

## EXHIBITION

### **LARGER THAN LIFE** **VASCO ARAÚJO - JAVIER TÉLLEZ**

**17 September 2010 – 9 January 2011**



Javier Téllez. *O Rinoceronte de Dürer*, 2010. Digital film, colour, sound, 38'. Courtesy of the artist and Peter Kilchmann Galerie, Zurich. Commissioned by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian - CAM, Lisbon



Vasco Araújo. *Mulheres d'Apolo*, 2010 (video still). Video, 16'9". Courtesy Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon

#### **DATES**

17 September 2010 – 9 January 2011

#### **PLACE**

Exhibition rooms on the first floor

#### **OPENING HOURS**

Tuesday to Saturday (holidays included)

From 11am to 9pm

Sundays, from 11am to 3pm

#### **PRODUCED BY**

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo, Spain / CAM, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal

#### **CURATOR**

Isabel Carlos

## **WORKS EXHIBITED**

The exhibition 'LARGER THAN LIFE', produced by MARCO, Vigo and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian – CAM, Lisbon and curated by Isabel Carlos, focuses on the work the artists Vasco Araújo (Lisbon, Portugal, 1975) and Javier Téllez (Valencia, Venezuela, 1969). This type of anthological dual exhibition has not been much explored, and where Araújo and Téllez are concerned, it is particularly important to highlight the fruitful dialogue between them. Various factors exist which are common to both of their bodies of work. The exhibition shows anthological works by both artists, along with others specifically created for this exhibition.

## SYNTHESIS OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

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MARCO, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vigo, starts its new exhibition schedule with a show produced jointly by MARCO and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian – CAM, Lisbon. The exhibition *LARGER THAN LIFE* brings together the work of the artists Vasco Araújo and Javier Téllez.

Vasco Araújo was born in 1975 in Lisbon, the city where he lives, and Javier Téllez was born in 1969 in Valencia, Venezuela, and currently lives between Berlin and New York. These two artists, who belong to the same generation, already possess a substantial body of work and have growing international reputations. In this respect, we cite by way of example the solo exhibition that Araújo recently staged at Jeu de Paume in Paris and the acquisition of two of his video works by the Centre Georges Pompidou; in Téllez's case, we can cite his remarkably successful participation in the last Whitney Biennial in New York, or the recent acquisition of the 2004 work *La passion de Jeanne D'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)* by the Tate Modern in London. Both artists belong to the same generational span. But this biographical retail is not the prime reason for presenting their works together. Rather, it is the fact that these two artists display a set of common characteristics.

The first aspect to be noted is the fact that their work is frequently based on references to the history of cinema. In the case of the Venezuelan artist, this particular feature is clearly assumed and takes the form of citation. Sometimes he even makes use of the film itself, as happens in *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)*, in which the artist uses Carl Theodor Dreyer's film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, but with new dialogues between the scenes, written by women patients at the Rozelle Hospital in Sydney. In the case of the Portuguese artist, cinema does not appear in his work in such an explicit and material way, but in his videos we see echoes of various filmographies, ranging from Bergman to Fassbinder, but also including Almodóvar, Antonioni or Oliveira.

Yet it is not just the cinematic heritage that is worked upon by Téllez and Araújo, it is also the great classical narratives, namely those drawn from Greek tragedy, opera in the case of the Portuguese artist, or outstanding and paradigmatic historical events. The psychological and psychiatric dimension is a feature that runs through the works of these two artists: in the case of Téllez, through his work with patients; in the case of Araújo, because he frequently touches upon themes related to psychological and family dysfunction and social traumas.

But, above all, what unites the works of the two artists is the fact that they make visible the strange, the uncomfortable, what we often do not want to see or confront. It is from life that the artists show us zones of invisibility and prejudice. "Death, life, drama, opera and fado run through the exhibition from one end to the other: there is an excess, there is something 'larger than life' in all of these works."

The exhibition intends to show anthological works by both artists, along with others specifically created for this exhibition. This last one feature, in Araújo's case, the video *Mulheres d'Apolo* and the performance *O Morto*; as well as the video installation *Rinoceronte de Dürer*, by Javier Téllez, which was filmed in the panoptic space of the Miguel Bombarda mental Hospital, in Lisbon. The architectural structure of the panopticon has been widely used in hospitals and prisons, as is the case with the MARCO Museum, a building which was a former panoptical prison.

