

bilbao **museoa**

BBKateak **Sergio Prego**

Thirteen to Centaurus

Bilboko Arte Ederren Museoa
Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao

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BBKateak

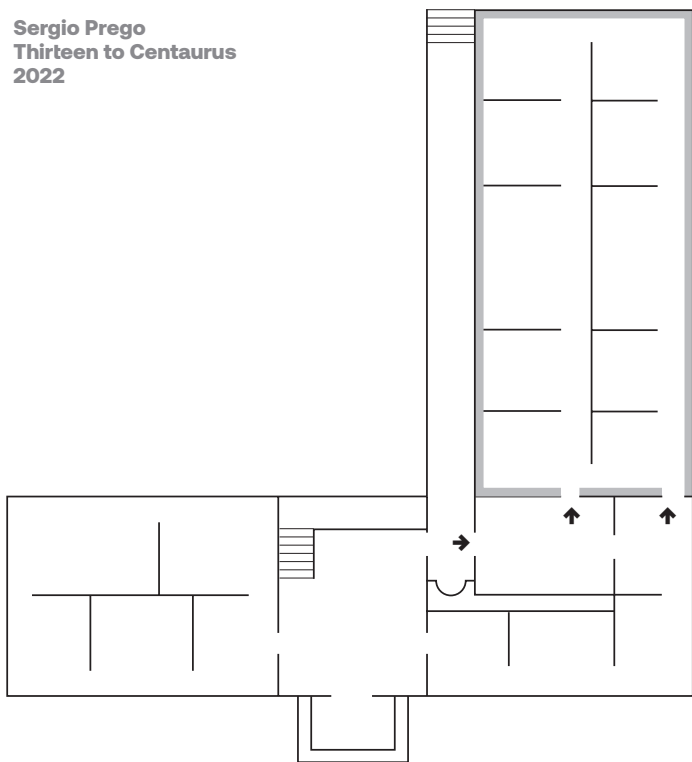
BBKateak is an exhibition proposal which seeks to offer the collection new stories while construction on the enlargement is underway. Via a dynamic programme of presentations which are periodically updated, each of the galleries in the old building shows an unexpected face-to-face interaction between two artists and their works; their names may be distant in time and/or in their cultural and geographic provenance, but they suggest a look at art transformed and under construction. The museum's metamorphosis is thus reflected in a constantly changing collection.

This opens the *Thirteen to Centaurus* programme, a sculptural project by the artist Sergio Prego inspired by the emptying of the galleries.



Old building Ground floor

Sergio Prego
Thirteen to Centaurus
2022





Sergio Prego (San Sebastián, 1969)

An artist living in Brooklyn (New York), his work revolves around sculpture, while integrating a performative perspective. Between 1993 and 1995, he attended several workshops and seminars at the Arteleku art centre in San Sebastián taught by Juan Luis Moraza, Txomin Badiola and Ángel Bados. Between 1996 and 2002, he worked in the studio of the American artist Vito Acconci developing public art and architecture projects. He participated in the conception and development of the PRIMER PROFORMA 2010 at the MUSAC Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León, as well as in the art education programme promoted by Kalostra in San Sebastián in 2015. His recent exhibitions include *Rose-colored Drift/To the Students* (Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, 2017), *Perforado por* (Spanish pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, 2019, along with Itziar Okariz) and *Poured Architecture: Sergio Prego on Miguel Fisac* (Graham Foundation, Chicago, 2020).

Thirteen to Centaurus

Envisioned by the artist Sergio Prego (San Sebastián, 1969) for the museum's galleries during its enlargement, and taking advantage of the opportunity to remove the artworks from the collection from this work zone, *Thirteen to Centaurus* takes advantage of an extraordinary situation to propose a sculpture experience in interaction with the museum's interior architecture.

A sequence of large pneumatic modules transforms the perception of ten adjacent galleries which comprise the architectural body of the museum's old section. The installation is primarily made up of a series of fourteen modules located in space, sized to fit the galleries in which they are placed. These elements are articulated in relation to the symmetry lines of the different galleries, creating a pattern in which concatenated elements alternate either in physical continuity with one another or separated by the walls dividing the rooms or by empty spaces between geometrically similar edges which are parallel in space.

