

BÒLIT CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORANI GIRONA

Ajuntament  de Girona

 Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura
i Mitjans de Comunicació

ESPANYA 	FRANQUEIG PAGAT
	P.D.

DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

26.6.09 - 20.9.09
OPENING 25.6.09

Manuel Saiz
Toni Serra
Bill Viola

BÒLIT - LA RAMBLA / DADESPAI / NIU
Rambla de la Llibertat 1 - 17004 Girona.
Dilluns tancat · Lunes cerrado · Monday closed.
Dimarts · Martes Tuesday: 18-21 h. Dimecres ·
Diumenge i festius. Miércoles · Domingo
y festivos. Wednesday · Sunday and Bank
holidays: 12-14, 18-21 h.

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· Lunes cerrado Monday closed. Dimarts · Martes
· Tuesday: 17-19 h. Dimecres · Diumenge i festius.
Miércoles · Domingo y festivos. Wednesday
· Sunday and Bank holidays: 12-14, 17-19 h.

DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

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«You see nothing but appearance, but the essential is decided by destiny. And then, when destiny takes its course, even the heavens are astounded. To try and deny this is to diminish the universe. Destiny can transform stone into water. You have seen the millwheel turn, come then and see the river that moves it. Have you seen how the dust flies? Look rather at the wind that makes it fly. You have seen how the cauldron of ideas boils over. Be sensible and observe the fire beneath that makes it boil. Do not worry about patience; think rather about what patience has given you. You claim to have seen something, but your acts prove that you have seen nothing at all! Admire the ocean before admiring the foam, for he who only sees the foam becomes troubled by secrets, whilst he who sees the ocean becomes smitten with admiration. Make your heart like an ocean. He who only sees the foam will spin with dizziness, but he who sees the ocean will know no doubt.»

Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi:

Lantern in Daylight, Matnawi, 13th century

Dark Nights of the Soul, titled after the famous poem by Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz, brings together works by three artists who approach the subject of mysticism from very different perspectives and methods. However, a similar artistic medium is held in common, and all the projects are presented as video or installation works in different formats. The video installations by **Bill Viola**, **Toni Serra** and **Manuel Saiz** contain spiritual knowledge gleaned from different cultures and sensitivities. They represent a range of regards concerning reflection and discovery of the hidden face of existence through experience of the unknown, of dreams, and of visions of life and death. Beyond beliefs and stereotypes, these artworks deal with the symbolical constructs used to attain that which has no hard-and-fast meaning.

Christian mysticism, Sufism, Zen Buddhism and Indian yoga all teach the practice of contemplation and meditation as ways of reaching knowledge of our Inner Being. Since earliest times, mankind has felt the need to transcend the material world and enter into contact with the immaterial world beyond. Even today, experience of the intangible and the invisible is the very stuff of spiritual searching, be this through thought, literature and of course, art.

Toni Serra's video *Perro Corazón* (1998-2004) is headed by appropriate declarations by Mohamed Choukri, in which the writer explains that, as opposed to our experience of ephemeral reality, our transition through creative territory can bring enduring knowledge about the truth of existence, and mysticism and the practice of art as a vision can bring a revelation of the occult. «Mystery has its charm, more than reality. Reality fades away and dies. But mystery has durability and duration. The creative imagination: now all that will remain of man is his imagination and his creation. Our most important experience is that of the imagination which brings us from the ordinary to the sublime...



Ira Cohen, interviewed by Toni Serra in *Perro Corazón*, 1998-2004.

ideas are out there in the street and ordinary people can experience them. (...) The question is how to reach this inner vision, beyond the outer vision? (...) This is the most important thing. Not everybody attains the Sufi vision of the inner creative vision; people fear the mysterious, the imagination. (...) In Arabic, the prophets' vision is called *ruhb*; I am not referring here to the religious prophets but to the great philosophers, painters and writers. We are all prophets»

The video image, like music, takes place within a concrete time span; it flows in time; it only exists when being seen. Its effects on the spectator vary according to space, context and situation. Music and video attain their *raison d'être* by contrasting with their opposites: music contrasts with silence, video contrasts with darkness, with the disappearance of the image. This same feature is also present in most spiritual disciplines. As Bill Viola adroitly points out, religious and artistic practices both occur through «illumination»¹, as indeed in the projects presented at **Dark Nights of the Soul**. Bill Viola's contemplative work, Toni Serra's critical regard and Manuel Saiz' ironic outlook all focus in different ways on the image as vision and on its relationship with awareness.

