

Video Art and Digital Creation Programme
of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum and the BBVA Foundation

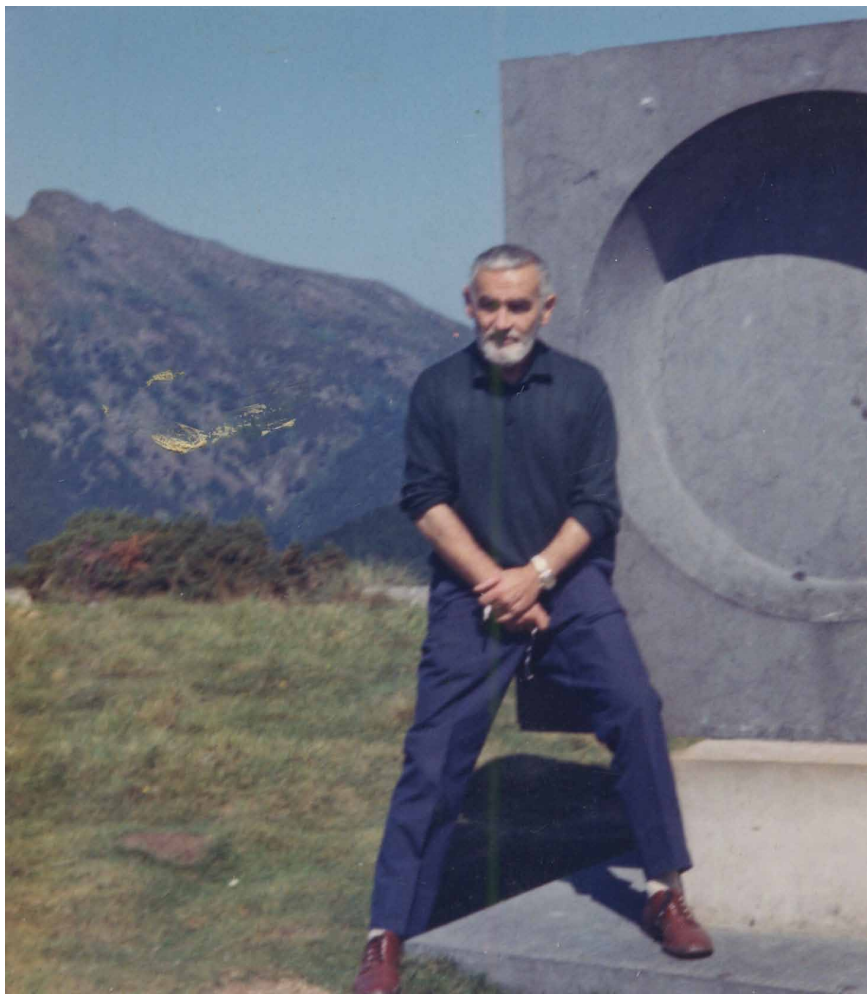
STONE AND SKY

VIDEO INSTALLATION
BY VÍCTOR ERICE



BILBOKO ARTE EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES DE BILBAO

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Jorge Oteiza next to the stele of the *Aita Donostia Memorial*, peak of Mount Agiña, c. 1965
Archive of the Jorge Oteiza Foundation Museum, reg. 3030

STONE AND SKY

VÍCTOR ERICE

The motif of *Stone and Sky* is the *Aita Donostia Memorial*, located at the peak of Mount Agiña (Lesaka, Navarra) and created by the sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908–2003) and the architect Luis Vallet de Montano (1894–1982). Made at the request of the Aranzadi Science Society, which chose the location, and opened on 20 June 1959, it consists in a funeral stele and a chapel, the former created by Oteiza and the latter by Luis Vallet.

Beyond the beauty of the landscape, the peak of Mount Agiña (618 m) is an extremely important place. The repository of identity hallmarks, it is part of a megalithic site which has 107 stone circles, eleven dolmens, four mounds and one menhir, landmarks associated with ancestral spaces and rites which make it particularly meaningful. The leading theory on their meaning is that they are burials. However, some studies also suggest that Pyrenean stone circles actually represented stars and constellations, making them the remains of a pre-Christian astral religion. Likewise, it is important to bear in mind that *Urtzi*, the Basque name for God—which seems to date from the 12th century—meant ‘firmament’.

