of the structure can be found dismantled in an empty plot beneath the Ronda de Dalt ring road.

4.

*Triangles of Shredded Newspaper*, 2023

These sculptures have been created using shredded newspaper and are based on the four wedges by German sculptor Ulrich Rückriem that can be found in Pla de Palau. Rückriem's sculptures, arranged in two pairs, were made in 1984 of Finnish granite and installed in Barcelona in 1992.

5.

*Font Màgica Lighting System*, 2023

Lighting system with colour filters made from the city's flowers, such as bougainvillea or mimosa. The mechanism refers directly to Montjuïc's Font Màgica, its magic fountain, built for the Universal Exhibition of 1929, by Carles Buigas.

6.

*Reel of rope made from shredded palm tree*, 2023

7.

*MBM-2 Lamp*

Wall light designed by Oriol Bohigas, Josep Maria Martorell and David Mackay in 1964 and produced for the first time in 1966.

8.

*Spheres of Waste*, 2023

These spheres refer to the Parc del Besòs, developed by Albert Viaplana and Helio Piñón between 1982 and 1984. In the park, the architects' first gesture was to create a long line of concrete balls that in turn were a reference to Joan Miró's painting *The Birth of the World* (1925).

9.

*Stachys maritima*, 1907

Botanical Institute of Barcelona

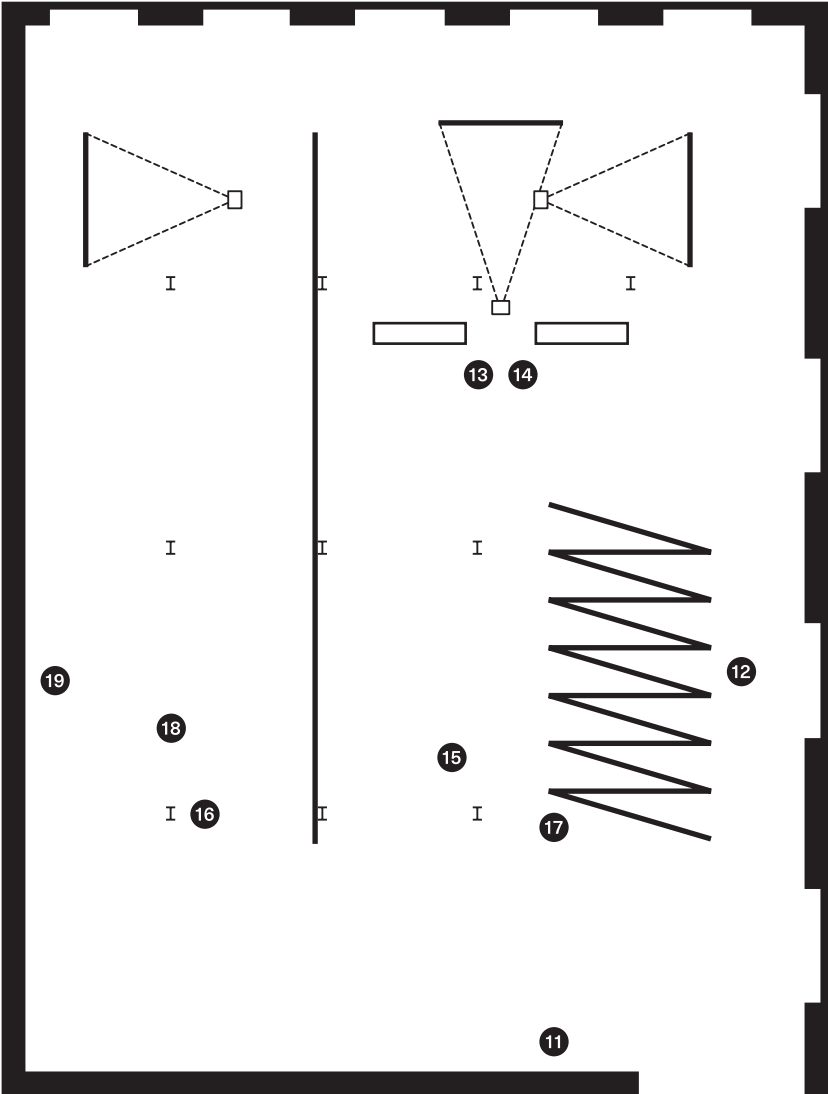
"BC-49051 *Stachys maritima* Gouan ESP B Barcelona, Can Tunis 3ITDF27 Casa Antúnez 00/07/1907 1907 M. Llenas FLORA CATALANA"

Last account from the Botanical Institute of Barcelona on *Stachys maritima* found in Barcelona, dated 1907 and collected in what is now Zona Franca. This is a perennial villous and rhizomatous plant, with a strong root system from which numerous leaves emerge. The plant was very common on the dunes and sandbanks of the city's coastline, particularly in the Poblenou district. It is now an endangered species in Catalonia and the only populations can be found in a handful of suitable spots along the Costa Brava.

10.

*Ramp of Salt*, 2023





1st FLOOR

11.

Photograph of the Olympic Archery Field, 2002

12.

Models Based on Zigzag Structures

Project model of Passeig de Colom and Moll de la Fusta,  
last quarter of 20th century, 1988.

Museu d'Història de Barcelona.

Project model of Palau Sant Jordi,  
last quarter of 20th century, 1988.

Museu d'Història de Barcelona.

Model of the Olympic Village: Super Unit 8,  
last quarter of 20th century, 1988.

Museu d'Història de Barcelona.

Project model of the Olympic Area in Vall d'Hebron,  
last quarter of 20th century, 1992.

