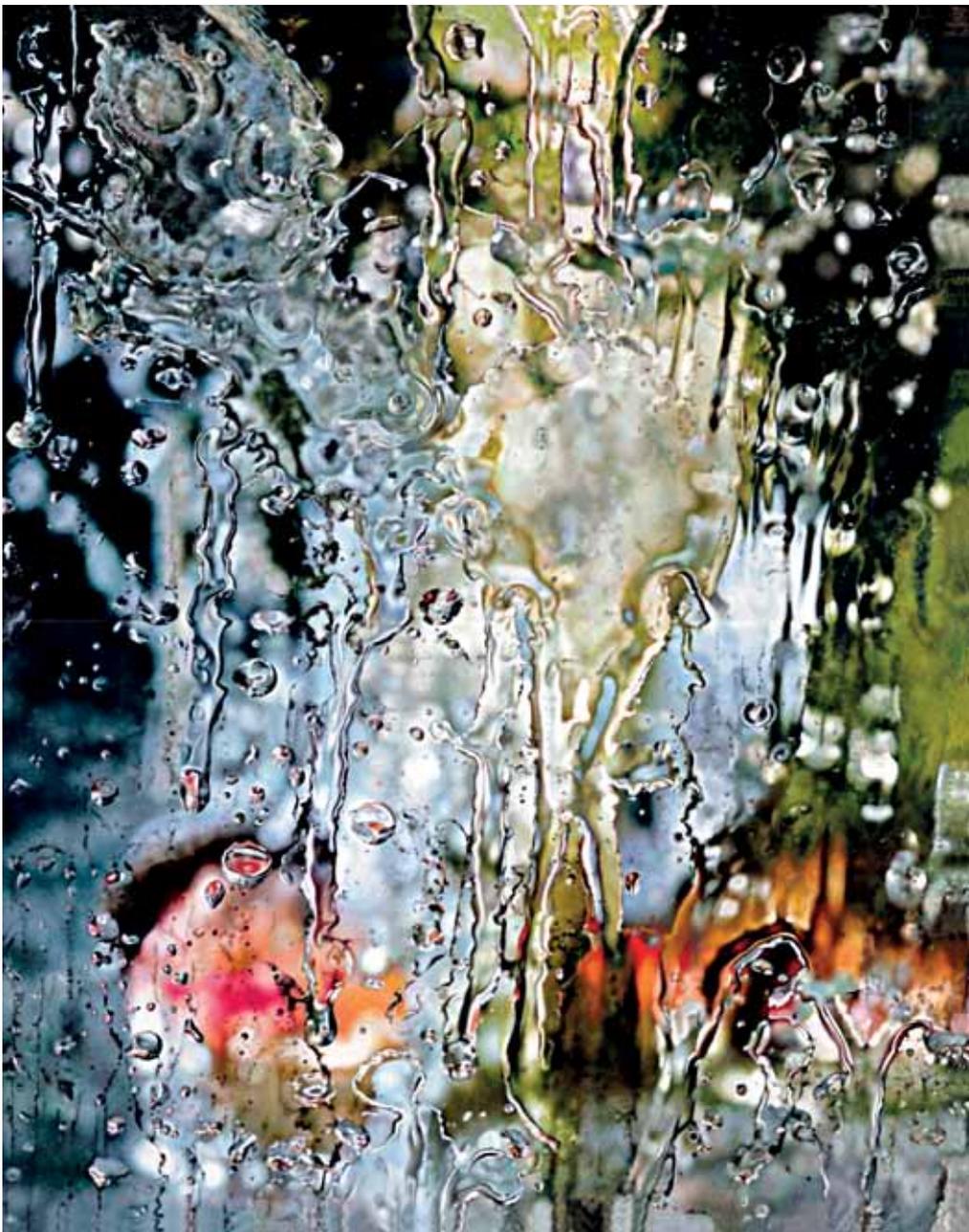


THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO

presents on June 14, 2013

# Riotous Baroque

From Cattelan to Zurbarán—Tributes to Precarious Vitality



GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

## ***Riotous Baroque. From Cattelan to Zurbarán – Tributes to Precarious Vitality***

- Dates: June 14–October 6, 2013
- Curator: Bice Curiger
- Galleries: third floor
- Venues: Kunsthaus Zürich and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Co-organized by Kunsthaus Zürich and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, *Riotous Baroque. From Cattelan to Zurbarán – Tributes to Precarious Vitality* strikes up a dialogue between 17th-century artworks and contemporary pieces in an attempt to extricate the concept of the Baroque from its conventional stylistic pigeonhole, moving away from clichés such as pomp, rich ornament, or gold and instead focusing on the Baroque as a “tribute to precarious vitality”: the riotous yet uncertain nature of existence.