The membrane of the modules is based on the tetrahedron as an abstract model for their structure. It is the simplest regular solid with the greatest structural consistency: four equal triangular sides. Tetrahedrons are unique in that their edges do not match the axial edges of the orthonormal coordinate system, and they do not fit a cubic capacity system. That is, when these forms occupy a space they cannot completely fill it but instead leave interstitial spaces between them. As a result, their geometry is somewhat unsuited to the museum's galleries as their container, whose structure becomes distorted and whose perception is hindered by the presence of the tetrahedrons. When the membrane is blown up, each of them transforms into a curved organic shape similar to a topology in which

no other geometric elements can be identified except the two edges connecting the modules comprising the chain of tetrahedrons. The pneumatic structures can be described as organic shapes, such as organs or organisms, which consist in a membrane enclosed upon itself with orifices that regulate the relationship between inside and outside. The characteristics of these organic forms are determined by the plasticity of the surface tension of the membranes.

Five of the galleries which are aligned and comprise one wing of the architectural body containing this installation are occupied by modules with translucent membranes that barge into the space like alien bodies. The masses occupy exactly one-half of the width of those five galleries on the side where the doorways connecting them are, such that they interfere with a linear route and force sinuous circulation. In their path, the spectators are sometimes very close or in physical contact with them while in other stretches they are under the membranes that filter the light from the skylights. The non-orthonormal structure transforms the perception of and passage through the gallery space.

On the opposite wing comprised of the other five galleries, the modules are made of an opaque black membrane. They are placed in the lengthwise half opposite to the straight line of circulation created by the doorways connecting the galleries. The chain of sculptures is hung on the wall, fitting just over the border caused by the space between the skirting board and the moulding, which bounds it from above. In this wing, the massive black bodies are situated on the opposite side of the circulation route like entities at a contemplative distance.

In parallel, a number of figurative drawings on paper are hung along the entire exhibition opposite to the walls occupied by the modules. The drawings are present as the most familiar way of representing life and humanity, in dialogue and dissonance with the violence generated by the abstract and yet organic presence of the modular pneumatic elements.

The project also incorporates an installation with images of two or three works from the collection in the same place where they used to

be in its most recent arrangement. In this way, the project is inscribed within the context of the museum that is empty both spatially in its architectural form and temporally in relation to its preservation function. One or two framed pneumatic membranes on the borders of the room contain photographs of the works chosen on a true-to-life scale, such that viewing them is mediated by the translucent plastic membrane interposed between the spectator and the photograph, which fulfils a protective function like a frame, distancing us from the image and leading our perception of it to vanish in a haze.

In the science-fiction story, *Thirteen to Centaurus*, J. G. Ballard describes the experiment in which some subjects' lives unfold in utter isolation in a dome, simulating the conditions of intergenerational interstellar travel, without either contact with or knowledge of the outside world. The purpose is to consider the factors of human behaviour that have led past attempts at space colonisation to fail. Doctor Roger Francis is in charge of psychologically tracking the subjects of the study and secretly leaves on a regular basis to coordinate the progress of the project and the support and maintenance tasks with the outside team maintaining the facilities. After 50 years, the decline in public and political support endangers the project, and he desperately asks that the research be continued so it can be concluded in the very distant future:

'... If the project ends it will be we who have failed, not them. We can't rationalize by saying it's cruel or unpleasant. We owe it to the fourteen people in the dome to keep it going.'

Chalmers watched him shrewdly. 'Fourteen? You mean thirteen, don't you, Doctor? Or are you inside the dome too?'

The obscure story interlinks utopian and dystopian images of the future associated with questioning the forms of progress that have characterised modernity, whose development has often collided with ethical and moral positions resulting from human experience. This association resonates in the attempts to use the pneumatic structures commonly found in the radical architecture experiments of the 1960s and 1970s by José Miguel de Prada Poole, Event Structure Research Group, Ant Farm and Hans Walter Muller, among others, who have

been and continue to be touchstones for the artist. When working on them, pneumatic architecture has questioned the massive use of material resources to create other forms of inhabiting. With this experimental quest inserted within the genealogy of sculpture, the use of pneumatic membranes is connected to questioning material mass as an element constitutive of spatial experience.

Sergio Prego