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# ARTFORUM

## Madrid Reviews

### Tamar Guimarães

MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFÍA



Tamar Guimarães, *La incorrupta* (The Uncorrupted), 2016, HD video projection, color, sound, 36 minutes.

For her first solo exhibition in Spain, Tamar Guimarães presented the thirty-six-minute film *La incorrupta* (The Uncorrupted), 2016, which was commissioned by the Reina Sofía. In it she presents a story about a guest curator and her potential exhibition, using the very museum in which the work is screened as the film's setting. Throughout the film—an amalgam of documentary, fiction, and essay—viewers are privy to conversations among the curator (played by the artist), museum director, and staff, in addition to confidential discussions among the latter. The exhibition's point of departure is a seventeenth-century reliquary in the province of Málaga, Spain, containing the incorrupt hand of the Spanish mystic Saint Teresa of Ávila. The film concludes with the curator making a formal presentation to staff and students, during which she stresses "corruption as a human condition," one that she hopes to trace from the hand in medieval relics up to its presence in modern documentary film.

The request to show an object of religious devotion in a museum of contemporary art provokes divergent responses. There are practical issues regarding authorization, conservation, and insurance, and then there are the various (and sometimes controversial) interpretations the relic could generate. The staff raises questions along the lines of: If a museum is a secularizing machine, how does it render the hand's inclusion attractive to the church? What do we make of the fact that Francisco Franco purportedly slept with the object in his bedroom? How will the conservative press react? Alongside such queries, hands engaged in various activities (e.g., writing, rolling a cigarette, tapping on a book, drawing, eating fruit) are visually underlined through fixed-frame close-ups dwelling on minimal gestures. Guimarães also weaves the motif of the hand into the film via the deft use of cultural references. For example, in a picnic scene employees discuss the book *Arte de furto* (The Art of Stealing, 1652), a title also featured in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), which is similarly structured by close-ups of hands; in another scene, the curator reviews frame enlargements that include images from Yvonne Rainer's *Hand Movie*, 1966.

Such reflexivity extends beyond the visual and verbal images of hands to the actors themselves, many of whom are played by actual museum personnel. In the opening scene João Fernandes, the Reina Sofía's deputy director and the curator of this show, speaks to the fictional guest curator about her curatorial idea. The artist's decision to cast herself and the museum's staff in quasi-fictional roles appeared even more provocative in the context of the Reina Sofía's concurrent Marcel Broodthaers retrospective and its compelling presentation of his institutional critique. As is now well known, Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, 1968–72, was a fictional museum that engaged in all the discursive activities of a real one. As the museum's "director," Broodthaers organized inaugural speeches, exhibitions of its various collections, and publicity campaigns. With his shift from art producer to administrator, Broodthaers sought to draw attention to the language and institutions within which art and its discourse are framed.

Such an ambition could be attributed to *La incorrupta*, which offers contemporary viewers a kind of behind-the-scenes view of the discussions that inform exhibitions, from the bureaucratic to the conceptual. In the concluding scene, Guimarães breaks with her role as curator to appear as the artist rehearsing her lines. Yet such a disclosure of the "reality" within the filmed fiction fails to produce any critical distancing effect. Instead, Guimarães offers a reflection of an endogamic art world and a film seemingly produced for an insider public. As to the question of what hands can do, which is, after all, *La incorrupta*'s leitmotif, I came away from the film wanting less explanation and more visual evidence of the hand as "tool of counteraction," which the curator evokes in relation to Chris Marker's *Le fond de l'air est rouge/A Grain Without a Cat*, 1977/1993. Within *La incorrupta*'s highly formalized visual language, perhaps what is missing is precisely the trembling of images of which Marker's film speaks.

—Kaira M. Cabañas