GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on September 23, 2014

The Art of Our Time.
Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collections

The Art of Our Time: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collections

- **Curated by** Petra Joos, Lucía Agirre, Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, Nancy Spector, Tracey R. Bashkoff, and Lauren Hinkson

- **Dates:** September 23, 2014–January 25, 2015 (third floor)
  October 23, 2014–May 3, 2015 (first and second floors)

This exhibition celebrates 20 years of partnership between the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Echoing the museum's opening exhibition in October 1997, which occupied the entire building, *The Art of Our Time: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collections* reveals how the collections of the museums in the Guggenheim constellation have grown and flourished over the years, underscores the synergies between them, and shows how their holdings complement each other while retaining their distinctive identities.

This ambitious show has two opening dates: September 23 for the third floor and October 23 for the second and first floors.

Third Floor: The Origins of the Collections

Following a loose chronology, the exhibition begins with an extraordinary selection of works from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum collection founded at the dawn of the 20th century. This was a time marked by the triumph of avant-garde movements that, armed with utopian ideals and ambitions for political change, challenged the rich figurative legacy of Western art and advocated new approaches that looked beyond mere aesthetic concerns. The presentation continues with important examples of American Abstract Expressionism and its European counterpart, Art Informel, and concludes with two singular spaces dedicated to Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida.

Galleries 305 and 306

The early 20th century was a time of fertile artistic experimentation throughout Europe. In France—specifically in Paris—artists such as Albert Gleizes developed a Cubist vocabulary and eschewed traditional perspective and the illusory depiction of depth, as can be seen in *Portrait of an Army Doctor* (*Portrait d'un médicin militaire*, 1914–15). In Germany and Austria, a number of artists used the pictorial form to express emotions and spiritual states, as exemplified by Franz Marc's *White Bull* (*Der Stier*, 1911). The Expressionists experimented with passionate imagery and abstract form in an effort to convey contemporary psychological truths.

Abstraction flourished in the work of artists like Vasily Kandinsky and László Moholy-Nagy who, in paintings such as *Improvisation 28 (second version)* (*Improvisation 28 [zweite Fassung]*, 1912) and *AXL II* (1927), respectively, assigned spiritual and utopian properties to pure form and color. Surrealists in multiple parts of Europe explored the relationship of the unconscious to the real world,

using techniques of psychic automatism as a means to translate their mental visions into biomorphic forms, such as those found in Joan Miró's work *Landscape (The Hare)* (*Paysage [Le Lièvre],* autumn 1927).

The fragmentation of form that characterizes many of these movements—the fractured planes of Cubism, the disturbed figures of Expressionism, and the hybrid juxtapositions of Surrealism—can be interpreted as a visual analogy to social and psychic rupture.

Gallery 307

During World War II, many European artists took refuge in the United States, and in New York specifically, making America the heir to Europe's artistic legacy and contributing to New York's emergence as a new art capital.

Abstract Expressionism is often regarded as the first truly American artistic movement. Action painting—a term coined to describe a gestural, expressive form of painting linked to the subjective heroism of earlier forms of Expressionism and the Surrealist technique of automatic writing—falls within the Abstract Expressionist field, and is represented in the exhibition by Jackson Pollock's *Untitled (Green Silver)* (ca. 1949). Other Abstract Expressionists used large planes of color to evoke certain spiritual states. These Color Field painters created meditative works of intense lyricism, as exemplified by Mark Rothko's *Untitled* (1952–53).

Meanwhile, a new artistic trend was brewing in Europe under the influence of existentialist philosophy and Eastern schools of thought. Often seen as the European answer to Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel (from the French *informe*, meaning "unformed" or "formless") is characterized by spontaneous gestures and an emphasis on the physical properties of the work of art. These qualities can be seen in Jean Dubuffet's *Knoll of Visions* (*La butte aux visions,* August 23, 1952) or Asger Jorn's *Green Ballet* (*Il balletto verde*, 1960).

Gallery 304

During the postwar years, the art world began to take notice of a youthful talent named Eduardo Chillida. He moved to Paris for a short time in 1947 and had rocketed to international fame by 1958, when he won the International Grand Prize for Sculpture at the Venice Biennale. That same year, shortly before the New York museum opened its doors on Fifth Avenue, his work entered the Guggenheim Collections with the acquisition of *From Within* (*Desde dentro*, March 1953). Chillida studied architecture in Madrid, and this training is apparent in the underlying structures, attention to materials, and carefully planned spatial relationships that characterize his sculptures. In fact, the artist always thought of sculpture as related to architecture. The materials he chose informed his investigations into conceptual and metaphysical concerns: stone and plaster at first; iron, which he later used to explore the metamorphosis of space and the abstract definition of spatial volume; and lastly wood and steel, which allowed him to represent Basque traditions in industry, architecture, and agriculture. Each of these materials are represented in the monographic space dedicated to his oeuvre.

