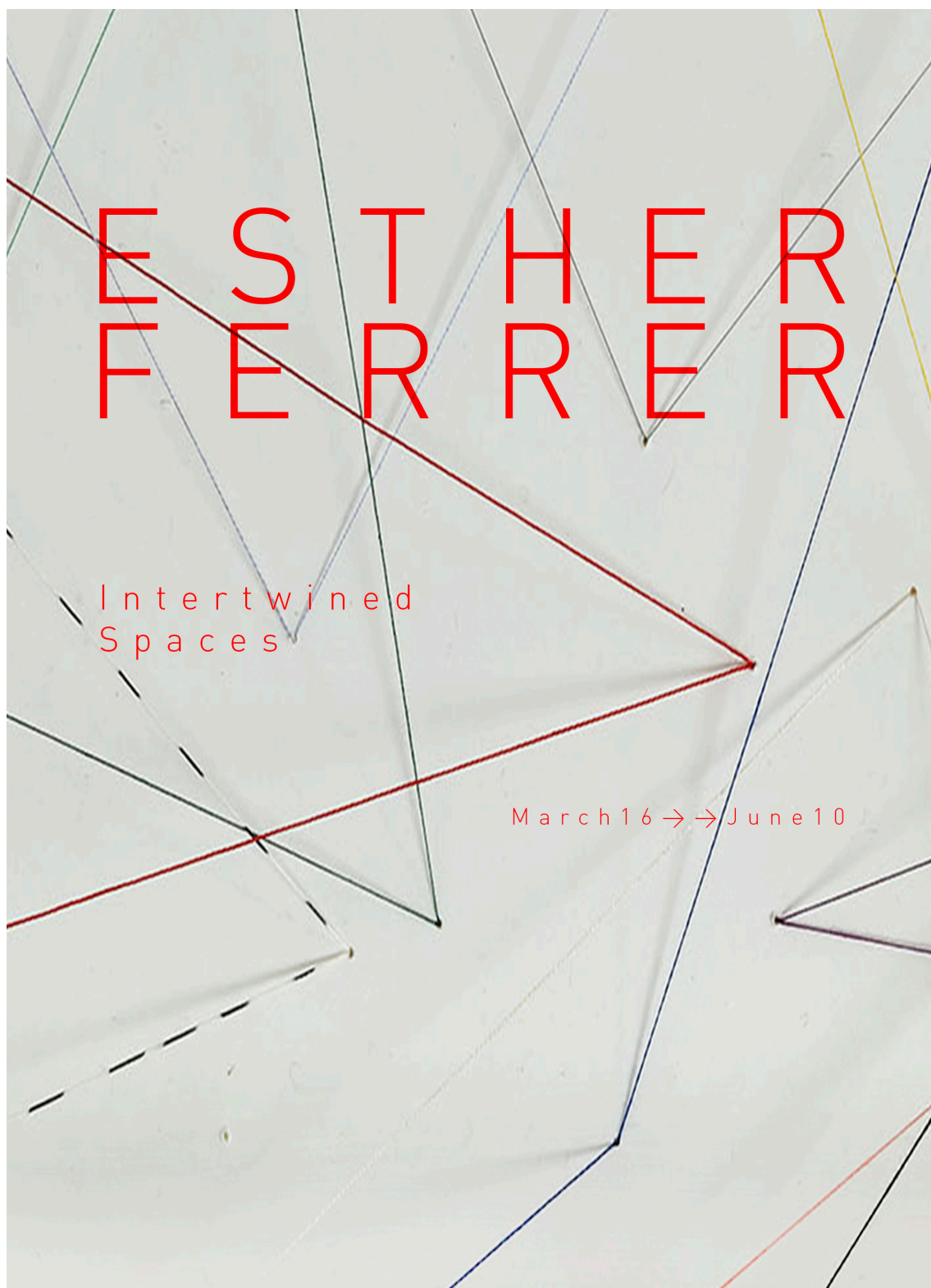


GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Esther Ferrer. Intertwined Spaces

- Dates: March 16–June 10, 2018
 - Curator: Petra Joos
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- The exhibition shows nine previously unseen installations by one of the Spanish pioneers of performance art, a genre she defines as the art which combines time and space with the presence of an audience that participates in the action.
 - Above all, Esther Ferrer values the spectator's freedom, so she offers questions rather than conclusions, enabling interpretations to be generated autonomously by each viewer.
 - Many of the installations in the exhibition reflect on a fundamental aspect of Ferrer's career: the construction of space.
 - In *The Laughs of the World* (*Las risas del mundo*), the organic, natural and ephemeral sound of the laugh becomes an artistic object by expanding in time and space, leaving the order of its reproduction in the hands of the spectator and giving rise to spontaneous concerts of laughter.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Esther Ferrer. Intertwined Spaces*, an exhibition made up almost entirely of previously unseen installations by one of the leading practitioners of performance art in Spain. In keeping with Esther Ferrer's work and thought, two of the eleven works that make up this show will be specially activated through performances by the artist or the interaction of the public.

Since the start of her career in the late sixties, Esther Ferrer (Donostia/San Sebastián, 1937) has developed her thought through a wide variety of forms and materials, becoming one of Spain's pioneers of performance art, a genre she defines as "the art that combines time and space with the presence of an audience that is not a mere spectator, but can participate in the action if so wished."

Above all, Esther Ferrer values the spectator's freedom, so she offers questions rather than conclusions, enabling interpretations to be generated autonomously by each viewer.

In 1967, Esther Ferrer started to participate in the activities of the Zaj group with Walter Marchetti, Ramón Barce and Juan Hidalgo, and action art has been her main means of expression ever since. From 1970, in parallel with her work with Zaj, she returned to the visual arts in the form of manipulated photographs, installations, paintings and drawings based on series of prime numbers, objects or sound pieces. Her oeuvre is a part of the Minimalist and Conceptual Art movement. When she began to work in the 1960s, she was under the influence of Stéphane Mallarmé, Georges Perec, John Cage, and the feminist theorists of the day.

Her work with Zaj continued with very direct actions until 1996, when the group broke up after a retrospective exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

Throughout her extensive career, Ferrer has participated in several action art festivals and has presented works at numerous museums. She has also won multiple awards: in 1999, she represented Spain at the Venice Biennale; in 2008, she was awarded the National Prize in Plastic Arts; in 2012, she received the Gure Artea Prize from the Basque Government; and in 2014, she won the MAV (Women in Visual Arts) Prize, the Marie Claire Award in Contemporary Art, and the Velázquez Award in Plastic Arts.

Entrance to an exhibition (Entrada a una exposición, 1990/2018)

As the artist explains:

“Life is shrouded in the skin, which is a human being’s first clothing, the frontier between two worlds, and, as Paul Valéry wrote, ‘the deepest thing in man’, but at the same time the most superficial, a word that comes from the Latin *superficies*, based in its turn on *facies*, a face. The skin is therefore like the surface of a mirror that reflects the depth of which the poet speaks.

Subject of love or aggression, memory, bearer of ritual or object of discrimination, the skin is also a sometimes unyielding source of information about our physical and emotional condition. Above all, however, the skin is the gateway to our sensations owing to its interaction with the nervous system, which transmits them to the brain.”

Entrance to an Exhibition is an installation that tries to raise everyone’s awareness of their own skin through contact with an external element, in this case the sensuality of feathers. The work is designed to arouse sensations, stimulate the viewer’s receptiveness, and increase his or her perceptive capacity by creating a state of pleasurable “alert”, a preparatory stimulus for the visit to the rest of the exhibition. “It’s a matter of feeling, not thinking; the rest of the exhibition is there for that.” The sensory experience brought on by this work contrasts with the type of experience offered in the rest of the show, which is dominated by sobriety, minimum materiality, and the development of abstract ideas and concepts, such as the mathematical schemes underlying her *Spatial Projects (Proyectos espaciales)*.

The Laughs of the World (Las risas del mundo, 1999/2018)

Humor is indissociable from the work of Esther Ferrer. Indeed, it is her absurd view of society, laden with an irony peculiar to the artist, which allows her to construct an artistic corpus with a markedly critical character.

In *The Laughs of the World*, the organic, natural and ephemeral sound of the laugh becomes an artistic object by expanding in time and space, leaving the order of its reproduction in the hands of the viewer.

A number of electronic devices are suspended over various points of a large world map on the floor. These are more than forty tablets showing images of mouths that belong to people of different ages, genders and provenances, while reproducing the sound of their laughs. The sound archives are activated by the interaction of visitors, since they are programmed to start every time they are approached, allowing the spontaneous production of what the artist calls “concerts of laughter”. The installation is also designed to activate different laughter groups at random according to the visitors’

position on the map, allowing the public to experience how different cultures and languages mold laughter in different ways.

