

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on February 14, 2014

Ernesto Neto: The Body that Carries Me

Sponsored by





It is an enormous pleasure for Iberdrola to collaborate with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in making one of the most representative exhibitions dedicated to Ernesto Neto to date, possible.

This pleasure is two-fold given that Neto is not only one of the most outstanding figures on the international art scene, but that, furthermore, he comes from a fundamental country for our Company, Brazil, in which Iberdrola has been present for fifteen years, supplying energy to forty million people.

Furthermore, this sponsorship allows us to renew our firm collaboration commitment to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and support a new artistic expression within the frame of our social action activities associated with the corporate social responsibility of our company.

As Ernesto Neto says, what human beings share is more important than what sets them apart. This is perhaps why this exhibition constitutes a great space for the shared experience, to which the expansive spirit of the author contributes, as reflected in the way the organic forms of the works are projected throughout the Museum.

Life, to Neto, is characterized by his constant movement. The artist focuses on the idea of connections and the relationships that occur in nature, including the world of the artificial, as this author considers man, and all that the human being creates, part of nature.

His installations work as a whole, as if they were a body-landscape left open for us to discover and explore. The artist uses this to offer the spectator the opportunity to put down their roots in life and feel again the experience of an intense connection with nature.

In short, the visitor will enjoy this show from a double dimension, both aesthetic and physical, which is why I recommend partaking in this extraordinary experience first-hand.

Ignacio S. Galán
President of Iberdrola

Ernesto Neto: The Body that Carries Me

- Curator: Petra Joos
 - Dates: February 14 – May 18, 2014
 - Sponsor: Iberdrola
- A unique retrospective dedicated to the work of Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto, one of the most influential creators of his generation.
 - Developed in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition offers a broad selection of his work from the 1990s to the present, including pieces that he created specifically for the Museum spaces.
 - A multisensory, interactive journey that starts in the Museum Atrium and continues in the galleries of the second floor in which visitors become part of the artworks.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents [*Ernesto Neto: The Body that Carries Me*](#), a unique retrospective dedicated to the work of Ernesto Neto (b. 1964, Rio de Janeiro), one of Brazil's most outstanding artists who is internationally renowned for his organic sculptures, which often take on colossal dimensions, such as the enormous installation hanging in the Museum's Atrium, *The Falling Body [Le corps] female* [from *Leviathan Thoř*] (*O corpo que cai [Le corps] fêmea [de Léviathan Thoř]*), 2006.

Sponsored by Iberdrola, the exhibition offers a selection of more than fifty pieces from the 1990s to the present, some of which the artist has especially reconfigured in order to adapt to the Museum's unique architectural spaces while others were created specifically for the exhibition in Bilbao.

Throughout his nearly thirty years of production, Neto has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work, from delicate drawings to large-scale installations to pieces that were created so that they may be penetrated, inhabited, felt, and even smelled, allowing spectators to interact with them and experience their own bodies and feelings, without losing sight of the fact that, like the human body, they are also fragile and delicate.

This unique journey through the artist's magical universe begins in the Atrium and continues throughout the second floor of the Museum, immersing visitors in a game of sensory stimuli and visual, tactile and olfactory suggestions and inviting them to escape from the everyday and experience his art with all the senses. As Ernesto Neto says, an exhibition is a place for poetry: *We are always receiving information, but here, I want you to stop thinking. Take refuge in art. I think that not thinking is good, it allows you to directly breathe in life.*

Neto transforms the art experience into a multisensory, interactive event that invites us to connect with our senses in their pure state. Developed in close collaboration with the Brazilian artist, the exhibition showcases an unprecedented fusion of the wavy, organic shapes of Gehry's architecture with a work of art with the permanently underlying concept of "nature as the master of art." *We learn from nature, there is no doubt about it. Everything can be found in nature; everything boils down to nature. I am sure that some day we will live in total harmony with the natural world,* Ernesto Neto comments.

Divided in six sections ("Why Are You Going to Rome Again?", "That's Life", "Tent of Dreams", "Sweet Border", "Never Mind the Mess", and "Candy Man Candy"), that occupy nine Museum spaces—some sections take up more than one space—the exhibition introduces the spectator to certain areas of instability, and then provides moments of calm and reconciliation with the self. A magical journey roaming through tunnels, surfaces your body can sink into, prominent figures to embrace, and fantastic environments to smell and feel.

