

**CENTRO  
BOTÍN  
CENTRE**

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[www.centrobotin.org](http://www.centrobotin.org)

An abstract painting by Julie Mehretu, featuring dense, overlapping layers of dark, gestural brushstrokes in shades of black, grey, and brown, set against a background of muted, earthy tones like ochre, green, and blue. The composition is complex and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement.

**JULIE MEHRETU:**

**A UNIVERSAL HISTORY OF  
EVERYTHING AND NOTHING**

**October 12, 2017  
February 25, 2018**

## CENTRO BOTÍN PRESENTS THE WORK OF JULIE MEHRETU

- The show is the most important survey of Julie Mehretu's work to date in Europe.
- In her large-format abstract paintings, the Ethiopian-born, New York-based artist captures the contemporary spirit.
- *Julie Mehretu. A Universal History of Everything and Nothing* is on view at Centro Botín from 12 October 2017 to 25 February 2018.

*Santander, 14 September 2017.*- The Centro Botín in Santander presents from 12 October 2017 to 28 January 2018 the exhibition *Julie Mehretu. A Universal History of Everything and Nothing*. **The show features a selection of around 30 paintings and 60 drawings from key moments in Mehretu's practice, making it the most comprehensive exhibition of her work in Europe to date.**

Born in Ethiopia in 1970, Mehretu made a name for herself in the New York art scene in the late 1990s with a highly personal vocabulary. Using techniques such as drawing, ink and acrylic, Julie Mehretu combines geometric lines, architectural drawings and urban projections with layers of colour and other more personal elements, brushstrokes and quasi-calligraphic marks.

Maintaining a complex balance between precision and chaos, the forms interact in the canvas sometimes taking the shape of a whirlpool or streams, other times that of pieces bursting in the air as if in an explosion that tries to reach the beholder.

All the surfaces are meticulously worked by the artist. Layers, lines, brushstrokes and marks are juxtaposed on top of each other, other times erased or blurred by Mehretu herself, leaving on the canvas a voluntary trace of movement and interaction.

Mehretu's pieces are sometimes redolent of crowds, the agitation of our time, the energy of a world in constant motion, evoking either current or historical events, vanishing cities or civilisations, geo-political dynamics, moments of fragility or change. They are, in her own words, "story maps of no location."

Benjamin Weil, art director of Centro Botín, underscores Julie Mehretu's social engagement in her work, her will to embrace time and history as well as her reflections on social order, symbols of power and political thinking. "The selection of paintings reproduced in *Julie Mehretu. A Universal*

*History of Everything and Nothing* is all the more significant as representative of a post-9-11 period in which war and its spectacle have become a daily occurrence, and in which violence, racism and crimes against humanity have become a blip on the radar of current events. Tracing the evolution of Mehretu's oeuvre over this time, *A Universal History of Everything and Nothing* also reveals the continued and active reflection on painting as a medium that speaks to us in the present". Weil also acknowledges his profound gratitude towards Mehretu: "we must express our heart-felt thanks to Julie Mehretu for accepting our invitation to work with Centro Botín in Santander and the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto. We are indebted to her for her steadfast spirit of collaboration, and for her moral as well as artistic intelligence that is part of her extraordinary art. We are also delighted to collaborate with the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in the artist's first one-person exhibition in Portugal and the most important exhibition dedicated to her work in Europe."

## **Exhibition walktrough**

Centro Botín proposes a complete overview of the artist's production, ranging from her early graphite drawings and her ink and acrylic paintings, to her large-scale canvases with worked surfaces and complex architectures, and also featuring her more dramatic recent works.

While her paintings will be on display in Gallery 2 on the second floor, where the Carsten Höller exhibition was installed until recently, her smaller sized drawings will be on show at Gallery 1 on the first floor, where they will be hung following the closure, this coming 24 September, of the exhibition *Lightness and Boldness. Goya's Drawings*.

And so, as from 12 October, it will be possible to see pieces like *Arcade* (2005) or *Zero Canyon (a dissimulation)* (2006), where one can appreciate signature features of Mehretu's work, like her use of architectural drawings, colour, the succession of layers and marks and her choice of large formats to generate a unique experience in the beholders.

In later works, like in her suite *Invisible Line*, the artist begins to shed architectural references and colour in order to focus on gesture, in a quasi-calligraphic line charged with energy and vibration. Another of her most recent series, *Conjured Parts*, comments in an even more harrowing tone on references to current affairs, like in the case of *Conjured Parts (Syria), Aleppo and Damascus* (2016).

The exhibition has been curated by Vicente Todolí, President of the Fundación Botín Artistic Committee, and Suzanne Cotter, Director of Fundação Serralves-Museu de Arte Contemporanea, Porto.

