

Exhibition: **Guillermo del Toro: At Home with Monsters**

On View: **August 1–November 27, 2016**

Location: **Art of the Americas Building, Plaza Level**



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(Los Angeles—April 26, 2016) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is pleased to announce *Guillermo del Toro: At Home with Monsters* (August 1–November 27, 2016), the filmmaker’s first museum retrospective. The exhibition explores del Toro’s creative process by bringing together elements from his films, objects from his vast personal collections, drawings from his notebooks, and approximately 60 objects from LACMA’s permanent collection. The diverse range of media—including sculpture, paintings, prints, photography, costumes, ancient artifacts, books, maquettes, and film—totals approximately 500 objects and reflects the broad scope of del Toro’s inspirations.

“To find beauty in the profane. To elevate the banal. To be moved by genre. These things are vital for my storytelling,” said del Toro. “This exhibition presents a small fraction of the things that have moved me, inspired me, and consoled me as I transit through life. It’s a devotional sampling of the enormous love that is required to create, maintain, and love monsters in our lives.”

“By bringing del Toro’s notebooks, collections, and film art into museum galleries, we acknowledge the curatorial aspects of his approach to filmmaking,” says Britt Salvesen, curator and department head of the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings department at LACMA. “On one level, he carefully constructs and stages his films in the manner of an exhibition. On another level, he fills their plots with commentaries about the social, psychological, and spiritual power of objects. In this

retrospective, as in his extraordinary filmography, del Toro demonstrates the energizing effects of cross-pollination.”

Michael Govan, LACMA’s CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, says, “This retrospective is a wonderful example of Art+Film at LACMA. Del Toro encourages us to ignore our traditional art-historical narratives and hierarchies of high and low culture, just as he blends and reinvents conventional genres in his films. With his ability to collapse time and space, history and fiction, nature and fantasy, he taps the latent potential at the core of our institutional mission.”

Following its presentation at LACMA, *Guillermo del Toro* will travel to its co-organizing institutions: the Minneapolis Institute of Art (February 26–May 21, 2017) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (September 30, 2017–January 7, 2018).

Exhibition Organization

Guillermo del Toro is organized into eight thematic sections. The exhibition begins with **Childhood and Innocence**, exploring the central role children play in many of del Toro’s films. Often, these children can perceive alternate realities and give expression to unfiltered emotions in ways that adults cannot. Del Toro does not insulate his young protagonists from fear, abandonment, harm, or even death. At some level, del Toro’s films endlessly revisit his own childhood, which he felt was marred by a strict Catholic upbringing and bullying classmates but redeemed by books, movies, and horror comics. He began drawing at a very young age. To this day, del Toro maintains his early habit of keeping a notebook at hand to record ideas, phrases, lists, and images. Resources for his films, these journals are also essential to his evolution as an artist.

Victoriana, the next gallery, references the Romantic, Victorian, and Edwardian ages, as well as latter-day interpretations of the Victorian era. Charles Dickens, the quintessential Victorian writer, inspired the name of del Toro’s personal residence, Bleak House, a curated space from which many objects in the exhibition are borrowed. Dickens’s blend of realism and fantasy, fascination with the city, sense of humor, and predilection for taxonomy, multifarious character types, and intricate plot twists resonate in del Toro’s films. This gallery also demonstrates del Toro’s interest in the Victorian relationship to science, in which humans attempted to exert dominion over nature through meticulous categorization. As suggested by his extensive collection of insect specimens, images, and trinkets, del Toro has inherited a fascination with such creatures, although the insects in his films tend to break free of human control in spectacular ways.

Visitors will subsequently experience a version of Del Toro's **Rain Room** (not *that* Rain Room), a favorite spot in Bleak House in which del Toro has installed a false window and special effects to simulate a perpetual thunderstorm.

The next section explores del Toro's interest in **Magic, Alchemy, and the Occult**. His films are full of puzzles, talismanic devices, secret keys, and quests for forbidden knowledge. Many of del Toro's characters are scientists, contemporary successors to the monks and alchemists who explored the boundaries between the holy and unholy. He cites the influence of H.P. Lovecraft, the idiosyncratic American writer whose work is considered foundational for the genres of horror and science fiction. Lovecraft's vivid evocations of madness, transformation, and monstrosity continue to be a major source of inspiration; for the last decade, del Toro has been attempting to adapt Lovecraft's novella *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) for the screen.

