Institutional Image & Outreach to Society
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In terms of its goals to engage with society, 2023 was a passionate and enormously productive year for CNIO. This is particularly true of the programmes we pursued from our Institutional Image Office, which led to the 6th edition of CNIO Arte, the 4th Art and Science Symposium, the 1st CNIO Artistic Residences, and the organisation of an exhibition entitled “CNIO Arte: Dialogues between Art and Science” touring various US cities. With all these activities, as well as some others we will mention later, CNIO made great advances in its engagement with civil society, largely thanks to the vast potential of art and the bonds forged with the field of science.

However, we were not alone in successfully accomplishing all these programmes and had the immense fortune of being able to count on, yet again, the support of Fundación Banco de Santander, as well as our new partners, Instituto Cervantes, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, and FECYT (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology). We must also add to the list the collaboration with the Spanish Embassy in Washington, DC, and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. We are extremely satisfied that such highly reputable institutions placed their trust in us to develop a whole series of programmes that are unquestionably helping to make CNIO an increasingly more recognised institution within broader society in Spain. This, of course, owes both to its scientific achievements and the cultural and artistic programmes we are undertaking and offering society.

Without a doubt, we should start with our flagship programme, CNIO Arte, which, predicated on the hugely important field of science, wishes to build bridges between artists and scientists in order to generate new artistic ideas and works. In 2023, we addressed the passionate subject matter of life from a poetic focus in The Thread of Life in the Arts and Sciences, the title of the 4th Art and Science Symposium held in February 2023, which came on the back of a dialogue between 2 extraordinary women we had introduced to each other. The first, Liz Blackburn (Hobart, Tasmania, 1948), is a recognised molecular biologist and 2009 Nobel laureate in Medicine or Physiology for her work on telomeres, structures of our genetic material that condition the life of cells and of organisms. She was teamed up with visual artist Amparo Garrido, who had been working as coordinator of CNIO’s Institutional Image Office until that moment but who took leave of the institution to continue pursuing her career as an artist. The 2 women began discussions and exchanged their respective learnings with a view to stimulating the creation of a series of artworks to be undertaken by Garrido.

Liz Blackburn’s research had shown that severe chronic stress shortens telomeres and, in addition, demonstrated that meditation therapies are able to reverse these effects. Given the evidence of Blackburn’s research, Amparo Garrido decided to undergo a profound immersion in one of Spain’s most beautiful areas: the Monfragüe National Park in the northeast of Cáceres, a special reserve for the protection of birds. There she filmed a visual poem called Meditation and made a series of photographs of birds, more specifically black vultures.
Blackburn and Garrido took part in the aforementioned symposium, alongside the symposium director Carlos Jiménez, CNIO director Maria A. Blasco, and the theologian María Gelpí. Amparo Garrido’s visual poem, as well as 2 wonderful large-format photographs, were presented at CNIO in mid-February to coincide with the Art and Science symposium, and 1 week later, between 22 and 26 February, we attended ARCOmadrid, the annual international art fair, with Garrido’s excellent works. The project was curated by the artist Marina Vargas, a friend and colleague at CNIO ever since she presented the Intra-Venus sculpture in 2022.

Without a doubt, ARCOmadrid marks a special moment in the annual calendar for our programmes at CNIO, given that the art fair provides enormous visibility and guarantees diffusion among the general public and specialised audiences from Spain, and indeed from other countries, who visit the fair every year. We can confidently claim that CNIO Arte is the only initiative at the fair specifically focused on the exhibition and diffusion of artworks and programmes connecting art and science. And thus, on Friday 24 February, CNIO Arte officially opened its booth at ARCOmadrid, in a ceremony attended by Maria A. Blasco, CNIO director and executive director of CNIO Arte; Borja Baselga, managing director of Fundación Banco de Santander; Amparo Garrido, artist for CNIO Arte 2023; and Marina Vargas, curator of CNIO Arte.

As a result of the growing projection of our activities within Spain’s art scene, Instituto Cervantes steadfastly committed to working with our initiative and jointly to begin organising a number of exhibitions in several of its centres in the USA, more specifically in New York (February-April 2023) and Chicago (October 2023-January 2024), all with the support of Fundación Banco de Santander. The excellent response to the exhibition in New York encouraged the Spanish Embassy in Washington, DC, to invite the exhibition to its cultural centre in the former ambassador’s residence in the city, where it was held between April and June. The exhibition, entitled “Dialogues between Art and Science”, brought together works by all the artists who have taken part in the CNIO Arte programme since it was first set up: Eva Lootz, Chema Madoz, Carmen Calvo, Daniel Canogar, and Susana Solano.

Also worth underscoring is the collaboration between CNIO and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Given the theme of CNIO Arte in 2023 and its obvious connection with Wellbeing, the Guggenheim’s programme of activities exploring issues concerning physical and emotional wellbeing, the museum contacted our institution to invite us to hold a conversation on 5 July between our director Maria A. Blasco with Liz Blackburn and Amparo Garrido.

One of the greatest new developments in our programmes to foster a rapprochement between art and science consisted in setting up the first Artistic Residences at CNIO. This was possible with the invaluable support of FECYT, which decided, as part of its mission, to catalyse the relationship between science and society by supporting the transfer of knowledge through our CNIO Artistic Residences initiative. A jury comprising Maria A. Blasco, Amparo Garrido, Semiramide González, Marina Vargas, and Carlos Jiménez chose the artist Clara Montoya (Madrid, 1974) from among 40 candidates. In May 2023 we decided the subject matter for the 7th edition of CNIO Arte 2024. In view of current circumstances, climate change presented itself almost as a given. The chosen duo is the macroecologist David Nogués Bravo and the recognised Spanish artist Dora García. In their first conversation, Nogués, a professor at the University of Copenhagen, suggested to García, who lives and teaches at the University of Oslo, that they meet in the Svalbard archipelago to start talking and exchanging impressions that would form the basis for Dora García’s future artwork. Over the course of just a few months, García organised the crew necessary to shoot a film in different locations in Svalbard during the month of August.