Paris, New York and the Basque International Art Community

Anna María Guasch and Joseba Zulaika

At the turn of the 19th century, introduction to modernity meant for Basque artists the expected trip to Paris. Leaving aside Madrid and Rome, it was in Paris where they discovered the true meaning of modernity. This meant a new way of looking at art and life, including the concrete realities of their Basque society and culture. Joaquín de Zuazagoitia put it in these terms: "what provided the tone of Basque painting was that our painters, like the Catalans, stopped going to Madrid and Rome and went to Paris. There they vibrated with the concerns of impressionist painting, and in Paris, through Whistler, Sargent—two Americans—and through Manet, they returned the eyes to the great tradition of Spanish painting. With the eyes educated in Paris, capable of understanding better the Spanish tradition, upon returning they found themselves a country that was theirs, of so salient traits that it would well deserve to represent it. The naturalism of the painting then called modern forced them to abandon the great historic topics and to look at the daily life around them with tender eyes. Thus the most notorious characteristics of Basque painting are its capacity to observe the daily life of the Basque Country—that has been at once its

power and its limitation—and a return to Spanish pictorial tradition through the French influence."[1]

Here we have a paradigm of how a new "knowledge community" is created: artists need to go to Paris to discover their own Spanish and Basque reality. Much like archeologists and ethnographers needed to go to European universities to be able to discover their own prehistoric cave paintings and folkloric tradition. The need for a new window with a different perspective, the seductive indirection of a turnaround to discover your own, manifests itself in a new type of "knowledge" that transforms and reorders all you knew already. Hence the pivotal experience of taking the train in Bilbao or San Sebastian and moving to Paris. Paris was Baudelaire, Haussmann, the commune, the Eiffel Tower, the Seine river. It was above all impressionism and fauvism, later it was cubism, it was everything. But what did Montmartre or Pigalle or Les Champs Elysees possess to make a Basque painter fall in love with his village's fishermen or his town's bridges? The intoxicating aura of modernity could shift perspectives, touch all perception, and bring about a different subjectivity. Suddenly, in a sort of parallax effect, the artist "knew" something quite different about his own tradition and his autobiography. Nothing was no longer the same, and yet every building and every ruin was still there—

[1] Quoted in Manuel Llano Gorostiza, *Pintura vasca* (Bilbao: 1965), p. 30)

only that now the artist was looking through Paris and seemed to be able to see everything anew in the modern glow of its passage and beauty.

The painter Eduardo Zamacois (1841-1878) was the first to open the way to Paris, to be followed soon by future generations of Basque artists. Anselmo de Guinea (1985-1906) was next to jump from paintings of 18th century Spanish historicism and Basque iconography to Parisian impressionism. But the two main figures of that first wave of painters were Adolfo Guiard (1860-1916) and Dario de Regoyos (1875-1913). Guiard, who lived seven years in Paris and was influenced by Ingres and Degas, broke with the tradition of large paintings dedicated to historical themes for national exhibits and began working on small formats of less than a meter and on topics that were remarkable for their ordinariness and banality: lemons, a man sitting, a landscape with a train, a girl combing herself. As to Regoyos, his influence will become decisive among Basque artists both in terms of his audacious techniques (impressionism, fauvism, pointillism and other means) and thematic (farmers, pilgrims, dancers, folkloric types, farm implements…). Still, Regoyos's universe is not imbued in the ideological iconography of a nationalist evocation of Basque rural life; his rural architecture does not portray an ideal organization of the world, nor an epic sense of life; his interest in Basque life has to do basically with aesthetics and light—his preference being not for the harsh light of Castile

and Andalusia but the changing tonalities of grey and opaque lights of the Cantabrian landscapes. As Lasterra wrote about him, once he found this universe, "then everything was like a miracle… Regoyos will find the salvation of his art touched by the miraculous grace of light."[2] In Brussels *Le Journal de Beaux Arts* had written that Regoyos "was the most audacious" among the painters in a collective exhibit, and that "he has thrown himself into complete modernity."[3] His art was not understood by his society and he became the object of ridicule. His approach to art was a novelty among Basque artists; it could only be seen by eyes struck by European modernity.

The house/workshop of sculptor Paco Durrio in Montmartre became the port of entry for Basque and Spanish artists. His parents were French and he lived all his life between Bilbao and Paris. A close friend of Gauguin and Picasso, his art subscribed to *modernism*.[4] Among Durrio's visitors were relevant names such as Francisco Iturrino (1864-1924) and Juan de Echevarría (1875-1931). Iturrino, who was exhibiting his work with Picasso in 1901, would not take Basque fishermen or local festivals or Bilbao's factories as motives for his work but would rather paint themes

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[2] Crisanto de Lasterra, *Dario de Regoyos: poseía del color y de la luz* (Bilbao: T.G. Arte, 1966), 139.

[3] Quoted in Lasterra, *Regoyos*, 129.

