

Valentín Dueñas in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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In 2015, the collection of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum was enriched by the addition of a red marble chimneypiece with bronze reliefs and motifs [fig. 1], through a deposit from the Provincial Government of Bizkaia. The sculptural decoration and very probably the overall design as well as the element that now embellishes the chimneypiece's mantelpiece (a reclining female figure cast in bronze) were made by the Basque sculptor Valentín Dueñas Zaballa around 1919 and 1930, respectively. Commissioned by the Echevarría Echevarrieta family, it was made for the dining room of the Munoa palace in Cruces, Barakaldo (Bizkaia), where it remained until its recent restoration and removal to the museum after the property was taken over by the town council of Cruces following the death in January 2014 of Amalia Echevarrieta Madaleno, the last heir living in the building.

The work's sculptor, Valentín Dueñas, remains little known today. The fact that he has barely been mentioned in art-historical texts until recently makes it essential firstly to offer a brief account of his life and work that will allow for a better interpretation of his works in the museum within the context of their day and of the artist's oeuvre. Aside from Flores Kaperotxipi, who singled out Dueñas from among the talented group of Basque sculptors of the first half of the 20th century,¹ and Marrodán, who referred to his work as "sculpture of a consciously creative type, founded on its honest intentions, sadly unknown, but of sufficient merit to be reflected as an influence within the context of the Basque aesthetic",² later studies have either overlooked or underrated the artist. This is the case with Plazaola, who considered him a sculptor "of inferior level",³ and Josefina Alix, who referred to an output "of small substance",⁴ while Barañano, González de Durana and Juarista saw his art as "simply a repetition" of that of Paco Durrio.⁵ Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea was the first to devote a small but enlightening biographical and artistic study to Dueñas in 1984,⁶ which has been fundamental for any subsequent research, and to champion him as an original artist in search of modernity.⁷ Finally, in 2013 Soto contributed new information on Dueñas's early years and his time as a grant student in Paris.⁸

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1 Flores 1954, p. 123.

2 Marrodán 1980, p. 120.

3 Plazaola 1982, p. 202.

4 Madrid 1985, p. 96.

5 Barañano/González de Durana/Juaristi 1987, p. 251.

6 Bilbao 1984, pp. 52-55.

7 Sáenz de Gorbea 2004, p. 117.

8 Soto 2013, pp. 60-65.



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1. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Chimneypiece for the dining room of the Munoa palace,
c. 1919
Red marble and bronze, 340 x 142 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. DEP3467

The present analysis of the artist's works in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum will be preceded by a brief outline of the context in which they were produced, as part of a series of commissions that Dueñas received from the Echevarría Echevarrieta family which, as will be explained during the course of this text, was undoubtedly one of his principal patrons.

Valentín Dueñas: a brief account of his life and art

Birth, family and early training (1888-1912)

Valentín José Dueñas Zaballa (fig. 2) was born in Bilbao at 10 in the morning on 16 December 1888 and was baptised in the parish church of San Nicolás de Bari on 23 of that month.⁹ The legitimate son of Cesáreo Dueñas Olalla and Marcela Zaballa Muga, he was the second of eight children: the first, Enrique Eugenio, was born on 13 July 1887; followed by María Felipa, born on 1 May 1891;¹⁰ Celia, who was born on 15 December 1892 and died on 7 March 1893 of bronchitis;¹¹ Eugenio Domingo, born on 21 September 1894;¹² Dolores, on 18 September 1896;¹³ Celia Anastasia, on 20 June 1898;¹⁴ and Cesáreo, on 18 August 1905.¹⁵

At this period Bilbao was embarking on a period of modernisation and of more rapid economic growth that would determine its subsequent course. After the end of the Carlist siege with the arrival of the Marquis of Duero on 2 May 1874, most of Spain's emerging steel industry began to concentrate around the city. The period of most significant growth for this activity was between 1880 and 1892, culminating in 1902 with the founding of the Altos Hornos de Vizcaya company. This industrial development, combined with mining, ship-building and maritime trade, encouraged both economic and population growth as well as growth in the size of the city itself. Thus in 1876 a project to enlarge Bilbao on the left bank of the River Nervión was approved and by 1900 the city had almost tripled in terms of inhabitants, which now numbered more than 80,000. A significant part of the population corresponded to the new bourgeois class, which was Liberal, progressive and open to outside influence (including the Echevarrieta family). Together with the local and provincial governments, this class would be crucial for encouraging and promoting the arts at the turn of the century.

Valentín Dueñas was born on the second floor (right) of number 22, calle Esperanza, where his family had lived since at least 1887,¹⁶ although they subsequently moved to the fourth floor, where they are recorded as living in May 1891.¹⁷ During the artist's childhood the family moved house on various occasions, living on both sides of the river. They are recorded at the following addresses: 5th floor (flat B), on calle Colón de Larreategui (1892-1894),¹⁸ and the ground floor of the same building (1894-1896);¹⁹ the first-floor flat at number 2, calle

9 Civil Registry of Bilbao, vol. 42/2, fol. 12; Archivo Histórico Eclesiástico de Bizkaia-Bizkaiko Elizaren Histori Artxiboa (=AHEB/BEHA), Baptismal records of the church of San Nicolás de Bari (1887-1895), p. 98.

10 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Nicolás de Bari (1887-1895), p. 10 (Enrique Eugenio) and p. 243 (María Felipa).

11 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1892-1893), p. 65; Death registry of the church of San Nicolás de Bari (1893), pp. 74-75.

12 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1894), pp. 396-397.

13 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1896-1897), p. 53.

14 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of Nicolás de Bari (1895-1903), p. 153.

15 Civil Registry of Bilbao, vol. 6/3, fol. 86.

16 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Nicolás de Bari (1887-1895), pp. 10 and 98.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

18 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1892-1893), p. 65; Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1894), pp. 396-397.

19 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Vicente Mártir (1896-1897), p. 53.



2. Valentín Dueñas, c. 1903-1907
Auñamendi Eusko Entziklopedia

Iturribide, in 1898,²⁰ once again in 1901 they were in the second-floor flat at number 28, calle Esperanza,²¹ and subsequently, from 1904, at number 12, calle Ledesma, 6th floor.²² It is known that the family set up a tavern in the ground-floor apartment (B) on calle Colón de Larreategui, which Cesáreo ran with the help of his wife from 1 January 1896 to 15 November 1897, when they moved to the ground-floor flat at number 4, calle Iturribide.²³ Little more is known about the artist's mother, other than that she was the daughter of Julián Zaballa Peña and Anastasia Muga Torre and was born in Barrasa de Mena (Burgos). Dueñas's father, who was born in 1857, was from Astudillo (Palencia) and was the son of José Dueñas González and Victoria Olalla Alonso.²⁴ Cesáreo's principal occupation was not, however, that of running a tavern²⁵ but rather wood carving, which he undertook in workshops of his own which he set up in 1888 at number 24 calle Esperanza²⁶ and in

20 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of Nicolás de Bari (1895-1903), p. 153.

21 Archivo Histórico Foral de Bizkaia/Bizkaiko Foru Agiritegi Historikoa (=AHFB/BFAH), file opened by the City Council of Bilbao on the complaint presented by Cesáreo Dueñas Olalla regarding the water bill he received for the tavern on calle Colón de Larreategui, B, in the last quarter of 1901, having closed his account in November 1897, Bilbao Quinta 0086/009.

22 AHFB/BFAH, file opened by the City Council of Bilbao on the permission requested by Cesáreo Dueñas Olalla to hang a sign on the wood carving workshop at number 12, calle Hurtado de Amezaga, Bilbao Primera 0316/074; AHFB/BFAH, D. Valentín Dueñas requested a grant to continue his studies as a sculptor abroad. Arts, Box 1204, file. 9.

