



Towards the encounter

Linz is an Austrian city of 200,000 inhabitants, known throughout the country for being its main steel producer. In the international cultural sphere we know it as being the location, since 1979, of the Festival Ars Electronica, one of the biggest digital arts festivals in the world.

In its University of Fine Arts and Industrial Design we find the Interface Cultures department, where a prestigious international Master's Degree in interactive digital arts is taught.

Enrique Tomás, known in the world of experimental music as Ultranoise, is a lecturer at the university and in March 2016 I invited him to Bilbao to give some talks, concerts and presentations of his work, which took place in the UPV/EHU Fine Arts Faculty, and in Sarean, a socio-cultural space in the San Francisco neighbourhood of Bilbao.

From this encounter the opportunity arose to take a number of Bilbao artists with bold, experimental proposals to the Austrian city to take part in a project. The Madrid artist, Alex de Europa, was also present as an organiser.

The artists selected were Karla Tobar, Amaia Vicente, Blanca Ortiga, Saray Pérez Castilla, Sandra Quintanilla and Laurita Siles.

The project was undertaken in the AFO (Architecture Forum of Upper Austria) over June and July 2017.

Shedding the skin, which was the title of the project, consisted of a reflection on the part of the artists and curators on changes to the city model. Bilbao, with its mutation through the Guggenheim effect and commitment to technology, culture and services, was compared to Linz.

Linz is still a predominantly industrial city, but in recent years has been making a strong commitment towards changing its idiosyncrasies and becoming a post-industrial city, as is the case for Bilbao.

The final aim of the project was for me to show a part of the most advanced art currently being made in Bilbao, and to do so via six women artists. To support female creators who experiment with languages and who dialogue between disciplines.

When I believe or participate in international projects, I always think about fostering synergies between those who do the travelling and those who play host. Creating new forums, networks and knowledge in which artists, specialists and publics take part.

As a cultural manager and curator, every year I usually invite at least 20 foreign artists in different disciplines to show their work in Bilbao, which I've now been doing for 15 years. In the same way every year I try and show something that is being done outside our country, be it accepting invitations from galleries, art centres and festivals, or on other occasions creating original projects.

I promote encounters where artists coming to Bilbao, as well as showing their work, discover what's being done here and the authors. It's interesting for publics and artists, especially

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young people, to find out first hand what's being done elsewhere, outside of the big names shown to us by museums and institutional art centres. Even more important is the possibility of exchanging experiences. Through the encounters both in Bilbao and abroad, productive collaborations and opportunities are born.

These exhibitions and festivals also spur younger organisers and curators on to create new projects. If others are doing it, why not me? This is how new networks and opportunities for all come about.

Of course, these types of independent experimental initiatives must rely on support from the institutions, in order for them to avoid turning into an exploitation of artists and culture workers. Precariousness in cultural work is almost symptomatic, and must be stopped.

There are, generally, many opportunities to show the most experimental art, together with multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices, in our city outside the festival context. To this end support for current or past initiatives such as Iturfest, Hormonado Art Competition, Zarata Fest, Gau Irekia,... is essential. These formats, due to their nature of being encounters, also provide added value.

This all has an impact on the creation of publics and opportunities that can also allow the development of interesting artistic projects throughout the rest of the year. The festival brings together publics seeking new experiences and opens the door to the possibility of development during the rest of the year.

I'm committed to all types of encounters, and the more contrast, the better.

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