

Interacting, Respecting, Knowing and Loving Each Other Forces of Cohesion and Division in 1970s Basque Art.



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URTE AÑOS

BILBOKO ARTE
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ARTES DE BILBAO

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The March on Pamplona

In his speech on the occasion of Gaur's presentation at Galería Barandiarán in San Sebastián, Jorge Oteiza outlined a meticulous action plan for the Basque School Groups (Grupos de la Escuela Vasca or GEVs). After underscoring the pivotal role of the gallery in the development of a composite art and praising the involvement of an industrialist like Dionisio Barandiarán in a simultaneously "material and spiritual enterprise", he moved on to organisational matters: "*The second question* has to do with the methods of uniting all artists. *And the third question* [is] the purpose of our provincial groups within the BASQUE SCHOOL in which we are regionally reborn. What we are now beginning is a march on Pamplona for all Basque artists. It is plain to see that each of our four provincial capitals aspire to regional capital status. We already see San Sebastián, for instance, as the tourism capital of our region. Bilbao as the social, industrial and perhaps political capital. For now we do not have a clear vision of Vitoria, with its silent, rather heraldic daydreams. But Pamplona is the clearly the capital poised to become the principal regional hub of universities and humanisms."¹

The now extensive historiographical literature on the invention, organisation, development and conflicts of the GEVs tends to highlight their admirable "design-in-progress": the groups did not unite or appear simultaneously, but created a powerful wave that grew as it spread across the Basque Country in a counter-clockwise circle: the well-known "action plan" whose milestones were Gaur (Gipuzkoa), Emen (Bizkaia), Orain (Álava) and Danok (Navarre). The most conscious and dynamic forces in each province were to unite in the powerful undertow of that wave. Gaur Emen Orain Danok [Today Here Now All] was an extremely succinct encapsulation of a programme that called for collaboration among (All) artists, marked by a temporal urgency (Today, Now) and nationwide ambitions (All). Gaur, the first group to be established and by far the most structured, would make its public debut in San Sebastián with an exhibition and a manifesto.² Emen would then follow suit in Bilbao, but augmented by Gaur's work. Gaur and Emen were to go to Vitoria together and

1 Jorge Oteiza. *Presentation of the Gaur group*, Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Archivo, reg. nos. 8728a and 8728b.

2 For the manifestos of the Gaur, Emen and Orain groups, and documentation on the Basque School movement, see Francisco Javier San Martín (ed.). *Euskal artea eta artistak 60ko hamarkadan = Arte y artistas vascos en los años 60*. [Exh. cat.]. Donostia-San Sebastián : Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia, Koldo Mitxelena Kulturuneko, July/September 1995, pp. 335–559, especially the timeline and documentary appendices.

join Orain, and all three would finally converge with Danok in Pamplona. Accumulation was based on the principle of hospitality, which in turn would exponentially increase the collective capital that the artists managed to accumulate. However, as it turned out, in Vitoria that hospitality became hostility: the doors were slammed shut, and Basque artists proved incapable of welcoming others into their home.

It was a brilliant, coherent strategy, but it did not take into account the specific conditions in which art was being made in the Basque Country. The idea was to generate an unstoppable wave, driven by those forces most conscious of the need for a new cycle of association among artists capable of facing the challenges of the present. But the truth is that those forces, within each group and as a whole, were quite diverse, often divergent and sometimes even conflicting. And the conflicts, present from the moment the groups were created, intensified as the wave reached other capitals—Bilbao and Vitoria—and ultimately brought about their failure as a collective enterprise, proving that the dynamics of natural phenomena are very different from those of human undertakings.

The system for creating the groups, devised at Irun by Oteiza and Ibarrola in the presence of Basterretxea, and especially their convergence in Navarre, was a splendid experiment in aesthetic engineering. Since the days of the early avant-garde movements, artists' groups had been linked to one city, where they launched their manifesto and exhibitions; but the GEVs were a *regional* experiment that involved a territory and the idea of shared long-distance experience. It was a novel project for an entire region.³ Its designers may have anticipated that any flaws in the original plan would eventually come to light and force them to take additional steps to modify the design as they went, but two unforeseen problems emerged: the initial distances were greater than the designers would admit; and events unfolded so swiftly in 1966–1967 that this theoretical redesign proved impossible and unity was shattered. Danok lost the right to exist.

In any event, the most interesting part of Oteiza's opening statement at the presentation of Gaur was the final emphasis on Pamplona, not only as a point of convergence with the other three groups, completing the associative circle, but also as the seed of a Basque university in Pamplona. Careful examination of the documents Oteiza prepared between early 1966 and April 1967 reveals that the joint exhibition of the four groups was far less significant than the consolidation of Pamplona as the centralised hub or capital of an "educational project". In other words, Basque artists converging at Pamplona would sanction its importance as a centre for studying and spreading Basque creativity, as a "laboratory for our education". Oteiza saw Pamplona as the cornerstone and founding purpose of his dream of a Basque university for a cultural renaissance.⁴ In collusion with Miguel Urmenea—city councillor, member of the provincial council and director of the municipal savings bank in Pamplona—and other local and national agents, he gradually mapped out a series of educational projects: a new school of arts and crafts, a cultural centre and an aesthetic research institute, his top priority as a "political awareness-raising school". Period documents confirm that this was Oteiza's ultimate goal, beyond the problematic creation of Danok and its convergence with the other groups. In the end, neither the most basic objective—a joint exhibition of all the groups—nor the most ambitious—the creation of a hub of learning—were achieved. At a Gaur meeting in Barandiarán, Oteiza laid out the priorities, but he was also quite open about his experience of failure: "Our primary objective is not the art-producing gallery. I'm an expert—hear me now—an expert on increasing failures. Our objective is Pamplona, our university; the only province in a position to serve us; the laboratory for our education."

3 Many documents from that period (by Amable, Oteiza, Sistiaga, etc.) reflect the idea that, after a meeting ended, the discussion would continue "in the car", a space that prolonged the debate and simultaneously underscored the geographical distance between participants, moving away from each other in different vehicles, all headed for their own cities. A significant portion of their arguments and agreements took place in transit, on roads across the country, each with his/her provincial partners, and the negotiating table inevitably shattered into tiny centripetal pieces.

4 The March on Pamplona is thoroughly analysed in Javier Balda. "Una modernidad incompleta: el proyecto frustrado de Danok. 1966-1967", in *Danok taldea, 1966-1967: modernitate osatugabea = Grupo Danok, 1966-1967: una modernidad incompleta*. [Exh. cat.]. Pamplona: Museo de Navarra, 2018, pp. 19–48.