The writer José de Arteche, who accompanied Oteiza on his first visit to Mount Agiña, recounted his friend’s reaction when he saw the stone circles there: ‘Oteiza knelt with his arms extended out, saying that he wanted to receive the telluric emanations. He looked like a child. Vallet helped him get up. It was cold ... Oteiza cast an anxious look over the landscape. He looked like he was in a trance again: “It is essential”, he said, “to fill our landscape with funerary stelae, with strategically lit signals arranged in this long night that we do not want to arouse”’.

‘Our Basque prehistory’, wrote Oteiza, ‘is our sacred history’. He stated that the specific feature of a Basque stone circle was the



Jorge Oteiza next to the microliths of a Basque stone circle, c. 1965
Archive of the Jorge Oteiza Foundation Museum, reg. 2576.
Photograph: Luis Vallet de Montano

fact that it contained nothing inside it; it is not a grave but, more importantly, a protective space for the individual and their solitude, an art form: 'One day, facing all these small stone circles atop Mount Agiña I thought about my disoccupation of space. Any work of art is either a reality of shapes occupying a space or an unoccupied space. This small kind of stone circle is a statue and is one of the most important creations in the artist's creative genius of all times.'

Situated in front of the video camera, observed by it day and night, the stele-sculpture and chapel of the Memorial have been subjected to a cinematism process in *Stone and Sky* in which light, sound and time play an essential role. The daytime view, dominated by the sun (*Eguzki*) from dawn to dusk, contrasts with the night-time view. The former offers images in which nature coexists with the footprints of history (the work of man: the stone circles, Oteiza's decrepit stele, Vallet's chapel); the latter tries to capture something of the metaphysical dimension of the scene lit by the Moon (*Ilargi*, that is, the light of the dead). In short, they are the elements of what Oteiza identified as the 'Culture of the Sky'.



Jorge Oteiza working in his atelier in Nuevos Ministerios, Madrid, 1956–1957
Archive of the Jorge Oteiza Foundation Museum, reg. 2576. Photograph: Basabe

The sculptor recognised himself as an artist of the sky, as compared to artists of the earth. The sky was his purpose: to evoke it in all its immensity in stone and wrought iron. Through a childhood experience, he recounted how the sky provided him with his first aesthetic understanding of the world. Since that time, the great celestial vault seemed to him a place of rest and protection from the fears of existence.

His second public statue project after his anthropomorphic sculpture of Arantzazu, Jorge Oteiza worked on the stele for Mount Agiña while preparing to participate in the São Paulo Biennial in September 1957 with his *Experimental Project*. Regarded as one of his most important creations, it is a synthesis between geometric abstraction and the integration of nature, as well as a symbolic projection where the religious and the political coexist. The purpose of this formal deployment was clear; in its creator's words: 'This stone should cause an impression of seriousness, solitude, as well as a distant, irremissible presence, such as that of the stones that have been with it since our prehistory, certainly much longer than us. The geometric



Still from *Stone and Sky* (Day Space)

symbolism of the circle and the square, slightly off-kilter in this distinguished place, like an anchor rotating incessantly around the landscape, beckons us to clear everything, to ignore us with the indifference of everything that is Good and Eternal, which leads us to pray and feel how little we are.’

With regard to the chapel, perhaps Luis Vallet’s most iconic work, it was formally envisioned as a simple tilted paraboloid which represents a vessel run aground on the mountain. According to its author, it is a structure capable ‘of giving the sense of condensing and gathering all the sounds and music of Basque nature, just as the great musicologist we are commemorating did; it was designed to be made of reinforced concrete, a material from our era that is as imperishable as Neolithic materials.’

Within this set of sounds which Vallet mentioned in his purpose, *Stone and Sky* includes a work by the musician and Capuchin brother to whom this Memorial is dedicated: Aita Donostia, the pen name of José Gonzalo Zulaika y Arregi (1886–1956), specifically, his *Andante doloroso* (Mournful Andante), performed by Josu Okiñena, the last of



Still from *Stone and Sky* (Night Space)

his compositions for piano dating from 1 March 1954. Likewise, the installation sought to integrate a small testimonial of Jorge Oteiza's most intimate writing, his lesser-known status as a poet, into its images. Indeed, he stated: 'Poetry is what heals me, what rids me of distress and rebalances me. Poetry is my pacemaker.'

