

## PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

### GUIDED TOURS

La Virreina Centre de la Imatge offers free guided tours on Tuesdays at 6 pm.

### TALKS, CONVERSATIONS AND SCREENINGS

These talks, conversations and screenings are based on Bonillas' research on the J. R. Plaza Archive. As well as including the artist's firsthand account of his work, the sessions also strike up a dialogue with other contemporary artists using similar elements such as family archives, the idea of manipulating and looking afresh at inherited materials or the tension between documentary, biography and fictional narratives.

#### SESSION 1

##### IÑAKI BONILLAS AND RAFAEL LEMUS A PERFORMATIVE CONVERSATION

Specially designed for this occasion, Iñaki Bonillas and critic Rafael Lemus have created an experimental conversation that moves beyond the traditional format of dialogue to include new images and audiovisual aspects.

##### IN CONVERSATION

Iñaki Bonillas and Rafael Lemus

##### DATE AND PLACE

Friday 24 February at 7 pm. Virreina LAB

#### SESSION 2

##### IÑAKI BONILLAS AS SEEN BY JOAN FONTCUBERTA

Joan Fontcuberta, a leading figure in the world of photography, has used his multifaceted work to question and explore the uses, similarities and potential of the photographic image. In his contribution to the catalogue for the *J. R. Plaza Archive* exhibition, he writes that Bonillas "introduces us to a meticulous archaeology of images trapped in mirrors". In this session, Joan Fontcuberta looks at this and other aspects of the artist's work.

##### TALK

Joan Fontcuberta

##### DATE AND PLACE

Thursday 8 March at 7 pm. Virreina LAB

#### SESSION 3

##### RETHINKING THE FAMILY ARCHIVE IN IÑAKI BONILLAS AND DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS

Deimantas Narkevičius' film *Disappearance of a Tribe* (2005) is a film montage made up of personal photographs that tell the story of a family against the backdrop of the iron curtain in postwar Soviet Europe. Starting with Bonillas and Narkevičius' use of family archives, Ángela Molina introduces the screening by drawing parallels between both artists.

##### PRESENTATION

Ángela Molina

##### SCREENING

Deimantas Narkevičius, *Disappearance of a Tribe* (2005, 10 min, original language with subtitles)

##### DATE AND PLACE

Thursday 19 April at 7 pm. Virreina LAB

Free admission. Limited places

### IÑAKI BONILLAS' WORK AS SEEN BY...

**Sergi Botella**

**Paco Chanivet**

**Lúa Coderch**

**Matías Costa**

**Lola Lasurt**

**Ryan Rivadeneyra**

On each tour, two artists will lead visitors through the exhibition to link their creative practice and interests with those of Iñaki Bonillas. These six artists all take the family sphere to explore ideas of identity and memory, along with issues of legacies, biography and archive.

##### DATES AND PLACE

Thursday 15 March at 7 pm. Exhibition rooms

Thursday 22 March at 7 pm. Exhibition rooms

Thursday 12 April at 7 pm. Exhibition rooms

Free admission. Limited places

### [LA VIRREINA/EXPOSICIONS]

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Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, noon to 8 pm

With the collaboration of



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# IÑAKI BONILLAS J. R. PLAZA ARCHIVE

24.02 – 06.05.2012

ENGLISH



From the series *Tineidae*, 2010

# IÑAKI BONILLAS

## J. R. PLAZA ARCHIVE

In the year 2000 Iñaki Bonillas inherited a collection of material from his grandfather, José María Rodríguez Plaza. It included 30 photo albums, 800 slides, two volumes of an encyclopedia of film and a folder full of various documents. This mixed bag of objects and images, which Bonillas would later call the J. R. Plaza Archive, led him to set out on a long process of reflection on the possible uses of an archive of this nature (a collection focused on family-related photography, with the sentimental value that would imply) within the practice of contemporary art.

The archive should here be understood as the combination of two ideas: the notion of “beginning, origin, first place” that can be drawn from the Graeco-Latin root of the term; and the more contemporary vision that sees the archive as a body of material that reveals the passions of a specific collector (following Walter Benjamin’s definition), who in this case was J. R. Plaza. The archive is not then a mere question of the past for Bonillas, but of “the future itself”, as Jacques Derrida would say. Here, it has to do specifically with a finite group of images that nonetheless offer a play of uncountable possibilities.

