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Embracing Modernity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction

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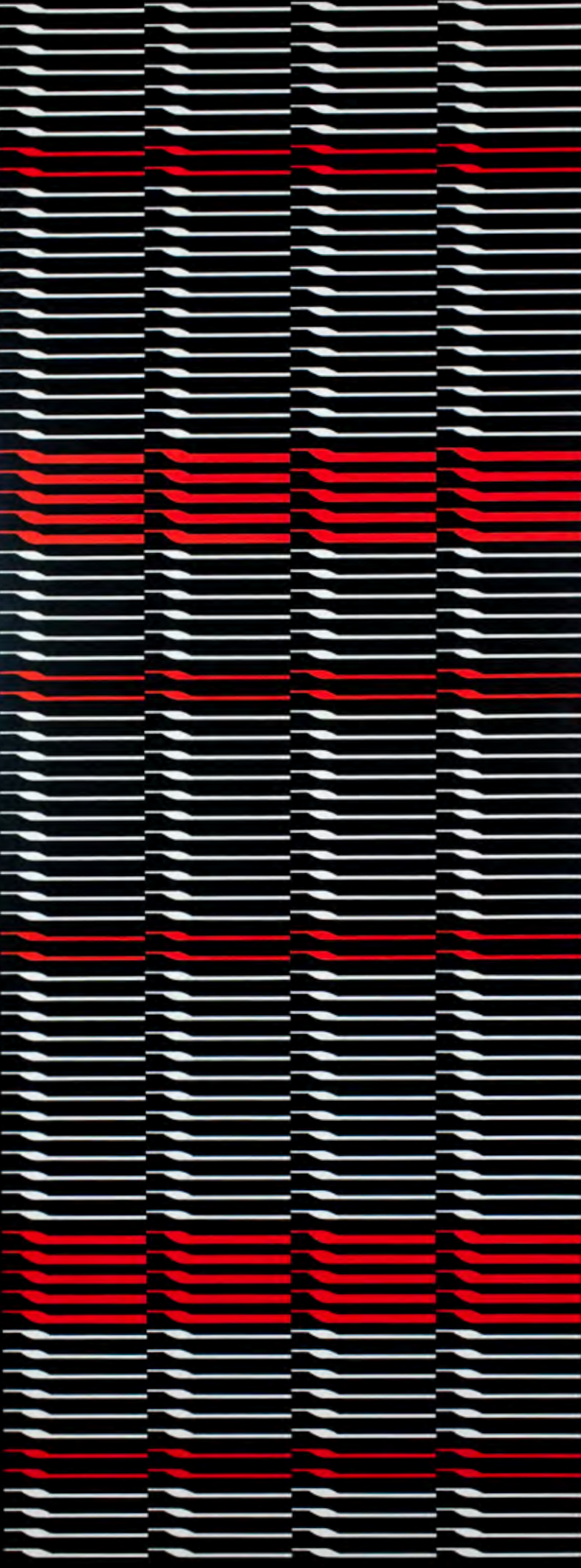


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EMBRACING MODERNITY

Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction

Front Cover:

Mateo Manaure, *Untitled*, 1977, Acrylic on wood, 56½ × 21½ × 1 1/8 inches, Art&Art, LLC Collection

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Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction

October 13, 2010 - January 2, 2011

The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum





Alejandro Otero, *Model- Project for Park Avenue, New York*, 1982, Mixed media, 46 ½ x 15 x 15 inches
Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami

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Director's Foreword

The concept of Abstraction in Latin America as a distinct and influential category of modern and contemporary art production is finally being recognized for its significance, and Venezuela stands at the forefront. For years, the art of Latin America was too often associated with fantasy, surrealism, figuration, murals and political propaganda, not to mention Popular or Folk Art. It was also subtly ignored for being “derivative” of European and American artistic stylistic categories throughout the twentieth century. Fortunately, that has changed with new exhibitions, excellent scholarship, and the accessibility of collections for exhibitions that can demonstrate that Abstraction is not unusual, but is important and just as interesting as many of the other abstract art movements that have dominated the last century and this, in all parts of the world. Now we know that Latin America is a source for new ideas, that artists not only travelled and brought ideas back with them, but brought ideas from their homeland to other locations as well and left their mark upon numerous artists and art movements abroad. This exhibition is of great importance for The Frost Art Museum and our very diverse community that mirrors the complexity of the art from the continent of South America. To present Abstraction from Venezuela, one of the most influential countries for the formation of abstraction as a modernist aesthetic and category, allows the visitor to follow its development from the 1940s through the work of some of the most important artists in the world, then and now, and to expand our understanding about how it emerged and why it has become recognizable for certain characteristic features, such as minimal geometric forms, drawing in space, chromatics, kinetic works, and interactive installations. This exhibition will introduce all of these concepts through the works of the most renowned protagonists of Venezuelan modernism and inaugurate a new chapter in the story of the Art of Latin America for the South Florida community. I am grateful to the curators, Francine Birbragher-Rozencwaig and Maria Carlota Perez, for bringing their insight and scholarship to this very current discussion of the origins of Venezuelan modernism.

