

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

## Media Contacts:

Katie Bruton, [katie.bruton@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:katie.bruton@blantonmuseum.org)

Carlotta Stankiewicz, [carlotta.stankiewicz@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:carlotta.stankiewicz@blantonmuseum.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

### Blanton Museum of Art Presents First U.S. Retrospective of Oscar Muñoz



***Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia* features drawings, installations, and photographic and video works from one of the most significant contemporary Latin American artists**

AUSTIN, TX — December 14, 2021— The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin will present *Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia*, the first retrospective of renowned Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz presented in the United States. Co-organized by the Blanton Museum of Art and Phoenix Art Museum, the retrospective premiered in Phoenix in September 2021 and will be on view at the Blanton from February 20 to June 5, 2022.

*Invisibilia* includes approximately 40 evocative artworks in diverse media that Muñoz has created over the last five decades. Disparate works are united by Muñoz’s consistent explorations of themes of memory, time, history, and knowledge. They range from his early charcoal drawings of the late 1970s to videos produced in the present day, and hybrid artworks in which Muñoz combines photographic processes with drawing, printmaking, installation, video, sculpture, and interactive elements. The exhibition will showcase works rarely seen outside of Colombia and will also debut new works created between 2019 and 2021.

“It is an honor to present the first retrospective of Oscar Muñoz’s work in the United States, which will help bring greater awareness to the remarkable work of a leading contemporary artist whose major U.S.

debut is long overdue,” said Blanton director Simone Wicha. “We are delighted to partner with Phoenix Art Museum in organizing this timely exhibition. *Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia* also represents the Blanton’s first exhibition dedicated solely to Colombian art, a cornerstone of the museum’s vast collection of 20th-century and contemporary Latin American art. Above all, I’m excited for our community to visit this unique, immersive exhibition. Muñoz uses varying media in such ingenious ways to explore ideas we can all relate to, provoking deeply moving experiences that stay with us long after encountering his work.”

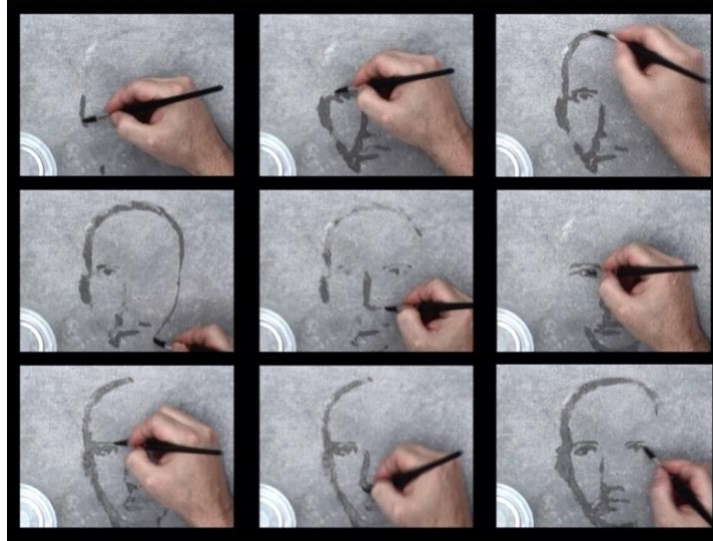
Born in 1951 in Popayán, Colombia, and active in Cali, Muñoz is internationally renowned for riveting works that splice the media of film, video, photography, painting, drawing, and installation. His primary investigations are of such elusive yet universal themes as identity, social amnesia, memory, and the transience of life. Working in a country beset by the catastrophes of civil war, he employs ephemeral materials like light, water, fire, and dust to create portraits and experiential works that associate the precarity of the image with the fragility of life. As the foundation of his practice, Muñoz deconstructs photographic processes due to the medium’s inherent relationship with concepts of time, history, and objective truth, in addition to its great potential for being manipulated for other formal and conceptual concerns. Although he does not consider himself a photographer, Muñoz was awarded the 2018 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography.

Curated by Vanessa Davidson, Blanton curator of Latin American art and former Shawn and Joe Lampe Curator of Latin American Art at Phoenix Art Museum, *Invisibilia* represents the first collaboration between the Blanton and Phoenix Art Museum. Davidson has worked closely with Muñoz since 2018 to create this retrospective that traces the evolution of the artist’s radical practice over five decades.

“The universality of Oscar Muñoz’s work lies in his exploration of far-reaching themes of identity, time, knowledge, and history in diverse media,” said Davidson. “As viewers experience the exhibition, I hope they consider the ways in which Muñoz uses the simplest means, such as water painted on sun-warmed cement, to illustrate the transience of the image as a metaphor for the transience of life. His artworks are often fleeting—yet they become indelible in our imaginations.”

