

Laura Llaneli (Granada, 1986). She pursued Music Studies at the Sabadell Conservatoire and has a Diploma in Graphic Design. Furthermore, she holds a BA in Fine Art and a Master's Degree in Sound Art, both from the University of Barcelona (UB). She is a member of Sons de Barcelona and the groups Nenazas and the Grupo de Investigación Multifocal. In 2014, she was selected for Lo Pati – Eufònic, BCN Producció and Sala d'Art Jove. In 2013, she took part in Arts Sònica (Arts Santa Mònica), FAQ-Factotum (Fundació Antoni Tàpies), Drap-Art (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona – CCCB) and Eufònic. In 2012, she participated in the Fourth Performance Biennial Deformes (Chile), Festus Torelló y CurtCircuit Fest (Antic Teatre). She was a resident artist in L'Estruch, Sabadell, and is currently a resident artist in Hangar, Barcelona.

Her work explores the relationship between sound-music experience and production on the one hand, and contemporary visual art devices and practices on the other, laying an emphasis on the impact of variations on stable patterns and structures in certain cultural products. In the project *Bec quadro* (Natural Sign), she tests the staying power of pop sound as a social icon, builds a historic bridge between models of understanding music in the West and combines the tribute with a critical interpretation, alternating songs from recent pop music via a conventional system of musical notation.

- 1. Your training spans music in a conservatoire, graphic design, visual arts and sound art. Can you describe the process and progression when intertwining these creative aspects in a single body of work? What was the beginning and how have new disciplines and formats been articulated along the way?**

When it came to choosing the focus of my professional career, I very much wavered because I liked everything. First I wanted to pursue music professionally, though I soon focussed on technology and engineering; maths was always my favourite subject. In my final year before university I changed my baccalaureate strand overnight, from the technology to the artistic branch. It was one of the riskiest decisions I have ever made, as I was closing the doors to every field of engineering. Then I studied design, but it was not until the end of my Fine Art studies that the subject of sound began to rear its head. Now I think that maybe it did not matter what I chose at that time; I could have ended up in the same place, returning to the mathematical formula: the order of factors does not change the product.

- 2. In your overall working approach you place an emphasis on sustaining parameters and playing with the variation of some elements, whether sound, spatial, technical... Why do you consider variation on convention important as a vertex for the artistic practice you engage in?**

I believe that nothing that is given can be considered absolute. Everything reverberates convention, and I think it is variable and questionable. So I like to stretch things and see how far they bear up as they are. What would happen if what we take as real or true were variable? To what extent does it pull everything else to pieces? It's like a game of moving chips. What happens if I take this chip and put it here? Does the

tower collapse? I am interested in how small gestures exert an impact on a structure and the connotations this holds over the logic of what is usual.

- 3. The collecting of popular culture and everyday elements is a constant in your authorial line. How does this input take part in pieces fairly related to the technical and conceptual specificities of the disciplines and supports you use? Why is this intersection that runs through most of your projects notable?**

I tend to think in abstract and conceptually as regards lines and relations between elements, but I need these elements to be plausible so that these lines of theory that can fly over nothing settle on specific points. I am interested in what is popular and everyday because it is what I live with, what I have more at hand and the point from which I can generate approaches that are directed towards other places. Listening to music on the radio or seeing a score on the Internet makes me contemplate things; on the basis of these elements I can link other more philosophical or social themes of popular culture, thinking of sound technology, in the Internet as a medium... These anchor points act as nodes for establishing conceptual relations and opening up spaces of reflection.

- 4. The elements we spoke of can be clearly seen in the sequence of previous works that begin with *37 sobre 1* (37 on 1, 2010) up to the recent *No sé nada de Live Coding* (I Don't Know Anything about Live Coding), *Octavas* (Octaves), *Gnossienne No. 1* and *Dispersión botánica* (Botanical Dispersal), all carried out in 2013. Could you tell us about these or other projects and the specific questions you have explored through them? To what extent do they fix a line of development and establish a framework for the subsequent approach in *Becuario*?**

We see a common thread in all these projects: I start out from an element (melody, song), that we could say is solid, established, and I subject it to variation parameters. Popular variations through singing and memory, decoded *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, a separate music group. With *Becuario* I asked myself how to pursue this line of taking a musical piece apart by acting on a single element, changing something that was neither time nor space, as I had done before. What's more I asked myself what it meant for something like this to occur in a place such as Espai Cub. I was listening and reading lots about classical music and about which paths contemporary music had taken. I was curious about altering compositions through musical notation, something I had never done before. Then it was clear to me that it made sense to use the natural sign as the element in a space of these characteristics. What's more, when I performed *Gnossienne No. 1* at the Fundació Tàpies, I fell in love with a note that sounded different from the others in this space: it was a mi natural, I had a natural right in front of me...