The exhibition *Iñaki Bonillas. J. R. Plaza Archive (2003-2012)* is a unique opportunity to delve into the full spectrum of Bonillas’ research into the materials of this vast archive. In each of the rooms of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge is possible to encounter a different work, beginning with the second of Bonillas’s approaches to the family albums (the first project was a fleeting site specific installation that cannot be reproduced here). This first work shown here still has the feel of someone coming to an unknown body of material for the first time. Before exploring the complexities of such a vast collection, Bonillas set out to simply “open up” the archive, showing it to the world. In the work *Pequeña historia de la fotografía II* [“Little History of Photography II”, 2003], Bonillas examines the possibility of systematizing the presentation of the archive (a clearly conceptual gesture). To do this he re-photographs each of the pages of the 30 albums and presents them as a catalogued and unified luminous whole (a large light box) that recalls the all-encompassing urge of early archaeology.

After this inaugural piece, Bonillas began to use the archive to delve into matters that had interested him for some of years. One, for example, was the notion of never-ending or infinite variation, undoubtedly inherited from the so-called “administrative aesthetic” that so enthralled the minimalists. What is sought here is the appearance of neutrality that might annul the images that are turned instead into mere elements of a sequence governed by the abstract principle of quantification. We are thus dealing with an insinuation of mimesis, which in spite of everything continues to set out difference.

Following on this idea as developed in earlier work, Bonillas takes only the vertical photographs out of the archive (there are 990 of them), laying them out in a way that resembles a modern frieze that, incidentally, ends up illustrating a century in the family history. Under the apparent objectivity suggested by the work’s title, *Todas las fotografías verticales del Archivo J. R. Plaza documentadas fotográficamente* [“All the Vertical Photographs of the J. R. Plaza Archives Photographically Documented”, 2004], the artist provides us with a reading of Photography as a parallel existence and as an essential ritual of family life in modernity. It is thus a conceptual homage by the grandson, an artist, to his grandfather, an amateur, a receipt acknowledging the inheritance of photography making. Yet it is also a door into further understanding Bonillas’s strategies related to the creation of self-referential images.

In the two next pieces, for the first time Bonillas not only displayed the contents of the archive but set them going in order to produce a new perception of the material. *Martín-Lunas* (2004), for example, is an attempt to tell the story of an absence. It involves a set of light boxes made from slides where J. R. Plaza tried to make a friend who had betrayed him disappear, inking out his face with a black felt pen. This gesture ended up making Antonio Martín-Lunas the unquestionable focal point of the images. Thus the piece is a reflection on photography as a place where conflict can be redeemed.

Then would come *Archivo J. R. Plaza (Reversos)* [“J. R. Plaza Archive (The Other Sides)”], from 2005. It is a group of photographs of which Bonillas allows us to see only the backsides and what is inscribed back there: the brand of photographic paper, the studio stamp, and also the handwritten annotations made by the photographer’s grandfather. As he took the photographs out of their albums, Bonillas also found particles of the black paper used for the original binding. The result ends up being somewhat similar to some Japanese ink drawings on rice paper, or to the sediments on the bottom of a cup of Turkish coffee that might tell us our fortune. Bonillas is not trying to see the future, though he does invite us to speculate about it.

Later on, Bonillas would return to Martín-Lunas. This other piece, however, does so from an abstract perspective. In *Fotografías delineadas* [“Delineated Photographs, 2006”] the artist is literally trying to trace out the absence of Martín-Lunas. This time the starting point is not the slides but a set of photographs J. R. Plaza crudely cut his friend out of. Bonillas then works with the pure silhouettes of these mutilated images to produce a set of linear drawings (some are done in pencil, while others resemble early photograms) that evoke the empty space left by Martín-Lunas.

