

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE «GUGGENHEIM EFFECT». BRIEF APPROACH TO THE IMPACT OF GUGGENHEIM BILBAO MUSEUM ON THE BILBAO ART SYSTEM

VEINTICINCO AÑOS DEL «EFECTO GUGGENHEIM». BREVE APROXIMACIÓN AL IMPACTO DEL MUSEO GUGGENHEIM BILBAO EN EL SISTEMA DEL ARTE BILBAÍNO

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Abstract²

This article analyses the impact that Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has had on the local art system since its opening in 1997 until 2022. For this matter, in the first part of the article I present a historical review of the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao, from which the creation of this international cultural infrastructure arose. Following, the nature of Bilbao's artistic ecosystem is introduced, to then go on to study how this museum has influenced it. Finally, the three parameters that have guided this analysis are presented: the presence of Basque art in the museum through its exhibition and acquisition, its influence on the presence of galleries and exhibition spaces and, lastly, the perception that the local art system has of the museum.

Keywords

Museums; Artistic environments; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; Culture; Art centres; Local culture; Global museums

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza el impacto que el Museo Guggenheim Bilbao ha tenido en el sistema del arte local desde su apertura en 1997 hasta el año 2022. Para ello, primeramente, se hace una revisión histórica del Plan Estratégico para

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la Revitalización del Bilbao Metropolitano, del que surgió la creación de esta infraestructura cultural de carácter internacional. Seguidamente, se introduce la naturaleza del ecosistema artístico bilbaíno, para pasar a estudiar cómo ha influenciado dicho museo en este. Por último, se presentan los tres parámetros que han guiado dicho análisis: la presencia de arte vasco en el museo a través de su exposición y adquisición, su influencia en la presencia de galerías y espacios expositivos y por último, la percepción que tiene del museo el sistema del arte local.

Palabras clave

Museos; entornos artísticos; Museo Guggenheim Bilbao; cultura; centros de arte; cultura local; museos globales

Twenty-five years after the Guggenheim Museum was opened in Bilbao, much has been written about the power of this cultural institution to transform a city with a marked industrial past and to place it on the map as a cultural and international must-see. «The Guggenheim Effect» has been analysed in scientific and popular literature from mainly economic, architectural and urban planning perspectives. These studies have shown that the museum has been a vital part of this success story. And so it has been shown that culture can be an economic engine that promotes tourism, consumption and the creation of a city brand.

This article analyses the impact of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao from a cultural perspective. In particular, I propose studying its influence on the Bilbao territory through what an art space of this kind does to promote enjoyment, learning and, specifically, artistic production and consumption. In order to understand this impact on the territory, three values are analysed: the presence of Basque art in the museum, its influence on the presence of galleries and exhibition spaces, and the perception that the local art system has of the institution. Before starting with the subject, we must not forget that although the Guggenheim Museum is a vital part in the process of making Bilbao a city that focuses on services and one with international tourist circuits, it is one more piece in a much larger puzzle (Barcenilla, 2022).

In order to carry out this research, interviews were conducted with cultural agents in the city of Bilbao. The method used to approach the informants was the semistructured interview. The informants were selected according to their high degree of activity, knowledge and participation in Bilbao's artistic and cultural sector from museological, academic, artistic and sociological perspectives. For the selection of the informants, the diversity of the sector was taken into account to collect data that are as faithful as possible to the sector's reality.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE REVITALISATION OF METROPOLITAN BILBAO. CULTURAL CENTRALITY AS A CRITICAL ISSUE

As it is well-known, at the dawn of the 1990s Bilbao was in the throes of a serious economic, ecological and social crisis. After its heyday as an industrial capital in the steel, shipbuilding, textile and automobile sectors, the 1970s crisis had dealt it a severe blow. In addition to the 1973 oil crisis, Bilbao had been hit hard, and it would seem it would never recover. Its identity as an industrial city, confirmed by its urban landscape of shipyards, loading and unloading areas, cranes, chimneys and commercial buildings, seemed to have come to an end. In a social context marked by high unemployment rates, a complex political landscape, the active presence of the terrorist group ETA, pockets of poverty, and the last throes of heroin, Bilbao faced a large-scale challenge.

Faced with this situation of multidimensional crisis, the Bilbao municipality and the Basque Government set in motion a complex process to analyse Metropolitan Bilbao's reality with the intention to begin a reconversion process. Within this framework, the Association for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao, commonly

known as Bilbao Metropoli-30, was set up on 9 May 1991³. This association, with full legal and patrimonial responsibility, aimed to recover and revitalise Bilbao and its metropolitan area. In particular, its first activity was to carry out the research and implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao. Its founding members include the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Biscay, the Bilbao City Council, the Public University of the Basque Country, BBVA, Iberdrola, the Chamber of Commerce of Bilbao, the University of Deusto, Bilbao Plaza Financiera, Kutxabank, among others⁴. On 9 July 1992, the Association was recognised as a «Public Utility Entity» by the Basque Government.

The Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao was approved in March 1992, but its research phase was carried out from 1989 to June 1992. Promoted by the Basque Government's Department of Economy and Planning, this plan arose from recognising the situation of decline that Bilbao was undergoing. This strategic planning was developed in four phases, and its reports were published both individually and independently. Phase I was devoted to quantitative research into the situation of Bilbao and its metropolitan area. Based on this analysis, the critical issues that affected the territory were identified along seven axes:

1. Investment in human resources
2. A service metropolis in a modern industrial region
3. Mobility and accessibility
4. Environmental regeneration
5. Urban regeneration
6. Cultural centrality
7. Coordinated management of public administrations and the private sector

In phases II, III and IV, the analysis of each raised critical issue, the design of goals, objectives and strategies to address them, and, finally, the design of an action plan for each one were respectively developed. It is important to highlight the large number of participants in each phases, approximately 340⁵.

