

Press release

Jasper Johns

Night Driver



May 29 – October 12, 2026

The BBVA Foundation, whose mission is to promote scientific knowledge and cultural creation, is renowned for its commitment to the arts in all their forms. This has been the ethos of our collaboration since the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao first opened its doors. For three decades, our support of the arts has helped offer visitors exhibitions such as *Jasper Johns: Night Driver*, dedicated to one of the foremost of contemporary artists.

Flags, targets, numbers, and letters are the motifs that run through Jasper Johns's work, often in variations, and for which he is generally renowned. In his oeuvre, the American artist explores the painterly process and the nature of representation. On the one hand, he is indebted to the great masters of art history; on the other, he questions and challenges these, dissociating himself from tradition and from the dominant trend of his time, Abstract Expressionism. In this sense, he is a key figure in the birth of movements such as Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptual Art, that transcended the subjectivity and individualism that prevailed in the 1950s.

Jasper Johns's biography is reflected in his professional career, and his personal relationships often became sources of creative influence. Fellow artist Robert Rauschenberg, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, and musician John Cage were three members of his innermost circle whose ideas can be traced in Johns's works.

The show takes us on a journey through a critical period in art, spanning the seven decades of work of a quintessential artist of the second half of the twentieth century, whose oeuvre is at once deeply plastic and essentially intellectual. Johns's creations combine the mundane and the sublime, life and death, criticism and humor, anatomy and the cosmos, play and reflection, seeking to activate the gaze of the viewer.

This anthological exhibition provides us with a window onto Johns's artistic progress over the course of time. I am sure that those who come to Bilbao to visit the show will discover pieces that reveal their full potential when viewed in person.

In the name of the BBVA Foundation, we would like to thank Miren Arzalluz, Director General of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and her team for their work on the organization of the exhibition. We thank, too, Enrique Juncosa, curator of the show, whose conscientious gaze has shaped this exhibition project.

Carlos Torres Vila
President of the BBVA Foundation

Jasper Johns: Night Driver

- Dates: May 29 to October 12, 2026
 - Curator: Enrique Juncosa
 - Sponsored by: BBVA Foundation
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- This comprehensive retrospective is entitled after a drawing by Jasper Johns from 1960 and includes nearly 140 works—paintings and sculptures, drawings, prints, an artist's book, and a stage design.
 - Between 1954 and 1955, Jasper Johns destroyed his earlier work and painted his first American flag. This marked the beginning of a series of iconic works built around signs and flat elements drawn from everyday imagery that would come to anticipate Pop art.
 - Far from Expressionist rhetoric, Johns's work takes an ironic, restrained approach, one that still carries emotional weight and is widely seen as a forerunner of Minimalism and Conceptual Art.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Jasper Johns: Night Driver*, an ambitious retrospective dedicated to one of the most celebrated artists of our time. The exhibition is sponsored by the BBVA Foundation, a Strategic Trustee of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao since 1997.

Night Driver takes its title after a 1960 drawing by Johns, described by the artist as his first work based on a personal feeling. The show features nearly 140 works, including paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, an artist's book, and a stage design. The pieces are organized chronologically, reflecting Johns's repeated return to certain themes. In this presentation, paintings and sculptures are shown separately from works on paper.

Jasper Johns was born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1930 and grew up in South Carolina, where he was raised before continuing his studies in New York. In 1953, he moved to New York, where he soon formed close friendships with figures such as artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer John Cage, and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Together, they would reshape the artistic landscape of their country.

Between 1954 and 1955, Johns destroyed his earlier work and painted his first American flag, marking the beginning of a series of iconic works that feature signs and flat elements—numbers, letters, targets, and maps—drawn from everyday, recognizable imagery and widely regarded as precursors to Pop Art. When these works were exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958, they brought him immediate recognition, and the Museum of Modern Art acquired three of the works on view.

Between the 1950s and 1960s, Johns was also in contact with Marcel Duchamp, whose work and thinking would have a defining influence on his practice. The exhibition then moves into the 1970s and 1980s. Here, Johns develops abstract compositions built from crosshatched patterns of strokes, alongside pieces rich in visual references to artists of different periods. Also included are the series devoted to the four seasons,

as well as a group of images in which Johns depicts a woman's face, with eyes, nose, and lips drifting toward the edge of a rectangular field. The exhibition concludes with a selection from the 1990s and 2000s, where the artist returns to some of his best-known themes while continuing to explore new ideas, as in the *Catenary* series.

Far from Expressionist rhetoric, Johns's oeuvre is defined by an ironic, restrained approach that nonetheless carries emotional weight and is widely regarded as a forerunner of Minimalism and Conceptual Art. Although often interpreted allegorically, his work is rich in biographical references, though not always immediately apparent, as well as philosophical ideas and metalinguistic reflections. Despite this intellectual, at times hermetic dimension, the artist does not renounce the power of images or of painting itself.

EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGH

Gallery 205

The exhibition opens with examples of Johns's celebrated paintings of flat motifs, including such well-known works as *Flag on Orange Field* and *Drawer* (both 1957), *False Start* (1959), *Painting with Two Balls* (1960), and *Target, Map, and In Memory of My Feelings – Frank O'Hara* (all 1961).

In Memory of My Feelings – Frank O'Hara marks a moment, between 1961 and 1964, when the impersonal subject matter of Johns's work begins to shift, giving way to more emotional concerns. The dominant gray palette of these paintings lends them a melancholic tone.

Gallery 206

This gallery presents a number of Johns's early sculptures, most of which were produced between 1958 and 1961. These are small-scale pieces based on everyday objects, such as light bulbs or flashlights. Rather than casting light on other objects, they become the object of vision itself.

Also on view are three large-scale works, *Studio* (1964), *Untitled* (1964–65), and *Studio II* (1966), centered on the theme of the artist's studio. Although abstract in appearance, they are made using impressions of doors or windows and incorporate a range of objects such as cups, brooms, brushes, cutlery, and measuring tools, evoking the atmosphere of the studio.

Between 1964 and 1972, Johns introduces numerous new subjects, including a renewed presence of the human figure, among them self-portraits, imagery related to his studio and tiled walls. In *Souvenir* (1964), a self-portrait created after a trip to Japan with composer Tōru Takemitsu, Johns printed a photobooth portrait onto a ceramic plate purchased in a souvenir store.

Gallery 207

This gallery brings together a significant group of abstract works from the Crosshatch series, produced by Johns between 1973 and 1984. These include *Corpse and Mirror* (1974-75), *Cicada* (1979), and *Dancers on a Plane* (1980-81). In these works, Johns explores simple variations in the organization of the pictorial space using strategies such as repetition, cropping, inversion, and displacement.

From the mid-1980s onward, Johns continued to explore new directions, including the autobiographical *Seasons* series, with works such as *Summer* (1985) and *Fall* (1986), characterized by dense, complex compositions and an allegorical dimension.

During this period, his practice also reflects an ongoing engagement with other artists, including Edvard Munch in *Between the Clock and the Bed* (1983), Picasso in *After Picasso* (1998), and Frida Kahlo in *The Bath* (1988).

Gallery 209

This gallery presents works from the 1990s onward, including two from the *Catenary* series, created by Johns between 1997 and 2003 and once again marked by the gray tones and a play on language.

From this period is *Untitled* (1992–94), a work of complex composition that introduces new imagery, including floor plans of his grandparents' house, where Johns grew up, as well as images of galaxies and references to other artists.

The gallery also features a large-scale bronze work, *Numbers (0–9)* (2007–11), composed of twelve units, along with a video of a collaboration between Jasper Johns, Marcel Duchamp, and choreographer Merce Cunningham, titled *Walkaround Time* (1968). Johns designed the costumes and the set based on a work by Duchamp, which is shown alongside the film.

Gallery 202

This gallery features a large selection of works on paper. Johns's drawings are not preparatory studies but rather variations on earlier paintings, and they form an essential part of his practice. In addition to demonstrating his technical skill, they also reveal the reflective nature of his approach.

Johns works with a wide range of materials and mediums, often combining them, including pencil, charcoal, pastel, encaustic, ink, ballpoint pen, watercolor, collage with paper and objects, and metallic pigments. Beyond paper, Johns has also drawn on plastic, exploiting its transparency and varying degrees of absorbency.

Printmaking likewise allows the artist to alter the colors of earlier images and to reproduce details or fragments rearranged in different ways and configurations. For decades, Johns has worked with Gemini and ULAE, two of the most important print workshops in the United States.

Gallery 203

Alongside additional works on paper and a group of monotypes, this final gallery presents *Foirades/Fizzles* (1976), an artist's book produced in Paris with Irish writer Samuel Beckett that includes five texts by Beckett alongside some thirty prints by Johns.

The gallery also highlights works connected to Johns's friendships with other artists, including several very small drawings he gave to Robert Rauschenberg, reinterpretations of other artists' works, a drawing he gifted to Richard Serra in exchange for one of Serra's, and a rare portrait of Marcel Duchamp, *M.D.* (1964). Also on view are tracings after works by artists such as Paul Cézanne and Willem de Kooning, which serve as points of departure for Johns's reflections on the image and artistic tradition.

DIDAKTIKA

The Museum's Didaktika program offers educational spaces and digital content that complement the exhibitions, providing visitors with tools and resources to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the works on view.

On this occasion, the exhibition includes two educational spaces, one located in the corridor adjacent to the galleries and the other in gallery 201. The first explores Jasper Johns's creative process through interactive displays designed to reveal the multiple layers of meaning in his practice. The second highlights key 20th-century artists such as Marcel Duchamp, whose legacy Johns engaged with, as well as contemporary figures with whom Johns exchanged ideas, including Robert Rauschenberg. This exchange fostered significant interdisciplinary innovation in New York during the 1950s and 1960s.

Activities

Opening Talk (May 27)

Exhibition curator Enrique Juncosa will present this retrospective devoted to one of the most significant figures in postwar art.

Shared Reflections

Exclusive guided tours of the exhibition led by Museum professionals.

- Curatorial View: with Marta Blàvia, Museum Curator (June 10)
- Key Concepts: with Luz Maguregui Urquiza, Education Coordinator (July 1)

Activities for Museum Members

Members of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao also have the opportunity to take part in additional tours and activities related to each exhibition.

Soirée, Matinée (May 26 and 27)

Exclusive guided tours for Museum Members with the exhibition curators prior to its opening to the public. For International and Honor Members.

Lagunartean (June 11)

Guided tour of the exhibition followed by lunch at Bistro Guggenheim Bilbao.

Exclusive Tours (June 16, 18, and 21)

Group guided tours of the exhibition.

In-depth Tours (June 9)

Small-group talks that provide context for the exhibition, followed by a guided tour.

360° Immersions (June 25)

Free, live, online guided tours of the exhibitions led by Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Digital Education.

www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/amigos-del-museo

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with texts by exhibition curator, Enrique Juncosa, along with contributions by novelist Colm Tóibín and art historian Roberta Bernstein, author of the *catalogue raisonné* of Johns's paintings and sculptures, as well as an interview between Johns and painter Terry Winters, conducted in 2010.

COVER IMAGE

Jasper Johns

Painting with Two Balls, 1960

Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects (3 panels)

165.1 x 137.5 cm

Collection of the artist

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026

For further information:

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IMAGES FOR PRESS USE

Jasper Johns: Night Driver
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 further information, please contact the Marketing and Communications Department of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by telephone at +34 944 359 008 or by email at media@guggenheim-bilbao.eus

Jasper Johns

Flag on Orange Field, 1957

Encaustic on canvas

167.6 x 123.8 cm

Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Gift, Ludwig Collection, 1976

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Painting with Two Balls, 1960

Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects (3 panels)

165.1 x 137.5 cm

Collection of the artist

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Target, 1961

Encaustic and collage on canvas

167.6 x 167.6 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago

Gift of the Edlis Neeson Collection

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

0 through 9, 1961

Oil on canvas

137.2 x 104.8 cm

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Gift of The American Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc., Leonard A. Lauder, President

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Map, 1961

Oil on canvas

198.1 x 313.1 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, 1963

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

In Memory of My Feelings – Frank O'Hara, 1961

Oil on canvas with objects (2 panels)

101.6 x 151.8 cm

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Partial gift of Apollo Plastics Corporation

Courtesy of Stefan T. Edlis and H. Gael Neeson

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Flags, 1987

Encaustic and collage on canvas

65.5 x 83.8 cm

Collection of the artist

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Untitled, 1964–65

Oil and charcoal on canvas with objects (4 panels)

182.9 x 426.7 cm

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

The Bath, 1988

Encaustic on canvas

122.6 x 153 cm

Kunstmuseum Basel

Acquired with funds from the Freunde des Kunstmuseums Basel, 1988

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Jasper Johns

Flashlight III, 1958 (cast 2010)

Bronze, tempered glass, and silver plating. Edition of 2 (2/2)

13.3 x 21 x 9.5 cm

Collection of the artist

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Dancers on a Plane, 1980–81

Oil on canvas with painted bronze frame

200 x 161.9 cm

Tate, London. Purchased 1981

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Summer, 1985

Encaustic on canvas

190.5 x 127 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Philip Johnson, 1998

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Untitled, 1992–94

Encaustic on canvas

198.1 x 300.7 cm

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Savarin, 1982

Monotype

127 x 96.5 cm

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Gift of The American Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc., Leonard A. Lauder, President

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Untitled (Red, Yellow, Blue), 1998

Acrylic over intaglio mounted on canvas

86.4 x 191.8 cm

Collection of the artist

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026



Jasper Johns

Slice, 2020

Oil on canvas

127 x 168 cm

Private collection

Promised gift to The Museum of Modern Art

© Jasper Johns, VEGAP, Bilbao, 2026

