

ASIER MENDIZABAL
COMPARATEME



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ASIER MENDIZABAL COMPARATEME

Opening: 14.05.2026, 19:00h | Exhibition: 14.05 > 14.07.2026
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Asier Mendizabal has been constructing a remarkable body of work over the past twenty years, in which he pays most attention to the relations between form, discourse and ideology. The question of the sign and its materiality and identification as a social and political emblem has a central place in his practise. Mendizabal's works confront conventional narratives of history, archival or ethnographic objects, or political and subcultural representations, looking at the technical and material conditions of all of them. While sculpture is most representative in his oeuvre, Mendizabal's work unfolds in many other media, from silkscreen, flags to photographic series and collages, always with an instinctive feel for sculptural and graphic form. Writing is a regular and fundamental resource in his practice.

Asier Mendizabal. *Comparateme*, April 2026

All the material in this exhibition refers to and draws on a series of articles by the French paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan. The author of *Gesture and Speech* proposed the influential idea of the parallel evolution and mutual determination of manual gestures along the symbolic capacity that for a long time seemed to define the human. Technique and speech. Language and the hand. I recall here two moments in which Leroi-Gourhan's work refers directly to hands and which, each for a reason, produce in me an almost sentimental affect.

1) In his short 1967 article *Les mains de Gargas: Essai pour une étude d'ensemble*, he reviews the recurrence in different caves and in different geographic areas of the engraved silhouettes of hands, typical of the Paleolithic. It is well known that, in many cases, the represented hands lack one or more fingers, and the interpretation that this indicates severe injuries from hunting accidents or frostbite, or more broadly, ritual amputations, still persists. Leroi-Gourhan refutes these lurid interpretations for a far simpler explanation. Why would it not be easier and therefore more probable that the missing fingers are merely folded fingers, showing different gestures in multiple combinations, as if it were a visual language? The hand would be, in this uncomplicated conjecture, literally a sign, as it is today, for example, for deaf people. The chart with which Leroi-Gourhan illustrated the article reproduced the silhouettes, gathered in the Gargas cave, of the different combinations of extended and folded fingers, as if it were an alphabet, noting the frequency with which each combination appears. The drawings and their arrangement have an almost comic quality in their simplicity.

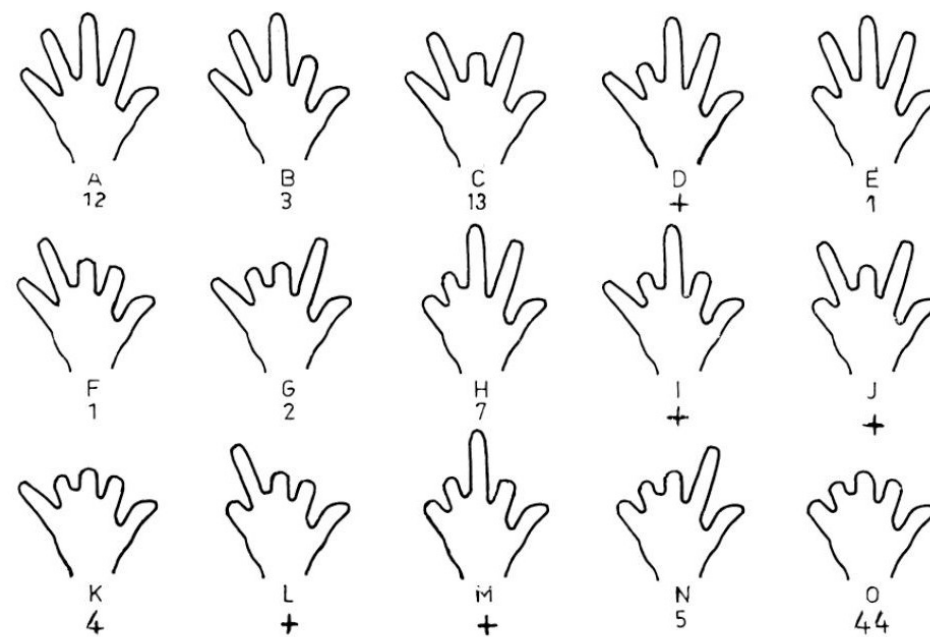


Fig. 1. — Tableau des formules digitales avec leur fréquence. Les formules non représentées sont marquées d'une croix. Dans la seconde ligne la formule index-auriculaire repliée a été omise (J) ; elle n'offre pas de représentation.