“Acclaimed for his contributions to conceptual photography and use of innovative techniques and materials, Muñoz is one of the most significant contemporary artists—not only in his native country, but in Latin America at large,” noted Carter E. Foster, Blanton Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs. “This important survey of his works testifies to Vanessa Davidson’s extensive research into Muñoz’s practice and commitment to expanding conversations around contemporary Latin American art. Four years in the making, *Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia* has proven to be worth the wait.”

*Invisibilia* features works spanning the late 1970s through 2021, from early charcoal drawings in the Blanton’s collection to never-before-seen recent works that illuminate the artist’s increasing interest in literature and the configuration of text and image upon the page. Rather than presenting works chronologically, the presentation at the Blanton is organized into two nuclei that explore the intertwined themes at the heart of Muñoz’s experimental approach.



The first nucleus, **Presence/Absence**, features works that examine the nebulous gaps that remain where there was once a concrete form or physical being. The artworks in these galleries are defined by the simultaneous existence of traces of images and nothingness. The section begins with the video work *Re/trato [Portrait/I Try Again]* (2004), which depicts the artist attempting to paint a self-portrait with water on warm pavement; the portrait quickly vanishes once the liquid makes contact with the hot ground. Viewers watch as Muñoz tries in vain again and again to complete the image over the course of 28 uninterrupted minutes, much like the myth of Sisyphus futilely attempting to roll a boulder up a hill.

This nucleus likewise explores the tension between our ability to see and our blindness to experiences or histories that we might rather forget or that are physically erased, altered, or obscured from view. One key work, *Paístiempo [Countrytime]* (2007), features images and texts pyro-engraved on newsprint that dissolve and disintegrate as their pages are turned, mirroring the immediate obsolescence of periodicals the day after publication—as well as Colombians’ numbing overexposure to violence in the news. In the print work *El Testigo, Sería Impresiones débiles [The Witness, Weak Impressions Series]* (2011), Muñoz equally brings into question the objectivity of history and the camera lens. Here, the artist alters a historical photograph that depicts the relinquishing of arms by rebel groups in Colombia, changing the focus from the iconic handshake to the blind man in the background, who “witnesses” the truce.

In his earlier work *Cortinas de baño [Shower Curtains]* (1985-1986), Muñoz airbrushed ink in serigraphs on plastic shower curtains to create shadows of people in the bath, turning the viewer into a voyeur. This large-scale installation marks the artist’s first experiments with non-traditional media as well as his initial explorations of photographic processes.



The second nucleus, **Memory/Amnesia**, highlights works revolving around the impossibility of permanence, especially in relation to memory and to the image itself. For Muñoz, both are impermanent and imperfect—subject to distortion, corrosion, or transfiguration over time. It opens with *Narcisos en proceso* [*Narcissi in Progress*] (1995-2011), a series of self-portraits created through the application of charcoal powder on the surface of water—a technique Muñoz developed that dematerializes the photographic image. As the water in the work's acrylic trays evaporates over the course of the exhibition, the dust settles, leaving the image distorted upon the bottom. First created during the violent Colombian conflicts of the mid-1990s, *Narcisos en proceso* associates the precarious nature of the image with the ephemerality of life itself.

In other works, Muñoz touches upon the relentless violence in Colombia, but his approach is more philosophical than political. Created using sugar cubes stained with coffee—the foundation of Colombia's export economy—his *Pixeles* [*Pixels*] (1999-2000) series re-creates images of the anonymous faces of those killed in the crossfire between Colombia's military forces and insurgent rebels. Unless the viewer squints, these pixelated faces remain hazy and unclear, incongruously captured in sweet sugar.

The video works in this nucleus exemplify how Muñoz makes time and memory into malleable materials by revealing invisible intersections in the past and present, especially in *Sedimentaciones* [*Sedimentations*] (2011), *Editor solitario* [*Solitary Editor*] (2011), and *El Coleccionista* [*The Collector*] (2014-2016). In all three, a ghostly hand or figure moves photographs across surfaces, continuously rearranging or removing an almost endless collection of portraits drawn from sources as varied as Muñoz's life, Colombian history, mythology, anonymous photographers' archives, and art history. The narratives they engender change subtly when Muñoz places disparate images strategically in proximity to others. In our attempts to thread them together, we become the artist's accomplice.

“Muñoz strives to ‘*hacer memoria*’—to ‘make memory’—in his work,” concluded Davidson. “I hope visitors contemplate how the meanings of the photographs they take and keep to document their own lives change over time, and how they help to build memory and community. What do our selfies say about us, and how do they themselves ‘make memory’?”

*Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia* will be accompanied by a bilingual catalogue in English and Spanish, constituting the first substantive monograph on the artist's work in English. The exhibition catalogue will be the first to consider the impact of the artist's entire five-decade career, featuring works from the 1970s through 2020 to underscore his contributions to the field of conceptual photography in Latin America and beyond. Designed by Tracey Shiffman Associates, published by Hirmer Publishers (New York and Berlin) in association with the University of Chicago, and edited by Vanessa Davidson, the book features two interviews with Oscar Muñoz as well as a text by the artist. Additional contributors include: Florencia Bazzano, Natalia Brizuela, Marta Gili, Mariángela Méndez, María Inés Rodríguez, Elena Shtromberg, Robert Storr, Joan Fontcuberta, and Alejandra Uslenghi.

*Oscar Muñoz: Invisibilia* is co-organized by the Blanton Museum of Art and Phoenix Art Museum.

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### **Public Programs**

*Curated Conversations: Oscar Muñoz*

Wednesday, April 13, 2022 | 12 p.m. CT

As part of the Blanton's digital *Curated Conversations* series, curators Vanessa Davidson and Florencia Bazzano will discuss Muñoz's artistic practice and key works in the exhibition.

Online symposium: *New Perspectives on Contemporary Colombian Art: Oscar Muñoz in Context*

Friday, June 3, 2022 | Time TBD

More details and information on these public programs will be made available at [blantonmuseum.org/events](http://blantonmuseum.org/events).

### **Digital Resources**

Chronology: Oscar Muñoz

A bilingual chronology of Muñoz's work in relation to key artistic, cultural, and historical events that have taken place in Cali and in Colombia at large since the 1940s is available online for free at [blantonmuseum.org/munoz-chronology/oscar-munoz-chronology](http://blantonmuseum.org/munoz-chronology/oscar-munoz-chronology). The Spanish language version will be available soon.

### **About Oscar Muñoz**

Born in Popayán, Colombia, Oscar Muñoz (b. 1951) studied art at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Cali in the 1970s. As an art student, he began by making drawings based on photographic images, and although his studies did not specifically include photography or audiovisual media, his independent explorations of these media became central to his artistic practice. Known for his use of ephemeral materials in poetic reflections upon memory and mortality, Muñoz often bridges the media of film, video, photography, installation, and sculpture. His work has been shown in numerous international solo and group exhibitions, including those at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO), Mexico; Jeu de Paume, Paris, France; Museo de Arte Moderno La Tertulia, Cali, Colombia; Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), Lima, Peru; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo de Arte del Banco de la República - Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia; and High

Line Art, New York, NY. Muñoz's works are in numerous private and public collections around the world, including those at the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX; Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá, Colombia; Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich, Switzerland; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Colombia; Museo del Barrio, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco, CA; and Tate Modern, London, UK; among many others.

In 2006, Muñoz founded *Lugar a Dudas* (Room for Doubt), a cultural center and residency program for artists located in Cali, which has become a center for international artists to work through ideas and participate in dialogue and public debate about art and politics with the larger community. For more information on the artist, visit [sicardi.com](http://sicardi.com).

### **About the Blanton Museum of Art**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 21,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

### **About Phoenix Art Museum**

Since 1959, Phoenix Art Museum has provided millions of guests with access to world-class art and experiences in an effort to ignite imaginations, create meaningful connections, and serve as a brave space for all people who wish to experience the transformative power of art. Located in Phoenix's Central Corridor, the Museum is a vibrant destination for the visual arts and the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Each year, more than 350,000 guests engage with critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions and the Museum's collection of more than 20,000 works of American and Western American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed for visitors of all ages, along with vibrant photography exhibitions made possible through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit [phxart.org](http://phxart.org).

## Phoenix Art Museum

### **Image Captions:**

Oscar Muñoz, *Editor solitario* [*Solitary Editor*]; still, 2011, Blu-Ray video projection on a table with sound, 78 47/64 x 31 1/2 in. Collection of the artist (photo: courtesy of the artist)

Oscar Muñoz, *Re/Trato* [*Portrait/I Try Again*]; stills, 2004, single-channel video projection without sound, 28 min. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Purchase with funds provided by the Jumex Fund for Contemporary Latin American Art (photo: courtesy of the artist)

Oscar Muñoz, *Narcisos en proceso* [*Narcissi in Progress*]; detail, 1995-2011, charcoal powder and paper upon water in acrylic containers, each 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 x 3 7/8 in. Collection of the artist (photo: courtesy of Phoenix Art Museum)