

# Intangibles

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Can an art exhibition be staged without the physical works of art? Can we be emotionally moved without seeing the art object itself? What other experiences can a digitally-exhibited work of art offer?

These and other questions lay at the heart of the Colección Telefónica digital exhibition *Intangibles*, a ground-breaking experimental project that arose in response to the challenges of the digital revolution and the unstoppable changes it represents.

## 2. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

History shows us that the emergence of new technology brings about major changes at all levels. The art world is not immune to this. In 1947, André Malraux's "The Imaginary Museum" outlined a new way to group together a set of photographs of art works that established a series of relationships between different eras and styles, in much the same way that a museum collection would do. Photography allowed Malraux to suggest such an exercise and relate the history of art in a new and interesting non-traditional manner. More than sixty years later, "The Imaginary Museum" has taken on a new relevance, given the global changes to the paradigm presented by the digital revolution. The explosion of digital images and relationships in which we find ourselves immersed on a daily basis is changing the world of art, museums and exhibitions. However, a door has opened that allows us to relate other visual stories as ways of exhibiting an art collection. Contemporary society – defined by the acronym VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) – challenges us to come up with new viewpoints within a digital context in an unstable world in which the ground rules are constantly changing.

Through the selection of a number of the Colección Telefónica's most renowned artists, the exhibition *Intangibles* didn't show real works but rather a

digital presentation specifically designed for each. The aim of this exhibition was to reflect upon how the digital revolution has impacted the way we approach art in terms of its physical and sensory limits, its almost ubiquitous capacity for reproduction and the fragility of some of its traditional criteria and values. This ground-breaking project had a global focus that transcended the framework of space and time. One of its defining features was its simultaneity. Visitors from Madrid, Mexico City, Bogotá, Quito, Santiago de Chile and Montevideo were able to take in the digital experiences relayed by the selected artists, sharing and exchanging their impressions in real time through the Mapamundi Intangible or "Intangible World Map", especially designed for the exhibition. Around 200,000 people attended the event in the various cities that took part, with over 10,000 messages shared at the exhibition centres.

*Intangibles's* innovation was evident not only in the way that it approached and investigated new visual narratives in the Colección Telefónica, connecting these cities in real time, but also in the key role of the public, who were a central part of the process from the moment that the idea was conceived. Through the design approach that was used – known as "Design Thinking" – the voices of visitors and experts in the field were included. A series of interviews and workshops with people from different backgrounds helped to define the most relevant digital experiences for each of the artists and their works, while a selection of the audiovisual material used in this process was on display in the exhibition hall.

The exhibition took visitors into a painting by Paul Delvaux, gave them an audio-tour of Pablo Picasso's studio and allowed them to sit inside one of Eduardo Chillida's sculptures. This was a very participative exhibition, with visitors also interacting with Juan Gris and María Blanchard's cubism, producing an automatic painting in the style of Roberto Matta and interpreting Joaquín Torres-García's visual iconography.

A digital experience of a work of art can never replace the original, however that was never the aim of *Intangibles*. When technology is put at the service of culture it can nevertheless enhance the sensations that art produces in the viewer, create a broad range of emotions, challenge the public, encourage its active participation and, above all, open up new ways of getting to know the artist and their work. This was our resolve in this project.

### 3. REFERENCES

Espacio (2020) Intagibles [event page online]. <https://espacio.fundaciontelefonica.com/en/evento/intangibles-a-digital-exhibition-from-the-telefonica-collection/> (retrieved 27 March 2020).

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**Figure 1:** *Intangibles*.