Why Are You Going to Rome Again? (Por que você está indo de novo para Roma?)

The journey through this magical environment begins in the Atrium, where the spectacular installation *The Falling Body [Le corps] female [from Leviathan Thot] (O corpo que cai [Le corps] fêmea [de Léviathan Thot])*, 2006, hangs from the 55-meter-high ceiling. Inspired by Thomas Hobbes's appropriation of the Leviathan, the frightening sea monster described in the Book of Job as the "king of the most ferocious beasts," this gigantic sculpture consists of a huge hanging, stretched-out, levitating body that envelops visitors with its long, soft, heavy, fallen limbs. For Ernesto Neto, this beast represents the society to which we belong and reminds us of the force of gravity that anchors us to the earth.

The "feminine" part of the original installation was selected for this exhibition, which Ernesto Neto created in 2006 for the Panthéon in Paris, a building which became a monument for humanist ideology after the French Revolution.

Made of polyamide fabric that has been sewn together and stuffed with sand and Styrofoam pellets, simulating the soft, organic voluptuousness of a human body with bulges, orifices and fallen masses, this sensual, soft, transitory piece is loaded with dualities and connotations characteristic of the body: heaviness-lightness; masculine-feminine; movement-stillness; interior-exterior.

Beneath this fascinating sculpture is the installation *Looking at the sky (Olhando o céu)*, 2013, which consists of a series of hammocks that serve as mobile carts. Visitors are encouraged to lie down in the hammocks and push themselves around with their feet, moving through the Atrium while observing the Museum's architecture and the enormous *Falling Body [Le corps] female [from Leviathan Thot]* sculpture hanging above their heads. These mobile hammocks have binoculars and compartments with spices, encouraging visitors to observe, breathe deeply, empty their mind, and enjoy with all their senses.

That's Life (É a vida)

Life is a body we are part of—A vida é un corpo do qual fazemos parte, 2012) dominates one of the large curved galleries in the Frank Gehry building. Exhibited for the first time in 2012 in the exhibition *Madness is part of life* in Japan, this enormous sculpture is divided in two parts, the male part and the female (the aisle and the platform), and is about fecundation, the very moment in which the spermatozoid gets into the ovule, the beginning of life. Taking on the shape of a dragon hanging from the ceiling, this piece was made using a manual, multi-color crochet technique and, as all the rest of Ernesto Neto's work, it symbolizes his particular concept of life, which sees no separation between people and nature: *our minds and our thoughts, everything we invent and construct, comes from the natural world.*

This magical stroll along a walkway made with yards and yards of artisan crochet work in all different colors invites visitors to climb up and walk around, experiencing how the floor moves as it separates from the ground, hearing the sound of the plastic balls beneath their bare feet, and finally lying down at the highest part of the dragon to enjoy the view, rest, or tune into their own thoughts. The objective is to create a certain sense of vertigo, questioning the stability we take for granted and, as the artist explains, inviting us to take a break from the speed, information overflow, and complexity of life at this moment in time. Neto gives us the opportunity to meditate on how we are to face new challenges in society, allowing us to "go higher and look at the horizon" through his piece.

The name of this piece, taken from the expression "that's life," could be interpreted as a symptom of our resignation to difficulties, like the well-known French saying *c'est la vie*; however, for the artist, it is a vibrant affirmation and poetic invitation to live with all of our senses.

Tent of Dreams (Oca de sonhos)

In the tupi-guarani language, one of the many spoken by the Amerindian peoples around the Rio de Janeiro area, the term "Oca" is used for a communal dwelling that is collectively built and used by one or more family groups. An *Oca* can also be a meeting place and living area where the entire tribe celebrates rituals and shares their ancestral legacy: a house of knowledge. The *oca's* roof replaces and complements the firmament, the natural sky that covers everything. Ernesto Neto's intention with this section, called *Tent of Dreams*, is to show the concept of cosmological architecture that has pervaded all of his work since the beginning of his artistic career.