Installations with chairs (Instalaciones con sillas, 1984 and 2018)

"I've always been interested in chairs, everyday and almost anodyne objects whose mere presence can nonetheless modify the space of a room." Esther Ferrer has always been struck by the number of models that have been created, and will continue to be created, for something as everyday and elementary as a chair. She is attracted above all by the "anthropomorphic" quality of its structure, regardless of the material from which it is made. For the artist, the sight of a chair makes us think of human beings, with all that might suggest. When stripped of upholstery and decoration, its "skeleton" forms a set of straight or curved lines organized in an almost organic manner. If the structural richness of a chair is combined in a set, either on a wall or in the round, the variety of resulting forms can be fascinating.

Two installations are presented in this exhibition: one is from the 1984 series *Installations with Chairs (Instalaciones con sillas)*, and the other from the 2018 series *Suspended Chairs (Sillas suspendidas)*. Both projects are here materialized for the first time in an exhibition space.

Spatial Projects (Proyectos espaciales, 1990/2018)

Esther Ferrer started to work on her *Spatial Projects* series in the 1970s. The installations shown in this exhibition come from projects in the form of drawings or models that date from 1990 until 2006. The artist used cardboard structures similar to architectural models for her designs.

"I've never been especially interested in carrying out my projects in a physical space or on a large scale. If the model works, the work is done as far as I'm concerned. If I can't set it up in a real space, never mind. What interests me is the process."

During her creative process, the artist attaches threads to the different planes of the model, measuring regular distances between the connections so that the threads will look like lines running across space in geometrical patterns. Their infinite variations are the motif that gives these works their serial character. By varying only small details, like the number of threads or the distance between them, the mathematical basis for the installation is completely modified and an infinite number of different results are obtained.

For these installations, Esther Ferrer uses threads, wires, elastic bands or string, all fragile everyday materials, and arranges them over the bare walls, the floor and the ceiling, fixing them with clamps or nails. She thus intervenes in the space with a minimum of elements, giving it a new set of characteristics that modify the viewer's perception.

Ferrer subjects these elements to intense mathematical rigor, positioning the clamps at different intervals measured to generate various rhythms, directions and grids that alter perception of the space and the passage through it. Angles break or fold in the corners, creating a series of geometric forms.

The artist reflects upon space as follows: “In some installations I decide to submit to a rule—it’s a way of eliminating my subjectivity as far as possible—or to a system I’ve decided on, such as the series of prime numbers. On the other hand, there are others I structure in an aleatory fashion, allowing myself to be guided by an intuition that determines the rhythm.”

The reason behind the title of the works in this series, *Spatial Installations* (*Instalaciones espaciales*), is that the artist sees them as resembling drawing in space. She conceives three-dimensional drawings with no perspectival simulacrum, since it is they which create the perspective themselves, marking out the space, occupying it, and above all defining and transforming it with their mere presence. This transformation is best perceived when the viewer contemplates it in movement, visualizing the different perspectives.

In the artist’s own words, “space is not the support of the work but its raw material; both natural and architectural space, which it appropriates, generally using the fewest elements possible. My concern is not to intervene too much, not to get in its way, so that it remains transparent and air can flow through. This is perhaps one of the reasons why I usually construct my installations with thin threads or wires. I look for efficacy. No decorative features or adornments, just the essential.”

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The educational and cultural program of this exhibition presents the following activities:

Encounter with artists: Esther Ferrer (March, 14)

Artist Esther Ferrer, a pioneer in performance art in Spain, will talk about her exhibition and creative process with Petra Joos, exhibition curator and curator of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

Venue: Auditorium Tickets: free, at the Admissions desk and on the website

Course: Approaches to art: A brief history of performance (May 16 and 17)

Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, Director of the Centre for Contemporary Creation of Andalusia (C3A), will share the keys to performance art: its history, its main works and artists from the 50s.

- May 16: analysis of the historical foundations of contemporary performance: Allan Kaprow and the Fluxus movement, American and European conceptualism, body art, Viennese Actionism, performative painting, feminist strategies in performance art...
Case study: Yoko Ono
- May 17: A journey through performance since the 1980s. Marina Abramović and durational performance. Activism and performance, performance and relational art up to the present day, with Tino Sehgal.
Case study: Esther Ferrer. Background: Zaj.

