

Press release
Zurich, 30 October 2014

Kunsthaus Zürich presents a solo exhibition by Javier Téllez

In an overview to be shown at the Kunsthaus Zürich from 31 October 2014 to 4 January 2015, the Venezuelan artist Javier Téllez addresses issues of 'normality' and 'otherness'. He works in close collaboration with minorities in society, such as psychiatric patients, people with disabilities and refugees. The exhibition 'Shadow Play' features a representative selection of Téllez's film installations from the last ten years as well as two new works that are receiving their first showing in Zurich.

Javier Téllez was born in 1969 in Valencia, Venezuela. He lives in New York and has made his reputation through participation in leading international group exhibitions such as documenta 13. Curated by Mirjam Varadinis, the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich is his first solo show at a major institution in Switzerland and includes six film installations.

NEW FILM WORKS EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE KUNSTHAUS

Two of the film works have been created specially for the Kunsthaus and are receiving their first showing as part of the exhibition; they are 'Shadow Play' (2014), which gives its name to the exhibition, and 'Bourbaki Panorama' (2014). As always in Téllez's work, they aim to give a voice and visibility to people who otherwise inhabit the margins of society. 'After training as a film-maker I decided that instead of my own stories I would tell those of others – people who are not otherwise heard', the artist explains. Having worked with patients from psychiatric clinics on a number of occasions in recent years, in his latest pieces he turns to the plight of refugees. Today, more people are on the move and seeking refuge than at any time since the end of the Second World War. 'Bourbaki Panorama' examines Switzerland's humanitarian tradition in the context of the current political situation, but also the fundamental issues of war, flight, and life in exile. In this silent, 35mm film, Téllez creates a moving portrait of the existentially exposed situation of refugees, but once again combines the socio-political content with references to film and art history. Besides a group of refugees living in Switzerland today, Alberto Giacometti's celebrated 1947 sculpture 'La Main' and the Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne also feature prominently. Giacometti created 'La Main' in memory of a severed arm that he saw lying in the road during the war. The Bourbaki Panorama, which was created in 1881 and later transferred to Lucerne, played a central role in the construction of Switzerland's self-image as a country with a strong

humanitarian tradition. Over 100 metres in length, the historical image depicts the retreat of Bourbaki's defeated army into Switzerland. The panorama was, in a way, a precursor of cinema, as it gave the viewer the impression of being at the centre of real events – for Téllez the ideal homage to the medium of film that is the characteristic feature of his work.

As in earlier productions, the new films reflect the importance, for Téllez, of actively involving the people he works with in the artistic process. He invited the refugees to tell their own stories using shadow play rather than words – hence the title. The work consists of brief picture stories that tell of flight, fear, checks and imprisonment, once again entering into dialogue with Giacometti.

FOUR FILM WORKS FROM THE LAST TEN YEARS

The latest two works by Téllez form the centre point of the exhibition, and are framed by four films from the last decade that are screened in adjoining rooms. They include 'Caligari and the Sleepwalker' (2008), which was created in collaboration with a psychiatric institution in Berlin. Javier Téllez invited the patients to view Robert Wiene's 'Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari' from 1920 and conceive a new version of the silent movie, set against the backdrop of the Einstein tower. Wiene's classic is one of the first films to focus on psychiatric disorders.

Showing next to it will be 'Letter on the Blind, For the Use of Those Who See' (2007). The film borrows its title from Diderot's 'Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient' from 1749 in which the French philosopher recounts the life of a blind mathematician and reflects on the relationship between human reason and knowledge acquired through the senses. Téllez's film is based on an Indian parable, in which six blind men who have never seen an elephant are invited to touch the animal in turns and describe how they experience it. In the ancient parable the six descriptions and interpretations vary widely, illustrating that reality is not objective but is instead represented subjectively by our own perception. Finally 'La Conquista de México' (2012), created for documenta 13, is inspired by the legendary trip to Mexico by the French poet, playwright, actor and theatre director Antonin Artaud and his notes for a play entitled 'The Conquest of Mexico', from 1934. Also on display is 'O Rinoceronte de Dürer' (2010). Additionally, Javier Téllez has integrated into the exhibition a selection of reference materials that were important to the creation of the films on show and offer an insight into his artistic process.

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich, tel. +41 (0)44 253 84 84
www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Opening hours: Fri-Sun/Tues 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Wed, Thurs 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Public holidays: Christmas 24/26 December, 31 December, 1/2 January 2015:
10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Closed on 25 December.

Admission including collection: CHF 15 / CHF 10 (concessions and groups),
Children up to the age of 16 free of charge. Admission free on Wednesdays.

Advance sales: Zurich Tourism. Hotel room reservation and ticket sale available
from the Tourist Service at Zurich Main Railway Station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00,
information@zuerich.com, www.zuerich.com

SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at
stations and by phoning Rail Service 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by land line),
www.sbb.ch/kunsthhaus-zuerich

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NOTE AND CONTACT FOR THE MEDIA

Visual material can be downloaded from the website www.kunsthhaus.ch under
Information > Press.

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