

Bleda ^{Eng} y Rosa

**May 26th – September 4th
2022**



María Bleda (born Castellón, 1969) and José María Rosa (born Albacete, 1970) are among the artists of their generation who have most closely focused on the complexities involved in the notion of landscape from within the field of contemporary photography. Over the course of three decades they have undertaken one of the most intensive and rigorous explorations of the links that connect the representation of territory and history.

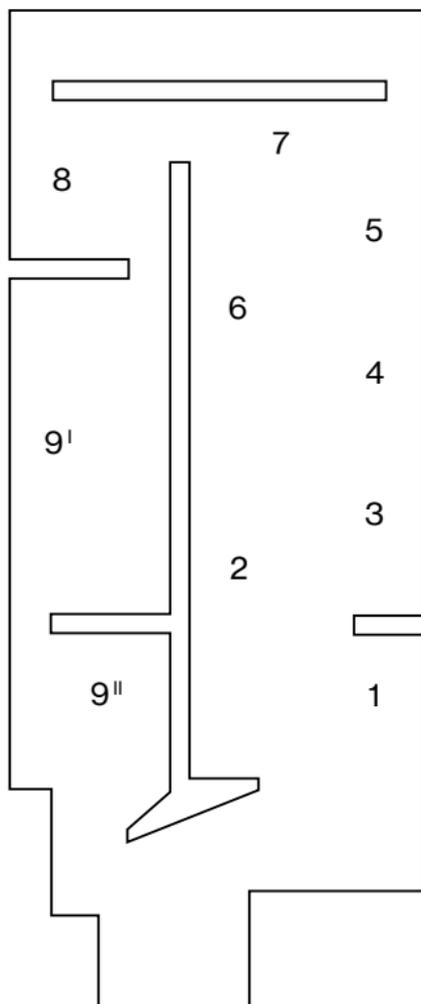
This retrospective offers a survey of their career, for the first time bringing together the entirety of their work produced to date; an exceptional perspective given the number and scope of their different series. Presented as an installation specifically conceived for this space, the exhibition allows for an in-depth focus on the significance of Bleda y Rosa's artistic proposal while configuring new fields of analysis through the thematic areas present in the artists' work. In this sense, the presentation follows the major discursive axes of their work, notably the dialectic between landscape and territory and the narrativity of the images in relation to historical accounts and personal experience.

An important part of Bleda y Rosa's research has been devoted to a specific investigation of the foundations of western visual culture and the ways in which history and its representations have laid down the patterns for our ways of seeing, understanding and remembering. This facet of the artists' work has been characterised by a carefully considered choice of the spaces in which they have taken their photographs, through which they have drawn attention, in a manner equally evocative and precise, to the different temporal strata that run through the present reality of a place. However, this aspect does not solely respond to an interest in showing how the more or less visible marks of the past have settled in the territory. What the subtle but decisive shifts in Bleda y Rosa's photographs in fact reveal is precisely how certain visual or textual motifs are capable of activating specific devices of memory and the imagination.

With a comparable poetic force, the essentially interrogative dimension that characterises Bleda y Rosa's artistic practice embraces key issues regarding the way in which the past inserts itself into architectural and urban spaces. Through their focus on archaeological sites, rooms, cities and memorials as always partial repositories of history and memory, they have looked at both the processes that monumentalise the past and the complex links that arise between cultures, countries and events. The temporal framework in which Bleda y Rosa move is as extensive as the archaeological remains or historical documents permit: from the earliest, most remote human settlements to recently constructed architectural references.

While all of the artists' projects specifically focus on these major themes, the perspective offered by the present

exhibition contributes to a reflection on the meaning and “work” of the images in a broad sense, an aspect emphasised by the use of projection as a feature of the installation. The photographic object thus disappears in order to give space to new, interconnected readings between the series and to other rhythms of contemplation and understanding of the works.



1	<i>Football Pitches</i> (1992–1994)	04'50"
2	<i>Battlefields</i> (1994–2016)	25'18"
3	<i>Cities</i> (1997–2000)	04'00"
4	<i>Rooms</i> (2001–2006)	04'00"
5	<i>Typologies</i> (ongoing since 2007)	04'00"
6	<i>Memorials</i> (2005–2010)	06'20"
7	<i>Origin</i> (ongoing since 2003)	12'26"
8	<i>Corporations</i> (ongoing since 2006)	02'34"
9	<i>Promptuarium</i> (2010–2017)	
	Notes on War and Revolution ^I	08'08"
	The Continent and the Wind ^{II}	08'36"



1 FOOTBALL PITCHES (1992–1994)

Within Bleda y Rosa's artistic praxis the use of photography is founded on a deep interest in the medium's culture, while their methodologies and formalisations are approached from premises associated with conceptual art. This is evident in their project *Football Pitches*, of which the first photograph, taken in 1992 in El Ballestero (Albacete), encapsulates visual and discursive aspects that would define their subsequent development.