CULTURE AS THE AXIS OF INNOVATION

As previously mentioned, one of the critical points identified in Phase I of the Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao is cultural centrality. In Phase II, which was completed in July 1990, an analysis of the pre-existing cultural qualities of Bilbao was carried out. With this analysis of deficiencies and current trends, in Phase III of the strategic plan a cultural dimension with educational, international, infrastructural and fiscal characteristics began to be drawn up.

3. Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao: [online] https://www.euskadi.eus/eusko-jauriaritza/contenidos/asociacion/asbo30121991/eu_def/index.shtml. [Accessed 5/12/20].

4. Bilbao Metr poli-30: [online]. <https://www.bm30.eus/asociacion/socios-fundadores/>. [Accessed 5/12/20].

5. Bilbao Metr poli-30: «Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao. Phase IV: Action Plan», Bilbao, Bilbao Metropli-30, 1992, pp. 94-96.

In Phase IV, the creation of a new cultural facility was presented: the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. By the date the report was published, it was already being planned under the direction of Frank Gehry, who had been awarded the design competition in July 1991. In the text of the report, «Action Programmes» were presented as an initiative «which brings together important existing initiatives among the institutions operating in the metropolis, the implementation of which is currently being developed. The Action Programme for the location of a Guggenheim Museum of Contemporary Art in the Metropolis falls in line with these characteristics»⁶.

It is relevant to see that the project for a new contemporary art space went from being named in Phase III as a strategy: «To promote the creation of a contemporary art museum of international prestige», to having a programme dedicated exclusively to it in Phase IV. This is due to the fact that this project had been traced, shaped and consolidated at the same time as this strategic planning had been developed in its entirety. Specifically, the Basque institutions came into contact with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation at the beginning of 1991. After one year of conversations, on 13 December, 1991, an agreement was signed for the location of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Three months later, this deal was formalised in New York on 27 February 1992.

A PROJECT BASED ON POLITICAL WILL. CULTURE AS AN ENGINE FOR CHANGE

I think it is important to look back at the genesis of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao because it can be seen that it is a far-reaching cultural project that was born within a plan to revitalise the territory, supported and promoted by political will. However, we must place this fact in a broader movement that had been developing since the 1990s. Within this framework, Richard Florida (2002)⁷ coined the term «the creative class» in which he encompasses and promotes the talent related to professionals involved in new technologies, but also includes those related to art and culture. In his work, Florida advocates the transformation of work culture and the importance of the creative in the creation of wealth. His discourse also strongly influences the development of cultural industries.

As O'Connor *et alii* (2020)⁸ explain, after the fall of industrial cities, the creative cities concept very strongly influenced the reconversion of these localities. Signifying a move towards the globalised city, this proposed a shift away from the generation of wealth through industrial work towards a focus on cultural and creative dimensions. Thus during the globalisation process in the 1990s, belief

6. Ibid, p.65.

7. Florida, Richard: *La clase creativa. La transformación de la cultura del trabajo y el ocio en el siglo XXI*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2010.

8. O'Connor, Justin *et alii*: «Creative cities, creative classes and the global modern», *City, Culture and Society*, 21 (2020).

spread that art and culture can be economic engines for the reconversion of a territory and the consequent creation of wealth. According to O'Connor *et alii*, the creative city has been developed in various ways,

For some it meant investing in the arts and cultural infrastructure, hoping to attract global companies and their equally footloose senior staff. Or an iconic building could be catalytic for the local population, declaring a new future for the city, and maybe bringing in cultural tourists for good measure. These could be part of a city's ambitious bid for international cultural (or sporting) events, and the ever-growing conference trade- -attempts at 're-branding' which extended to the various 'city of culture' programs that were emerging and, after 2004, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN).

The city of Bilbao meets all the above parameters, namely: it has invested in cultural infrastructure and has attempted to develop artistic neighbourhoods. It is currently attracting international educational capital to the island of Zorrotzaurre, such as the Digi Pen Institute of Technology⁹, and has created an iconic building like the Guggenheim Museum, which attracts large numbers of tourists. Bilbao is a destination for large gatherings related to work, culture and sport. Finally, Bilbao forms part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network¹⁰.

From this point of view, this city has been a success story as far as its transformation is concerned. The link between these global economic movements and the transformation that the city of Bilbao has undergone since the 1990s, particularly with the construction of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, is evident here. It is, therefore, important to stress the importance and success that this art space has had in generating wealth¹¹ by attracting tourists and visitors who invest in the hotel and catering sector, who spend money while they remain in the city and who stay an average of almost two nights in the city (prepandemic data)¹². Is also important to imagine that, in addition to an economic intention, there was a political will in which this art centre was projected as a cultural centre from which would emanate, like a shock wave, positive impacts on the city's cultural life. Training in the arts, artistic production, reflection and cultural consumption which, together with the influence of the museum, gave rise to the idea that Bilbao would be a cultural capital in contact with international markets. And in a way, this is how it was planned.