Gallery 301

Another monographic section of the exhibition is devoted to Jorge Oteiza, whose oeuvre defies classification and extends beyond the sculptural object, as he conceived his practice as a process of experimentation with mass and space. Oteiza's output took the form of series such as *Emptying of the Sphere* and sets he referred to as *familias experimentales* (experimental families), including his *Metaphysical Boxes*; they are illustrated here by examples such as *Study for the Emptying of the Sphere* (*Ensayo de desocupación de la esfera*, 1958) and *Metaphysical Box by Conjunction of Two Trihedrons: Homage to Leonardo* (*Caja Metafísica por conjunción de dos triedros. Homenaje a Leonardo,* 1958), respectively. The work Oteiza made in his final years can be associated with Minimalism, yet his sculptures are ultimately rooted in the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, especially Neoplasticism and Constructivism, and his special predilection for abstraction, humanism, and spirituality links him to other post–World War II artists.

Gallery 302

In many parts of the New York art world of the 1960s and early '70s, painting was displaced in favor of sculpture and concept was privileged over material, idea over sensory quality. In Minimalist works, such as Robert Morris's *Untitled (Sixteen Steel Boxes)* (1967), artists dispensed with illusion and representation to foreground the viewer's experience of encountering the art object in the gallery space. Meanwhile artists such as Bruce Nauman conceived the making and viewing of art as a time-based and often-participatory experience, as evinced by works such as *Lighted Center Piece* (1967–68). In the conceptual work of Lawrence Weiner, material presence is eliminated and language becomes the sculptural medium, as in *A STAKE SET* (1969).

Gallery 303

The European artists featured in this gallery, Jannis Kounellis and Richard Long, are leading exponents of Arte Povera and Land art. Their works reflect a broad spectrum of artistic and political stances adopted in response to the ideological, economic, social, and political forces that shaped their era.

Kounellis believed that postwar European society lacked appropriate aesthetic forms with which to reflect the fragmentary nature of contemporary civilization. His work *Untitled* (1988) combines organic and industrial elements in a kind of poetic confrontation between nature and culture. Richard Long translates his personal experience of nature into clay or stone sculptures and drawings that allow visitors to experience a record of the artist's wanderings, as in *Bilbao Circle* (2000).

Second Floor: From Pop Art to the Late 20th Century

The second half of the 20th century marks the chronological starting point of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao collection, and the second floor of the exhibition features selected pieces, groups of works, and series drawn primarily from the Bilbao holdings.

Gallery 205

The 1960s was one of the most provocative decades—culturally, politically, and philosophically—of the 20th century. The remarkable economic growth that occurred from the end of World War II through the Cold War era of the 1950s resulted in a newly invigorated consumer culture in America. A number of the artists who burst onto the scene, particularly in New York and Los Angeles in the early years of the decade, responded to this new commercialism.

Pop art is often considered an essentially American phenomenon, but British artists and theorists first debated and formulated its main tenets in the late 1950s. In Pop art, the everyday replaces the epic and the mass-produced is awarded the same significance as the unique, effectively eroding the gulf between "high art" and "low art." Works such as James Rosenquist's *Flamingo Capsule* (1970), Andy Warhol's *One Hundred and Fifty Multicolored Marilyns* (1979), and Roy Lichtenstein's *In* (1962) show how artists used imagery culled from advertisements, billboards, movies and television, comic strips, and product packaging to celebrate and simultaneously critique popular culture.

Gallery 206

Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly are two of the most prominent and influential artists of the second half of the 20th century. Both studied at the legendary Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and by the mid-1950s they had developed their signature visual languages.

In contrast to the heroic gestures characteristic of Abstract Expressionist painting, Twombly's calligraphic marks, sometimes rendered simply in black on white painted surfaces, have frequently been compared to graffiti. This apparently abstract vocabulary could be infused with deep cultural significance, as Twombly often made direct reference to classical literature and mythology in his art. *Nine Discourses on Commodus* (1963), Twombly's first piece consisting of multiple yet inseparable canvases, refers to the disastrous rein of Roman emperor Aurelius Commodus (ruled 177–192 CE) and suggests a narrative of great passion through abstract imagery.