[4] See Crisanto de Lasterra, *En Paris con Paco Durrio* (Bilbao: T.G. Arte, 1966).

from the Spanish folklore such as Andalusian women with mantillas, nudes, gypsies, horses, and gardens; these were more appropriate for the luminosity of his fauve forms in which the line disappears in the light and there are no shadow; they were also more dear to his friend Matisse with whom he spent the years 1909 and 1910 in Andalusia and Morocco. Echevarría paints still lifes, flowers, portraits, and Castillian fields; he is not interested in ethnography, but he did have a first romantic period in which he works in Basque fishing towns, to be followed by more luminous paintings in Granada and more literary ones in Madrid.[5] Among the sculptors, Durrio is the most important name, but Higinio Basterra (1876-1975) deserves mention as well, for he brought Rodin's influence after his 1898 visit to Paris, and Nemesio Mogrovejo (1875-1910) who went to Paris in 1894 and whose death in 1910 was followed by an exhibit of his work and the creation in Bilbao the following year of the Association of Basque Artists. These painters and sculptors brought from Paris not only aesthetic codes; they embodied new lifestyles and subjectivities; they belonged to another "knowledge community" with its own set of aesthetic and moral values which would translate into a different sensorial palette and a perspective distanced from nativistic premises. By introducing the

[5] For more elaboration, see Anna María Guasch, *Arte e ideología en el País Vasco: 1940-1980* (Madrid: Akal, 1985), 29-55.

basic premises, tastes, techniques, and spirit of modern painting, they were significantly expanding and recreating the local culture.

The ideological divide concerning Basque ethnicity and nationalism was reflected among artists as well. Painters such as Ignacio Zuloaga (1970-1945) and Manuel Losada (1865-1948) concentrated entirely on the Spanish pictorial tradition. For others, such as Valentin Zubiaurre (1879-1963), Ramon Zubiaurre (1882-1969) and the brothers Arrue, Basque folkloric and ethnic themes became prominent. The very idea of "Basque art" emerged, to be questioned to this day by some critics. Still others, Aurelio Arteta (1879-1940) most prominently, combined socialist and nationalist sympathies.[6] The artistic community, by bringing together European romantic and modernist styles, as well as local cultural contents, had to blend diverse traditions into a viable aesthetic forms.

Architecture was no exception. Eclecticism is perhaps the dominant trait of the early 20th century architecture as practiced in Basque cities and towns. One of the best examples is the Teatro Arriaga (1890) in Bilbao, by Joaquín de Rucoba, which shows French influences as it is inspired by Paris's Opera house.[7] The group of architects that became known at the turn of the 20th century was called "the generation of the *ensanche*

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[6] See Guasch, *Arte i ideología*, 40-55.

[7] Bernardo I. García de la Torre and Francisco Javier García de la Torre, *Bilbao: Guía de arquitectura* (Bilbao: COAVN, 1993), 86.

('enlargement')", the grand urban recreation of Bilbao as an entirely new city on the left bank of the river, across the old Bilbao of the "seven streets", needed for the new industrial era. The plan was designed by Alzola, Hoffmeyer and Achucarro (1973), and implemented mostly by Alzola when he was mayor of the city (1877-79). The influence of the Parisian Gustav Eiffel on Alzola and other architects such as Gorbeña has been recognized. Many works were projected at the time that never went beyond the design stage; one of them was a large, visionary commercial center (1893) built over the Nervion River in the style of the Hausmannian Paris' *passages*. Its architect was Alberto de Palacio, a frequent visitor of Paris and a friend of Eiffel, heavily influenced by the Parisian utopianism of the turn of the 19th century,[8] and an enthusiast of the new technologies and the idea of progress.

The Fine Arts Museum

By the time the Association of Basque Artists was formed in 1911, the project of a Fine Arts Museum had been conceived and approved in Bilbao in 1908; it was to be opened by 1914; the building was at the city's old quarter and it originally had been a Public Hospital, later turned into the

[8] Nieves Basurto Ferro, Paloma Rodriguez-Escudero Sanchez, and Jaione Velilla Iriondo, *El Bilbao que pudo ser*: *Proyecto para una ciudad, 1800-1940* (Bilbao: Diputacion Foral de Bizkaia, 1999), 87.

Arts and Crafts School. A second Museum of Modern Art was founded in 1922 and completed by 1924, housed in a building owned by the Provincial Council. After the Spanish civil war, in 1945 the Final Arts Museum completed its own building next to the park of the *ensanche* where the collections of the two museums were merged. The foundation of the museum during the first two decades of the century marked the artistic interests of a new prosperous and cosmopolitan middle class that resulted from the booming industrialization which peeked during the 1914-1918 First World War.[9] In Javier Viar's assessment, these bilbainos who were mostly "conservative anglophiles… facilitated the education of a number of artists, enabling them to visit Impressionist Paris and return with a certain spirit, although tempered, of the revolutionary ideas emanating from the French capital. These artists were essential in the establishment of cultural events and institutions, of which one was the Fine Arts Museum that exists today."[10] Two of those artists, Manuel Losada and Aurelio Arteta, became the directors of the two Bilbao modern museums. A reflection of their artistic overall perspective is that the collection of the joint Museum of Fine Arts that replaced both of them focuses on three main areas: historic or "universal"

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[9] Javier Viar, "The Guggenheim Bilbao, Partner in the Arts: A View from the Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao," in Anna Maria Guasch and Joseba Zulaika, eds., *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005), 98-99.

[10] Viar, "The Guggenheim Bilbao", 99.

art (although almost entirely European); contemporary art of the twentieth century; and Basque art.

The Post-war Period

After the 1936-39 Spanish civil war and during the first decades of Francoism Basque art has no international projection. In 1956 Agustin Ibarrola decided he should try to show his work somewhere outside of his country. Where would he go? To Paris, of course: "I took a bunch of canvases with me with the intention of showing them to the galleries and secure an exhibit. When I saw what they were exhibiting, I didn't dare to show them my Basque workers, fishermen and farmers. The paintings projected by Parisian galleries was cosmopolitan, de-nationalized, without country, without issues to denounce, nor precise social experiences to transmit."[11] Modernist Paris seemed now too modern and too cosmopolitan for Basque artists suffering under Franco's dictatorial oppression.

