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Steve McQueen Brings Nina Simone and David Bowie Together in an Unlikely Duet

At Guggenheim Bilbao, the British artist has married the voices of the music titans in a work that spans decades.

By Jo Lawson-Tancred (October 28, 2026)



Archival images of Nina Simone and David Bowie. Courtesy Guggenheim Bilbao.

One of those rare artists to make it big as a film director, Steve McQueen is best known for his work with the moving image. But in his latest project at Guggenheim Bilbao, McQueen has stripped away all visual distraction, plunging visitors into a startlingly unusual sound installation.

When I visited the Basque city ahead of *66-76-26*'s opening on October 9, I was a little skeptical of its ability to wow, especially in such an architecturally grand space. The show, I'd heard, was composed simply of two versions of a song, "Wild Is the Wind," one by Nina Simone from 1966 and another made a decade later by David Bowie. Their dates inform the work's title. With all the instrumentation removed, the two legends appear to be performing a duet a capella.

As soon as I walked in, any doubts melted away. Despite the apparent simplicity of the work, it has a surprising dimensionality and poignancy that feels easily monumental enough to fill one of the Guggenheim's largest galleries, which has recently been used for sprawling retrospectives of Ruth Asawa and Yayoi Kusama.



Installation view of Steve McQueen's *66-76-26* (2026) at Guggenehim Bilbao. Photo courtesy Guggenheim Bilbao.

On entering the darkened, cavernous gallery, I first felt disorientated, even swallowed up. Simone and Bowie's voices reach across to each other from either end of the gallery, loud, overlapping, and somehow immediate. Though there is a square arrangement of benches at the center of the room, I later found myself tracing its edges, which become fuzzy when seen from afar.

The work's sonic depth is also emotional. For McQueen, the power in these performances is how they render a schmaltzy, 1950s love song into a lament.

"The way it was delivered was horrifying," the British artist said at a press conference for the new exhibition, recalling his first encounter with the song. Indeed, there is a unbridled desperation to lines like: "Oh my darling cling to me, for we're like creatures of the wind."

Yet the tenderness of the lyrics has a growing relevance for McQueen in the face of mounting political and social crises. "I don't want to sound soft or hippie," he said, but "sometimes you feel that love is the only thing to hold onto in a storm."

The artist first heard the Bowie version of "Wild Is the Wind" in the 1990s, later realizing that it had been made in homage to Simone after the pair became close friends in the 1970s. Bowie borrows from her soulful singing style, which McQueen connects to the pain of the Civil Rights Movement. "How could you escape an environment you had no control over?," he asked. "You could propel a certain sense of freedom within a voice."

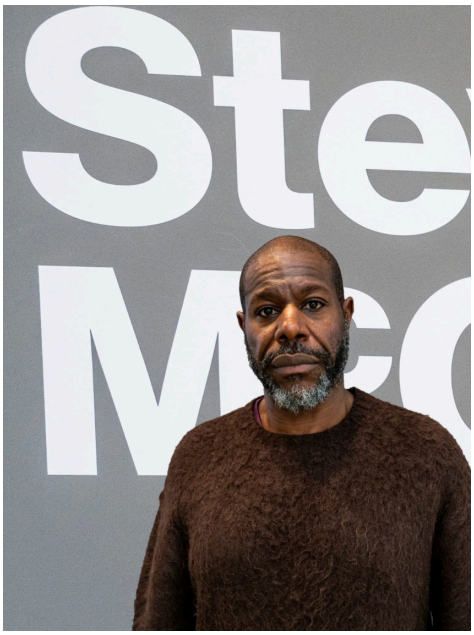
Heard together, "these two wailing voices ascend," he said. If each is a stone, "they come together to make fire. I was very excited to investigate that." The result is an experiment unlike anything I have previously seen within museum walls, but McQueen has undoubtedly pulled it off.

When I asked him how the work makes him feel, given his own, decades-long attachment to both versions, McQueen paused before admitting he felt "scared."

“The work addresses you, and it asks a lot,” he said.

Shrouded in darkness and annexed from an overstimulating world, *66-76-26* offers no easy means of diverting our attention. We must simply feel whatever it is that the song inspires. McQueen hopes we can meet the challenge.

“66-76-26” is on view at Guggenheim Bilbao through February 21, 2027.



Steve McQueen. Courtesy Guggenheim Bilbao.