Rauschenberg can be considered a precursor to Pop art because he used everyday objects and images taken from magazines and newspapers. Yet his works typically reveal expressionistic traces of the artist's hand that distinguish them from the cool, detached aesthetic of Pop. On view in the exhibition is one of Rauschenberg's most iconic and monumental creations, *Barge* (1962–63). Painted in a single 24-hour period, it is one of the best examples of the dynamic, silkscreened paintings he began making in the 1960s.

Gallery 207

Georg Baselitz first earned recognition in the late the 1960s for his signature paintings with upside-down motifs. He reoriented the subject, not the canvas, to reexamine it in a way that subverted traditional compositional rules and to move beyond the narrative connotations of his earlier paintings. In the 1970s he began applying paint with his hands, and later with his feet, a technique that underscores the painted image as a product of a body's action and not only a conceptual or spiritual creation.

Mrs. Lenin and the Nightingale (2008), a suite of sixteen paintings nine of which are shown here, is based on a repetition of the same compositional structure: two upside-down male figures sitting next to each other, their penises exposed and their hands resting solemnly on their thighs. The basic motif originates from Otto Dix's renowned portrait *The Artist's Parents II* (1924). As in many of his works, Baselitz referred to a specific art-historical precedent, reinterpreting it in his own way: in this case, replacing Dix's figures with two dictators, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. Each painting bears an individual title comprising a pun or an enigmatic phrase. None of the titles refer directly to the dictators portrayed; they were inspired for the most part by reflections upon, or encounters with, the work of modern and contemporary artists.

Gallery 209

This gallery features pieces by Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer, two artists of different generations whose work shares cosmogonic themes and certain formal resources.

One of Beuys's most dramatic installations, *Lightning with Stag in Its Glare* (*Blitzschlag mit Lichtschein auf Hirsch*, 1958–85), articulates the German artist's abiding fascination with earth, animals, and death. Completed one year before his death, this installation evinces a number of the theories and mythologies from which Beuys drew throughout his career, the significance of this complex installation may ultimately be located in his idea of "social sculpture," with which he hoped to rejuvenate or illuminate society with his creative thought.

Kiefer is a leading representative of German Neo-Expressionism, a movement characterized by the revival of subjective heroism and textural brushwork. History—whether the recent history of his native Germany or the history of vanished civilizations—is the raw material of Kiefer's work, as can be seen in *Sun-Ship* (*Das Sonnenschiff*, 1984–95) and *Only with Wind, Time, and Sound* (*Nur mit Wind, mit Zeit und mit Klang*, 1997). Kiefer's habitually large-scale, quasi-architectural works are executed in an almost monochromatic palette and with a combination of unusual materials like ash, lead plates, plaster, seeds, soil, and straw. Organic merges with inorganic, and the monumental scale and textural richness enhance the solemn, transcendental quality of his work.

Galleries 202 and 203

These galleries are given over to a series by American artist Alex Katz comprising eleven canvases and an impressive sculptural-architectural installation by Miquel Navarro, born in Valencia.

In Katz's series *Smiles* (1994), the cold, neutral backgrounds contrast with the sitters' casual smiles, and the poses of some of the women suggest an undercurrent of tension. The harsh lighting, a common photographic device, underscores the flatness of the portraits. Although the work is figurative, Katz does not aim to capture the sitter's personality, but rather to reflect more profoundly on the nature of representation and the perception of images.

Wall City (*Ciudad muralla*, 2000–01) is a perfect example of Navarro's cities, which he uses to generate arenas for the confrontation of ideas. This sculptural landscape is built with architectural elements that act as formal vehicles to translate the experience of the cityscape. Through this work,

Navarro invites visitors to reflect on the notion of human scale and the complicated relationship between architecture and sculpture.

Gallery 204

Christian Boltanski began to make a name for himself in 1986 with unsettling installations of old photographs, clothing, and other personal belongings that he presented as artifacts and vestiges of the lives of others. Reminiscent of small theaters or churches, the spaces he creates can inspire hushed wonder and a poignant sensation of loss and absence. Boltanski's work often uses the mementos of individual lives to explore the recovery of collective memory in the wake of tragedy. For *Humans* (1994), Boltanski culled photographs of more than one thousand anonymous people from archives and mass media sources. The work suggests death and disappearance while also offering a reflection on the loss of identity.