Leroi-Gourhan, André. *Les mains de Gargas. Essai pour une étude d'ensemble*. In: *Bulletin de la Société préhistorique française. Études et travaux*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1967. pp. 107-122.

2) On the subtitle on the cover of a compilation of his articles— all predating the one about gesturing hands— the author announces, unnecessarily and therefore symptomatically, that the text is accompanied by *366 dessins de l'auteur d'après les originaux*. One is tempted to translate it as 366 drawings from *the hand* of the author. The notice seems intended to give value to the author's personal stroke, which surprises when one checks that none of those drawings aspires to artistry or shows particular skill. They are schematic notes that record visual elements the anthropologist compares, showing the formal evolution of several motifs, in series or themes. In these series, the original figural referent becomes lost and abstracted into ornaments that can be related across different cultures, uses, and times.

These are the drawings that are manipulated in the two series that make up this exhibition. In *Temas alternos (cacerías, colosos, adoradores)* [Alternating Themes (Hunts, Colossi, Worshippers)] (2026) pairs of motifs extracted from the collection of images drawn by Leroi-Gourhan are overlaid, enlarged to a scale relative to the human hand. The silhouette's negative space in the different combinations of fingers, extended or folded, acts as the boundary between the two superimposed drawings. As a consequence, the contiguity between the images, the successive arrangement that is the optimal condition for their comparison, collapses, intertwining figure and ground, causing lines to converge and break off, questioning the comparability and even the alterity of these illustrations.

The metal pieces that make up *El tema de los dos caballos* [The Theme of the Two Horses] (2026) reproduce drawings that, belonging to the same set, have a particular visual logic: the geometric schematization of the animal motifs studied in the article from which the series takes its title. The lines that compose these illustrations are retraced by running a finger over a slab of wet clay, over which molten zinc is poured, solidifying the mark at the scale imposed by the use of the finger as an instrument. Overlaid in pairs, like the collages of the previous series, they insist on the effect of collapsing the order of previous and next figure, complicating the separation of figure and background, combining in one the images that were proposed as elements of comparison; as *comparatemes*.

Comparateme is a term so scant that I had to wonder whether the three or four search results that turn up in my engine are really linguistics articles or, instead, typos that slipped into the huge output that fills academic journals. In any case, the formation of the term should be correct, even if it proves to be a neologism. Comparateme: the minimal unit susceptible to comparison, in a translation, for example, or between two images. In her questioning of the concept of comparability as a method of analysis, the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern proposes the vectors of relation and scale. Comparability is not a universal starting point but a consequence of weaving specific relations at determined scales. Her book *Partial Connections* proposes replacing the search for totalities or universals with the analysis of partial connections between phenomena. Comparability is not a given. Against the homogenization of difference to make it comparable, she proposes maintaining the tension between incommensurable scales. It is not so much a matter of finding hidden patterns as of describing how links are woven, always incomplete, fragmentary, situated. The modulation exercises that make up this exhibition refer, no less partially, to this intention to direct attention to the forms of comparison.



Photograph of the production process of the sculptures from the series *El tema de los dos caballos*

THE COLLECTOR IS PRESENT
ASIER MENDIZABAL IN ASIER TAPIA'S COLLECTION

Exhibition: 14.05 > 16.05.2026

Our proposal for *The Collector is Present*, an initiative launched by Art Barcelona and linked to the annual Barcelona Gallery Weekend, is inserted in Asier Mendizabal's new solo exhibition *Comparateme*, which opens on May 14. The idea is to respond to Mendizabal's work *Stilfragen (crania)* (2016), in the collection of Barcelona-based Asier Tapia, by linking it to one or two more of Mendizabal's works (not part of the new show), and to articulate a formal and conceptual exercise with the complicity of the collector Asier Tapia, Asier Mendizabal, and ProjecteSD.