It is something of a paradox that Danok, an artists' group planned for Pamplona but never actually constituted, still looms large in the collective imaginary. It was even the subject of a recent exhibition at the Museo de Pamplona—quite a feat for a stillborn project.⁵ “Anything that does not exist and has a name ends up existing,” Silvina Ocampo wrote in *Ejércitos de la oscuridad*.⁶ Danok never saw the light of day, for various reasons, but because it was named it has ended up acquiring substance: a christened entity is always something that *exists*. Yet there is no contradiction here. Oteiza himself seems to have answered Silvina Ocampo years earlier; in *Quousque tandem...!* he wrote, “Our historians usually deal with things that have happened to us, overlooking the part that didn't happen, which is the most vibrant, vital and therefore truest history: a Basque style that is the secret of our inner life.”⁷ For Oteiza, the history of ghosts, of entities in limbo, of aborted projects was also history. He knew that this collective impulse should be judged not merely for what it accomplished, but also for the possibilities it offered, regardless of whether they became reality. That community of Basque artists never materialised, and yet here I am, fifty years later, attempting to write its unconsummated history.

Looking back at Oteiza's tireless efforts on behalf of the GEVs, when he was no longer an active artist, it is clear that he wanted the self-organisation of artists to be intimately bound up with the creation of hubs of thought, pedagogy and experimentation where Oteiza himself could be an agent—something far more ambitious than mere exhibitions, which he, by then a sculptor without sculpture, almost always had powerful reasons to avoid. He did not want to go to Mexico in 1970, Pamplona in 1972 or Venice in 1976 as a sculptor, but he made the situation tenser, insisting on a project that would transcend mere exhibition and develop into a more ambitious cultural enterprise. In his particular hierarchy, artists ranked below students and centres of learning where children and youth might revive the shattered, misrepresented tradition of the “Basque spirit”. This was not an impulsive or ephemeral idea—quite the opposite. Long before his conclusive project—ever since his return to Spain, in fact—Oteiza had been developing the theoretical, programmatic and organisational aspects of a wide range of initiatives in aesthetic education, which he considered essential foundations for a Basque cultural renaissance. The plan to create a Basque university in Pamplona was merely the specific formulation in 1966–1967 of his idea for the Institute of Comparative Aesthetic Research, a project which, in different forms and locations, kept him occupied practically his entire life.⁸

The GEV initiative, as we now know, crashed and burned. A stable union of Basque artists in different territories was never achieved, and even specific attempts at united action foundered; consequently, by 1968 the rift between the different sectors of the Basque art community, on both the political and personal levels, was even wider than a few years earlier. Yet, like all unsuccessful group projects, it undoubtedly served to clarify positions: the actors were not more united, but at least they got to know each other better in that conflictive interaction.

5 Ibid.

6 Silvina Ocampo. *Ejércitos de la oscuridad*. Buenos Aires : Editorial Sudamericana, 2008.

7 Jorge Oteiza. *Quousque tandem...! : ensayo de interpretación estética del alma vasca*. Amador Vega (ed.). Alzuza (Navarre) : Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, 2007, p. 101.

8 See Miren Vadillo ; Leire Makazaga. *Los proyectos educativos de Jorge Oteiza : el Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*. Pamplona : Nafarroako Unibertsitate Publikoa, Jorge Oteiza Katedra, 2007.

1968

The events of May 1968 in France had little direct impact on the Basque Country. The long struggle against Franco's dictatorial regime maintained dynamics among both workers and students that were relatively specific to the Basque context, focused on fighting for democratic liberties and the construction of a national identity. But 1968 was the year that ETA, an organisation founded one decade earlier and ideologically close to *Third-World oppositionism* in those years, committed its first assassinations and suffered its first losses. On its organisational chart of resistance in the late 1960s, ETA V had an active cultural front that aimed to achieve a renaissance of Basque culture based on its national political singularity.

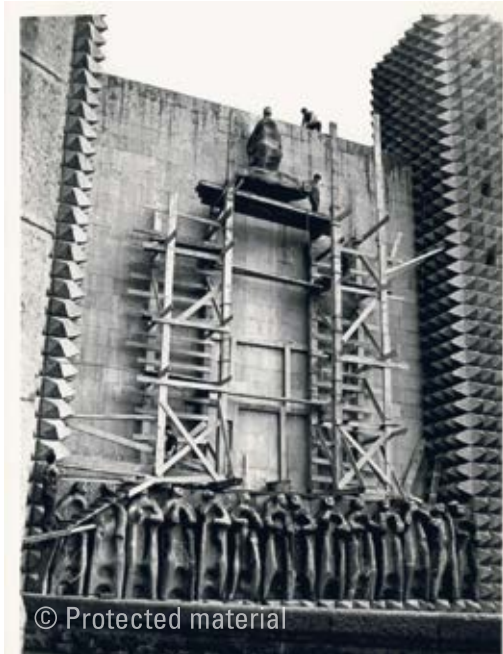
Basque artists, with a few irrelevant exceptions, were more or less committed to the anti-Francoist movement. In 1968, Oteiza and Ibarrola embodied two positions which, extrapolated to the political struggle, were similar to those that existed inside ETA at the time: the "essentialist" position, focused on the cultural and linguistic struggle and rooted in a predominantly nationalist ideology; and the "labourist" position which, in general terms, called for an alliance with the working class as the most relevant revolutionary subject in Basque society. Jorge Oteiza never joined a political party, although around 1968 he was sympathetic to the ideas of ETA's cultural front, whereas Agustín Ibarrola and his inner circle—María Dapena and Dionisio Blanco, among others—belonged to the Communist Party of Spain, which became the Communist Party of the Basque Country in 1977. In November 1968, when Oteiza finally managed to resume work on the Sanctuary of Arantzazu, he was still shaken by the death of Txabi Etxebarrieta and decided to place the *Pietà* figure, with the dead son lying at his mother's feet, at the top of the wall, crowning the frieze of the Apostles.⁹ Those were cruel times: Ibarrola was behind bars in Basauri, arrested for participating in rallies related to the historic *Huelga de Bandas* labour strike in Basauri, which kept the dictatorship on the ropes for six months and ended with the declaration of a state of emergency and the arrest and banishment of a significant part of the factory workforce.¹⁰

1968: a year of clear-cut significance in Western political memory, but less easily defined in the context of art in the Basque Country. The debates were different, but Pedro Osés was in Paris in May, and on returning to Pamplona he painted a series with his friend Aquerreta as a form of protest against the old city that was suffocating them. In any case, 1968 was a halfway point—a season of waiting and ripening—between 1966 and 1972: in other words, midway between the failed GEV project and the 1972 Pamplona Encounters which, as we will see, was another harsh salutary lesson in the attempts to unify Basque artists.