The Sala Rekalde, dependent on the Provincial Council of Biscay, was created in 1991 with the intention of programming contemporary art exhibitions. The aim of this strategic and educational action was to promote the type of art that Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was going to endorse among the people of Bilbao. In other words, this gallery played a strategic role in anticipating and raising awareness of what was to come. Another project that attempted to add to the possibility of

9. <https://www.digipen.es/about>. [Accessed 1/04/2022].

10. <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/bilbao>. [Accessed 1/04/2022].

11. Plaza, Beatriz *et alii*: «Arte y economía, un matrimonio de conveniencia: el Museo Guggenheim en Bilbao», *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica De Geografía Y Ciencias Sociales*, [online], 335 (2010), <http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/sn/sn-335.htm>. [Accessed 23/11/2021].

12. Garmendia, Xabier: «Bilbao roza el millón de turistas al año», *El Correo*, [online], <https://www.elcorreo.com/bizkaia/bilbao-roza-millon-20200129174132-nt.html>. [Accessed 23/01/2022].

generating a cultural and creative capital in Bilbao, and in the shadow of this institution, was the creation of Bilbao Arte in 1996. This project, designed to support artistic creation and thought, envisaged attracting artists to the vicinity of the San Francisco neighbourhood in an attempt to generate a creative district in this popular intercultural quarter that would foster a local art market. For various reasons, this attempt to gentrify the neighbourhood was in vain, and the project to promote Bilbao as a city of international artistic creation gradually faded away.

While these plans for the city's cultural centrality did not culminate, it is necessary to look back and wonder what impact Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has had on the city's artistic life since its opening. Bilbao has not become a hotbed of international creation in the way that Berlin has. However, it is certain that the museum has had a far from negligible impact on the artistic-cultural fabric. Beyond its international reputation, its brand, its importance in the Bilbao skyline, and an average of almost one million visitors a year (prepandemic data)¹³, what has been the impact of the institution in the artistic context?

BILBAO'S ART SYSTEM. AN ECOSYSTEM IN MOVEMENT

Bilbao's art scene has been studied and mapped out. It is a relatively small sector characterised by being active and in which the city's creative agents, most of whom are graduates of the Faculty of Fine Arts, know one another. It is a territory rich in municipal grants from the Provincial Council of Vizcaya and the Government of the Basque Country, which favours a substratum in which cultural production initiatives of different kinds are born and developed, and make the Bilbao scene a rich and prone environment for the creation, production and exhibition of art.

This network has been studied by Oihane Sánchez Duró in her publication *Bilbao Detournement* (2016)¹⁴, an exhaustive mapping of the Bilbao art system in relation to cultural production. As this research work shows, this fabric has an approximate and changing number of some 50 cultural and artistic proposals. This number includes the city's museums, cultural centres, galleries, cultural production projects of various kinds, creation and exhibition spaces, performing and interdisciplinary spaces. This issue also includes the institutional, the consolidated, the temporary and the experimental.

As Sánchez Duró explains¹⁵, this network is abundant and diverse, but it also harbours certain inequalities between agents. On the one hand, as the sector is largely dependent on the aforementioned public subsidies, internal competition is clear. Likewise, those who have been awarded this funding are likely to receive aid in multiple calls for proposals. Hence a tendency exists to support the successful projects, groups or individuals in the first instance. On the other hand, it points

13. *Ibid.*

14. Sánchez Duro, Oihane: *Bilbao Dé-tour-nement. Catálogo de espacios y prácticas artístico-culturales*, Sestao, Oihane Sánchez Duro, D.L., 2016.

15. Interview with Sánchez Duro, Oihane. [20/06/2021].

out that more support for the practices inherited from sculpture and painting is possible than for other types of practices related more to the contextual or the collaborative. However, as his study shows, contemporary collaborative and hybrid practices are present in the Bilbao art system. They are also present in the roles of its agents because a large part of the professionals making up the system perform mixed functions that combine research and curatorship, production and creation, or dissemination and teaching, to name only a few possible combinations.

Although this fact speaks of the inherent precariousness of the cultural-artistic sector in the Basque Country (as in any other Autonomous Community in Spain), it also provides us insight into its contemporaneity. Multitasking is the norm in cultural production and is the prevailing language on a global level. The fact that the Basque art sector agents form part of this trend also speaks of the actuality of what it means to make culture in the 21st century and, therefore, of the contemporaneity of their artistic and reflexive practices. It remains to be investigated whether this is partially an influence of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao on the local Bilbao art system.

THE IMPACT OF GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO. BASQUE ARTISTS IN THE CULTURAL INSTITUTION

The first parameter chosen to analyse the impact of this institution on the Basque art system is related to Basque artistic production and its presence in the museum through its exhibition programme and the acquisition of its work. If we think about the many ways in which an institution of these characteristics can generate an impact on the art system, these two parameters are certainly not the only ones. On the one hand, it can generate numerous experiences with artists, such as production programmes, educational and dissemination activities, programmes in community contexts, curatorial and a myriad of other practices. In fact, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao carries out some of these actions, such as working with artists in its educational programme «Learning through Art»¹⁶.

The reason why these two parameters have been chosen is because they are both primary actions of a museum (as is education) that directly affect artists' ability to produce and, thus, the art system to which they belong. They are, therefore, related to the fundamental functions of an artist and those of a museum. Before continuing, it is important to emphasise that, in its statutes, the founding aims or objectives of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Foundation does not include the promotion of Basque art, although it does include, among others, that of «creating a programme

16. Learning through Art is an annual programme in which local artists work with school pupils. This programme has been running since 1999, [online], <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/exposiciones/aprendiendo-a-traves-del-arte-2021>. [Accessed 12/01/2022].

of exhibitions of contemporary modern art that is internationally outstanding and of a quality comparable to that of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation»¹⁷.