## TEXT BY THE CURATOR

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"Vasco Araújo (Lisbon, 1975) and Javier Téllez (Valencia, Venezuela, 1969) belong to the same generational span. But this biographical detail is not the prime reason for presenting their works together. Rather, it is the fact that these two artists display a set of common characteristics. The first aspect to be noted is the fact that their work is frequently based on references to the history of cinema. In the case of the Venezuelan artist, this particular feature is clearly assumed and takes the form of citation. [...] Sometimes, he even makes use of the film itself, as happens in *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)* (2004), in which the artist uses Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, but with new dialogues between the scenes, written by women patients at the Rozelle Hospital in Sydney. In the case of the Portuguese artist, cinema does not appear in his work in such an explicit and material way, but in his videos we see echoes of various filmographies, ranging from Bergman to Fassbinder, but also including Almodóvar, Antonioni or Oliveira.

Now that, as Mark Cousins has stated, videos have come out of the cinema hall, crossed over the street and installed themselves in museums and art centres, it is fascinating to note how these two artists (and they are far from amounting to a unique case in contemporary art) work with the cinematic universe as a kind of ready-made from which other films and videos, other artistic works, are created. Yet it is not just the cinematic heritage that is worked upon by Téllez and Araújo, it is also the great classical narratives, namely those drawn from Greek tragedy, opera, or outstanding and paradigmatic historical events.

*O Rinoceronte de Dürer*, the new video by Téllez, filmed in the panopticon of the Miguel Bombarda Hospital, in Lisbon, begins with the Portuguese history of the embassy that the king Dom Manuel I took to see the Pope in Rome in 1513 and which included a live rhinoceros, an animal that until then had been unknown in Europe, as a way of demonstrating the power and strength of the Portuguese court. The impact that the animal had was enormous, leading the German painter Albrecht Dürer to depict it based on the descriptions of people who had seen it. As was to be expected, given the process that he followed and the way in which the human being relates to what he does not know, the drawing is fanciful and imaginary, it is larger than life [...]

The artist, once again, worked with psychiatric patients, specifically from the day hospital, and they are the actors in this work, which is centred around the presence of an embalmed rhinoceros. This animal is pulled around day and night and runs around the circular structure of the panopticon to the amazement of the men and women who inhabit the cell-rooms [...]

Working with mental patients has been a constant feature in Javier Téllez' work: the son of two psychiatrists, he has a familiarity and proximity with the world of mental illness, which allows him to create situations and works in which these patients appear with a grandeur and dignity that escapes the stereotyped image that we have of people who have psychiatric problems, transforming them into central characters and obliging us, as spectators, to look closely at their faces, to stare at them and ask ourselves if they are in fact really so very different from us.

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In his series of photographs, *Todos os Que Caem* (2009), Vasco Araújo radicalises this questioning and photographs himself at the Júlio de Matos Hospital as a mad in-patient. The psychological and psychiatric dimension is therefore a feature that runs through the works of these two artists: in the case of Tellez, through his work with patients; in the case of Araújo, because he frequently touches upon themes related to psychological and family dysfunction and social traumas – see, for example, the work *Far di Donna* (2005) in this exhibition.

But the exhibition shows other areas of contact between the two works: the shrivelled insects that appear in Araújo's *Nature vivante* (2005) are from the same realm as Tellez' rhinoceros: the realm of taxidermy. They are animals that have lived and died, but which continue to exist because they have been embalmed and conserved, or, in other words, they are larger than life. Just like art, theatre or literature.

In *Mulheres d'Apolo* (2010), Araújo's most recent video, the title not only derives from the fact that it was filmed at the Sociedade Filarmónica Alunos de Apolo and that many of the characters are the people who frequent this dance hall, but it also evokes the myth of Apollo, the god from Greek mythology who supported Troy and its women against the Greeks. The monologue in the video, put together by the artist from various texts, has passages that have been taken from the play by Euripedes, *The Trojan Women* (415 BC), that precisely recount the courage, resistance and intelligence of the Trojan women in the face of the massacre perpetrated by the Greeks. That these words should now be placed in the mouth of a middle-aged woman seeking an escape from loneliness and the ill treatment she receives from her husband in a ballroom, clad in supposedly 'glamorous' clothes, inevitably affords a tragic-heroic dimension to the video, but also a profoundly sad one. This woman is given to us through her voice (the voice is that of the actress Lúcia Sigalho) and some partial shots of her body, although her face is only revealed to us at the end of the video. And the face, as well as the body, we then understand, is that of Vasco Araújo himself, in a highly skilled performance – the woman is, after all, him. This detail directs our attention to another characteristic, which, more than any other, unites the works of the two artists: making visible what in general one does not want to be seen. Death, life, drama, opera and fado run through the exhibition from one end to the other: there is an excess, there is something larger than life in all of these works.