In *A New Chance for Symbolic Dimension*, **Manuel Saiz** appropriates an excerpt from Ingmar Bergman's film *Ansiktet (The Magician/The Face)*, in which cynical rationalist Dr Vergéus

¹ «The Light Enters You», interview with Bill Viola in *Shambhala Sun*, November 2004.

calls upon magician-cum-hypnotiser Dr Vogler to account for the latter's paranormal powers. This happens in the presence of political and religious figures and of members of Vogler's troupe including his androgynous wife, a charlatan and an old witch. The scene takes place in the context of an argument on the magician's alleged ability to see visions. In his video installation, Manuel Saiz removes some of the original stills but, although the image is interrupted during the argument, it does not disappear altogether. This is because the image is projected onto a surface impregnated with a light-retaining solution that makes the image appear to the viewer as if revealed in a vision. Ingmar Bergman, who explored the mysteries of death in so many of his films, now offers us an opportunity to reflect on a hidden state of awareness. Manuel Saiz also introduces an ironic note, involving us as actors in the scene as he invites us to reflect on the essence of the moving image. Bill Viola observed that, before photography brought about the death of the image by making it an artefact of the past, the image was

Manuel Saiz. Light impressions from *A New Chance For a Symbolic Dimension*, 2005, still from the film *Ansiktet (The Magician/The Face)*, by Ingmar Bergman, 1958.

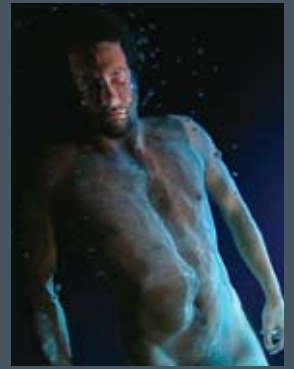


already becoming de-materialised and internalized; before becoming frozen as a register of the past, the image was already the representation of reality in real time. This was demonstrated in 1425 by Brunelleschi's experiment on the façade of Florence cathedral, when he presented the camera obscura to his contemporaries: «It is important to note that the invention of photography was not the invention of the camera, but that of the process of fixing an image onto a plate»². However, when we seek the origin of photography solely within the laws of optics, the properties of light and the focus of the human eye, we realise that an image can only be captured in a mirror. The ideal mirror is the black depths of the pupil of the eye: therein lies the very essence of the image, therein resides the image's ability to become visible, when reflected in other eyes. The very same principle underlies many types of meditation practices in their search for the interior vision of the self. «As the gateway to the soul, the pupil of the eye has long been powerful symbolic image and evocative physical object in the search for knowledge of the self. The color of the pupil is black. It is on this black that you see your self-image when you try to look closely into your own eye, or into the eye of another»³. **Bill Viola** has developed these ideas through profound reflection and numerous projects, delving deeply into theories of perception and the philosophies of classical Greece, Zen Buddhism and Islamic Sufism.

The Messenger is a video installation designed in 1996 for a place of worship, specifically Durham Cathedral in the north of England. It was recently shown at the Haunch of Venison gallery in Berlin, and now at **Bòlit, Centre d'Art Contemporani. Girona**. A large-scale projection shows a naked male figure emerging very slowly from water, breathing deeply, and then slowly submerging again, in a magnificent metaphor referring to the ineffable transition between life and death. Intense darkness and deep silence fill the space, propitiating an atmosphere of sensorial immersion that invites meditation through the collision of opposites, in an idea that was previously developed by Viola in other works. In *Room for St John of the Cross* (1983), for example, the artist projects large images of jagged mountains, violently moving with the jerky motion of the camera, on a wall behind a black cell, recalling the imprisonment of San Juan de la Cruz by the Spanish Inquisition. The murmur of a recitation of poems can be heard beneath the imprisonment of San Juan de la Cruz by the Spanish Inquisition. The murmur of a recitation of poems by the saint can be heard beneath a wailing wind, in an allusion to the connection of man with his surroundings, through an intense feeling of liberation, of fusion between the human and the divine.