23 AHFB/BFAH, file opened by the City Council of Bilbao on the permission sought Cesáreo Dueñas, resident of the city, to open a tavern in house letter B on calle Colón de Larreategui, Bilbao Tercera 0165/011; AHFB/BFAH, file opened by the City Council of Bilbao on the request of Cesáreo Dueñas to cease paying any taxes on the tavern established on calle Colón de Larreategui, letter B, Bilbao Cuarta 0428/; AHFB/BFAH, file opened by the City Council of Bilbao, Bilbao Quinta 0086/009. This file also includes various small incidents such as one from 1899 when Sebastián Mateo Zaldívar wounded Julián Olalla Azcona with a knife having previously demanded that he pay for the drinks that he owed to Marcela Zaballa. AHFB/BFAH, Public Safety, Wars and Military Service, doc. no. AQ00114/268.

24 AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of San Nicolás de Bari (1887-1895), p. 98.

25 On Eugenio Domingo's birth certificate he appears, for example as an *industrial* [manual worker].

26 AHFB/BFAH, File opened by the City Council of Bilbao regarding the permission requested by Cesáreo Dueñas Olalla, resident of this city, to hang a sign on the lower part of the door of his workshop at number 24, calle Esperanza, Bilbao Tercera 0077/096.

1908 at number 12, calle Hurtado de Amezaga.²⁷ He possibly also worked for other employers. This activity must have been interrupted at various moments, probably while he was running the tavern, and undoubtedly in mid-October 1903 when he was arrested and imprisoned on suspicion of having murdered Marcos de Ma-rañón Martínez.²⁸ As later proved, Cesáreo, who was known for his left-wing beliefs as the secretary of the Casino Republicano, was innocent and was soon released, but the initial difficulty of establishing the facts - which took place on 11 October during the clashes initiated by Republican workers against participants in the procession to the Sanctuary in Begoña as they passed along the Paseo del Arenal in Bilbao - complicated the investigation and meant that Cesáreo was held in prison between 14 October and 30 December that year.²⁹

We have found little more information on the other members of Valentín Dueñas's family, aside from this brother Enrique who, possibly following in his father's footsteps, attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Bilbao between 1898 and 1908 within the "Workers Education" section. He was awarded various prizes³⁰ although he later worked for the accounts department of the Bilbao city council, holding various administrative posts.³¹

Valentín also attended the School of Arts and Crafts, starting there in 1899. He followed the standard first-year studies: Figure drawing/Copying prints, for which he achieved a pass. In the 1900-1901 academic year he passed Figure drawing/Copying from plaster casts, while the following year he also passed Figure drawing/Life drawing. Between 1902 and 1904 he took classes in Ornamental drawing/Copying from prints and copying from plaster casts, for which he was awarded a special mention and a second prize, respectively, in addition to a third prize of 20 pesetas for effort. Finally, between 1904 and 1906 he again took the Figure drawing class, gaining two second prizes.³²

Between 1906 and 1909 Dueñas was the recipient of a Viuda de Salces Study Grant, which was a small grant offered to young people aged under 18 from modest backgrounds who were considered diligent students. Managed by the city council and based on funds from a bequest by Anselma de Salces, among those to benefit were sculptors and those working in the decorative arts. The grant was extremely modest (759 pesetas a year) but it allowed Dueñas to continue his artistic training in Bilbao. At this date he was living at number 12, calle Ledesma and was working as an apprentice in the workshop of Quintín de Torre (1877-1966).³³ He continued to attend the School of Arts and Crafts, where between 1906 and 1909 he attended the Figure drawing/Life study classes, where he was awarded three second prizes. Between October and November 1906 he took the Modelling class but ceased to attend it,³⁴ possibly because he considered his training in Torre's workshop to be sufficient. He stated that at the end of his grant period he received "honourable grades from the Jury for my exercises and, in the public session of the city council held on 19 November last year [1909], I received recompense and congratulations for my talents for Art."³⁵

27 AHFB/BFAH, File..., Bilbao Primera 0316/074.

28 AHFB/BFAH, Case against Cesáreo Dueñas Zaballa, Judicial, Court of Instruction of Bilbao, Criminal, doc. no. JCR0389/010; AHFB/BFAH, Group of documents on provisional imprisonment of the accused, Cesáreo de Dueñas Olalla, Judicial, Bilbao Law Courts, Criminal, doc. no. JCR0389/012; AHFB/BFAH, Group of documents on the insolvency of the accused, Cesáreo de Dueñas Olalla, Judicial, Bilbao Law Courts, Criminal, doc. no. JCR0389/013.

29 Ibid.

30 Archivo Histórico de la Escuela de Artes y Oficios, Instituto Emilio Campuzano (=AHEC), Libro de Registro-Enseñanza del Obrero, 20, p. 322.

31 See AHFB/BFAH, Bilbao Segunda 0655/008; Bilbao Sexta 0098/017; Bilbao Sexta 196/106; Bilbao Sexta 0024/167; Bilbao Decimosexta 0009/693.

32 AHEC, Libro de Registro-Enseñanza del Obrero, 21, p. 77.

33 Soto 2010a, p. 63.

34 AHEC, Libro de Registro-Enseñanza Profesional, 2, 1900-1910, p. 304.

35 AHFB/BFAH, D. Valentín Dueñas..., Artes, Caja 1204, exp. 9.

We know little information on the sculptor at this period, except that in early 1909 he was called up, resulting in several articles in the local press calling for an art lover to pay the 6,000 *reales* that would enable him to avoid this and thus avoid a two-year halt to his artistic career. Dueñas received various shows of support, including the newspaper *El Nervión* and that of the apprentice bullfighter Pepe Muñagorri. In the end an anonymous donor paid the amount in question.³⁶

Time in Paris and early works (1910-1916)³⁷

On 10 January 1910 Valentín Dueñas applied for a new grant, on this occasion from the provincial government of Bizkaia,³⁸ which had previously funded other artists, including Nemesio Mogrobejo (1875-1910) and Quintín de Torre, so that they could complete their studies abroad. In his application, Dueñas referred to his three years in Torre's workshop, his status as a recipient of a Viuda de Salces grant and the grades he had achieved at the School of Arts and Crafts. He enclosed three photographs of sculptures.³⁹ In a session of 22 February, the jury decided to award him a grant of 2,500 pesetas a year for two years with the obligation of presenting as proof of his progress a figure modelled from life in the first year and a group with two figures on a subject of his own choice in the second year.

Dueñas thus moved to Paris. There he made contact with the sculptor Paco Durrio (1868-1940), moving into his house at number 4 on the Impasse Girardon.⁴⁰ It is not known if he already knew Durrio, if he contacted him with a recommendation from someone or simply if, like many Spanish artists in Paris, he was attracted by Durrio's well-known hospitality. It is most likely that they would have met during one of Durrio's trips to Bilbao or that Dueñas made contact with Durrio on the advice of Quintín de Torre. Whatever the case Durrio must have largely assumed the role of Dueñas's master from this point onwards as the latter largely adopted his artistic ideas: subject matter, iconography and even Durrio's primitivist style with its summary, synthetic modelling. He also collaborated on his projects from the outset⁴¹ and later took charge of the final execution of a number of Durrio's works, which would probably never otherwise have been completed. This is the case with the *Monument to Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga*,⁴² now installed next to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, and with the *Echevarrieta Family Pantheon* in Getxo (Bizkaia).⁴³ Finally, that same year, 1910, Dueñas exhibited a bust in a shop window on the Gran Vía in Bilbao.⁴⁴

Dueñas was unable to complete his two-year grant as it was cancelled in October 1911 due to the introduction of new regulations and a new application process for grants from the provincial government, which was implemented on 1 January 1912.⁴⁵ It has to be assumed that Dueñas had already sent back his first

36 Laureano Marcaida. "Por un joven artista. Valentín Dueñas", *El Liberal*, Bilbao, 27 February 1909, p. 2; "Por un joven artista. Valentín Dueñas", *El Liberal*, Bilbao, 5 March 1909, p. 2; "En favor de un joven artista", *El Nervión*, Bilbao, 2 March 1909, p. 2; "Testimonio de gratitud", *El Nervión*, Bilbao, 6 March 1909, p. 2; Laureano Marcaida. "Por un joven artista. Valentín Dueñas", *El Liberal*, Bilbao, 8 March 1909, p. 1. The latter biographical details (1906-1909) have already been published in Soto 2013, p. 61.