Carol Damian
Director and Chief Curator
The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum

Introduction

While the great masters of 20th-century Venezuelan abstraction, Alejandro Otero, Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO), have been featured in important exhibitions focusing on Latin American art and Geometric Abstraction and have been recognized individually in major retrospectives, the majority of the artists who participated in the development of the abstract movement in Venezuela are unknown to the international community.

The exhibition *Embracing Modernity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction* presents, for the first time in the United States, the generation responsible for the development of one of the most important periods of the history of modern art in Venezuela. It includes a selection of works by a significant number of artists who adopted abstraction to break apart from traditional styles and to find new paths leading towards experimentation and freedom of expression.

Many artists and intellectuals of this generation had the opportunity to read about the avant-garde movements of the beginning of the 20th-century, and to travel to Europe and the United States to learn from the source. Most of them became actively involved in the modernist movement and promoted radical changes in their country of origin. Their experiences inspired them not only to create abstract works, but most importantly, to participate in the development of the modern discourse.

Those who stayed in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s were interested in the concepts of movement, optical illusion, and the participation of the viewer in the realization of the work of art. Some of them became the founders of Kinetic Art.

Those who returned to Venezuela, and those who never left, adopted Geometric Abstraction in the early 1950s, but later followed different paths. Some opted for a more mathematical form of abstraction, while others followed a more lyrical and organic approach.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the movement was its embracing quality. Talented artists who contributed to the development of a multidisciplinary abstract geometric expression in painting, sculpture, furniture and graphic design and worked with architects, musicians, dancers, philosophers and writers have been represented in this exhibit with pieces that document the collaborative spirit that reigned at the time.

With great respect and admiration, we acknowledge each and every one of the artists represented in this exhibit. Some of them adopted Geometric Abstraction in the 1950s, others deviated towards more lyrical interpretations or changed styles, and some opted for abandoning their artistic careers and working in other disciplines. Whichever way they went, we recognize their leading role in the development of a significant chapter of Venezuela's art history.

We would have liked to represent all the artists who participated in the development of Geometric Abstraction in Venezuela, but unfortunately we were not able to include them all. Although their works are not in the exhibit, we wish to recognize in particular the contribution of Aimée Battistini, Perán Erminy, Dora Hersen, Ramón Vazquez Brito, Genaro Moreno, Alirio Oramas, Marcel Floris and Harry Abend.

Finally, we included two artists who were influenced by the lyrical expression and the spirit of experimentation that permeated abstraction in the 1960s and produced works that constituted a direct response to Geometric Abstraction in the early 1970s. By including them we provided a unique opportunity to establish an intergenerational dialogue and offered a glimpse of the ways in which contemporary Venezuelan artists have responded to the legacy of Geometric Abstraction.

Francine Birbragher-Rozencwaig and Maria Carlota Perez
Co-Curators

Embracing Modernity: Origins of Geometric Abstraction in Venezuela

Francine Birbragher-Rozencwaig

Modern architecture and abstract art have dominated Venezuela's aesthetic discourse within the country and abroad since the 1950s. The process of embracing modernity, which occurred long after modernist painting and sculptural styles were adopted in Europe and the United States, was a complex one. It included the participation of artists and intellectuals who believed in freeing themselves from tradition, adopting new styles inspired by the European avant-garde, expanding their horizons by traveling abroad, and working against an environment reluctant to adopt new artistic trends.

The rise of abstract art in Venezuela occurred decades later than in Europe and the United States, but its origins must be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century to a series of events that resulted from the opposition of young artists to the teaching styles of the Academia de Bellas Artes de Caracas. In 1912, the Círculo de Bellas Artes was created as a response to the traditional methods applied by Antonio Herrera Toro, the Academia's director. Formed by Antonio Edmundo Monsanto, Leoncio Martínez, Rafael Agüín, Cruz Álvarez García, Julián Alonzo, and Manuel Cabré, it welcomed artists, writers, poets, musicians, and intellectuals interested in art, including Rómulo Gallegos and Andrés Bello Blanco. The open nature

of the Círculo allowed the artists to become familiar with literary and artistic avant-garde movements, including Impressionism and Cubism.