² Bill Viola: «Video Black-the Mortality of the image», in *Illuminating Video. An essential guide to videoart*. New York: Aperture, 2005. p. 481.

³ Bill Viola: *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*. Los Angeles and Boston: Voyager Press/The Contemporary Art Television Fund, 1986.



Bill Viola. Still from *The Messenger*, 1996.

The Passing (1991) and *Heaven and Earth* (1992) are centred on the moment of the transition of the soul. In these works, Bill Viola takes the death of his own mother as his starting point. In *The Passing*, we see a video documenting showing the last moments of a life, whereas on the two opposite monitor screens of *Heaven and Earth*, images of the face of the dying mother merge with images of Viola's son opening his eyes shortly after birth. In *Nantes Triptych* (1992) three simultaneous slow-movement projections contrast real-life images of birth and death; in the center of these we see a clothed man floating in a watery space changing from turbulence to calm: the vacuum between life and death. Here the camera acts like an eye that watches the most private, most intimate moments of our life. Viola also directs his artist's regard onto the world of dreams, when the unconscious mind acts in a suspended time space, free from the constraints of reality. In his admiration of Giotto's frescoes in Assisi depicting Pope Innocent asleep, Viola describes it as representing the «fluidity between the inner world and the other world, through the porous, transparent space of dreams»⁴. The territory of dreams is a mystical space par excellence, close to meditation and transition, in which the mind can reach out to the unknown.

Toni Serra's works often appeal to the unconscious mind through dreams, ritual and altered states of awareness. In *Istishara Archives* - a triptych reminiscent of classical religious art in the western tradition - , the artist presents a series of video recordings on different aspects of the Arabic imaginary, which he has created over the last two decades. Toni Serra combines a collision of three different situations in this video-installation that won the Nam June Paik Award in 2006. The centre screen documents the experience of dreams (*Istishara*), beliefs (*Dar Al Ajira*, 2000), ancestral practices (*Last Night Dikr*, 2005), sacrifice (*Dhia Dhikr*, 2004) and an analytical experience contrasting East and West (*Seffar*, 2001-2004); on one of the side screens we see *1991 Next Hundred Years* (1991) collection of images on the New York victory parades after the Gulf

War, and on the other side screen, we see *The War Room* (2005) documentary on the development of war video games by the Institute for Creative Technologies. This was part of an agreement between the American Armed Forces and the University of Southern California in 1999, aimed at obtaining the necessary talent and resources from among technology professionals to design simu-



Giotto. *Innocent III sleeping*, Upper Church frescos, Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi, S. XIII-XIV.

lation methods for training the troops: video games for instructing troops, war played as a game.

The deep breathing of a sleeping girl, the incessant beating of the rain and the restless sighing of wind in the trees bring us through oneiric stories imbued with feelings of solitude and fear; memory and transmission of ancestral knowledge; the voice of an old travelling preacher that reminds us of the impermanence of the body and material goods and their insignificance in the face of death. Scenes from daily life (eating, sleeping and meditating) intermingle with evocative images like the fusion of a well with a human torso, in poetic allusion to the search for the Inner Self and soul-cleansing transit by ritual trance and sacrifice. In this collage in movement, Toni Serra confronts this personal, inner world with images of arab identity constructed out by armed conflict and war. The voice of former US president Bush resounds implacably over a military victory parade through New York streets thronged with enthusiastic crowds, «No president lightly sends the sons and

