

## PRESS RELEASE

3/11/2021

The exhibition will be open from 3 November 2021 until 17 April 2022  
upon prior free reservation on the website

### THE EXHIBITION ***THE GREAT IMAGINATION. HISTORIES OF THE FUTURE*** TRACES 250 YEARS OF FUTURISTIC IMAGINATION WITH HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PIECES

- *The Great Imagination. Histories of the Future* proposes a reflection on our capacity to imagine the future in a journey that brings together fictions from the 18th century to the present day. It explores the extent to which our current vision of the future remains anchored in ideas and values of the past, and explores - through four installations created for the exhibition - the role that imagination and creativity can play in the production of alternative futures.
- Echoing the concept of the Great Acceleration coined by the Earth Sciences, the exhibition suggests a close relationship between the socio-economic and environmental changes of the last three centuries and the proliferation of stories and concerns about the future that have occurred during the same period.
- The exhibition begins and ends with references to Jim Dator, a pioneer in the study of futures, who proposes that the millions of visions we have created can be grouped around four archetypes or "generic images of the future", which are: Growth, Collapse, Discipline and Transformation.

**Madrid, 3 November 2021** - Have we always imagined, as we do now, radically different futures? How has our idea of the future changed at different historical moments? What impact have these ideas had on the evolution of our societies? How do these images appear and develop, and what role do imagination and creativity play in the production of possible futures? These are some of the questions posed by *The Great Imagination. Histories of the Future*, an exhibition that reflects on imaginaries of the future. To understand how the future was thought of in the past and why, to see how these ideas continue to condition us when it comes to imagining it and to rethink how we can venture new futures from the present moment. In a century beset by multiple crises,

whose outcome may be crucial for the history of our planet, is it still valid to speculate on idealised futures such as those imagined in the past? What alternative futures can we imagine in order to respond to the challenges we are facing?

From the most popular series of the moment, through films, literature, and even advertising, our culture is saturated with images of futures. Each era has had its own particular vision of the future, conditioned, to a large extent, by the context that has nurtured it. The exhibition, curated by Jorge Camacho, an expert in the design of futures, presents projects ranging from the first utopias of the 16th century to the most current speculations, including the whole imaginary that spread from the Industrial Revolution onwards and from which we continue to drink to a large extent. The exhibition is structured into four main sections: Present Futures, Before the Future, The Great Imagination, and Four Alternatives: The World in 2050.

## **PRESENT FUTURES**

We are currently experiencing a true explosion in our interest in the future; an explosion that is not only quantitative but also qualitative, and which invites us to ask ourselves why, how and for whom we generate these images of the future. This eagerness to give form to our desires and our fears has, in recent decades, been expressed in an increasing variety of disciplines and media ranging from literature and film to series, architecture, design and advertising. The first section, entitled "Present Futures", covers the period from 2010 to 2021, with a selection of contemporary pieces that address some of the recurring themes in current projections of the future: the frontier between the physical and the virtual world, the coexistence with robots and artificial intelligence, the spatial colonisation or the need to generate strategies of renaturalisation. In this section, we may find exhibits such as *NurturePod* (2017) by the expert professor in prospective, Stuart Candy; the sculpture *H.O.R.T.U.S. XL Astaxanthin.g* (2019) by ecoLogicStudio; images of *Afro/Eco/Agro Brooklyn* (2021) by Olalekan Jeyifous; or the projection *Seoul City Machine* (2020) by Liam Young. A three-dimensional big data visualisation sculpture created by Domestic Data Streamers shows how the interest in the notion of the future varies from era to era. Based on data from Google Trends, it shows the number of articles and news items that include the term "future" published between 2008 and 2021.

## **BEFORE THE FUTURE**

The fact that humans have a kind of innate prospective capacity does not mean that we have always produced images of the future in the sense that we do now. At the dawn of modernity, utopian narratives and satire could be considered the most immediate precursors of the futuristic imagination. Even in the 17th century it is still difficult to find narratives that properly refer to the future. Inspired by the discovery of unknown territories such as the American continent, distant islands with fantastic realms served

various authors to project models of ideal societies. In this section, visitors will discover unique editions of *Utopia* by Thomas More, *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon, *City of the Sun* by Tommaso Campanella and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, each of them interpreted through the contemporary eyes of Javier Sáez Castán, winner of the 2016 Spanish National Prize for Illustration.

It is necessary to wait until the 18th century for the emergence of the first properly futurist stories: Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* (1733) and, particularly, Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1771), which initiate a new paradigm by imagining a future time connected both chronologically and causally with the present. The so-called uchronies of the 18th century opened the doors to 250 years of imaginative explosion oriented towards the future. Some bibliographical gems from the Piero Gondolo della Riva Collection can be admired in this section along with an installation entitled *Timeline of the Future* that shows in which year some milestones in comics, literature and films set the future.

## **THE GREAT IMAGINATION**

Is it a coincidence that this futurist explosion was unleashed precisely at the same time as the growth of cities, the exponential increase in mobility or the emergence of communication technologies? Does the futurist imagination bloom thanks to a context of material progress or is it precisely the outburst of a creative fantasy that animates and guides the endless innovations that appear at this time? This question, which is the focus of much of the exhibition, is based on the concept of the Great Acceleration coined by the Earth Sciences and which defines the exponential growth of human activity occurring in the second half of the 20th century, the origin of which is usually traced back to the mid-18th century. The Great Imagination suggests a process of feedback between, on the one hand, the acceleration of socio-economic and environmental change and, on the other, the proliferation of stories and concerns about the future that occurred during the same period.

The city and its architecture, mobility and transport, automated life, telecommunication and the conquest of space are again some of the themes around which popular fictions from the 19th century to the 1980s are grouped, resonating with the first part of the exhibition. The verticality of ever taller buildings or the overpopulation of cities on the verge of collapse are captured in images ranging from Erich Kettelhut's or Otto Hunte's drawings for the film *Metropolis* in the 1920s to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* in the 1980s. Imagination applied to transport is captured in illustrations ranging from Albert Robida's late 19th century reveries of the Parisian sky full of flying cars to Norman Bel Geddes' drawings of cities full of automobiles for *Futurama*. Visions of domotic houses appear in films such as Segundo de Chomón's *The Electric Hotel* (1908) and Buster Keaton's *The Electric House* (1922); fantasies of communication devices integrating voice and moving image are popularised as early as the late 1870s with the idea of the telephonoscope

and come surprisingly close to today's smartphones in films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The role of technology in education is already raised in Jean-Marc Côté's *En l'an 2000* (1899) and online education seems to be a reality just around the corner in advertising in the 1960s. It is perhaps in the second half of the 20th century that the aspiration for a modern, comfortable life reached its peak of splendour and, one must acknowledge, its greatest degree of innocence. Even in the 1960s, images of a future 21st century still speculated about radical technological transformations in our homes without considering the possibility of women becoming liberated from their traditional roles in the household economy.

## **DYSTOPIAS**

If futurist fiction was born with the 18th century uchronias projecting the dreams of modernity into a future time, it reached its climax during the 20th century as the nightmares of modernity began to take an increasingly prominent place in the Great Imagination. First literature and then dystopian cinema have been used to warn humanity about the dangers of value-free progress. Social control and robotisation, the climate crisis resulting from our way of life or the possibility of a final war embody recurring fears about the future that are more relevant today than ever. More recent works such as Kraftwerk's *The Robots* (1978) evoke the fear of robotisation alongside Winsor McCay's 1930s illustrations, and unique editions of George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We* (1924) or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), embody dystopian visions of fears that continue to preoccupy us in 2021.