The show juxtaposes works by great 17th-century masters such as Pieter Aertsen, Giovanni Battista Langetti, Alessandro Magnasco, José de Ribera, Jan Steen, David Teniers the Younger, Simon Vouet, and Francisco de Zurbarán with that of renowned contemporary creators like Maurizio Cattelan, Robert Crumb, Urs Fischer, Glenn Brown, Tobias Madison, Paul McCarthy, and Cindy Sherman, among others. Rather than drawing superficial thematic and formal analogies, the exhibition attempts to enable the two realities, with all their differences and affinities, to collide, cross-fertilize and permeate each other, inviting the audience to see them in a whole new light.

In the words of Bice Curiger, curator of the exhibition, *Riotous Baroque* does not seek to “host a festival of masterpieces”, nor does it attempt to “proclaim a neo-Baroque stylistic tendency”; rather, it aims to bring an art separated from us by several centuries into the world of the comprehensible, the world of experience: “In our age of massive revolutions in visual and communications media, revisiting an epoch that celebrated the visible and the sense of sight as a popular allegorical motif is both pleasurable and meaningful. The impulses of the present day will perhaps open up new ways for us to look at old art.”

More than one hundred works fill the third-floor galleries of the Museum, with an arrangement inspired by cinematographic montage techniques that invites us to look back at history from a contemporary perspective, exploring a wide range of popular Baroque themes such as earthiness, coarseness, religiosity, and sensuality, the grotesque, the burlesque, and the virile from multiple angles.

In addition to pieces from Kunsthaus Zürich, the show features loans from some of Europe’s leading Old Masters museums, such as the Museo de Bellas Artes of Bilbao, the Prado Museum, the

Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, and the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. The exhibition also includes a number of invaluable works from private collections.

### **The Bucolic and the Comical**

The exhibition opens in the classical galleries with a series of works that reflect vice, dissoluteness, sinfulness, and passion, a cheerful, carefree thematic repertoire developed in the 17th century to cater to the tastes of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, a new class of buyers that emerged from the ranks of prosperous city merchants.

Bucolic, comical scenes that depict an everyday reality filled with sensual and carnal temptations, such as *Wedding Feast in a Farmer's Tavern* (ca. 1665) by Jan Steen and *Still Life with a Pig (La Porchetta)* by José de Ribera, alternate with images of the poverty, obscenity and violence prevalent in the society of that era, as in Adriaen Brouwer's *Tussling Farmers by a Barrel* (1625–1638). In these works, the artists depicted worldly motifs with all their nuances which simultaneously attempt to teach a moral lesson that is not immediately apparent.

This same section includes a work by Juergen Teller in which two of his female friends are photographed as they stroll naked through the empty halls of the Louvre, posing before the *Mona Lisa* and the *Borghese* or *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*. The convergence of life with art—and vice versa—is slightly unsettling and surreal in this publicly practiced intimacy.

An entirely different reality is presented in the photographs taken by Boris Mikhailov on the fringes of modern post-Soviet society, a community overrun by Western consumerism that now finds itself in harried, oppressive circumstances. The existential tenor of these images makes us think of the "life excluded from the art space", alluding to a kind of existence undoubtedly led by many people on our planet.

The same space contains Dana Schutz's piece *How We Would Dance* (2007) which, according to the artist herself, combines the fantastical and the reflective by evoking the upside-down saint in Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* with a figure in her painting that appears to be falling backwards.

### **Mythology and the Glorification of Manliness**

In a patriarchal society, ruling houses deliberately invoked mythology or the heroes of Antiquity to legitimize their own lineage and power. Thus, the figure of Hercules portrayed by Francisco de Zurbarán symbolized not only the personification of virility but also the ideal of a virtuous sovereign. Cautionary visual depictions of human vice and models of a virtuous lifestyle all revolved around a world of men. Homages to feminine charms, almost always subtle and discreet, stood in contrast to paeans to male virility and heroism.