Asier Mendizabal *Stilfragen (crania)*, 2016
Concrete. ca. 25 x 25 x 25 cm. Unique
Asier Tapia Collection
Photograph credit: Roberto Ruiz

BIOGRAPHY

Asier Mendizabal (Ordizia, 1973, Spain) lives and works in Bilbao and Stockholm.

Mendizabal graduated from the Facultad de Bellas Artes of the Universidad del País Vasco in 1997. He did post-graduate studies at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London. After doing a workshop at Arteleku, he participated between 1997 and 1999 in De Ateliers program in Amsterdam and in the Platform Garanti residency program in Istanbul in 2006. He was a co-founder and member of the faculty of the Kalostra art school in San Sebastián and since 2017 he is Professor of Sculpture and Installation at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. In 2017 he received the Premio Arte y Mecenazgo Award awarded by la Caixa.

Selected solo exhibitions: Sismógrafo, Porto, PT (2024); Fundación-Museo Jorge Oteiza, Alzuza, ES (2018); Zarigüeya/Alabado contemporáneo, Quito, EC (2016); Museo San Telmo, Donostia-San Sebastián, ES (2014); Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen, NO (2011); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, ES (2011); Raven Row, London, UK (2011); Galerie Miroslav Kraljevic, Zagreb, HR (2011); Culturgest, Lisbon, PT (2009); MACBA, Barcelona, ES (2008).

Selected group shows: *Collection. Contemporary Art: 1975 – Present*, MNCARS, Madrid, ES (2026); *Arts of the Earth*, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, Bilbao, ES (2025); *Vasos comunicantes, Colección 1881 – 2021*, MNCARS, Madrid, ES (2021); *A Fire in my Belly*, Julia Stoschek Foundation, Berlin, DE (2021); *Una dimensión ulterior*, Patio Herreriano Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Español, Valladolid, ES (2019); *A desire for archeology: Outlook on the future*, Carré de Art-Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, FR (2018); *El arte y el espacio*, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, Bilbao, ES (2017); 31st São Paulo Biennial, BR (2014); Biennial of in Limerick, IR (2014); *A Singular Form*, Secession, Vienna, AT (2014); *Camera of Wonders*, Centro de la imagen, Mexico City, MX (2016); *Tension and Liberty*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa, PT (2015); *Whose Subject am I?*, Kunstverein, Düsseldorf, DE (2015); *Scenarios about Europe*, GFZK, Leipzig, DE (2012); *ILLUMInazioni – ILLUMInations*, 54th Venice Biennale, IT (2011); *In the First Circle*, Fundació Tàpies, Barcelona, ES (2011); *As Artes*, Cidadãos, Museo Serralves, Porto, PT (2010); Bucharest Biennale 4 (2010); *Manifesta 5*, Donostia-San Sebastián, ES (2004); *Después de la noticia*, CCCB Barcelona, ES (2003); Taipei Biennale, CN (2002).

Work in collections: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid; MACBA, Barcelona; ARTIUM, Vitoria; Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea (CGAC), Santiago de Compostela; Museo Guggenheim Bilbao; Fundació Banc de Sabadell, Barcelona; Collection “la Caixa”, Barcelona; Museo de San Telmo, Donostia-San Sebastián; Colección Meana-Larucea, Madrid; Fundación Iberdrola, Madrid; Colección Banco de España, Madrid; Comunidad de Madrid, Madrid; Fondation Kadist, Paris; Frac des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou; Julia Stoschek collection, Düsseldorf; Schröder Collection, Berlin, among others.

Cover Image: Asier Mendizabal *Temas alternos (cacerías, colosos, adoradores) #1*, 2026
Collage, ink print cut-out. 44,4 x 39 cm. Unique