

"LA CAIXA" COLLECTION / CALL FOR CURATORS

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Exhibition IN FREE FALL

Produced by	"la Caixa"
Judges of the 4th Call for Curators	Marta Almeida Àngel Calvo Martí Manen Antònia M. Perelló Ane Rodríguez Armendariz
Curator	João Laia
Exhibition design	Pep Canaleta (3carme33)
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4 IN FREE FALL JOÃO LAIA

4.2 LIST OF WORKS

4.6 BIOGRAPHY

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“The image of falling has always made a deep impression on western culture. It comes from some remote theological origin, but is also linked to a primeval desire to escape from the gravitational forces that cause all bodies to fall to earth. The fall then was just a moment, dramatic but fleeting, of ascension or elevation. In modern times the image of falling has undergone a considerable change [...] ever more important to understand as a culture of the ‘non-material’ or the ‘intangible’ increasingly takes over.”

—José A. De Bragança

“Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness.”

—Hito Steyerl

“HERE is no more. Everything is NOW.”

—Paul Virilio

In Free Fall uses the image of falling as a metaphor for the climate of accelerated transformation we are living through: the gradual dematerialisation of images, narratives and objects that used to be a fundamental base for our society led to a generalised feeling of facing the abyss. This project uses the concept as a structural tool, incorporating different temporal, geographical and symbolic contexts into a single narrative. The proposal is based on works created since 1969 and up to the present time and goes back to the ending of the Bretton Woods agreement in 1971 and the resulting

dematerialisation of the economy as a decisive event of our times. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello point out, “The deregulation of financial markets, their decompartmentalization, and the creation of ‘new financial products’ have multiplied the possibilities of purely speculative profits, whereby capital expands without taking the form of investment in productive activity.”¹ Using this central event for the financialisation of our societies (understood as the driving force behind the different processes of dissolution that are happening) as a starting point, *In Free Fall* approaches the current moment by putting subjective dynamics into context within the heart of widespread social movements. Àngels Ribé’s *Laberint* [Labyrinth] (1969 [2019]) is a key piece in the exhibition. Its spiral shape embodies the position of exploring the precipice in the project and the rhizomatic relationship between the themes we are looking at: by preventing a straightforward progression in the space, the barrier it puts up is evocative of recent geographical and political divisions; its plastic texture makes us think of its origins in oil and works as an indicator of the extractive model that rules over our societies and of the climatic consequences of this system; its translucent nature condenses the regime and the current ways of visibility and controls, marked by the idea of transparency; its penetrable aspect indicates furthermore the fluid borders that govern our day to day in material and symbolic terms, such as for example the system of constant activity we are subjected to: permeability and transparency as symptoms of the destruction of privacy. So overall these features suggest the instability of current times and the resulting sense of disorientation, causing anxiety and alienation, as the psychosomatic experience of *Laberint* embodies.

1

Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1999. [English version: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Gregory Elliott, Verso Books, London-New York, 2017.]

Ones gravitacionals [Gravitational Waves] (2019), by Eduard Escoffet, is another essential part of *In Free Fall*. Like *Laberint* this piece outlines a fluid structure in the spatial-time world of the exhibition. By taking over the audio guide as a means of artistic creation and subverting its possible explanations, Escoffet presents a series of sound gestures that enter into dialogue with the other works. The poet’s collection of pieces broadens the symbolic universes of the different works and so opens up alternative mental spaces. A hybrid movement between the intangibility of the sound experiment and the physical dimension of the viewers’ bodies, Escoffet’s intervention turns into a ghost that, like the spectre of the abyss, is a surprise in the exhibition. In a similar way, though within the confines of its space, Dara Birnbaum and Dan Graham’s video *Local TV News Analysis* (1980) pollutes the space with its analysis of the rhetoric of television news programmes. The piece creates a confused atmosphere that echoes the situation today, notable for “alternative facts”, “fake news” and deepfakes, where “truth isn’t truth” and reality competes with fiction. Runa Islam’s 16 mm film, *Assault* (2008) is a mirror-hallucination that receives the visitor in the exhibition’s universe showing and provoking psychologically disturbed emotions. The androgynous character reflects the growing affirmation and visibility of different gender types, which in conjunction with the manipulations of the film, could also be interpreted as a representation of the conservative forces that still today try to silence these dynamics. This work is in itself an example of the centrality of an integrated body, mind and emotional experience that the exhibition as a whole is aiming to show. Rosemarie Trockel uses repetition in *Untitled* (1985–1988), grouping together two images–narratives inside one context. The commercial logos of Pure Wool/Woolmark and Playboy show the contrasting positions historically imposed on women: housewife and object of sexual desire. The coexistence of the two portraits and their transformation into a grid illustrate the dynamics of commercialising the female condition and act as a criticism of the patriarchal and heterosexual economics that continue to dominate our societies, taking a similar approach to the thinking behind *Assault*.

Hong Kong Shanghai Bank (1994), by Andreas Gursky, also offers an analysis of the socio-economic structure in which we live. By portraying the building at night and from a view point half-way up, two factors that play with the

scale of the object, the image changes into an architectural and visual document produced by the speculative financial model, increasingly abstract as a result of its gradual distancing from real life. The generic nature of skyscrapers also speaks to us about the territorial insecurity characteristic of the economy today, a visible movement, for example, in the suppression of local specifics by the so-called international style and of the growing importance and interest in international finance in islands and offshores, which often act as tax havens, all concepts-images laden with meaning and free of any geolocation or geolocatable components. **Iman Issa's** display cabinet *Material for a Sculpture Commemorating an Economist whose Name Now Marks the Street and Squares He Once Frequented* (2011) continues this pondering on the abstract character of contemporary societies, in dialogue with both Trockel's analysis of gender and with the abstract spatial-visual expression of neoliberalism found in Gursky's image. This piece, which comprises a series of objects, like a pair of binoculars, a pocket watch and albums of black and white photographs, activates a humanising process of the person being remembered, thus becoming a counter-monument opposing the generic nature of historic narratives, and is remarkable for its plasticity and ideological structure.

The Otolith Group's video *The Radiant* (2012) continues the analysis of historic dynamics. Using the Fukushima disaster that took place on 11 March 2011 as a starting point, the video creates a global network of relationships that show the interdependence between ecology and economy, exploring and identifying different possibilities for representing radioactivity and analysing its political echoes. Paul Virilio's parallels between the material disintegration of nuclear fission and the initial stages of historic breakdown through the "global interactive brain"² seem to be a reference to this universe, in which he also confronts the progressive deterritorialisation of reality by, for example, substituting the notion of place with the idea of connection or the codification and the growing financialisation of territory, converting biosphere into technosphere. Using the way in which intense digital intervention is transferring actions and events to a place that is external to human time and with this movement breaking down the usual scales of space and time, *The Radiant* plays with alternative forms of interacting with and interpreting the planet. The exhibition's historic reflection continues with the coexistence between

2

Paul Virilio, *Le Grand Accélérateur*, Éditions Galilée, Paris, 2010.
[English version: *The Great Accelerator*, translated by Julie Rose, Polity, Cambridge, 2012.]

the works of Georg Baselitz, Andreas Gursky and June Crespo. Gursky's photograph, a portrait of Thebes, shows the malleability of the past through archaeology and tourism and reflects on its degree of fiction, particularly in terms of its relationship with mass tourism. The dialogue between *Theben, West* [Thebes, West] (1992) and *The Radiant*, as well as the current ecological crisis, define the image as a landscape of Anthropocene, a document about the kind of development that involves extraction and pollution.

Through his expressive though lightly detailed figures in *Schwarze Mutter mit schwarzem Kind* [Black Mother with Black Child] (1985), **Georg Baselitz** addresses the multiple human condition of being a woman, a mother and black. Although this is about classical situations/subjects, in the current context of movements such as Black Lives Matter or the migrations in the Mediterranean Sea, the storylines in this piece become doubly potent as they reach our society. As is usual in the work of **June Crespo**, the sculptures *Instrumentos y fetiches* [Instruments and Fetishes] and *Helmets (VII)* (2019) make up a sensitive and sensual analysis of contemporary models for representing the female condition. Here it is seen in her use of objects like high-heels, a choice which illustrates Crespo's interest in specific and symbolic contexts in which the body moves and alters, expressing at the same time the composite character of daily life. In dialogue with the images of Baselitz and Gursky, Crespo's sculptures broaden their material analysis of the female condition within the digital context: in the near future, their anti-monumental aura could turn into an almost archaeological remains-affirmation of contemporary society. *The Audience* (2010), by **Pedro Barateiro**, an

installation made up of a series of sculptures, bids the visitors farewell, alluding to different kinds of production and reception of speech in the public space and to the current breaking up of this kind of debating platform. The titles and layouts of the different elements in this work link up with the daily activities of citizens, echoing contemporary games such as LARP (live action role-playing) and illustrate the construction of identifying codes related to the politics that establish good or bad taste, materialising in power and representation dynamics.

Linking in with *The Audience*, one can hear again the comments coming from *Local TV News Analysis*. This reappearance underlines the interactive and theatrical dimension of the audience-installation and the need for civic self-awareness on a daily basis. This return also indicates the circular nature of the exhibition, as defined by *Laberint*, which in itself becomes a reference to being in a loop, seen and integrated as a symptomatic structure of the contemporary human condition. As a whole, the exhibition analyses different activities and narratives that give structure to the present and make an orchestral map of the current state of things. It offers a large constellation that investigates the profiles of reality, formerly stable, and portrays the present moment in all its macro and micro breadth, observing the transformations taking place in the fields of science, ecology, economy, geography, identity, politics and representation. Despite this context of threatened dissolution, the project is not proposing paralysing or nihilistic apathy, but, far from it, potentiality an opening to the future. On the one hand, this lack of definition indicates the almost total financial colonisation of life, domesticating the difference through a frictionless universal compatibility

3

Martha Rosler, "Why Are People Being So Nice?", *e-flux*, 77 (November 2016).

referred to by Martha Rosler³ and formulating an indifferent, non-historic temporary nature typical of the present continuous of update. On the other hand, and being undefined, the circumstances also suggest a change is happening now, so therefore not yet defined, at the heart of which, although no community has presented itself, there is a moment in suspense in which different formations could possibly get established, which would open various future hypotheses. So, in this way, *In Free Fall* is using the field of art as a forum for looking at different ways of reading and interacting with the world, thereby showing in this process how it belongs to a social field in constant evolution and proposing productive immersion in the now.

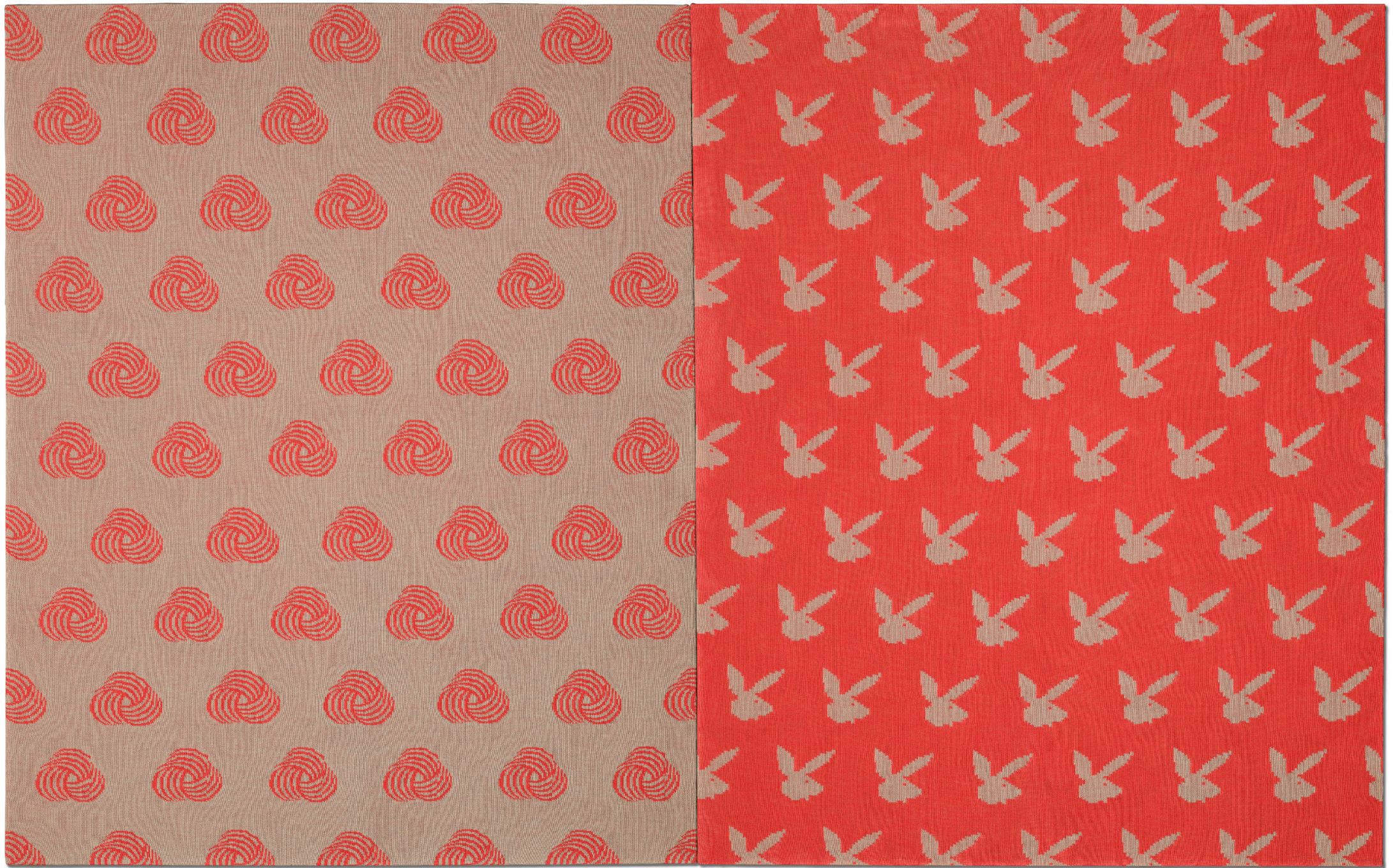


ÀNGELS RIBÉ *Laberint*, 1969 (2019)

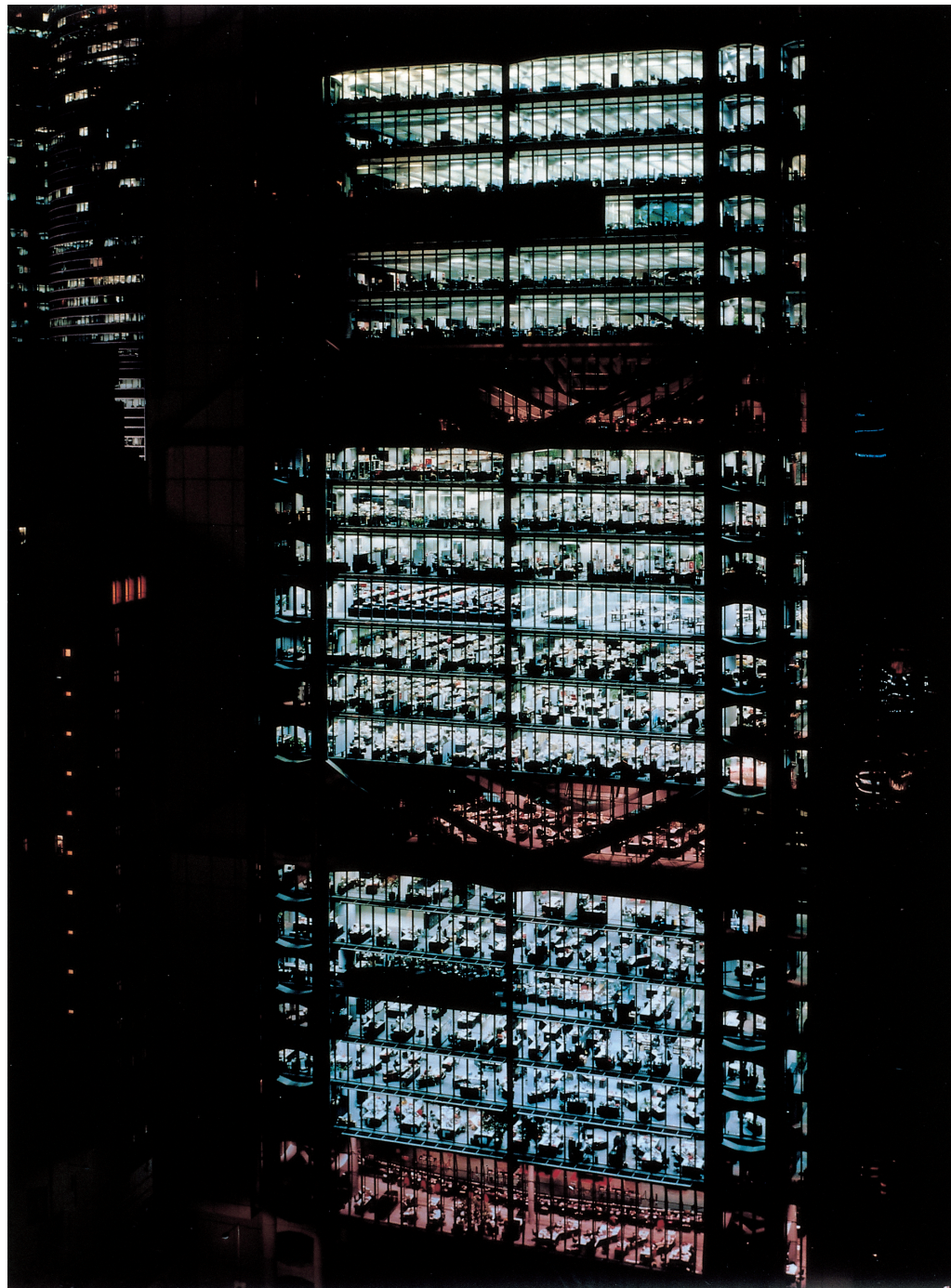




RUNA ISLAM *Assault*, 2008



ROSEMARIE TROCKEL *Untitled*, 1985-1988



ANDREAS GURSKY *Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, 1994*



Material for a sculpture commemorating an economist whose name now marks the street and squares he once frequented





ANDREAS GURSKY *Theben, West*, 1993



GEORG BASELITZ *Schwarze Mutter mit schwarzem Kind*, 1985



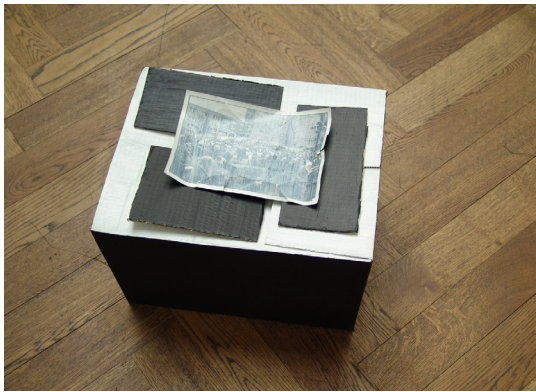
JUNE CRESPO *Instrumentos y fetiches*, 2019



JUNE CRESPO *Helmets (VII)*, 2019



PEDRO BARATEIRO *The Audience*, 2010



PEDRO BARATEIRO *The Audience*, 2010 (Selection of pieces)



PEDRO BARATEIRO *The Audience*, 2010 (Selection of pieces)



LIST OF WORKS

PEDRO BARATEIRO

The Audience

2010
19 sculptures
A range of materials
Variable dimensions
"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

GEORG BASELITZ

Schwarze Mutter mit schwarzem Kind

[Black Mother and Black Child]
1985
Oil on canvas
330 x 250 cm
"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

DARA BIRNBAUM + DAN GRAHAM

Local TV News Analysis

1980
Single-channel video, colour, sound
61 min 8 s
MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium

JUNE CRESPO

Instrumentos y fetiches

[Instruments and Fetishes]
2019
Bronze and ceramic coating
210 x 45 x 31 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Helmets (VII)

2019
Steel, bronze, ceramic coating
and textiles
54 x 50 x 33 cm
Courtesy of the artist

EDUARD ESCOFFET

Ones gravitacionals

[Gravitational Waves]
2019
Idea, development and text:
Eduard Escoffet
Voices: Eduard Escoffet (Catalan,
Spanish and phonetical work),
Barbara Held (English)
Translation of spoken texts:
la correccional (serveis textuais)
Recording, editing and mastering:
Pablo Miranda (Laisla Estudio)
Courtesy of the artist

ANDREAS GURSKY

Hong Kong Shanghai Bank

1994
Colour photograph
184.5 x 136 cm
"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

Theben, West

[Thebes, West]
1993
Colour photograph
183 x 144 cm
"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

RUNA ISLAM

Assault

2008
16 mm film, colour, silent
5 min 31 s, in loop
"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

IMAN ISSA

*Material for a Sculpture
Commemorating an Economist whose
Name Now Marks the Street and
Squares He Once Frequented*

2011

A range of materials

Vitrine: 215 x 156 x 58 cm

MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation

THE OTOLITH GROUP

The Radiant

2012

Single-channel video, colour, sound

64 min 14 s

MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation.

Executive producers

ÀNGELS RIBÉ

Laberint

[Labyrinth]

1969 (2019)

Polyvinyl chloride

300 x 1,000 cm in diameter

MACBA Collection. MACBA Consortium.

Long-term loan of the artist

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL

Untitled

1985-1988

Woollen fabric

Diptych: 201 x 320 cm

"la Caixa" Contemporary Art Collection

B I O G R A P H Y

JOÃO LAIA

João Laia is the chief curator for exhibitions at Helsinki's Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. Recent exhibitions include *Vanishing Point* (2019) at Cordoaria Nacional, Lisbon; *Drowning in a Sea of Data* (2019) and *Transmissions from the Etherspace* (2017) at La Casa Encendida, Madrid; *foreign bodies* (2018) at P420, Bologna; *10000 anos depois entre Vénus e Marte* (2017-2018) at Galeria Municipal do Porto; *HYPERCONNECTED* (2016) at MMOMA (Moscow Museum of Modern Art) and *Hybridize or Disappear* (2015) at MNAC (Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado), in Lisbon. Laia co-curated the 19th and 20th editions of Videobrasil (2014-2018) in São Paulo. Other exhibitions, performance programmes and screenings were held at Xcèntric, at CCCB (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona); Galeria ZDB (Zé dos Bois) and MAAT (Museu de Arte, Arquitectura e Tecnologia), in Lisbon; DRAF (David Roberts Art Foundation), Delfina Foundation, South London Gallery and Whitechapel Gallery, in London; Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage, in Rio de Janeiro; Moderna Museet, in Stockholm; International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, and CAC (Contemporary Art Center) in Vilnius. In 2012-2013, Laia attended the post-graduate research programme CuratorLab at Konstfack, Stockholm, and in 2014 was part of the curatorial residency of Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, while co-directing the project space The Green Parrot in Barcelona (2014-2016). He edited *A Multiple Community* (Edições Sesc, 2018), co-edited Daniel Steegmann Mangrané's monograph *The Spiral Forest* (Mousse Publishing, 2018) and has published in magazines such as *Flash Art*, *Frieze*, *Mousse Magazine*, *Spike Art Magazine* and *Terremoto*.



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