

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on July 14, 2017

## **Georg Baselitz. The Heroes**

## Georg Baselitz. *The Heroes*

- Dates: July 14–October 22, 2017
  - Curators: Max Hollein, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco; Eva Mongi-Vollmer, Städel Museum Frankfurt; and Petra Joos, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
- 
- In 1965/66 Georg Baselitz, one of the most influential painters and sculptors of our time, developed his dramatic and paradoxical *Hero* paintings in a virtually explosive spurt of productivity. The forceful workgroup of the *Heroes* and *New Types* is widely regarded today as a key example of German art from the 1960s.
  - The fragile and paradoxical *Heroes* find their counterpoint in their form: the frontal depiction and central placement of the clearly outlined figure contrast with the wildness of the palette and the vehemence of the pictorial style.
  - The fact that the artist—who was just 27 years old at the time—decided to take on the subject of the “heroes” or “types” was quite provocative, as (male) heroism and its onetime exponents had been called into question by the war and its aftermath.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is pleased to present *Georg Baselitz. Heroes*, a monographic exhibition devoted to a series of paintings that depict vulnerable, defeated “heroes”, created in 1965/66 by one of the most influential artists of our time, Georg Baselitz. This show, organized by the Städel Museum Frankfurt in collaboration with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the Moderna Museet Stockholm, and the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, has assembled 60 paintings, drawings, and sketches from the series for the first time. Baselitz’s monumental, frenzied, defiant figures are an energetic statement of the artist’s self-assertion and identity that ran contrary to the prevailing artistic and ideological trends of his time. Establishing an ideal continuity between past and present, the exhibition in Bilbao (as in Rome) concludes with a selection of paintings from the *Remix* cycle that Georg Baselitz began working on in 2005, which includes *Heroes* and *New Types* from 2007 and 2008.

The artist has admitted, “What I could never escape was Germany, and being German.” In 1965, Georg Baselitz saw post-war Germany as a state of multifaceted destruction where ideologies, political systems, and artistic styles were up for discussion. This lack of order was very much in keeping with the artist’s own nature, and he chose to emphasize the equivocal aspects of his time from a skeptical perspective. His *Heroes* in their tattered battle dress possess an accordingly contradictory character, marked by both failure and resignation. The fact that the artist—who was just 27 years old at the time—decided to take on the subject of “heroes” or “types” was quite provocative, as (male) heroism and its onetime exponents had been called into question by the war and its aftermath.

The fragile and paradoxical *Heroes* find their counterpoint in form: the consistently frontal depiction and central placement of the clearly outlined figure contrast with the wildness of the palette and the vehemence of the pictorial style. Baselitz thus illustrated an unwelcome reality that challenged the story of success of the German Federal Republic's economic miracle by resorting to figuration, a supposedly obsolete form. Yet Baselitz was concerned with far more than general social issues—he was also reflecting on his own place in society.

Soldiers, shepherds, rebels, guerrilla fighters, and modern painters are the *Heroes* and *New Types* that Georg Baselitz produced in a burst of intensely solitary expressive productivity. Painted with vigorous brushwork where colors, lines, and figures rival each other in strength and intensity, these pictures portray a brand-new kind of hero.

Setting aside the positive image associated with the rhetoric of wartime and post-war propaganda, Baselitz's *Heroes* are the epitome of frailty, insecurity, and inconsistency. These giants in tattered uniforms stand out starkly, wounded and vulnerable, against a rubble-strewn background. Yet the feeling of despair is attenuated by the presence of an object, like an artist's palette, or the gesture of picking up a small cart, or a shred of countryside as if protecting the seeds of some future crop.

These figures are both tragic failure and a sign of hope: precious ambiguity expressed by a young man born in Germany before the demise of the Nazi regime, who later witnessed the division of his country into two irreconcilable halves and was unable to find a valid model for society in either of them.

In addition to showcasing nearly the entire cycle of *Heroes* or *New Types*, the exhibition also presents a selection of drawings and woodcuts on the same theme, as well as the earliest examples of Baselitz's "Fracture paintings" from 1966 in which the artist experimented with the reorganization of images that preceded the period of upside-down paintings.

According to exhibition curator Max Hollein, "The *Heroes* are both a landmark and a fervent pivot in Georg Baselitz's oeuvre. They have sprung from a deep, inner necessity in deliberate confrontation with pressing, charged subjects and unfold a timeless reflection on the artist's existence as such. Giving expression to strikingly visualized and self-felt isolation, uprooting, and lack of orientation, the works render the artist's precarious experience in a broken world, establishing a paradigmatic image of his condition."

Baselitz's *Heroes* and *New Types* are furnished with a repertoire of recurring objects: field packs, palettes and brushes, or torture implements. Despite their repetitive 162 x 130 cm format, each work strikes us with an expression all its own, which depends on the chosen method of painting and the colors employed. The ample chronological sequence of the selected works illustrates Baselitz's gradual departure from his motif. It is only a short distance from this series to his subsequent theme of upside-down figures.

Baselitz began the *Heroes* and *New Types* workgroup during the period he spent at the Villa Romana in Florence on a grant. After returning to West Berlin, he continued developing the theme.