Emptiness is also what seems to be explored in *Bañeras* [“Bathtubs”, 2005], where four projections, each comprising eighty slides, orchestrate three hundred and twenty recurrences of the same thing—or something pretty close. Once again, the infinitesimal variation, only that in this case the starting point is a single image. It is the picture of a cloud that J. R. Plaza took while resting on one of the natural bathtubs often to be found scooped out of the rock along the sea shore, where, at low tide, the trapped water heats up (thus the title). This partially figurative, partially abstract image works for Bonillas as a “canvas” that can be tinted, from slide to slide, in all the possible tones of the chromatic spectrum used in photography. Like a cloud slowly shifting its shape, the change from one color to another is barely perceptible, so that the viewer could be surprised to be looking at magenta when the sequence had begun in green.

In a work done in 2006 as well, *Luminosidad del error* [“Luminousness of Error”], here presented in a revised version, Bonillas make his first incursion into the use of the extra-photographic elements of the archive, bringing to light two volumes of an old encyclopedia of film that Plaza set out to correct. Every night, after watching a movie on television, Plaza made sure that under the categories of “director” and “actor” the name of the film just seen would appear. If there were an error in the encyclopedia, Plaza would carefully mark it with a pencil. Bonillas for his part uses these intervened pages and transforms them into a series of light boxes, inside of which are projected the various films that Plaza chose to annotate. The films thus take on an unexpected role: they are not there to entertain us nor help us have a good time; rather, their job is to illuminate the error detected by Plaza. Cinema is in this way reduced to its essence: light.

*A sombra e o brilho* [“The Shadow and the Flash”], from 2007, is a work that definitively sets apart Bonillas’s more conceptual studies from the more speculative ones. It is a piece that collates two elements of the archive: a series of photographs where Plaza is dressed as a cowboy, along with the diary he kept while working as a hand on a Wyoming ranch for a few months in 1945. That is, a fictitious visual representation and a truthful narrative that intertwine and dialogue until the supposed polarity begins to fall apart and it becomes clear that both the real voyage and the fake cowboy self-portraits share a similar logic, the logic of an escape into an imagined existence.

In *Doble claroscuro* [“Double Chiaroscuro”, 2008-2010], Iñaki Bonillas begins once again from a single archive image. This time, however, he creates seven different pieces from it, four of which are shown here. The idea was to produce a new set of images as well as to create a new archive within the existing archive. More than looking for the images’ flexibility, the purpose is to show how images are able to regenerate, to put it in biological terms. The image in question is a portrait that drew the artist’s attention because the irregular grid drawn on top of it with in pencil. This oddity inspired Bonillas to make use of the 104 squares that could be created if the grid were to be cut up, not as 104 fragments but as whole images, whose multiple combinations would end up shaping these works, including a 16 mm film, an enigmatic drawing and a couple of abstract *collages*.

*La expresión de las emociones* [“The Expression of the Emotions”, 2010] is a series that needs solar light to work. For this reason La Virreina Centre de la Imatge has borrowed part of the window over the central courtyard of the building to show these images, dealing as they do with blindness, or better yet with the negation of sight. With a choice of photographs where the subject portrayed refuses or fails to properly look at the camera (something that is not that frequent, since normally the photo would be retaken in such circumstances), Bonillas navigates the world of emotions as Charles Darwin would catalogue them, so as to provide an explanation of the reasons why someone would decide to conceal their eyes.

Along with the work already mentioned, the most recent takes on the archive can be seen in this exhibition, such as in *Tineidae* (2010), a set of photographs with a clearly jovial subject matter, which nonetheless appeared devoured by moths; *Días de campo* [“Days in the Countryside, 2011], a reflection on our ever more complicated relationship with nature; *Cibachromes* (also from 2011), a group of *collages* where we see Plaza representing himself with the talent of a great actor; as well as a number of other works, including a new work made specifically for La Virreina Centre de la Imatge.

This final piece is *Fisiología del matrimonio* [“Physiology of Marriage”], a large tapestry inspired by the decoration that this palace might have had in its glory years. Bonillas uses this to review his grandparents’ odd experience in advertising, when both of them worked as models to sell a brand of washing machines. The artist takes the fictional photographic story that Plaza and his wife feature in, representing a happily married couple who go on a second honeymoon to Acapulco thanks to their washing machine, and, as is appropriate for such theatricalities, turns it into a pattern that repeats itself tirelessly all over the space, in an attempt to give an all-powerful quality to the resulting variations.