The tale of *Susannah and the Elders* (ca. 1745-50), which shows the sexual violence done to a lovely young woman by two lecherous old men, is illustrated in an eponymous painting by Francesco Capella. This particular story was a popular motif because it satisfied buyers' voyeuristic desires in a morally unrestrained context. We come across Susannah again in Glenn Brown's *Nigger of the World* (2011), but here she is headless and her body covered in lacerations: she has lost her attractiveness, and the leering old men have also disappeared.

The highly disturbing picture by Christiaan van Couwenbergh, *The Rape of the Negress* (1632), takes a similar direction, allowing us to witness the crude scene of a black female slave being raped by three white men.

A work from the *Problem Paintings* series by Urs Fischer likewise immerses us in the complexity of the artistic representation of sexual relations. The artist superimposes fruits, vegetables, tools and other objects on the faces of Hollywood actors, in a personal exploration of the classic genres of art history such as the portrait and the still life.

In the case of Maurizio Cattelan, this artist frequently infiltrates the art space with signs of life that are usually excluded from it. For example, his *Untitled* (2007) shows two stuffed dogs closely watching a small chick, which seem to represent the Baroque idea that vitality can also be a sign of the precariousness of life, of its fragile, ephemeral nature.

## The Burlesque and the Grotesque

This period also had a taste for depictions of coarse, impulsive behavior that flouted conventions and of the anomalous, the ugly and the discordant, in direct opposition to sublime classical harmony. Deformity and exaggeration were tools that artists used to address themes like the body and sexuality with detachment.

Juan Carreño de Miranda's portrait of the naked body of Eugenia Martínez Vallejo reveals to us a "she-monster", which the artist rendered both clothed and nude. The Baroque taste for the bizarre, for *bruttezza*, is also apparent in other works, such as Faustino Bocchi's *Burlesque Scene* or *The Crazy Lovers* by Bartolomeo Passerotti.

Certain contemporary works convey the modern reality of a world drowning in excess and hyper-consumerism, and a case in point is *Under Sided*, the sculptural theatre in which Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch's video installation *Temp Stop* (2009-10) is displayed, offering a glimpse of a darkly obsessive youth culture.

One of the large petal-shaped galleries in the building designed by Frank Gehry contains works on mythological themes that draw us into a rich universe of literary allusions, fantasy and eroticism, such as *Satyrs Taking Sleeping Venus by Surprise* (ca. 1925) by Nicolas Poussin and *Allegorical Scene* (1680-1690) by Dominicus van Wijnen.

In Simon Vouet's painting *The Rape of Europe* (ca. 1640), the depiction of carnal lust is lent a

humorous note by the bull's expression, with its lascivious, lolling tongue and bulging eyes staring at Europa's bared breast with unconcealed desire.

Lasciviousness and crudeness are also present in Urs Fischer's irreverent piece entitled *Noisette* (2009), in which a highly realistic silicone tongue, activated by motion sensors, pokes out through a hole in the wall of the Museum and waggles gently before the eyes of the surprised visitors before retreating into the recess once more. This work is in keeping with the social conventions of the northern European Baroque, when sticking out one's tongue was considered a bawdy, rude, irreverent, rule-breaking gesture, just as it is today. However, *Noisette* also conveys something subtler, animating the art space and causing life to protrude from the centre of a lifeless wall.

### Caravaggio and Darkness

The show continues with a series of paintings that employ the chiaroscuro technique with which Caravaggio revolutionized the art world in the 17th century, creating a heightened sense of drama that focuses on the sacred and the profane, daily life and sensual corporeality. This trend spread across Europe and was particularly popular in the north, primarily thanks to the Caravaggisti of the Utrecht School. The sculptural voluptuousness of *Saint Sebastian Attended by Saint Irene and Her Maid* (ca. 1615–1621) by Dirck van Baburen offers a clear example of religious emotionality and humanity. Caravaggio's influence was particularly strong among Spanish painters. In the daring composition *Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women* (ca. 1621), José de Ribera, whose realism influenced the development of the Italian Baroque in Rome and Naples, found inspiration in Caravaggio's use of light and revisited the theme of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian with a direct, elementary pictorial style.