⁴ Bill Viola: *The Eye of the Hearth. A portrait of the artist*, A film by Mark Kidel. London: BBC, 2005

daughters of the nation off to war... we are here to define the future of the world for the next hundred years», while a marine proclaims that «we will free those people, and then we will be able to return home and be free again». On another screen, Abdelfettah Seffar from Fez reflects on the current (2001) state of the world, and predicts that «the only change that can happen is a crisis affecting the

Toni Serra. Still from *Istishara Archives*, 2006, corresponding to (from top to bottom): *1991 Next Hundred Years* (1991), *Last Night Dikr* (2005) and *The War Room* (2005).



whole system, and this will happen in the western world. What we are seeing here is the result of globalisation. We are caught between two influences: preserving our way of life or accepting and importing western models... we are trapped in the middle... the west has gone too far. The system will fall on its own».

Istishara Archives is a network of inter-textual images which can be read as an accurate premonition from one decade ago, now that we are witnessing the devastating break-down of a whole economic and values system previously thought to be indestructible.

In their study of war photographs, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca and Sonia García López clearly show how «the retrieval and migration of images is done by taking photos which, either by design or by chance, have been proved to cause dismay in viewers' hearts. This effectively means that they have become (or are in the process of becoming) symbols of human, political, social ideological or ethical values»⁵. Images take on a life of their own. They are symbolic constructs that are as powerful as or even more powerful than the tangible or intangible reality that they reflect. To return to the words of Rumi, we must strive to see the ocean and not just the foam, to go from the material to the unattainable, from the outside to the inside, from the surface of things to their deepest essence. This is the message brought to us by the diverse but concurring projects in **Dark Nights of the Soul**.

Rosa Pera

Manuel Saiz

Logroño, 1961. Manuel Saiz is a visual artist and independent curator residing in London who has been exhibiting his sculptures, photographic reproductions and video works since the mid-1980s in art galleries and museums all over the world. From 1995 onwards, his work has been focused on videos and video installations, which have been projected in numerous cinema and video festivals including Impakt (Utrecht), VideoLisboa (Lisbon), Videoex (Zurich), International Short Film Festival (Hamburg) and Transmediale (Berlin). Recently, his video-installations have been seen in exhibitions such as *Specialized Technicians Required* (Galería Moriarty, Madrid), *Nominal Politics* (T1+2 Space, London), *East End Academy* (Whitechapel Gallery, London) and *Save the Day* (Kunsthörs, Vienna).

Manuel Saiz was a founder member of TheVideoArtFoundation in 2003. He directed the 25hrs Festival (www.25hrs.org) with a selection of 300 international video artists, generating a journey through the history of video since the

⁵ «Imágenes en migración», in Antonio Monegal (Ed.), *Política y (po)lítica de las imágenes de guerra*. Barcelona: Paidós Estética, 2007.

1990s. Other projects currently being developed include videoDictionary (www.videodictionary.org) and artDVD-book (www.artdvdbook.com). | www.saiz.co.uk

Toni Serra

Barcelona, 1961. Toni Serra is the author of texts, videos, interactive and other sub-media projects. Founder member of OVNI (Unidentified Video Observatory) archive and OVNI programmer and researcher since 1993.

Serra has explored different visions through his videos, a no man's land between documentary and poetry with the constant presence of the notion of *trance* and the realities of dreams. His first works, filmed in Barcelona, New York and Tangiers, raised questions on beauty, on the mystery of the ephemeral and the marginal. In 1994, back in Barcelona, he started the *TV Code* video series, a personal criticism of the alienating mechanisms of the mass media, in which he seeks to parody its spectacular power of seduction and to deconstruct its hypnotic ability to create social models and identitarian stereotypes. He came to understand criticism as a tool for making things appear and for discovering other worlds. This in turn led him to reflect and experiment on how video relates to the visionary, to our inner experience and to visions that move through worlds, spaces and times, through the real and the unreal, through dreaming and wakefulness, through poetry and prophecy... like a ship that erases the borders and limits across which it sails. This is the underlying idea behind the *Hamdulillah Tapes* and *Dream Archives* series, a work in progress since 1998 when the artist began to alternate his residence between Barcelona and the Moroccan city of Duar Msuar.

| www.desorg.org (On-line Archives: Abu-Ali & Toni Serra)

Bill Viola

New York, 1951. Bill Viola is widely acknowledged as a pioneer in the world of video art and has gained international acclaim as one of the major artists in this genre.

