

**Württem  
bergischer  
Kunst  
verein  
Stuttgart**

**JORGE RIBALTA  
Monument Machine**

February 20 till May 1, 2016

Press conference: Friday, February 19, 2016, 11 a.m.



## Introduction

With *Monumentmaschine* (Monument Machine), running from February 20 to May 1, 2016, the Württembergischer Kunstverein will be showing the first solo exhibition in Germany by the Spanish photographic artist, theorist, and curator **Jorge Ribalta** (b. 1963 in Barcelona).

Ribalta's often comprehensive series of analogue black-and-white photographs, which are anchored in the discourses of the critically and politically engaged artistic documentary photography of the 1970s (Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, Jo Spence, etc.), are rather focused on the incidental and subliminal than on obvious or sensational aspects. The works revolve around nationally and historically charged sites and figures and the construction thereof.

Ribalta arranges his series, which may hold up to 200 photographs, in dense spatial ensembles. Arrayed in several horizontal and vertical rows, multiple angles of reading arise. Furthermore, a specially developed display will feature at the Kunstverein exhibition, fostering connections, disruptions, twists and turns between the series.

*Monumentmaschine* presents a selection of six series in which Ribalta explores the relations between documentary photography, cultural heritage, and nationalism. It deals with the role played by monuments and the present-day UNESCO-driven tourist and cultural-heritage industries according to the reproduction and internalization of national identities, ideologies, and fictions. What relevance has been assigned here to photography since its inception?

The exhibition is based on the eponymous solo show, co-produced by the Centro Guerrero in Granada and the Fundación Helga de Alvear in Cáceres, which comprises the series *Wild Laocoön* (2010–11), *Scrambling* (2011), and *Empire (or K.D.)* (2013–14).

These three works involve icons and monuments that, like flamenco, the Alhambra, or Charles V, represent "Spanishness"—although flamenco in particular, which has its roots in the Romani and Kalé cultures, but also the Alhambra, which is shaped by the period of Muslim-Moorish Nasrid rule in Granada, actually both signify a transnational confluence of cultural identities. Charles V (1500–1558), the first King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation, in turn stands for the imperialist expansion of Spain as the global Habsburg empire on which "the sun should never set."

The exhibition will also show the series *Renaissance: Scenes of industrial reconversion in the Nord-Pas de Calais coalfield* (2014), *Petit Grand Tour* (2007), and *Carnac, 1. August 2008* (2008). The shift from heavy industry to leisure and creative industry, as well as the touristic construction and marketing of ancient times and prehistory, are of central focus here.

## Historical References

Photography has always served the ends of historical-monument preservation and national cultural heritage. The point of departure here rests with the *Mission Héliographique*, a comprehensive photographic registry and catalogue of all historical monuments and memorials in France, commissioned in 1851 by the French Commission des monuments historiques chaired by Prosper Mérimée—the author of *Carmen* (1845), a story which, as is well known, still today generates clichés of “Spanishness” and flamenco.

The *Mission Héliographique* was to become a model for countless other similar projects, including the famous photography program carried out in the 1930s by the **Farm Security Administration (FSA)** in the United States. This project focused not on monuments but rather on social cartography—charting rural poverty—in the spirit of the New Deal, the social and economic reform program implemented as a result of the Great Depression. The FSA photography project, headed by artists like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, became formative for those early—and meanwhile widely challenged—discourses of documentary photography as a guarantee for transparency and truthfulness.

A contemporaneous equivalent to the *Mission Héliographique* was the work of the British photographer **Charles Clifford**, who resided in Spain and prepared, between 1854 and 1864, extensive photographic documentation of Spain’s historical sites and monuments. He released this work in several publications, including *A Photographic Scramble through Spain*, a tourist guide about Spain addressing foreign (especially British) visitors and celebrating the Alhambra as the highlight of Spanish cultural heritage.

## Approaches

Jorge Ribalta’s practice and theoretical exploration of documentary photography tie into this proximity of photography, cultural heritage, and fictions of national identity. Aiming for neither transparency nor truth, his photographs investigate **the structures of meaning production inherent to photography—understanding photography as a technique, machine, and cultural apparatus**. Ribalta’s photographic approach to monuments and national icons leads to **anti-monuments** and anti-icons, for instance by underscoring the infrastructures and the activity “behind the scenes” of these showplaces—from the workers and diverse workplaces to the marketing structures of the cultural industry. An emphasis is on the monument as machine and reflection on the operating modes and effects of this machine.