Movies, Comics, Pop Culture delves into del Toro's obsession with cinema, from B movies and horror films to directors Alfred Hitchcock and Luis Buñuel. Del Toro's voracious appetite for film is matched by his enthusiasm for comic books and his admiration for a wide range of illustrators such as Moebius (Jean Giraud), Frank Frazetta, and Richard Corben. He has directed several comic-book adaptations, working closely with Mike Mignola on two films based on his *Hellboy* series. Always, del Toro refuses to abide by the traditional hierarchies between high and low culture.

Frankenstein and Horror reveals del Toro's lifelong love affair with the tale of Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. He first absorbed the story as a child, via James Whale's 1931 film, impressive in its Expressionist-inspired visual beauty. As a teenager, he read Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), which emphasizes the monster's essential fragility and vulnerability. The story became a touchstone for the young del Toro, who identified powerfully with the creature's outsider status. The filmmaker now finds in *Frankenstein* an analogy to his directorial approach. Like the monster, his films are amalgams of used, discarded, and diverse source materials, given new life and purpose.

Del Toro's fascination with monsters of all types is showcased in **Freaks and Monsters**. He sees some monsters as tragic: beautiful and heroic in their vulnerability and individuality, they mirror the hypocrisies of society and bring to light corrosive standards of perfection. Though he identifies with the tragic type of monster, del Toro is also adept at creating truly terrifying ones. He begins by thinking of a monster as a character, not simply an assembly of parts. It must be visually convincing from all angles, both in motion and at rest. In his notebooks, he constantly records ideas for distinguishing

physical features that may come to fruition only years later. In addition to drawing the initial concepts, he is closely involved in fabrication—he entered the movie industry in Mexico as a special-effects artist—and has often expressed his preference for practical effects as opposed to computer-generated imagery.

The final section is **Death and the Afterlife**. Growing up in Guadalajara, Mexico, in the late 1960s and 1970s, del Toro had a number of disturbing confrontations with death, seeing corpses in the street, in a morgue, and in the catacombs beneath the church. His strict Catholic grandmother instilled in him the notion of original sin and even submitted him to exorcisms in a futile attempt to eradicate his love of monsters and fantasy. The pursuit of immortality—promised in Catholic doctrine as the reward for following the church’s teachings—is often seen in his work as a misguided, arrogant desire, destined to bring about the downfall of those caught up in it. Del Toro’s films often include characters acting entirely out of self-interest alongside others who are forced to make sacrifices. His flawed or damaged characters frequently find purpose in community: they take responsibility for their own survival and that of the individuals and environments around them.

Exhibition Catalogue

Guillermo del Toro is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Insight Editions. The 144-page volume is edited by Britt Salvesen, Jim Shedden, and Matthew Welch with contributions by Guillermo del Toro, Keith McDonald, Roger Clark, and Paul Koudounaris. The hardcover catalogue is \$29.95 and is available at the [LACMA Store](#) and [Art Catalogues](#).

About Guillermo del Toro

Guillermo del Toro (b. 1964) is one of the most inventive filmmakers of his generation. Beginning with *Cronos* (1993) and continuing through *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001), *Hellboy* (2004), *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006), *Pacific Rim* (2013), and *Crimson Peak* (2015), among many other film, television, and book projects, del Toro has reinvented the genres of horror, fantasy, and science fiction.

Working with a team of craftsmen, artists, and actors—and referencing a wide range of cinematic, pop-culture, and art-historical sources—del Toro recreates the lucid dreams he experienced as a child in Guadalajara, Mexico. He now works internationally with a cherished home base he calls Bleak House in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

Credit:

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Art Gallery of Ontario.

Original music and soundscape for this exhibition created by Gustavo Santaolalla.

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Image captions:

(Left) Guillermo del Toro, Page from Notebook 3, Leather-bound notebook, ink on paper, 8 x 10 x1 1/2 in., Collection of Guillermo del Toro. Photo courtesy Insight Editions.

(Right) Guillermo del Toro, Page from Notebook 5, Leather-bound notebook, ink on paper, 8 x 10 x1 1/2 in., Collection of Guillermo del Toro. Photo courtesy Insight Editions.

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

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