As a methodology for analysing the exhibition programme that includes artists from the Basque territory, I have analysed all the exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum since its opening in 1997 and selected those in which local artists have been present. As seen in Figure 1, a 18 exhibition experiences have been identified in which artists from the territory are present. The nature of these exhibitions varies. To facilitate the analysis, I have organised them into five groups: monographic exhibitions, national or international group exhibitions with the presence of Basque artists, group exhibitions of Basque artists, educational exhibitions of works by Basque artists, and exhibitions in which Basque art or history are the central theme.

As far as monographic exhibitions are concerned, five exhibitions have been held. *Cristina Iglesias* (1998-1999), *Chillida: 1948-1998* (1999), *Oteiza: Mito y Modernidad* (2004-2005), *Pello Irazu: Panorama* (2017) and *Esther Ferrer: Espacios Entrelazados* (2018). The same number of collective exhibitions of national or international nature and with the presence of Basque artists have been programmed. They are: *Arte contemporáneo vasco y español* (1999), *La torre herida por el rayo: lo imposible como meta* (2000), *Chillida/Tàpies: materia y pensamiento visual* (2001-2002), *Transparencias* (2003), *El arte y el espacio* (2017-2018). Analysing the data available in the museum's digital archive, the commonest names of Basque artists are Cristina Iglesias, Prudencio Irazabal, Javier Pérez, Juan Luis Moraza, Leopoldo Ferrán, Francisco Ruiz de Infante, Mabi Revuelta and Chillida.

Continuing with the group exhibitions composed exclusively of artists from the Basque context, three have been programmed: *Incógnitas. Cartografías del arte contemporáneo en Euskadi* (2007), *Chacun à son goût* (2007-2008), *Garmendia, Maneros Zabala, Salaberria. Proceso y método* (2013-2014). The first of these exhibitions was, as its title indicates, a cartographic exhibition of contemporary Basque art. As a working method, its curator, Juan Luis Moraza, proposed a questionnaire on the perception of the state of affairs in the Basque art system. This questionnaire was answered by 120 artists from four generations. The intention of this methodology was to obtain a reliable portrait of the art scene's complexity, as well as a sufficiently large number of informants to obtain results that reflect the sectors' reality as closely as possible.

The second of these exhibitions, *Chacun à son goût*, and curated by Rosa Martínez, is an exhibition of 12 artists whose careers became well-established in the 1990s. All the exhibited projects were newly created. These artists are Elssie Ansareo, Ibon Aranberri, Manu Arregui, Clemente Bernad, Abigail Lazkoz, Maider López, Asier Mendizabal, Itziar Okariz, Aitor Ortiz, Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa, Sergio Prego and Ixone Sádaba. As we see below, all these artists had at least one work in the collection as the museum acquired the works in this exhibition.

17. Fundación del Museo Guggenheim de Bilbao: «Estatutos de la Fundación del Museo Guggenheim de Bilbao», Bilbao, [online], https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/fundacion/f17/es_def/adjuntos/x42tEstatutosOriginales.pdf. [Accessed 25/01/2022].

Finally, the third of the exhibitions is dedicated to the work of artists Garmendia, Maneros Zabala, and Salaberria. The text of this exhibition states on its website its intention to support the Basque art sector. «This exhibition project continues the vocation of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao to analyse the artistic environment as a way of favouring the contextualisation of this production»¹⁸. In this case, the works of the three artists also became part of the collection.

Between 2007 and 2011, three exhibitions of selected works by local artists from the collection were programmed. This exhibition formed part of a programme called «Laboratorios» of a marked pedagogical and informative character. The first edition was developed in connection with the museum's tenth anniversary and, according to the institution, this exhibition model «allows us to get to know different aspects related to these works: the creative process, the cultural, artistic and intellectual references of the two authors, the importance of the materials and the main discourse of each work»¹⁹. The aim is, therefore, to show the creative processes of current artists and to promote them in their context. These exhibitions lasted 2 months, compared to the temporary exhibitions which lasted between 4 and 8 months.