In the 1920s and 1930s, young Venezuelan artists were informed of the developments of the European movements, but found it difficult to develop innovative styles due to Caracas'

conservative environment. The rampant opposition to the teaching methods of the *Academia* led to a significant changing of the guard. In 1936, one of the founding members of the Círculo de Bellas Artes, Edmundo Monsanto, was appointed director of the educational institution that was renamed Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas. The *Escuela* became the place



Jesús Rafael Soto, *Untitled (Landscape)*, 1949, Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 18 7/8 inches
Private Collection

where artists interested in learning and experimenting found docents and peers willing to share their interest in the avant-garde movements, and particularly Cubism.¹ Students were also given the opportunity to participate in official salons and international exhibitions, and upon finishing their studies many of them obtained grants to travel abroad.

Despite the fact that most Venezuelan artists were aware of European trends including abstraction, the majority of them preferred to produce landscape and figurative painting and to benefit from a tradition that gave them professional and

economic stability. There was also a political reason. In a country that experienced political instability, artists working on classical styles in painting and architecture were assured a stable relationship with the government. This was particularly true in the 1950s when figurative and landscape artists benefited from their association with the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who promoted art as a vehicle to exalt patriotism and national identity and use art.

In the 1940s, students at the *Escuela de Artes Plásticas* who were familiar with European avant-garde

movements, including Cubism, Futurism and Constructivism, and their main representatives including Cézanne and Picasso, demanded new changes. They encountered a strong opposition to their ideas and a revolt at the educational center led to the expulsion of some of them. Cuban critic José Gómez Sicre and French critic Gaston Diehl who visited Caracas in 1948 found a captive audience among these young artists and promoted the idea of creating an alternative environment to satisfy their needs. The creation of *Taller Libre de Arte* (Free Arts Workshop) in 1948, responded to the demands of these young artists who were eager to learn and experiment, but did not have the opportunity to travel abroad. It functioned as a cultural center that offered open art classes, exhibitions, conferences and seminars on modern art. It also published, for a period of time, a magazine dedicated to the dissemination of information about contemporary art and literature.² The *Taller* played a significant role in the emergence of Geometric Abstraction in Caracas. Despite its founders' expressionist character, it exposed its members to Geometric Abstraction, the style in vogue in Paris, and organized the first exhibition of abstract work in Venezuela, José Mimó Mena and the *Grupo Concreto-Invencción* of Buenos Aires (1948).³

In 1949, Alejandro Otero, who had gone to Paris in 1945, returned to Caracas to show his *Cafeteras* (Coffeepots) series both at the *Taller* and at the Museo de Bellas Artes. This controversial exhibit marked the arrival of Geometric Abstraction in Venezuela. These works, the first ones by a Venezuelan artist to show bold abstraction, stirred a controversy over the adoption of abstraction as a pictorial style and inspired young artists to learn about abstraction from the source.

Expatriate artists and intellectuals living in Paris gathered often to share ideas,



Alejandro Otero, *Líneas Coloreadas*, 1950, Oil on canvas, 31 ½ x 31 ½ inches
Fundación Daniela Chappard

experiences and frustrations. In 1950, some of them decided to organize a formal group with the purpose of publishing a magazine to share their ideas with their Venezuelan and Latin American counterparts. Artists Pascual Navarro Velázquez, Alejandro Otero Rodríguez, Mateo Manaure, Luis Guevara Moreno, Carlos González Bogen, Narciso Debourg, Perán Erminy, Rubén Nuñez, Dora Hersen, Aimée Battistini; dancer Belén Nuñez; and philosopher J.R. Guillent Pérez published the first issue of the magazine *Los Disidentes* (The Dissidents) in March, 1950. Their mission, as stated in the first page of the publication, was defined as follows: “The leaflet *Los Disidentes* has as its essential mission to bear witness to the concerns and interests of a group of Venezuelan youngsters interested, individually and collectively, in rethinking from their roots, the topics and assets of Latin American culture and life. This first issue has as its

immediate goal to communicate the essence of our attitude. No created interest, no sentimentality to what we believe is our inalienable duty. Latin American youth faces an alternative: To submit itself to the traditional canon or to make it possible for Latin America to achieve its true dignity.”⁴

Artists Armando Barrios and Miguel Arroyo, and filmmaker César Enríquez joined the group in Paris, and poet Rafael Zapata, journalist Bernardo Chataing, and artists Oswaldo Vigas, Alirio Oramas, Luis E. Chávez, Régulo Pérez, Genaro Moreno, and Omar Carreño, joined in Caracas. They all shared the group’s interest in promoting an open forum for the discussion and the analysis of the international and local cultural scene.