Taking center stage in Ribalta’s dense series of small-format prints is not the individual, self-contained picture but rather that which plays out between the images. **Aby Warburg’s** never-completed *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–29) served as inspiration for him, but also **Sergei Tretyakov’s** factography theory developed around the same time. According to Tretyakov, it is not only the interruption of movement that allows photography to capture complex social interrelations; necessary is also the arrangement of photos in series, the production of relations among the pictures.

## **JORGE RIBALTA**

### **Monument Machine**

February 20 – May 1, 2016

### **An exhibition by**

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

### **Extending the homonymous exhibition by**

Centro Guerrero, Granada and

Fundación Helga de Alvear, Cáceres,

curated by Yolanda Romero

### **Curators**

Hans D. Christ, Iris Dressler

### **PRESS**

### **Press Conference**

Friday, February 19, 2016, 11 a.m.

### **Press images / Press release**

<http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/press/>

### **Contact Press**

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### **EVENTS**

### **Opening**

Friday, February 19, 2016, 7 p.m.

### **Artist Talk**

Saturday, February 20, 2016, 2 p.m.

### **Curator's tours**

Wednesday, February 24, 2016, 7 p.m.

(Member's jour fixe)

Wednesday, March 9, 2016, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, April 6, 2016, 7 p.m.

Sunday, May 1, 2016, 4:30 p.m.

### **Free guided tours**

Each Sunday, 3 p.m.

### **Museum's night**

Saturday, April 2, 2016, 7 p.m.–2 a.m.

### **Further events**

[www.wkv-stuttgart.de](http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de)

[www.facebook.com/wuerttembergischer.kunstverein](http://www.facebook.com/wuerttembergischer.kunstverein)

kunstverein

## WÜRTTEMBERGISCHER KUNSTVEREIN

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Fax: +49 (0)711 - 29 36 17  
info@wkv-stuttgart.de  
www.wkv-stuttgart.de

### **Hours**

Tue, Thu–Sun: 11 am–6 pm  
Wed: 11 am–8 pm

### **Entrance fees**

5 Euro / 3 Euro reduced / Members of WKV: free

## Works in the exhibition

Texts: Jorge Ribalta (excerpts)

### *Petit Grand Tour. Tarragona, 29 agosto – 6 octubre 2007*

**(Petit Grand Tour: Tarragona, August 29 – October 6, 2007), 2007**

51 gelatin silver prints, framed 50 x 50 cm, silkscreend texts on matts

Collection Banco de España, Madrid

Produced with the support of Caixa Tarragona



Tarragona is located 100 km to the south of Barcelona, at the Mediterranean Sea. During the period of the Roman Empire it was one of the main cities of the Iberian Peninsula, and the capital of the Roman province Hispania Citerior or Hispania Tarraconensis. Due to its important archeological remains of the Roman period, UNESCO declared the city world heritage in 2000.

This series depicts various processes or situations in the production of history in a city that is over-coded by Roman antiquity: the everyday labor of the production of a brand new antiquity. Those processes or situations are: some Roman remains downtown, particularly around the Via Augusta and the Roman amphitheater; the works of excavation, restoration and preservation of some monumental areas around the amphitheater; the both public and internal activities of the Archeological Museum, including the main building and its branch in the old paleochristian necropolis; the theatrical re-staging of Roman everyday life by a group of Roman history amateurs; and the main touristic monumental routes downtown.

The method of the urban walk adopted in this series refers to the tradition of modernist street photography, but also to both a repetition and a parody of the classic early modern journey to Rome and Italy, the grand tour experiences of Goethe, Stendhal and even Flaubert on his trip to the Mediterranean East. These grand tours are the intellectual grounding for the first photographic monument surveys of the 1850s and 1860s, the rise of the "golden age" of photography, including those by Du Camp, Frith, Salzmann, Stillman, Sommer and the photographers of the Mission Héliographique.

**Carnac, 1 agosto 2008 (Carnac, August 1, 2008), 2008**

15 gelatin silver prints, framed white wood 20 x 25 cm

Collection Banco de España, Madrid

The series starts as a loose reportage of a guided tour (history lesson) at the Le Ménec alignments, one of the megalith fields in Carnac. The Carnac megalith site dates from 5.000-3.000 B.C. and is among the biggest and best preserved ones in the French Bretagne. This region has a concentration of Neolithic monuments on both sides of the English Channel. The vicinity of such monumental vestiges in what are currently French and British territories suggests this was a same historical area of influence and exchange. The meaning of prehistoric stone circles and alignments remains open to interpretations, even if the ritual and astronomic theory prevails.