He has played an important role in the establishment of video as a major form of contemporary art and, by doing so, has contributed to the broadening of its scope in terms of technology, content and historical dimension. For over 35 years, Viola has produced video tapes, created architectural video installations, sound landscapes, electronic music performances, plasma screen video compositions, and works for television. His video installations –total environments that envelop the viewer in image and sound– employ sophisticated state-of-the-art technologies and are distinguished by their precision and direct simplicity. They are exhibited in museums and galleries all over the world and can be found in many major public and private collections. Viola's single-channel videotapes have been

distributed in cinemas and broadcast around the world, while his writings have been widely published and translated into many languages.

Viola uses video to explore the phenomena of sense perception as an avenue to self-knowledge. His works focus on the universal human experiences of birth, death and the unfolding of consciousness. They have roots in eastern and western art as well as in the spiritual traditions of Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism and Christian mysticism. Viola's use of the inner language of subjective thoughts and collective memory in his videos reaches out to a wide audience and inspires a direct, personal response to his art. | www.billviola.com



A festival of sacred and world music conjures up, above all, the ideas of spirituality and confluence of cultures. The event continues to stand at the crossroads of diversity, with oral tradition as its driving force and music as its vehicle, with repertoires of many different origins, colours and sensitivities, from ancestral to contemporary, from near and faraway.

This festival is now in its tenth year, after a fruitful decade that has enabled us to reach out to a much wider perspective than before we began this venture. The occasion deserves a special celebration, and so this year's festival is taking place in conjunction with the field of visual arts. A dialogue with Bòlit, Centre d'Art Contemporani. Girona produced brisk results. From among the options available to us, there was unanimous agreement from the start to invite artist Bill Viola to illustrate this year's festival poster. There was even more excitement and anticipation when we decided to ask Viola to present one of his most emblematic works here in Girona. Our dream has come true with the presentation of *The Messenger* video installation in the context of **Dark Nights of the Soul** exhibition by Bòlit. This is a handsome metaphor of the cultural life of the city, with music and visual arts flowing together in the same direction, towards the reflection that stems from creation.

Víctor García de Gomar and Rosa Pera

INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES WORKSHOP

Istishara [visions of Otherness]

Led by: **Toni Serra**. Talks given by: **Dalila Ennadre, Xavi Hurtado** and **Àlex Muñoz**. Date: **6-10 July, 2009**. Venue: **Niu**.

The workshop will start with a screening of a selection of audiovisual creations: independent documentaries, creative video and media archaeology, mostly from the OVNI [Unidentified Video Observatory] archives (www.desorg.org).

We propose to start by discussing a series of videos on a tight-rope between social criticism / reflection and an introspective questioning of human nature: dual aspects of a single reality which have often been dissociated by our prevailing western tradition, thereby depriving us of the means of deepening our critical regard, not only on ourselves and our society, but also on the role of video as a creator of visions and imageries.

The development of consumer technology has brought with it an increasing trivialisation of the image, a saturation of visual stimuli, and a masking of other realities. However, it has also given us video as an everyday tool with which we can reflect on the realities of our lives and our dreams, and with which we can create our own imagery; it has heralded the arrival of an independent visual discourse, and thus provided access to non-cloned visions. The workshop aims to explore and consider these possibilities through screenings and discussions of video artworks, interventions by guest artists, and contributions from participants.

There will be screenings and discussions on videos that explore the mechanisms of social and identitarian control, the violence and conflicts of globalization; the image as a spectacular mirage, media deconstruction; the devices of otherness (migration and the creation of the "other"), inner experiences, initiation journeys, accounts of dreams, transits towards other realities, indigenous and Islamic rhizomes, and much more.

Interventions by:

Dalila Ennadre

Casablanca, 1966. Dalila Ennadre lived in Guyana, Germany, Morocco and Canada from 1985-1996 before settling in France. The artist's work consists in building bridges to bring people and cultures closer together. It is based on the fact that ignorance is the main cause of fear and discrimination, as well as being the origin of conflicts, racism and all manner of exclusions. It is important for her to continue working in this direction, striving in her documentaries to create a universal language which speaks of the things that connect people to life.

Xavi Hurtado

Barcelona, 1961. Xavi Hurtado began working with video in the 1990s, questioning the interview as a means of representation. He then moved to New York where he studied Interactive Media and did a series of projects in which he used cinema and *found footage* to explore the links between technology and identity. In 1996, he moved to Co-

lombia, where he worked as a university lecturer in Bogotá and travelled around the country. Consumption of *yagé* led him to the Amazon where, after attending workshops on video and dreams in 2001 and 2002, he created the *Dream Tapes* series. In 2004 and 2005 his trips to Quito and Tena (River Napo) in Ecuador gave rise to other joint projects on the indigenous rhizome, now within the context of the Americas Social Forum. In 2005-2006 he travelled along the Colombian Pacific coast and to the Cauca region taking part on community organization processes among indigenous peoples. Nowadays, he's working in the unstructured *Porvenir* archive (Bogotá, 2009) of 1940s-1960s American and British colonial and propaganda 16mm films for Latin America. Xavi Hurtado's work has been exhibited in art centres and at national and international festivals. It can be viewed at www.desorg.org and through Hamaca distributors.

Àlex Muñoz

Barcelona, 1966. Àlex Muñoz is a video-maker and photographer. He has been involved since the year 2000 in an ongoing project entitled *Frontera Sur* (South Border) on both sides of the border between Spain and Morocco, one of the most unequal borders in the world. Current projects include editing a documentary on hip-hop, filming a video on therapeutic processes, and recording for an exhibition on the Bages County workers' movement in Catalonia. His regard has now turned inwards, with a video on his relationship with nature, in which he explores how our perception, our vision, our feeling and our relationship with the outer world all vary and change... presupposing the existence of an inner and an outer world.

| For further information and reservations: www.bolit.cat / info@bolit.cat / 972 427 627

GUIDED VISITS

Every Saturday and last Wednesday of each month. 12 noon - 2 pm. **Free of charge.** Small groups (max. 15 persons). **Places by reservation only.** Includes guided visit around exhibitions at Bòlit-La Rambla, Bòlit-Sant Nicolau, Dadespai and Niu (Niu will open to the public only when no activities are taking place).

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RELATED ACTIVITIES CONCERT

J.S.Bach: Variacions Goldberg BWV988. Diego Ares, harpsichord. In the context of the Bill Viola's installation *The Messenger* (1996). In the 10th Festival of World and Sacred Music. Girona. **Price: 10€.** This day the exhibition will be closed due to the setting up of the concert.

| <http://www.ajuntament.gi/musiquesreligioses/>

BÒLIT CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORANI GIRONA



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura
i Mitjans de Comunicació

Organized and produced by: Ajuntament de Girona and Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament de Cultura i Mitjans de Comunicació. **Director:** Rosa Pera. **Production:** Farners Cabra. **Management, press & publishing coordinator:** Diana Sans. **Identity design – Design consultant:** Estudi Lamosca.

In collaboration with:



Diputació de Girona

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EXHIBITION

Curator and direction of the project: Rosa Pera
Special collaboration: Víctor García de Gomar
Production: Farners Cabra
Management, press & publishing coordinator: Diana Sans
Graphic design: Nitis Designs
Poster photography: Ambient Ideas Photography
Installation Coordinator: Xavier Torrent
Technical coordinator: Bobbi Jablonski
Assistant and audiovisual installation: Miquel Giner
Constructions: Fusteria Tianes & Pinta Croma
Vigilance: Omar Al-Ajvani Vázquez,
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