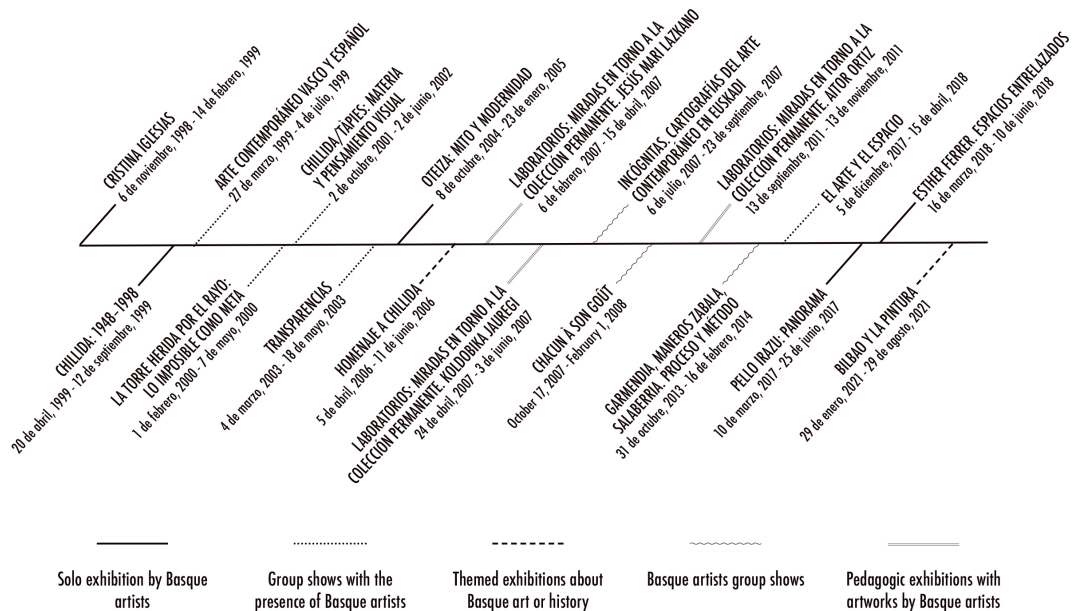


FIGURE 1. TIMELINE OF THE EXHIBITIONS PROGRAMMED BETWEEN 1998 AND 2021 AT GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO FEATURING BASQUE ARTISTS. Elaborated by the author

18. Museo Guggenheim Bilbao: «Garmendia, Maneros Zabala, Salaberria. Proceso y Método», Bilbao, [online], <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/exposiciones/garmendia-maneros-salaberria-proceso-y-metodo-del-archivo-al-no-lugars>. [Accessed 15/01/2022].

19. Museo Guggenheim Bilbao: «Laboratorios», Bilbao, [online], <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/exposiciones/laboratorios-miradas-en-torno-a-la-coleccion-permanente-jesus-mari-lazkano>. [Accessed 10/01/2022]

ARTISTS	NUMBER OF ARTWORKS IN MUSEUM GUGGENHEIM BILBAO'S COLLECTION
IBON ARANBERRI	1
TXOMIN BADIOLA	1
EDUARDO CHILLIDA	4
ESTHER FERRER	1
IÑAKI GARMENDIA	1
CRISTINA IGLESIAS	2
PRUDENCIO IRAZABAL	1
PELLO IRAZU	1
KOLDOBIKA JAUREGI	1
JESÚS MARI LAZKANO	2
ABIGAIL LAZKOZ	1
MAIDER LÓPEZ	1
ERLEA MANEROS ZABALA	1
ASIER MENDIZABAL	1
JUAN LUIS MORAZA	1
ITZIAR OKARIZ	1
AITOR ORTIZ	1
JORGE OTEIZA	5
JUAN PÉREZ AGIRREGOIKOA	1
JAVIER PÉREZ	2
SERGIO PREGO	1
IXONE SÁDABA	1
XABIER SALABERRIA	1
DARÍO URZAY	2

FIGURE 2. LIST OF BASQUE ARTISTS IN THE COLLECTION AND THE NUMBER OF WORKS BY EACH ONE ACQUIRED BY THE MUSEUM. Elaborated by the author

As a last category, the theme of two exhibitions are Basque art and history, understood in a broad sense. Firstly in 2006, the collective exhibition *Homenaje a Chillida* was held. In it, 45 artists exhibited works in tribute to the sculptor after his death in 2002. Secondly in 2021 *Bilbao y la pintura* was programmed, whose theme and focus was the city of Bilbao.

These 18 exhibition experiences include works by contemporary Basque artists, many of whom are in the collection, as we will see below. In numerical terms, all the museum's exhibition experiences over these 25 years, not counting the 23 annual exhibitions of the educational project «Learning through Art», total 200. Of this total, the 18 exhibitions featuring Basque artists represent 9% of the total production.

The figures relating to the presence of Basque artists in the collection are similar. According to its digital archive, the institution has acquired works by 78 artists, with a total of 24 Basque artists, specifically, 7 women and 17 men. This figure represents 30.7%. Of these 78 artists, the museum has 124 works, of which 35 are by Basque artists who represent 28.22%.

Figure 2 lists the Basque artists in the museum's collection and how many works have been acquired from each one. It is worth noting that, of the 24 represented artists, 18 have only one work, which represents 75%. In temporality terms, most of these works were acquired in 2008 and 2014 as a result of exhibitions *Chacun*

NUMBER OF ARTISTS FOR GENERATION

1900-09:	1
1910-19 :	0
1920-29:	1
1930-39:	1
1940-49:	0
1950-59:	5
1960-69:	9
1970-79:	7
1980-89:	0

FIGURE 3. PURCHASING TREND IN RELATION TO GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS. Elaborated by the author

à son goût and *Garmendia, Maneros Zabala, Salaberria. Proceso y método*. Given the type of multiple acquisitions following an exhibition, as well as their temporality, with a margin of error I deduce that the policies of purchasing works are directly linked with the programming of sporadic exhibitions, and not clearly with purchasing works by contemporary Basque artists.

With this logic, and looking at Figure 2 that depicts the number of works acquired per artist, it is clear that the largest purchases (5 and 4 works) have been for established artists, such as Oteiza and Chillida, respectively. As it is logical that this institution would like to have works by these artists who are very representative of contemporary Basque art, it is not surprising that they are the most widely present ones in the collection. As a comparative, but also illustrative, fact, the museum has eight works by American artist Jenny Holzer.

