

Press release

Arts of the Earth



December 5, 2025 – May 3, 2026

Over the past two centuries, awareness of our responsibility to conserve the natural environment has led us to make environmental considerations an essential factor in industrial processes and consumption habits. The history of this period reveals countless examples of our ability to constantly overcome the dilemma between technological progress and sustainability thanks to innovation and collaboration among all.

The exhibition *Arts of the Earth* encourages us to reflect on this aspiration through creations that speak about the planet's modification through human activity and the increasing preponderance of the artificial over the natural. It also invites us to rekindle our concern with the health of our planet.

This new show at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, which spans from the mid-twentieth century until today, explores scientific fields like biology, chemistry, botany, geology, and agronomy through the visual and conceptual arts, architecture, design, and contemporary crafts. The show's interdisciplinary approach enables it to bring together different perspectives on the concern with caring for our planet—with a particular emphasis on the topic of the soil as the cradle and habitat of life—and fosters participants' intellectual, sensorial, and emotional immersion through a painstaking selection of works and an innovative exhibition design.

The more than one hundred works, projects, objects, and archival materials in this exhibition are full of hope and remind us that we all possess the tools to promote sustainability and accelerate social development. And that precisely has been Iberdrola's goal over its 125 years of history: to build a better future for everyone through electrification.

I am confident that this exhibition will awaken the interest and sensitivity of all its visitors as they enjoy a truly novel artistic proposal.

Ignacio S. Galán
President of Iberdrola

Arts of the Earth

- **Dates:** December 5, 2025–May 3, 2026
 - **Curator:** Manuel Cirauqui
 - **Sponsored by:** Iberdrola
- *Arts of the Earth* brings together artworks from the past century until today, spanning media like sculpture, installations, drawing, and performance, in addition to an extensive selection of archival materials, architectural scale models, crafts and design works
 - Encompassing a wide variety of references to artistic activity in natural contexts, from Land Art to Arte Povera and activist conceptualism, the exhibition follows the common thread of materials (earth, leaves, branches, papers and textiles, archival documents) to connect the works while transcending the labels of established movements and trends
 - The show presents works by more than forty artists from radically diverse cultures, including names like Giovanni Anselmo, Joseph Beuys, Heidi Bucher, Mar de Dios, Jean Dubuffet, Agustín Ibarrola, Richard Long, Ana Mendieta, Fina Miralles, Asier Mendizabal, Delcy Morelos, Frederick Ebenezzer Okai, Gabriel Orozco, Asad Raza, Michelle Stuart, Meg Webster, and Héctor Zamora
 - Certain galleries are under a special lighting, temperature, and humidity protocol in order to house and ensure the wellbeing of plant species, including an installation that brings together 26 trees of multiple local species that will be replanted in the Basque Country after the exhibition ends

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Arts of the Earth*, an ambitious exhibition that explores the way contemporary art interacts with the soil as a material space and shared ecosystem. In line with the Museum's institutional commitment to environmental sustainability, *Arts of the Earth* offers a multidisciplinary, diverse cartography of art forms—including the visual arts, architecture, design and crafts—that provide a snapshot of the inventory of tools, possibilities, and future scenarios in the face of climate change and the ecosocial crisis our planet is experiencing. The exhibition is sponsored by Iberdrola, which on this occasion is also lending three works from its collection to the exhibition.

The show underscores collaboration and co-creation with ecosystems as alternatives to the mere extraction of resources or modification of materials, considering today's concern with the health of our planet and in particular with the survival of the soil—its living, sensitive, fertile matrix—as the core of a survey of artistic expressions through planetary geographies. Thus, the exhibition connects artifacts crafted with soil, wood, leaves, roots, and plants—ancestral media that have newfound importance today—with land interventions that cannot be pigeonholed by established movements and trends. Spanning a wide range of approaches to natural action, from Land Art to Arte Povera and activist conceptualism, the exhibition examines many of the ways humans seek to express their synergies with the Earth's living processes.

Artists from multiple recent generations and radically diverse cultures have wondered how to work with the earth when it most needs care and repair; how to appreciate and pay back its gifts; and how to learn

from what it offers at a time when it appears to be being stripped of its biological, mineral, organic, and chemical richness. The constructive potential of the soil and the substances comprising it go far beyond the classical formulations of sculpture, architecture, design, and landscaping. In recent years, many creative practices have experimented with the dynamic of the soil substrate by integrating composition and composting processes, drawing lines and revealing the shared roots of culture and agriculture, form and terraforming.

Arts of the Earth brings together artworks from the past century until today, along with documents and objects drawn from the wisdom of the Basques and other ancestral cultures. It examines media like sculpture, installations, drawing, and performance, in addition to an extensive selection of archival materials, architectural scale models, design works, and traditional crafts: practices that collaboratively summon knowledge and ritual, and with which *Arts of the Earth* will attempt to illuminate the intersections of culture and agriculture.

Artists in the exhibition

In its cross-cutting survey, *Arts of the Earth* presents works by Claudia Alarcón, Vicente Ameztoy, Giovanni Anselmo, Joseph Beuys, David Bestué, Heidi Bucher, Gabriel Chaile, Mel Chin, María Cueto, Patricia Dauder, Mar de Dios, Jean Dubuffet, Hans Haacke, Agustín Ibarrola, Inland/Campo Adentro, Richard Long, Ana Lupas, Isa Melsheimer, Ana Mendieta, Asier Mendizabal, Fina Miralles, Asunción Molinos Gordo, Delcy Morelos, Frederick Ebenezzer Okai, Dennis Oppenheim, Gabriel Orozco, Giuseppe Penone, Claire Pentecost, Perejaume, Solange Pessoa, Benedetta Pompili, Asad Raza, Oscar Santillán, Jorge Satorre, Daniel Steegman Mangrané, Tomás Saraceno, José María Sicilia, Michelle Stuart, Paulo Tavares, Unión Textiles Semillas, José Luis Uribe, Sumayya Vally, Meg Webster, and Héctor Zamora.

ORGANIZATION AND ROUTE THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition does not have themed sections, nor does it follow a sequence of chapters; instead, it allows webs of material and ecopoetic affinities to emerge in each of the spaces. The curatorial research that underlies the project is made of encounters, conversations, and coincidences that reveal a common feeling.

Galleries 205, 206, 207

The tour through the exhibition begins with historical recognition of several figures who may have intuited, prefigured, or embodied the mutation that art was to undergo in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a result of climate change. Certain artists take the role of early emissaries, like Jean Dubuffet and Joseph Beuys with their delicate collages or Jimmy Lipundja, an artist from the Milingimbi nation in Australia, with his paintings on tree bark that depict mythical visions closely linked to his native biome. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the development of ephemeral works in the landscape, like those by the Romanian artist Ana Lupas, the Catalan Fina Miralles, and the Cuban Ana Mendieta, converge with the production of anti-monumentalist sculptures made of sand, substrate, or straw, like the ones by the celebrated US sculptor Meg Webster and the Italian Giovanni Anselmo.

Experiences constructed or dreamed from the body of the Earth urgently articulate a material truth that runs counter to our sense of cultural property, giving way to contemporary art expressions in an expanded present, including dramatic modifications of the architectural space, like the intervention that Colombian artist Delcy Morelos specifically created in the Museum's gallery 206. This telluric space, almost an earthen abyss, is one of the exhibition's *tours de force*.

During *Arts of the Earth*, galleries 206 and 207 are subject to a special light, temperature, and humidity protocol so they can house and ensure the wellbeing of living species. In gallery 207, visitors will find botanical compositions like the historical living sculptures by the legendary conceptual artist Hans Haacke. His grass sculptures, including a large conical mound, are accompanied by a selection of "Wardian Cases" by German artist Isa Melsheimer, alongside the installation *Root Sequence. Mother Tongue* by American-Pakistani artist Asad Raza. This work brings together 26 trees of multiple species which will be replanted in the Basque Country after the exhibition ends. The installation will also host various performances and activities during the five months the exhibition will remain open.

Gallery 209

Arts of the Earth also devotes significant space to countless versions of earthworks in any of their states and compositions: clay, sand, and experimental or hybrid blends that include natural and industrial elements. At times, these are hybrids of clay, cement, or metal prostheses, through which a natural dynamic or a transformation process struggle to make their way. This is the case of works by Ghanaian artist Frederick Okai and Mexican Héctor Zamora; experiments with extraterrestrial soil compositions by Equatorian Oscar Santillán; and the celebrated adobe sculptures by Argentinian Gabriel Chaile, who also made a large charcoal mural directly on the Museum's walls.

In some cases, these production processes or material searches take place very close to the Museum, with mud and clay that are closely tied to the local landscape, such as the pottery by the Bilbao artist Mar de Dios, which is made with clay from Bizkaia, and the modular works by David Bestué, which were produced for the occasion using mud from the Nervión River. The exhibition also showcases the results of decomposition processes or the alteration of sculptural bodies in the subsoil in works by Patricia Dauder and Jorge Satorre.

Coexisting with these types of works are the textiles made by artists who cooperate with animal or plant species, exemplifying networks of mutual assistance and common survival. Thus, we find the huge abstract landscapes by Asunción Molinos Gordo made with a blend of wool from all the sheep breeds on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as an installation of swallow nests scattered through different parts of exhibition; color explorations of Amazonian biodiversity in the work of Susana Mejía; and compositions woven by the community of Wichí women from Argentina's Gran Chaco represented by the artist Claudia Alarcón and the Unión Textiles Semillas.

Galleries 201, 203

The exhibition inevitably embraces the study of the complex realities of the Anthropocene and the remediation or confrontation strategies of the ecosystems transformed by human action over the centuries, and more quickly in the recent decades of our planet's history. Thus, we see remediation works such as the ones by the pioneer Mel Chin, the first artist to have created an intervention for the purposes of plant remediation in the United States landscape entitled *Revival Field* (1989–present). The show includes the recent project *Grains of Paradise* by South African architect Sumayya Vally, which reconstructs the migratory history of seeds between colonized territories and their European metropolises.

The study of ancient Amazonian biotope maintenance practices is at the core of the inquiries by the Brazilian artist and architect Paulo Tavares and echoed in the revival of ancestral practices and wisdom by the Inland/Campo Adentro collective in the northwest Iberian Peninsula. Composting cultural objects in the earth, exemplified by works by Claire Pentecost and Asier Mendizabal, contrasts with studies of the

ecosystem that renegotiate the distance between the symbolic and the useful: from the Land Art pioneer Dennis Oppenheim to the recent practice of experimental engineering by Tomás Saraceno and the constructive, sustainable, situated experiments put into practice by the Architecture School of Talca, Chile, and documented by the filmmaker and architect José Luis Uribe. Artifacts, amulets, and tools originally from the Basque Country—pieces from the past century from local ethnographic collections—as well as from other living traditions in Spain resonate with artistic expressions from other communities that are active on the planet, bringing together iconographies both new and old.

Gallery 202

In the large gallery at the end of the route, *Arts of the Earth* offers a meditation on the possibility of “sustainable art” as a future already experienced by modern abstraction. At either end of the gallery are works by the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone and the Basque Agustín Ibarrola. The former, a living proponent of Arte Povera, presents one of his first and most emblematic trees carved into the large trunks of other trees, as well as a large glass fingernail resting on thousands of laurel leaves, which occupy the exhibition space both olfactorily and visually.

The selection of works by Ibarrola, in turn, illustrates the experimental richness of the practice of an artist who in the early 1980's took a radical ecological turn in his work, which until then had been eminently urban and political. All over the gallery, forms at once fragile and primeval materialize in abstract pieces like the ones by Michele Stuart, María Cueto, and Richard Long. The quest for volume, by listening to the earth or as part of a nomadic composition process, becomes palpable in works of impressive stillness like the ones by Solange Pessoa, Gabriel Orozco, and Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, which express the metamorphosis of the mineral into the animal world.

Museographic and Exhibition Production

If artworks always establish a kind of contract of use with the planet, in an exhibition like this one there is an inescapable requirement for such a contract to be conscious and fair. Approaching production as a cooperation pact and an effort within a restitution or healing process often entails challenging the Museum's preservation policies.

In this sense, *Arts of the Earth* has made it possible to expand the measures that the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao already applied across the board to minimize its exhibitions' carbon footprint. Thus, this project's energy efficiency was coupled with the use only of compostable or recycled elements in its furnishings and museography. Furthermore, we forewent air transportation and the use of exclusive freight for the artworks, avoided the construction of rigid boxes, and implemented virtual tracking of the lent works. The exhibition thus aims to be a prototype not only for objects of perception and tools of action but also for the strategies and criteria that define the Museum of the future.

DIDAKTIKA

The Museum's Didaktika program offers educational spaces and digital contents that complement the exhibitions and equip the public with tools and resources targeted at appreciation of the works displayed.

“The Substrate of Art” is the title of the *Arts of the Earth* educational space. It not only explores key ideas in the exhibition but also illustrates some of the strategic actions that the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

has been implementing for more than a decade as part of its Environmental Sustainability Plan, whose goal is to achieve a carbon-neutral footprint by 2030.

Through the works of artists from different geographic regions and contexts, this Didaktika invites audiences to reflect on our relationship with the soil as a living, sensitive, fertile material. Many of the works included here highlight the importance of symbiotic relationships among species, both human and non-human, to preserve biodiversity, which is key to collective survival. Some showcase ancestral practices and wisdom conveyed through the generations, or they foster participation, with nature as the element generating encounters, while others reveal reparation, regeneration, and circular creation processes.

Thus, through samples of materials, audios, and videos, we invite visitors to sense, smell, see, and listen to bring them closer to the different artworks in the exhibition.

Activities

Opening talk (December 3)

The curator of the show, Manuel Cirauqui, will be accompanied by artists and other professionals like anthropologists and climate change experts to unpack the exhibition dynamically with a multidisciplinary approach.

Activation of Yoko Ono 's *Wish Tree for Bilbao* by (December 6)

The presence of trees in the exhibition showcases their role in the ecosystem and in cities. For this reason, the activation of this piece from the Museum Collection is meaningful as a guarantor of cordiality among all the planet's inhabitants.

Shared reflections

Exclusive tours of the exhibition accompanied by Museum professionals.

- Curatorial Vision: with Manuel Cirauqui, exhibition curator (January 21).
- Key Concepts: with Luz Maguregui Urquiza, Education Coordinator (January 14)

Creative Session: Kokedama Workshop (January 22)

Participants in this session guided by the artist Itziar Unzurrunzaga will rekindle their connection with nature by working with small plants until they generate unique ecosystems that they will be able to enjoy for a long time.

Arts of the Earth Film Series (February 18 to 22)

A selection of documentaries and fiction films invite spectators to reflect on different ways of inhabiting the Earth in the past, present, and future with stories that weave culture and nature together. They compass everything from indigenous wisdom harnessed to counter Amazonian deforestation to Victorian naturalists' intervention on Ascension Island, along with a glance at the vacated rural world in Spain and the life of a woman beekeeper in Macedonia. Several sessions will feature the film directors, who will participate in a colloquium after the screening.

Creative Session: Carding Wool (March 7)

This session is a wonderful opportunity to learn about ancestral wool-working techniques and their evolution until today in a workshop offered by the Mutur Beltz collective from Karrantza, who

collaborated with the artist Asunción Molinos Gordo to develop one of the pieces included in the exhibition.

Activation of Asad Raza's Work (March 21)

To mark the start of spring, the piece by Asad Raza in gallery 207 will be activated several times throughout the day, with brief talks, concerts, and encounters between guests and the public, with the artist's participation.

Musica Lithica (April 25)

During the week when International Earth Day (April 22) is celebrated, a very special concert will be held that fuses the Basque musical and oral tradition with a selection of contemporary percussion compositions.

Museum Member Activities

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao members also have the opportunity to participate in additional tours and activities related to each exhibition.

Soirée, Matinée (December 2 and 3)

Members-only tours with the exhibition curators prior to opening to the public. For International and Honor Members.

Meeting with the artist of the exhibition (December 15)

On the occasion of the Open Doors Day for Friends of the Museum.

Exclusive Tours (December 15, 23, 26, 28, 30)

Guided group tours of the exhibition.

In-Depth Tours (December 17)

Small group talks that contextualize the exhibition followed by a guided tour.

360° Immersions (January 22, 2026)

Free, live online guided virtual tours of the exhibitions given by Museum's Associate Director of Digital Education Marta Arzak.

As a culmination of the Arts of Earth exhibition, within the 2026 Members' travel program, the following are also planned:

- Visit to the Oma Forest and tribute to Agustín Ibarrola (April 2026)
- Visit to Carranza to learn about the Muttur Beltz project by Asunción Molinos Gordo (Spring 2026)
- Trip to Arles, France, to visit Luma and learn about the landscape architect Bas Smets (May 2026)

<https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/museum-members>

CATALOGUE

The exhibition will come with a catalogue which includes both research essays by the exhibition's curator Manuel Cirauqui, the architect Berta Gutiérrez, as well as the Unión Textiles Semillas collective, as well as a series of statements and documents from artists—including Fina Miralles, Mel Chin, David Bestué, Mar de Dios and Dennis Oppenheim—that reflect the multidisciplinary and diverse configuration of the exhibition.

COVER ILLUSTRATION

Giuseppe Penone

Fingernail and Laurel Leaves (Unghia e foglie di alloro), 1989

Glass and laurel leaves

Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

© Giuseppe Penone, VEGAP, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Alex Yudzon

For more information:

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Communication and Marketing Department

Tel: +34 944 359 008

media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus

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Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Online press image service

You can download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and building in the Museum's press room (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.eus).

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For more information, please get in touch with the Communication and Marketing Department of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by phone (+34 944 359 008) or email (media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus).

Jorge Satorre

I Could Never Forget the Way You Told Me Everything By Saying Nothing (Reliefs) [*Nunca podría olvidar la manera en que me dijiste todo sin decirme nada (relieves)*], 2021

Four reliefs, cellular concrete, rod, and soil from the garden of the CRAC Alsace

Four pieces, 205 x 107 x 15 cm each

Courtesy CarrerasMugica

© Jorge Satorre, Bilbao 2025



Sumayya Vally, Counterspace

Grains of Paradise, 2024

Wooden canoe with painted coating

510 x 50 x 95 cm

Courtesy of the City of Vilvoorde, Belgium

© Sumaya Valley, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Bruges Triennial 2024/Filip Dujardin



Agustín Ibarrola

Untitled, n.d.

Paint and treated railway sleepers

265 x 550 x 14 cm

Herederos de Agustín Ibarrola. Courtesy Galería José de la Mano

© Agustín Ibarrola, VEGAP, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Teresa Ormazabal Artetxe



Giovanni Anselmo

While the Earth Finds Its Bearings (Mentre la terra si orienta),

1967/2007

Earth and magnetic needle

Dimensions variable

Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino in

comodato da Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea CRT

© Giovanni Anselmo, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Paolo Pellion



Asunción Molinos Gordo

The Ancients (Los Antiguos), 2024

Mixed media, clay, and straw

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid

© Asunción Molinos Gordo, Bilbao 2025



Frederick Ebenezer Okai

Butterfly I, 2022

Earthenware vessels, welded wire mesh, light, kiln-fired firewood

299.7 x 386.1 x 137.2 cm

Courtesy the artist

© Frederick Ebenezer Okai, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Ebenezer Edem Dedi



Claudia Alarcón

When the fabric manifests itself, 2024

Hand-spun chaguar fibre, woven in yica stitch

200 x 300 cm

Courtesy the artist and Bienal do Mercosul

Photo: Thiéle Elissa



Hans Haacke

Directed Growth, 1970–72

Beans, earth, and twine

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

© Hans Haacke, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2025.



Joseph Beuys

Untitled, n.d.

Small branch with leaves on cardboard

30.5 x 21 cm

Courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London, Paris, Salzburg, Milan, Seoul

© Estate of Joseph Beuys / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2025



Isa Melsheimer

Wardian Case, 2023

Glass, potting soil, seeds, plants (installation view)

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

© Isa Melsheimer, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Studio Isa Melsheimer



Michelle Stuart

Extinct, 1992

42 plants/seeds, hand-printed rice paper, and pine

176.5 x 241.3 x 12 cm

ADA x Collection

© Michelle Stuart, Bilbao 2025



Solange Pessoa

Ó Ó Ó Ó, 2023

Bronze and dry leaves

36 x 94 x 204 cm

Courtesy the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, Paris, New York

© Solange Pessoa, Bilbao 2025



Meg Webster

Volume for Lying Flat, 2016

Peat moss, green moss, soil, and galvanized steel wire mesh

55.9 x 149.9 x 207 cm

Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

© Meg Webster, Bilbao, 2025



Mel Chin

Revival Field, 1991-ongoing

Photo: Plants, industrial fencing on a hazardous waste landfill

An ongoing project in conjunction with Dr. Rufus Chaney, senior research agronomist, USDA

Courtesy the artist

© Mel Chin, Bilbao 2025



Gabriel Orozco

Roiseau 6, 2012

Bamboo branch and feathers

290 x 270 x 190 cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

© Gabriel Orozco, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Florian Kleinefenn



Giuseppe Penone

Fingernail and Laurel Leaves (Unghia e foglie di alloro), 1989

Glass and laurel leaves

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

© Giuseppe Penone, VEGAP, Bilbao 2025

Photo: Alex Yudzon

