

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Opening on June 7

Martha Jungwirth

Sponsored by





Occident insurance company is pleased to sponsor this survey exhibition of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao devoted to five decades of the art of Martha Jungwirth, an important contemporary Austrian painter whose personal abstract style contains numerous allusions to the real world, from important people in her life to mythological themes, as well as current events and the history of art embodied in the masters that have had an impact on her.

In our efforts to promote art and culture, we strive to provide the public a deeper view into the splendid work of contemporary artists such as Jungwirth who, through the invention of a unique pictorial language, creates her own equivalent of reality where she exerts the impulse of the unconscious and other strategies that connect her to knowledge beyond thought, that which precedes verbal language and even what we view as our civilization.

“Painting is a matter of form and it receives a soul through me,” the artist has said. Jungwirth’s work fluctuates between abstraction and representation, which intertwine in a way that fascinates our gaze. Her expressive compositions explore materiality, ranging from density to sparsity, while in her most recent phase of her career, as can be seen in this exhibition, the artist has moved towards a fluid, open, transparent language.

Each time Martha Jungwirth begins a new work, she sets out on “an adventure,” in her own words, starting from a theme that leads into a creative process in which chance, material, and emotional and physical sensation become intensely present. The exhibition of the Viennese artist at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao invites us to immerse ourselves in her passionate pictorial exploration, to discover or rediscover works in which subtlety and urgency, sensuality and transcendence, intentionality and chance go hand in hand through unique formal proposals.

Juan Closa Cañellas
Director General, Occident

Martha Jungwirth

- Dates: June 7 to September 22, 2024
 - Curator: Lekha Hileman Waitoller
 - Sponsor: Occident
- Jungwirth's paintings and drawings masterfully navigate the delicate boundary between realism and abstraction: her art does not aim to depict a straightforward narrative or visual representation, rather it is defined by explosive, gestural strokes and vibrant hues that serve as poignant expressions.
 - Despite shifting trends within painting, Martha Jungwirth has consistently dedicated herself to developing a unique abstract style that draws on myriad influences from her life.
 - Her paintings and watercolors, informed by close observation of the human form, animals, the history of art, and extensive travel around the world evoke a sense of spontaneity through their erratic forms and intense colors.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Martha Jungwirth*, a retrospective exhibition sponsored by Occident featuring nearly seventy pieces that encompass six decades of work. Austrian artist Martha Jungwirth (b. 1940, Vienna) is celebrated for her unique abstract vocabulary grounded in the physical world. Ranging from 1976 to 2023, the works in the show include a substantial selection of watercolors and oil paintings as well as three artist books spanning nearly 50 years of remarkable production. Jungwirth's paintings and watercolors are informed by close observation of the human form, animals, the history of art, and extensive travel around the world. The resulting artworks evoke a sense of spontaneity through their erratic forms and intense colors. Martha Jungwirth's artwork will be shown in Spain for the first time since 1966, when she was awarded the Joan Miró Prize.

Martha Jungwirth stands as a seminal figure in the Austrian art scene. Rooted in the cultural and artistic milieu of postwar Vienna, she studied art at the Universität für angewandte Kunst (University of Applied Arts), Vienna, from 1956 to 1963. Despite the shifting trends within painting, Jungwirth consistently dedicated herself to developing a unique abstract style that draws on myriad influences from her life. Her early work demonstrates a distinct approach for the visceral and the subjective characterized by a fusion of Abstract Expressionism and a raw, emotive quality, setting the stage for the development of her unique aesthetic. Over the years, Jungwirth has exhibited a remarkable ability to evolve and adapt her artistic language. Her subject matter is as diverse as her own interests, ranging from introspective self-portraits to landscapes and works inspired by current events, such as COVID-19 or the Australian bushfires. Jungwirth's paintings and drawings masterfully navigate the delicate boundary between realism and abstraction. Her artworks don't aim to depict a straightforward narrative or visual representation, rather they are defined by their explosive, gestural strokes and vibrant hues that serve as poignant expressions.

Through colors that carry emotional weight and gestural forms that hint at their origins, Jungwirth's paintings defy easy categorization. Her work captures not just fleeting moments or mere images, but encapsulates profound experiences, emotions, and memories, and through her art, Jungwirth imparts an insightful understanding of the boundless intricacies of reality, offering viewers a glimpse into the depths of human perception and consciousness.