There was, however, one Basque artist who did have an opening in Paris: Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002). He went there in 1948 and the following year had his first exhibit in Paris. In 1950 he has a second exhibit at the Maeght gallery in Paris. Again in 1954 at the Denise René gallery,

[11] Quoted in Guasch, *Arte e Ideologia,* 117.

and in 1956 at the Maeght gallery (with a text by Gaston Bacherlard for his catalogue) Chillida will exhibit in Paris. Even if by then New York had "stolen" the idea of modernism from a postwar "Parisian art [that] was now fragmented," and the critic Clement Greenberg had "declared that American art had broken with Paris once and for all,"[12] for Basques Paris still seemed to be the only place that could grant international recognition. And this was also the case even for New York artists: "Why Paris? Because, notwithstanding the ravages of war, Parisian art still represented Western culture and for New York artists was a taproot of modernist thought."[13]

But there was another artist who, with Chillida, would obtain the greatest international renown and exert unparalleled influence among younger generations of Basque artists: Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003). He travelled a different rout; he spent thirteen years (1935-1948) in South America, where he became actively involved with the avant-garde movements of several countries. Like no other artist of his generation, Oteiza tried passionately and frequently in a utopian fashion to create a veritable "knowledge community" grounded primarily on aesthetics that would transform Basque society. He began his artistic work in Madrid in

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[12] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressonism, Freedom, and the Cold War* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), 203, 172.

[13] Guilbaut, *How New York,* 4.

1929 influenced by the European contemporary movements of Cubism, Russian Constructivism, De Stijl and the Bauhaus. The stated reason for his trip to South America was to study the pre-Columbian statuary in the city of San Agustin. He wrote a book-length essay of these statues theorizing on "art as sacrament,"[14] as well as various essays on aesthetics and issued "manifestos" for contemporary artists.[15] Upon his return from South America, he settled in Bilbao and by 1950 was awarded a contract to sculpt the statuary for the Basilica of Aranzazu, a project that brought together a group of cutting-edge artists. Oteiza's international recognition would come in 1957 by winning the International Sculpture Prize in the Sao Paulo Biennial with the twenty-nine sculptures of his "Experimental Proposal"—he carried out a deconstruction of the Euclidean forms of the cube, the circle, and the sphere. In the text he wrote for the occasion,[16] Oteiza acknowledges the influences of Kandnsky, Mondrian and particularly Malevich. These influences were the knowledge community with which he was truly involved, yet he also referred in that text to the Basque traditional "funerary stela" as a form or religious art he was closest to in his own work. These stelae are three to five fell tall tombstone pillars that express a

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[14] Jorge Oteiza, *Interpretacion estetica de la estatuaria megalitica Americana* (Madrid: Ediciones de Cultura Hispanica, 1952).

[15] See Jorge Oteiza, *Oteiza's Selected Writings* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2003).

[16] Oteiza, *Selected Writings,* 220-244.

pre-Copernican world controlled by the premises of circularity, centrality, irradiation, closure, and the internal void; not coincidentally, Chillida named his first abstract sculpture *Ilarik,* meaning in Basque "stela". Oteiza concluded his text with the oracular words: "I return from Death. What we tried to bury grows here." The titanic work of both Chillida and Oteiza in the 1950s can thus be seen as a successful effort at bringing together and confronting the aesthetic practices of contemporary art and the artistic premises of their native culture; valid knowledge had to come from the marriage of the latest European avant-garde and of what had been buried in the unconscious of the traditional aesthetic expressions.[17]

The very year Oteiza won the Sao Paulo Biennial, a group known as Equipo 57 was formed in Paris after a collective exhibit that took place at the Café Roind Point. It was composed by Oteiza, Duarte, Duart, Ibarrola, Serrano and Basterretxea—although Oteiza soon broke with the group, to be followed later by Basterretxea. According to Ibarrola, they formed the group in order to help each other make a living while painting and decorating Parisian houses, as well as become a study group "in order to explain to ourselves all that new aesthetic universe that was falling down on us."[18] Their main interests had to do with the plastic investigation of

[17] For more on Chillida and Oteiza, see the paper by Peter Selz.

[18] Quoted in Guasch, *Arte e ideologia,* 122.

space as well as with the social and ideological projections of the work of art. It is important to notice that they felt the need to work as a "team"; their manifesto declared that they used plastic art as "an investigative tool whose finality is to arrive at practical solutions applicable to objects of daily use, to urbanization."[19] These artists saw themselves as a community of expert knowledge who had to investigate aesthetic issues in order to help express social inequities and solve cultural and urban problems.

In 1958 Chillida wins the Grand Sculpture Prize at the XXIX Venice Biennial and the Sculpture Prize of the Foundation Graham in Chicago. In 1959 he participates in the Documenta II in Kassel, as well as exhibiting in North Caroline, Canada, New York, Baltimore, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Paris.

The 1960s: From Individual Internationalism to Native Collectivist Projects

The same need to work as a team—by linking formal investigations concerning the avant-garde languages with the need to project autochthonous culture beyond local frontiers—is reaffirmed in the

[19] Quoted in Guasch, *Arte e ideologia,* 123.

collective efforts that take place in 1966 by the groups that form the so-called Basque School. After the decade of the 1950s, in which Basque artists sought individually their own internationalization following the constructivist and abstract movements of the day (Oteiza, Chillida), in the 1960s the terms are inverted: the search for formal innovation takes place under collective interests that look for clear signs of identity regarding Basque art.