In Pamplona, before the whirlwind of the Encounters hit the city, Pedro Osés and Juan José Aquerreta, two young artists recently graduated from the School of Arts and Crafts, teamed up to paint a series about the Paris riots. The works, marked by an unabashedly photojournalistic realism, were unveiled in 1970 at the Sala de Cultura de la Caja de Ahorros de Navarra. The show's official title, *Pinturas de Pedro Osés & Aquerreta* [Paintings by Pedro Osés & Aquerreta] was deliberately neutral, but apparently everyone referred to it as "Paris May '68". The venue, a gallery opened by a local savings bank just a few months previously and

9 Apparently, shortly before his death Txabi Etxebarrieta was preparing a manifesto for Basque artists and intellectuals and had wanted to ask Oteiza's opinion on certain aspects of his text. See Francisco Javier San Martín (ed.). *Euskal artea eta artistak 60ko hamarkadan = Arte y artistas vascos en los años 60*. [Exh. cat.]. Donostia-San Sebastián : Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia, Koldo Mitxelena Kulturuneko, 1995, p. 467. On the changes in the sculpture programme at Arantzazu, see Javier González de Durana. *Arquitectura y escultura en la Basílica de Aránzazu : anteproyecto, proyecto y construcción, 1950-55 : los cambios = Arkitektura eta eskultura Arantzazuko Basilikan : aurreproiektua, proiektua eta eraikuntza, 1950-55 : aldaketak*. Vitoria-Gasteiz : Artium, Arte Garaikideko Euskal Zentro-Museoa, 2006.

10 See Pedro Ibarra Güell. *El movimiento obrero en Vizcaya, 1967-1977 : ideología, organización y conflictividad*. Bilbao : Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 1987, p. 67.



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Installation of the sculpture entitled *Andra Mari* by Jorge Oteiza in the basilica of Arantzazu, October 21, 1969
Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Archivo



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Agustín Ibarrola
Magistratura de trabajo contra los obreros de Bandas
(Labour Magistracy Against the Workers from
Laminación de Bandas), 1966
Private collection



Pedro Osés and Juan José Aquerreta
Serie *Mayo del 68* (May of '68 Series)
Oil and crayon on particle board
Fundación Caja Navarra

run by Xabier Morrás from 1971 to 1986, was destined to play a decisive role on the Pamplona art scene in coming years. Back in 1968, Morrás himself had painted urban scenes in a style carefully positioned halfway between Pop art and realism.

Osés and Aquerreta formed a temporary partnership to produce that urgent project, a record of events that happened many miles away but could easily be extrapolated to their own country's domestic situation. But there was another side to their decision: on that project, painting collectively was as important as the actual theme of the paintings, echoing the collaboration of Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati, the Paris-based Cooperative Les Malassis and, in Spain, Equipo Crónica and Equipo Realidad. Working as a group was a direct response to the Romantic notion of the solitary creator; but after that youthful experience, Osés and Aquerreta never did so again. Yet perhaps that act of co-working was their conscious or unconscious reaction to the failure of Danok and the strategy of the GEVs: plenty of meetings, statements, manifestos, positions ... but no real collaboration between artists. Gaur, Emen and Orain had been created to invigorate Basque art and visualise artists as cultural agents, but they were unable to iron out their differences and overcome the confrontations and misunderstandings of their own devising. So perhaps adopting a new approach and working together was worth a try.

It is also important to recall that, since the failure of the Danok initiative, Navarran artists had been absent from or under-represented in other collective projects. Not a single artist from Navarre was included in *Pintura y escultura vasca contemporáneas*, curated by José Luis Merino, arranged by the Basque Centre of Mexico and held at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes in October–November 1970, a highly restrictive exhibition that aspired to be an international showcase of cutting-edge Basque art. Nor were Navarran artists represented at the *Visual Arts Show* in Barakaldo, held in July 1971.¹¹ But their absence was even more conspicuous at the *Exposición de arte vasco*, held in Barakaldo from December 1971 to February 1972, where the trade union-inspired strategy of “indiscriminacy” formerly advocated by Emen was finally implemented and all sorts of artists were invited to participate, from world-renowned figures like Oteiza to traditional or “folk” painters, artisans and even amateurs. But Navarran artists had been left out again.¹² And even at the Pamplona Encounters, where their participation should have been a given, considering that Navarre hosted and sponsored the event, their presence in the *Muestra de arte vasco actual*, curated by Santiago Amón, was so embarrassingly limited that more Navarran artists had to be added on the morning of the show's opening.¹³

Returning to 1970, the native/foreign dichotomy that had fuelled some of the earlier debates began to seep into other areas. Up to that point, Art Informel and its variants of gestural abstraction had largely comprised the “foreign” factor—the “avant-garde” and “cosmopolitan”. However, now the winds from abroad, heated by the international political situation and the dynamics of art, blew across the border in the form of a chronicle of reality, figurative painting, but one far removed from the ideas of the defunct Estampa Popular group that had been a pillar of Emen in Bizkaia. Thus, the old confrontation between advocates of individual

11 The Pamplona-born artist Rafael Bartolozzi was included, but undoubtedly only because of his involvement with the Catalan art scene.

12 The situation was reversed two years later at the *2nd Visual Arts Show* in Barakaldo (May–June 1973) where, after a general assembly, a committee was set up to select the Basque artists who would participate in the show, and Xabier Morrás was appointed to serve on it. (The committee, which imitated the structure of the GEVs, consisted of Basterretxea, Ibarrola, Ortiz de Elgea and Morrás.) The selected artists included Osés and Aquerreta, as well as Joaquín Resano. Isabel Baquedano was invited but did not participate. See *II Muestra de Artes Plásticas*. [Exh. cat.]. Barakaldo : Sala Municipal de Exposiciones de la Casa Consistorial, 1973.

13 See Francisco Javier San Martín. “Pamplona 72, fase final de un desencuentro”, in *Encuentros de Pamplona 1972 : fin de fiesta del arte experimental*. [Exh. cat.]. Madrid : Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2009, pp. 130-139.

expression and champions of realism was resolved by taking a third route that no one had foreseen a few years earlier.

The visibility of this new direction in Navarran art was what inspired José María Moreno Galván to propose the “Pamplona School” label. In conversations with young Navarran painters, the critic from Madrid realised that these artists rejected “academic painting”: not that of hoary old academicism, but that of the “institutionalised avant-garde” in the Basque context, which they countered with, in their words, “a degree of realism in expression and a constantly critical attitude”.¹⁴ The “institutionalised avant-garde” could only mean the Gaur-Orain axis. The promoter mentioned Xabier Morrás, “who seems to be their most visible ideologue”, as well as Pedro Osés, Juan José Aquerreta and Pedro Salaberri, and noted the ages of these future assets: between 24 and 27 years old. But he did not mention Isabel Baquedano, who had taught some of them at the School of Arts and Crafts and provided much of the inspiration for legitimising a modern form of figurative painting.