37 See Soto 2013, pp. 62-65.

38 AHFB/BFAH, D. Valentín Dueñas..., Artes, Box 1204, file. 9.

39 Unfortunately no longer in the file

40 AHFB/BFAH, Official exams for a higher study grant in Sculpture, Arts, Box 2, file. 18.

41 By 1910, for example, he was already working on the *Monument to Arriaga*, according to the account in the article "El monumento a Arriaga", *El Pueblo Vasco*, Bilbao, 23 December 1910, p. 1.

42 On his collaboration with Durrio on the *Monument to Arriaga*, see particularly Soto 2010b, Bilbao 2013, Amezaga 2013.

43 Sáenz de Gorbea 2004, p. 123.

44 Bilbao 1984, p. 52.

45 AHFB/BFAH, on 1 January 1912 the provincial government of Bizkaia implemented the Regulations for Grants for Basque Artists with the modifications introduced in the Agreement of 3 October 1911, Arts, Exhibitions and Grants, box 1, file 5.

work, although nothing is known about it.⁴⁶ That same year, 1912, he exhibited a relief of a woman in profile that was signed, dated and dedicated to "D.R.E. With grateful thanks".⁴⁷ This may be a portrait of Amalia Echevarrieta, dedicated to Don Rafael Echevarria.

The new programme of study grants, published in the Official Bulletin of the Province of Bizkaia on 3 August 1912, included a higher level of funding for sculpture. Dueñas applied, competing with José María Garrós Reguant, José Larrea Echaniz and Manuel V. Moreno San Román, although Larrea was eliminated before he took the exams following a lengthy controversy as it was considered that his father had sufficient funds to pay for him to go abroad.⁴⁸ The decision was made by the sculpture jury, comprising the provincial deputies Indalecio Prieto and José de Urizar and the sculptors Higinio Basterra, José María Garrós Nogué (who stepped down when he realised that his son was one of the applicants and was replaced by Federico Sáenz), Pedro Sorriguieta and Quintín de Torre.

The exams began on 12 September with the drawing test, which involved copying a figure from life. All the applicants passed the first round, with first place going to Dueñas, second place to Garrós and third place to Moreno.⁴⁹ The second test, which began on 16 September, involved executing a *modello* in relief on one of three biblical subjects: Saint Peter and Saint John healing the lame man, the resurrection of Jairus's daughter, and the separation of Abraham and Lot. Once again Dueñas was given first place while Moreno was second and Garrós was third. The final test, in which the candidates had to model a torso with the arms and pose arranged according to their choice, started on 19 September. Following the display of the works at the School of Arts and Crafts in Bilbao between 9 and 11 October, the sculpture grant was unanimously awarded to Dueñas. Moreno was given second place and Garrós was third. Nonetheless, the choice of location abroad was not decided by the jury until the end of December when it was announced that Dueñas would continue in Paris.⁵⁰

In early January 1913, Dueñas thus returned to the French capital and soon moved close to Paco Durrio at number 2 on the Impasse Girardon. There he began to attend classes at a non-official art academy. During that year he focused his attentions, among other projects, on the first work to be sent back to Spain: a gesso nude modelled from life. This arrived in Bilbao in December 1913 and was exhibited in the Palacio Provincial. It was awarded honours and the corresponding prize of 500 pesetas. Dueñas donated the work to the provincial government.⁵¹

Also that year, 1913, the artist took part in the *Exhibition of Modern Art* held by the Association of Basque Artists, which he had joined that year, if not earlier. Dueñas showed a study of a head, a portrait bust, a figure study (possibly the first work he sent back to Spain to comply with his study grant requirements) and a low relief. These were numbers 75 to 78 in the catalogue.⁵²

The outbreak of World War I and the general political and economic situation that affected Europe made it difficult to send back his second-year work. In August 1914 Dueñas wrote to the provincial government ex-

46 Sáenz de Gorbea, however, states that he never received the funding and that for this reason his father withdrew the documentation on 29 April (Bilbao 1984, p. 52).

47 Ibid.

48 AHFB/BFAH, The Provincial Government..., Arts, Exhibitions and Grants, box 1, file. 5. On this subject, see Soto 2013, p. 63.

49 AHFB/BFAH, Official exams for a higher pension in Sculpture, [...], Arts, Box 2, file. 18.

50 "El pensionado Dueñas", in *El Noticiero bilbaíno*, Bilbao, 22 December 1912, p. 1.

51 The present whereabouts of this gesso is unknown and it was very probably destroyed.

52 Bilbao 1984, p. 52; Mur 1985, pp. 13 and 201.



3. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Nymph, 1915
 Stone. 153 cm (high)
 La Concepción, Jardín Botánico-Histórico de Málaga

plaining that he had been away from Paris where he had his work (a group of two figures entitled *Suffering*) ready and cast in gesso but that it was impossible to send it as the transportation of goods between France and Spain was not operating. Given the likely delay in its arrival, he decided to execute another work (ultimately not realised) which he would also send to the examining jury. The committee accepted his explanations and gave him special permission to spend two months in Bilbao but on the condition that he then move to another part of Spain to continue his studies if he could not return to France. In October the artist managed to return to Paris and to send his group to Bilbao, thus continuing with his study grant programme.

Suffering was exhibited between 2 and 22 December at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum and was once again awarded honours, although Higinio Basterra and the critic Francisco Iribarne disagreed. In a local newspaper the latter wrote: "Valentin Dueñas has a sculptor's hands; he knows how to emphasise the expressive elements of a torso, a knee, an arm; one can and should work on that art of relief for years at a time; one never knows enough; but then, more needs to be done; an overall harmony must be looked for; a rhythm that illuminates everything; from the smallest detail of the skin to the figures' overall pose; everything must respond to that spirit, that idea, that spiritual and indefinable movement."⁵³

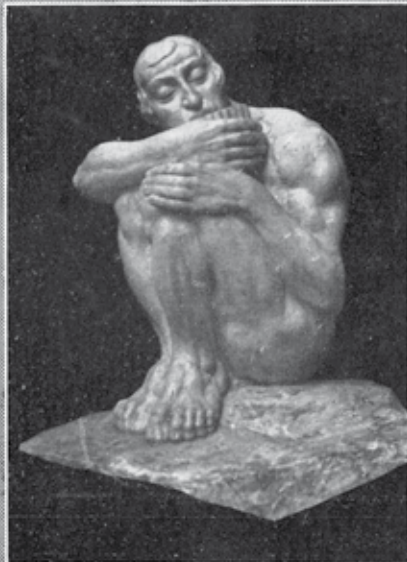
Dueñas made use of the 500 pesetas prize he was awarded for this work to make a study trip in early 1915 around the provinces of Spain. This trip may also have been his honeymoon, as on 6 February 1915 he had married a young woman from Bilbao, Ángeles Corto Barreras (1892-?) in the church of San Antonio Abad in that city.⁵⁴ He then returned to Paris where he was to be found in late February of that year.

53 Francisco Iribarne. "Las esculturas de Valentín Dueñas", in *El Pueblo Vasco*, Bilbao, 11 December 1914, p. 2.

54 AHEB/BEHA, Marriage records of the church of San Antonio Abad, no. 33, p. 78; AHEB/BEHA, Baptismal records of the church of the Santos Juanes (1892), p. 381.



En el Museo de Bellas Artes, de Bilbao



1 y 2. Notables trabajos escultóricos que forman parte de la Exposición organizada en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao por D. Valentín Dueñas, pensionado por la Diputación bilbaína.—3. Hermoso estudio escultórico de D. Moisés Huertas, que figura en el expresado Museo.

