

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

presents on November 20, 2012

Selections from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection III



15 GUGGENHEIM
BILBAO 1997-2012

Selections from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection III

- Opening date: November 20, 2012
- Curator: Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya
- Location: Galleries 103 and 105

- This is the third in a series of exhibitions ending in 2013 that offers a thematic, informative look at the Bilbao Collection, which currently boasts 124 works by 70 artists.
- On this occasion, the show examines the legacy of the pivotal figures of Pop Art as well as artists who had some kind of conceptual or biographical connection to this movement, such as Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Gilbert & George, Sigmar Polke, Robert Rauschenberg, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Alex Katz.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is pleased to present *Selections from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection III*, the third in a series of exhibitions that will conclude in 2013. The aim of this series is to show the public selected works from the Bilbao Collection, put them in context with one another and offer visitors a comprehensive vision of the collection's focus.

Curated by Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, Curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the show features a selection of works that represent the legacy of artists who played a key role in the Pop Art movement or had conceptual or biographical ties to this historical contemporary art trend. These pieces also underscore the complex, elusive task of defining the basic characteristics of Pop Art through works that fall outside the traditional boundaries of this movement.

A series of video and film creations from other collections will accompany some of the works on display, helping visitors to understand the complexity of these artists' praxis and discover new dimensions beneath the pictorial surface.

The presentation begins in Gallery 103 with eleven large-format canvases by Alex Katz (Brooklyn, New York, 1927) that comprise his *Smiles* series (1994). This will be the first public exhibition of these works since their recent addition to the Bilbao Collection.

The son of Russian immigrants, **Alex Katz** is one of the leading painters of his generation. This series consists of eleven portraits of smiling women against a dark neutral background, taken in the artist's trademark pictorial style without a hint of dimensional depth. In some of the works, his models are unfamiliar faces drawn from his own circle of acquaintances, such as his wife Ada Katz or female friends; in others, the sitters are easily recognizable celebrities accustomed to the stares of fascinated onlookers, such

as the American actress Lauren Hutton. Although the names of these women appear in the titles of the works, Katz's intention with these portraits is not to explore their personalities; rather, he is engaging in a more profound reflection on the nature of representation and visual perception. By repeating the same compositional scheme—figure and neutral background—and the same facial expression, a smile, the artist invites us to focus not only on the specific subject but also on his pictorial experimentation with such representations.

Selections from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection III continues in Gallery 105 with selected works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gilbert & George, Sigmar Polke, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol.

The American artist **Jean-Michel Basquiat** (Brooklyn, New York, 1960) who popularized graffiti is represented in the show by two works that are essential for understanding the evolution of his painting during the 1980s. Basquiat created both pieces at a particularly important moment in his career: after he was discovered as an artist, but before he reached his productive peak. *Moses and the Egyptians* (1982) is a work that alludes to a biblical episode but may also be associated with the history of Africa. In the center of the composition we can make out Moses' profile, suggested by a few white lines that seem to be the result of a fleeting impulse rather than a premeditated gesture. The same color also envelops the enormous stone tablets and surrounds the prophet's silhouette in the form of expressive droplets and smears of paint.

Humor, irony, and primitivism characterize Basquiat's *Man from Naples* (1982). The title of this forceful painting comes from a phrase written above the head of a red donkey which, despite being surrounded by countless scribbles, splashes of color, cross-outs and elementary signs, dominates the composition like a totemic image.

The internationally renowned, multidisciplinary British artists **Gilbert & George** (Dolomites, Italy, 1943 and Devon, UK, 1942) met in the year 1967. They soon began working and living together, fusing their identities so completely that it is now almost impossible to imagine one without the other. Furthermore, they make no distinction between their life and their art: they are their own works of art.

In the mid-1970s they began to use a grid format, reminiscent of early modernism, for their photographic creations, a practice they have continued to this day. However, it was not until the early 1980s that they began to tinge their photography collages with loud colors, cheerfully evoking the tradition of religious stained-glass windows. In their monumental *Waking* (1984), the artists occupy the center of an image consisting of brightly colored, symmetrically placed figures. Their faces are masks that seem to convey the horror of an existential angst: the transition from youth to adult maturity, suggested by the repetition of their figures in three different sizes.

Over the course of more than forty years, the German painter and photographer **Sigmar Polke** (Oels, Lower Silesia, modern-day Olenisca, Poland, 1941) produced a highly complex oeuvre which shaped the art of his time, including a series of photographs and films made during his travels in Afghanistan, Brazil, France, Pakistan, and the United States. These snapshots were later incorporated into his artwork in the 1980s. Using a variety of materials, such as sheer synthetic fabrics, colored lacquers, and hydrosensitive chemicals in combination with paint, Polke began to deliberately flaunt pictorial conventions, questioning the suitability of painting as a medium for representing contemporary life. This approach is exemplified by *Katherineiner's Morning Wood* (*Katherineiners Morgenlatte*, 1967–79), in which a mundane domestic interior is superimposed on patterned swatches and images culled from mass media sources, creating a formal metaphor for the complex layering of ideas in postmodernism.

Robert Rauschenberg (Port Arthur, Texas, 1925) is regarded as a forerunner of virtually every postwar American art movement since Abstract Expressionism. In 1962, after visiting Andy Warhol's studio and discovering the possibilities afforded by commercially available silkscreens, he began to insert existing images in his paintings, from his own photographs to pictures found in the media. *Barge* (1962–63), a canvas nearly 10 meters wide, is the largest of the artist's silkscreened paintings. This monumental work in black, white and gray incorporates many of the themes and images that Rauschenberg has used repeatedly in his 79 silkscreened paintings, such as the urban environment, the exploration of outer space, modes of transportation and great masterpieces from art history.

This work is accompanied by an audiovisual featuring five performances that the artist staged between 1963 and 1966: *Pelican* (1963), *Map Room II* (1965), *Spring Training* (1965), *Linoleum* (1966), and *Open Score* (1966). In these pieces, the artist explores themes related to dance, technology, and improvisation.

After quitting his job as a billboard painter in New York in 1960, **James Rosenquist** (Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1933), considered one of the leaders of the Pop Art movement, drew on many of the techniques of the sign-painting trade to create his own artwork. He fragmented and reassembled advertising images using commercial paint and working with large formats, swimming against the prevailing tide of Abstract Expressionism. Throughout his career, Rosenquist's work has consistently shown a fascination with advanced technology and scientific phenomena related to outer space and the cosmos. The thrill of the first American adventures in space exploration inspired him to create *Flamingo Capsule* (1970), dedicated to the three astronauts who died in a flash fire aboard *Apollo 1* during a training session in 1967. The 26-meter composition suggests "fire in a contained space" and "objects floating around in the capsule". Against a background of red and yellow tones, we see the crumpled metal foil of a uniform emblazoned with the American flag, a twisted and deformed food bag, and several balloons floating in the air to form an arc, in a painting that many still consider to be an antiwar statement.

Andy Warhol (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), often identified as the most essential figure in Pop Art, aligned himself with the signs of the mass culture of his day and pioneered the use of silkscreening, a mechanical reproduction technique, to compose his works from printed images found in newspapers, publicity stills and advertisements. *One Hundred and Fifty Multicolored Marylins* (1979), a canvas measuring more than 10 meters wide, is the largest in this series and features one of the artist's most famous celebrity subjects. Marilyn Monroe first appeared in Warhol's work in 1962, the year of her death, in numerous silkscreened paintings which used the same photograph of the young, ill-fated movie star, with parted lips and seductive, heavy-lidded eyes, in different configurations. The constant repetition of her face in the artist's work clearly expresses the potential of the silkscreen technique for the unlimited replication of this or any other image. At the same time, the reversed images have a haunting, ghostly quality which lends this painting an aura of retrospection that characterizes much of the artist's later work, from his shadow paintings to his self-portraits and skulls. Around the same time as he produced his first *Marilyn*, Andy Warhol began shooting *Screen Tests*, a series of 16-mm films with an approximate run time of three minutes each. In this exhibition his work is shown alongside twelve of these moving portraits, made between 1964 and 1966, of Warhol Factory regulars such as Edie Sedgwick, Ultra Violet, and Nico, writers and musicians of the caliber of John Cale, Lou Reed, and Susan Sontag, artists like James Rosenquist and Niki de Saint Phalle, and the actor Dennis Hopper.

This show is a singular, sweeping overview of a pivotal movement in art history that is also a cornerstone of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection, which currently contains 124 works by 70 different artists.

Cover image:

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Ada Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

228.6 x 167.6 cm

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Selections of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum Collection III
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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

Gallery 103

1.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Ursula Smiles 2, 1993

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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2.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Belinda Smiles, 1993

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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3.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Yvonne Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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4.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Ahn Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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5.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Alba Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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6.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Jessica Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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7.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Ada Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

228.6 x 167.6 cm

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8.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Katryn Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

243.8 x 182.9 cm

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9.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Karen Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

228.6 x 167.6 cm

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10.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Lauren Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

228.6 x 167.6 cm

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11.

Alex Katz (USA, 1927)

Lysa Smiles, 1994

Oil on linen

228.6 x 167.6 cm

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Gallery 105

12.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (USA, 1960–1988)

Man from Naples, 1982

Acrylic and collage on wood

185 x 137 cm

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13.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (USA, 1960–1988)

Moses and the Egyptians, 1982

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

122 x 244.5 cm

Gift, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich

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14.

Gilbert & George (Italy, 1943 and United Kingdom, 1942)

Waking, 1984

Photo-piece

363 x 1,111 cm

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15.

Sigmar Polke (East Germany, now Poland, 1941–Germany, 2010)

Kathreiners Morgenlatte, 1980

Acrylic, wood, mixed media, framed collage on canvas and material

230 x 310 cm

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16.

Robert Rauschenberg (USA, 1925– 2008)

Barge, 1962–63

Oil and silk screened ink on canvas

203 x 980 cm

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17.

James Rosenquist (USA, 1933)

Flamingo Capsule, 1970

Oil on canvas and aluminized Mylar

290 x 701 cm

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18.

Andy Warhol (USA, 1928–1987)

One Hundred and Fifty Multicolored Marilyns, 1979

Acrylic and silk screen on canvas

201 x 1,055 cm

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