Museu d'Història de Barcelona.

Model of the Plaza de Glòries ring road,  
last quarter of 20th century, 1990.

Museu d'Història de Barcelona.

Model of Parc de l'Escorxador (now Parc Joan Miró).

Project authors: Antoni Solanas, Beth Galí,

Màrius Quintana, Andreu Arriola.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

Model of the Lluís Companys monument in Fossar de la Pedrera.

Project author: Beth Galí.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

Model of Cel Caigut (sculpture in the Parc de l'Estació del Nord).

Project author: Beverly Pepper.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

Model of the special renovation plan for Carrer Tarragona, 1986.

Project authors: Jordi Garcés, Enric Sòria.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

Model of Via Júlia.

Project authors: Bernardo de Solà, Josep M. Julià.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

Model of the Collserola Communications Tower (tender).

Project author: Norman Foster.

Urban Ecology, Barcelona City Council.

13.

*La Vanguardia, 1979–2011 (destruction, models, contra, threads), 2023*

As a result of reading all the editions of the *La Vanguardia* newspaper published between 1979 and 2011, four chronologically ordered thematic groups have been created (the destruction of the city due to accidents or promoted by public and private power / the urban planning and architectural models and projects / the events in opposition, destruction and aggression by individuals against public and private power and specific collectives / a series of constant threads throughout the vast reading exercise, such as rent increases or the rise in tourism).

14.

*Ciutat de sorra, 2023*

Song by Hidrogenesse

15.

*Lamparaalta Streetlight*

Urbidermis

Reflected light streetlamp designed by Beth Galí and Màrius Quintana in 1983, in homage to Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. It is particularly suitable for park and garden areas and was a pioneering piece of reflected light.

16.

Fragment of the poem *Tiempo* by Juan Ramón Jiménez, 1941

17.

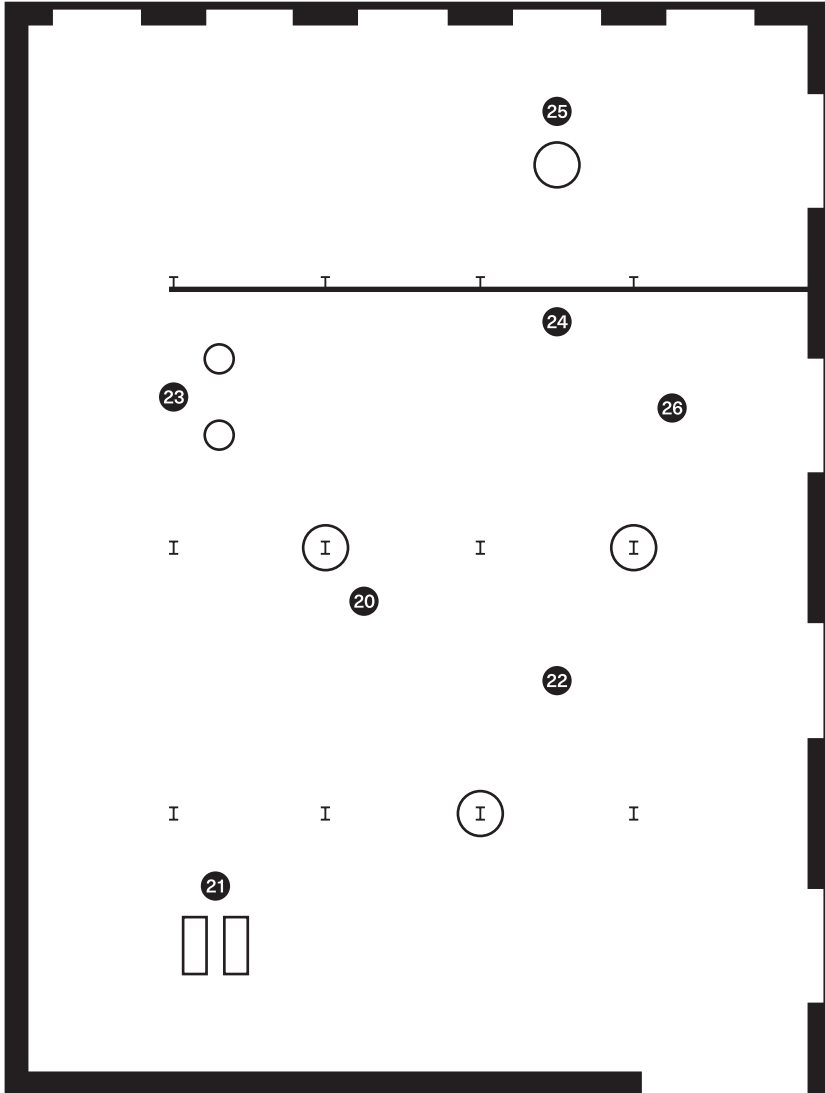
*Rose, 2023*

18.

*Disa lamp with newspaper cuttings, 2023*

19.

*Transition from Salt to Sand, 2019*



20.

*Pillars, 2023*

21.

*Holes of fat and bone, 2023*

22.

*Sculptures made from shredded newspaper, 2023*

23.

*Sugared pears, 2022*

24.

*Plasterboard wall partially covered with cornflower,  
jasmine and poppy petals, 2023*

25.

*Back, 2023*

26.

*Apple B, 2022*



Martí Llorens, *Beaches during the construction of the Olympic Village, 1988.*  
Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona.



## Dates and Times

Tuesdays to Saturdays, 12.00 to 20.00

Sundays and Holidays, 11.00 to 15.00

Guided tours, related activities and childcare services.

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