Like the giant body of some prehistoric reptile, the threatening installation *Stone Lips, Pepper Tits, Clove Love, Fog Frog* (2008) welcomes visitors to the beginning of the classical rooms. An immense polyamide fabric skin covers a wooden structural support in the form of a dome, reaching up from the floor like an enormous reptile skin. Ernesto Neto himself calls this and other pieces "animal architectures," which manifests his fascination for the two species that have dominated life on earth: dinosaurs and humans. In

previous works, where Neto used architecture as a shell, the artworks were the flesh while the architecture functioned as the shell or membrane covering it. In those pieces, the artist added some structures that served as “bones” and created a room within a room, a feature that can be seen in this work.

Like human beings, dinosaurs were also tremendously powerful millions of years ago, but in the end, they were unable to adapt to the changes in their natural environment and were eventually extinct – similarly, the artist expresses, to human beings alive in the present time.

The presence of two “masculine teardrops” filled with pepper and a “feminine teardrop” filled with clove in this installation awaken the visitor’s sense of smell and enhance the sensation of daydreaming.

This section continues in the last classical gallery with the sculpture *The slow pace of the body that is skin* (*O tempo lento do corpo que é pele*, 2004). Made using a rug fabric technique called “nozinho” (small knots) from the mountains near Río de Janeiro, this piece – an enormous, thick, red cloak that seems to be able to cover a mountain, animal or anything the one could imagine – is a clear representation of the idea of transition between the body and the landscape, which is ever-present in the artist’s work. This thick rug of tiny knots, made by the COOPA-ROCA women’s cooperative, is dense and heavy in contrast to the artist’s transparent, fragile pieces, perhaps demonstrating the weight of something that remains hidden. It also alludes to the skin as the place of existence, where all our internal vibrations connect with external vibrations.

Ernesto Neto refers to this installation as a “body-island” and as an “animal-mountain”. Beside it another piece created with the same technique zigzags on the floor like a snake.

Sweet Border (Borda doce)

“Sweet Border” was designed especially for this exhibition and it encourages us to reflect on our own limits and the limits of what is real, while also alluding to the existing connection between our bodies and the natural world, which the artist considers to be crucial.

In the depths of the forest, where everything comes in different shades of green, limits or “borders” are confused in an explosion of light and shadow filtering through the treetops. The artist “constructs” his own forest in this installation with a nylon “horizon” that forms the roof of the piece and allows light to filter through. In some areas, the nylon is pulled down towards the floor under the weight of the aromatic spices stored inside, resembling tree trunks.

Beneath this translucent roof, a steel structure in the center of the room holds hundreds of candles that are lit, one a day, starting from the first day of the exhibition. As the wax melts, it naturally creates a drawing.

Viewers can only see a small part of this organic process during their visit to the Museum, although it will continue through to the end of the exhibition.

A series of pouffes arranged around this installation give visitors a place to relax while surrounded by the virtual forest of sculptures, breathing deeply and inhaling the aromatic spices. As the artist explains: “We are nature. We all are. This is a key idea because we usually separate ourselves from nature; we externalize it in the third person, while nature does not actually correspond to a third person, but rather the first person; it is inside us. I also believe in the conviction that the entire world is nature.”

The same gallery features other groups of sculptures, such as *Copulônia* (2013)— an invented title with a double allusion to the notions of colony and copulation—consists of a number of nylon stockings of different sizes and colors and filled with lead balls; and *Lipzoid* (2013) and *The Ovaloids’ Meeting* (1998), which explore the idea of a large organic system whose elements maintain symbiotic relationships.

The layout of the space makes reference to an ancestral tradition practiced by a shamanic tribe from northern Brazil, the Huni Kuin, in which they try to connect their minds directly with nature. This room, Borda Doce, was designed to reflect the essential experience Ernesto Neto lived with the Huni Kuin people. It combines his artworks with the shamanic rituals of these people and conveys the spirit of the forest, present in the whole exhibition.

The section continues in another gallery, where the organically-shaped sculpture is composed of weathering steel and ceramic pots, each holding a plant, using one of Neto’s characteristic construction methods. The color of the piece changes over time, becoming a deep reddish brown.

A large, color photograph is featured in this gallery, which is another reference to the human body. While in Dallas, Texas, Neto became interested in various works from the Nasher Sculpture Center and took a series of close-up photographs.

Never Mind the Mess (Não repara não)

The artist invites visitors to participate in a very intimate experience in one of the Museum’s spaces, which takes on the shape of a petal. Neto transforms this large gallery into what he calls a “hyper event horizon” with two huge layers of polyamide fabric covering the floor and the ceiling, connected by columns of the same material. As you move through the space, you experience how the transparent structure transforms under the weight of your own body, while the gauze forming the installation’s floor and the ceiling distort the vision of an outdoor landscape.

The piece entitled *Ship Womb Chapel II* (*Nave Utero Capela II*, 2013) crowns the gallery. In 2001, Ernesto Neto married his girlfriend Lili (who was eight months pregnant at the time) inside an installation that was

being exhibited at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. A second, smaller version of this piece is now presented in Bilbao along with a video that describes the ritual of marriage. There is a communal mattress at the back of the gallery, inviting visitors to lie down. Each body leaves an imprint, which will change with the impressions of other bodies that come afterward. The artist pursues to create this feeling of fusion—of how our intimate encounters transform us, perhaps into something larger than ourselves.

This space also includes other pieces that require experimentation and interaction. The series *Humanoids*, made in 2001 with styrofoam and polyamide, consists of a sort of figures that can perfectly accommodate the anatomy of whoever sits on them, like an amorphous suit, allowing spectators to discover it by touching its surfaces, shapes and textures.

Around the mid-nineties, Neto abandoned the geometric language of his earlier pieces and began to sew and fill pieces of lycra with different materials, such as styrofoam balls, flour and spices, to obtain shapes reminiscent of bodies and living organisms.

The room ends with two projections of images Neto took of his friends on the beach and during long nights at his apartment, which were exhibited for the first time in 2010 at Galeria Laura Alvim in Rio de Janeiro.

Candy Man Candy (Baleiro Bala)

Inspired by the exchange/barter networks that have proliferated throughout various parts of the world in response to the current global recession, one of his new pieces was created specifically for this exhibition: *Barter Barter (Troca Troca, 2013)*. Several paper bags containing glass beads surround some daily life objects that constitute the center of the piece. Starting on the first day of the exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to replace these objects with others they have brought.

The artist aims to evoke concepts including solidarity, togetherness, recycling, and reuse of products and encourages us to examine our real needs in comparison with the needs of our fellow man. Neto transforms each participant into an artistic agent. Thus, the body of the work is constantly changing: part of it will be dispersed throughout the world, while visitors' personal choices will form part of it.

The journey through the universe of Ernesto Neto continues in a large gallery that invites visitors to immerse themselves in the vibrant popular culture of the artist's hometown. Yards and yards of string sewn with the crochet technique form an enormous, multi-colored web hanging from the ceiling in a series of columns full of colored plastic balls. These voluptuous sculptures also hold drums, typical of the Brazilian carnival, as well as clusters of bags of candy and spices, large green coconuts, soda and beer cans, and an endless number of objects, which the artist hopes will transport visitors to the bustling neighborhood life of street vendors in Brazil. A piano is located in the center of the installation.

Baleiro Bala is a popular song from the school of samba that tells the story of a street candy vendor —a *camelô*— who worked near the train tracks in Rio de Janeiro, which the artist took as an example of the survival of the individual. This installation is a vindication of the qualities of local artisan work and the small rituals of Brazilian popular culture that make the collective experience of life richer and more diverse, in contrast to the commercialization of the economy in the current global markets.

Due to its unique fusion with the Museum's architecture, *Ernesto Neto: The body that carries me* is the most spectacular retrospective to date of one of the most outstanding creators from Brazil. The artist deals with the body in its sensorial sense (the individual body) and in its political sense (the political body). Plato rejected the existence of the body as if the mind belonged to a higher plane. For Neto, it is the body that "carries us," and our minds serve that body they are part of just as other limbs do. There is also a cultural body, a political body that "carries us." The title of the exhibition finds itself in the interface of the internal and external relations. It is a mediator.

Exhibition catalogue

With essays by exhibition curator, Petra Joos, and Raphaela Platow, The Alice & Harris Weston Director del Contemporary Arts Center, Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati (Ohio), the exhibition catalogue features an interview with the artist and a review of the six sections of the show through illustrations and brief texts by Franck Leibovici, Tania Rivera, Luiz Alberto Oliveira, Pedro Luz, Hannah Monyer, and Rainer Hehl, who deal with questions such as creation, the ephemeral, social relations, cultural fusion, or the space of architecture.

Cover image:

Street Vendor Candy Bunches (Camelô Cacho Balabala), 2010

Candies, plastic bags, chain, and hooks

116 x 32 x 32 cm, edition of 4

Collection of the artist

View of the installation at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, 2010.

Photo: Everton Ballardin.

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Ernesto Neto: The body that carries me
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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

Ernesto Neto

Leviathan Thot (Female) (Leviathan Thot [Fêmeal]), 2006
Polyamide tulle, tube and stocking; Styrofoam pellets and sand
Collection of the artist
Installation view at 35 edition Festival d' Automne, Paris
Photo: Ernesto Neto
©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

Street Vendor Candy Bunches (Camelo Cacho Balabala), 2010
Candies, plastic bags, chain and hooks
116 x 32 x 32 cm
Edition of 4
Collection of the artist
Installation view at Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, 2010
Photo: Everton Ballardin
©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

Drum (Tambor), 2010
Crochet, stones, piano, Afro-Brazilian drums and snare drums
380 x 1,000 x 1,000 cm
Collection of the artist
Installation view at Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, 2010
Photo: Everton Ballardin
©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

Stone Lips, Pepper Tits, Clove Love, Fog Frog, 2008
Polyamide tulle, stocking, fabric and tube; wood, black pepper, clove and stones
4.90 m x 6.64 m x 9.60 m/12.50 m x 25. 72 m (ceiling)
Courtesy of the artist, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, Sao Paulo



Installation view *Psycho Buildings*, Hayward gallery, London, 2008

Photo: Steve White

©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014

Ernesto Neto

Venus Puffs, 1997

Polyamide tulle, plaster and cement

12 pieces: 160 x 160 x 25 cm each

Courtesy: Galeria Pedro Oliveira, Porto

Photo: Antonio Pinto

©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

The Slow Pace of the Body that Is Skin (O Tempo lento do corpo que é pele), 2004

Foam and polyamide carpet

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna

Installation view at Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2004

Photo: Jörg von Bruchhausen

©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

Copulônia, 1989 (detail)

Polyamide stocking and lead spheres

Collection of the artist

Installation view at Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, 2009

Photo: Eduardo Ortega

©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto

Life is a body we are part of -A vida é um corpo do qual fazemos parte, 2012

Crochet and polypropylene balls

780 x 786 x 1486 cm

Collection of the artist

Installation view at Espace Louis Vuitton Tokyo

Photo: ©Louis Vuitton / Jérémie Souteyrat work with the support of

Espace Louis Vuitton Tokyo

©Ernesto Neto, Guggenheim Bilbao, 2014



Ernesto Neto: The body that carries me

Calendar for parallel activities:

- Workshops for adultus / Creative Sessions:

Knitting Friends 1:

Crochet workshop with Ernesto Neto's team (members only)

Thursday, February 6.

Place: Gallery 208

Hour: 6–7:30 pm

Knitting Friends 2:

Crochet workshop

- Tuesday and Thursday, February 18 and 20.
For absolute beginners, two sessions.
- Tuesday, March 4.
For beginners, one session.
- Thursday, March 6.
For beginners, one session

Place: Galleries of the Museum and Zero Espazioa

Hour: 6–7:45 pm

- Conversation: Ernesto Neto and Friends:
Tuesday, February 11
Place: Museum Auditorium
Hour: 6:30 pm
- Educators:
From Tuesday to Sunday, throughout the exhibition, there will be educators helping visitors interact with some of the works.
Place: Atrium and galleries 203 and 208
Hour: mornings only
- Curatorial view with Petra Joos:
Wednesday, February 26.
Place: Information Desk
Hour: 6:30 pm