It is essential to recall that the stele on Mount Agiña was seriously damaged on 30 November 1992. The attack was attributed to a self-named Aralar Komando Kulturala (Aralar cultural commando unit). The sculptor Koldo Azpiazu, an Oteiza disciple, was considered its intellectual leader and was condemned by his master. Finally, in a public letter, Oteiza ironically declared himself to be the mastermind of the attack against his own sculpture. Some time later, he went to Mount Agiña and viewed his stele, stating: 'I found my mistreated stone, its edges bruised. I found it afflicted, aged, more whole and beautiful, indestructible, more alive and spiritual than ever.'



Jorge Oteiza and the carvers Joxemari and Vithor Celaya next to the stele of the Aita Donostia Memorial, peak of Mount Agiña, 1958
Archive of the Jorge Oteiza Foundation Museum, reg. 3359

JORGE OTEIZA

SCULPTOR

Orio, Gipuzkoa, 1908–San Sebastián, 2003

Jorge Oteiza is one of the most prominent and influential Basque artists of the 20th century. Self-taught, he started his career with an experimental attitude evinced in works that fall within the orbit of expressionism or primitivism. In 1935, he moved to South America, and during his long sojourn there he took an interest in topics like anthropology and politics. Upon his return to Spain in 1948, he began to practically and theoretically develop the foundations of his aesthetic and embarked upon the process of dematerialising his sculptures.

For Oteiza, the 1950s were intense years creatively and intellectually. Early in the decade, he was given the commission to make the statues for the Arantzazu Basilica in Oñati (Gipuzkoa), a project that did not materialise until 1969, and in 1957 he earned the International Grand Prize in Sculpture at the 4th Biennial of São Paulo. During this time that he was immersed in abstract inquiry, he announced the end of his sculptural activity in 1960. From then on, he focused his efforts on demonstrating the existence of a Basque cultural tradition that differs from that of the rest of Spain. Thus, in 1963 he published his most famous text, *Quousque tandem...! Ensayo de interpretación del alma vasca*, and shortly thereafter he participated in creating the groups of the Basque School—Gaur (Gipuzkoa), Emen (Bizkaia), Orain (Álava) and Danok (Navarra)—and founded the Deba School in an effort to develop an aesthetic sensibility rooted in the Basque Country.

Oteiza always held politically and ideologically iconoclastic stances, and he was critical of official recognition. In 1992, he donated his legacy to the people of Navarra, and after his death in the spring of 2003, the Jorge Oteiza Foundation Museum opened its doors in the town of Alzuza in what used to be his house-atelier.

VÍCTOR ERICE

FILMMAKER

Karrantza Harana, Bizkaia, 1940

Victor Erice lived in San Sebastián as a child and adolescent. At the age of 17, he moved to Madrid to study at the university. In 1960, he enrolled in the Official Cinematography School, where he earned a diploma in the speciality of Film Direction.

In 1968, he made his debut as a professional director by filming one of the three episodes in *Los desafíos* (The Challenges), in which Claudio Guerín and José Luis Egea also participated. In 1973, he filmed his first feature film, *El espíritu de la colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive), which won the Golden Shell at the San Sebastián International Film Festival that same year. In 1983, he directed the film, *El sur* (The South), based on a story of the same name by Adelaida García Morales, a work he has always considered unfinished. In 1992, he made *El sol del membrillo* (The Quince Tree Sun, or Dream of Light) in conjunction with the painter Antonio López, which they submitted to the Cannes Film Festival, where they won the Jury Prize and the International Critics' Prize. In 2002, he filmed *Alumbramiento* (Lifeline), one of the episodes in the feature film *Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet*, in which other prominent international filmmakers also participated, including Aki Kaurismäki, Jim Jarmusch, Win Wenders, Werner Herzog and Spike Lee.