In such context of recovery of historic memory from the perspective of critical nationalism emerge the various groups of Basque School named *Gaur* (Today), *Emen* (Here) and *Orain* (Now).[20] From their provincial territorial bases of Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba, these groups tried to renovate the traditional concepts regarding issues such as: How do you build an artistic avant-guarde scene in the context of a local community? How do you avoid stagnation, intellectual suphocation, the closure from foreign influences? What kind of relation should the artists have among themselves to assert their presence vis-à-vis institutional power?

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[20] According to Pedro Manterola, the creation of these groups was conceived as a wave that could not be resisted: "It all corresponds to the purest Oteiza style. It looks as if it were the outcome of a platonic dream: TODAY, HERE and NOW, and finally in Navarre EVERYONE and everyone together. The creature that Oteiza had baptized prematurely failed to come up to expectations during its gestation filled with difficulties. Like so many others, ¿was it destined to fail?" P. Manterola, "El arte en Navarra (1960-1979). Algunos recuerdos en torno a una década crucial", in *Arte y artistas vascos de los años 60*, (San Sebastián: Diputación Foral de Guipúzcoa, 1995), 239-240.

Not all these groups thought the same about the role of the artist.[21] There was a notorious antagonism between *Emen*, the Group leadered by Agustín Ibarrola, who advocated the creation of a cultural front to foment the participation of art in popular expressions (such as cultural weeks, social or sport gatherings) and *Gaur*, which saw its work as the equivalent of the "Spanish contemporary avant-guarde art" on the basis of a "spiritual rennaisance" of the Basque artist. This could be gathered from the text that accompanied *Gaur´*s first exhibit in 1966 at the Barandiaran gallery in San Sebastian: "Our Basque Country has sufficient money, and has sufficient artists of personality and international standing who cannot be unknown and silenced among ourselves, we are not a School of Madrid, we dont accpet that two of the gipuzkoan artists who suscribe this declaration, because they are the only ones in Spain who have won in the exterior the great international prizes in sculpture, that they continue to be made as if they belonged to the School of Madrid."[22]

The position by *Gaur* towards a "contemporary Basque art" was opposed directly to *Emen´*s more "assambleary" practice for whom art was

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[21] The groups had the following exhibits: Museum of Fine Arts in Bilbao by *Gaur* and *Emen* (August 1966); Provincial Museum of Araba by *Gaur*, *Emen,* and *Orain* (October 1966); the groups *Gaur* also exhibited in various town from Gipuzkoa, such as Beasain, Villafranca de Ordizia, Tolosa, and Legorreta throughout December of 1966 and January of 1967, accompanied with lectures, the most memorable one being Juan Antonio Sistiaga´s "The aesthetic expression as investigation."

[22] *Manifiesto del Grupo Gaur*, Galería Barandiarán, San Sebastián, April-May 1966.

an instrument to take consciousness of an authothomous culture. Oteiza proposed a more pedagogical role for art; in his *Quousque tandem…..!*[23] he emphasized not the production of works of art but on the elaboration of an aeshetic sensibility to be transmited to society through education. It was precisely Oteiza who established the bases for these associations of Basque artists when he wrote of the "discipline of an indivisible intelligence and an indivisible will (…) to bring to an end the deep cultural and material decadence we suffer and the isolation hmong ourselves and in relation to our country".[24]

Was the contemporary component of modern art what brought an ending to the Basque School and the cancelling of a planned great exhibit in Pamplona with the works of more than a hundred artists? The fact is that the ideological tension within the allegedly unitary project of the Basque School did not allow for the constitution o fan "art of synthesis" between the two aesthetic tendencies: a figurative and realist art propounded by Ibarrola and the group *Emen* that accepted "any aesthetic premise capable of expressing the historic moment of our country", and an abstract art "of triumphal morality and hegemonic spirit" practiced by the members of the group Gaur (Amable Arias, Rafael Ruiz Balerdi, Juan Antonio Sistiaga,

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[23] Jorge Oteiza, *Quousque tandem…! Ensayo de interpretación estética del alma vasca* (San Sebastián: Colección Azkue, 1963)

[24] *Manifiesto del Grupo Gaur*.

José Luis Zumeta, Jorge Oteiza, Eduaurdo Chillida, Néstor Basterrechea and Remigio Mendiburu).

The Decade of the 1970s: In Between the European Avant-garde and Social Realism

During the 1970s the history of Basque art continued to be marked by a series of ideological conflicts. There was no easy reconciliation between "the Basque artist in the European avant-garde" and the languages of popular tradition; nor was there a middle ground between the a-historical and metaphysical approach by Oteiza, who was trying to eliminate from Basque art any presence of Latin influence to return to the Neolithic period, the "zero cromlech," and the historicist position by Ibarrola who, unlike Oteiza, pointed out to more recent events and to non-native roots in order to advocate social realism.[25]

The Encounters of Pamplona in 1972 provided the first great opportunity to confront the experimental international, national and Basque avant-gardes as well as a more testimonial and politicized art. As argued by José Díaz Cuyàs: "With the Encounters happens as with the carnivals: they can be interpreted as an exercise in liberation, an expression of non-official culture, an attack against the hierarchy of values, a reivindation of the

[25] See Javier Serrano, "Arte alavés y arte vasco. Escuela de Arte Vasco", in *Arte y artistas vascos en los años 60,* 544.

body, and so on, or else as an inverted reproduction of what is official acting out as a safety valve and whose function is ultimately to consolidate the current hierarchy of values. This is the fundamentally ambivalent character of carnival and I believe that this is also the only way to interpret that equivocal festival in Pamplona."[26]. The Encounters were in theory sponsored by the Provincial Council of Navarre and the City Hall of Pamplona but in reality were financed by the Huarte family. Their goal was to bring to the public, by means of exhibits, colloquia and aesthetic experiences developed in the most various places (streets, plazas, movies, theaters), a plural sample of the latest tendencies in plastic, visual, musical and theatrical arts, overcoming the barriers between artistic creation and daily life.[27]

About three hundred and fifty people participated in Pamplona—elite musicians, film-makers, plastic artists, and intellectuals from the Basque Country, Spain, and other countries united in the defense of a concept of an international avant-garde. Among the performances were those of John Cage, the group ZAJ (Juan Hidalgo, Walter Marchetti, Esther Ferrer), conceptual and post-conceptual artists (Acconci, Kosuth, Oppenheim, On Kawara), some of the best known representatives of the Spanish conceptual

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[26] José Díaz Cuyás and Carmen Pardo, "Pamplona era una fiesta: tragicomedia del arte español", en *Desacuerdos 1, Sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado españo*l (Barcelona: Macba, 2003), 19.

[27] "Una de las notas de los Encuentros quisiéramos que fuese, de un lado, el que el público pueda –casi diríamos deba- intervenir en el hecho artístico de una forma mucho más próxima de la que se tenía por costumbre, habitándolo de una manera distinta; de otro, lógica consecuencia del anterior, el creador va a encontrarse a un público menos pasivo que de ordinario… Las razones para ello son muchas. Pamplona es una ciudad de larga tradición cívica, una de las raras en España en las que el pueblo es protagonista de sus fiestas; el tamaño de la ciudad es idóneo…Los encuentros se celebran e Pamplona. No se podía pues olvidar ciertos aspectos de la cultura vasca", *Catálogo Alea. Encuentros-72*, Pamplona, 1972.

art, such as Isidoro Valcárcel Medina and his installation *Estructuras modulares* (made of yellow and black scaffolding tubes that were hundred meters long) or the Catalans Robert Llimos with his *Corredores* and Jordi Benito with his project *24000000 Tm de hulla 3VII*. And next to all of this, the very same day of the opening of the Encounters (June 26, 1972) the exhibit *Current Basque Art,* was also inaugurated; it was curated by Santiago Amón, an art critic closely linked to the Huarte family, a fact that generated controversy. Oteiza and Chillida decided not to participate in the Encounters. One of the works at the exhibit by Dionisio Blanco, a militant member of the Communist Party, was censored, which forced Ibarrola and Arri to retire their works in solidarity with Blanco.

A few months earlier, on April 17, 1972, Basque artists had met in an assambly and signed a manifestó denouncing the partisan use made of the Encounters by the State's cultural apparatus as a policy of international prestige—the very same policy that wanted to show a cultural façade unconnected to the real issues, and particularly to the artistic needs of the Basque Country. There was once again "a clash of cultures" between the elitist character of the organization and the more interventionist aspirations of Basque artists in creative processes to the service of their cultural community.

During this same decade of the 1970s, artists from other parts of Spain expressed their attitude of rejection of Francoism in more open and international fashion. There were events organized by exiled artists in Paris or New York, as in the case of "the Catalans in Paris," particularly in the first generation after Tàpies (Muntadas, Jaume Xifra, Benet Rosell, Joan Rabascall, Antoni Miralda) or the subsequent case of "the Catalans in New York" (Miralda, Francesc Torres, Muntadas, Eugenia Balsells or Zush)—strictly individual experiences outside of any institutional support.

Compared to them, Basque artists showed a policy of "behind closed doors" charged with a national ideological project. Even the Basque participation in the Venice Biennale of 1976 entitled *Spain, Artistic Avant-garde and social reality* was marred by controversy among the antithetical positions of Ibarrola on the one hand and Oteiza and Chillida on the other. A few months after the death of Franco, a group of artists and critics representing the various nationalities of the Spanish state (Ibarrola was the Basque representative) planned an exhibit whose objective was to show what the great aesthetic options had been within Spain during Franco's forty years. The organizing committee set the premises that the work should be art of investigation and art of testimony within the anti-Francoist culture. Ibarrola, who was affiliated to the Communist Party, conceived Basque representation along the premise of the cult of personality and selected the three biggest names of the last decades: Oteiza, Chillida and himself.[28] Chillida and Oteiza declined to take part in the retrospective.[29]

The scant Basque participation at the Venice Biennial (only Ibarrola atended and two of Oteiza's sculptures provided by a collector without the sculptor's authorization) was the expression of the definitive break-up of the more or less tacit agreement among the anti-Francoist opposition forces, namely, between the artists close to the Communist Party and the sympathizers of the Basque nationalist left, the two main ideologies

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[28] Anna Maria Guasch, *Arte e ideología,* 171.

[29] The refusal to organize a large exhibit of ideologically nationalist Basque artists, as suggested by Chillida under pressure from artists such as Mieg, Ortiz de Elguea, Ruiz Balerdi and Zumeta, and the never realized project by Oteiza of organizing a joint pavillion of Northern (French) and Southern (Spanish) Basque countries left the Venecia Biennial without Basque representation. On the absence of Chillida and Oteiza, see *Euskadi alla Biennale*, in *Catalogo Generale* (Venecia: La Biennale de Venecia, 1976).

championing the practice of art.[30] In fact, the political parties of the Basque nationalist left decided to create a Basque Country-Italy committee to celebrate in Venice meetings under the banner *Aministía Denonzat* (Amnesty for Everyone). In the end, only people from the world of cinema and song took part, in association with roundtables debating issues of amnesty led by the lawyers J.M. Bandrés y M. Castells. In the opinión of Ibarrola, the events were "a real caricature of what could have been expected from any manifestation of Basque culture."[31]

The Decade of the 1980s: The new Internationalism

A new generation of artists emerged in the 1980s from the recently created Faculty of Arts (1969). Txomin Badiola, Angel Bados, Juan Luis Moraza, Darío Urzay and Pello Irazu are some of the names. This group brought the end of a large process of crisis and dissolution of the historic avant-gardes in the Basque arena and the beginning of a new postmodern eclecticism. The end result was the formation of an artist with a different profile in which the the aesthetic and the political, as well as the local and the itnernational, were resolved not as a dichotomous process, but from a plurality of viewpoints, as well as a given transversality, heterodoxy and hibridity.

Badiola, Bados, Morquillas, Moraza and others, catalogued as the New Basque Sculpture, and directly related to the minimal, conceptual, povera and the post-Caro British sculpture, began to produce their first

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30 "Euskadi alla Biennale de Venise: Une Victoire pour les basques", en *Enbata*, nº 429, noviembre 1976.

31 Javier Angulo, A*gustín Ibarrola, ¿un pintor maldito?. Arte Vasco de Postguerra 1950-1977,* (San Sebastián: L. Haranburu, 1978), 314.

works in the years 1978-1982. On the other hand, the new realisms of artists such as Vicente Ameztoy, Juan Luis Goanega , Zuriarrain, Lazkano y Darío Urzay were in tune with the international neo-expressionisms of the day both in the Italian versión—the trans-avant-garde—and the German one—the new savages--. As explained by Carlos Martínez Gorriarán,[32] Basque art has followed closely the international evolution, without traumas and fissures, yet without renouncing to its proper traditional matrix. In this sense, the end of Francoism as well as the end of the modernist project seemed to have liberated the Basque artist from the intense politization that animated the artists of the 1960s and 1970s when, under the leadership of Oteiza, they believed that art and the artists could have a testimonial role, a transformative function in the creation of a new society and cultura.

José Ramón Saínz Morquillas is a case in point. Without abandoning his natal Bilbao he works in the deconstruction and alteration of his own environment and daily reality from the standpoint of subversión and resitence as artistic practices. Badiola is also a paradigmatic example of such a "rite du pasage" from the profile of the artist of the sixties, ruled over by ideology, to the postmodern artist, given to irony, who, disappointed by the failure of the collectivist aims of the project of Basque School, decides to initiate a solitary road marked by the same desire of individuality that had characterized the Basque artist of the 1950s. But Badiola in particular embodies the artist who at a certain point of his career decides to leave the Basque Country to reside in one of the great cosmopolitan cities of international art.

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[32] Carlos Martínez Gorriarán, "El arte y los artistas vascos de 1966 a 1993". In *Nosotros los vascos. Arte V. Vanguardias en arte, arquitectura y cine* (San Sebastian: Lur, 1994), 121.

After having curated Oteiza's exhibit in Madrid, in 1989 Badiola moved to London first and then in 1990 to New York, where he stayed until 1998. In an interview[33] Badiola explains that the years 1987 and 1988 were particularly intense: "On the one hand, I was teaching at the Faculty of Fine Arts in conditions that deteriorated from day to day… On the other hand, there was my own work: 1987 was the year of my first individual exhibit in Madrid. This exhibit had a very positive repercussion (…) In that moment I was somewhat overwhelmed by the alleged success, I had the impression that it was relative, since the reasons that were given to assess the value of my work did not interest me, and just what interested me was never mentioned."[34].

Like Badiola, in the 1980s other artists felt the need to use the Basque imaginary ironically and without traumas, and to search for constant renegotiations between the issues of proximity and distance. These artists, following the deconstructivist and postmodern fashion of the times, proceeded to dismantle the formalist late modernist principles in which they had been educated. They articulated their creative strategies no so much as a native and referential style (as was the case in the 1960s and 1970s), but to contribute from a self-critical approach to the generalized formula that in the early 1990s came to be known as the New Internationalism—namely, the use of internationalism's *lingua franca* implemented with local narratives, with metaphors that speak of memory, individual as much as collective, and that do not renounce to a certain primordial authenticity. As argued by Jean Fischer, the New Internationalism formula allows artists of different geographic and political

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[33] Miren Eraso, "Txomin Badiola. El otro, el mismo," in *Malas formas. Txomin Badiola, 1990-2002* (Barcelona: Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, 2002), 143.

[34] Kewin Power, "Continuando la conversación", en *Malas formas*, 134.

areas to tell stories and allegories in need of deciphering, but always with the eyes in *mainstream* that provides the guiding languages.[35]

During these years a new generation of Basque artists begins to move to the international capitals of art (Nueva York, London, Amsterdam) to be in tune with the dominant trends in theory (references to authors such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, or Artaud, Bataille, Zizek will be mandatory), as well as formal plastic contributions (Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, besides the unavoidable quotes to Oteiza and, to a lesser degree, Chillida). The end result is the formation of languages that can be identified with the international currents of the times but implemented with local narratives immersed in the symbolic history of Basque culture, by taking into account the place of birth and growth of those languages, in a peripheral condition that turns into an artifact of productive differentiation, consciousness of the local beyond any type of "regionalist" limitation.

This new type of art can be seen, at the beginning of the 1990s, in the works of Txomin Badiola, Angel Bados, Pello Irazu, Juan Luis Moraza, Marisa Fernández and Darío Urzay. They "made a respectful step forward in relation to their elders, but without stepping too much beyond the stable and accepted canon, a step forward in which some even viewed an exiled, eccentric form, as well informed in its drift as it was orphan in its identity".[36] This is how some critics interpreted the first works Badiola presented in Madrid's Soledad Lorenzo gallery after his stays in London and New York; these were works in which the iron was painted in red, literary elements were added to the image, the epistemological basis of the

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[35] Jean Fischer (ed.), *Global Visions. Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Londres, Kala Press, 1994.

[36] "Remix", in *Malas formas. Txomin Badiola, 1990-2002*, 30.

abstract gramar that characterized the previous decades was put in question, and the very notion sculpture, now immersed in a process of hibridity by mixing diverse languages (film, video, televisión, comics), was subverted. Some paradigmatic works of these early 1990s were Badiola's *Bañiland* (1990-1991) o *Family Complot* (1993)—installations in which modernist mythical figures such as Malevitch or Oteiza are deconstructed, as well as designers such as Aalto or Jacobsen and other other evidences of failed utopian thinking, to be mixed with references to icons of the mass media and other subcultures to provoke with such fortuitous encounter the emergence of the "uncanny" or the "unholy," of what forces in every family situation the formation of deep charges of anxiety, strangeness and dissolution. As Badiola states in his conversation with Manel Clot: "One of my favorites goals (…) has been to achieve in my work a structure that will allow me to integrate each and every one of the aspects of my life, from the day to day events to my political and ideological perplexities, from my affects to the purely aesthetic debates, from my most intimate desires to the chronicling of society (…)".[37]

From the 1990s to the Present: Between the Global and the Local

In this same vein of interaction between mental and subjective ecologies, and echoing the sensibilities of the late 1990s that priviledged the micro and the molecular over the high political and ideological discourses, a new generation of artists was formed among Bilbao's students at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Among others, some of the names are Asier Mendizábal, Ibon Aranberri, Inazio Escudero, Mikel Eskauriaza, Joan Mikel Euba, Itziar Okariz, Tsuspo Poyo, Sergio Prego, Francisco Ruiz Infante and Pepo Salazar. Searching for a combination of the local and the

[37] "Remix", en *Malas formas. Txomin Badiola, 1990-2002,* 30-31.

international, the aesthetics and the politics, these artists leave temporarily their country to settle in New York (Abigail Lazkok, Itziar Okariz, Segio Prego, Ixone Sádaba), in París (Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa) or Berlín (Jon Mikel Euba) with the goal of finding new ways to intervene actively in the transmission of "tradition" or cultural heritage (what Homi Bhabha called "to reinstate and reinvent the past") [38] from the perspective of a renewed dialogue between the international formulas and the shared symbols of a local imaginary.

These artists make extensive use of the new technologies that characterize the current globalized world—its electronic cultural capitalism, its mobility, its utopian promise of breaking down territorial borders. What matters to them is not their "national condition" but what creative strategies are provided by local situations, formally as well as discoursively, to be used within the global cultural flows. Vis-a-vis the obvious impact of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum in the art scene, they recognize its presence but are rather indifferent to its influence: "Up to now the relationship between Basque artistic community and the Guggenheim institution has been characterized by mutual indifference and each one has functioned in a distinct universe".[39] These artists are regular in the *Manifesta* exhibits (Euba and Aranberri in *Manifesta* 4, Frankfurt, 2002; Mendizabal in *Manifesta* 5, San Sebastian, 2004); in *Documenta* (Aramberri in *Documenta 12,* Kassel); in biennials and other exhibits organized by Basque museum institutions. One of these last exhibits was organized by Bilbao's Museum of Fine Arts in 2002, entitled *Gaur, Hemen, Orain,* and later there was the *Chacun à son goût* exhibit with which the Guggenheim Bilbao celebrated in 2007 its tenth anniversary.

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[38] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004.)

[39] Miren Jaio, www.afterall.org/onlinearchive.html?online_id=941.

These exhibits reflected on the ways in which the Basque artist is affected in the global era by the values of proximity and intimacy and on how to negotiate between the local imaginary and the cosmopolitan languages.

The exhibit *Gaur, Hemen, Orain* (Today, Here, Now) recognizes, in the words of Guadalupe Echevarria, the emergence of a new "artistic stage" in the Basque Country: "The history of art provides many artists in the Basque Country, groups and individuals, who have left an enduring mark in the collective imaginary and, at times, tangible signs of their art in its streets, walls, o institutions. But never until now has the network of exchanges and relations among artists been so intense and so branched out."[40] In this new "artistic stage," almost for the first time, Basque artists have made society with the world by travelling to, settling in, and exhibiting in other countries; they place their works in a global stage in which the "here" and "now" are in New York, London, Paris, Amsterdam, or Madrid as much as in Bilbao, San Sebastian or Vitoria. This implies that they have to present themselves in front of a public that exceeds their local territory and that they have to question the values of the Basque community by problematizing overused words such as "culture," "tradition," or "people," to the point that even the most familiar shows its uncanny strangeness. "That is why these artists prove that a community is not made of collective certainties, not even of a shared sense of purpose, but of the possibility that each one has to interrogate the 'we' that is in play."[41]

The 2007 exhibit *Chacun à son goût* further demonstrated that Basque artists currently operate far from a nostalgic or traditionalist concept of "locality" while promoting subjective positions within the

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[40]Guadalupe Echevarría, *Gaur, Hemen, Orain* (Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 2002)

[41] ¿???

global visual culture. Its curator Rosa Martínez introduced the selected artists[42] as immersed in a debate in between assimilation, rejection and reconstruction of the historic weight of their specific "locus" as a precondition for creating their own language: "In the synchrony of this concrete present (…) the fundamental issues for a critical debate have to do with the strains and hibridities in between the local and the global, the feelings of individual and social belonging and exclusion, as well as the dialogue between the universalist will of the western artistic modernity and the questioning of its values from multiple postmodern and/or peripheral subjectivities."[43]

Three works that stood out in this exhibit were: Clemente Bernard's photographic series entitled *Crónicas del País Vasco (*Basque Chronicles, 1987-2001) and generated by the need to look at one's own surroundings "with clean eyes and an open heart;" the video *Irrintzi* (2007) by Itziar Okariz, who lives and works in New York, based on the performance of going through the museum shouting *irrintzis* (a traditional scream used in the past as a way to communicate among valleys); and Ibon Aranberri who presented at the Guggenheim one of his three installations known as "media trilogy" with which he was trying to activate communitarian situations. The title of Aranberri's installation was *Horizontes* (Horizons)

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[42] Los doce artistas seleccionados por R. Martínez fueron: Elssie Ansareo, Ibon Aranberri, Manu Arregui, Clemente Bernard, Abigail Lazkoz, Maider López, Asier Mendizábal, Itziar Okariz, Aitor Ortiz, Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa, Sergio Prego e Ixone Sádaba.

[43] Rosa Martínez, "Chacun à son goût," in *Chacun à son goût* (Bilbao: Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, 2007), 19.

(2001), a work that started from signs and symbols of the institutional and ideological representation of the modernist art movement repeated ad infinitum by the mass media. Previously in *Gaur Egun* (*This is CNN*) (2002) and *G-Pavilion* (2002) Aranberri had worked on the sculpture by Basterrechea that presides the Basque Parliament and Picasso's *Guernica*. In *Horizontes* he used the logos by Chillida for diverse causes, including a reproduction of his *Comb of the winds*. Aranberri hang from the ceiling of the Guggenheim's third floor zigzagging rows of Chillida's designs in 70 by 50 cm. formats as if they were festive pennants, thus evoking the atmosphere of celebration and political protest that animated the annual festivities of the 1960s and 1970s. In Aramberri's words: "*Horizontes* recreates this graphic-scupltoric legacy of Chillida's from the perspective of the media. The icons of various cultural and political orders, recycled and altered, lose their original stroke, morphing themselves in more abstract and neutral signs. Set in groups and without any sequential order, they get mixed and create a forest of graphic lines that can be recognized in the form of a stylistic continuity."[44] Once again symbols and memory obtain new meanings when connected to the context in which they are exhibited.

[44] "Ibon Aranberri", in *Chacun à son Goüt*, 30.

Postscript

Aranberri and Mendizabal represent the kinds of "artistic knowledge communities" that are operative in the current moment at the interface of local identities and global flows. Many of the allusions of Mendizabal's installations, photographs, videos and sound pieces include references to his Basque environment—such as to the musical radical rock group *Hertzainak*, a Basque name for *The Police*, the documentary on the Basque conflict *Hors d'Etat* by Arthur MacCrag (1983), Basque folkloric music such as street bands, or the geography of the country including landscapes of green valleys and views of derelict neighborhoods in Bilbao. In Mendizabal's 16 mm. black and white and with no sound film *No Time for Love* (2000) two overarching poles get condensed: the recourse to a formalist-constructivist pole and the need to overcome it through socio-political references. The title itself is borrowed from a song by *Hertzainak* in reference to the impossibility of making compatible love and revolution, desire and militancy.

What is intriguing in Mendizabal is his capacity for camouflage, his constant references to the radical nationalist left, concretely to the 1960s with allusions to the Brigata Rossa, the Baader-Meinhof, Jean-Luc Godard, Deleuze and Guattari, or punk-rock groups such as *The*

Clash and *Dead Kennedys*. The references are superimposed on a peculiar mix of the vernacular, the popular, and the communitarian. He is interested in the notion of "multitude," rather than "people," much as Paolo Virno is. All of this explains Mendizabal's inclusion of other artists' works, such as the video *Zer eskatzen du herriak!?* (What is what the people is asking for?) in which a band of street musicians interprets a festive theme, the photographs of the series *Bilbao* (2002-2003), documents regarding the construction of "txoznas" or marquees for popular festivities, or *Pabilioia* (2002-2003) on people hanging around carnival floats.

After the failure of modernity's universalizing project, the artist seems to be suggesting that it is the moment to return to the vernacular, the popular, the youth cultures and subcultures, particularly the musical ones, mixing political signs with punk, rock and hardcore. For artists of Aranberri and Mendizabal's generation the local constitutes a major source of inquiry combined with a new understanding of the relationship between history and social agency, between the field of emotions and that of politics, the grand scale factors and the vernacular factors—in short, their challenge is to create a knowledge community in which the global cultural flows and the specific local realities collide and crossbreed each other.