

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on May 12, 2016

Eija-Liisa Ahtila: *The Annunciation*

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- Dates: May 12–August 28, 2016
- Curator: Lucía Agirre
- Film & Video Gallery (103)

From May 12 to August 28, 2016, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is proud to present the Spanish premiere of Eija-Liisa Ahtila's *The Annunciation* (*The Annunciation – Marian Ilmestys*, 2010). This will be the seventh work to appear in the Museum's Film & Video Gallery, inaugurated in 2014 and dedicated to video art, video installation, and the moving image.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila (b. 1959, Hämeenlinna, Finland) shot *The Annunciation* on the snowy Aulanko Nature Reserve in southern Finland during the winter of 2010. The installation consists of three projections which reenact a well-known passage in the Gospel of Luke (1:26–38) that narrates one of the most important themes in Christian iconography, which is also the central motif of some of the earliest paintings to successfully use perspective.

The first part of the work is shot in a matter-of-fact documentary style with digital cameras. It begins with a group of women who are preparing to stage the event of the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she will be the mother of God's Son. We see the test flight of the Archangel, the women discussing the various roles they have been assigned, and the woman who plays the part of Mary learning how to ride a donkey. We can also see different pictorial depictions of the encounter between the Virgin and the Archangel and Mary's reactions in them. At the end of the rehearsals, the artist changes the tone and medium, using 35mm film to show Gabriel gliding across a beautiful tulip garden and through a glass window into the real space of the actors—a moment of angelic intrusion in the ordinary world.

The piece ends with an idyllic image of the young woman cast in the role of the Virgin Mary, no longer garbed in the bright blue we associate with Renaissance Madonnas, accompanied by a donkey, while Townes Van Zandt's song "No Place to Fall" plays in the background. There is a clear contrast between the interior scenes, made to resemble the artist's studio where the set of the Annunciation reenactment was built, and the snow-covered landscape outside.

Although based on an existing script, the action and dialogue were adapted to each actor's individual presence during the filming process. All of the performers except two are non-professionals, and most of them are clients of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute's women's support services. The animal actors are a trained raven, two donkeys, and a group of carrier pigeons from a bird farm.

The underlying viewpoint in this *Annunciation* is Estonian biologist Jacob von Uexküll's (b. 1864; d. 1944) idea that the different worlds of living beings all exist simultaneously. This concept implies certain limits, because it means living with and next to others; the same idea is also used to explore the nature of miracles and the possibilities of perception and knowledge. In the work, the actors are engaged in a process of reconstructing the sacred and redefining the human through the divine and the animal.

About Eija-Liisa Ahtila

Eija-Liisa Ahtila studied filmmaking at the London College of Printing, UCLA, and the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. In 1990 she received the Young Artist of the Year Award in Tampere, Finland. Since then, she has won numerous grants and awards, including an AVEK award for important achievements in the field of audiovisual culture (1997), the Edstrand Foundation Art Prize (1998), a DAAD fellowship (1999), honorary mention at the 48th Venice Biennale (1999), the Vincent Van Gogh Biennial Award for Contemporary Art in Europe (2000), and a five-year grant from the Central Committee for the Arts (2001), as well as the Artes Mundi Prize (2006). Most recently, she was awarded the Prince Eugen Medal for outstanding artistic achievement (2009).

She participated in Documenta XI (2002) and the 50th Venice Biennale (2005), as well as the 5th Moscow Biennale (2013). Important recent solo exhibitions have been shown at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2015-16), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2012), the Jeu de Paume, Paris, and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Dusseldorf (2008).

Film & Video (Gallery 103)

The Film & Video Gallery is devoted to video art, video installations, and the moving image, both from the Guggenheim Museums and from other international collections. The gallery opened in March 2014 with Christian Marclay's installation *The Clock*. In June it featured Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson's *The Visitors*, and from October 2014 to March 2015, Rineke Dijkstra's video installation *The Krazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee), Liverpool, UK* was presented in this gallery. Between March and July, the film series *Thread Routes* produced by conceptual artist Kimsooja was on display, followed by Shahzia Sikander's *Parallax* from July to November 2015. Finally, from December 3, 2015, to April 24, 2016, the gallery hosted Singapore-born artist Ho Tzu Nyen's installation *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Cover image:

Eija-Liisa Ahtila

Marian Ilmestys – The Annunciation, 2010

3-channel projected high-definition installation with 5.1 channel audio
28 min., 25 sec.

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

For more information:

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All information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.es (press room).

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

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