Closing weekend (15 and 16 December)
Free entry with prior reservation on the CCCB website

Press conference: Tuesday, 14 December at 11:00 in the CCCB Hall + Streaming via the CCCB YouTube channel

Our world cannot be understood without masks and maskers, and even less so nowadays, when a pandemic has forced us to live behind them. The Mask Never Lies, curated by the writer and cultural activist Servando Rocha and by the CCCB’s Head of Exhibitions, Jordi Costa, takes us on a journey through the political uses of masks in modern society. The exhibition, which is running in the CCCB’s Hall 2 from 15 December 2021 to 1 May 2022, looks at the politics of how faces are controlled, cultural resistance to identification, the defence of anonymity, the strategies of terror in the act of concealment, and the way in which bad guys, heroes or heroines and dissidents use masks as a symbol of identity.

Inspired by the essay Algunas cosas oscuras y peligrosas. El libro de la máscara y los enmascarados (Some dark and dangerous things. The book of masks and maskers) by Servando Rocha (La Felguera, 2019), this exhibition shies away from anthropological perspectives of masks to offer an underground history of the last century and a half under the sign of a de-sacralised mask, one that infiltrates the political landscape as an instrument at the service of perverse exercises of power or as a tool for constructing identity in political activism and social struggles. Between the Ku Klux Klan and Pussy Riot there is a heterogeneous repertoire of masked faces which conceal not only an identity, but also the origin of some of the phenomena that define our present day, such as fake news, conspiracy theories and the mechanisms of biopolitical control.
Set out in seven areas that constitute seven narratives – closed but with underground connections in the form of significant recurring themes and iconographies – The Mask Never Lies brings together a wide selection of documentary materials, audiovisual resources and objects that allow us to understand both the polysemy of the mask (Pussy Riot’s balaclavas, hoods from feminist protests, Mexican wrestlers’ masks, gas masks, etc.) and the singularity of the various contexts in which the concealment of the face has taken on a political dimension (Masonic objects, the camera and chair used in Alphonse Bertillon’s anthropometric system, activist pamphlets, weapons).

Pieces by artists including Félicien Rops, Lavinia Schulz, Leonora Carrington, Kati Horna, Marcel Janco, David Lloyd and Lourdes Grobet sit alongside new artistic productions by Nico Roig, Martí Riera i Onílyu, José Lázaro, Joaquín Santiago, Fernando González Viñas, Dostopos, May Pulgarín, Las Migras de Abya Yala, Domestic Data Streamers, Antoni Hervàs, Beatriz Sánchez and Gitano del Futuro.

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of debates, audiovisual material and educational and family activities.

**SECTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION**

**Introduction. The Ages of the Mask**

In its origins, the mask is a magical object that connects us with the most impulsive part of our identity. The Mask Never Lies begins with a 9,000-year-old enigma that contemplates us through the eyes of Neolithic masks, the vestiges of a possible ancestor cult that emerged when the first agricultural settlements lay the foundations of civilisation. In the contemporary context, the mask becomes a political weapon, an emblem of the infiltration of popular culture into the turmoil of history and an instrument for the re-enchantment of the world. Something of the secret and transformative power of the ritual mask still remains, even in our masked pandemic present.

1. Savage Carnaval

The story of the **Ku Klux Klan**'s success is, among other things, the story of its sartorial evolution – the triumph of costume design. The first Klan founded in Tennessee in 1865 underpinned its strategy of terror with rudimentary, homemade, carnivalesque clothing suggestive of demonic presences. Within a few years, and with the formation in decline, the release of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman* (1905), spurred the creation of the second Klan, which styled itself as a homogenous, cohesive army of soldiers in iconic white uniforms.

Photograph of a Klansman, 1870-1880. North Carolina Museum of History

2. The King of Phantoms

The evil and adored **Fantômas**, born in the French popular novel at the beginning of the 20th century and adapted to silent film by **Louis Feuillade**, inspired a whole array of artists including surrealist painters and poets. In a Paris gripped by crime, Fantômas embodied the fantasy of the fluid-faced, ever-changing villain, and was the forceful response of popular imagination to the facial control being developed by the incipient French forensic police of the time. Behind this fascinating figure could be found a real person of Spanish origin – the famous king of the thieves **Eduardo Arcos**, who claimed to have been the inspiration for the writers **Marcel Allain** and **Pierre Souvestre**.

Poster for the film Fantômas (Louis Feuillade) produced by Gaumont studios, 1913

3. The Great Fraud

At the end of the 19th century, **Léo Taxil** (the most famous pseudonym of the prolific writer **Marie Joseph Gabriel Antoine Jogand-Pagès**) published a huge number of books with fake documents and testimonies in order to construct a secret history of Freemasonry full of dark and diabolical cults. Later, he admitted that it was all a big hoax, leading to a clash between secret societies, the Church and the Vatican at the end of the 19th century. However, the lie trickled into the public imagination and both literature and popular culture represented the freemasons as masked figures, perpetuating a false identity that became superimposed over reality. The Taxil case is an early example of the phenomenon of fake news, capable of surviving its own debunking.

4. The Spectral Cabaret

In 1916, at the *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich, the founders of Dadaism conjured up the horrors of the European war through the wild dance, using masks as a central element of their fascination with everything primitive in opposition to the genocidal “reason” embodied by the traumatic experience of armed conflict. For *Sophie Taeuber-Arp* and *Emmy Hennings*, two key figures in the birth of Dada, the gas masks and disfigured faces of the soldiers were the expression of hell on earth. Meanwhile, in the dissident realms of expressionist dance, *Mary Wigman* and *Lavinia Schulz* explored the transformative power of the mask. This would irradiate outwards to other avant-garde movements, projecting onto the magical sorority embodied in the triad of complicity woven years later by the anarchist photographer *Kati Horna* and the surrealist artists * Remedios Varo* and *Leonora Carrington*.


5. The Fight

Mexican wrestlers not only inhabit the realm of fiction, they are also a faceless social force with roots that go all the way back to Aztec culture and its masked warriors. They are avengers and heroes of the people who also express the tensions between face, identity and mask. The emblematic *Superbarrio Gómez*, who was created after the devastating earthquake of 1985, gives this mythology a decisive push from the wrestling ring to the field of social struggle. This same leap has been emulated by many other figures who have taken up the fight in the areas of environmentalism, feminism, animal rights and the rights of LGTBI+ communities. In another sphere, but also with the masked face as an insignia, 1994 saw the emergence of *Subcomandante Marcos*, the Zapatista leader who defended anonymity as a political tactic under the slogan “we are all Marcos”.

Mask against mask
Photograph by Lourdes Grobet
6. Disappearance Prohibited

For centuries, hiding one’s face has been used as a way to subvert the obligation to identify oneself. The demand to give a face and a name has given rise to political and cultural resistance, such as the mysterious Invisible College, which in the early 17th century announced the existence of “invisible” cells in various parts of Europe, thus creating the idea of a lack of command or centre. In their comic book series The Invisibles, writer Grant Morrison created a fantastic dissident and magical genealogy, connecting these origins with the modern активisms that have challenged social control through different guerilla communication strategies. Transfusions between fiction and reality have been constant and in both directions. This is the case, for example, of Guy Fawkes, a member of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, who has been resuscitated as a great malleable symbol of the Anonymous movement, after his previous conversion into a comic book hero and a dark film superhero. However, in a contemporary age marked by an oversaturation of signs, even a punk revolution as essential as that proposed by Pussy Riot cannot avoid the risk of being reappropriated as a marketable image.


7. Apocalypse

Like the Red Death knocking at the door of Prince Prospero’s masked ball in Poe’s classic story, COVID-19 has come to inform us that the party of terminal capitalism is drawing to an end. Our apocalypse has already happened: the images of the ubiquitous masks are very similar to those that bear witnesses to previous epidemics of plague, cholera or Spanish flu. In parallel to the compulsory mask wearing, strong control and identification policies are being imposed. As in the past, in some areas, discourses have emerged that criminalise and stigmatise the poorest neighbourhoods, where the virus has become more prevalent. And despite science’s rapid response to the health crisis, there have also been those who prefer to indulge paranoid conspiracy theories. But in this carnival of half-masked faces there are also realities that have been turned on their head: today, the masked face, traditionally associated with danger, secrecy and clandestinity, identifies supportive community members who acknowledge their vulnerability, while it is bare faces that generate unease and concern.

Absurd protections against chadera. Print by Johann Bennedikt Wunder, c. 1932. Wellcome Collection library, London
GENERAL INFORMATION

Dates and opening hours
From 15 December 2021 to 1 May 2022
Open Tuesdays to Sundays and bank holidays from 11:00 to 20:00
Closed on non-bank holiday Mondays

Venue
CCCB Hall 2

Prices
€6 / €4 with discount
Sundays from 15:00 to 20:00 free with prior reservation

Discounts and concessions

High-resolution images of the exhibition in the CCCB digital press office

Una producció de El CCCB és un consorci de

[Images of CCCB, Diputació, Ajuntament de Barcelona, LA VANGUARDIA, ESTRELLA D'ABANCA]

Mitjà col·laborador Amb el suport de