Despite its short life (March-September, 1950), the magazine played a significant role in the development of Venezuela’s

abstraction. It provided a venue to share ideas and to criticize the stagnation of Caracas’ artistic and intellectual circles, as shown in critical texts on art education and the *Escuela de Artes Plásticas*,⁵ commentaries on Venezuelan art competitions and salons,⁶ and statements rejecting figurative and realistic styles.⁷ *Los Disidentes*’ main goal was not to promote abstraction, although it introduced its historical origins in one of its articles,⁸ but to express the group’s antagonism to Venezuela’s conservative approach to art and culture.⁹

Upon their arrival in Paris, Venezuelan artists had embraced the main movement in vogue in the French capital: Geometric Abstraction. They found in it the appropriate expression of the modern world they wanted to build and depict. Besides participating in workshops and salons, and exhibiting their works, they were committed to introducing the language of abstraction to the country’s visual arts, and to finding the way to be included into the international artistic discourse. An invitation to participate in a special project gave them the opportunity to achieve both such goals and, in addition, to formulate the formal and conceptual basis of what would become Venezuela’s Geometric Abstraction.

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, a Venezuelan architect who played a major role in the development and modernization of the country, invited several Venezuelan and international artists to participate in a massive undertaking of both urban planning and architectural design: the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas (1944-1970). The project gave Villanueva a unique opportunity to integrate art and architecture on a grand scale. The list of artists who participated included Jean Arp, André Bloc, Alexander Calder, Wifredo Lam, Henri Laurens, Fernand Léger, Baltasar Lobo, Antoine Pevsner, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Victor Vasarely,



Omar Carreño, *Tableau Objet*, 1954, Acrylic on wood, 17 x 25 1/8 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Miguel Arroyo, Armando Barrios, Omar Carreño, Carlos González Bogen, Pedro León Castro, Mateo Manaure, Francisco Narváez, Pascual Navarro, Alirio Oramas, Héctor Poleo, Braulio Salazar, Jesús Rafael Soto, Víctor Valera, and Oswaldo Vigas.

Influenced by Bauhaus, Villanueva's Ciudad Universitaria legitimized Modernism as the most appropriate expression for Venezuela's society and visual artists benefited from this. They also benefited from the renovations and transformations the country had gone through under the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez, who had adopted a modern discourse. As he once stated, his goal was to promote the "moral, intellectual, and material improvement of the inhabitants of the country and the rational transformation of the physical environment in order that Venezuela occupy the rank that corresponds to its geographic situation, its extraordinary riches, and glorious traditions"¹⁰ From railways to bridges, to electric plants, schools, and public housing projects, the country had experienced a visible transformation and was ready to embrace what would become Venezuela's artistic style *par excellence*: Geometric Abstraction.

Once abstraction was accepted and validated, artists were free to follow their individual paths. Some, including Soto and Cruz-Diez, stayed in Paris and developed works in which the participation of the spectator played a significant role in the nature of the piece. Building on the foundation of Geometric Abstraction, Cruz-Diez and Soto, together with Yaacov Agam, Jean Tinguely, Victor Vasarely and other artists connected with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and the Galerie Denise René, developed abstract works with kinetic and optical effects, forging a direct relationship between technology and art. Known as Kinetic Art, their work required spectators

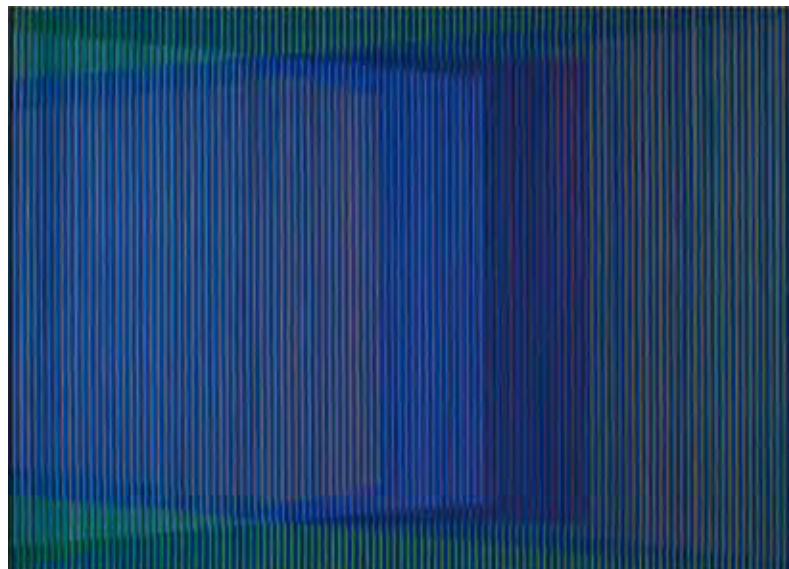
to actively participate in the art experience.