Gallery 208

Some artists of the 1960s believed that art should be the product of an idea rather than an emotion, and that the concept was more important than the execution. For Sol LeWitt, this meant establishing systems of logic in the form of written instructions that determined the outcome of an artwork before it was created.

Wall Drawing #831 (Geometric Forms) (1997), which LeWitt designed specifically for this gallery, was one of the earliest of the artist's wall drawings to incorporate acrylic paint. With its bright, highly saturated colors and irregular geometric shapes that follow the curving lines of the gallery designed by Frank Gehry, the painting both merges with and transforms architectural setting.

First Floor: Toward the 21st Century

The exhibition ends on the first floor with the Guggenheim Collections' most recent acquisitions of contemporary art. The selections, drawn from Cambodia, China, Ghana, and Korea as well as from Europe and the United States, reflect the museums' growing interest in global artistic production.

Gallery 105

The pieces featured in this gallery represent the work of emerging and contemporary artists. Together these works explore a wide variety of themes, such as identity, exile, memory, the poetics of architecture, the dynamics of the built environment, and physical violence and repression.

The first room brings together the work of artist Mona Hatoum, whose *Home* (1999) is linked to her personal experience as a Palestinian born in Beirut and living in exile in London, and Danh Vo, whose *Das Beste oder Nichts* (2010) relates to his family's desire for a better life as Vietnamese immigrants in Denmark. In the second room, Lee Bul's sculptures and Julie Mehretu's paintings illustrate how artists can use different mediums to address interconnected concepts such as visionary architecture, urban construction, and the effects of the built environment on individuals.

The third room in the gallery includes pieces by Ai Weiwei, Ik-Joong Kang, and Sopheap Pich, artists who use materials in expressive ways to make reference to biographical, historical, and political conditions. These works, along with Cristina Iglesias' installation, engage in a rich dialogue with contemporary issues and cultural traditions around the globe.

Gallery 103: Film and Video

The exhibition continues on the first floor in the Film & Video gallery with two video installations. Through November 2, audiences will be able to view a work by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson titled *The Visitors* (2012), a nine-screen video installation that documents a musical performance staged at Rokeby, a historic house in upstate New York that the artist has visited frequently since 2007. From November 14, the gallery will host Rineke Dijkstra's *The Krazyhouse (Megan, Simon, Nicky, Philip, Dee), Liverpool, UK* (2009), in which young people dance while DJs play their favorite music. These works reveal how, in recent decades, the Guggenheim Collections have focused on the art of today with a special interest in video art and video installations, mediums that have played an important role in the development of contemporary art.

Permanent and Site-Specific Works

The survey of *The Art of Our Time* is rounded out by works from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao collection scattered throughout the building and the grounds, which strike up provocative dialogues with their surroundings: the site-specific installations *The Matter of Time* (1994–2005) by Richard Serra in Gallery 104 and *Installation for Bilbao* (1997) by Jenny Holzer in Gallery 101; the volatile *Fog Sculpture #08025 (F.O.G.)* (1998) by Fujiko Nakaya and *Fire Fountain* (1961, fabricated 1997) by Yves Klein, and the sculptures *Maman* (1999) by Louise Bourgeois, *Tall Tree & the Eye* (2009) by Anish Kapoor, and *Tulips* (1995–2004) by Jeff Koons, all located in or around the pond; Koons's *Puppy* (1992) in the museum plaza; and *Arcos rojos/Arku gorriak* (2007) by Daniel Buren on the neighboring La Salve Bridge.

Didaktika

The Didaktika project helps visitors explore the contents of our exhibitions more thoroughly through educational areas, special activities, and the assistance of our gallery guides.

Educational areas

Given the ambitious scope of this exhibition, we have created two educational areas on the third and second floors where you can learn how the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao have evolved, how they complement each other, and the secrets of this museum concept's success.

On both floors, you will find a series of short texts that open with the question *Did you know...?* These wall texts invite you to view some of the artists and works featured in the exhibition from a different angle and explain why they were included in the Guggenheim Collections.

On the third floor, you can also follow a timeline that marks the milestones in the history of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. And you are welcome to relax in the reading corner, stocked with seminal books about the Guggenheim Collections.

On the second floor, the Didaktika includes an audiovisual section with some of the earliest graphic records of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao project, which clearly illustrates how the construction of this building transformed the city. The audiovisual section also includes a few short videos in which members of the curatorial team responsible for this exhibition explain why and how it was organized, along with testimonials from visitors, supporters, teachers, artists, Museum Members... in short, the people that constitute the social bedrock of this project. Their experiences and different points of view offer a multifaceted, open vision of how the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and its collection have grown over the years.

