

KW

Beatriz González

Retrospective 1965–2017

13 October 18 –

6 January 19

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13 October 18 – 6 January 19
Opening: 12 October 18, 7 pm

This fall, KW Institute for Contemporary Art presents the first major survey exhibition of Colombian artist Beatriz González (born 1938 in Bucaramanga, CO) in Germany. The exhibition features over 50 years of González' internationally acknowledged work and displays a selection of 120 works created between 1965 and 2017.

Growing up in Colombia in the 1940s and 1950s during an era of political unrest known as *La Violencia* (The Violence), González became a pivotal figure in the Latin-American art scene. In the late 1950s, González established an artistic practice strongly influenced by icon paintings, art-historical motifs, local styles, and mass media. Since then, González' work has been concerned with everyday scenes, public protest rituals, and scenes of collective pain in her home country, Colombia. The artist broke with the anonymous, impersonal style of Pop Art by addressing political events from the country's recent history through personal and intimate matters. González effortlessly juxtaposes formerly opposing elements—art and design as well as high and low culture. Her use of canonical motifs and art historical subjects enables her to critically reformulate their iconography, thus finding the congruence between Western and South American traditions.

In 1965 the artist started to use press clippings as templates for her portraits as she wanted to appropriate the aesthetics of popular imagery while still working within the parameters of painting's unique specificity, such as in her iconic work *Los Suicidas del Sisga No 2* (1965) which is located in the first room of the exhibition. This experimentation results in a style



Beatriz González, *1/500*, 1992
Silkscreen on paper, Courtesy the artist,
Private collection



Beatriz González, *Los Suicidas del Sisga No 2*, 1965
Oil on canvas, Courtesy the artist and Óscar Monsalve,
Museo La Tertulia, Cali

that neglects three-dimensional space and embraces silhouetted floating fields of color. The latter soon expanded almost accidentally onto furniture pieces that are prominently displayed in the hall of the building. One day, the artist bought a metal bed from a local market, and only after assembling it at home did she notice that the dimensions of the horizontal surface were almost identical to a painting of Christ she had just finished. With the furniture and curtain works, she proposes a “ready made” idea that does not follow the canonical logic. By introducing the element of narration, she corrupts the pure aesthetics of production and yet again challenges the autonomy of painting.

The newspaper clippings, some of which are displayed in several rooms of the exhibition, have a specific type of image that González started to collect. Central to the work of the 1960s and 1970s is the question of taste and the juxtaposition of supposedly oppositional types of imagery. Western masterpieces that she paraphrases in her own style, like *Télon de la móvil y cambiante naturaleza* (1978) appear next to popular graphics, which add a sense of humor to the complexity and were very fashionable throughout Latin America at that time.

The political dimension of her work is already prevalent here, but becomes explicit during the 1980s and 1990s,

mirroring the increase in brutal conflicts in the country. For example, *Decoracion de Interiores* (1981), which marks this shift, shows president Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (in office from 1978–82) together with noble society at a private reception, drinking and laughing. During his governance, Colombia underwent a horrific period of violence caused by the clash between guerrillas and the military. To counteract public unrest, he chose a harmless, private portrayal of his persona in the media.

The *Las Delicias* series (1997) contains large-format depictions of indigenous people crying. Works such as *El silencio*, *El paraíso*, *Autorretrato desnuda llorando* (1997), all located in room six, capture the history of the country, the victims, and traces of violence. Here the use of an overall darker color palette and the schematic contours of the figures add a contemplative, serene component that almost transcends the violent aspect. This dedication, not to the perpetrators but the victims, is still present in the more recent works and expresses the activity of mourning and memorializing a collective history. The series *Los Cargueros* (2007–2008) is the most recent example of how the artist perpetuates these aspects of her work. It repeats the motif of the silhouettes of two people carrying a dead body in an improvised hammock and appears in various ways, such as in the big graphite drawings *Carguero de la sombra* (2008) and *Carguero a la luz* (2008), which are placed next each other right before entering the hall, or in an in situ work that repeats almost endlessly on the facade of Bogotá's central cemetery. Taking the architectural layout of KW into account, a section of the columbarium's facade was reproduced and installed in the transitional area between the street entrance and the yard of KW.

Aside from her purely artistic practice, the artist has been very important in fueling Colombia's art scene on a discursive level in her role as a teacher and critic. Through her multifaceted and outspoken body of work, González has become one of the most important

female artists from Latin America, who manages to respond to questions of form and media, as well as questions of history and representation, like no other.

In conjunction with the exhibition on the artist, Diego García Moreno's documentary *Beatriz González ¿Por qué llora si ya reí?* will be screened at Pogo Bar. On 13 and 25 October, 22 and 29 November, 13 December, and 5 January the film will not be on view.

The exhibition *Retrospective 1965–2017* by Beatriz González marks the first presentation of this scale outside of Colombia and was produced in collaboration with the CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid.



Beatriz González, *Los papagayos*, 1986–1987
Oil on paper, Courtesy the artist and Óscar Monsalve, Private collection

On the work of Beatriz González

Room 1 and 2

“A vibrant multiracial culture as well as an avidly sensationalist press are the sources of some of the artist’s early works, including *Los Suicidas del Sisga No 2* (1965). The small canvas is straightforward: it shows, in half body, a young man and woman, absently holding hands. With its simple shapes and vivid colors, this painting could easily be a poster: something like a shop’s advertisement, romantically trying to emphasize the benefits of conjugal life. Indeed, the picture is based on the photograph of a young couple taken before committing suicide by drowning. In a farewell letter, they explained to be deeply in love, yet that to comply with their profound religious beliefs they had decided to die not to stain the girl’s purity. The painting is one of several works of the Sixties in which González explored the incisive violence of Colombian society. It is part of a series of portraits based on images of mass circulation.”

Holland Cotter, in: *The New York Times*, 4.9.1998

“Today, the newspaper as a news medium appears to be obsolete. But as the use of newspapers in the context of hostage-takings shows, this is not really the case. A newspaper has a material component, it is printed on paper, and thus it cannot be as easily manipulated as TV or social networks. Its date is printed on it. It bears witness. And thus it is contemporary in a way in which digital media are not. But most importantly, a newspaper page is in itself a kind of conceptual artwork—a combination of images and texts. Here, artists are in their element. But González did not adapt her art to the newspaper style as some conceptual artists did. Rather, she repaints and reformats the newspaper images in a subjective and even lyrical way. Painting shows its status as hostage in relation to the world of news: painting is not new and produces no news, and as such it seems to be irrelevant in a time like ours, dominated by news.”

Boris Groys, *Beyond the Stockholm syndrome*, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 217–218

Room 3

“Based on predominantly formal criteria, Beatriz González collects advertisements and news items that attract her attention and subsequently uses them as inspiration for her graphic series. Hans Ulrich Obrist has drawn a comparison between González’s interest in these news items and the French painter and writer Félix Fénéon’s penchant for faits divers (literally, “miscellaneous events”) in the early twentieth century. In addition to pictures of crimes such as murder and

suicide, González also collects photographs of wrestlers in working class gyms, provincial beauty queens, and commercial advertisements.”

José Ruiz Díaz, *Beatriz González’s image archive*, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 225–227



Beatriz González, *Nací en Florencia y tenía ventiseis años cuando fue pintado mi retrato (esta frase pronunciada en voz dulce y baja)*, 1974
Enamel on metal sheet assembled on a wood rack,
Courtesy the artist, Universidad de los Andes,
and Casas Riegner, Bogotá

Room 4

“Beatriz González’s works commemorative of the discovery of the Americas reflect her intention to produce iconic images able to synthesize the experience of reality, thus counteracting the confusion of signs, the simultaneity of times, the complex cultural identity and diversity of political, fetishistic, and mythical entities that coexist in a funereal present.”

Carolina Ponce de León, Consuelo Castañeda, in: *Ante América*, Bogotá 1992, pp. 14–21 (English translation)

Room 5, 6, hall and outside

“The other vein in González’s political art is her treatment of violent death, and it has nothing to do with irony or caricature. Adding up the official figures from the various stages of the conflict over the last three quarters of a century, the dead number at least half a million. Colombia ranks high in those dubious surveys that rate countries according to the happiness of their populations, but it must also be a country full of grief. That is what González paints: grief, *el dolor*, the end product of horror, not the horror itself.”

Malcolm Deas, History and politics and Beatriz González, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 213–216

“As of this point, it seems to me that Beatriz González’s work should be considered within the long tradition of visual representations of death that fill the memory of modern Western painting, above all, as an expression of an iconography—and an iconology—of (collective) martyrdom.”

Luis Pérez-Oramas, Beatriz González and anonymous auras: the circulation and sacrament of images, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 219–224

Room 6

“It was around this time that a certain image both symptomatic and deictic started appearing repeatedly in her work: an image of González herself, with her hands covering her face. An image that marks the obliteration of vision, and perhaps also the impotence of the image (which is nonetheless operative) in response to the images of dark shapes carrying the collective corpse of the Colombian nation, which she herself apprehends in its unbearable derision, in the endless sloping landscape of its never-ending suicide.”

Luis Pérez-Oramas, Beatriz González and anonymous auras: the circulation and sacrament of images, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 219–224

Hall

“The furniture chosen by Beatriz González as mounting for her paintings since 1970 signals a choice for the popular. The chromatic preference of the Colombians inclines towards bright materials, fake textures, ornaments. Beds, nightstands, and drawers freely combine figuration and abstraction. The use González makes of the pieces of furniture effectively illustrates the difference traced between fine and popular art.”

Marta Traba, *Los muebles de Beatriz González*, Bogotá 1978 (English translation)

“In the twentieth century, a dividing line was drawn between high culture and mass culture, but also between art and design. [...] González’s installations and objects, in which copies of the famous masterworks of historical painting are incorporated into everyday pieces of furniture or designs, continue to look transgressive even today. They appear transgressive because they seem to denigrate these masterpieces by reducing them to simple objects for everyday use. In them, we are confronted with a gesture that is precisely the opposite of Duchamp’s famous gesture of bringing an everyday object into the privileged space of art. Indeed, González transfers art history from spaces of public representation to the intimacy of private space.”

Boris Groys, Beyond the Stockholm syndrome, in: *Beatriz González 1965–2017*, Madrid 2017, pp. 217–218

Public program

Curator's tour through the exhibition with
María Inés Rodríguez
13 October 18, 3 pm

Book launch with Beatriz González
Diario del Guernica. Diario de una obra sin sentido
Mural Para Fábrica Socialista
13 October 18, 5 pm
Venue: Pogo Bar

Assistant curator's tour through the exhibition with
Cathrin Mayer
22 November 18, 7 pm

Colombian film afternoon
Two films selected by Beatriz González
(Spanish with English subtitles)
2 December 18, 5 and 7 pm
Venue: Studio at KW's front building
Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Curator's tour through the exhibition with
Krist Gruijthuijsen
13 December 18, 7 pm

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Opening hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 € / reduced 6 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 € / reduced 8 €
berlinpass holder 4 €
Free admission to people up to the age of 18,
KW Lover*, and on Thursday evenings from 6–9 pm

Guided Tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibition
during regular opening hours. For further information
on tours for large groups (over 10 people),
please contact Duygu Örs at do@kw-berlin.de
or +49 30 243459-132.

Colophon

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