Dynamic artwork: *Laugh Lab* (During the exhibition)

Regarding Esther Ferrer’s *The Laughs of the World* (*Las risas del mundo*, 1999/2008), visitors will have the opportunity to interact with the piece *Laugh Lab* (*Laboratorio de la risa*, 2018), by recording their own laughter and by consulting the literature related to this topic.

This piece will be activated every day from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm and from 3 pm to 5 pm

Concert: *Esther Ferrer y las risas del mundo* (19 de mayo)

An activity based on the exhibition, *Esther Ferrer. Intertwined Spaces* and the work *The Laughs of the World* (*Las risas del mundo*).

Cover image

Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series, 1980s

Model

Dimensions variable

Esther Ferrer Archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

For more information:

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

Images for press usage
Esther Ferrer. Intertwined Spaces
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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At the press area (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

Esther Ferrer

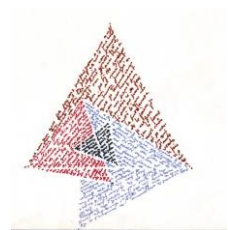
Napoleon's Triangle (Triángulo de Napoleón), end of the 1980s

Model. Color pen on cardboard

15 x 20 x 6 cm

Esther Ferrer Archive

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Esther Ferrer

Pyramid Shaped Spatial Projects on Wall series (Serie *Proyectos espaciales piramidales sobre muro*), end of the 1970s

Model. Thread, nails and oil paint

60 x 72 x 6 cm

Esther Ferrer Archive

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Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects on Wall series (Serie *Proyectos espaciales sobre muro*), 1977/2018

Grey thread and wall paint

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

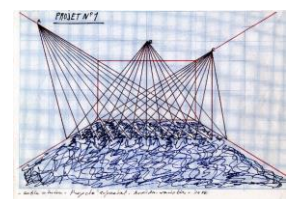
Spatial Projects series (Serie *Proyectos espaciales*), 1977

Drawing. Ink on graph paper

21 x 29.5 cm

Esther Ferrer Archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018



Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series (Serie Proyectos espaciales), 1990/2018

White thread and paint

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

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Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series (Serie Proyectos espaciales), 2006/2018

White thread and paint

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

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Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series (A Version) [Serie Proyectos espaciales (Versión A)],

end of the 1980s

Model. Red Thread and nails

17 x 20 x 20.5 cm

Esther Ferrer Archive

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Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series: Red A module (Serie Proyectos espaciales:

Módulo rojo A), 1990/2018

Red thread

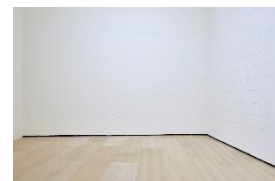
Site-specific dimensions

Collection Centre National des arts plastiques, Paris

N.º inv. : Fnac 2018-0008

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Spatial Projects series (Serie Proyectos espaciales), 2000/2018

Black thread and transparent nylon thread

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

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Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Suspended Chairs series (Serie Sillas suspendidas), 1980s

Drawing. Color pens on paper

20 x 30 cm

Esther Ferrer Archive

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Esther Ferrer

Suspended Chairs series (Serie Sillas suspendidas), 1980s

Model

36 x 20 x 21 cm

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Esther Ferrer

Suspended Chairs series (Serie Sillas suspendidas), 2000/2018

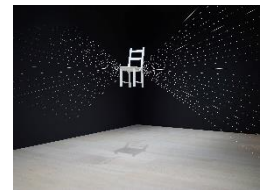
Black paint, white thread, and wooden chair

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Installations with Chairs series (Serie Instalación con sillas), 1984/2018

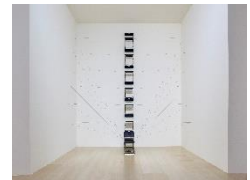
12 black chairs made of plastic and steel, and black thread

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

The Laughs of the World (Las risas del mundo), installation, 1999/2018

37 audiovisual screens, metal structures, and vinyl material

4 x 12.70 x 6 m

Esther Ferrer archive

© Esther Ferrer, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2018

Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Installation with electronic elements (Instalación con elementos eléctricos),
mid 1980s/2018

Steel cable, glass disc insulators from power towers, and electric waste material

Site-specific dimensions

Esther Ferrer archive

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Photo: Erika Ede



Esther Ferrer

Entrance to an Exhibition (Entrada a una exposición), 1990/2018

White and black natural marabou feathers

2.30 x 1 x 3 m

Esther Ferrer archive

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Photo: Erika Ede