Jungwirth's energetic paintings are decidedly non-conformist in style and are made on unexpected supports, such as cardboard, accounting books, or brown paper. The artist has consistently sought liberation in her engagement with unusual materials that defy the conventions of traditional artistic repertoires reveling in the non-precious, the overlooked, and the unorthodox. These weathered relics, marked by tattered edges and stains, serve as both her canvas and a catalyst for uninhibited expression, inviting her to navigate the nuanced contours of control and chaos with a spirited freedom that transcends conventional artistic boundaries. Jungwirth's work extends beyond the mere selection of uncommon materials; it transforms them into a dialogue with ordered systems within the physical realm. The juxtaposition of materials designed to impose order becomes, in Jungwirth's hands, a fertile ground for gestural, spontaneous, and brilliantly colored brushwork.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Objects and People

The exhibition opens with Jungwirth's earliest works, a selection of large-scale drawings of ordinary objects from her *Indesit* series which marks the genesis of her artistic career as it might be understood fifty years later, representing the beginning of her nuanced navigations between realism and abstraction. Also on display in this section is a selection of portraits and groups of people that are representative of the artist's shift to working exclusively with watercolors and oils. However unexpected for an abstract artist, the genre of portraiture is one the artist has revisited over the years, melding the human form with expressive, gestural brushwork and color. Defying the confines of traditional portraiture, Jungwirth's engagement with the genre displays an innate ability to capture the inner essence and character of her sitters rather than a literal representation.

Painting Escapes

In addition to her focus on the internal landscape, Jungwirth has consistently turned her gaze outward, exploring the natural world. Travel as a form of artistic research has been fundamental to her practice since the 1970s. Jungwirth's travels have always been immersive experiences fueled by reading classical literature, studying architectural history, and other parallel pursuits which serve to imbue her paintings with the rich cultural textures acquired during her journeys. The paintings that result from her trips are not mere representations of the places she has visited but rather emotional responses to the moods and sensations invoked by nature. Through a synthesis of abstraction and recognizable forms, Jungwirth creates a dialogue between the internal and external, inviting viewers to experience the profound connection between the self and the world.

Animals as Imagery

In Jungwirth's recent animal paintings, the convergence of history and current events is palpable through a selection of paintings that have their roots in the stark reality of the world grappling with climate change. Her recent *Australidelphia* series (2020) focuses on Australian marsupial mammals, some of which are termed "living fossils" due to their unchanged characteristics from prehistoric times. The series is not just a nod to these ancient creatures but also a reflection on the devastating bushfires that ravaged Australia in 2019–20, leading to immense animal casualties. While the paintings resist simplistic reductions to recognizable images, the chromatic elements—comprising pink, red, brown, and black motifs—within her compositions symbolize the external violence these species faced.

Art History

Jungwirth consistently finds inspiration in a wide spectrum of painters, encompassing both celebrated figures and those less prominently featured in the canon. Her series of paintings inspired by artists like Richard Gerstl, Frans Hals, and Oskar Kokoschka exemplify her expansive exploration of art history. In her latest works, she looks to the masterpieces of Francisco de Goya and Édouard Manet, infusing them with her distinctive artistic vocabulary, resulting in radical departures from the original sources. Amid this convergence of historical narratives and contemporary interpretations, her ongoing experiments with the materiality of paint remain evident striking a balance between gesture and open space, abstraction and realism.

CATALOGUE

Martha Jungwirth will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue featuring the works in the show accompanied by Jungwirth's 1988 poem "the ape in me," which can be interpreted as an artistic statement, and two insightful essays by exhibition curator Lekha Hileman Waitoller and scholar Julianne Rebentisch.

DIDAKTIKA

As part of the Didaktika Project, the Museum designs educational spaces, digital content and host activities to complement each exhibition as a way to contribute to the appreciation and understanding of the works.

This time, the Didaktika, that is sponsored by Fundación EDP, offers additional information about the particular universe of color and gestures in the work by Martha Jungwirth and on her references to old masters such as Frans Hals (17th century), Francisco de Goya (18th-19th century) or Edouard Manet (19th century).

The Didaktika is completed by a sample of the artist's own work materials, accompanied by explanations about the different techniques used.

ActivitiesOpening talk (June 5)

Martha Jungwirth presents her exhibition to the public in dialogue with Lekha Hileman Waitoller, its curator.

Shared reflexions*

On these tours, members of the Guggenheim Museum staff offer different perspectives on the contents of the new exhibition.

- Curatorial vision (June 12) Lekha Hileman Waitoller, Curator.
- Key concepts (June 19): Luz Maguregui Urquiza, Education and Interpretation Coordinator.

*Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre

COVER IMAGE

Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Australidelphia (Ohne Titel, aus der Serie Australidelphia)*, 2020

Oil on paper over canvas

241.5 x 330.9 cm

Private collection, London

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Charles Duprat

For more information:

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Images for the use of the Press

Martha Jungwirth

Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa

Online press image service

In the press section of the Museum's website (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.eus), registered users can download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and the building. If you have not yet opened an account, you can register and download the required material.

If you are already a user, introduce your username and password and access the image downloading facility directly.

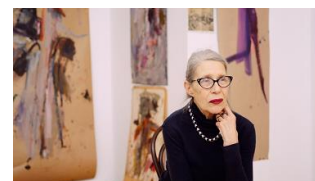
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For further information, the Press Department of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao can be contacted by phone (+34 944 359 008) or email (media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus).

Portrait of Martha Jungwirth

Photo © Shawn Dell

Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul



Martha Jungwirth

Here and Now and Never Again (Hier und jetzt und nie wieder), 1982-83

Watercolor on paper

211.6 x 221 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle, Don des Amis du Centre Pompidou, Cercle International, 2021

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Audrey Laurans



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, 1990

Oil on thin cardboard over canvas

186 x 142 cm

The Nixon Collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Auktionshaus im Kinsky GmbH, Vienna



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Spittelauer Lände* (*Ohne Titel*, aus der Serie *Spittelauer Lände*), 1993

Watercolor on paper

190 x 210 cm

The Albertina Museum, Vienna – The Haselsteiner Family Collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Nausicaa* (*Ohne Titel*, aus der Serie *Nausikaa*), 2001

Watercolor on handmade paper

140 x 105 cm

Museum Liaunig

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo © Museum Liaunig



Martha Jungwirth

Empty Quarter, from the series *Yemen* (*Leeres Viertel*, aus der Serie *Jemen*), 2005

Watercolor on handmade paper

104 x 140 cm

Private collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Courtesy: Galerie Krinzinger & Martha Jungwirth



Martha Jungwirth

Portrait U. K. (Porträt U. K.), 2019

235 x 195 cm

Oil on paper over canvas

Sammlung Österreichische Nationalbank

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo OeNB



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Australidelphia* (*Ohne Titel*, aus der Serie *Australidelphia*), 2020

Oil on paper

244 x 593 cm

Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, London · Paris · Salzburg · Seoul

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Elmar Bertsch



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Australidelphia* (*Ohne Titel*, aus der Serie *Australidelphia*), 2020

Oil on paper over canvas

241.5 x 330.9 cm

Private collection, London

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Charles Duprat



Martha Jungwirth

Artist Book (*Malbuch*), 2020s

Oil on paper (cashbook pages)

50 x 74 cm (open)

Private collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Ulrich Ghezzi



Martha Jungwirth

Bukephalos, 2021

Oil on paper over canvas

248 x 264 cm

Nicoletta Fiorucci Collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Lisa Rastl



Martha Jungwirth

La Grande Armée, 2021

Oil on paper

235 x 704.5 cm

Alex & Gabriela Davidoff Collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Charles Duprat



Martha Jungwirth

Bull (Stier), 2020

Oil on paper over canvas

144.5 x 208.5 cm

Private collection

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Lisa Rastl



Martha Jungwirth

Untitled, from the series *Francisco de Goya, Witches' Flight (Ohne Titel, aus der Serie Francisco de Goya, Flug der Hexen)*, 2022

Oil on paper over canvas

242.6 x 281 cm

Buffalo AKG Art Museum, George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund, 2022

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Ulrich Ghezzi



Martha Jungwirth

Maja III, from the series *Francisco de Goya, Maja (Maja III, aus der Serie Francisco de Goya, Maja)*, 2022

Oil on paper over canvas

264.5 x 226.8 cm

Alkar Contemporary Collection (ACC), Bilbao

© Martha Jungwirth, Bilbao, 2024

Photo Ulrich Ghezzi