Today we know that the Pamplona School initiative never took off, and even the artists included in that school did not feel particularly involved in it, but this centralist offensive is interesting for two reasons. The first is the choice of the term “school”, already obsolete by the 1970s but revived by Moreno Galván, perhaps in an attempt to compare it with the failed endeavour of the Basque School. It seems clear that this was a belated attempt, albeit with a contrasting idea, to fill the Navarran gap in the strategy of the GEVs: what the Basque artists’ initiative failed to achieve with their “march on Pamplona” could be accomplished “from Madrid”, as they used to say.¹⁵ The second is a substantial difference that reveals the inconsistency of this supplanting operation: Moreno Galván selected his artists—led by Isabel Baquedano and Xabier Morrás—based on stylistic parameters, somewhere between Pop and a critical brand of figuration (or at least one with urban sensibility), whereas the concept of “school” that Oteiza and Ibarrola proposed had nothing to do with style. Indeed, they had reinstated the old concept of a school as an assembly of minds, claims and demands regardless of stylistic affinities, as a strategy of collectivity rather than a choice between specific options. As Ana Olaizola wrote, “Beyond the use of this term through force of habit, its choice in the case of the Basque School reflects an express will to designate not a closed group or clearly defined artistic language, but an activity that aims to create a new environment and a new state of mind.”¹⁶

At any rate, the artists involved in that Pamplona School, which never truly existed, as such did have some things in common apart from their age, place of origin and ambitions; they shared a certain aesthetic orientation, as well as a strong determination to fight for their art in a particularly hostile setting—and a position in the international community. In the mid-1960s, advocates of abstraction could still claim a degree of avant-garde blood purity, but by the beginning of the 1970s it was obvious that new forms of figuration—whether critical, Pop, expressionist or surrealist—had earned the right to be considered fully contemporary alternatives. This new context, to which artists in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia were already responding, undoubtedly helped to consolidate these Navarran artists and others who were beginning to surface elsewhere. When an up-and-coming Santos Iñurrieta, raised in the wake of the Orain artists, exhibited at

14 See José María Moreno Galván. “La Escuela de Pamplona”, in *Triunfo*, Madrid, no. 409 (4 April 1970), pp. 45–46. The critic, a native of Madrid, first proposed this term in an influential Madrid-based journal. Moreno Galván had travelled to Pamplona the month before, where he visited several artists’ studios and held conversations with some of them.

15 See Ignacio Aranaz. “Pamplona 1970”, in *Escuela de Pamplona*. [Exh. cat., Planetario de Pamplona]. Pamplona : Caja de Ahorros de Navarra, 1995.

16 Ana Olaizola. “Arte y artistas vascos en los años 60 : el proyecto de la Escuela Vasca”, in *Euskal artea eta artistak 60ko hamarkadan = Arte y artistas vascos en los años 60*. [Exh. cat.]. Donostia-San Sebastián : Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia, Koldo Mitxelena Kulturuneke, 1995, p. 125.

Galería Mikeldi in Bilbao in 1972, Javier Serrano hailed his appearance as a paradigm shift: "I think we must climb out of our metaphysical hole and start looking for signs on the surface, at ground level."¹⁷

Gipuzkoa, Later

The dynamics in Gipuzkoa were similar but more varied than in Pamplona: artists like Carlos Sanz, Vicente Ameztoy, José Llanos, Rosa Valverde and Ramón Zuriarrain, who had not joined Gaur for different reasons, entered into a lively generational group dynamic. They did not make programmatic statements, but their works generally had much more in common than those of the previous generation. Instead of holding formal meetings with agendas and allotted speaking times, they gathered regularly in bars and studios to talk about whatever they were working on at the time. Their everyday, intellectual and emotional interactions were more intense and real than among the artists of the previous generation. We might say that the group initiative of the GEVs—a didactic, politico-cultural, hierarchic structure that continued the tradition of avant-garde collectivism¹⁸—gave way to another type of group based on friendship and elective affinities and, most importantly, devoid of any activist connotations other than the defence of their own artistic principles. To put it another way, although they were never an official group and, in Navarre, even rejected that definition imposed by an external agent, in practice these artists operated as clusters of complicity, dialogue and collaboration. Their association was something like a *weak* bond, to use the chemical terminology Oteiza was so fond of, as opposed to the strong bond the GEVs had aspired to form.

With no particular programmatic course charted—though it would be more accurate to say that they refused to chart any course at all—these artists began to wander through the realms of subjectivity, of experience, of the moment, and with every step they moved farther away from the idea of constructing a patriotic or "national" art. As the 1970s wore on, many of Gipuzkoa's artists left the city of San Sebastián for country houses in nearby towns (Hernani, Oiartzun, Goiatz, Altzuza, etc.), motivated less by the Oteizan spirit of "regeneration", which claimed that the path to cultural salvation lay in exploring one's roots, than by a simple desire to escape from an oppressive atmosphere ... and to seek refuge in the detachment of a subjectivity lived as a discovery of the personal. The repercussions of the French May 1968 uprisings did penetrate here, albeit belatedly. All these circumstances gave rise to new themes, new ideas and different ways of expressing them. The Statue of Basque Autonomy or Statute of Gernika, ratified in 1977, was perhaps a fitting socio-political backdrop for this change of perspective among artists.¹⁹ With the dictator's regime gone and the harshest episodes of repression behind them, some artists dared to wax ironic on certain vernacular clichés. The "narrative reaction" to abstraction and "private interpretations" of context defined these atomised poetics, according to Daniel Castillejo.²⁰ The unbreathable spaces of Carlos Sanz, the intensely domestic privacy of Marta Cárdenas, the perverse ingenuity of Rosa Valverde, the stunning experience of the lands-

17 Santos Iñurrieta. [Exh. brochure]. Bilbao : Galería Mikeldi, 1973.

18 René Passeron (dir.). *La Création collective*. Paris : Clancier-Guénaud, 1981

19 In his foreword to the catalogue of the exhibition *Artistas vascos entre el realismo y la figuración. 1970-1982*, curated by Maya Aguiriano and presented at the Museo Municipal de Madrid in 1982, city mayor Enrique Tierno Galván hailed the show as an expression of the cultural diversity of the new "state of autonomous regions" and the drive which, moving past the "traditional and incidental", had motivated Basque art to strike a balance between local and global. For a more detailed discussion of this important exhibition, see San Martín, Francisco Javier, "Diez años de exposiciones. 1980-1990", in *Euskal margolariak Aurrezki Kutxen bildumetan / Pintores vascos en las colecciones de las Cajas de Ahorros : últimas tendencias*. Bilbao : Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa ; Donostia-San Sebastián : Gipuzkoa Donostia Kutxa ; Vitoria-Gasteiz : Vital Kutxa, 1996, pp. 11–48.

20 See Daniel Castillejo. "De los espacios intermedios (Entre la vanguardia y la crisis)", in *En los setenta*. Donostia-San Sebastián : Okendo Kultur Etxea, 1995.

cape and its peoples, ironic if not downright sarcastic, in Vicente Ameztoy, the playful surrealist poetics of Ramón Zuriarrain and the dark comedy of Andrés Nagel. If the painters' decision to set out in a brand-new direction was courageous, then Nagel's was doubly so: he dared to take on sculpture, a field where the looming shadows of the previous generation and the clichés of a specifically Basque language were stiflingly oppressive. A space of subjectivity or introspection was gradually carved out: Juan Luis Goenaga, isolated in Alkiza, practised a telluric style of painting based on a radical attitude in nature. These artists defined a period of *instability* in Gipuzkoa's creative community, within the broader instability of the political situation at the time. We should also recall that, in the mid and late 1970s, consolidated abstract artists like Amable and Zumeta took a turn towards critical, humorous or grotesque figuration.

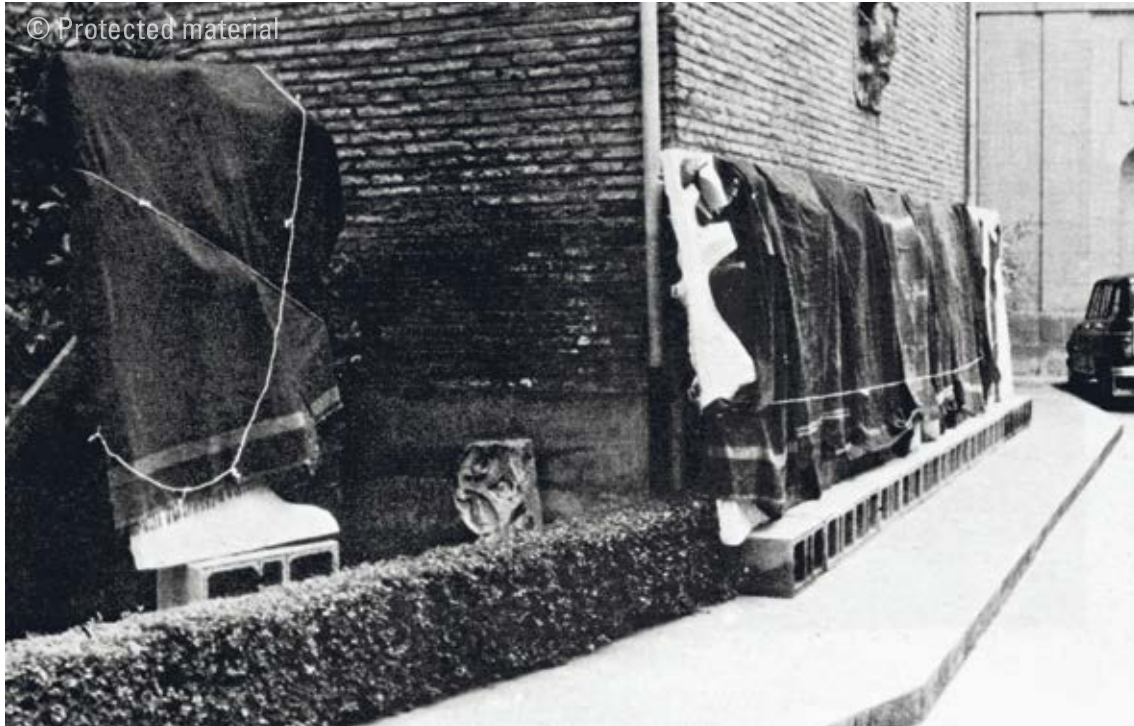
Vicente Ameztoy may be the artist who best exemplified this paradigm shift from collective to individual, from the most expansively political and public to the most restricted sphere of artistic activity and personal paths. In 1967, just one year after the presentation of the Gaur group, Ameztoy had already had his first one-man show at Galería Barandiarán in Donostia, the strategic distribution centre of Oteiza's ideas about composite art. Despite this close connection between Barandiarán and the Gaur artists, Vicente Ameztoy did not toe the party line, setting aside the essentialist abstraction favoured by its members and instead embarking on a figurative revival that would breathe life into new narratives. In the 1970s, he was able to spearhead—thanks to his age, experience and strong commitment—that figurative reaction against, or at least oblivious to, the tendencies of older artists.

1972 Encounters

While these subtle generational changes were brewing in response to different aesthetic orientations, but also to the failure of the collective initiative of the GEVs, an unexpected phenomenon appeared out of nowhere: the Pamplona Encounters. Despite being a private initiative hatched outside the Basque Country, this event managed to dramatically upset the fragile coexistence of Basque artists. Confronted with an international context, it was a unique opportunity for Basque art to shine. Yet perhaps that confrontation with the international avant-garde was one of the factors that radicalised the different positions. Instead of being welcomed as a chance to show a united front based on a minimal common ground, the Pamplona gathering fanned the flames of discord: advocates of politically engaged art and assembly-ist organisation accused the Encounters of being an "elitist avant-garde directive" and an attempt to whitewash the oppressive face of Francoism; Oteiza, at the centre of a more experimental camp focused on the expression of Basque nationality, made his participation conditional on demands that the organisers were hardly prepared to meet. In truth, Oteiza saw the Encounters not as an opportunity for intervention but as a chance to reactivate the collective dynamics of the Basque School.

Sponsored by the Huarte family, the encounters were held in Pamplona from 26 June to 3 July and coordinated by the Alea group, which managed to assemble a varied sampling of international and Spanish avant-garde work in fields such as music, film, the visual arts, performance, poetry, dance, etc. As a concession to the host city, a showcase of contemporary Basque art was organised, aesthetically and even physically distant from the experimental tendencies that constituted the bulk of the Encounters. The exhibition was curated by Santiago Amón and featured twenty artists from all four Basque territories, though Oteiza was predictably and noticeably absent.

The Encounters, and Amón's show in particular, were rejected by the Assembly of Basque Artists gathered in Bilbao. In a statement released on 17 April, the assembly condemned its elitism, among other aspects,



Frieze by Agustín Ibarrola covered with blankets as a protest against the preventative censure of the painting by Dionisio Blanco in the 1972 Pamplona Encounters

denounced it as a liberal, progressive facade for the outside world that concealed the true reality of the country, and insisted that participants in the exhibition should have been democratically elected by regional artists' assemblies.²¹ Meanwhile, the Deba Art School, backed by Oteiza at the time, made its participation in the Encounters contingent on a whole slew of guarantees and demands, and essentially saw the event as a platform for relaunching the artists' union, taking "control of our actions" and staging a revival of the Basque School. Having internalised his experience with the GEVs, Oteiza adopted a strategy of saturation, demanding much more than what was offered, unilaterally breaking any agreements reached, and straining the situation to intolerable limits for the other party, driven, perhaps unconsciously, by his instinct for failure. From his platform at the Deba School, he laid out his "non-negotiable terms" for participating in the Encounters: a new venue in Pamplona for Navarran artists, copies of all material produced at the Encounters, funding for the Navarran artists' office and the Deba School, and the assurance of participation in future editions.²² These requests were undoubtedly legitimate and even realistic, but by presenting them as basic concessions that had to be made before even beginning to negotiate other terms, Oteiza made it very difficult for the organisers to accept. When they refused—or, more accurately, failed to act—he brought out the heavy artillery, lambasting the Encounters as an "artistic running of the bulls" and "stagnant folklore

21 "Resolución adoptada en la Asamblea de Artistas Vascos (el 17 de abril de 1972)", in M.^a José Arribas. *40 años de arte vasco, 1937-1977: historia y documentos*. San Sebastián: Erein, 1979, pp. 187-192.

22 In Appendix 2 to the resolution adopted by the Assembly of Basque Artists on 17 April 1972, Oteiza demanded: "1. The opening of a venue for information and cultural affairs of Basque artists in Pamplona, a centre to be organised and run by Navarran artists in collaboration with Basque artists from other provinces. 2. Two copies, one for this centre and another for the Deba Art School, of all audiovisual material used at these Pamplona encounters. 3. Funding for both centres. 4. Assurance of active participation in the organisation of all future Pamplona encounters." See M.^a José Arribas. *40 años de arte vasco, 1937-1977: historia y documentos*. San Sebastián: Erein, 1979, p. 194.



Empty pedestal where a piece by Eduardo Chillida was going to be installed in the Contemporary Basque Art Show held at the 1972 Pamplona Encounters

of contemporary art” and ultimately throwing in the towel: “Now I just need to be left alone. I have always failed with the rest and I would continue to fail.”²³ Even so, the assembly process and the debates that took place in the months leading up to the Encounters generated an abundance of documents and statements which have yet to be studied in detail.

Despite the calls for transparency, in the end the Encounters were anything but transparent. Programme changes and cancellations were constant. The national and local press, which followed the event with keen interest, reported the cases of censorship, cancellations, incidents and absences that transpired in the turbulent course of the Encounters. The organisers who made the decisions were a ubiquitous yet practically invisible presence; in general, they were torn between their intention to showcase the latest experimental art and their terror that it might overflow and spread beyond the established boundaries. Though originally announced as a biennial event, the Encounters were never repeated.²⁴ In the days leading up to the inauguration, Eduardo Chillida withdrew his work before it could be unloaded from the lorry, claiming that it would be displayed alongside the work of another artist who had plagiarised his own, and that this might easily confuse spectators. The day after the opening, a painting by Dionisio Blanco about the Burgos Trial²⁵ was censored by organisers as a preventive measure, fearing the foreseeable reaction of government authorities.

23 Typewritten text by Jorge Oteiza about Santiago Amón and the Pamplona Encounters, 18 May 1972, Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Archivo, facsimile reproduced in *Encuentros de Pamplona 1972: fin de fiesta del arte experimental*. [Exh. cat.]. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2009, p. 118.

24 After the Encounters, the possibility of making them a biennial event was discussed. Alexanco and Luis de Pablo, the visible heads of Alea, began putting out feelers for a second edition. Alexanco even talked about approaching Robert Rauschenberg to do a performance in Pamplona, but in January 1973 ETA kidnapped Felipe Huarte, Félix Huarte's son, and the project was scrapped.

25 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Burgos Trial (1969) was a summary court-martial under the Francoist regime in which various ETA members were tried and sentenced to death.

At an impromptu assembly, Ibarrola and Blanco asked the other Basque artists to withdraw their works as a show of support, but the majority refused and took an ambiguous stance, causing tensions to rise dramatically. In the end, only Agustín Ibarrola, Arri, Fernando Mirantes and Blanco himself draped cloths over their works or took them down and propped them on the floor, facing the wall. The most noticeable result of the Basque art show at the Encounters was a rift between artists. The divisive forces were partisan strategies and individual inclinations, which took precedence over a collective sentiment that proved not to be very strong. Meanwhile, with police patrolling the streets of Pamplona—both uniformed and plain-clothes officers, doubly present thanks to Equipo Crónica's *ninots*²⁶—some works were covered with blankets, and all that remained of others was a large empty pedestal. When the Encounters ended, there was a general sense of having missed an opportunity to share and connect with audiences, or to lay new foundations for relaunching a project of collaboration among Basque artists, compounded by a feeling of defeat and low morale. For the rest of the decade that had just begun, no serious attempts were made to launch another collective project. Oteiza, who during that period was the principal unifying agent but also partly a divisive wedge, gave up the idea of being a mediator between artists for good: "I decided I would have no dealings with any Basque artist ever again ... Basque artists (without exception) are a genuinely pitiful bunch, thoughtless and irresponsible with regard to their colleagues, their country and art."²⁷

Basque Pavilion

Government repression intensified after the dictator's death, but the overwhelming momentum of the democratic movement proved unstoppable and gradually changed the balance of power. In May 1975, the Venice Biennale, then in the process of modernising its structures to reflect the new post-68 cultural climate, organised the Convegno Internazionale Progettuale, a conference to establish the general guidelines of its action plan for the next four years. A Spanish proposal was approved at that meeting, presented by the historian Tomàs Llorens and the artists Rafael Solbes, Manuel Valdés and Alberto Corazón, which materialised the following summer in a major exhibition at the Italian Pavilion titled *Spain: Artistic Avant-Garde and Social Reality, 1936-1976*.²⁸ The Biennale appointed an organising committee for the event that included Antoni Tàpies, Agustín Ibarrola, Antonio Saura and the historian Valeriano Bozal, which, among other things, focused on assessing the survival of the avant-garde under the dictatorship, an "inclusive project with room for all the diverse national cultures of the Spanish State".²⁹ The exhibition was a survey of the Spanish avant-garde, from the Republican Pavilion at the 1937 Exposition Internationale in Paris to the present day. But there were two significant absences: Chillida and Oteiza, who had of course been invited. The explanation offered by the Basque delegation was that the work of these two great artists could never be properly understood

26 TN: A Valencian word meaning "doll" or "puppet", most often used to designate the huge papier-mâché figures paraded during the annual Fallas celebrations.

27 "Resolución que Oteiza pone en conocimiento de los artistas vascos", Deba, 12 May 1972, Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Archivo, facsimile reproduced in *Encuentros de Pamplona 1972: fin de fiesta del arte experimental*. [Exh. cat.]. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2009, p. 117.

28 A slightly different version of the Venice exhibition was shown from December 1976 to February 1977 at Fundació Joan Miró. The catalogue was initially blocked by censors for the crime of "illegal propaganda". See Valeriano Bozal... [et al.]. *España: vanguardia artística y realidad social, 1936-1976*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976; Francisco Calvo Serraller. *España: medio siglo de arte de vanguardia, 1939-1985*. Madrid: Fundación Santillana: Ministerio de Cultura, 1985, vol. II, pp. 885-891.

29 Letter from the committee, 20 January 1976, quoted in Simón Marchán. "La Escuela Vasca en el escenario del arte español de los setenta", in *Laboratorios 70: poéticas, políticas y crisis de la modernidad en el contexto vasco de los setenta = 70eko hamarkadako laborategiak: poetikak, politikak eta modernitatearen krisia hirurogeita hamarreko hamarkadako Euskal Herrian*. [Exh. cat.]. Bilbao: Sala Rekalde Erakustaretoa, 2009, pp. 81-90.

outside the context of Basque culture. Consequently, they demanded the creation of a Basque Pavilion whose participants would be democratically selected. However, the possibility of assigning pavilions to historical nations—especially Catalonia and the Basque Country—had been expressly vetoed by the Biennale, rendering further discussion pointless. Negotiations with the Spanish side also broke down, as the Basque delegation argued that the selection represented the “Spanish left wing” (Coordinadora Democrática) and the “nationalist right wing” (Basque government in exile), but not the “socialist *abertzale*”³⁰ (KAS) option. Nonetheless, towards the end of the Biennale in October, various forms of contemporary Basque film and music were shown at different locations in Venice under the title “I Baschi alla Biennale ‘76”.

In short, Basque artists were conspicuously absent from the international showcase:³¹ they had been invited to represent Spain rather than the Basque Country, and consequently their works could not be properly appreciated in an ambiguous Spanish-Basque pavilion. A solitary *ikurriña*, the Basque flag, stood in for the artists’ works, “recalling with its presence the people who, perhaps more than any other, had suffered cruelly under the yoke of Franco’s dictatorship and yet, owing to various circumstances, found itself excluded from this great anti-Francoist festival”.³² Exactly ten years after the GEV initiative, that lonely flag in the space reserved for Basque artists signalled a final failure: the political symbol of the Basque Country was present, but not the creations of its artists. According to Morquillas, that abortive exhibition was “the official, definitive death certificate of the Basque School groups”,³³ though in fact there is one final chapter, more like an epilogue, this time featuring an industrial corporation.

Fundación Orbegozo

Fundación Orbegozo burst onto the Basque art scene with unusual energy and determination in the late 1970s. This foundation assembled a group of artists who agreed to supply artworks and participate in regular exhibitions in exchange for a monthly stipend, an unprecedented arrangement in the Basque art community. The recruited artists were Ortiz de Elgea, Juan Mieg, Santos Iñurrieta and Alberto González (Álava), José Barceló and Gallo Bidegain (Vizcaya) and Zumeta (Gipuzkoa). The recruiter and chairman of the foundation’s Art and Humanities Institute was Santiago Amón, no stranger to controversy, who finally found himself in a position of authority where he could decide, unhampered by assembly-ism, what he believed were the truly progressive parameters of Basque art. In addition to young artists and José Barceló, who did not actively participate in the Emen debates, the selected group included the most polemical wing of the previous decade’s Gipuzkoa-Álava axis. *Erakusketa*, the title chosen for the exhibitions in which the foundation showed off its assets, put “Basque art” on the back burner but used the Basque language in its formulation, a valid idea as the plan was to take these shows to the rest of Spain and abroad.

30 TN: The Basque word *abertzale* literally means “patriot” and is mainly used in reference to Basque nationalism.

31 With the exception of Agustín Ibarrola, represented in the room dedicated to “normative art” as the founder of Equipo 57 as well as in the Estampa Popular section.

32 Rosalía Torrent Esclapés. “Máscara y realidad : el arte español en la Bienal de Venecia”, in *Un siglo de arte español en el exterior : España en la Bienal de Venecia, 1895-2003*. Madrid : Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales y Científicas : Turner, 2003, p. 246.

33 José Ramón Sainz Morquillas. “Los 70 : una infancia triste, pero voluptuosa”, in *Disidentziak oro : poetikak eta arte ekinbideak Euskal trantsizio politikoan = Disidencias otras: poéticas y acciones artísticas en la transición política vasca : 1972-1982*. [Exh. cat.]. Donostia-San Sebastián : Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia, Kultura Zuzendaritza Nagusia, 2004, p. 65.



Poster showing the activities of *Euskadi en la Bienal 76* (The Basque Country in the '76 Biennale). Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (the closed fist is the same one that Jorge Oteiza used the following year as the logo of the Basque Party Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia or EIA)

The first exhibition opened in Bilbao in December 1978, where the stipended group was joined by nine other artists to offer a representative sampling of Basque art.³⁴ With these new recruits, it travelled to the other three Basque capitals and numerous towns before landing in Madrid, where it was shown at the Palacio de Velázquez from December 1979 to January 1980, and eventually winding up at Fundació Miró in Barcelona in February and March. Times had changed, but never before had Basque art had an opportunity to occupy such prestigious venues. The artists under contract were always the core of the shows, adding or subtracting other names at each venue—always chosen according to “stringent qualitative criteria”, in Amón’s words³⁵—in order to reinforce or legitimise the former. In hindsight, Amón’s selection, in addition to generating inevitable tensions between artists, reveals the critic’s inability to correctly interpret the Basque context, and his blindness to any innovative or cutting-edge proposal outside abstraction, a kind of iconoclastic Puritanism, as if the absence of figures were a prophylactic against the clichés of the ethnicism that had dominated part of Basque art many decades earlier. The fact is that the more narrative proposals in painting, whether in Gipuzkoa or Navarre, or even in the sculpture of Andrés Nagel, had nothing to do with that idealised pastoral world. Moreover, he was guided by the belief that abstraction, gestural or geometric, was the sole repository of the avant-garde spirit. In the late 1970s, when postmodern ideas were already hatching, Santiago Amón still clung to an outdated figuration/abstraction dichotomy.

34 The added artists were the sculptors Chillida, Mendiburu, Larrea and Nagel, and the painters Ruiz Balardi, Díez Alaba, Salaberri, Ramos Uranga and Pello Azketa. See *Erakusketa 78 : euskal artea = arte vasco*. [Exh. cat.]. Bilbao : Fundación Faustino Orbegozo Eizaguirre, 1978 ; Miren Vadillo. “La Fundación Faustino Orbegozo, un centro de promoción cultural a finales de los años setenta”, in *Ondare : Cuadernos de Artes Plásticas y Monumentales : revisión del Arte Vasco entre 1975-2005*, no. 26. Donostia : Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2008, p. 240.

35 Santiago Amón. “Erakusketa”, in *Erakusketa 1979*. Madrid : Dirección General del Patrimonio Artístico, Archivos y Museos del Ministerio de Cultura, 1979. Also reprinted in Francisco Calvo Serraller. *España : medio siglo de arte de vanguardia, 1939-1985*. Madrid : Fundación Santillana : Ministerio de Cultura, 1985, vol. II, pp. 1012-1014.

The shows received extensive media coverage:³⁶ in Bilbao, no doubt thanks to the megaphone of the foundation itself and Caja Laboral Popular, the bank that sponsored and hosted the exhibition at its new venue in El Arenal; and in Madrid and Barcelona, with different slants, given the novelty of assessing Basque art from the perspective of the newly-fledged system of autonomous regions. Most of the articles were merely informative or superficially complimentary, but barely a week before the Madrid opening, Ángel González García published a brief, incisive text that revealed the hidden underpinnings of the exhibition.³⁷ In it, he wondered if the “qualitative criteria” the curator claimed to apply might actually be the corporation’s own “administrative criteria”. He questioned the fact that this corporate enterprise had been endorsed by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and managed to secure a venue as prestigious as the Palacio de Velázquez, “the very place where we would have wanted to see a great exhibition of Basque art, designed and produced according to criteria other than the specific interests of a foundation”. He also cast doubt on the show’s claim to be representative of contemporary Basque art, adding that this statement had been “contested” in the Basque Country. He lamented the absence of painters like Ameztoy and Goenaga, and of course sculptors like Chillida and Oteiza. And he called some of the catalogue texts “delusional”. In conclusion, he remarked, “Well, someone ought to start thinking about the exhibition that Basque art deserves.”

Offended by the sectarianism of a selection that once again undermined any collective impulse among artists, Jorge Oteiza also lashed out against this “Institute of Amón-ities”, criticising a “selection of artists with a centralist ethos, poor but obedient, content and happy to ride on the Orbegozo bandwagon”.³⁸ When *Erakuseta '78* landed in Vitoria, in January of the following year, Javier Serrano, who also had ties to Orbegozo³⁹ and had been one of the most vocal defenders of discrimination in 1966, proved unable to escape the ghosts of the past in his commentary, a haunting presence less obvious in his allusions to Orain than in his satisfied conviction that the show’s participants had been “rigorously selected”.⁴⁰ Indeed, they had been selected with surgical precision, not by the repressive Francoist regime—a thing of the past by that time, when Spain’s democratic constitution had already been approved and the General Basque Council established—but by a company starting to build a collection of contemporary Basque art. In this case, Oteiza poignantly contrasted the critic’s divisive work with the camaraderie of artists: “The critic does not know how to teach, and all the differences, jealousies and suspicions that divide artists are the fault of critics who don’t know how to explain us to each other, who don’t teach us to interact, respect, know and love each other”.⁴¹

In March 1966, one month before Gaur made its debut at Galería Barandiarán, a very young Ortiz de Elgea exhibited at the Sala Municipal de Arte in San Sebastián. The catalogue cover bore an important notice: “The GAUR group requests the presence of Gipuzkoa’s artists”. And inside was the famous letter “from Oteiza the sculptor to Elgea the painter”, a sort of pre-GEV manifesto in which he set out his plan to orchestrate

36 See Miren Vadillo. “La Fundación Faustino Orbegozo, un centro de promoción cultural a finales de los años setenta”, in *Ondare : Cuadernos de Artes Plásticas y Monumentales : revisión del Arte Vasco entre 1975-2005*, no. 26. Donostia : Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2008, pp. 245–249.

37 Ángel González García. “Orbegozo-79”, in *El País/Artes*, Madrid, 1 December 1979.

38 Miguel Pelay Orozco. *Oteiza : su vida, su obra, su pensamiento, su palabra*. Bilbao : La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1978, p. 357.

39 The foundation planned to produce a series of monographic publications on the artists it sponsored, but in the end only one volume materialised, dedicated to Carmelo Ortiz de Elgea and written by Javier Serrano. See Javier Serrano. *Ortiz de Elgea*. Bilbao : Fundación Faustino Orbegozo Eizaguirre, 1979.

40 “This is the first time since October 1966—in other words, the first time in over twelve years—that our city has seen such a rigorously selected showcase of Basque art”, Javier Serrano. “Erakusketa 78-79 : arte vasco contemporáneo en el Museo Provincial”, in *El Correo Español-El Pueblo Vasco*, Álava, 14 January 1979, p. 23. Quoted in Miren Vadillo. “La Fundación Faustino Orbegozo, un centro de promoción cultural a finales de los años setenta”, in *Ondare : Cuadernos de Artes Plásticas y Monumentales : revisión del Arte Vasco entre 1975-2005*, no. 26. Donostia : Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2008, p. 242.

41 Miguel Pelay Orozco. *Oteiza : su vida, su obra, su pensamiento, su palabra*. Bilbao : La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, 1978, p. 357.

a convergence of all groups in Pamplona. He closed the stirring missive with these words: “*Agur*,⁴² young and powerful Elguea, I personally want to congratulate you and greet you with a warm embrace.” Many years later, when the Orbegozo manoeuvre materialised and a corporate collecting operation came along to replace the original collective initiative, Oteiza retrieved that old four-page catalogue from his library and sat down, pen in hand, to express his grievous disappointment, bitterly concluding that there was also a negative version of the Basque School, a school of “self-serving, suspicious, egotistical, ungenerous” individuals.⁴³ And here, at last, the collective identity project begun more than a decade earlier was abruptly abandoned, having lost all hope of a future.

Finally, in October 1978, the Aula de Cultura of the Caja de Ahorros Municipal de Bilbao opened in Calle Elcano, a project backed by Leopoldo Zugaza and managed by José Ramón Morquillas. This new art venue, destined to play a pivotal role in events of the following decade, kicked off its first season with an ambitious exhibition: *Euskal Artea / Arte Vasco 78*. Following the example of Vizcaya, the show was marked by an inclusive, cohesive spirit, with a nicely balanced array of different generations, trends and territories. However, the Orbegozo protégés withdrew their works to protest the exclusion of Gallo Bidegain and Barceló. And so an exhibition with plural ambitions was curtailed by singular interests in a final episode of disagreement among artists, cruelly exposing them as the weakest links in the chain.

Every attempt to create a collaborative structure of Basque artists, from 1966 to the unsuccessful Basque representation at the 1976 Venice Biennale, ended in failure. Nearly ten more years would pass before a new generation of artists took another stab at collectivism. In 1983, though neither the winds of globalised art nor the ultra-individualistic poetics of expressionism were conducive to collective action, another attempt was made—*Euskal Artisten Elkarte* or EAE, reviving a historic name from the 1920s—this time based in Bilbao. But it, too, was short-lived, toppled once again by regional tensions, among other factors. Years later, when the myth was finally linked to the crime, Juan Luis Moraza invited Basque artists to engage in a “slow and cautious task” sustained by “sanity and the cordiality of humour”.⁴⁴

42 TN: A Basque word that can mean “hello” or “goodbye”.

43 Handwritten note by Jorge Oteiza, Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Library, reg. 10023. The full text reads: “But this young man who turned out to be a fool became an Orbegozo-happy Amón-ite and latched on to the foundation until he had sucked it dry; and so this group of Basque artists merely confirms that there are good Basque Schools and also negative, bad Basque Schools, like this bunch: self-serving, suspicious, egotistical, ungenerous.”

44 Juan Luis Moraza. “Ornamento y ley”, in *Juan Luis Moraza : ornamento y ley*. [Exh. cat.]. Vitoria-Gasteiz : America Aretoa, Arabako Foru Aldundia, 1994, pp. 12–38 (transcript of the lecture delivered at the seminar *Esculpir en el tiempo*, University of the Basque Country, 1993).