In 2005, in response to a request from the Centre de Cultura Contemporània in Barcelona, and within the context of the exhibition entitled *Erice-Kiarostami. Correspondence*, he started to direct the series of short films called *Letters to Abbas Kiarostami*. For that same show, in December 2005 he wrote and directed *La Morte Rouge*. Simultaneously, he made a video installation based on several Antonio López paintings entitled *Fragor del Mundo, Silencio de la Pintura* (The Clamour of the World, the Silence of Painting), which was exhibited at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània in Barcelona, La Casa Encendida in Madrid, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image) in Melbourne.

He has also worked on the documentary series *Memoria y sueño* (Memory and Dream), three chapters of which have been produced so far: *Roma, Città Aperta, Sierra de Teruel* and *Le Mépris*. In 2011, he filmed *Ana, tres minutos* (Ana, Three Minutes), an episode in the feature film *A Sense of Home*. In 2012, he filmed *Vidros partidos* (Broken Windows) in Portugal, which is part of the feature film *Centro histórico* (Historical Centre), co-directed by Manoel de Oliveira, Pedro Costa and Aki Kaurismäki. Finally, in 2018 he made *Plegaria* (Prayer), a short film based on photographs he took over the course of several years.

Particularly since the 1990s, Víctor Erice has taught many classes, seminars and workshops. This is how he shares his experience as a director, while also continuing to reflect on cinematography. He has written numerous articles for newspapers, magazines and books and has delivered lectures and lessons in numerous places around Spain and abroad, particularly in Europe but also in Japan and the United States. He has also led workshops targeted at the processes of writing, filming and editing.

Filmography

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|------|---|-----------|---|
| 1963 | <i>Los días perdidos</i> .
Medium-length film at the Official
Cinematography School, Sound. 41' | 2002 | <i>Alumbramiento</i> .
Episode of <i>Ten Minutes Older:
The Trumpet</i> . 11' |
| 1968 | <i>Los desafíos</i> . Third episode.
Co-directors: Claudio Guerin and
José Luis Egea. 102' | 2005–2007 | <i>Abbas Kiarostami-Víctor
Erice: Correspondence</i> . Video. 98' |
| 1973 | <i>El espíritu de la colmena</i> .
Feature film. 97' | 2005 | <i>Memoria y sueño</i> .
Documentary series. Video |
| 1983 | <i>El sur</i> .
Feature film. 94' | 2006 | <i>La morte rouge</i> . Video. 34' |
| 1990 | <i>Apuntes 1990-2003</i> .
Video. 28'30" | 2011 | <i>Ana, tres minutos</i> .
Episode in the feature film
<i>A Sense of Home</i> . Video. 3' |
| 1992 | <i>El sol del membrillo</i> .
Feature film. 130' | 2012 | <i>Vidros partidos</i> .
Episode in the feature film <i>Centro
histórico</i> . Co-directors: Manoel
de Oliveira, Pedro Costa and
Aki Kaurismäki. 35' |
| 1996 | <i>Preguntas al atardecer</i> .
Episode of <i>Celebrate Cinema 101</i> .
Video. 6' | 2018 | <i>Plegaria</i> . Video. 5'30" |

LUIS VALLET DE MONTANO ECHEANDÍA ARCHITECT

Plan, Huesca, 1894–San Sebastián, 1982

A ‘frontier architect’—as he has recently been described—Luis Vallet de Montano was born in Huesca, but his family immediately moved to his mother’s hometown, Irun. He earned his degree from the Architecture School of Madrid in 1920. Professionally, he began espousing a ‘Neo-Basque’ style, but later, just like the majority of architects of his day, he adopted the rationalist language. In 1921, he was appointed municipal architect of the Irun Town Hall. The works he made for the city from that year on include the Casino, the Conservatory, the Bidasoa porcelain factory, the Municipal Slaughterhouse and the grain storage cooperative. He was a member of GATEPAC group (Group of Spanish Artists and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture), founded in 1930.

During the Spanish Civil War, after Irun fell into the hands of Franco’s troops in September 1936, he was forced to go into exile in France. He was stripped of his job and disqualified by the Directorate General of Architecture. He did not go back to Gipuzkoa until 1943, and the administrative reparation of his job did not occur until late 1976. In September 1956, he designed the house of Jorge Oteiza and Néstor Basterretxea on Avenida de Iparralde in Irun in conjunction with the two artists. His most representative work is probably the memorial chapel devoted to the musician Aita Donostia on Mount Agiña.

