

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Opening October 22

Women in Abstraction

Sponsored by

Fundación
BBVA

The BBVA Foundation is proud to contribute its sponsorship to the organization of this major exhibition, which foregrounds the role of women artists in the roots and evolution of abstraction in all its different facets.

With a chronological, multidisciplinary approach, *Women in Abstraction* showcases the works of more than one hundred women artists from all over the world to present an unprecedented reinterpretation of the history of abstraction. Based on a vast array of voices, the exhibition offers a broad, complex vision that highlights the specific contributions of each of these creators, regardless of the recognition they may have earned until now.

The show also pays tribute to some of the most influential women collectors of the 20th century, such as Peggy Guggenheim and Hilla Rebay, women who managed to anticipate the importance that abstraction would gain in art history and start some of the most important collections in the world with this type of work.

The BBVA Foundation is extraordinarily pleased to sponsor this exhibition, which underscores diversity in artistic creation and specifically in abstraction. Shows like *Women in Abstraction*, organized jointly by two prestigious institutions, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the Centre Pompidou of Paris, enable us to more deeply study and appreciate figures who were ignored or underestimated in the past.

We are confident that the Museum's visitors will enjoy this exhibition, which offers the opportunity to admire a unique set of works of art, not only in themselves but also because of what they mean in highlighting the essential role played by many women pioneers of modernity.

Carlos Torres Vila
President of the BBVA Foundation

Women in Abstraction

- Dates: October 22, 2021 – February 27, 2022
 - Curators: Christine Macel, Chief Curator at the Centre Pompidou; Karolina Lewandowska, Curator of Photography and Director of the Museum of Warsaw, in collaboration with Lekha Hileman Waitoller, Curator of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
 - Exhibition organized by the Centre Pompidou Paris in collaboration with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.
 - Sponsored by: Fundación BBVA
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- *Women in Abstraction* sets out to write the history of the contributions made by female artists to abstraction in the 20th century, through to about the 1980s, with a few incursions into the 19th century.
 - In accordance with the terms chosen for the title, the artists are presented here as players and cocreators in their own right, of modernism and its legacy.
 - The exhibition reveals the process of invisibilization that marked the work of these female artists, while still presenting their positions, with all their complexities and paradoxes. Many of these artists adopted a non-gendered identity while others laid claim to a “female” art.
 - This history aims to be open, embracing dance, the decorative arts, photography and film. The perspective is also intended to be comprehensive, including the modernities of Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, while not forgetting African American women artists and Spanish artists, some of whom have not had international recognition, in order to recount a multi-voiced history and reach beyond the western canon.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Women in Abstraction*, an exhibition sponsored by the BBVA Foundation that shares a new vision of the history of abstraction from its origins to the 1980s through the works of more than one hundred female artists that span visual arts, dance, photography, film, and decorative arts. Through a chronological analysis, the exhibit highlights the processes that led to the invisibility of female artists and points out some of the milestones that marked the history of abstraction, while questioning esthetic canons, without defining a new one.

Women in Abstraction goes beyond the idea that art history is a succession of pioneering practices, and by according female artists a new place within that history, it proves how complex and diverse it is. This can be seen at the very beginning of the exhibition which opens with an unprecedented foray into the 19th century presenting the rediscovery of Georgiana Houghton’s work from the 1860s, undermining the

chronological origins of abstraction by tracing it back to its spiritualist roots. Houghton's work illustrates "sacred symbolism," one of the themes explored in the exhibition. The spiritualism in vogue in the 1850s constituted a major pathway into abstraction. Women were its precursors in the 19th century: they were the first to invent an abstraction that was not conceptualized as such, defined as a sacred symbolism drawn from a desire to represent the transcendent.

The exhibition also shines a spotlight on key figures through mini monographs highlighting artists who have been unfairly eclipsed or rarely shown in Europe. In the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, the specific educational, social, and institutional contexts that surrounded and encouraged or, conversely, hindered the recognition of women are brought to light. The exhibition reveals why many women artists did not necessarily seek recognition. It considers the positions of the artists themselves, with all their complexities and paradoxes. Some, like Sonia Delaunay-Terk, adopted a non-gendered position while others, like Judy Chicago, laid claim to a feminine art.

This female version of history challenges the limitation of the study of abstraction to painting alone, which is one of the reasons that many women have been excluded, given that such a modernist approach rejected the spiritualist, ornamental, and performative dimensions of abstraction. The perspective is also a global one. The energy of the Parisian scene in the 1950s is underlined by examples of surprising stylistic combinations, with the works of the Lebanese artist Saloua Raouda Choucair, Cuban-American artist Carmen Herrera and Turkish artist Fahrelnissa Zeid. The exhibition also explores the modernities of Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, not to mention the African American artists whose multiple voices only benefited from certain visibility from the early 1970s onwards to tell their story with several voices and reach beyond the Western canon.

Another theme explored in the exhibition is the role of textiles in the history of abstraction. From the early 1960s onwards, certain artists, mainly from Eastern Europe and the United States, made what were often monumental textile works that did not have a relationship to the wall, but rather dominate the space, like sculpture. The term "New Tapestry", which assigned these works to the realm of crafts, was progressively abandoned in favor of "Fiber Art" and "Textile Art". The "Wall Hangings" exhibition was presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1969. It was the first time that textile works were exhibited in an art museum. The Catalan artist Aurèlia Muñoz's work makes an important contribution to this theme.

The exhibition's scenography includes documentary spaces devoted to founding exhibitions, key women actors of abstraction, and celebrated critics, particularly within the feminist struggles of the 1970s and their postmodern interpretation. Landmark publications and other written materials are included in the exhibition, continuing the multi-disciplinary lens through which the subject is explored.

Women in Abstraction also raises several questions. The first concerns the very term of the subject: what exactly is abstraction? Another deals with the causes of the specific processes that made women invisible in the history of abstraction that still prevails today. Can we continue to isolate "women artists" in a separate history when we would like this history to be polyvocal and non-gendered? Lastly, the exhibition establishes

the artists' specific contributions, whether pioneers or not, but in all cases stakeholders in this original and unique history.

DIDAKTIKA

The exhibition is accompanied by a didactic area featuring themes that are crucial for the understanding the production of women artists throughout history, the influence of theosophy in the creation of the first abstract works, and the multiple possibilities of expression offered by abstraction.

Sponsored by BBK

Exhibition-related Programs

Panel (October 20)

Christine Macel, Chief Curator, Centre Pompidou, and Lekha Hileman Waitoller, Curator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, will discuss their research and work of the past few years, which translated into this exhibition.

Shared Reflections*

Unique on-site tours led by professionals from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's Departments of Curatorial and Educational, looking at new exhibition contents from various standpoints.

- Curatorial Vision (November 3)
Lekha Hileman Waitoller, Curator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and curator of the exhibition, will lead a tour of the main works in the show.
 - Key Concepts (November 10)
Luz Maguregui, Education Coordinator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, will discuss with attendants the general and didactic keys of the works in the exhibition.
- * Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre.

Creative Session. *Photographic Formats: Photobooks* (November 18)

Many artists in the exhibition were fascinated by books: from Natalia Goncharova and Liubov Popova to Louise Bourgeois and Lygia Pape. An introductory workshop taught by photographer Miren Pastor where participants can discover the photographers in the show and the specifics of photobooks.

Screenings: Institut Français: (December 10)

In the context of the Museum's TopARTE program, the documentary *Point de emergence*, directed by Carola Roussopoulos and produced in 1978 on the occasion of the Paris Salon of Women Painters and Sculptors, will be screened, followed by a colloquium.

Screening: 'Voices and Faces of Women in Abstraction' (January 21, 22, and 23)

Film cycle to discover the fascinating personalities of a selection of artists featured in the exhibition, such as Hilma af Klint, Natalia Goncharova, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Fahrelnissa Zeid, Judy Chicago, Mary Heilmann, Barbara Hepworth, or Barbara Kasten.

CATALOGUE

Key to this project is the ambitious catalogue that includes five main essays, fifteen thematic essays, and 112 texts dedicated to each of the artists, providing an analysis of their approach to abstraction and the context in which they worked. It also features a timeline of facts and events related to abstraction, as well as cultural and feminist history.

The French edition was organized at the Centre Pompidou under the direction of Chief Curator Christine Macel and Karolina Lewandowska, Curator for Photography and Director of the Museum of Warsaw. The English version was co-edited by Thames & Hudson and a Spanish and Basque version were co-edited by the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

The exhibition was conceived by Christine Macel, Chief Curator at the Centre Pompidou, and Karolina Lewandowska, Curator for Photography and Director of the Museum of Warsaw, and organized in collaboration with Lekha Hileman Waitoller, Curator at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

The artists

Berence Abbott 1898, Springfield (Ohio, United States) - 1991, Monson (Maine, United States)

Carla Accardi 1924, Trapani (Italy) - 2014, Rome (Italy)

Etel Adnan 1925, Beirut (Lebanon)

Hilma af Klint 1862, Stockholm (Sweden) - 1944, Ösby, Djursholm (Sweden)

Anni Albers 1899, Berlin (Germany) - 1994, Orange (CA, United States)

Laure Albin-Guillot 1879, Paris (France) - 1962, Paris (France)

APY Lands Collaborative APY is the acronym for Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, a large area of land that is the home to several Aboriginal communities located at the meeting points of three Australian states: South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia. Yaritji Young, Wawiriya Burton, Nyurpaya Kaika, Tjimpayie Presley, Naomi Kantjuriny, Angkaliya Eadie Curtis, Nyunmiti Burton, Tjungkara Ken, Tingila Young, Sylvia Ken, Wipana Jimmy, Mary Pan, Maringka Baker, Alison Milyka Carroll, Carlene Thompson, Mona Mitakiki, Illuwanti Ken, Panjiti Lewis, Tuppy Goodwin, Puna Yanima, Julie Yaltangki, Barbara Moore, Sharon Adamson, Paniny Mick, Betty Muffler, Nellie Coulthardt, Ingrid Treacle, Meredith Treacle, Anyupa Treacle, Madeline Curley, Imatjala Curley, Tjangali George, Elizabeth Dunn, Teresa Baker, Kani Patricia Tunkin.

Gertrud Arndt 1903, Racibórz (Poland) - 2000, Darmstadt (Germany)

Ruth Asawa 1926, Norwalk (CA, United States) - 2013, San Francisco (CA, United States)

Elena Asins 1940, Madrid (Spain) - 2015, Azpirotz (Spain)

Vanessa Bell 1879, London (United Kingdom) - 1961, Charleston Farmhouse, Fittle (United Kingdom)

Lynda Benglis 1941, Lake Charles (LA, United States)
Lee Bontecou 1931, Providence (RI, United States)
Martha Boto 1925, Buenos Aires (Argentina) - 2004, Paris (France)
Louise Bourgeois 1911, Paris (France) - 2010, New York (NY, United States)
Trisha Brown 1936, Aberdeen (DC, United States) - 2017, San Antonio (TX, United States)
Jagoda Buić 1930, Split (Yugoslavia, today Croatia)
Mary Ellen Bute 1906, Houston (TX, United States) - 1983, New York (NY, United States)
Marcelle Cahn 1895, Strasbourg (France) - 1981, Neuilly-sur-Seine (France)
Huguette Caland 1931, Beirut (Lebanon) - 2019, Beirut (Lebanon)
Regina Cassolo Bracchi 1894 Mede (Italy) - 1974 Milan (Italy)
Rosemarie Castoro 1939, New York (NY, United States) - 2015, New York (NY, United States)
Gianinna Censi 1913, Milan (Italy) - 1995, Voghera (Italy)
Judy Chicago 1939, Chicago (IL, United States)
Lucinda Childs 1940, New York (NY, United States)
Wook kyung Choi 1940, Seoul (Korea) - 1985, Seoul (Korea)
Irene Chou 1924, Shanghai (China) - 2011, Brisbane (Australia)
Saloua Raouda Choucair 1916, Beirut (Lebanon) - 2017, Beirut (Lebanon)
Lygia Clark 1920, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (Brazil) - 1988, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
Carlotta Corpron 1901, Blue Earth (MN, United States) - 1988, Denton (TX, United States)
Parvine Curie 1936, Nancy (France)
Dadamaino (Eduarda Emilia Maino, dit) 1930, Milan (Italy) - 2004, Milan (Italy)
Sonia Delaunay-Terk 1885, Gradizhsk (Ukraine) - 1979, Paris (France)
Germaine Dulac 1882, Amiens (France) - 1942, Paris (France)
Alice Essington Nelson 1846, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (United Kingdom) - 1921, Hove, East Sussex (United Kingdom)
Alexandra Exter 1882, Bialystok (Russian Empire) - 1949, Fontenay-aux-Roses (France)
Claire Falkenstein 1908, Coos Bay (OR, United States) - 1997, Venice (CA, United States)
Esther Ferrer 1937, San Sebastian (Spain)
Helen Frankenthaler 1928, New York (NY, United States) - 2011, Darien (CT, United States)
Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn 1881, London (United Kingdom) - 1962, Ascona (Switzerland)
Loïe Fuller 1862, Fullersburg (IL, United States) - 1928, Paris (France)
Gego 1912, Hamburg (Germany) - 1994, Caracas (Venezuela)
Natalia Gontcharova 1881, Nagaevvo (Russian Empire) - 1962, Paris (France)
Marcia Hafif 1929, Pomona (CA, United States) - 2018, Laguna Beach (CA, United States)
Harmony Hammond 1944, Chicago (IL, United States)
Mary Heilmann 1940, San Francisco (CA, United States)
Florence Henri 1893, New York (NY, United States) - 1982, Compiègne (France)
Barbara Hepworth 1903, Wakefield, Yorkshire (United Kingdom) - 1975, St Ives, Cornwall (United Kingdom)
Carmen Herrera 1915, Havana (Cuba)
Sheila Hicks 1934, Hastings (NE, United States)

Marta Hoepffner 1912, Pirmasens (Germany) - 2000, Lindenberg im Allgäu (Germany)
Georgiana Houghton 1814, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain) - 1884 London (United Kingdom)
Lotte Jacobi 1896, Toruń (German Empire) - 1990, Deering (NH, United States)
Virginia Jaramillo 1939, El Paso, (Texas, United States)
Tess Jaray 1937, Vienna (Austria)
Barbara Kasten 1936, Chicago (IL, United States)
Ilona Keserü 1933, Pécs (Hungary)
Helen Khal 1923, Allentown (PA, United States) - 2009, Ajaltoun (Lebanon)
Katarzyna Kobro 1898, Moscow (Russian Empire) - 1951, Łódź (Poland)
Benita Koch-Otte 1892, Stuttgart (Germany) - 1976, Bielefeld (Germany)
Běla Kolářová 1923, Terezín (Czechoslovakia) - 2010, Prague (Czech Republic)
Elaine de Kooning 1918, New York (NY, United States) - 1989, Southampton (NY, United States)
Lee Krasner 1908, New York (NY, United States) - 1984, New York (NY, United States)
Germaine Krull 1897, Wilda, Poznań (German Empire) - 1985, Wetzlar (Federal Republic of Germany)
Ida Lansky 1910 Toronto (Canada) - 1997, Dallas (TX, United States)
Bice Lazzari 1900, Venice (Italy) - 1981, Rome (Italy)
Verena Loewensberg 1912, Zurich (Switzerland) - 1986, Zurich (Switzerland)
Barbara Maples 1912, Temple (TX, United States) - 1999, Dallas (TX, United States)
Agnes Martin 1912, Macklin (Canada) - 2004, Taos (NM, United States)
Dóra Maurer 1937 Budapest (Hungary)
Marie Menken 1909 New York (NY, United States) - 1970 New York (NY, United States)
Joan Mitchell 1925, Chicago (Illinois, United States) - 1992, Neuilly-sur-Seine (France)
Nasreen Mohamedi 1937, Karachi (Pakistan) - 1990, Vadodara (NM, India)
Vera Molnár 1924, Budapest (Hungary)
Marlow Moss 1889, London (United Kingdom) - 1958, Penzance, Cornwall (United Kingdom)
Tania Mouraud 1942, Paris (France)
Aurèlia Muñoz 1926, Barcelona (Spain) - 2011, Barcelona (Spain)
Elizabeth Murray 1940, Chicago (IL, United States) - 2007, New York (NY, United States)
Aurèlie Nemours 1910, Paris (France) - 2005, Paris (France)
Louise Nevelson 1899, Percaslavie (Ukraine) - 1988, New York (NY, United States)
Vera Pagava 1907, Tbilisi (Georgia) - 1988, Ivry-sur-Seine (France)
Gret Palucca 1902, Munich (German Empire) - 1993, Dresde (Germany)
Marta Pan 1923, Budapest (Hungary) - 2008, Paris (France)
Lygia Pape 1927, Nova Frigurgo (Brazil) - 2004, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)
Alicia Penalba 1913, San Pedro (Argentina) - 1982, Saint-Geours-de-Maremne (France)
Howardena Pindell 1943, Philadelphia (PA, United States)
Liubov Popova 1889, Krasnovidovo (Russian Empire) - 1924, Moscow (USSR)
Bridget Riley 1931, London (United Kingdom)
Dorothea Rockburne 1932, Montreal (Canada)
Olga Rozanova 1882, Melenki (Russian Empire) - 1918, Moscow (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)

Valentine de Saint-Point 1875, Lyon (France) - 1953, Cairo (Egypt)
Zilia Sánchez 1926, Havana (Cuba)
Helen Saunders 1885, London (United Kingdom) - 1963, London (United Kingdom)
Lillian Schwartz 1927, Cincinnati (OH, United States)
Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian 1924, Qazvin (Iran) - 2019, Tehran (Iran)
Arpita Singh 1937, Baranagar (India)
Janet Sobel 1893 (Ukraine) - 1968 Plainfield (NJ, United States)
Varvara Stepanova 1894, Kaunas (Russian Empire) - 1958, Moscow (USSR)
Hedda Sterne 1910, Bucharest (Romania) - 2011, New York (United States)
Gunta Stölzl 1897, Munich (German Empire) - 1983, Zurich (Switzerland)
Sophie Taeuber-Arp 1889, Davos (Switzerland) - 1943, Zurich (Switzerland)
Atsuko Tanaka 1932, Osaka (Japan) - 2005, Nara (Japan)
Lenore Tawney 1907, Lorain (OH, United States) - 2007 New York (NY, United States)
Elsa Thiemann 1910, Thorn-Mocker (German Empire) - 1981, Hamburg (Federal Republic of Germany)
Alma Woodsey Thomas 1891, Columbus (GA, United States) - 1978, Washington (DC, United States)
Maria Helena Vieira da Silva 1908, Lisbon (Portugal) - 1992, Paris (France)
Fahrelnissa Zeid 1901, Büyükada (Turkey) - 1991, Amman (Jordan)

Cover image:

Fahrelnissa Zeid

The Arena of the Sun, 1954

Oil on canvas

196 x 296.5 cm

Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Collection, Istanbul, Eczacıbaşı Group Donation

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Photo: Reha Arcan

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Sophie Taeuber-Arp in her studio-office at l'Aubette (Sophie Taeuber-Arp dans son atelier-bureau de l'Aubette), 1927

Collection Fondation Arp, Clamart



Fahrelnissa Zeid in her studio (Fahrelnissa Zeid dans son atelier)

© Raad Zeid Al-Hussein



Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian in her studio, working on Heptagon Star, Tehran, 1975

Estate of Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian



Tess Jaray

St Stephen's Green, 1964

Oil on canvas

183 x 152 cm

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, gift of Amis du

Centre Pompidou, Cercle International, 2020

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Audrey Laurans/Dist. RMN-GP

© Tess Jaray, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2021



Judy Chicago

Smoke Bodies, from *Women in Smoke*, California, 1971-72

Pro Res 422 / H. 264, mut 14'45"

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

Courtesy of Through the Flower Archives, The Center for Art + Environment
at the Nevada Museum of Art, Salon 94 and Artist Rights Society

© Judy Chicago

© Judy Chicago, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2021



Joan Mitchell

Méphisto, 1958

Oil on canvas

182 x 165 cm

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, exchange of value, 1995

© Estate of Joan Mitchell

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Jacques Faujour/Dist. RMN-GP



Vera Pagava

The Big City (La Grande Ville), 1959

Oil on canvas

146 x 116 cm

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, gift of Mme Elisso

Tarassachvili, 2016

© Association culturelle Vera Pagava

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP



Helen Saunders

Canon, c. 1915

Pencil and gouache on paper

36.8 x 29.8 cm

The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions and with a donation from Lorna Ferguson and Terry Clark in honor of Richard Born

© Estate of Helen Saunders

© 2020 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago



Georgiana Houghton

Album of Spirit Art, 1866-84

Album containing a series of watercolours by Georgina Houghton and other artists

49 x 42 x 3.5 cm

The College of Psychic Studies, London

Image courtesy of The College of Psychic Studies, London



Barbara Kasten

METAPHASE 3, 1986

Cibachrome

101.6 x 76.2 cm

Courtesy the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York

Image courtesy of the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York.

Thomas Dane Gallery, London; Kadel Willborn Gallery, Düsseldorf

© Barbara Kasten



Huguette Caland

Body Scraps (Bribes de corps), 1973

Oil on linen

149.9 x 149.9 cm

Courtesy of the Caland Family

Photo: Elon Schoenholz



Saloua Raouda Choucair

Fractional Module, 1947-1951

Oil on canvas

47 x 67 cm

Saloua Raouda Choucair Foundation

© Saloua Raouda Choucair Foundation, Beirut

© Galerie Saleh Barakat



Hilma Af Klint

The Swan, No. 16, Group IX/SUW, 1915

Oil on canvas

154.5 x 151 cm

Courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation

© Hilma Af Kint, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2021

Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm



Barbara Hepworth

Oval Sculpture (N°2), 1943, cast 1956

Plaster on wooden base

29.3 x 40 x 25.5 cm

Tate, presented by the artist, 1967

© Bowness

© Tate



Fahrelnissa Zeid

The Arena of the Sun, 1954

Oil on canvas

196 x 296.5 cm

Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Collection, Istanbul, Eczacıbaşı Group Donation

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Photo: Reha Arcan