The much-discussed history of Baselitz scandals that had begun in 1963 with the show at Galerie Werner & Katz was now drawing to a close. The *Hero* paintings represent a turning point in the oeuvre of the artist's early years and today can be regarded as a historical document. These works were not aligned with any

artistic trends of the time; they did not embrace the ZERO Group's vision of the future, the French or American approaches to abstraction, or the variations on German post-war Art Informel. Even twenty years after the end of the war, Baselitz was not content to merely convey the superficial feeling of a new beginning. And even if the *Heroes* and *New Types* adhere to recurring motifs, they are monstrous, broken, and forceful in their painterly formulation. They represent an important stance within post-1945 German art.

### ***Remix***

Establishing an ideal continuity between past and present, the exhibition concludes with a selection of paintings from the *Remix* cycle that Georg Baselitz began to work on in 2005, which heralded the *Heroes* and *New Types* of 2007 and 2008.

In his *Remix* paintings, Baselitz revisited the most provocative aspects of his own history, such as *Die grosse Nacht im Eimer (The Big Night Down the Drain)*, 1962-63, and *Die grossen Freunde (The Great Friends)*, 1965, and made new versions or interpretations of them with the benefit of hindsight. Enlarged and rapidly painted with swathes of bright, transparent hues and explosive, meandering lines, the *Remix* paintings are radical transubstantiations—part-caricature, part-ghost—of their more ponderous predecessors. The spontaneity with which they are executed gives rise to mnemonic flashes of things in the past, present, and future. The impulse to clarify and update is evident, but the haunting, fleeting quality of this work also has to do with a mature artist's meditations on time, presence, failure, and possibility. The artist has explained, "I like the word 'remix' because it comes from youth culture."

### **Biography**

Georg Baselitz was born in Deutschbaselitz (Saxony) on January 23, 1938. He initially enrolled at the College of Fine Arts in Berlin-Weissensee (East Germany), where he was expelled after two semesters for "sociopolitical immaturity," and later resumed his studies in Berlin-Charlottenburg at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (West Germany) in 1957. His first travels abroad took him to Amsterdam and Paris. In 1961 he held his first exhibition with Eugen Schönebeck in an unoccupied house, an occasion marked by the publication of the first "Pandemonic Manifesto," as it came to be called. The following gallery shows were controversial. In 1966 Baselitz left Berlin for the region of Rhine-Hesse, near Worms. He painted his first picture with upside-down figures in 1969, a decision to which he remained true for the rest of his career. As his renown grew, he increasingly presented works in exhibitions abroad, and in 1980 he and Anselm Kiefer were invited to represent the Federal Republic of Germany at the 39th Venice Biennale. Much-acclaimed exhibitions in various countries such as Great Britain and the United States followed. Baselitz continued his teaching activities, begun in Karlsruhe in 1978, in Berlin from 1983 to 1988 and from 1992 on. Numerous retrospectives, distinctions, awards, and honorary professorships still pay tribute to the outstanding relevance of his work.

**Cover image:**

Georg Baselitz

*The Modern Painter (Der moderne Maler)*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Frank Oleski, Cologne

**For more information:**

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Marketing and Communications Department

Tel: +34 944 359 008

[media@guggenheim-bilbao.es](mailto:media@guggenheim-bilbao.es)

[www.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es)

Complete information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at [www.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es)  
(press room).

Images for press usage  
**Georg Baselitz. The Heroes**  
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

**Online Photo Service for Press Images**

At the press area ([prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en](http://prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en)) you can register and download high resolution images and videos featuring the exhibitions and the building. Sign in to get access. If you are already a user, log in here (you need your username and password).

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

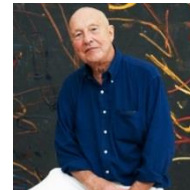
Georg Baselitz in his studio in Berlin, 1966

Photo: © Elke Baselitz 2017



Georg Baselitz, 2014

Photo: © Peter Knaup 2017



**Georg Baselitz**

*Blocked Painter (Versperrter Maler)*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg,

Collection Ströher

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Archiv Sammlung Ströher



**Georg Baselitz**

*The Shepherd (Der Hirte)*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, Loan of the

Österreichische Ludwig-Stiftung, since 1993

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Frank Oleski, Cologne



**Georg Baselitz**

*Rebel (Rebell)*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Tate: Purchased 1982, London

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Friedrich Rosenstiel, Cologne



**Georg Baselitz**

*The Modern Painter (Der moderne Maler)*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Frank Oleski, Cologne



**Georg Baselitz**

*A New Type (Ein neuer Typ)*, 1965

Gouache, ink wash and crayon on paper

487 x 317 mm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Jochen Littkemann, Berlin



**Georg Baselitz**

*Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*, 1965

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Collection Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris – Salzburg

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Frank Oleski, Cologne



**Georg Baselitz**

*The Tree (Der Baum)*, 1966

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Jochen Littkemann, Berlin



**Georg Baselitz**

*The New Type (Der neue Typ)*, 1966

Oil on canvas

162 x 130 cm



Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark,  
Donation: Franz Dahlem  
© Georg Baselitz, 2017  
Photo: Kim Hansen, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk

**Georg Baselitz**

*Eagle 53 – Heroe 65 (Remix), [Adler 53 - Held 65 (Remix), 2007]*

Oil on canvas

300 x 250 cm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz, 2017

Photo: Jochen Littkemann, Berlin



**Georg Baselitz**

*Curly-One (Lockiger), 1966*

Oil on canvas

162 x 114 cm

Privately owned

© Georg Baselitz 2017

Photo: Jochen Littkemann, Berlin