Glenn Brown's *Carnival* (2011) also uses lighting—in this case a powerful blue light—to heighten the dramatic appeal of a horse head measuring more than 3 meters. As we move closer to the picture, the brushstrokes blend together in an orderly tangle of disturbing lines and patches of color that is both surprising and unsettling.

In the Late Baroque, themes related to night-time and darkness took on a new eeriness in the gloomy visions of Alessandro Magnasco and his rapid, nervous painting populated by shadowy figures of monks and brigands (*Monks by a Fire*, ca. 1725). In *Court Scene* (ca. 1710–20), Magnasco depicted a prison interrogation tableau that conveys a sense of the full dread and horror inspired by the Inquisition, which ordered people to be tortured in the name of the Lord. The counterpoint to self-flagellation was the carnival, which served as an escape valve, a legally sanctioned opportunity to contravene the established order, as we see in Pieter van Laer's *Carnival Celebration at an Inn* (ca. 1635).

Representations of witches and the torments suffered by St. Anthony express the phantasmagoria of temptation. In the mysterious paintings of Monsù Desiderio, considered an early forerunner of Surrealism, we see classical architectural structures, almost always devoid of human presence, that topple, explode or blaze in the spectral glow of the night.

Alongside these we find the raw, precarious, aggressive interventions of Oscar Tuazon, with their poetic allusions to both the history of modern sculpture and the counterculture of the 1970s, as well as

to other speculative and utopian ideas related to housing, survival strategies and shelter. In *Numbers* (2012), Tuazon created a composite walk-in sculpture that refers to the modules which, in the United States, represent the minimum dimensions for small spaces like shower stalls or telephone booths permitted by law.

### ***Vanitas*, or the Manifestation of Excess**

The final section of the show features a variety of allegories and portraits, as well as works that address a theme familiar since Antiquity and highly popular during the Baroque: the *vanitas*. In the 17th century, the presence of wars and catastrophes meant that death was ubiquitous, a fact that was reflected in countless symbols such as skulls—*Vanitas Still Life with Skull, Wax Taper and Pocket Sundial* (ca. 1620) by a German master—and in pictorial motifs like the ships tossed on stormy seas so eloquently rendered by Jacob van Ruisdael.

In this context, the still life acquired special significance. Cut pieces of fruit and wild game carcasses are depicted with erotic ambiguity, while the splendidly laid tables, luxuriant floral arrangements and the beauty of exotic artifacts remind us that transience and decay is our true and ultimate fate, as in David de Coninck's *Still Life with Flowers, Fruit, and Small Monkey* (ca. 1685).

The four hyper-realistic paintings (enamel on aluminum) by Marilyn Minter displayed in this same gallery, delightful and disturbing in equal measure, may also be an attempt to reflect excess and exuberance. An enormous baby happily plays in the midst of silver paint, representing the human quest for pleasure, expensive high heels splash in muddy puddles, and a woman's mouth, caught halfway between a mischievous smile and a grimace, drips and glistens. These images bear an excessive celebration of the surface, the visible and what has been called the 'pathology of glamour'.

Art's closeness to the crude reality of life is also addressed in Diana Thater's large video installation on the theme of Chernobyl and the disaster that occurred on April 26, 1986, in Reactor 4 of the nuclear power plant on the outskirts of the Ukrainian city of Prypiat, now one of the world's most heavily contaminated regions. Thater's film conveys the eeriness, gloom and menace of this abandoned site. The atmosphere of ruin is pervasive, and yet there is something curiously romantic about the desolate landscape. Thater shoots the rubble and detritus of the disaster while simultaneously expressing her awe at the extraordinary power of nature.

This exhibition takes a different and singular look at art history, displaying the art of centuries past alongside selected works by contemporary artists and thereby juxtaposing two distinct realities which, according to the curator, "are mutually enriched by their clash, heightening their charge and interrupting the linearity of conventional narrative techniques".