Today, the enigmatic presence of those aligned stone fields appears as music scores offered from the remote past for its future interpretations. The succession of such interpretations is what we call history.

In 1903, Alois Riegl established that the monuments are the fossilization of the *Kunstwollen* of their time and that esthetic experience is rooted in historical memory: it emerges from the observation of hand-molded stones that have been deformed by time and wheather. Monuments are documents.

**Laocoonte Salvaje (Wild Laocoön), 2010-11**

200 gelatin silver prints variable dimensions (from 13x18 to 30 x 40 cm), framed 50 x 50 cm, silkscreend texts on matts

Collection Helga de Alvear, Cáceres

Produced with the support of Cajasol Obra Social, Seville



In November 2009 Ribalta was invited to participate in a program on flamenco and contemporary art. He articulated his project as a repertory of photographs that update the visual geography of flamenco from the hypercodified icons derived from postwar Neorealism. The resulting series is an intervention in a system of representations heavily determined by the identitarian discourse of Spanish national culture, but also by forms of popular and “anti-systemic” production. The dominant narrative about flamenco is that it constitutes the emblematic art form of Spanish national-popular culture. Significantly, flamenco was declared world heritage by UNESCO in 2010, precise while Ribalta was working on this project. But historically, flamenco subcultures have simultaneously existed in opposition to the hegemonic national-state culture, as expressions of subalternity and anti-state forms of resistance. It is both, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. The historic-political reading of flamenco and the critique of the identitarian-nationalist discourse proposed here can only be based on the recognition and analysis of this structural ambivalence in the concept of nation, between the State-form and popular culture.

The series consists of the photographic documentation of a selection of historically significant places. The network of spaces includes museums and art centres, academic institutions, public administrations, festivals, schools, record labels and recording studios, musicians’ agencies and musical impresarios, tablaos, commercial premises of clothing and other products, communication media, rehearsal rooms, tailors’ workshops, workshops for the manufacture and sale of instruments, fairs, popular tourist venues, theatres, flamenco clubs, associations, bars, neighbourhoods, landscapes, historical places, etc. Those places visibilize the historical, economic, social, administrative, and political structure of the institutional-popular culture of flamenco in Spain. The photographs include both, the places and the activity produced there. The title refers to a poem by Federico García Lorca.

### ***Scrambling, 2011***

78 gelatin silver prints, framed 30 x 35 cm, some matts include silkscreened texts, wall text

Produced with the support of Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona

Courtesy angelsbarcelona gallery, Barcelona





This series, whose title refers to Charles Clifford's *Photographic Scramble Through Spain* (c. 1864), was produced at one of Europe's most famous monuments, the Alhambra in Granada. It reflects the fabric of everyday relations and processes involved in the work of the production / reproduction of a monument: the offices and the employees of the Alhambra, the management and administration, the activities of upkeep, cleaning, conservation and security, as well as marketing, the programming of activities, educational programs, the routes and guided tours.

The monument is understood as the result of the intersection of (at least) four discourses: 1) the monument as a constructed site, as architectural-landscape-territory, 2) the monument as enterprise, as post-industrial factory, 3) the monument as public space, as city, and 4) the monument as icon and as a space of identitarian-national devotion.

The photographs were taken over eight consecutive days, from May 9th to 16th 2011 – that is, during the period of the final stage of restoration of the hydraulic system in the Lion's Court (2002-2012), which was a crucial intervention in the most characteristic space of the monument, constituting in itself a decisive turning point in the public image of the Alhambra. Thus, the iconic place par excellence of the monument is relatively invisible or unrecognizable in these images. It appears in an abject manner, literally like a body opened on the dissection table.

The series consists of seventy-seven photographs presented variably in ten groups or segments.

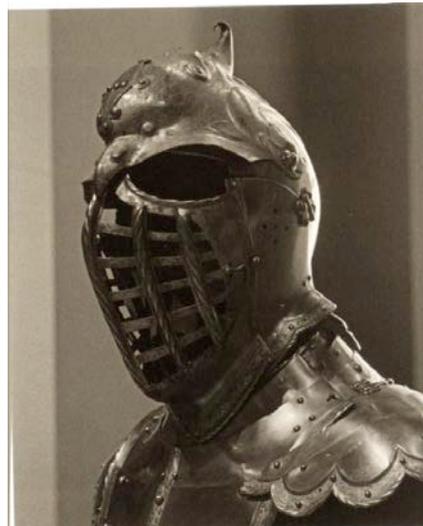
The first corresponds to images from the Alhambra archive; the second deals with the Torre del Vino and surroundings; the third refers to the security system in the monumental complex; the fourth is a short series of portraits of people with various posts, responsibilities and tasks, and it attempts to synthesize the intersecting system of labor relations involved in the everyday operation of the monument, based on the work of specific people; the fifth consists of images of gardening tasks; the sixth links to the preceding series through irrigation activities and shows the water circuit in the complex; the seventh is a short series on work in the plasterwork restoration workshop; the eighth concerns the Lion's Court during the renovation of the hydraulic system; the ninth is about the public reception areas, entrances and ticket sales; and the tenth is about the marketing of the monument. There is one other image, number seventy-eight, which is in fact prior to all the others, although it was made later. This is a reproduction made in my studio in Barcelona of the double page of Roland Barthes's book *Camera Lucida* showing Charles Clifford's image of the Torre del Vino.

***Imperio (o K.D.) [Empire (or K.D.)]***, 2013-14

196 prints, white aluminium frames, framed in 3 different sizes, combined: 50 x 60, 30 x 36 and 18 x 20 cm, vinyl wall texts

Produced with support of Centro José Guerrero-Diputación de Granada, and Fundación Helga de Alvear, Granada and Cáceres

Courtesy Casa sin Fin gallery, Madrid





The photographs of this series were taken at a number of locations in Spain and Europe related to the abdication, retreat and death of Charles V (1500-1558), the first King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation. This places include Yuste and Cuacos de Yuste, Madrid and El Escorial, Granada, Barcelona, Brussels, Bolonia, Lille, Cambrai, Le Cateau-Cambrésis and Lens. The series is arranged like a play in three acts, with several scenes in each act.

The first scene of the first act is a walk through the wood surrounding the Yuste monastery, where Charles V spent his last years and died. It finally leads to the compound itself. The next scene takes place around the pond across the palace and ends with the view from the upper pavilion of the palace over the landscape of the Sierra de Gredos. The last scene is a tour through the interior of the compound, including the palace and living quarters of Charles V, the church and the monastery cloisters.

The first scene of the second act corresponds to the return from the monastery to Cuacos de Yuste. It includes a moonrise sequence in the German Military Cemetery referring to Ansel Adams' famous photograph *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941) and an image of the Plaza de España in Cuacos. It was taken in the same direction as the photograph made by Charles Clifford in 1858, but from further back. The last images were shot at *Autoservicio Eva*, a grocery store, and show shop-windows with tins of Carlos I paprika, a typical product of Cuacos. The second scene takes place in Brussels during winter and summer. The winter images begin with a brief staging of the author drinking a *Charles Quint / Keizer Karel* beer at the terrace of *Le Rubens* brasserie at Place Agora. The other images correspond to the places associated with the abdication and funeral of Charles V, such as the remains of the Aula Magna of the former Palace of Brussels or Coudenberg Palace (where Charles V pronounced his famous abdication speech on October 25th, 1555). The group of summer images were taken during the celebration of the *Ommegang*, a procession held annually in Brussels in early July, whose origins go back to medieval times. It is now a tourist attraction that reenacts the grand procession of 1549 in honor of Philip II, when he came to Brussels to be reunited with his father, Charles V.

The first scene of the third act is arranged as a flashback or daydream by Charles V in his retreat, remembering some of his outstanding moments of hegemony. The second scene begins with a set of images taken in the Charles V Palace in the Alhambra during the rehearsals for the opera *I pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo (1892). It is followed by a group of images on the uses of the figure of Charles V as merchandising for consumer products, such as paprika from Extremadura, Belgian beer, Mexican chocolate, Brandy from Jerez, or tourism in Extremadura. Also represented here is the use of the figure of Charles V as source for the imperial idea in Spanish fascism, as in the cover of a book of photographs of the Alcázar de Toledo taken during the Spanish Civil War.

The last images are of Le Cateau-Cambrésis and Lens, now French cities located on the border area between France and ancient Flanders. Some of Charles V's last military campaigns took place here in the 1550s. The palace where the 1559 peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis was signed no longer exists. It was situated in the present gardens of the Palais Fénélon, home to the Musée Matisse. The last image shows a portrait of Charles V's banker Anton Fugger painted by Hans Maler (c.1529) and presented at the new Louvre-Lens museum. This art museum opened in late 2012 and was built on the site of an old coal mine in the region of Nord-Pas de Calais.

***Renaissance. Scenes de la reconversion industrielle au bassin minier du Nord-Pas de Calais (: Scenes of industrial reconversion in the Nord-Pas de Calais coalfield), 2014***

176 prints, framed white wood 30 x 36 cm, vinyl wall text, separate text

Produced with the support of the Centre Régional de la Photographie Nord-Pas de Calais, Douchy-les-Mines



The Nord – Pas de Calais coal-mining region crosses the French-Belgian border and is part of the historical Northern European heavy industry core, which extends into the quite near German Ruhr area. The coal exploitation started in the 18th century, peaked in the mid-20th century and lasted till the 1980s' Mitterrand presidential mandate, when the French Northern region around Lille was designed to develop a "new economy" center for culture industry related activities, strategically located between Paris, London and Brussels, with the new business district Euralille as its symbolic center. After de-industrialization and the foundation of a mining museum in Lewarde that opened in

1984 as a pioneer "écomusée" institution, the region has participated in industrial heritage policies and campaigns, following the model of the Ruhr industrial region. A few of the former mining sites have been preserved and they define a historical industrial region that was declared world heritage by UNESCO in 2012. The most recent last step in this process of transition from industry into cultural and leisure economies is the opening of Louvre-Lens, a Louvre museum branch in a former mining site in Lens, in December 2012.

This photographic series is a tour of the monuments, an observation of such historical industrial landscape. It is organized in eight scenes, composed of a variable number of photographs each. The first three scenes are historical excavations or "memory scenes". They attempt to visibilize the *longue durée*, how the current Nord – Pas de Calais mining region is part of a longer European history that traces back to the rise of the modern capitalist nation-state system in the 16th century. The other scenes are organized around aspects of "Becoming Heritage", the entanglement of new and old industries or of leisure.

## JORGE RIBALTA

Jorge Ribalta is an artist, researcher, editor and independent curator.

### SOLO SHOWS

Has made solo shows at, among others, galleries Zabriskie (New York and Paris), Casa sin Fin (Madrid) and angelsbarcelona (Barcelona). His solo exhibition Monument Machine has been presented in 2015 at Museo Guerrero (Granada) and Fundación Helga de Alvear (Cáceres). His most recent exhibition has been Renaissance. Scènes de la reconversion industrielle Dans le bassin minier du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, at the CRP Centre Régional de la Photographie Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Douchy-les-Mines, 2015-16)

### GROUP SHOWS

Has participated in many group shows like *New Photography 10* (MOMA, New York, 1994), *Fragments* (MACBA, Barcelona, 1996) *Sets and Situations* (MOMA, New York, 2000), *Playgrounds* (Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2014) and the recent *The Beast and is the Sovereign* (MACBA and WKV, Barcelona and Stuttgart, 2015)

### CURATORIAL PROJECTS

Curator of exhibitions (selection): *Universal Archive. The condition of the document and the modern photographic utopia* (MACBA, Barcelona, 2008), *A Hard, Merciless Light. The Worker-Photography Movement, 1926-1939* (Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2011), and *Not Yet. On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism* (Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2015)

### EDITORIAL WORK

Editor of the books (selection): *Public Photographic Spaces. Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to Family of Man, 1928-1955* (MACBA, 2009), *The Worker Photography Movement, 1926-1939. Essays and Documents* (Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2011) and *Not Yet. On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism. Essays and Documents, 1972-1991* (Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2015).

Has been Head of Public Programs at MACBA between 1999 and 2009.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY (Selection)

Jorge Ribalta, *Laocoonte salvaje, Periférica*, Cáceres, 2012.

John Roberts, "Photography, landscape and the social production of space", in *Philosophy of Photography*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2010, p. 135-156.

Stephanie Schwartz, "Between Labour and Intellect: Jorge Ribalta's Anonymous Work", in *Philosophy of Photography*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2013, p 358-373.

Jorge Ribalta, *Scrambling*, Museo Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, 2015.

*Monumento máquina. Jorge Ribalta*, Centro José Guerrero, Granada and Fundación Helga de Alvear, Cáceres, 2015.