[...]The voice is fundamental in this exhibition. In *Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who See* (2007) – the title is a translation into English of the work by Diderot, *Lettres sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui voient*, published in 1749 – Javier Tellez gives us the chance to listen to what six blind people feel when they come into contact with the skin of an elephant. In *Duettino* (2001) and *O Morto* (2010), Vasco Araújo transforms, in the first case, a human being – once again himself – into a kind of white plaster statue that repetitively shouts-sings a small excerpt from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, while, in the second case, in the action of *O Morto*, the 'Dead man' is a wooden statue that 'talks' to a theatre prompter about who is in control and who is being controlled [...]

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Nothing alerts us more to the voice and the sound than muteness and absence. A sense that something is missing makes the absent person important; in *Far de Donna*, the son only begins to sing when his mother loses her voice and a woman recounts the mother's drama in sign language. In *Happy Days*, Araújo transcribes Samuel Beckett's 1960 play with the same title onto the window panes, but he takes away the speeches and limits himself to transcribing only the scenic indications and stage directions: the dialogue, the words exchanged between the two characters, disappear, leaving only the indications of their bodily movements [...]

Martin Heidegger, the philosopher, preferred the auditory model to the visual model. In the visual model, the world is given to us as a path leading towards clarity and distinction, whereas, in the auditory model, the world is something more resistant and opaque, something which creates noise, a world of obstacles and oppositions [...]

*In Sklavenstern, there are no hospitals or psychiatrists because they are all mental patients.*

*We pretend to be what we aren't out of fear of being rejected*

The first sentence is a free translation of one of the sentences that appear written on the slates of *Caligari und der Schlafwandler* (Caligari and the Sleepwalker), the second is taken from *Mulheres d'Apolo*, and they both underline how 'Larger than Life' is an exhibition that seeks to talk about and show the other side of the curtain —in *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)*, the lining, the other side of the red velvet curtain, is composed of sheets from the Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital —, the side that we are afraid to see or think about, because, deep down inside, we know that what separates the 'normal' from the 'non-normal' is minimal and elusive, and that, at any moment, we may pass from one side to the other with the same facility with which we open and close the curtain. But we must also bear in mind the old humanist precept that everything that is human must not be alien to us".

**Isabel Carlos**

[Excerpts from the text by the curator for the exhibition catalogue]

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### ABOUT THE CURATOR

Isabel Carlos (Coimbra, Portugal, 1962) is the director of the Modern Art Centre (CAM) of the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. She has curated the following exhibitions, among others: *Sublime* (Museu do Chiado, Lisbon 1994); *The Day After Tomorrow* (Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon 1994); *Mediations* (Palácio Galveias and Museu do Chiado, Lisbon, 1997); *Eve's - Paula Soares Triennial of India*, (New Delhi 1997); *Entrada Azul - Helena Almeida retrospective* (Casa de América, Madrid 1998); *Trading Images - one year international exhibition cycle* (Museu da Cidade, Lisbon 1998); *Initiare* (Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon, 2000); *Helena Almeida: Inhabited Drawings* (The Drawing Center, New York 2004); *Por entre as linhas* (Museu das Comunicações, Lisbon, 2007), and *Taking Time* (5th Anniversary of the MARCO, Vigo 2007), with Iñaki Martínez Antelo. Isabel Carlos was curator of the Sydney Biennial of 2004, and more recently the Sharjah Biennale of 2009. She founded and directed the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea (IAC) from 1996 to 2001, dependent on the Portuguese Ministry of Culture, whose international collection she set up and managed for three years. Whilst at the IAC, she organised a number of activities related to her post, amongst which were the Portuguese representations at the Venice Biennale of 2001, the London Art Biennial 2000, and the São Paulo Biennial of 1996 and 1998.

### CATALOGUE

On the occasion of this exhibition, MARCO of Vigo and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian of Lisbon have published a trilingual catalogue (Portuguese-Spanish-English) which includes two essays by Jacinto Lageira on the work of Vasco Araújo —*Return to muteness*— and Javier Téllez —*These others who bind us together*—; a text by Gabriela Rangel on the affective dimension of the image in relation to the works *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)* and *Mulheres d'Apolo*; an unpublished interview with Javier Téllez and Mark Beasley; and the text by José María Vieira Mendes for the work *El muerto* by Vasco Araújo; together with a text by the curator, Isabel Carlos, and images and information of the works exhibited.

### INFORMATION AND VISITS

Members of the museum staff are available in the halls to provide visitors with information, in addition to the regular guided tours:

- Every day at 6 pm
- 'A la carte' tours for groups, by appointment at the tel. 986 113 900/11

# PRESS RELEASE

## REQUESTS FOR GRAPHIC MATERIALS

EXHIBITION

**'LARGER THAN LIFE'**

**VASCO ARAÚJO - JAVIER TÉLLEZ**

### GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

**IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:**

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