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IN INGLESE - The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents [2020/03/15], a project by the artist José Manuel Ballester

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The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents **José Manuel Ballester [2020/03/15]**, which will be open to the public over the next three months. The project consists of a series of photographs taken by the artist around the deserted streets of locked-down Bilbao last spring, exhibited alongside *About the Guernica*, 2009/2020 by Ballester, an emptied-out version of Picasso's painting that conveys a contemporary perspective on the historical event and human tragedy. This project as a whole offers a reflection on the consequences of serious events such as wars or pandemics. Thus, the dialogue between the 'emptied out' Guernica and the photographs of the apparently uninhabited city presents the viewer with an interesting and open reflection.

This project bears witness to the period of lockdown through a selection of large-scale photographs that reflect the deserted streets and spaces of Bilbao such as La Salve Bridge, Elcano, the Metro and Calle Bailén, casting an almost unreal image that could represent the current situation anywhere in the world. In the words of Ballester, "The human absence on the streets created unusual images of totally empty roads, avenues, and squares, but the most disturbing part was knowing that all the inhabitants were there, that they were just a few meters from me, protected within the walls of their homes. Despite being so close, silence reigned supreme."

This portrait of the uninhabited city has many parallels with the artistic vision José Manuel Ballester has been developing for years through his impressive series of works called *Hidden Spaces*, in which he reinterprets key paintings in the history of art devoid of their characters, giving them a new artistic and human sense.

About the Guernica is a photographic reproduction printed on linen, the same size as Picasso's original canvas, digitally treated to empty the space of all its human characters. Thus, the architectural interior, with its interplay of light and shadow, remains a silent witness to the bombing of Gernika in 1937. Ballester shifts Picasso's chosen time sequence to a later time, in which all of the protagonists have disappeared, but in which, in the artist's words, "the signs of the inhuman remain, as do the flames of the fire that still burns, like the flower that blossoms from the sword".

The experience provided within the museum itself is complemented by a digital project that develops the concept of emptiness so strongly present in Ballester's work, accessible from the Museum's website. In addition, a book has been published that includes the series of twenty photographs taken by the artist in the streets of Bilbao alongside his reinterpretation of Picasso's work, with comments by Carlos del Amor.

A Collaborative Project

This project is presented to the public in a time of restrictions. After the lockdown and the Museum temporary closure last spring, current mobility constraints and economic difficulties make it hard for initiatives to move forward. It is in these challenging times when collaborations and the sum of efforts acquire new value, working together to make a project become a reality.

[2020/03/15] José Manuel Ballester would have been impossible without the generous collaboration of three companies: Estudios Durero has been responsible for the production of the large-scale photographic reproductions with special high-quality printing solutions, in addition to the creation and publication of a homonymous book; Giroa-Veolia has carried out the installation and lighting of the works in the special context that we are going through, and LIN3S has developed the digital experience that, for the first time in the Museum, shows in an innovative way not only the pieces presented in the Museum space, but also some others by the artist that complete his project for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

Hidden Spaces in the Museum Collection

José Manuel Ballester's intervention on Guernica and on the other works included in the Hidden Spaces series is, in his own words "an attempt to bring into the present moment the events that motivated the creation of these works and to equate them with the current conflicts that exist in the world. These are events that scandalise and move us, but, at the same time, they fade away in our consciousness when they are far away." "When you strip paintings of their characters, you're faced with a desolate, absurd landscape that brings out the horror in the wake of human savagery."

Three works by José Manuel Ballester belonging to the Hidden Spaces series are present in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection: The Third of May (2008), The Royal Palace (2009) and The Raft of the Medusa (2010). These works are reinterpretations, respectively, of The 3rd of May 1808 (1814) by Francisco de Goya, Las Meninas (1656) by Diego Velázquez, and The Raft of the Medusa (1818-19) by Théodore Géricault.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Session of bertsos Hustuari Hitzak (Words about Emptying Out) (December 21) Renowned bertsolaris Andoni Egaña and Maialen Lujanbio will offer a session of bertsos from the Museum gallery that houses the work About the Guernica and José Manuel Ballester's images of uninhabited spaces. This session will be accessible via streaming.

A Conversation (January 14)

Artist José Manuel Ballester, curator Petra Joos, and journalist Carlos del Amor will discuss the most relevant aspects of this unique project in a talk that can be followed both in person at the Museum Auditorium and via streaming.

www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus