

Press Release

Chillida in Menorca

Hauser & Wirth Menorca

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On the occasion of 'Eduardo Chillida 100 years' and in collaboration with the Estate of Eduardo Chillida, 'Chillida in Menorca' celebrates the artist's profound connection with the island through a major presentation of sculpture and works on paper, including several created during his time in Menorca. Featuring over 60 works spanning half a century from 1949 to 2000, the exhibition exemplifies the full breadth of Chillida's oeuvre. The presentation concept, developed by architect Luis Laplace with a focus on local materials, amplifies the artist's bond with the island and its natural environment. Accompanying the exhibition is an Education Lab, developed in partnership with Chillida Leku and the NGO Menorca Preservation via its project Plastic Free Menorca.

Eduardo Chillida (1924 – 2002) is one of the preeminent Spanish sculptors of the 20th century, whose varied and pioneering practice reinterpreted the dialectic of solid and void, positive and negative and interior and exterior space. Chillida's connection with Menorca formed during the many summers he spent on the island from 1989. Setting up an outdoor studio at 'Quatre Vents', the family house he created with his wife Pilar Belzunce in Alcaufar, he found a quiet place to work on chamotte clay sculptures, surrounded by the fields and their dry-stone walls. At 'Quatre Vents', he also worked in a studio with a large window overlooking the sea, where he explored many of his 'gravitations'.

In Menorca, Chillida drew inspiration from the white light of the Mediterranean that was a perfect contrast to the 'black light' of his native Basque Country, as he described it. He held an enduring admiration for the light, the open-air quarries of local 'marès' stone and the monuments from the Talayotic period, including T-shaped 'taules' ('tables' in Catalan) which inspired some of his works and have been recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2023. He commented: 'The light in Menorca is magnificent. The island has a beautiful history, there is a very interesting stone culture, and it's so full of wind. So, I have heard it said: Menorca, wind and stones.'

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The exhibition opens with a series of large format 'gravitations', two-dimensional works on paper exploring the qualities and limitations of space. These delicate black and white works result from cutting various layers of paper, attaching them to threads and then suspending them to allow air to circulate between them. Alongside the 'gravitations' is 'Mural G-56' (1985), a large-scale mural which uses black graphic elements to draw from the same exploration between positive and negative space. In Chillida's own words, 'in most of my sculptures, the positives and negatives alternate. Each one is somehow reciprocal, the dissentient of the other'.

'Chillida in Menorca' showcases a series of well-known steel sculptures and wood reliefs, emphasising Chillida's interest in making space visible through the forms around it. Initially a student of architecture, Chillida explored concepts such as the limit, space and scale. In 'Proyecto para un monumento' (Project for a Monument)' (1969), a play on scale linking to the artist's many public monuments, interior space is shaped through three solid blocks that fit together. In other works, totemic elements of an intimate human scale continue to emphasise the interplay between solid forms and negative space.

Throughout the exhibition, a selection of works are presented on plinths made from 'marès', the local stone used to build the 18th century building housing the gallery. The presentation concept has been developed by architect Luis Laplace, who led the restoration of Hauser & Wirth Menorca and the reconditioning at Chillida Leku – the museum created by Eduardo Chillida in his lifetime – and places the artworks in dialogue with the surrounding landscape and the architecture of the space.

Alongside materiality, the act of making was a crucial concept in Chillida's work. The hand was the artist's closest subject and his most immediate tool to work graphically or sculpturally – it stood for everything handmade. Rejecting moulds, he embraced the irregular morphology of works created by the direct manipulation with his hands, such as the chamotte clay sculptures he worked on in his Menorca studio. These are presented alongside drawings featuring the hand, in which he found a living element to investigate space through the movement of the fingers, which open and close in an attempt to grasp their surroundings.

In Menorca, Chillida modelled many of his 'Lurra' sculptures – a series named after the word 'earth' in Basque. They are made from chamotte clay, a type of clay which can be fired in large blocks without breaking. Chillida was attracted to this property of the material and explored the endless possibilities of shapes that it allowed for. In works such as 'Lurra M-32 (Earth M-32)' (1996), fine incisions reveal patterns of straight and circular shapes.

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In other pieces such as 'Lurra M-13 (Earth M-13)' (1995), the incisions would penetrate in such a way to reveal the interior space and impart a sensation of buoyancy. The titles link the works back to their place of origin: those with an 'M' in their title are among those made in the Menorca studio, while those with a 'G' were made in Grasse, in the south of France, where Chillida became acquainted with the material.

Also made from chamotte clay are a series of 'Óxidos (Oxides)', which acquired a distinct colour and texture through the use of black copper oxide and the double firing process. As in 'Mural G-56', 'Óxido G-78' (1985) features abstract geometric motifs, which correlate with his abstract ink drawings and are painted on both sides of the work, inviting the viewer to experience the sense of space created with it.

The final galleries in the exhibition foreground the artist's passion for natural phenomena. He incorporated organic shapes in his early works on paper and steel sculptures and emphasised the natural qualities of the materials he worked with such as granite, alabaster and felt, amongst others. An example of this is the granite piece 'Escuchando a la piedra III (Listening to the Stone III)' (1996), in which the artist removed just enough material to reveal the form and emphasise the rock's impenetrability. Similarly, exploring the versatility of steel, the sculpture 'Lotura XXVII (Bond XXVII)' (1992) is composed of longitudinal arms created in the forge, without moulds, and manipulated to open up and then wrap back into themselves, quietly inhabiting the space with a tree-like quality.

Having grown up by the Atlantic Ocean, Chillida recalled spending hours contemplating the waves and referred to the sea as his teacher. 'Homenaje a la mar IV' (Homage to the Sea IV)' (1998), from the series of tributes which Chillida dedicated to figures or phenomena that inspired him, evokes the rugged Cantabrian coastline through geometrical shapes hewn out of alabaster in contrast to an uncut stone base. In dialogue with this sculpture is 'Homenaje a la arquitectura II (Homage to Architecture II)' (2000), a reference to Chillida's ongoing exploration of forms – whether organic or architectural – and their structuring in space.

Placed in dialogue with the Mediterranean Sea is 'Proyecto Peine del viento I (Comb of the Wind Project I)' (1966). The study is part of the artist's most important series of work, culminating with three colossal steel sculptures embedded in the rocks on the seashore of San Sebastián, a work which fuses materials, land, sea, and air. With its tentacular arms embracing the dynamism of the elements, the work is an invitation to look.

About the Education Lab

The Education Lab is an interactive space that takes its starting point from Chillida's time in Menorca and how he responded to its landscape and, in particular, the sea. Inspired by his sculpture 'Homenaje a la mar IV (Homage

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to the Sea IV)', visitors are invited to look at the elements and the landscape anew through self-directed activities and to spend time with the resources on display. As part of the initiative, users of day care centers across the island created their own tributes to the sea using recycled plastic collected from the coastline.

The initiative has been developed in collaboration with Chillida Leku, the museum devoted to the artist's work in San Sebastián, as well as the NGO Menorca Preservation via the project Plastic Free Menorca. Facilitating a platform for discovery, discussion and additional learning resources, the Education Lab is part of Hauser & Wirth's commitment to inclusive learning programs that instigate a dialogue between art, artists and diverse audiences. Located at our galleries in Menorca, Somerset and Downtown Los Angeles, as well as at Chillida Leku, each Education Lab is a collaboration with a local community group, school or university.

About Eduardo Chillida

With a pioneering practice that spans small-scale sculpture, plaster work, drawing, engraving and collage, Spanish artist Eduardo Chillida is best known for his prominent monumental public sculptures. His contribution towards Spain's post-war artistic reputation and his personal legacy endure through his work and through the Foundation which he set up in 2000. In the same year, Chillida opened Chillida Leku, an exhibition space and sculpture park converted from a historic farmhouse, harmoniously integrating his works into the landscape.

Chillida was born in San Sebastian in 1924. From 1943 until 1946 he studied architecture at the University of Madrid before turning his attention to drawing. In 1948 Chillida was awarded a scholarship to study in Paris. On his return to Spain in 1951, he began experimenting in materials that resonated with the Basque region's industrial heritage such as iron, wood and steel. Chillida settled in Hernani and, in 1952, he set up an iron foundry, learning techniques from a local blacksmith. He continued to make engravings and collages and this core practice was to continue throughout his career, allowing him to explore form and line by cutting into paper.

Throughout his lifetime Chillida was recognised with numerous awards, including the Grand International Sculpture Prize at the Venice Biennale (1958), Kandinsky Prize (1960), Grand Award for Arts in France (1984), and Jack Goldhill Award from the Royal Academy of Arts in London (1996). His work has been celebrated with solo exhibitions and retrospectives at major institutions, most recently at Kunsthalle Krems, Austria and The Rijksmuseum, Netherlands, with earlier solo presentations at the Guggenheim Museums in Spain and New York; Museo nacional centro de arte Reina Sofía, Spain; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Eduardo Chillida died in San Sebastián, Spain in 2002.

About 'Eduardo Chillida 100 years'

The 10th of January 2024 marked the centenary birth of the artist and sculptor Eduardo Chillida. The Eduardo Chillida - Pilar Belzunce Foundation has developed a multidisciplinary programme of exhibitions, publications, audio visual and learning projects, with the objective of promoting his work nationally and internationally. For the Foundation, the centenary is an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of Chillida's work. Under the slogan 'Eduardo Chillida 100 years. Meeting place', the centenary highlights the artist's public work. Forty-five sculptures in public spaces in cities such as San Sebastián, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Helsinki, Dallas and Washington, have become meeting places for people and celebrate the values in Chillida's work and his role as a 'creator of places'.

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Homenaje a la mar IV (Homage to the Sea IV), 1998
Alabaster
64 x 154 x 150 cm / 25 1/4 x 60 5/8 x 59 in
Photo: Alex Abril

Eduardo Chillida working in his studio in Menorca, 1996
Photo: Hans Spinner

Gravitación (Gravitation), 1990
Paper, ink, string
120 x 79 cm / 47 1/4 x 31 1/8 in
Photo: Alex Abril

Lurra M-13 (Earth M-13), 1995
Chamotte clay, copper oxide

26.5 x 22 x 21 cm / 10 3/8 x 8 5/8 x 8 1/4 in
Photo: Marc Autenrieth

Lotura XXVII (Bond XXVII), 1992
Corten steel
123 x 60 x 37 cm / 48 3/8 x 23 5/8 x 14 5/8 in
Photo: Iñigo Santiago

Óxido G-78 (Oxide G-78), 1985
Chamotte clay and copper oxide
100 x 114 x 13.5cm / 39 3/8 x 44 7/8 x 5 3/8 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zurich