

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on July 12, 2018

Javier Téllez: *Shadow Play*

Javier Téllez: Shadow Play

- Dates: July 12–November 18
- Curator: Manuel Cirauqui
- Film & Video Gallery (103)

From July 12–November 18, 2018, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Shadow Play*, featuring two works by the New York–based artist Javier Téllez, a key figure in video and film-based practice in the art of recent decades. This is the second exhibition in 2018 in the Film & Video Gallery, a space at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao entirely devoted to key works of video art, video installation, and the moving image as an artistic language.

The work of Javier Téllez (b. 1969, Valencia, Venezuela) investigates the history of the moving image—its icons, social norms, and specific relational forms—while it systematically tackles institutional dynamics, disability, and mental illness as states of marginalization and cultural invisibility. Individuals living on the edges of the social and rational canon thus critically take part in the production, writing, and performance of Téllez's films and installations, as it is the case of the two works presented at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Both *Bourbaki Panorama* and *Shadow Play*—from which the exhibition borrows its title—are the result of a collaboration with refugees seeking asylum in Switzerland, and were produced for the Kusthaus Zurich in 2014.

Bourbaki Panorama is a silent 35-mm film that shows a group of refugees wandering in circles within one of the most important painted panoramas of European history. The immersive mural from 1881, permanently mounted in the city of Lucerne, depicts the alpine exodus of 87,000 French soldiers in pursuit of asylum after their defeat at the hands of Prussian troops, in what is considered the first defining moment in the history of Switzerland's geopolitical neutrality and its vocation as a country of asylum. Téllez's piece makes a stage of this grand-scale tableau where historical ambition and the pre-cinematographic spirit of the nineteenth century seem to converge. In this space, a group of people—all of them actual refugees—wander as if trapped in the loop of history. One amongst them pushes a bronze sculpture: Alberto Giacometti's *The Hand* (1947), a work that was created as an evocation of the terrible sight of an arm amputated by an explosion. The presence of this piece in such a context invites multiple readings: the breakdown of the social body, the communal and marginal role of migrants, or their alienation from the history and heritage of the place of asylum. Meanwhile, it suggests the idea of the artwork itself as a migrant object, taking refuge in the museum where it is protected from the conflicts of the outside world. The constant motion of the film through the enormous 35 mm projector also replicates the circular

movement of migrants around the mural. In this sense, Téllez had stated, “The mechanical sound of the projectors is also an important element of *Bourbaki Panorama*, for their sound evokes weaponry and war.”

Presented together with this work is *Shadow Play*, again a silent 35 mm film featuring a group of refugees who participate here as actors and screenwriters. The film recounts the hardships each member of the crew has gone through by means of brief, symbolic fables. Using only their bodies and hands, these figures express themselves with minimal means. The absence of sound or words in the narration highlights not exactly the muteness, but rather the deprivation of speech that defines the refugee’s existence, as it is often excluded from the social and political life of the country of asylum. In the meantime, each of the individual stories manifests the age-old archetypes of exile: destruction, oppression, censorship, misery, and death. Just as in its companion work, Giacometti’s *Hand* interrupts into *Shadow Play*—although this time in its original plaster version. Transformed into a black shadow projected against the screen, the sculpture—both threatening and fragile—serves as a narrative agent while altering, with its unmistakable silhouette, the abstraction and universality of traditional shadow drama.

Javier Téllez: Biography

Born in Valencia, Venezuela, in 1969, Javier Téllez lives and works in New York. His work reflects a sustained interest in bringing peripheral communities and invisible situations to the fore of contemporary art addressing institutional dynamics, disabilities and mental illness as marginalizing conditions. Téllez’s projects have often involved working in collaboration with people diagnosed with mental illness to produce film installations that question the notions of the normal and the pathological. Combining different approaches to filmmaking, Téllez opens a dialogue that provides a fresh interpretation of classical myths, private and collective memories, and historical references.

Téllez has been exhibited individually at the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester (2018); San Francisco Art Institute (2014); Kunsthaus Zürich (2014); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (2011); Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2005); and the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City (2004). He has participated in group exhibitions such as: SITE Santa Fe, NM; MoMA PS1, Long Island City; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas; Castello di Rivoli, Torino; Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Germany; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and the Renaissance Society, Chicago. In addition, he has taken part in *dOCUMENTA*, Kassel, (2012); and *Manifesta*, Trento; the Sydney Biennial; and the Whitney Biennial, New York (all in 2008); the Venice Biennale (2001 and 2003); and the Yokohama Triennial (2001). He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1999 and in 2016 the Global Mental Health Award for Innovation in the Arts from Columbia University, New York. His work is part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Talk with artists: Javier Téllez (July 12 at 6:30 p.m.)

Javier Téllez will be in conversation with Manuel Cirauqui, curator of the Film & Video Gallery, about the artist's work and the exhibition *Shadow Play*, on July 12 at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. After the discussion, there will be a Q&A with the audience.

Film & Video (gallery 103)

The Film & Video gallery is a space devoted to video art, video installation, and contemporary practices addressing the moving image. Featuring work from various collections in the constellation of Guggenheim Museums, as well as other international collections, the programming of this gallery began in March 2014 with Christian Marclay's installation *The Clock*, which was followed by *The Visitors*, by the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, and *The Krazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee)*, *Liverpool, UK*, by Rineke Dijkstra. Shown in 2015 were the *Thread Routes* series by the conceptual artist Kimsooja, *Parallax* by Shahzia Sikander, and *The Cloud of Unknowing* by the Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen. In 2016, the turn came for *The Annunciation – Marian Ilmestys* by the Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila, *Sigh* by Sam-Taylor Johnson, and *Disorient* by Fiona Tan. In 2017, the Film & Video gallery featured the disturbing *(Untitled) Human Mask* (2014) by the French artist Pierre Huyghe, along with *The Guests* by experimental cinema pioneer Ken Jacobs, and the ambitious performance-based film work *Winter* (2013) by Amie Siegel. In 2018, the turn came for *Closed Circuit* by Michael Snow.

Cover image:

Javier Téllez

Shadow Play, 2014

Film installation, 35 mm film projection

10 min., 56 sec.

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann galerie, Zurich

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

Press Images for
Javier Téllez: *Shadow Play*
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 359 008 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

Javier Téllez

Shadow Play, 2014

Film installation, 35 mm film projection

10 min., 56 sec.

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann galerie, Zurich

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Javier Téllez

Bourbaki Panorama, 2014

Film installation, 35 mm film projection

13 min., 47 sec.

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann galerie, Zurich

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Bourbaki Panorama 2014

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