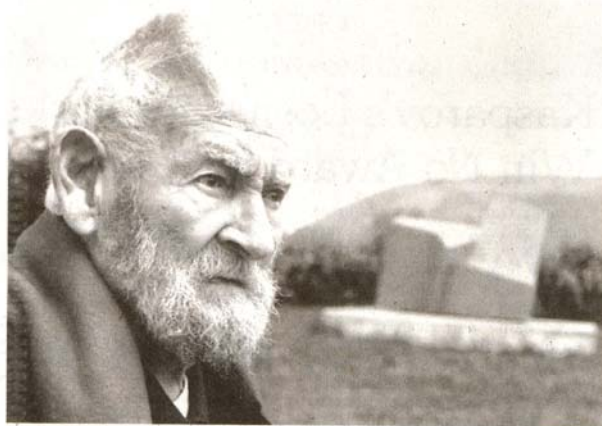




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Brigitte Lacombe, 2002

Jorge Oteiza, who influenced the American sculptor Richard Serra.

Jorge Oteiza, 94, a Sculptor Of Big, Abstract Metal Works

Jorge Oteiza, a Basque artist and intellectual whose abstract metal sculptures seemed spacious and weightless despite their large scale, died on Wednesday in San Sebastián, Spain. He was 94.

Although Mr. Oteiza was not widely known outside Spain, his work resonated with a handful of powerful figures in the art world. Richard Serra, the San Francisco-born sculptor of enormous structures of metal, did not encounter Mr. Oteiza's work until the 1980's, well into his own career, yet saw him as a precursor and like-minded visionary.

"Oteiza has discovered a self-evident language that others have found useful in ways not formally anticipated," Mr. Serra wrote in an essay for Mr. Oteiza's 85th birthday in 1993.

Jorge Oteiza Embil was born in Orio, in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa. He began working in sculpture early, and won awards in his 20's. But his style developed during a 13-year sojourn in South America beginning in 1935, and his mature works blend the influence of modern sculptors like Henry Moore with pre-Columbian figurative art.

Among his religious works are a frieze of Jesus' apostles above the entrance to the Basilica of Aranzazu, a new church built for the Franciscans of Guipúzcoa. In Mr. Oteiza's design, each apostle had a hole in his body to signify sacrifice. The church authorities objected — one called the figures "a row of monks with their guts torn out" — and the commission, made in 1950, was not completed until 1969.

Mr. Oteiza's most influential works were his large boxlike forms leavened by abundant empty space. His first New York exhibition, with 11 of those pieces in alabaster and iron, opened on March 27 at Haim

Chanin Fine Arts in Chelsea.

In 1959 Mr. Oteiza announced his retirement from sculpture, saying that he had fully exhausted its possibilities for manipulating space. Though a few commissions were left to complete, he later created only small three-dimensional maquettes. He also taught, made films and wrote philosophical works. His major literary work was "Is This Where We Have Reached?" subtitled "An Effort to Interpret the Aesthetics of the Basque Soul."

He is survived by two brothers, Juan José and Antonio, and two sisters, Carmen and Pilar, all living in

A first New York exhibition opened two weeks ago.

Spain's Basque region.

Known for his outspoken views on politics and art, Mr. Oteiza had long-standing rivalries and conflicts. He had a decades-long dispute with another Basque sculptor, Eduardo Chillida, over the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. They reconciled in 1997; Mr. Chillida died last year.

When the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in 1997, Mr. Oteiza ridiculed it as an "extravagant Disneyland." But Mr. Serra pressed the museum to buy at least one work by Mr. Oteiza, and it arranged with Mr. Oteiza's foundation to acquire several pieces. But Mr. Oteiza quarreled with his own foundation, eventually disavowing it, and the sale was never completed.