

Barbaric Comedies

Vane

Bigas Luna

8-12 June 2016

Wednesday – Sunday 12 noon – 5pm

Launch event: Friday 10 June 5:30-7:30pm

Vane is pleased to be taking part in an homage to one of Spain's most influential contemporary filmmakers and artists, Josep Joan Bigas Luna (1946-2013), in a collaboration with Durham University, the Tyneside Cinema, and ¡Vamos! Festival.

'Barbaric Comedies', curated by Betty Bigas and Santiago Fouz Hernández, showcases some of Bigas Luna's controversial video artwork, including the famous short *Necklace of Flies* and the five-piece video installation 'Barbaric Comedies', which was inspired by the well-known work of Spanish dramatist Valle-Inclán.

The work of Bigas Luna is internationally renowned and his films include the popular comedy/drama *Jamón, jamón* (1992). The homage to his work is part of a series of international events that started in San Francisco in 2015 and will continue with planned events in Barcelona later this year and in Los Angeles in 2017.

The video installation 'Barbaric Comedies' was produced in 2003 to complement Bigas Luna's extravagant adaptation of the famous trilogy by Spanish playwright Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936), the *Barbaric Comedies*. The seven-hour long performance took place in Sagunto, Spain, as the closing act of the Valencia Biennale. It had a budget of 2.4 million Euros and a cast of 90 actors, including trained theatre actors, street performers and extras, as well as animals. The video pieces were meant to introduce the spectator into the world of Valle-Inclán as re-interpreted by Bigas Luna. The two had a lot in common, as suggested by the pop-up 'Bigas-Valle Museum' in the corridor that led to the 10,000-square-metre industrial unit where the main performance took place.

The pieces were chosen for this homage event as they are closely related to the 'Iberian Portraits' trilogy of films by Bigas Luna being screened at the Tyneside Cinema. While aesthetically quite different, the imagery is very similar. The videos highlight Bigas Luna's obsession with sexual organs, both male and female. The opposition between the sexes is played out in the opposing personae that Bigas Luna termed 'Allattatore' (male) and 'Allattatrice' (female), and yet they are united by another of his leitmotifs: milk. Bigas Luna said that he became obsessed with milk from the moment he was breast-fed by his mother. His first drawing of milk dates back to 1979. Sperm and milk are the same word in Spanish (*leche*) and those two complementary pieces play out the visual and sexual association between the two – just as in his 1994 film *The Tit and the Moon* (part of the 'Iberian Portraits' trilogy). The 'Allattatrice' figures first materialised as drawings but rapidly became part of Bigas Luna's personal mythology. He defined them as 'women who offer their milk to the Mediterranean Sea, or shoot it up to the sky'. 'Sometimes', he added, 'they will drink their own milk, or offer it to those who are thirsty'. They represent fertility. In contrast, the male version ('Allattatore') represents impotence. This juxtaposition illustrates one of the main joint aims of the 'Iberian Portraits' trilogy of films and the 'Barbaric Comedies': the destruction of the Iberian *macho*.

A different kind of contrast is established between the two virgin figures: the 'Verge Dolorosa' literally symbolises the pain, the darkness; while the 'Verge Lactatio' is the virgin of light, milk and sensuality. Perhaps somewhere in between is the 'Mamador Molar' a 'toothless, bald and ragged old man' that Bigas Luna describes in the video as 'necessary': 'His job was to empty the breasts of new mothers when they were too full or hardened to the point that the baby couldn't or wouldn't breast-feed'. The man would 'kneel in front of the patient and suck the woman's breasts until they

were empty'. There is considerable visual investment in the act of breast sucking, but also on the discarded milk, which attracts flies, another obsession of Bigas Luna.

The exhibition is completed with a separate video work, *Necklace of flies*, the first he made to be streamed online as part of the NotodoFilmFest (jamesonnotodofilmfest.com), a Spanish online short film festival. Reminiscent of one of the most famous scenes of Luis Buñuel's surrealist silent film *Un chien andalou* (1928), the video starts with a female voiceover that recalls the story of a friend who made necklaces with live flies as a way to experience sensual pleasure. The text of the voice-over translates into English as follows:

"A former girlfriend of mine had managed to master the art of capturing flies. After patiently studying these animals, she discovered the exact spot to introduce the needle for threading them so that they wouldn't die. In this manner she made necklaces of living flies and went into raptures over the divine feeling that the rubbing of the desperate legs and the trembling wings produced on her skin."

Known internationally for his work as a post-Franco filmmaker (he directed 16 feature films between 1977 and 2010), Bigas Luna was also an interdisciplinary and very prolific artist. During his lifetime he produced a huge collection of drawings, paintings, sculptures, video installations and video art. He also directed or co-directed some major public performances, including the critically acclaimed opening and closing ceremonies of the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992. His artworks have been exhibited in prestigious galleries around the world, most recently in Barcelona, Turin, Valencia and New York. He was also one of the artists selected for the Spanish Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo in 2010.

Santiago Fouz Hernández, June 2016

Tyneside Cinema Screenings

Screenings of four Spanish films by Bigas Luna will be held at Tyneside Cinema in Pilgrim Street, Newcastle. As well as the world-famous film trilogy 'Iberian Portraits', including *Jamón, jamón*, which launched the careers of Oscar-winning actors Penélope Cruz and her husband, Javier Bardem, Tyneside Cinema will also screen Bigas Luna's final film *DiDi Hollywood* starring Elsa Pataky and Peter Coyote.

Screenings will be held on Friday 10 June at 8pm (*Jamón, jamón*); Saturday 11 June at 5pm (*Golden Balls*) and 8.30pm (*The Tit and the Moon*); and Sunday 12 June at 3pm (*DiDi Hollywood*). All films will be introduced by Dr Santiago Fouz Hernández, Reader in Hispanic Studies, in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, at Durham University. Films on Friday 10 June and Saturday 11 June will be followed by Q&A sessions with the director's daughter, art curator Betty Bigas, and Consol Tura, actress and casting director of Bigas Luna's films.

For prices and ticket deals go to www.tynesidecinema.co.uk, call the box office on 0191 227 5500 or email box.office@tynesidecinema.co.uk

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