## **FOUR ALTERNATIVES: THE WORLD IN 2050**

Today, the world is in the midst of a pandemic and an economic recession, while facing major issues such as climate change, the crisis of democracies, and the great challenge of digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Therefore, the ability to generate new visions that help us to think of viable and alternative worlds is more necessary than ever. The exhibition closes with a set of installations created specifically for the show that represent four alternative visions set in 2050. Based on the theory of one of the pioneers of futures studies, Jim Dator, according to which the different prospective visions can be grouped into four archetypes of the future, four scenarios are offered that respond respectively to a future of Growth, Collapse, Discipline and Transformation.

### **A Future of Growth. Carlota Pérez + Institute for the Future**

What would happen if, in thirty years' time, we had transformed the current, unequal and unsustainable growth paradigm into a new type of growth that is green, innovative and fairer? This is the theoretical and political proposal of Carlota Pérez, Honorary

Professor at the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (University College London, United Kingdom), and one of the world's leading experts on the relationship between technological innovation and social change. Jacques Barcia and Jake Dunagan, researchers at the Institute for the Future and experts in futures design, materialised this possibility to transport us to the first final of the Regeneration Cup. Today, Verde y Oro FC team competes for the trophy that celebrates mitigating climate change without having to sacrifice a global economic prosperity that has never been more evenly distributed thanks to technological advances.

### **A Future of Collapse. Raphaël Stevens + N O R M A L S**

For Raphaël Stevens, collapse is the horizon of our generation. Stevens is a researcher and specialist in ecological transition, one of the initiators of the intellectual movement known as “collapsology”, whose ideas he reflected together with Pablo Servigne in the book *How Everything Can Collapse*, which explores the real possibility of a civilisational collapse. N O R M A L S, a studio formed by Cedric Flazinski and Régis Lemberthe, takes this idea as its starting point to offer us a fabulous provocation: faced with the imminence of collapse, and following the overwhelming victory of a referendum, the government of Pyria decides to wipe out itself as a state in order to guarantee the survival of its inhabitants.

### **A Future of Discipline. Giacomo D'Alisa + BECOMING**

Is it possible to avoid the collapse that many think will be the irremediable consequence of unbridled economic growth? An increasingly prominent global intellectual and political movement offers a possible way out: living well with less, prioritising equity and sustainability. Giacomo D'Alisa is a political ecologist at the Centre for Social Studies (University of Coimbra, Portugal) and one of the world's leading experts on degrowth. For this installation he has collaborated with Becoming, a research studio that explores emerging scenarios for rethinking the world. Together they invite us to visit the headquarters of the ERRES, an intergenerational group that meets to participate in the regeneration of human and urban ecosystems. The headquarters is located in a former shopping centre that in 2050 has been converted to house other types of services focused on the well-being of the community and the planet.

### **A Future of Transformation. Holly Jean Buck + OIO STUDIO**

Living simply and in balance with the Earth may be attractive to some people, but totally dull to others. Where would the adventure of discovering new worlds be? What if, to mitigate climate change, we were to transform the planet and its ecosystems? Wouldn't it then be attractive to rediscover it? This is the future represented by Blue Marble Travels, the result of a collaboration between Holly Jean Buck and OIO Studio. Buck is a

professor in the Department of Environment and Sustainability (University at Buffalo, United States) and author of the book *After Geoengineering*. OIO Studio is a creative firm comprised of designers, technologists and bots developing future products and interactions.

## **YOUR FUTURES**

While imagining alternative futures is more important than ever, it will only be useful if within those alternatives we can recognise at least one image whose magnetism inspires us to live differently in the present. The exhibition culminates in an experience created by Domestic Data Streamers where visitors can evaluate their individual stance on the future, along with that of other visitors. Ultimately, this journey through more than 250 years of futuristic imagination aims not only to trigger a reflection on the future but also to contribute actively and critically to its construction process.

**Parallel activities:** The exhibition *The Great Imagination. Histories of the Future* is accompanied by free workshops for schoolchildren and families. There is also a programme of free guided tours for individuals and groups with prior reservation. For all activities and for the reservation of your free admission, please consult our website: **[espacio.fundaciontelefonica.com](http://espacio.fundaciontelefonica.com)**