Those who returned to Venezuela continued to educate society and to broaden its taste and knowledge through exhibitions and special projects. In 1952, Carlos González Bogen and Mateo Manaure founded the gallery Cuatro Muros, located in El Silencio, an area renovated by Villanueva. The gallery made abstract art available to the public and provided an exhibition space for the growing number of artists interested in Geometric Abstraction.¹¹ The gallery's manifesto stated that "art was more than optical," suggesting a rupture with the artists working in Paris. Inspired by Victor Vasarely (1906-1997), Jean Dewasne (1921-1999), Edgar Pillet (1912-1996), Max Bill (1908-1994), and Ellsworth Kelly (1923), González Bogen, Manaure, and many of the abstract artists working in Caracas developed a more mathematical approach, which followed Constructivism's absolute order of vertical and horizontal, and resulted in rigorously geometrical order schemes.¹²

During the 1950s and 1960s artists went in different directions, including Neo-Plasticism, Free Abstraction, and Kinetic Art. Otero, Soto and Cruz-Diez's participation in the Kinetic movement made them the most recognized Venezuelan figures locally and internationally. Mercedes Pardo dedicated her work to a thorough exploration of color, and Víctor Valera, Carlos González Bogen, and Omar Carreño, attained recognition working on sculpture and tridimensional pieces.¹³

One of the most prominent artists of that period was Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO), a German-born architect and engineer who produced some of the most original works in modern Venezuelan art. Her lyrical approach to abstraction led her to experiment with unusual materials and forms, inspiring not only her contemporaries, but also the next generation of artists, like Eugenio Espinoza and Claudio Perna. GEGO took abstraction to a whole new level.

It is important to recognize the role of Alfredo Boulton, an individual who



Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Psychromie 549*, 1971, Aluminum and acrylic, 31 ½ x 23 ⅝ inches
Private Collection



Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO), *Untitled*, 1962, Watercolor on Japanese paper, 33 3/4 x 24 3/4 inches, Amy Dean and Alan Kluger Collection, Miami

was instrumental in the creation of the modern discourse in Venezuela. He was a historian, an art critic, a photographer, and a leading figure in the development of the modern discourse. Besides organizing exhibitions at the Ateneo de Caracas and writing articles in *El Universal* under the pen names Bernardo Pons and Bruno Plá, in the 1930s he documented Venezuela's process of modernization through his photographic work, published three volumes on the history of Venezuelan painting, *Historia de la pintura en Venezuela* (1964, 1968, and 1972), and wrote several monographs, including Alejandro Otero (1966), Jesús Soto (1973), and Carlos Cruz-Diez (1975).¹⁴

During the years that modernity took shape in Venezuela, the artists and intellectuals featured in *Embracing Modernity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction* became the pioneers and founders of one of the country's main artistic movements. This exhibit recognizes and celebrates their achievements, and their role in one of the most important chapters of Venezuela's art history.

- 1 Bélgica Rodríguez, *La Pintura Abstracta en Venezuela 1945-1965* (Caracas, 1980), 9.
- 2 Rina Carvajal, "Venezuela," in Edward J. Sullivan, ed. *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century* (London/NY Phaidon Press Ltd./Phaidon Pres Inc.) Reprinted in paperback (with revisions), 2000, 145.
- 3 Hugo Achugar, "Latin American Modernities," in Ariel Jiménez, ed. *Alfredo Boulton and his Contemporaries, Critical Dialogues in Venezuelan Art 1912-1974* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), n.55, 30.
- 4 *Los Disidentes*, No. 1, Paris, Marzo, 1950. Reproduced in Bélgica Rodríguez, *La Pintura Abstracta en Venezuela 1945-1965* (Caracas, 1980), 163. Translated by Francine Birbrgher-Rozenwaig.
- 5 Mateo Manauere, "La Escuela de Artes Plásticas de frente y de perfil," *Los Disidentes*, No. 1, Paris, March, 1950, 7-11. In Rodríguez, 169-173.
- 6 Luis Guevara, "Concursos y Salones de Arte en Venezuela," *Los Disidentes*, No. 5, Paris, Septiembre, 1950, 3-5. In Rodríguez, 245-247.
- 7 Carlos González Bogen, "La Escuela 'de los paisajistas' de Caracas," *Los Disidentes*, No.2, Paris, Abril, 1950, 2-3. In Rodríguez, 184-185.
- 8 Alejandro Otero, "Del Arte Abstracto," *Los Disidentes*, No. 4, Paris, Junio, 1950, 10-14. In Rodríguez, 232-236.
- 9 Appendix 1, see page 80.
- 10 Servicio Informativo Venezolano, 1954: facing page of frontispiece. Cited in Marguerite Mayhall, "Modernist but Not Exceptional: The Debate over Modern Art and National Identity in the 1950s Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Venezuelan Exceptionalism Revisited: The Unraveling of Venezuela's Model Democracy (March, 2005), 124-146. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30040280>.
- 11 Appendix 2, see page 81.
- 12 Rodríguez, 27.
- 13 Carvajal, 145-146.
- 14 Ariel Jiménez, ed., *Alfredo Boulton and His Contemporaries: Critical Dialogues in Venezuelan Art, 1912-1974* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 377.