### **Catalogue**

The exhibition catalogue offers an overview of works that convey different aspects of the connection between art and life. The images, essays, and an extensive glossary transport readers to the sensory

world of the Baroque. Among the authors whose texts attempt to define the characteristics and spirit of "the Baroque" are the exhibition curator, Bice Curiger, the Belgian writer and philosopher Raoul Vaneigem, and Austrian author Elfriede Jelinek, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004. The catalogue also includes the transcript of a panel discussion between Nike Bätzner, Michael Glasmeier, Victoria von Flemming, and Tristan Weddigen on the meaning of the word "Baroque" and its evolution throughout history.

### **The Art of the Day and Its Context**

The exhibition is accompanied by a didactic area where visitors are presented with a series of terms that define the Baroque and revolve around the concepts of vitality and closeness to life. This space also proposes an imaginary game in the form of a diagram that traces the possible interconnections between those terms. In keeping with the spirit of entertainment that characterized this era, visitors will also be able to enjoy a repertoire of Baroque music selected by art historian Michael Glasmeier, featuring the works of classical composers and modern renderings by the musician Frieder Butzmann.

During the exhibition, on Tuesday, June 11, at 6:30 pm, the artists Cristina Lucas and Marilyn Minter will participate in a round table discussion in the Museum Auditorium. At this debate, moderated by the curator of the show, Bice Curiger, the artists will explain their respective creative processes and discuss the works included in the exhibition. Admission is free of charge with a ticket to visit the Museum, and a simultaneous English-Spanish interpreting service will be provided.

### **Cover image:**

Marilyn Minter (1948-)  
*Meltdown*, 2011  
Enamel on two metal panels  
304.8 x 243.8 cm  
Private Collection  
Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

### **For more information:**

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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](mailto:media@guggenheim-bilbao.es)

1. **José de Ribera (1591-1652)**

*Saint Sebastian Tended by the Holy Women*, ca. 1621

Oil on canvas

180.3 x 231.6 cm

Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao



2. **Maurizio Cattelan (1960-)**

*Untitled*, 2007

Taxidermied dog, Taxidermied chick, expanded polyurethane

Variable size

Installation view: Maurizio Cattelan, Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria,  
February 2–March 24, 2008.

Private Collection

Photo, Markus Tretter

Courtesy, Maurizio Cattelan's Archive



3. **Albert Oehlen (1954-)**

*FM 18*, 2008

Oil, paper on canvas

230 x 270 cm

Loan by the artist

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



4. **Diana Thater (1962-)**

*Chernobyl*, 2010

Installation: 6 projectors, 6 media players, Lee Filters

Edition of 3 + 1 A.P

Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, London

Installation view at Hauser & Wirth, London

Image courtesy Hauser & Wirth



5. **Glenn Brown (1966-)**

*The Happiness in One's Pocket*, 2012

Oil on panel

225 x 180 cm

Collection of the artist, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



6. **Simon Vouet (1590-1649)**  
*The Rape of Europe*, ca.1640  
Oil on canvas  
179 x 141.5 cm  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



7. **Juergen Teller (1964-)**  
*Paradis XII*, 2009  
C-Type, Edition 2/5  
127 x 177.8 cm. With frame 134.5 x 194.5 x 0.6 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery



8. **Pieter Aertsen (1507/08-1575)**  
*The Meatstall*, 1551-1555  
Oil on panel  
123 x 175 cm. With frame 151 x 202 x 8.5 cm  
Bonniefantemuseum Maastricht



9. **Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1624)**  
*Hercules diverts the River Alfeus*, 1634  
Oil on canvas  
133 x 153 cm. With frame 147.5 x 169 x 6.5 cm  
Museo Nacional del Prado



10. **Urs Fischer (1973-)**  
*Problem Painting*, 2012  
Acryl. Lack und Siebdruck auf Aluminium  
360 x 270  
Kunsthaus Zürich. Vereinigung Zürcher Kunstfreunde, Geschenk des Künstlers



11. **Bartolomeo Passerotti (1529-1592)**  
*The Crazy Lovers*, n/d  
Oil on canvas  
114 x 118 cm  
Private Collection, Paris



12. **Cristina Lucas (1973-)**  
*More Light (Más luz)*, 2003  
HD video 4:3 color and sound. 10 min  
Edition 1/3 + 2 AP  
Courtesy the artist and Juana de Aizpuru Gallery