·Fot. Amado·

4. Sculptures by Valentín Dueñas reproduced in the magazine *Novedades*, San Sebastián, 12 December 1915 Koldo Mitxelena Liburutegia-Biblioteca, San Sebastián. Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia-Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa



5. Valentín Dueñas
(Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
The Pardon, 1915
Plaster, 125 x 125 cm
Present whereabouts unknown
Auñamendi Eusko Entziklopedia

During the course of 1915 in Paris, Dueñas produced his third required work: a low relief modello to send back as his fourth-year test, and a gesso sculpture which he sent in November for assessment. Both were exhibited between 6 and 22 December at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, on this occasion earning the middle grade of “satisfying the regulatory obligations”, with one vote against the decision from his old master, Quintín de Torre, who wanted to award him honours. The life-size sculpture depicted a seated woman holding an amphora [fig. 3]. It seems to have been sent back with another female figure, also seated and leaning forward in a pose similar to the other work [fig. 4]. Both reveal the clear influence of Quintín de Torre’s expressivity, a treatment of the musculature characteristic of Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929), and Paco Durrio’s Synthetism and Symbolism, all influences evident in Dueñas’s works for funerary pantheons. That same year, 1915, he also took part in the National Fine Arts Exhibition with a gesso entitled *The Pardon* [fig. 5], measuring 125 x 125 cm, and a *Bust* in the same material.⁵⁵ The first would be awarded one of the eight third-class medals given out on that occasion and a travel grant of 500 pesetas assigned to works awarded prizes but not acquired by the State.⁵⁶ According to a newspaper article of the time, the work “Convinces for the difficulties the artist has overcome when constructing such a complex group; the figures of which it is comprised are closely linked in a reconciliatory embrace, and as a whole it offers a serious and careful study of modelling.”⁵⁷

55 Madrid 1915, p. 48 (no. 701-702).

56 “Bellas Artes. Premios de la exposición”, in *ABC*, Madrid, 18 July 1915, p. 15; “Exposición de Bellas Artes”, in *El Imparcial*, Madrid, 13 May 1915, p. 3; “Artes y Artistas. Adquisición de obras”, in *La Correspondencia de España*, Madrid, 4 July 1915, p. 6; “Los premios de la Exposición. Obras adquiridas por el Estado”, in *La Época*, Madrid, 17 July 1915, p. 3; Pantorba 1980, pp. 228 and 397; Bilbao 1984, p. 52; Caparrós 2014, pp. 414-416, 426 and 528.

57 J. del C. “La Exposición de Bellas Artes. XII. Escultura”, in *La Correspondencia de España*, Madrid, 4 July 1915, p. 6.

In November 1916 and despite the context of the war, Dueñas punctually sent his work back from Paris in the form of a gesso relief sculpture. Once again exhibited at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, it was awarded honours by the jury although, as the official report stated, this was “no masterpiece”, possibly in the light of a comparison with *The Death of Orpheus*, sent back as a fourth-year work by Nemesio Mogrobejo who had been assigned a “very special distinction” in 1907.⁵⁸ That same month Dueñas took part in the *Exhibition of the Association of Basque Artists* in Madrid with a portrait and a small figure (numbers 213 and 214 in the catalogue), while between December 1916 and January 1917 he exhibited the same works (as numbers 150 and 151) in the Association’s exhibition held in Barcelona.⁵⁹

The return to Spain and living in Madrid (1917-1936)

The exact moment when Valentín Dueñas returned to Spain is not known, although it may have been around 1917, having completed his study grant period. He chose to settle in Madrid, the city of origin of his wife’s family on her mother’s side, who would probably offer them assistance in settling in the capital.⁶⁰ He is permanently registered as a resident there from 1920 onwards, with the exception of the Civil War and the early post-war years when he may have lived elsewhere.⁶¹ During this period Dueñas and his wife lived at various different addresses: firstly the ground-floor shop at number 68, calle Jorge Juan;⁶² from 1924 at number 17, calle Lope de Rueda (second floor, right);⁶³ then in a house which they purchased at number 10, calle Vascos, which they modernised and which acted as a studio⁶⁴ and finally, once again as tenants at number 9, calle Maudes (third floor, left),⁶⁵ and at number 11, calle Maudes (fourth floor, front), although Dueñas kept his studio on the calle Vascos.⁶⁶

The artist maintained his connections with Bilbao during these years, both with regard to executing sculptures and to participating in exhibitions. For the Vista Alegre cemetery in Derio (Bizkaia) he created the funerary pantheons of the Martín de Aldama, Echevarría La Llana (possibly commissioned by or at least through the mediation of Rafael Echevarría) and Ricarda Esteban families.⁶⁷ In stylistic terms, all these works can be closely related to the sculpture of Quintín de Torre, Paco Durrio and Paul Gauguin, combining modernity and antiquity in a quest for the synthetic, the primitive and the expressive, influenced by Egyptian art and archaic Greek *kouros* figures. With regard to exhibitions, in 1917 Dueñas took part in the Salon of the Association of Basque Artists, exhibiting the model for a clock to be cast in bronze for “R.E.” (Rafael Echevarría?), while

58 On this subject, see Soto 2013, p. 56.

59 Juan de la Encina. “La Semana Artística. Los Artistas Vascos”, in *España*, Madrid, 23 November 1916, p. 10; Mur 1985, pp. 243 and 246.

60 In fact, as noted in different parish censuses, Valentín and Ángeles, who had no children, lived with different relatives at various times: in 1924 with Ángeles’s brother Sebastián (a musician) and his wife María Luisa Agüero; with her nephew Antonio Corto and his brother Cesáreo Dueñas in 1930; and finally, with her niece Ángeles Corto Abásolo from 1945.

61 There is no census for inhabitants in Madrid in 1935, but he does not appear in the one of 1940, possibly because he was living away from the capital, like his brother Cesáreo who was in Santoña (Cantabria), although the latter’s wife, Cándida Díez, and their children, Juan María Dueñas Díez and Cesáreo Dueñas Díez, lived at number 15, calle Palma (Archivo de la Villa, Madrid (=AV), Census of inhabitants for 1940, vol. 42, sheet no. 12.116).

62 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants for 1920, vol. 264, sheet no. 7.764.

63 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants for 1925, vol. 281, sheet no. 10.982.

64 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants for 1930, vol. 720, sheet no. 11.049. In October 1930, Valentín Dueñas requested permission from the city council of Madrid to modernise and enlarge a property at number 10, calle Vascos, to be designed by the architect Serrano (“Bolsa de la construcción. Licencias solicitadas al Ayuntamiento de Madrid 15-30 octubre. Reforma y ampliación”, in *El Eco patronal*, Madrid, 1 November 1930, p. 12). In April 1932 he applied for a license to rent (“Bolsa de la construcción. Licencias solicitadas al Ayuntamiento de Madrid 15-30 April. Licencias de alquiler”, in *El Eco patronal*, Madrid, 1 May 1932, p. 11).

65 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants for 1945, vol. 98, sheet no. 30.810.

66 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants for 1950, vol. 76, sheet no. 23.333. By that date the building had been re-numbered 14 on the street.

67 Sáenz de Gorbea 2007, nos. 8, 9 and 17.

for the exhibition of the work of Alfonso W. Sena Manterola he contributed a flower vase.⁶⁸ That same year he attended the controversial banquet in homage to Pío Baroja in a restaurant in Artxanda (Bilbao),⁶⁹ and two years later exhibited two works, *Low Relief* (possibly the principal low relief of the chimneypiece under discussion here) and *Bronze*, at the *International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture in Bilbao*.⁷⁰ Various works were acquired from that exhibition for the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, but none of Dueñas's works were purchased at that date, although Nemesio Sobrevila, a member of the exhibition's jury, voted in his favour with 17 points.⁷¹

In Madrid, Dueñas began to attend the informal debates organised by Gómez de la Serna on Saturday nights at the Café Pombo,⁷² while he also took part in various exhibitions. At the *National Exhibition* of 1920 he showed his gesso sculpture *Ruth*,⁷³ a nude measuring 200 x 80 cm of which the Echevarría Echevarrieta family later acquired a version in stone [fig. 6], and another gesso bust entitled *José Mari (Basque head)* of 50 x 70 cm. On this occasion Dueñas also participated in the Decorative Arts section, the catalogue of which records four silver rings entitled *The Kiss*, *Night*, *Reverie* and *The Kiss of Evil*; a gesso statue measuring 42 x 19 cm entitled *The Offering*; and a bronze figure entitled *The Jeweller*, measuring 30 x 12 cm.⁷⁴ While their appearance is unknown, the titles of the rings reveal close connections with the Symbolist subject matter of Paco Durrio's jewellery and given the latter's influence on Dueñas it can be assumed that they were also very similar in appearance.

Two years later, in 1922, Dueñas once again exhibited within the Sculpture and Decorative Arts sections at the *National Exhibition*, showing three works: *Cheles* (marble, 50 x 22 cm), *Portrait* (gesso, 50 x 22 cm) and *Offering* (gesso relief, 39 x 70 cm),⁷⁵ while in 1925 he exhibited two reliefs at the *Salón de los Ibéricos* in Madrid,⁷⁶ where his works were displayed in the central gallery alongside sculptures by Juan Aduara, Emiliano Barral, José Capuz, Ángel Ferrant, Victorio Macho, José Planes and Quintín de Torre. No records survive of his participation in any further exhibition until 1934 when he showed *Crisis*, a gesso sculpture measuring 36 x 19 cm, priced in bronze at 2,000 pesetas⁷⁷ at the *3rd Exhibition of Basque Artists* in Bilbao.⁷⁸ Two years later Dueñas showed *Bust*, *Femme accroupie* and *Sculpture* in the *Exhibition of Basque Painting* organised by the Association of Basque Artists between 22 May and 10 June 1936 in Paris.⁷⁹

As Xabier Sáenz de Gorbea has noted, in Madrid Dueñas devoted almost all his activities to selling decorative sculpture and to executing various cast and carved works for other sculptors.⁸⁰ We know, for example, that in 1920 he was involved in the casting of the relief *The Death of Orpheus* by Nemesio Mogroboje⁸¹

68 Bilbao 1984, p. 52.

69 Ibid.

70 Bilbao 1919b, nos. 378 and 379.

71 AHFB/BFAH, Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture. First International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture, patronised by the Provincial Government of Bizkaia, 1919. Culture C-1220-file. 2. Much of the documentation in this file has been published by Barañano/González de Durana 1987, quoting Dueñas on p. 176.

72 Although he does not mention the year, Gómez de la Serna describes him as attending (Gómez de la Serna 1986a, p. 171; Gómez de la Serna 1986b, p. 536). These discussion groups took place on Saturday nights between 1912 and 1937.

73 "Ruth (nude life study), by Valentín Dueñas", illustrated in *Blanco y Negro*, Madrid, 23 May 1920, p. 38, no. 3.

74 Madrid 1920, nos. 451, 452, 582, 583 and 584.

75 Madrid 1922, nos. 641, 642 and 792.

76 Madrid 1925, nos. 13 and 14. On the Society and this exhibition, see particularly Madrid 1995a and Pérez Segura 2002.

77 Archivo, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao (=AMBAB), Boletín de inscripción no. 13, Exposición de Artistas Vascongados, 1934/1-1-2.

78 Bilbao 1934, no. 93; Mur 1985, p. 297.

79 Mur 1985, p. 299.

80 Bilbao 1984, p. 52.

81 Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, inv. no. 82/196. AMBAB, letter from Valentín Dueñas to Manuel Losada, Madrid, 11 December 1920, D. 276.



6. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Ruth, 1920
Stone
Garden of the Finca Munoa,
Town Council of Barakaldo, Bizkaia

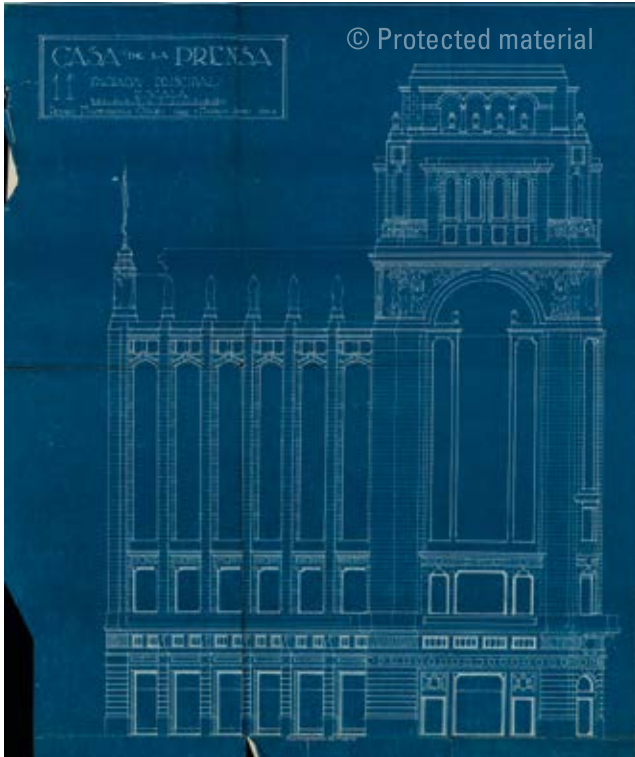
in the Calahorra Hermanos foundry (Madrid), and that through the mediation of Rafael Echevarría he was commissioned to produce a bronze copy of *Eve* by the same artist.⁸² In the 1930s Dueñas also worked with his master Paco Durrio on the final execution of the *Monument to Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga*, unveiled on 13 August 1933,⁸³ and the *Pantheon for the Echevarrieta Family* in Getxo, the design of which took from 1903 to 1923,⁸⁴ although the wrought-iron entrance has recently been dated to 1931.⁸⁵

82 This copy was first in the garden of La Concepción in Malaga and later in the Munoa palace, both properties owned by the Echevarría Echevarrieta family. AMBAB, letter from Valentín Dueñas to Manuel Losada, Madrid, 11 December 1920, D. 276; AMBAB, letter from Rafael de Echevarría to the president of the Board of Trustees of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Barakaldo, 8 August 1921, D. 392.

83 On his collaboration with Durrio on the *Monument to Arriaga*, see particularly Soto 2010b, Bilbao 2013 and Amezaga 2013.

84 Amezaga 2013, p. 74.

85 Bilbao 2013, pp. 181-186.



7. Pedro Muguruza Otaño (Madrid, 1893-1952)
Design for the Casa de la Prensa. Principal façade, June 1924
 Archivo de la Villa, City Council of Madrid, doc. 41-285-48

8. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Abundance, c. 1928
 Decorative surround in artificial stone for the Casa de la Prensa, Madrid

Dueñas also undertook various projects for the architect Pedro Muguruza Otaño (1893-1952), including a frieze of winter sports motifs for the Hotel Reina Victoria in Guadarrama, the decoration of the Spanish Red Cross building, and a group of houses on calle Padilla in Madrid (on the corner with calle Alcántara), built by the promoters Mayo Hermanos.⁸⁶ His most important project would have been the Casa de la Prensa of 1924-1928 [fig. 7] on the Gran Vía in Madrid, for which he was commissioned to undertake all the artificial stone elements for the façade, the principal public space, the lobby, amphitheatre and the vestibules of the theatre; a series of monumental figures referring to the press, among other subjects, made in Murcia stone to crown the cornice and the turret facing onto calle Tudescos; an allegorical coat-of-arms of Abundance and a medallion depicting Power at the entrance to the building.⁸⁷ Of the latter, he only executed the coat-of-arms of Abundance [fig. 8], in addition to various decorative reliefs for the façade. The series of monumental figures for the cornice was not executed, possibly for reasons of budget. With regard to these commissions, it is interesting to note that Muguruza had close links to Horacio Echevarrieta, a client and supporter, and that the Casa de la Prensa was built on Echevarrieta's initiative, given that he had secured the municipal concession for building works on the Gran Vía (sections 2 and 3). It is thus more than likely that Dueñas's involvement was proposed by Echevarrieta.