## **Visual Arts Programme at Fundación Botín**

Julie Mehretu's relationship with the Visual Arts Program at Fundación Botín began in 2015, when the artist directed one of the Visual Arts Workshops at Villa Iris. On that occasion, and under the title *Perdiendo el Norte*, for two weeks she lived and worked with 15 international artists she herself had selected for the unique experience.

Since 1994, the Visual Arts Workshop at Villa Iris has attracted practitioners from all over the world under the direction of artists of the stature of Lothar Baumgarten, Tacita Dean, Carlos Garaicoa, Mona Hatoum, Carsten Höller and Joan Jonas, among others.

This year, in line with the usual activities of the Visual Arts Programme at Fundación Botín, the relationship will be reinforced with this exhibition at Centro Botín, which will open to the public on 12 October, and with the incorporation of a work by Mehretu into the Fundación Botín collection: *Conjured Parts (Sekhmet)*, 2016, a large-format ink and acrylic painting on canvas that will also be on display in the show.

## **Exhibition Catalogue**

The exhibition is accompanied by *A Universal History of Everything and Nothing / Una historia universal de todo y nada*, a book with essays by Suzanne Cotter, Amin Maalouf and Marina Warner. Apart from reproductions of Mehretu's works, the book embarks on a visual journey through her creative process, with images of her studio, sources of inspiration and other materials.

## **Centro Botín**

This show brings to a close the first year in the exhibition programme of Centro Botín, the most significant project in the history of Fundación Botín. The new art centre opened its doors to the public last 23 June, with the first exhibition in Spain of Carsten Höller (*Y*, from 23 June through 10 September); the most relevant exhibition of Goya's drawings ever held in our country, organised in collaboration with the Prado Museum (*Lightness and Boldness. Goya's Drawings*, continuing until 24 September); and *Art at the Turn of the Century*, a preliminary presentation of the Fundación Botín collection, which will remain on view at Centro Botín until 25 February.

Conceived by the architect and Pritzker Prize winner Renzo Piano, Centro Botín aspires to become a benchmark private art centre in Spain and a stopover on the international circuit of world-class art centres, contributing from Santander, through the arts, to the development of creativity as a means to generate economic and social wealth.

## **On the artist**

Julie Mehretu was born in 1970 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and grew up in East Lansing, Michigan (USA). Mehretu, who lives and works in New York, graduated in painting at the celebrated Rhode Island School of Design.

The daughter of an Ethiopian father and an American mother, Julie Mehretu and her family left Ethiopia in 1977, shortly after the revolution.

Her work has received major awards and scholarships: in 2005 she was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship and in 2015 the US Department of State Medal of the Arts. She is also the recipient of the American Art Award from the Whitney Museum of American Art, among other distinctions.

Her work has been seen in the world's foremost contemporary art museums. In recent years she has received attention for monumental pieces like the mural work she created for the Goldman Sachs headquarters in New York measuring 25 metres long by 7 metres high, and the diptych she conceived for the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMOMA), consisting of two pieces of approximately 8 by 10 metres.

## **Recent exhibitions**

Recent solo exhibitions include *Julie Mehretu: Hoodnyx, Voodoo and Stelae*, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York (2016); *The Mathematics of Doves*, White Cube, Sao Paulo (2014); *Julie Mehretu: Half a Shadow*, carlier|gebauer, Berlin (2014); *Liminal Squared*, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York (2013) and *White Cube*, London (2013); *Julie Mehretu: Grey Area*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin & Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2009); *Julie Mehretu: City Sitings*, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit (2007) and *Williams College Art Museum*, Williams, Massachusetts (2007); *Julie Mehretu: Black City*, Kunstverein Hannover (2007), Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek (2007) and *MUSAC-Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León*, Leon (2006).

Her work has featured in recent group exhibitions such as: *Sharjah Biennial 12*, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2015); *The International Biennial of Contemporary Art Foundation of Cartagena*, Cartagena, Colombia (2014); *5th Moscow Biennale*, Moscow, Russia (2013); *documenta (13)*, Kassel, Germany (2012); *Prospect.1*, New Orleans Biennale, Nueva Orleans, Los Angeles (2008); *Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2004); *Sao Paulo Biennial*, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2004); *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2004); *Poetic Justice*, 8th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul (2003).

**Julie Mehretu. A Universal History of Everything and Nothing**

Dates: 12 October 2017 – 25 February 2018

Curated by: Suzanne Cotter, Director of Fundação Serralves–Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto, and Vicente Todolí, President of the Fundación Botín Artistic Committee.

Opening hours: Winter (October to May), Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 8 pm.

Summer (June to September), Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 9 pm.

**Centro Botín**

**Muelle de Albareda, s/n**

**39004 Santander**

**More information:** [www.centrobotin.org](http://www.centrobotin.org)

**Images for media use**

Register on the Centro Botín [website](http://www.centrobotin.org) and download the graphic materials currently available, both of the exhibition and the building, with their corresponding credits.

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**More information:**

**Fundación Botín**

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