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## **Flanders – Basque Country culminates with a conference addressing the relationship between the two regions through art and the Atlantic**

- The conference, organised jointly with the Catholic University of Louvain, will be held on 17 and 18 October in Louvain**
- The Flanders-Basque Country cultural cooperation programme consists of 13 projects that have led to 43 initiatives involving over 100 artists and professionals**

Today, the Etxepare Basque Institute presented 'Art Overseas between Flanders and the Basque Country' in San Sebastian's Tabakalera centre. The conference will mark the end of the Flanders – Basque Country (Vlaanderen - Baskeland), the bilateral programme of cultural and artistic cooperation that has taken place in both regions in 2023 and 2024. The press conference was attended by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and Language Policy of the Basque Government, Ibone Bengoetxea, the director of the Etxepare Basque Institute, Irene Larraza, and the conference coordinator and lecturer at the University of the Basque Country, Aintzane Erkizia. The press conference also provided an opportunity to reflect on this initiative, which has strengthened connections between artists and cultural operators from Flanders and the Basque Country. It has allowed the public to experience the quality and innovation of their respective creative scenes through a diverse range of multidisciplinary offerings.

Since the Flanders – Basque Country programme was launched in 2023, a total of 43 activities have taken place (workshops, artistic residencies, concerts, performances,

exhibitions, film screenings, conferences...). The events have been organised around 13 bilateral collaboration projects. A total of 29 groups, sectoral associations, and cultural and institutional stakeholders have been involved in its development, with over 100 artists and professionals participating in the programme.

The Flanders – Basque Country programme is the result of collaboration at three levels: among artists and creators from Flanders and the Basque Country; within the sectoral and institutional ecosystem, which includes Azkuna Zentroa, Tabakalera, Zirkozaurre, and Dantzagunea in the Basque Country, and Morpho, LLS Paleis, M Museum and Zirkuszentrum in Flanders, among others; and governmental collaboration through the General Secretariat for External Action of the Basque Government, the Etxepare Basque Institute and the Flanders Arts Institute. In turn, the development of this initiative has facilitated a deeper understanding of the cultural and creative landscape, laying the groundwork for a long-term relationship.

### **Basque Country and Flanders through art**

The Flanders – Basque Country programme will culminate with an academic conference organised in collaboration with the Catholic University of Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven). The event will be held on 17 and 18 October at the M Museum in Leuven. Entitled ‘Art Overseas between Flanders and the Basque Country’, the conference will explore the deep connections between the two regions through the lens of art. Coordinated by University of the Basque Country lecturer and researcher Aintzane Erkizia, the event will bring together art historians, academics and artists from Flanders and the Basque Country. Together, they will examine how art reflects the cultural exchange that has shaped the identities of these two regions and their cultural systems, both connected by the Atlantic.

The relationship between Flanders and the Basque Country, which dates back centuries, has primarily evolved through the sea - a shared route that facilitated the continuous exchange of goods, ideas, and people. For centuries, works of art travelled alongside merchandise, and today, the Flemish imprint is clearly perceptible



in Basque art, a legacy that will be the subject of discussion at this conference. The event seeks to highlight how the inhabitants of the coasts have turned their gazes towards other shores, forming new communities and cultural connections. Featuring insights from art experts and representatives of the contemporary art scene, the conference aims to be a platform for understanding art not just as an aesthetic object, but as a dynamic testament to the exchange between cultures and territories.

### **Collaborative Initiative for Cultural Exchange**

The Flanders – Basque Country programme started to take shape after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two governments in 2021, which included the cultural and creative industries among its areas of collaboration. In 2021 and 2022 the Etxepare Basque Institute and its partner in Flanders, the Flanders Arts Institute, in collaboration with the Office of the Basque President and the Chancellery and the Flemish Department of Culture, organised working visits to the Basque Country and Flanders to explore their respective cultural and creative ecosystems, as well as their international reference centres. These visits facilitated connections between creators and cultural stakeholders, fostering spaces of trust to experiment and develop joint projects that have ultimately become the foundation of the Flanders – Basque Country programme. Likewise, the Basque Government and the Flemish Government launched several calls for proposals to promote and encourage cultural cooperation between the two regions. Most of the projects that have come to light during these two years are the result of this process.

As a result, in 2023 and 2024 a stable framework has been created to promote a long-term cultural, creative and artistic relationship between Flanders and the Basque Country.

### **Etxepare Basque Institute**

The Etxepare Basque Institute is a public agency dedicated to promoting Basque language, culture, and creative talent internationally, as well as building lasting



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relationships with other countries and cultures. To this end, the Institute fosters quality artistic activities and supports the mobility of artists and cultural industry professionals, in addition to teaching Basque language and culture. The agency also encourages collaboration with international stakeholders in the pursuit of cultural and academic endeavours.

**+ Info**

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