Figure 3 shows the purchasing trend in relation to these artists' generations, which

roughly indicates the tendency to purchase works in the generations of Basque artists. Interestingly, there are no purchases at all in some generations, such as those from the 1940s and from the 1980s onwards. The largest number of artists belongs firstly to the decade of the 1960s with nine artists. In second place comes the decade of the 1970s with seven artists.

Although promoting and supporting the Bilbao art sector are not the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Foundation's objectives, the figures that emerge from this analysis suggest a certain interest in exhibiting and conserving contemporary works of art by Basque artists. However, the exhibition and acquisition trend shows that there is no clear planning to use such actions as practices that aim to revitalise the art system in the context.

THE IMPACT OF GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO BEYOND ITS WALLS. CULTURAL ESTABLISHMENTS: GALLERIES AND EXHIBITION SPACES

The second parameter chosen to analyse the impact that this museum has had on the territory's artistic fabric includes galleries and exhibition spaces. Although I think it is important to know this aspect, it is not the function or the objective of this cultural institution type to promote the more or less formal art market in its surroundings, nor in the city where it is located. However, it is common and usual

for creative districts to develop around these institutions (more or less programmed, more or less informal), and it is also common for galleries and exhibition spaces to emerge. Such is the case of the gallery district around the Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofía or the Centre Pompidou in Paris. This is no compulsory parameter for analysing the impact of a museum on a territory. However, it really does reflect the fact that such an institution attracts visitors with an interest in art beyond museum institutions and with the capacity to acquire it.

The choice of this analysis parameter is based on two reasons: to find out the possible influence of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao on the dissemination of contemporary art in a city with an industrial past and little historic consumption in this field; to discover whether the city's inclusion in the international cultural circuit has influenced the consumption of contemporary art through local galleries by either by the city's inhabitants or visitors.

As a starting point to understand the current state of the city's gallery sector, mapping has been carried out. Although this mapping is not exhaustive, it locates eight spaces of diverse natures. Of them we find the city's historic commercial galleries, as well as more recently created galleries, exhibition spaces of a younger and more experimental nature, and spaces that combine critical cultural production with the exhibition of artworks.

As seen in Figure 4, these spaces are distributed in three areas in the city. These are, in order of proximity to the museum, Abando, San Francisco and Solokoetxe. The closest area, Abando, is where the Galería Vanguardia, Carreras Mugica and Galería Juan Manuel Lumbreras are located. In the San Francisco neighbourhood Espacio Marzana arte-galeria, SC Gallery + Art Management and the Okela Sormen Lantegia project can be found. Bulegoa zenbaki barik and La Taller Galería y Taller de Grabado lie in the Solokoetxe neighbourhood.

The nature of these spaces varies, as do the urban landscapes they inhabit. The three galleries based in Abando are commercial galleries that work with contemporary art and represent both Basque and international artists. Galería Vanguardia is the oldest of this selection having been founded in 1984. This gallery sells national and international contemporary art. CarrerasMugica opened in 1994 under the name Galería Colon XVI. A few years later, in 2014, it opened a new location with its current name, which comes from the surnames of its directors, Pedro Carreras and Ignacio Múgica. This gallery promotes international artists and emerging Basque art. Finally, Juan Manuel Lumbreras Galería de Arte dates back to 1995 and its work focuses on international contemporary art by paying special attention to the work of emerging Basque artists through its «Joven llama Joven» programme.

The three galleries in the San Francisco neighbourhood are three contemporary art projects, but their spaces and proposals are younger in character. Less formal and more accessible to the young artists of the area, these galleries offer more daring proposals and feature emerging artists. Espacio Marzana opened in 2002 and focuses on promoting new emerging artistic proposals. SC Gallery + Arts Management opened in 2008. Since its beginnings, it has promoted contemporary art through exhibitions and public art projects. Okela Sormen Lantegia emerged in 2014 and is run by artists. One of its characteristics is to produce experimental

and *ad hoc* projects for its space and to generate a network of visual artists in the Basque Country.

Finally, the two galleries in the Solokoetxe neighbourhood are two projects that closely combine production and exhibition. Indeed both are spaces that we can call interdisciplinary with different lines of work, including cultural production and thought, creation and exhibition. Bulegoa zenbaki barik presents itself as an office of art and knowledge. It opened in 2010 with a marked interdisciplinary critical character. The Taller Galería y Taller de Grabado also emerged in 2010 as a space for the creation and exhibition of graphic art.

