

By SHARMILLA GANESAN

Claudia Bueno has an instinctive affinity for light, and the many languages it can speak. The Venezuelan light artist, who has been working with the medium for seven years, excels at using light, darkness and shadows to create pieces that resonate with viewers on an intuitive level.

Currently based in Kuala Lumpur, Claudia debuted her work here earlier this year at Wei-Ling Contemporary, with two series called *Forgotten Cities* and *Extracto*. The former is a delicate reflection on modern urbanscapes in all their disorganized and dynamic glory, while the latter explores the convergence of nature and modern technology using a vivid combination of colours and light.

In *FIBERSPACE*, Claudia shines the light inward, with a site-specific light installation that is reminiscent of both our own nervous systems as well as the ever-present web of technology that links us to one another.

Hardened string is used to create a huge interwoven structure of intricate patterns onto which video images of fire and water are projected, evoking the idea of electrical impulses flowing through fibers. Towering to the top of the gallery space, yet open enough for one to wander through, the result is an experience that is both intimately familiar and hypnotically otherworldly.

We speak to Claudia about the journey that resulted in her creation of *FIBERSPACE*.

How much did the gallery space influence your idea for *FIBERSPACE*?

Earlier this year, (Wei-Ling Gallery owner) Lim Wei-Ling presented to me the idea of doing a site-specific art installation at the Brickfields gallery space, something that hasn't been explored much in Malaysia. I wanted the work to be born from the space I was given, rather than imposing an unrelated concept onto it. I think it's a very distinctive space, because of the

transit flow it has, and the three floors with an open middle section. Wei-Ling also told me its history – how it was once an antiques shop, that there had been a fire here, and how they've preserved some of the burnt pillars as a symbol of that memory – and, without being too literal about it, I wanted to incorporate some of these associations with the past.

Did you already know at that point what form your installation would take?

What I had in my mind at that early stage was very vague, however, there were hints, like the element of fire, that were pointing at potential leads. I started exploring possibilities, and this often takes two paths: the thought-processing development, and the hands-on experimentation. Sometimes, the two don't initially relate to each other, but as I go deeper into the creative process, brain and hands become find an ongoing synergy.

So I started experimenting with inks, watercolours, markers, paper and paint, which I hadn't done in years. For a long time, technology played an important role in the materialization of my art, until recently, when a change of location from Switzerland to Malaysia imposed a very different palette of media and materials that were now be available for my work.

As I engaged further into this process of playing in the studio, while also reading, looking at photos, sketching and taking notes, I started noticing my thought patterns, the outpouring of ideas, constant flashes and sparks of crisscrossing thoughts, the overwhelming absorption and processing of stimuli, the state of alertness... It was very dynamic and unstructured, and as I kept trying to grasp a concept that would define this project, it was this very process that became the concept. I became aware of it all and thought, why not visually present exactly this? Instead of finding reflections on surroundings, let's find inspiration in the more self-contemplative, the more intuitive. Because we're all people, we all identify with it. We are all similarly wired beings with a nervous system that keeps us functioning.

And so I dove into research on images of neuroscience, the nervous system, synapses, filaments, tissue, organic growths patterns and fibers. These were very appealing to me, and helped me shape the way in which I could visually present what I had in my mind.

And how did you come upon the idea of using threads in your installation?

That was one of those successful accidents that can become solutions if one is alert. One key element in the piece was the fact that I wanted to integrate fire, but didn't know how. There was, however, an experiment I was playing around with where I projected images of fire onto a large volume of paper cutouts. It didn't work at all, but if it hadn't been for that attempt, I wouldn't have seen the biggest hint I got for this installation. As I hung the cutouts, I used thread, and I noticed that when the fire was projected onto the thread, it looked as if sparks were moving through it. That caught my attention immediately.

So I refocused now on working with thread, but I was not satisfied with the way it naturally hung in a straight line; my work has always been organic and feminine. I experimented on how to create different patterns with thread, and finally found an epoxy resin that would harden the string in curvy lines.

By this point, the concept had come alive in my mind, and it was a fusion of the thread, the ink paintings, the organic aspect of the ink that runs freely, the images of fire and water and the video projections.

Once the concept was consolidated, the question was how to film the videos that were to be projected onto the thread networks, the pulsing of fire and the movement of water. My brother Adolfo Bueno (TKSH films) is a filmmaker based in Barcelona, and after understanding my vision for *FIBERSPACE*, he became a major collaborator by directing the filming and editing of the video clips. We ended up with three videos: water with waves and bubbles, burning alcohol with strokes and splashes, and charcoals with wind. His creative involvement was incredibly important in filling the installation with the sense of life I was pursuing.

Where did the name *FIBERSPACE* come from?

When I was doing the ink drawings, I was creating organic patterns of growth mixed with architectural details. It was that idea of mental space, of having rooms in your head, and how sometimes when you get an idea, your mind walks into a room, you explore the room, you bump against walls, you exit and go into another room. This idea of an intangible space reminded me of *cyberspace*, the virtual world of computer communications, digital networks and data.

I wanted to present a similar abstraction that would relate to our inner processes, our nervous system: a space that exists and can be measured by medical equipment; yet, we can't touch or see, but can very much feel. Fiber is used in many fields – textiles, neuroscience, technology – but ultimately, it's a conduit, a thread, a channel, a filament for something to travel through, a pathway.

What were the challenges involved in creating this installation?

This installation has been a large puzzle where many parts have had to come together. Given the scale, the materials and the technology involved, it required support from various participants. For me personally, the most challenging part was the creation of the thread networks. Every single thread in the piece had to be picked out, hand-dipped in the epoxy resin, and laid out in a specific place and pattern. I had the equipment, I had a schedule planned out, and I had a space to do it in. Then on the third day of working, I developed a severe allergy to the epoxy resin and couldn't even get close to it! At that point, there was no going back to try and reformulate the project, it just needed to be done.

Luckily, my husband Daniel noticed the crisis and got involved to lighten the workload. He mixed all the chemicals for me and helped with the making of the webs. I had to work wearing a chemical protective suit and a full-face respirator mask. Imagine this in the boiling humid weather of Malaysia, inside a suit that doesn't let your body heat out. It was unpleasant as well as dangerous. I had to figure out a way of wearing ice bags under my suit to keep from overheating.

Yes, it had gotten completely out of proportion by that point! It was physically challenging and tedious, and a very unexpected way to work on this intimate, inner concept

while having a plastic barrier between me and my own art. All I could do was take it as a meditative process, getting into a trance of throwing thread. And while I wouldn't look forward to it, it's one of those things that I would do again if I had to.

How do you situate *FIBERSPACE* within your existing body of work?

Being my latest and most ambitious project, I see *FIBERSPACE* as an art piece where many years of creative practice have blended into one complex exhibition. Each new body of work integrates fresh ideas and inspirations. Outside eyes may not always see the conceptual link between my works, but the intrigue I have as an artist and how it flows through my hands weaves a bond that, to me, connects them all.