Special activities
***Ensemble Kandinsky-Switzerland* concert**
Thursday, October 23

In connection with the exhibition *The Art of Our Time: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collections*, the Museum, in association with the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, will offer a special concert performed by the Ensemble Kandinsky-Switzerland.
The program is directly related to the show and includes a repertoire of pieces for clarinet, piano, viola, violin, and cello by composers of the stature of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Igor Stravinsky, Erik Satie, Arnold Schönberg, and Morton Feldman. Join us on a melodious journey from classical to contemporary music.

Venue and time: Museum Auditorium, 7 pm
Tickets available at the admissions desk and on the website: € 5 for Museum Members and € 8 for non-members. Visit the website for program details

FestivalArte
Experience The Art of Our Time!
Saturday, November 8, and Sunday, November 9

A creative, multidisciplinary art festival organized to celebrate the Museum's 17th anniversary and the major exhibition of the Permanent Collection, *The Art of Our Time*, with a variety of activities for audiences of all ages.

Information and tickets: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am to 2 pm, on +34 944 359 080 or the Museum website.

Gallery docents

Visitors may ask the Museum's gallery docents in case they want to know more about the artworks in the exhibition, just ask our gallery docents. These experts can provide a wealth of information about the show's artistic content and the specific works in each gallery, as well as subjects like the Museum's architecture, the Guggenheim network, and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao project. Daily, 11 am to 2 pm. Free service.

Further information

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Press images

The Art of Our Time: Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collections

Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa

Online press images service

Visit our online Press Room (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en) and register in order to download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and the building. If you do not yet have an account, you can register for one and download all the materials you need. If you are already registered, sign in with your user name and password for direct access to the image download area.

For more information, please contact the Press Department at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by calling us on +34 944 35 90 08 or writing to media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

1. Franz Marc

White Bull (*Der Stier*), 1911
Oil on canvas
100 × 135.2 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 51.1312



2. Marc Chagall

Paris Through the Window (*Paris par la fenêtre*), 1913
Oil on canvas
136 × 141.9 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.438
© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2014



3. Amedeo Modigliani

Nude (*Nu*), 1917
Oil on canvas
73 × 116.7 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 41.535



4. Vasily Kandinsky

Composition 8 (*Komposition 8*), July 1923
Oil on canvas
140 × 201 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.262
© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2014



5. Mark Rothko
Untitled, 1952–53
Oil on canvas
300 x 442.5 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa



6. Eduardo Chillida
How Profound Is the Air (*Lo profundo es el aire*), 1996
Alabaster
94 x 122 x 124 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa



7. Jorge Oteiza
Metaphysical Box by Conjunction of Two Trihedrons. Homage to Leonardo (*Caja metafísica por conjunción de dos triedros. Homenaje a Leonardo*), 1958
Steel
28.5 x 25 x 26.5 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa



8. Bruce Nauman
Lighted Center Piece, 1967–68
Aluminum plate and four 1,000-watt halogen lamps
Plate: 6.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection, Gift, 92.4161
© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2014



9. Sol LeWitt
Wall Drawing #831 (Geometric Forms), 1997
Acrylic on wall
Site-specific dimensions
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa



10. Andy Warhol
One Hundred and Fifty Multicolored Marilyns, 1979
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
201 x 1055 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa



11. Anselm Kiefer



Only with Wind, Time, and Sound (*Nur mit Wind, mit Zeit und mit Klang*), 1997
Acrylic and emulsion on canvas
470 x 940 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa

12. Julie Mehretu



Middle Grey, 2007–09
Ink and acrylic on canvas
304.8 x 426.7 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Commissioned by Deutsche Bank AG in consultation with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin 2012.206
© Julie Mehretu

13. El Anatsui



Earth's Skin, 2007
Aluminum and copper wire
Approximately 449.6 x 1000.8 cm
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi
© El Anatsui
Photo by Andrew McAllister, courtesy of the Akron Art Museum

14. Ai Weiwei



China Log, 2005
Ironwood
57.8 x 337.5 x 55.2 cm overall
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Lybess Sweezy and Ken Miller 2012.138
© Ai Weiwei
Installation view: *Now's the Time: Recent Acquisitions*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, November 3, 2012–January 2, 2013.
Photo: Kris McKay

15. Cristina Iglesias



Untitled (Jealousy II) [*Sin título (Celosía II)*], 1997
Wood, resin, and bronze powder
260 x 350 x 300 cm
Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa