

VANESSA WINSHIP

30th MAY – 31st AUGUST 2014



Untitled, from the series *she dances on Jackson*. United States, 2011-2012
© Vanessa Winship

Press conference: May 28th, 2013
Dates: May 30th – August 31th
Venue: FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE. Bárbara de Braganza,13, Madrid, Spain
Curator: Carlos Martín García
Production: Exhibition organised by FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE
Website: <http://www.exposicionesmapfrearte.com/winship>
Facebook www.facebook.com/fundacionmapfreultura
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FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE opens a new exhibition hall in the heart of the city, alongside Madrid's main cultural institutions. Located at Calle Bárbara de Braganza 13 (on the corner of Paseo de Recoletos), opposite the National Library, the space boasts 868 square meters spread over two floors and will provide us with a city-center venue in which to host the photography exhibitions we have been organizing for several years.

In 2007 FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE decided to make photography a key theme of its arts program and acquired the complete Brown Sisters series by Nicholas Nixon, marking the beginning of an incipient photography collection. This acquisition also lay the foundations for a new focus in our exhibition program, launched at our Azca gallery in January 2009, based simultaneously on the work of the grand masters and on contemporary photographers who had earned international acclaim but had never held a major retrospective of their work. Walker Evans was the subject of our first exhibition, and he has been followed by Fazal Sheikh, Graciela Iturbide, Lisette Model and others. All in all, we have hosted 18 exhibitions since that first experience, making us the only institution in Madrid that offers a regular program of four photography exhibitions a year.

In addition to organizing this program for our own galleries, we have capitalized on the effort involved in bringing each exhibition to fruition by touring them after their stint in Madrid to other cities in Spain, Europe and, most of all, Latin America. Consequently, we not only show the work of these artists in our own country but help to disseminate it much further afield. This has led us to collaborate and forge close ties with other institutions that have been active in the field of photography for many years, including venues such as the Winterthur Fotomuseum, the Huis Marseille Museum voor Photographie in Amsterdam, the Jeu de Paume in Paris, the Fotomuseum in Rotterdam, the George Eastman House in Rochester and the International Center for Photography in New York. At the same time, we have been able to offer audiences in countries like Brazil, Mexico and Colombia the chance to admire the work of artists such as Walker Evans, Fazal Sheikh, Dayanita Singh, Gottard Schuh and Graciela Iturbide.

The new venue reflects the determination of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE to reinforce its commitment to the dissemination of photography in this country.

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE opens its new photography gallery at Paseo de Recoletos 27 with the first retrospective exhibition dedicated to the work of British photographer Vanessa Winship. Curated by Carlos Martín García, the show offers visitors a complete overview of Winship's work, featuring a broad selection of photographs from all of her series, starting with her initial project in the Balkans and ending with her work in Almería this year, produced by FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE and due to receive its first public showing at this exhibition.

Vanessa Winship (Barton-upon-Humber, United Kingdom, 1960) studied at the Polytechnic of Central London during the 1980s at the time when postmodern theory was beginning to permeate the practice of photography and cultural studies. These ideas are reflected in the artist's deliberate remove of all potential documentary content from her photography in order to concentrate instead on notions more related to identity, vulnerability and the body. Accordingly, since the 1990s Vanessa Winship has worked in regions which, in the collective imaginary, are associated with the instability and darkness of a recent past and with the volatile nature of borders and identities. Her images, in black and white, challenge the perception of photography's immovable truth. Meanwhile, the formal choice of black and white reflects a deliberate shift from the photograph as narrative and constitutes, in the words of the artist herself, a "marvelous instrument of abstraction that enables us to move between time and memory".

Vanessa Winship is one of the most renowned photographers on the contemporary international scene. In 2011 she was the first woman to win the prestigious Henri Cartier-Bresson (HCB) award. Her other distinctions include winning first prize in the *Stories* category of the World Press Photo awards in 1998 and 2008, the *Descubrimientos* award at PhotoEspaña in 2010, and the Godfrey Argent Prize in 2008, bestowed by the National Portrait Gallery in London.

A TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION

I lived and worked in the region of the Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus for more than a decade. My work focuses on the junction between chronicle and fiction, exploring ideas around concepts of borders, land, memory, desire, identity and history. I am interested in the telling of history, and in notions around periphery and edge. For me photography is a process of literacy, a journey of understanding.

Vanessa Winship

The Vanessa Winship exhibition adopts the form of a chronological journey through each of the series that make up her oeuvre, featuring a selection of 188 photographs. Between 1999 and 2003 Vanessa Winship traveled through the regions of Albania, Serbia, Kosovo and Athens, coinciding with the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia and resulting in her series ***Imagined States and Desires. A Balkan Journey***. This project was a fundamental step in defining her photographic vision and in her decision to break with contemporary reportage and the traditional concept of the photojournalist. The images that make up this series mostly center on the tragedy of the exodus of Kosovar Albanian refugees from Serbia to neighboring countries. They are a collection of snapshots that reflect the volatile nature of borders, ethnic groups and creeds while asserting that identity is not bestowed by territory but is ingrained in individuals, wherever they go. The fragmentary nature of the series, its condensation into micro-stories, lays the foundations for her future practice.



Untitled, from the series *Imagined States and Desires. A Balkan Journey*, 1999-2002
© Vanessa Winship

In 2002 Vanessa Winship moved to the Black Sea region and over the next eight years traveled through Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. Her work in this area gave rise to one of her most renowned series, ***Black Sea: Between Chronicle and Fiction***. In this series, she presents her vision of the area and the residents of the regions around the shores of the Black Sea, which she presents as a natural border—challenging all notions of geopolitical or historically established limits— of the vital space of each nation, and even of the distinction between public and private space. Winship's work therefore focuses on the aspects that endure beyond the action of politics: collective rituals, modes of transportation, recreational spaces, and the movement of human beings up and down the coastlines. In *Black Sea*, portraits of Turkish wrestlers and Ukrainian wedding guests allow Winship to elaborate on her reflections and explore the concepts of sexual differentiation governing societies: on one hand, Turkish wrestling, a direct descendant of Greco-Roman wrestling and an icon of masculinity in the country; on the other, participation in a wedding ceremony as a means of self-presentation in society for young Ukrainian women.

In both of these series, the images are accompanied by brief notes written by the artist, either expressing a single thought or a short description, which create a deliberately incomplete narrative. For Winship, these notes are meant to remind us of the power of text to evoke an image.



Untitled, from the series *Sweet Nothings: Schoolgirls of Eastern Anatolia*, 2007
© Vanessa Winship

Sweet Nothings: Schoolgirls of Eastern Anatolia (2007), produced during her travels through Eastern Europe, is a key project in Vanessa Winship's evolution as a photographer. It is an almost serial collection of portraits of schoolgirls from the rural area of Eastern Anatolia, a region bordering with Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran where the plurality of ethnic groups is silenced by the proliferation of uniforms, of both schoolchildren and military personnel. On a certain level, the school uniforms recall the tools used by states to classify the population, to "mark" their territory and neutralize the plurality of areas, as in Eastern Anatolia where the ethnic and geographic borders are not as clearly defined as they are on maps. This fact—the presence of uniforms—represents a framework for action, a boundary for the project, and allows Winship to further develop her interest in faces, gestures, and the sense of belonging to a group or community.

Georgia, another region on the shores of the Black Sea, is the setting for the series produced by between 2008 and 2010, in which she mostly focuses on portraits.

Georgia. Seeds Carried by the Wind is a detailed study of the faces the photographer came across. These are portraits of youths and children, mostly individuals who, when grouped together, appear almost without variation as same-sex pairs. The collection suggests an energetic, survivor country. These images are combined with a series of colored photographs (the only ones in Winship's entire output) that accompany tombstones in a cemetery. The two collections establish an interesting dialogue between different generations of Georgians and, simultaneously, between the artist herself and the original anonymous photographer. Meanwhile, the landscapes and stones that complete the series evoke a premature death. By combining landscape and portrait as places where the traces of identity, history and present are imprinted, this series is a key project in Winship's work as it prompts a debate about her practice and the issues posed by the two genres.



Untitled, from the series *Georgia. Seeds Carried by the Wind*, 2008-2010
© Vanessa Winship

In 2011 Vanessa Winship received the prestigious Henri Cartier-Bresson (HCB) photography award. The project for she won the prize led to the series ***she Dances on Jackson. United States*** (2011-2012), produced in the United States, a country which she represents as of great uncertainty, where the weight of the recent past is manifested through public works and constructions which are either underused or have fallen into disuse, and where the faces of anonymous individuals and groups reveal their disillusionment with the promises of the American dream. This series also constitutes Winship's definitive approach to landscape photography, a genre which has gained increasing prominence in her output. Short texts written by the author replace the gradual disappearance of the portrait, operating as narratives of the missing photographs. In ***she Dances on Jackson. United States*** the geographic leap to the other side of the Atlantic defines the characters that people Winship's earlier photography.

Before embarking on her trip to the United States, Winship worked in her home town on the estuary of the *Humber* river (2010), for which this series is titled. In this project, we again witness the growing preeminence of landscape in her work. This process culminates masterfully in her most recent series, *Almería. Where Gold Was Found*, which represents the reaffirmation of her work as a landscapist and the total absence of the human figure. In January 2014, for the purposes of this exhibition, the artist moved to Almería, a place marked by rootlessness and its border nature and geological diversity, to carry out her latest project. Winship has focused on photographing the geological formations along the coastline of Cabo de Gata and the devastation of the area following the proliferation of intensive agriculture based on greenhouse production. The land of gold, Spaghetti westerns and marble now appears as a land of plastic and, like all other places Winship has photographed, seems to be located in a place suspended in space and time. All of the images in this section of the show reflect the rapid transformation of the region following the introduction of greenhouses, a radical systemic change and altered coexistence brought about by the arrival of communities of immigrants and their access to consumer society customs. Almería, as Winship's photographs clearly show, continues to be a fragmented landscape in which urban and rural collide and where the "non-place" that is the greenhouse acts as a metaphor for the area's instability and vulnerability.



Untitled, from the series *Almería*, 2014. © Vanessa Winship

CATALOGUE

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue featuring all the images on display and specially commissioned essays about the work of Vanessa Winship by Neil Ascherson, Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa and Carlos Martín García. The catalogue will also include two excerpts from *Campos de Níjar* (Níjar Country) and *Coto Vedado* (Forbidden Territory) by Juan Goytisolo, as well as a biography-timeline, an updated bibliography, and a selection of the texts the photographer uses to complement her series, in the manner of a “travel diary”. To date there are only two monographs on Winship, one devoted to the *Black Sea* series and one to *Sweet Nothings*, which means that this catalogue will be the first and most incisive historiographical approximation of her entire oeuvre.