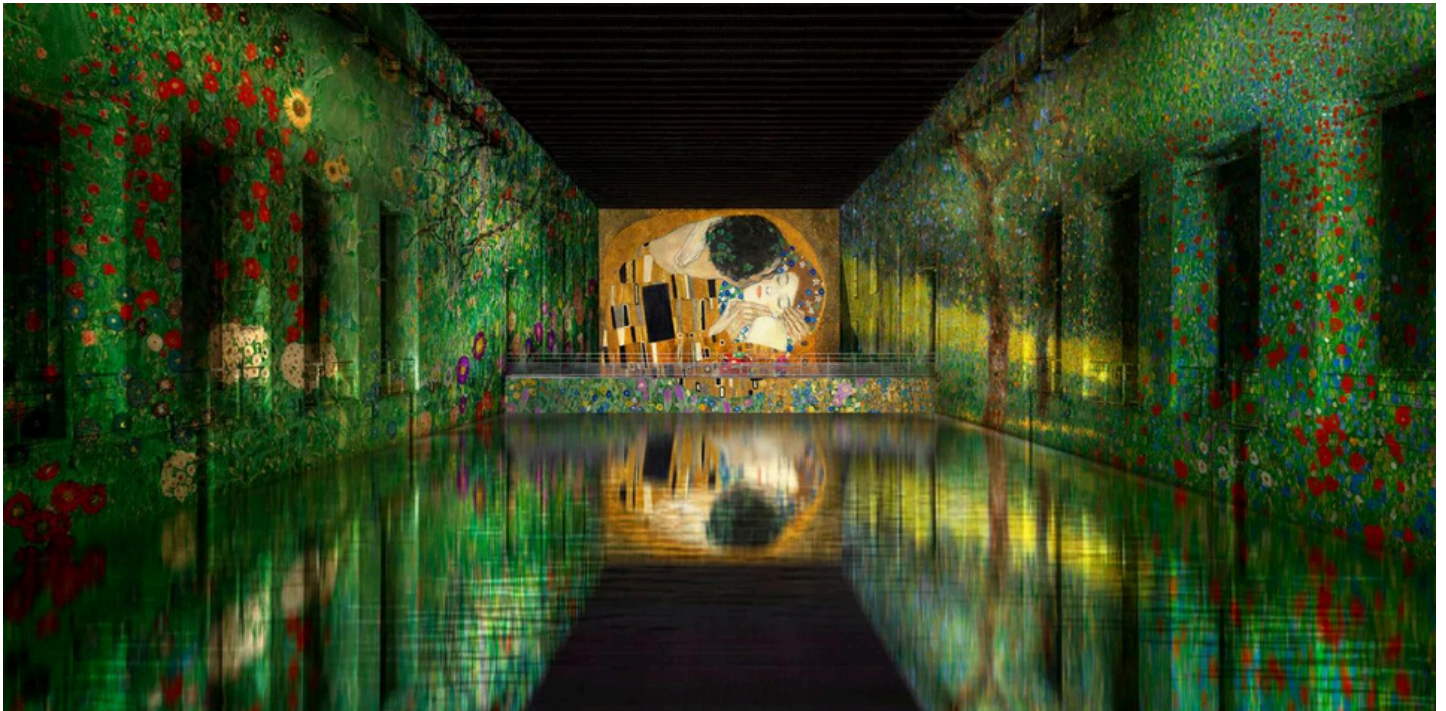


CULTURAL ARTICLE

(Eng)

BASSINS DES LUMIÈRES BORDEAUX AND THE REVITALIZATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE



Source: Bordeaux Convention Bureaux

By **Laura Pedrañez**

The Bassins des Lumières in Bordeaux is the largest digital art center in the world. It hosts immersive digital exhibitions showcasing some of history's greatest artists. Located in the city's former submarine base, it offers visitors a chance to experience art in a completely new way.

The Bordeaux submarine base, built during World War II by German occupiers, was an impressive complex designed to house U-boat submarines. Its construction required a large number of workers, mostly refugees from the Spanish Republic, and was completed in 1943. It was an important part of the German naval strategy for control of the Atlantic during the war but was ultimately abandoned in 1944 due to bombings by the American army. After that, it was used by some companies until 1999, when it opened to the public with its first cultural events program.

It wasn't until 2020 that it gained more popularity with the establishment of the Bassins des Lumières by Culturespaces Digital, a company specialized in creating immersive cultural experiences. Its striking digital exhibitions turn the imposing walls of the base into a gigantic canvas where works of art come to life.

The revitalization process of the submarine base has not only preserved its historical legacy but has also given it a new cultural identity. It has also significantly contributed to the economic and touristic revival of the city's cultural activities.



We must also talk about its role in the recovery of industrial heritage, a trend that has been booming in recent years and is closely related to the creation of new cultural spaces. The abandonment of industrial heritage is something relatively recent. The implementation of new technologies, globalization, exports, and the relocation of companies to industrial centers with lower costs, has caused our generation to inherit numerous enclaves of former factories, mines, train stations, and, of course, submarine bases, all of which have been abandoned and dilapidated by negligence. Only in recent years have these spaces—once forgotten and condemned to inhospitality—been recovered, reflecting the work of a whole generation, which in the future we will appreciate being able to study and admire.

In addition to revitalizing this environment, the Bassins des Lumières initiative brings culture and art closer to all types of audiences. It has been shown that many people who are not interested in visiting museums, galleries, or other artistic exhibitions are often intimidated by these spaces.

They are usually historical buildings or others have a specific architecture, such as the Musée de Beaux Arts or the MÈCA in Bordeaux, which sometimes alienate the public who may not have much knowledge or interest in art. They see them as inaccessible spaces, reserved only for the people who have extensive knowledge or interest in art's history. Thus, with these immersive digital exhibitions, a "friendlier" space is created, and it could be more attractive for all kinds of people. This is especially true for those visiting with children too, as children often do not enjoy traditional museums, because they need a more interactive experience. It is also worth noting the accessibility of the venue, allowing anyone to experience the exhibition.

However, there are also detractors of this type of spectacle, as they see it as the trivialization of art. It is believed that it can affect the appreciation of the artwork per se. While bringing the public an easier and more attractive way to experience the artworks; interest in visiting a museum, learning and seeing the originals may also be lost.

I think we should listen to both opinions. I believe that these initiatives are a very good way to revitalize spaces of industrial heritage, while bringing great exhibitions closer to everyday people. However, I think they should be accompanied by detailed information, such as with initiatives like the one that already exists: being able to download a mobile application that offers educational content about the projected works and the artists.

In another vein, I also believe that female artists should be included in these exhibitions, and not just stick to the so-called "masters" of art history. There are many women artists who deserve recognition, and using this type of display—which attracts more attention from the general public—to give them a voice, tell their story and show their work would be empowering and enlightening. An exhibition about Georgia O'Keeffe, Remedios Varo, or Frida Kahlo would be spectacular.

I invite every curious person to visit the Bassins des Lumières. As Bordeaux's cultural scene reinvents itself, this space remains an example of how the inhabited past can be a reference of modernity in the present, and be at the forefront of these times, merging art and technology.



SOURCES

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IMAGES:

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