- 5. In *Becuario* you propose altering the scores of recognisable pieces of music by applying this musical notation technique. Tell us what this mechanism entails and why you are interested in applying it.**

Applying the natural sign in front of any note that is altered via a sharp or flat makes it “natural” again. Sharps and flats alter notes and make them rise or fall by a half tone. When you apply the natural, this note returns to its original position, becoming a natural note. By way of clarification: if we think of the piano keyboard, the natural notes would be the white keys and the altered notes the black keys; applying the natural is the equivalent of playing the white keys only. I was interested in questioning harmonies, not as something new, but as something curious, with regard to songs that have accompanied me for some time. What would happen if scales and musical notes had not evolved like this? What would today’s compositions be like? In a way, I already spoke of this in *Octavas*, when I successively counted do-do#-re-re#-mi... Why are they still being called “octaves” if there are twelve notes? I was also interested in beginning to collect scores and speaking of notes, when most people are composing on the basis of synthesizers and frequencies. In many fields of music, notes are not even spoken of anymore.

6. From this exercise you have considered understanding the cube as a space of reduction. What are you referring to by this?

I imagined the cube as a giant natural; the natural is also a square figure. I found that both elements fitted in, in discourse and form. I thought of the Espai Cub as a space with a different ambiance inside La Capella, like a kind of Faraday cage or an anechoic chamber. A place in which, when you go inside, your perception of something changes. I speak of the cube as a space of reduction because any musical composition that enters it becomes a natural, in other words, it goes from playing with variables with twelve notes to playing with ones with seven.

7. In *Becuardro*, initially you considered working with paradigmatic classical music themes; however, during the process you decided to use pop songs from the sixties to the present day. What was the motive behind this decision? What do you think it contributed to the project?

My work always navigated between classical and pop. The scores I have always had and performed were classical music; that is why that happened in the beginning, because for me they went together. Once the process was initiated, something there bothered me: working with scores, piano and classical music was too tedious, dense, somewhat conventional and dull. Using classical music forced me to choose pieces that were too commonplace, those with greater public domain, so that the variations in my application of the natural were noted. This made me remain in something perhaps superficial and that did not quite interest me. So what material could I work with that was popularly recognised and would give me a little more freedom? This is when I decided to go for pop, which offered more styles and harmonies, and would make people connect faster with the project.

8. The *Becuardro* project is largely an experiment that revolves around the staying power of musical language, the capacity of a song to remain recognisable despite alterations. Why were you interested in gauging this tension? What do you think the result was once this experiment was carried out?

I am obsessed thinking why things are as they are and to what extent they can be. Pop is composed in such a way that the tunes stick in your mind, you hum them and they are part and parcel of your life. The results of *Becuerdo* vary according to the type of melody and harmony: in some songs it seems that nothing happened to them – the rhythm is so strong people do not notice the alteration –; others become different songs. I've come to really like some of them, such as *Videotape*, by Radiohead.

9. While developing the project you opted to leave the musical application on piano up to a performer. What lesson did you learn from this distancing? How do you think it contributed to *Becuerdo*?

While it is true that I performed all the tests myself to choose the themes and see how they underwent the modifications, I felt it appropriate that the recordings be made by another pianist. When you are playing yourself, you are more attentive to more technical matters while other things are overlooked. When someone else is playing, you are aware of the phrasing, the character, the tempo... particularly the styles and dynamics. What pop has is that it mixes jazz, rock, classical music and other genres, and it is played in different ways. Being off the piano implies a greater appreciation of these details that, after all, are really important, and being able to give this kind of performance instructions.

10. One of the latent elements in the installation is the presence of the piano as a common thread in pop songs. What meaning and relevance does this instrument have today in pop music? Why was the piano important in *Becuerdo*?

In this case the piano acts as a hinge between classical and pop music. Unlike more modern instruments, key instruments in pop – such as the bass and the electric guitar, or the drums –, the piano is the only quintessential classical instrument that is still being constantly used in this music genre. It is common to find ballads incorporating piano and great classical introductions in exceedingly rock records in which piano did not previously feature. This is the case, for instance, of the intro in *November Rain*, by Guns N' Roses. Axl Rose, with his fingers stiffened, plays an instrument that does not correspond to him to enter a genre that denotes a certain value. I could be wrong, but I think that piano is *the* noble instrument in the collective imaginary, bound up with academic or status connotations associated with the person playing it. In the world of art, it has always been the most attacked instrument; let's remember Fluxus, in their numerous actions, destroying it. For me, working with the piano in pop music, seeing how it draws closer to it, has also been an exercise at personal level: disentangling this instrument from the strictly classical genre.