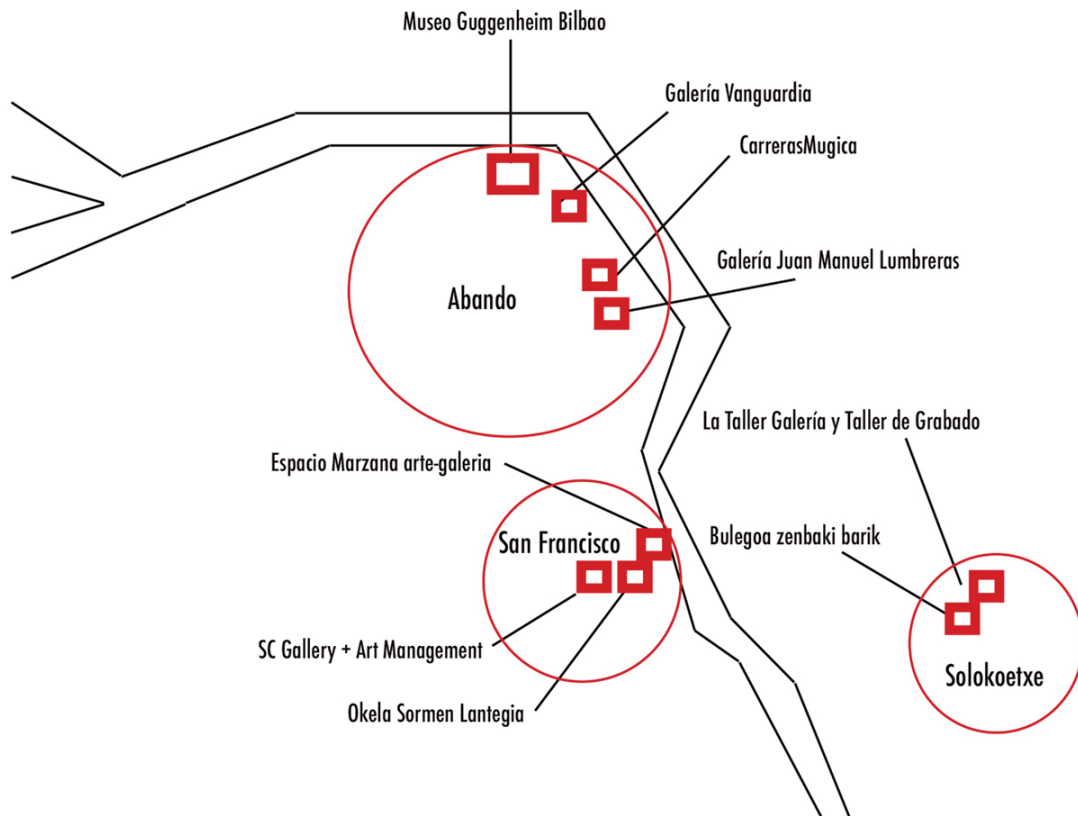


FIGURE 4. MAP OF THE ACTIVE GALLERIES IN BILBAO. Elaborated by the author

Against this heterogeneous backdrop, it is clear that experiences of a diverse nature amalgamate. In conversation with Juan Manuel Lumbreras²⁰, the gallery owner highlights the importance of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao as an educational agent for Basque citizens. He explains that both the institution and the actions prior to it and explained above, such as the Sala Rekalde and Bilbao Arte, have served to introduce contemporary art into Basque society. It has, therefore, influenced the

20. Interview with Lumbreras, Juan Manuel. [4/02/22].

development of sensitivity to a form of art that might otherwise have been beyond the reach of those who were not professionals in this sector.

This informative and educational work is not trivial, but has meant updating the relationship that citizens have with art, the value they attach to it and the possibilities it has offered so that today's galleries can devote themselves to contemporary art in this territory. Otherwise, they would not be understood or valued by society as a whole. In line with this, Lumbreras positively values the presence of this institution in the city because it has given way to non-figurative contemporary art, which has evidently broadened the understanding of the artistic fact. However, he does not believe that the museum has had an obvious influence on the city's art market because the majority of visitors are not potential buyers of art in the city's galleries. The gallery owner says that, although it is true that some visitors do come to galleries, particularly those in Abando, the percentage is minimal.

The Bilbao art system is a sector in which the agents making it up know each other and interact. This also happens with formal cultural institutions, and with the university. However, the Guggenheim Museum remains on the periphery of the work carried out by these exhibition spaces and there is not much dialogue.

It is clear that this museum has made it easier for the presence of contemporary art to be accepted in the city as part of its idiosyncrasy. This has had some positive repercussions, such as, possibly, facilitating the existence of the galleries herein mentioned, projects that, without the presence of this institution, could have found a territory that is very desensitised to current and emerging creation. However, the large number of visitors that the museum attracts does not affect the consumption of art in the city. This happens because the average visitor is attracted by a cultural experience of easy consumption that is limited to visiting Gehry's building, and their interest in consumption of art is in, indeed, very little. So too is visiting other cultural establishments in the city, such as the Museum of Fine Arts or the galleries herein mentioned.

THE IMPACT OF GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO AS PERCEIVED BY THE BILBAO ART SECTOR

Analysing the impact that Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has had on the city's art system since its opening in 1997 by interviewing its agents is a highly complex task. The perception of this influence is mediated by a wide variety of values, most of which are subjective and driven by professional interests. Therefore, in the following lines I will present the data collected during my field research to present the landscape that emerges when asking artistic and cultural professionals from different backgrounds about the impact that this institution has on the sector. As part of my working methodology, when analysing the interviews, I identified the themes that are substantially repeated and that sketch a landscape perceived in a common way, with minor variations, but no major differences. I think it is important to study the perception that the art sector in Bilbao has of the museum because this can provide

us with plenty of information about how its actions are received in the territory. As this analysis is ongoing, it is not intended to be prescriptive, but illustrative.