Embracing Diversity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction in the Sixties and Seventies

Maria Carlota Perez

“Nada es nacional en esta parte del mundo, como no sea la referencia de un punto de anís en las empanadas o un chorrito de vino La Sagrada Familia en la olleta, o la bienamada Maizina Americana que aún así se distingue por un águila y no por un tordito sabanero. Crearle a nuestros jóvenes un muro, y en este caso, una desidia ante lo que les pertenece por historia y por derecho, es una profunda estupidez.”¹

José Ignacio Cabrujas



Alejandro Otero, *Héctor*, 1975, Paper Collage, 19 5/8 x 15 3/4 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

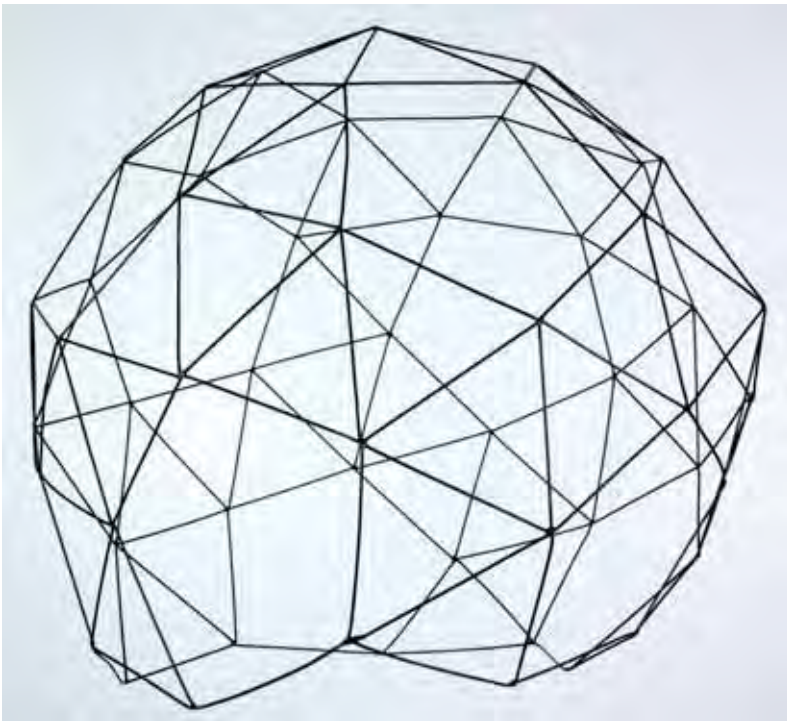
Nothing can be more reductive and ambiguous than using a standard art-classification term like “Geometric Abstraction” to present a group of works produced in Venezuela. As useful as these terms are, generalizations will always limit the understanding of intellectual traditions that reflect on cultural productions—sometimes facilitating understanding, other times contributing to confusion. In the context of the exhibition *Embracing Modernity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction*, the work of artists who labored in the constructivist tradition in Venezuela during the sixties and seventies has been seen and analyzed for its contribution to the European modernist discourse. It is not my intention here to convince the reader that Geometric Abstraction in Venezuela was a product of local traditions. I rather limit myself to the suggestion that during this period

Venezuela was going through critical social changes and that a discussion of the development of this movement in Venezuela would be a richer one if considering points of analysis distinct from those generally used when referring to the European idea of modernity.

Historically, Venezuela has been a country where ideas from various parts of the world converge. As other countries did before World War I, Venezuela looked towards Europe in search of modern ideas that would shape the future of this then young country. This aspiration turned into public policy during the forties and fifties, when modern European art and architecture became political instruments fostering social change under the dictatorial regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-1958).² Cultural diversity was enriched with the arrival of skilled workers from Spain, Italy and

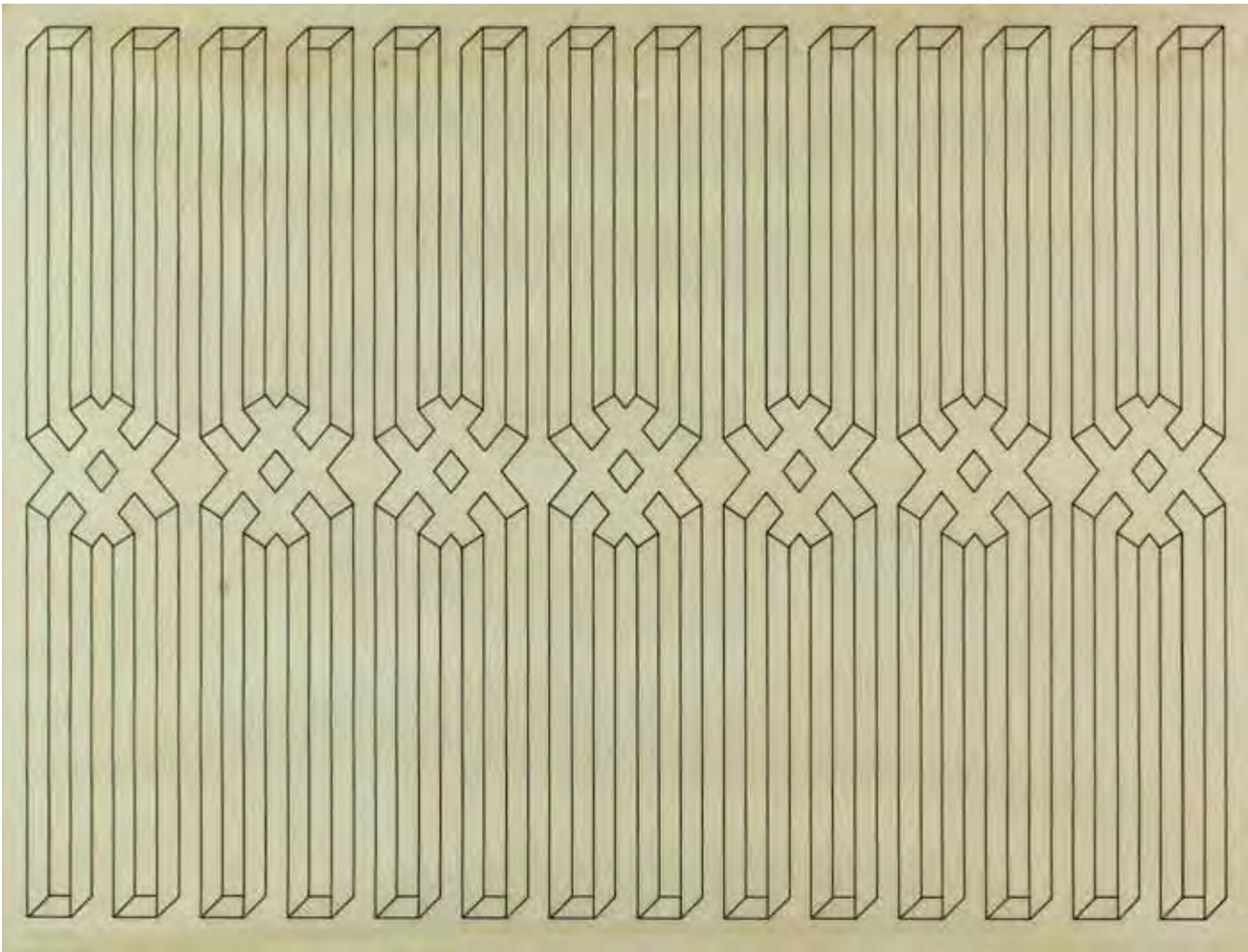
Portugal recruited over a ten-year period of open immigration (1948–58). During that time, approximately one million immigrants coming from a continent devastated by the effects of World War II arrived in Venezuela.³

During the sixties and seventies, the country imported ideas from the political vanguard and promoted them as the most efficient remedy for economical underdevelopment. They were supported by an abundance of resources, benefit of a booming oil industry. Information came from everywhere. New artistic styles developing in the art capitals of the world were known in Venezuela very early in their development. Artists had myriad ideas, styles and cultures, framed in the context of natural beauty, political instability and racial mixes. That diversity became Venezuela’s cultural singularity and the main influence for its artistic production.



Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO), *Untitled (Esfera)*, 1977, Steel, 27 1/8 x 27 1/8 x 27 1/8 inches, Art&Art, LLC Collection

The sixties were violent years in Venezuela. Reactionary ideas inspired by the Cuban Revolution took the form of political and artistic discourse that aimed at provoking middle-class Venezuelans’ sense of tradition and beauty, in declared opposition to Geometric Abstraction.⁴ While many abstract artists considered themselves leftist intellectuals, alternate artistic movements tended toward more radical political antagonism. Despite the open disapproval from critics like Marta Traba,⁵ Kinetic Art was supported by the new democratic government, probably due to its apolitical discourse, international success and established association with progress. In its cultural policies the government confirmed the importance of art in the streets and public spaces. Art was integrated into the people’s social spaces with projects like Carlos Cruz-Diez’s *Physichromie* (1971), a mural for the public garden of the Institute of Scientific Research IVC; Soto’s *Ambientación del Complejo Cultural Teresa Carreño* (1972-1982),



NEDO, *Reversión 23*, 1967, Ink on paper, 17 7/8 x 24 5/8 inches, Art&Art, LLC Collection

consisting of several works that were installed at the Teresa Carreño Theater and its premises and Mateo Manure's decoration for public buses. Various private institutions and collections believed in the benefits of kinetic work in common productive and private spaces, commissioning works from artists working in that style.