11. Other matters related to your approach are how the relationship between consumption and the music industry is articulated, musical scores as a system of transmissibility of music, or the collective as a progressive formula of sound production. What do you think is important to highlight in these issues?

I think that the score as "the element" in which making music last is part of some elite circles. Not knowing how to read or write a score is not synonymous with not being

able to make music. In the conservatoire they make you see that the score is essential, but with time you realise that there are people that do not work like that. I think this always happened, but now with Internet, everything is faster. You can visit a YouTube channel and follow a tutorial that teaches you how to play the piano in repetition modules based on the keyboard; no written notation. You can thereby skip the step of reading a score, and so the music is not as fixed, it is more movable and organic, and everyone can add something, an element of personal taste or to facilitate the performance. I understand this – which was already present in my work in pieces such as *37 sobre 1* (37 on 1) – to be like a collective form of composition. In any case, if we look, we always find the score of the pop song we want. This, unlike what happens in classical music, is not written in parallel to the audio, nor beforehand. According to what I have found out, the score in pop is generated afterwards. Once the song is circulated, the actual record companies commission someone with generating this score for its marketing. They are generally simpler, adapted to the public that listens to this music and who, generally speaking, are not professional singers or musicians. If it is not record companies it is people – like those that create the channels on YouTube – who generate this material to share. That's why I return to the idea of music as a collaborative art: some generate and perform it, others write it and others perform it again.

12. The Espai Cub installation is highly sensory: visually, sound and plastic wise... What importance does sensory experience have in your work in general? How has the public responded to this space of immersion?

Music is highly sensorial; people connect to it quickly. Though my work concentrates on contemporary art circuits, I think it is important to maintain this sensitive implicit connection in music. On working with musical and sound material from this other field – though I do not believe they are separate –, I can generate this conceptual layer that my projects are impregnated with, a substrate of significance beyond the sensitive plane of music. Let's say you can draw close to the installation first in a sensory manner, through something more intuitive, more "alive" and, once there, detect the other levels of meaning. Moreover, I am interested in the clean visual aesthetic; I think a piece should be as complete as possible as far as the finish is concerned. I do not sideline plastic arts or care in the design because my work speaks of sound – here I return to the sum of my different training again. The public response has been really good precisely because of the closeness of music and the meticulous aesthetics. Something that stood out on opening night, apart from the fact that Espai Cub was crowded for really long spells, was seeing people take selfies inside; that was the highlight.

13. In your opinion, what has the BCN Producció context contributed to the project and to your path?

BCN Producció surprised me positively on several levels. It is a place where you can really work professionally, both because of the space and the pleasant manner of the people involved. As regards the project, it was the first time that I encountered a

budget of this magnitude and such a large time margin before the exhibition, which allowed me to undergo phases I had never passed through before. I am used to working in a much faster manner, no sooner thought than done, with almost no budget, doing everything myself and getting by thanks to friends and borrowed stuff. Being able to think of which headphones to buy and there could be twenty identical ones, how I design the shelves for the scores, how I carry out transactions with companies, how I explain to the assembly technicians what I want from the installation... these are things that were difficult for me but which I have assumed in a gratifying manner. As regards my career, BCN Producció has given me a professional framework when working and taking decisions, and this has constituted progress for me.

14. Tell us about your upcoming projects.

Right now I am working on the project *Why Patterns?*, which I am presenting in September at the Sala d'Art Jove and that I had begun before *Becuardro*, though which is being significantly influenced by it. I deal with the compositional patterns of American minimalist music from the sixties but through gesture: how to bring these patterns to repetition movements. These movements are those of the instrumentalist before the instrument: what finger exercises must a pianist do beyond the piano to exercise their muscles, which parts should be tensioned or not when playing, and the same as regards violinists, percussionists and saxophonists. The intention is to create choreographies, but we will see where the process leads. In parallel, and while *Becuardro* is ongoing, I wish to edit, both in the paper and sound publication, the projects I have done thus far: *bandcamps*, records, printed book... Generating this material that remains after the exhibitions is important and, in my case, identifying the formats that best meet every project is essential.