AITA DONOSTIA (JOSÉ GONZALO ZULAIKA) COMPOSER AND MUSICOLOGIST

San Sebastián, 1886–Lekaroz, Navarra, 1956

José Gonzalo Zulaika, better known as Aita Donostia, is one of the most important figures in traditional Basque music. In addition to being an admired composer, he was also a prominent musicologist who carried out a vast amount of research, compilation and dissemination of the folklore and music of the Basque Country, which materialised in his numerous reference works that he published and the countless lectures he delivered all over the world.

He composed his first piece for orchestra—*Diana*, 1897—at a very young age, when he was studying in the Lekaroz (Navarra) seminary. After donning the habit of a Capuchin priest in 1908 and making a brief educational sojourn in Barcelona, in 1911 he deepened his knowledge of the popular tunes from the Basque Country, and he composed his celebrated work for piano *Preludios vascos* (Basque Preludes) between 1912 and 1913. In order to further his training, he moved to Madrid in 1918 and to Paris in 1920, where he connected with the most advanced European musical currents. In 1922, he published his *Cancionero vasco* (Basque Songbook), a compilation of almost 2,000 lyrics and scores from the popular songs collected over the course of one decade.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, his nationalist ideas forced him to go into exile in France, where he continued his work until he was able to return to Lekaroz in 1943. From there, he immediately moved to Barcelona to join the recently created Spanish Musicology Institute between 1944 and 1953, when he permanently returned to Lekaroz, where he died in 1956.

JOSU OKIÑENA

MUSICIAN

San Sebastián, 1971

The pianist Josu Okiñena holds a PhD from the University of Valladolid. After earning first prize for piano and chamber music from the Higher Conservatory of San Sebastián, he studied with the celebrated performer Félix Lavilla. He was given the prize of honour at the end of his degree programme at the Royal Music Conservatory of Madrid, and the Andrés Segovia and José Miguel Ruiz Morales Prize for Spanish music performance in Santiago de Compostela. He furthered his training in New York at the prestigious Juilliard School of Music with Oxana Yablonskaya, and in London, where he took master classes with Krystian Zimerman, Bruno Leonardo Gelber and Ivo Pogorelich. He studied with Maria Curcio, an alumna of the legendary pianist Artur Schnabel, for five years. Okiñena's influences during his formative years resulted in an extraordinarily personal style which earns him admiration in concert calls all over the world.

In 2001, he returned to San Sebastián to support the creation of the Higher Music Centre of the Basque Country, Musikene, with his teaching, and in 2006 he and the Symphony Orchestra of Euskadi premiered the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* by Ignacio Tellería, demonstrating his commitment to current music and in particular to the composers from his homeland. In March 2011, he won the research prize at the University of the Basque Country for his work on Aita Donostia. In 2013, he recorded a set of preludes for piano by the celebrated Basque composer for Sony Classical, a recording which expert critics considered one of the top ten records of the year and which earned him fame as an up-and-coming pianist. He has also recorded a selection of works by Erik Satie with the same label.

CREDITS STONE AND SKY

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Idea and Direction

Víctor Erice

Executive Producer

César Romero

Director of Photography

Valentín Álvarez

Editing

Juan Pedro Díez

Second Camera Operator

Ian Ingelmo

Post-production

Entropy Studio

VFX Director

Ignacio Lacosta

VFX Supervisor

Fernando Jiménez Orgaz

Conforming

Álvaro Arancón

Colour

Guillermo Peña Jr.

Sound Design and Mixing

Raúl Lasvignes and Ignacio Román
(Crislama)

Live Sound

Xabier Agirre

Second Editor

Florencia Handler

Production Assistants

Joseba Abrisketa and Lidia Esteban

Camera Assistant

Sara Gallego

Gaffer

Gorka Zudaire

Machinist

Iñigo Bach

Assistant Machinist

Iker Ibarlucea

Music

Andante doloroso, written by Aita

Donostia

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Music Editing: Josu Okiñena

Camera Material

Drago

Red Gemini Camera

Catts Camara

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STONE AND SKY

Video installation by Víctor Erice

Gallery 32

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