In 1930 Dueñas was commissioned to execute a sculpture of *Queen María Cristina de Borbón* to be installed opposite the Home for Laundrywomen in Madrid on the Paseo de San Vicente, to commemorate the Queen's ongoing support for that institution. The magazine *Colores* launched the project and the management of

⁸⁶ "La piedra artificial. Valentín Dueñas. Los Vascos, número 10", in *El Heraldo de Madrid*, Madrid, 29 May 1928, p. 12.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

subscriptions to pay for it.⁸⁸ Dueñas himself was among the first to subscribe, together with Felipe Sánchez Pintado, Alfonso Giráldez-Borbón and the Bank of Spain.⁸⁹

Also in this period, around the mid-1930s, the artist must have executed the marble bust of the President of the Basque Country, José Antonio Aguirre, which is now in the Ajuria Enea palace in Vitoria.

The late years (1937-1952)

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to discover any information on the late career of Valentín Dueñas, from the start of the Spanish Civil War to his death, nor even the exact date of the latter event, which some have placed in 1954,⁹⁰ or, more recently, in 1952.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the artist must have continued active as a sculptor, possibly more focused on decorative sculpture or the execution of the final works for projects initiated by others, rather than on his own output, given that he ceased to participate in exhibitions, although in 1950 he declared his annual income arising from his activities as a sculptor as 24,000 pesetas.⁹²

Valentín Dueñas and his relationship with the Echevarrieta family

Echevarrieta is the surname of one of the leading families of Basque industrialists in the last quarter of the 19th and first third of the 20th centuries, during which time the family amassed a large fortune comparable to that of the Chávarri, Ibarra, Martínez Rivas and De la Sota families, among others.

The family's rise to wealth began with Cosme Echevarrieta Lascuráin (1842-1903), son of Juan Manuel Echevarrieta, a carpenter who became a ceramics and glass salesman, and Marta Lascuráin Madariaga. A prominent political figure (generally considered the principal Republican leader in Bilbao in the last third of the 19th century), Cosme was also an active businessman who set up various companies during the course of his lifetime. In 1867 he founded Echevarrieta & Olave in partnership with Julián Olave, an enterprise that focused on trade with the colonies, salt fish, barges and minerals. Having abandoned his political career, in 1882 and in partnership with Bernabé Larrínaga he founded Echevarrieta y Larrínaga which was dedicated to property speculation and iron extraction and production, firstly from mines in the province of Bizkaia and later, from the 1890s, in other parts of Spain such as the Coto Fortuna in Mazarrón, Murcia, and the Sierra Menera mines between Teruel and Guadalajara.

Cosme, who married Jacinta Maruri Carvajal, had two children: Amalia (1868-1955) and Horacio Echevarrieta Maruri (1870-1963). Horacio inherited his father's Liberal ideas (he was a member of parliament for Bilbao for the Republican-Socialist party between 1910 and 1918) and his mining interests, which he expanded and diversified. He also enlarged his interests in shipbuilding, hydraulic energy (promoting the creation of the Saltos del Duero, which subsequently became Iberduero and years later Iberdrola), cement production (he was one of the founders of Cementos Portland Iberia), transport (founding the Iberia airline, among

88 "La Reina doña María Cristina y el Asilo de las Lavanderas", in *ABC*, Madrid, 18 September 1930, p. 23; "La Reina doña María Cristina y el Asilo de las Lavanderas", in *ABC*, Seville, 19 September 1930, p. 22; "Para un monumento a la Reina Cristina", in *El Siglo futuro*, Madrid, 2 October 1930, p. 4.

89 "Para un monumento a la Reina Cristina", in *El Siglo futuro*, Madrid, 2 October 1930, p. 4.

90 Flores 1954, p. 155, considers that the artist died in 1954, close to the date of the completion of the manuscript (published that year), also stating that he died in Madrid; Bilbao 1984, p. 53, states that "around 1954 he must have died in Madrid."

91 *Enciclopedia general ilustrada del País Vasco* [online]. San Sebastián: Auñamendi, 1979-2003 [Consulted: 20 October 2015]. Available online: <<http://www.euskomedia.org/aunamendi?idi=es>>; Barañano/González de Durana/Juaristi 1987, p. 251; Sáenz de Gorbea 2004, p. 11; Soto 2013, p. 61.

92 VARIOUS AUTHORS, Census of inhabitants of 1950, vol. 76, sheet no. 23.333.



9. Francisco Iturrino (Santander, 1864-Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, 1924)
Portrait of Rafael Echevarría, 1913
 Oil on canvas, 145.3 x 115.4 cm
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Inv. no. 82/187



10. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Horacio Echevarrieta Maruri, 1921
 Bronze, 46 x 35 x 22 cm
 Euskal Museoa-Bilbao-Museo Vasco
 Inv. no. 2010/1071

other transport companies) and even oil drilling.⁹³ Amalia, who was married to Rafael Echevarría Azcárate (1873-1926) [fig. 9] shared property and projects with her brother, including the Munoa palace. Located in the Burceña quarter in Cruces, Barakaldo, it had been acquired by Rafael Echevarría from his uncle Alfredo Echevarría Arriaga, the Marquis of Vilagodio on 28 October 1916 and was the couple's habitual residence together with La Concepción in Malaga, another property that Amalia had acquired in 1919 and which also featured various works by Dueñas. These included one of the two female sculptures that he sent back as a grant student in 1915, better known as *Nymph* [fig. 3]. Horacio also spent lengthy periods of time in Munoa, where he died on 20 May 1963.

It is not known how Dueñas first made contact with the Echevarrieta family, although it can be presumed that it was through his master, Paco Durrio, who maintained a cordial and fruitful relationship with the family and had already introduced his colleague Francisco Iturrino (1864-1924) to Horacio. Alternatively, Dueñas may have met them due to their shared Republican ideology (it should be borne in mind that his father was secretary of the Casino Republicano). Whatever the case, Dueñas undertook various commissions for different members of the family from the time of his early years in Paris, if not before.⁹⁴ The account offered above of the artist's life has referred to various projects (some of them now lost) and other possible ones, principally for Rafael Echevarría: a relief of a woman in profile of 1912; one of the female figures that he sent back as a grant student in 1915; a bronze clock cast in 1917; the stone version of *Ruth* (1920);

93 On Cosme and Horacio Echevarrieta, see particularly Díaz Morlán 1999 and Díaz Morlán 2011.

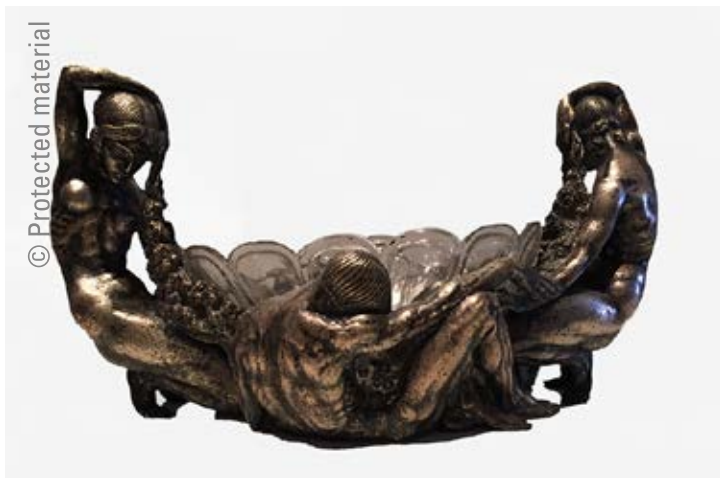
94 Which reinforces the idea of Durrio as the intermediary between the two.



11. Valentín Dueñas
(Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
*Crouching naked Youth holding a
Bowl*, c. 1915-1921
Bronze, 28 cm (high)
Private collection



12. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Crouching Servant, c. 1915-1921
Bronze, 23 cm (high)
Private collection



13. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Table centerpiece with male and female figures interlaced with floral garlands
c. 1915-1921
Silver, 32 x 56 cm
Private collection



14. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
*Portrait of a Girl with
Plaits*, c. 1921
Marble, 56 x 19.7 x 21.2 cm
Private collection

and the family pantheon of the Echevarría La Llana family in the Vista Alegre cemetery in Derio (Bizkaia). For Horacio he also sculpted a bust [fig. 10],⁹⁵ dated 1921 and cast in bronze in the Mir y Ferrero foundry in Madrid. In addition there were various projects for the architect Pedro Muguruza and a number of sculptural works: two decorative figures in bronze measuring 28 and 23 cm high that depicted a naked, crouching youth holding a cup and a young girl leaning forward [figs. 11 and 12]; a surtout-de-table with male and female figures interlaced with garlands of flowers [fig. 13]; a marble bust of a young girl with plaits [fig. 14] of around 1921;⁹⁶ and the chimneypiece and reclining female figure that are the subject of this article.⁹⁷

In addition, Dueñas could also have acted as intermediary for Rafael Echevarría in the purchase of works of art and antiques,⁹⁸ as Paco Durrio had done for Horacio Echevarrieta.

The chimneypiece for the dining room of the Munoa palace and the *Reclining Female Figure*

Most of the above-mentioned works by Dueñas were acquired for the Echevarrieta's town palace in Burceña. Known as Munoa, it was originally a country house that was remodelled around 1860 by the Bilbao architect Juan Echevarría La Llana (1803-1881) with a magnificent park in the English style that gave onto the estuary of the River Cadagua. As noted above, Rafael Echevarría, grandson of Juan Echevarría, acquired it from the latter's second son, his uncle Alfredo, in 1916 and commissioned the architect Ricardo Bastida (1879-1953) to update and remodel it. The original building had an elegantly built eclectic design. Bastida added two lateral wings to the central section with mansard roofs, giving a majestic French appearance to the house, which stood out from the 7-hectare plot that surrounded the original construction.

The chimneypiece was originally located in the dining room on the ground floor of the building [figs. 15 and 16], the heart of the house, aligned with its central axis, between two large windows and next to the principal dining table. Set into the wall, it conformed to the preferred model for aristocratic residences used from the early modern age onwards, with the fire at floor level, framed by a large structure made of red marble from Ereño (Bizkaia) that continued up the wall to the ceiling, reaching a total height of 340 cm and a width of 142 cm. This architectural decoration in the Neo-Palladian style consists of two different levels with the two parts separated by a projecting mantelpiece that follows the overall design of the chimneypiece, with a rhythmical movement in the cross-section of the lower part that diminishes in the upper section. Located on the mantelpiece is the *Reclining Female Figure*, flanked on either side by a decorative vase.

Palladian chimneypieces, which were extremely common in the Neo-classical era, were generally made, like this one, in marble, with the lateral elements imitating columns and a decoration of floral bands on the surround. In this case, both the lower and upper sections are articulated with grooved pilasters. The lower

95 Initially attributed to Paco Durrio. See Barañano/González de Durana 1988, p. 149.

96 Also initially attributed to Paco Durrio (see Barañano/González de Durana 1988, p. 157) but published as by Dueñas in Bilbao 2013, p. 61. Dated in that catalogue to around 1910-1913, for the present author it is later, around 1921 and closer to the style of a marble base for the bust commissioned by Alejandro Estrada y Ramos's firm, Marmolera Industrial, in August 1921 (AMBAB, letter from Alejandro Estrada y Ramos to Valentín Dueñas, Madrid, 5 August 1921, in the Archivo Roberto Sterling-Fondo Rafael de Echevarría, D10). In addition, the bust seems closer to the artist's style of the end of the second decade of the century and the early 1920s.

97 Of the works referred to, it would seem that at least the reclining woman in bronze and the marble bust of a young girl with plaits belonged to Amalia Echevarrieta and were expropriated from the Munoa residence at the start of the Civil War, reclaimed in September 1937 and recovered after June 1941 (AMBAB, Certificate signed by Juan Hernani Echevarría, Bilbao, 23 June 1941, D1.519).

98 As can be deduced from a letter from Valentín Dueñas to Rafael Echevarría, written in Madrid on 24 May 1921 and now in the AMBAB, Archivo Roberto Sterling-Fondo Rafael de Echevarría, D1.



15-16. Two views of the dining room in the Munoa palace with the chimneypiece in its original location

part, which has a fluid design, has two levels of pilasters that make the structure more dynamic. They are set on a rectangular base with the lower part of the shaft decorated with superimposed elements that recall ventilation grilles, crowned with a free interpretation of the Ionic capital, without an astragal and with an Ionic bronze cymatium of egg and dart pattern over an elaborate, curved trapezoid annulet. The base of the metal smoke hood is decorated with a band of geometrical motifs in a notably Art Deco style, while the rectangular opening of the fireplace is entirely covered with red ceramic tiles.

The mantelpiece is located above this section, articulated in the form of an inverted Doric entablature with a plain architrave, a frieze of plain triglyphs decorated with bronze reliefs of acanthus leaves and metopes embellished with a free, convex interpretation of glyphs. The architrave and metopes are broken by the presence in the centre of a rectangular bronze plaque with a female mask, beneath which hangs a decorative foliate garland also cast in metal. Above the frieze is a triple structure in the manner of a gable or cymatium with an alternation of fillet moulding and convex, cylindrical moulding.

The upper part, which is subdivided into two sections crowned by an entablature, has two fluted pilasters of the Giant order that terminate in two Composite capitals with stylised acanthus leaves cast in bronze and an Ionic marble top. Between them is a bronze relief, which is the most interesting of the entire work, set into the marble structure and topped by a Neo-Romanesque frieze with geometrical decoration. Over this, a bronze plaque with palm fronds and acanthus leaves completes the entire structure. The fireback and poker, in the Neo-Renaissance style, were undoubtedly purchased separately, as were the decorative vases previously standing on the mantelpiece.

The architectural concept of this chimneypiece, which can undoubtedly be attributed to Valentín Dueñas, even though it is not signed nor are there any known preliminary studies for it, finds its distant reference in the Palladian forms of the British architect Inigo Jones (1573-1652), who was also noted for designing items



17. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Cleopatra's Banquet, 1919
Bronze, 88.7 x 75.1 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
The relief on the front of the chimneypiece

of this type. In contrast to Jones, however, Dueñas would have integrated it into the wood panelling of the room in the manner of another celebrated English architect and designer of chimneypieces, Christopher Wren (1632-1723). Another precedent may be the work of the brothers Robert (1728-1792) and John Adam (1735-1826), who designed symmetrical and richly ornamented fireplaces with frames incorporating low reliefs in stone or marble, a mantelpiece for supporting objects and a front face set into the wall with space to house paintings (or in this case the principal sculptural relief which terminates in an arched top).

Dueñas cast the relief in bronze at the Mir y Ferrero foundry in Madrid in 1919 [fig. 17]. It depicts the banquet that took place prior to the death of Cleopatra, following Plutarch's account in his text on Anthony in the *Parallel Lives* (chaps. LXXXIV-LXXXVI, particularly chap. LXXXV).⁹⁹ After Alexandria had fallen to Octavius, Cleopatra killed herself on 12 August, 30AD at the age of thirty-nine when she realised that Octavius was planning to take her to Rome and exhibit her as a slave. She visited the tomb of her lover Mark Anthony, bathed, then attended a great banquet, during which a man appeared with a basket of fruit (figs, according to Plutarch), in which was concealed the snake that poisoned her with its bite. Dressed in royal garments and crowned, her dead body was discovered lying on "a gold bed, regally adorned", flanked by her two dying servants, Charmion and Iras.

Cleopatra's life and in particular her suicide have been a source of inspiration for numerous artists, writers and even musicians over the centuries, particularly from the 16th century onwards.¹⁰⁰ Giambattista Tiepolo, Eugène Delacroix, William Shakespeare, Théophile Gautier, Georges Bernard Shaw, Georg Friedrich Handel and Jules Massenet are the most important creative figures who have immortalised her with their brush, pen or notes. Within the episode of her death, most accounts focus on the moment when the snake bites the naked Cleopatra or the discovery of her body next to those of her two maids. These are the two most intensely dramatic moments and were depicted by artists including Michelangelo, Guido Reni and Artemisia Gentileschi. Cleopatra was also one of the principal *femmes fatales* in history and was frequently depicted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by artists such as Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Arnold Böcklin, Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema and Paul Gauguin.