Firstly, 100% of the interviewed professionals recognise the decisive role that the museum has played in the transition of Bilbao from an industrial city to a city of services and an international tourist destination. This success story is perceived as an economic and tourist agent. It is also understood that this is possibly its main function, and some interviewees think that an analysis of its work as a cultural institution may be an uninteresting undertaking. At the same time, there is a general feeling that the museum provides a high-quality programme, except for some blockbuster exhibitions, which are perceived as uninteresting, and even far-removed from contemporary art. There is a general consensus about this institution having put Bilbao on the map of contemporary art, and that this is beneficial for the sector. It is also acknowledged that without it, the city would be a depressed one, and that most of the urban improvements making Bilbao a city with quality of life are due to the renovation led by Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

However, there are a number of perceptions in which it is seen as lacking. These perceptions have to do with the museum's role as a cultural institution; that is to say, its influence beyond its role as an economic and tourist agent. There is a widespread feeling that the Guggenheim Museum does not actively participate in the city's cultural life. This is shaped in a variety of ways. As several of my informants state, there is a general feeling that it is located in Bilbao just as it could be elsewhere. That is, the nature of the Bilbao context is not perceived to have permeated this institution. Therefore, it is not perceived as a situated museum that interacts with its environment, and one that listens to it and adapts to it, but as an agent that is apart and alien to the surrounding context.

This perception is not surprising because this museum has often been classified as a franchise, which does not emerge from the cultural roots of the place, but «lands» in a territory with which it does not dialogue, by not allowing itself to be impregnated with the characteristics, interests or concerns of that context. As Anna Maria Guasch explains in her text «Global museums versus local artists. Paradoxes of identity between the global and the local»²¹, the Guggenheim Museum is a cultural model within the globalisation logic. In other words, it belongs to the global discourse of art. As we know, one of the inherent risks of globalisation is cultural homogenisation, the process by which the characteristic aspects of a culture run the risk of becoming blurred by the influence of a global mass culture. While Guggenheim Museum Bilbao may represent this globalising attempt to generate unique discourses and promote one type of art, it is true that the field of creation in Bilbao has not bowed to the seduction of the international market, hence this perceived distance, this detachment between that institution and the local art system. As Guasch states, «...the Guggenheim did not become Basque, nor has Basque culture influenced the programme of the international Guggenheim and,

21. Guasch, Anna Maria: «Museos globales versus artistas locales. Paradojas de la identidad entre lo global y lo local» in Guasch, Anna María; Zulaika, Joseba (eds.): *Aprendiendo del Guggenheim Bilbao*. Madrid, Akal, 2007, pp. 191-212.

according to official visitor figures, there has been an increasing disconnection between the museum and the place»²².

This lack of a link with the local art system is pointed out by most of the establishments, collectives and institutions interviewed. In the first place, there are regrets that it has not been possible to reach an agreement that would make it easier and cheaper for members of the sector to visit the museum, who wish to use it as a space for learning and inspiration, but are not willing to pay the regular entrance fee every time they feel like enjoying a temporary exhibition. We have to take into account that the entrance fee is 18 euros, which is a high price for repeated visits. Secondly, it is perceived to have few initiatives that promote Basque creation. Finally, a general complaint is made about lack of support for production and exhibitions, as well as the museum's lack of research into local art.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM THE FRANCHISE MUSEUM TO THE MUSEUM OF BONDS

Museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them. Museums, in common with all other social institutions, serve many masters, and must play many tunes accordingly. Perhaps success can be defined by the ability to balance all the tunes that must be played and still make a sound worth listening to.

Eileen Hooper Greenhill²³

A museum is a complex institution that must pay attention to many fronts. Attention to the role of the museum in relation to the collection and its exhibitions, attention to diverse audiences, attention to what is happening in the context, attention to what is happening in international museum conversations. That is hard work. Of course, we have to bear in mind that attending to all these functions, and all these audiences, entails the practice of listening and understanding the complex multifunctionality that a museum can have today. As always, none of this is imperative because it is evident that not all cultural institutions have to cover the same items. Therein lies the charm of museology: each museum project can be unique.

However, if we pay attention to the nature of conversations in today's museum environment, the generation of bonds and attention to the local creative scene and audiences forms part of the agenda. These values are being consolidated as fundamental in newly created art centres. In this context of multifaceted museums, which, as Eileen Hooper Greenhill explains in her text *Museums and the Shaping of*

22. Guasch, Anna Maria: «Museos globales versus artistas locales. Paradojas de la identidad entre lo global y lo local» in Guasch, Anna Maria; Zulaika, Joseba (eds.): *Aprendiendo del Guggenheim Bilbao*. Madrid, Akal, 2007, pp. 197.

23. Hooper Greenhill, Eileen: *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. Londres, Routledge, 1992, p.1.

Knowledge, is a quality inherent to museums since their origins, it is interesting to analyse the role of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

In view of the presented data and the large literature body that precedes this article, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is clearly a cultural agent that has been responsible for successfully promoting the revitalisation of the city of Bilbao. As we know, it has been able to function as an engine for the region's economy and has facilitated Bilbao's resurgence from a severe economic and social crisis. It is undeniable its great success in it promotes quality contemporary art and makes art accessible to Bilbao and the Basque Country.

However, an analysis of its work as a cultural agent from the art and culture perspective reveals some shortcomings. Firstly, it programmes and acquires works by local artists in a discreet manner. Secondly, its impact on the territory, particularly on generating an atmosphere that leads to the purchase of art, is limited. Finally, from the local art system, it is perceived as a distant agent that is not very accessible for the collaboration and promotion of local art.

Twenty-five years after its opening, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao continues to be an urban and economic success. However, it is worth wondering whether it might not be more interesting to move from being a franchise institution to one that generates bonds with the locals, and which might also be of interest to its international visitors. At the end of the day, the understanding of the function of a museum today is to bring positions more closely together, to open doors to the relational and to generate debate. One only needs to look at the current initiatives and research processes of the Guggenheim Museum in New York to confirm this tendency.

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