In this project, which makes use of the serial format that would structure their work from this point onwards, Bleda y Rosa focused on the type of playing fields which just a few years ago were frequently to be seen on the outskirts of villages and cities but which, at the moment in the early 1990s, were beginning to disappear and showing clear signs of neglect. This fact gave rise to the idea of working on such places with the aim of reflecting on the passing of time in relation to geographical space.

Football Pitches also clearly reveals the artists' interest in the landscape, in this case an everyday, functional one: vernacular, to use the term used to define such locations in the American documentary tradition. These are in effect photographs which subscribe to an aesthetic of a documentary "style", to use the terms that Walker Evans does, the characteristics of which are generally defined as objective, neutral and devoid of obvious signs of their creators' subjectivity. Nonetheless, the conceptual nature of Bleda y Rosa's artistic practice is also striking in this first series. The serial structure, a distinctive use of framing and the inclusion of textual references encourage the viewer to reflect not only on what is lost with the disappearance of these places as social spaces, but also what it means to photographically document a place and to perceive a location from a photographic perspective.



Bunker Hill, 17 de junio de 1775.

2 BATTLEFIELDS (1994–2016)

Battlefields, characterised by an approach already defined by the mid-1990s, is possibly Bleda y Rosa's most emblematic and representative work. Together with *Football Pitches*, it marked the artists' debut in the Spanish art world and brought them immediate recognition due to the formal and conceptual significance of these first two series, which possess a maturity and vision rare in the work of such young artists.

With this project, remarkably extensive in both chronological and geographical terms, organised into three parts entitled *Spain*, *Europe* and *Overseas*, Bleda y Rosa focus for the first time on places marked by history. The concept that articulates this project is once again associated with a profound reflection on the landscape: as a territory which the artists experience empirically by producing their own memories and as an artistic genre that defines their works, establishing dialogues with history painting of a commemorative type.

In formal terms the compositions maintain a structure similar to that found in the previous project with, for example, a particular importance conceded to the horizon line, although this series also makes use of other decisive gestures. As with panning in filmmaking, in the panoramic images of *Battlefields* a hiatus – visual, but also temporal – is created which divides the scene into two and introduces a gap between the two parts. While this interruption allows for an emphasis on the fragmentation intrinsic to photographic framing, a different aspect defines this project conceptually: the textual reference to the battle and its date open up an unexpected space between past and present, introducing the viewer's imagination into it.

This dynamic implies a questioning of the images through which the historical past can be thought and what new forms of imagination might be conceived. In addition, the gaze on the present-day terrain shown in these photographs reflects how Bleda y Rosa also question the circulation of specific visual references to the detriment of others. In these landscapes in which the course of history was decided, the signs most easily identifiable with the epic of battle are not clearly visible. By preventing automatic readings and hindering potentially unambiguous metaphors the artists propose an experience which refers to both the representation of the conflict and what their images put into play.



3 *CITIES* (1997–2000)

Bleda y Rosa's interest in exploring the ancient civilisations that have created the complex social substrata of the Iberian Peninsula articulates the thematic core of *Cities*. For three years they visited various Iberian, Celtic, Greek, Roman, Islamic and Phoenician sites, although on this occasion their travels and working methods followed dynamics that were subtly different to their previous ones. The serial nature of the earlier projects was now diluted in favour of smaller, heterogeneous groups of photographs inspired by the artists' contemplation of the ruins in each different place.

The desire to work from a new premise, arising from a more spontaneous experience of place, resulted in new compositional framings and a more subjective approach that reflect some practices of Land Art. Creating the rhythm of the camera through a movement close to the artists' bodily gesture – leaning, touching and brushing – seems to allude more powerfully to the sensory and the tactile. Furthermore, in their depictions of the archaeological remains Bleda y Rosa now omit central views of the ruins and rather show what can be seen *from* them. The use of such viewpoints results in the opening-up of a new field of observation which the artists have continued to investigate since, namely the processes by which the past is memorialised.

In *Cities*, the conditions required for a reflection on history and narratives of past events present new challenges. Firstly, because the chronological distance between the photographic shot and the time evoked by the ruins means engaging with imaginaries less saturated with visual references. Secondly, because in this case the temporal interval that Bleda y Rosa open up in their images reflects their intention to question the viewer on the legacies of those cultures and their surviving presence in individual and collective memory: how much remains of them in us, in our behaviour, habits and ways of being.



4 ROOMS (2001–2006)

With the aim of learning more about the places where the early cultures of the Iberian Peninsula first emerged, in 2001 Bleda y Rosa decided to expand the framework of their research to other geographical contexts housing important Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Arabic and Celtic sites.

In contrast to the situation that arose with the ruins explored in *Cities*, in the locations photographed for the *Rooms* series the state of preservation of many of the villas and palaces made it possible to go inside them and gain an experience of the space quite different to the one investigated in the open-air archaeological sites. This possibility became a new focus of interest, particularly because the buildings where the artists chose to work were important centres of power but also settings for daily life.

These rooms, which welcome the viewer in a more close-at-hand manner, are characterised by a different temporal complexity and the echo of great historical accounts acquires another type of resonance. The intimacy of their architectural volume can produce the feeling of physically entering these places, which the camera defines with extreme sobriety, articulating form, space and time through the tiniest nuances. Once again, Bleda y Rosa move away from habitual views. Observing what is located on the margins, it is in the zones of passage and the peripheral details that they find an unexpected space through which the past can be considered from a different dimension.

If this new shift of direction moves away from the recurring motifs that constitute the principal iconic references of many of the monuments which the artists have worked on, their approach also involves trying out another type of perception. This is not the equivalent of omitting the visual heritage associated with these architectural structures of evident historical importance and undeniable beauty, in fact quite the opposite; it allows us to appreciate it more clearly, while offering us a new time for contemplating what has not yet been imagined.



5 TYPOLOGIES (ONGOING SINCE 2007)

In *Typologies* Bleda y Rosa's interest in architecture as a space of memory is approached from a new perspective, this time with a starting point in the dialectic between the monument's original function and its musealisation. As its title suggests, the series is conceived as a kind of typological inventory of the architectural culture of antiquity. Villas, *domus*, triumphal arches, altars and aqueducts, among other references, make up this study. In reality, however, the implicit allusion to a possible catalogue has an essentially reflexive meaning. This group of photographs, which includes some of the artists' most recent, taken specially for this exhibition, does not possess any aim of documentary exhaustiveness. The principal theme encourages us to reflect on how over the course of history certain forms of study and documentation have modulated our understanding of classical architecture.

Within this systematic approach to the different architectural forms, Bleda y Rosa's photographs do not always conform with the same degree of consistency to the type of description that we would expect from them. While in some cases the compositional framings refer very directly to the *Rooms* series, in others the distance chosen for photographing these monuments encourages us to contemplate them from unexpected viewpoints. With these departures from the norms of representing classical architecture the artists not only encourage us to observe the sediments of history with less certainty but also to acknowledge what effects experiences derived from their musealisation have on our understanding. Furthermore, in this group defined by its serial focus, Bleda y Rosa return to questions they first raised in previous projects regarding the nature of documentary representation, while at the same time emphasising the dialogue with the history of photography by evoking in their images the earliest architectural views taken by Édouard Baldus for the Mission Héliographique in 1851.



Große Hamburger Straße Scheunenviertel

6 MEMORIALS (2005–2010)

Bleda y Rosa's reflection on the dialogue between history and memory takes a fresh turn in the series *Memorials* with its focus on a new field of analysis, namely how the contemporary city creates and deals with historical memory, particularly through its monuments. In this project, undertaken in three different cities – Berlin, Washington and Jerusalem – the artists' proposal juxtaposes two key issues: firstly, how traces of the past overlap with the urban fabrics of today's cities; and secondly, how the process of transforming memory into monument involves the danger of fixing it in stone.

In formal terms, these aspects are emphasised through different methodological devices. On occasions, and in an unanticipated manner, some elements present in the scene block possible visual expectations. We thus encounter an entire repertoire of obstacles intended to hinder access: fences, firmly shut doors, vegetation-covered walls that hide views, etc. The use of this mechanism encourages the spectator to remember their participation in the interpretation of the images, as well as the constructed nature of all representation.

In this oblique approach to the spaces of memory, Bleda y Rosa's photographs possess a significant ability to evoke the layers of time which testify to the multiple histories of each site. Firstly, the research process underlying each composition connects up with contextual references to the history of photography, albeit without presenting them in an explicit manner. The images that take us to places in Washington where the conspirators in the plot to assassinate Abraham Lincoln met may perhaps evoke the famous portrait of Lewis Payne which Roland Barthes discussed in *Camera*

Lucida. In other cases the attention paid to a memorial is interwoven with other historical reminiscences which refer to how citizens have devised their own forms of dissidence and protest or, as in the case of the photographs taken in Jerusalem, locates us in spaces disputed by communities of different politico-religious affiliations.



7 ORIGIN (ONGOING SINCE 2003)

Origin, which is Bleda y Rosa's most geographically extensive project, offers a survey of different places where successive scientific theories formulated since the late 18th century have located the origin of the human species. This contact with the territory not only emphasises the fact that within this period of time, successive accounts have led to a constant modification of the hypotheses on the emergence of human life, but also that this transformation of the idea of mankind based on each new discovery is characterised by a constant geographical shift.

Another aspect associated with the notion of time acquires particular importance in this project. The chronological span in which Bleda y Rosa set *Origin* allows for an emphasis on various temporal simultaneities that are crucial with regard to the 19th century, for example the fact that the earliest theories of evolution, such as those by Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, coincided with the birth of paleo-anthropology, the height of Romantic painting and the rise of photography.

In formal and conceptual terms, *Origin* returns to some of the lines of approach which first appeared in *Battlefields*. The photographs also have a panoramic format although once again the attention to detail does not offer too many certainties with regard to the nature of the clues that they offer. While the textual reference locates us in the temporal and geographical register of the discovery that undermines previous theories (and the entire articulation of the historical account), with regard to the images a dual intention is interwoven in these photographs. As in *Battlefields*, they indicate with scientific precision the exact point where a key event that changed the course of history took place. At the same time and without abandoning the documentary approach, the aesthetic references invoked in this series reveal a meticulous construction that allows for an in-depth focus on the issue of how, in all its growing complexity, the culture of landscape has marked out ways of seeing and understanding the territory.



8 CORPORATIONS (ONGOING SINCE 2006)

Corporations continues a line of artistic investigation which Bleda y Rosa have pursued with increasing attention regarding architecture and its functions. In this project, which so far consists of two bodies of work, they look at the ways in which different companies and institutions have used their architectural structures to symbolise concepts connected with both knowledge – learning, in an academic sense – and work and production.

Photographs of the libraries of three ancient and prestigious universities locate the viewer in privileged spaces, but ones in which the atmosphere presents signs of a certain opposition between an old promise of learning and restricted access to it. The voices chosen to rub against the images are those of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, for example, who have questioned the discourses and structures that legitimise erudition, focusing from different viewpoints on the problematic aspects of a socially egalitarian construction of academic knowledge.

The second part of this project is the series produced in the corporate headquarters of Telefónica. In it, Bleda y Rosa confront two specific historical and sociological contexts: the early decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century. The nature of the texts associated with the old offices, such as the excerpts from Arturo Barea's book *The forging of a rebel* (1940–45) refer to a precise moment in their past. In contrast, the extracts from Richard Sennett's essay *The corrosion of character* (1998) project towards the future by heightening our gaze on the work spaces of the new, more recently built headquarters with a particular emphasis on the tensions that underlie the labour dynamics favoured by neo-liberal policies.



EDUARDO BLEDA

9 *PROMPTUARIUM* (2010–2017)

With *Promptuarium*, the reflections that Bleda y Rosa have favoured over the course of their career regarding the interconnected relationship between geographical spaces marked by history and historical accounts acquire a more profound and complex dimension due to the multiple discursive lines which this series unfolds. In this project, structured into two bodies of work, the artists look at a period of history of enormous social, political and cultural transformation which, in the context of the revolutionary processes of the 18th and 19th centuries, brought about the end of the Ancien Régime and the implantation of Enlightenment thought.

In “Notes on War and Revolution” Bleda y Rosa focus on the Spanish War of Independence, offering a survey of this period through five geographical reference points – Trafalgar, Madrid, Girona, Cadiz and Vitoria – which between 1805 and 1814 were the locations of some of the military campaigns, uprisings and popular revolts that were crucial for the achievement of a new political order. If the term “promptuarium” suggests a succinct compilation, in this project Bleda y Rosa provide their own version through a meticulous exercise of the articulation of images and texts. The way in which they assemble and connect facts, accounts and marks of time points up the fragmentary nature of history as a necessarily plural narrative, while the shifts and disjunctures brought about by their photographs allow for the activation of new narratives and new parameters of understanding.

In “The Continent and the Wind” the artists look at two key moments. The first concerns the phase of colonisation that took place in Latin America from the 16th century onwards and revolves around various geographical shifts associated with the conquest, the exploitation of resources and religious persecutions, while the textual references are by authors involved in that domination, pillaging and evangelisation. The second period is that of the early scientific expeditions which contributed to disseminating the Enlightenment thought and revolutionary processes which led to various countries achieving independence. In the latter case the photographs take us to the present-day places from where those scientists set out, the collections they assembled, the houses where the first revolutionary plans were drawn up and the locations of military engagements. At the same time, the voices that run through these images are the accounts – often in the form of correspondence – by individuals who experienced the revolutionary processes with differing degrees of involvement.

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Dates

From May 26
to September 4, 2022

Curator

Marta Dahó

Opening hours

Tuesdays – Sundays
(and public holidays): 11am–8pm
Last entry: 7.30pm

Visitors must leave the galleries
10 minutes before closing time

Admissions

Standard ticket: 5 €
Ticket with reduction: 3 €
Free standard ticket: Tuesdays
(except public holidays)
Groups: 3 € / per person

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