In contrast to these examples, Dueñas focuses here on the banquet held prior to the suicide, which is a subject more appropriate to the context of the dining room in which the chimneypiece was located. It is not known whether the Echevarrieta family proposed the subject or, as seems more likely, if it was the artist's idea, influenced by his master Paco Durrio's interest in Egyptian art,¹⁰¹ while also being a suitable subject for the room and its decoration. In fact, the way the relief is inset and its perspective reveal close similarities to another similar work by Durrio, albeit on a different subject: the *Design for a Chimneypiece. The Presentation of Christ in a Basque Tavern*, designed by Durrio around 1900 as the fire-plate for a chimneypiece for the Ibaigane palace owned by Ramón de la Sota.

The scene on the present relief is set in a royal palace, in a room framed by curtains in which the most notable element, occupying the greater part of the pictorial space, is a bed (the gold bed referred to by Plutarch), raised up on a platform that is reached by four steps and crowned by a canopy structure with palmiform columns and an entablature that almost seems to be set into the room's ceiling. Standing out in the centre of the entablature is the image of the goddess Nekhbet who takes the traditional form of a vulture. Nekhbet

99 Plutarch 1921, pp. 277-280.

100 Two exhibition catalogues are particularly interesting on this subject: London 2001 and Geneva 2004.

101 It should be remembered that Durrio had produced various pieces of jewellery depicting Cleopatra and that Egyptian forms clearly influenced works such as the *Pantheon for the Echevarrieta Family* and the *Monument to Arriaga*, on which Dueñas worked.



18-19-20. *Cleopatra's Banquet*, 1919
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Details

is one of the principal female Egyptian goddesses together with Wadjet, who was habitually depicted as a woman with the body or head of a cobra. The latter may thus be referred to through the snake that bit Cleopatra. The goddesses were the two patron deities of Ancient Egypt from the time of the union of Upper and Lower Egypt and were an expression of the pharaohs' rule.

The bed is occupied by Cleopatra, reclining on her left arm as she awaits her fate. She is surrounded by a total of eleven figures: five servants, some of them bearing fruit and other food; a group of three singers [fig. 18] on the far left which, aside from formal differences, recalls the figures in Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria*; two musicians, a man playing a hand-drum and a woman kneeling at the foot of the bed as she plays a harp; and finally, a naked female dancer who occupies the foreground but whose movement to the left leads the eye towards the scene's principal figures: the maid carrying the tray with the fruit (not just figs, and thus a free interpretation of Plutarch's text) in which the snake is concealed [fig. 19], and Cleopatra herself.

All the figures are located on different spatial planes in the scene through the gradual reduction in the depth of the relief. Their arrangement creates a sense of crowding or horror vacui that is increased by the way the poses of the male figures at the far left and right of the foreground are adapted to the frame. This sensation is also emphasised by the play of the pronounced perspective, with the principal line of recession defined by the floor tiles, and a second one, which conflicts with the first, created by the structure of the bed. The figures have long, slender proportions and pronounced musculature (particularly in the case of Cleopatra), while their features are of a primitive, synthetic type recalling those of Durrio and Gauguin. The most interesting figures are possibly the ones in the foreground: the kneeling musician playing the drum on the left, whose body reflects the influences that Dueñas assimilated during his time as a grant student in Paris, among them the work of Antoine Bourdelle and Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962); the slave carrying a vessel on her head (possibly with water for Cleopatra's bath), with a pose that vaguely recalls one of Michelangelo's incomplete Slaves; and above all, the naked dancer [fig. 20], with her unstable pose, sinuous forms and markedly decorative character. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the hair and the drapery, which is very close to the Art Nouveau style and to the popular small figures of female dancers in the Art Deco style, such as those of Demetre Chiparus (1886-1947), who also depicted Cleopatra on numerous occasions.

Also worthy of note on the chimneypiece is the plaque set into the frieze in the lower section [fig. 21]. Surrounded by a rectangular frame, in the centre is a female mask executed in a summary manner and with a markedly frontal presentation. This female face with its slanting eyes, straight nose and fleshy lips is surrounded by its own hair, executed as extensive, waving masses and decorated with large circular ornaments at the level of the ears which recall those of the female dancer and the harpist in the relief. Masks of this type, which derive from Paco Durrio's on the base of the *Monument to Crisóstomo de Arriaga*, also appear in other works by Dueñas. They are, for example, to be seen on the front faces of the *Pantheon of the Echevarría La Llana* family in the Vista Alegre cemetery in Derio. Finally, the summary, decorative treatment of the hair recalls the classicising aesthetic with primitivist and Art Deco notes characteristic of the work of other sculptors of the 1920s, such as Vicente Beltrán Grimal (1896-1963).

The *Reclining Female Figure* [fig. 22] that was located on the mantelpiece was cast by Dueñas in Madrid, again at Mir y Ferrero, in 1930. It is thus a separate work executed eleven years after the principal relief on the chimneypiece although it is likely that it was conceived from the outset as a decorative element that would complete the whole. The subject matter of a reclining woman covered with fruit logically relates to that of the banquet on the relief. However, in contrast to that work, Dueñas's figure is closer to classical sculpture and to the revival of the rounded, volumetric forms of the female figure that reappeared with the so-called return to order and were subsequently used by Nemesio Mogrobojo in his four silver reliefs for the



21. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Relief with Mask, c. 1919
 Bronze, 24 x 33.9 cm
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Plaque from one of the friezes on the chimneypiece

Echevarrieta family,¹⁰² and, at the same period as Dueñas's work, by the Valencian sculptors Ramón Mateu Montesinos (1891-1981) and the above-mentioned Vicente Beltrán Grimal. The body's position, its undulating rhythms and the woman's Dionysian attitude recall classical figures of bacchantes, although here with fruit rather than an amphora of wine. The garland of fruit modestly covers the figure in the areas not covered by the drapery, falling from her left arm and extending along the ground towards her right arm. The face is similar to those of the expressive figures executed by Dueñas from the time of his period as a grant student in Paris, possibly influenced by the work of the above-mentioned sculptors Torre, Bourdelle and Meštrović. Examples in Dueñas's work include the *Nymph* in La Concepción (Malaga) and the *Tomb of the Martín de Aldama Family* in the Vista Alegre cemetery.

Sadly, no documentation survives on the commission and execution of the chimneypiece, nor of the *Reclining Female Figure* on its mantelpiece. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that both were located in the dining room of the Munoa palace and that this room was decorated with a cycle of oil paintings executed around 1915 by the Basque painter Aurelio Arteta (1879-1940).¹⁰³ Painted with figures with marked outlines and bright colouring which almost tends to chromatic abstraction in the background, these scenes depict allegories of the foodstuffs and drinks provided by the land and sea. In the present author's opinion, the

¹⁰² Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, inv. nos. 09/234, 14/5, 14/6 and 14/7.

¹⁰³ Most of them, now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. A fundamental contribution to this subject is the article currently in preparation by Miriam Alzuri entitled "Aurelio Arteta. His decorative cycle for the dining room of the Munoa palace"



22. Valentín Dueñas (Bilbao, 1888-Madrid, 1952)
Reclining Female Figure, 1930
Bronze, 27.5 x 69 x 19 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Sculpture on the mantelpiece of the chimneypiece

decoration of the chimneypiece could have been commissioned from Valentín Dueñas at the same time as these paintings or shortly afterwards, possibly between 1917 and 1919, the former the year of his return to Spain and the latter the date of the principal relief. Thus *Cleopatra's Banquet* and the *Reclining Female Figure* are thematically connected to the cycle of paintings in the dining room, completing the decoration of a space dedicated to libations and to the enjoyment of culinary pleasures. In addition, this space became the heart of the house and one that reflected the family's patronage of Basque artists during these years.

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