The official support that Kinetic Art received during that time might have influenced the general notion that all artists working with geometry during the sixties were (or had to be) part of that movement. But many artists committed to the potential of constructivist values had allowed ideas other than those

proclaimed by the Paris-based group into their work. All around the world, the sixties and seventies were marked by a progressive movement towards a redefinition of art. Art production moved its focus from form to concept, from universalism to local necessities, from consumerism to social enjoyment, from elitism to socio-cultural immersion. Venezuela's modern style availed a language to explore ideas that were being evaluated in different latitudes, including the limits of space, nature, participation and expression.

Alejandro Otero, a leading member of the group *Los Disidentes*, had broken ties with figuration as early as 1950 after

his quest for abstraction had taken him to create *Líneas Inclínadas*, expressive lineal forms that deconstructed the object in its plastic language. Later, with the *Coloritmos* series (1954-1960), the artist explored the limits of form and material, using black parallel lines as the setting where interventions of color will mark the rhythm of the viewer's vision. After exhausting the possibilities of his *Coloritmos*, Otero re-evaluated modern postulates with the use of trivial objects generally considered inadequate in art, exploring a technique used by the historical avant-garde: collage. "*Je remets constamment tout en question. C'est mon drame,*"⁶ Otero said. A keen researcher of art's problems but also

concerned with those of his time, Otero went further into his imagination, abandoning his brushes and focusing on coloring strips of journals, newspapers and printed material, using them as the blocks of his compositions and eventually letting the printed words work as brushstrokes. Going beyond abstraction, Otero points at the viewer's sensorial capacities, presenting a quotidian element that is close, but unreachable.

Mercedes Pardo, Otero's wife, was a painter known for her colorist skills. She explored the subjective and expressive capacities of color, which resulted in a freer interpretation of abstraction. Through her paintings, Pardo rejected the limits of bi-dimensionality and explored the inclusion of the third dimension by incorporating painting's traditional instruments, color and form.⁷

The result of this search was an oeuvre that evolved to offer colors charged with vitality and space.

The expressive capacity of color explored by Pardo seems opposite to the precision and scarce use of color present in Nedo Mion Ferrario's work. Better known as NEDO, this Italian-born graphic designer brought with him visual traditions that contributed to the idea of modernity that was being built in Venezuela. He created monochrome works that explored the idea of ambiguity through space. In his work, form and space become one, only to revert to their original roles once and again. NEDO's profound study of geometrical shapes allowed him to create "impossible" forms that questioned the viewer's way of seeing.

Another artist who contributed to the cultural diversity that characterizes

Venezuela was Gertrude Goldschmidt, or just GEGO, a German-born architect who arrived in Venezuela, in 1939. In Germany, she had studied at the now University of Stuttgart, "a place where tradition meant rigor and functionality rather than irrational experimentation," as she recalled.⁸ In Venezuela, her artistic production formally began in 1953, after meeting graphic artist Gerd Leufert, who became her artistic partner. Always having the line as her starting point, GEGO's sculptural work evolved from volumes constructed by consecutive parallel lines made of iron, to environmental works made with malleable wires where space, light and chance seemed to have colluded and taken over artistic control. This resulted in a symbiosis between structures and their surrounding space, achieved through an irregular and imperfect geometry that gave a sense of organic



Eugenio Espinoza, *Impenetrable*, 1972/2005, Acrylic on unprimed canvas, Installation Locust Projects, Miami

construction and suggested an open-ended work that was free of the rigid, mathematical, perfectionist base of geometry.

GEGO's work provides the viewer with more than just an object; it offers an experience. In 1969, commissioned by Miguel Arroyo, director of the Museo de Bellas Artes, GEGO created *Reticulárea*, an installation where a net surrounds the viewer, blurring the line between order and disorder, visible and invisible, art and life. The inclusive experience provided by this structure is diametrically opposed to a work by a young artist who had been her student. In 1972, Eugenio Espinoza presented *Impenetrable* at the *Ateneo de Caracas*, an alternative exhibition space. The work consisted of a grid painting the same size as the floor area of the room in which it was exhibited. Instead of being hung on

the wall, however, the canvas covered the entire exhibition area, elevated a few centimeters above the floor. The elevation and the canvas itself forbade the viewer physical access to the area, allowing only visual access and thus forcing a shift in perception. Instead of including the viewer in the work following Kinetic Art's traditions, the artist limited the participant's role and impelled him to reflect, not act. Instead of addressing the participant's senses, Espinoza called for reason to reevaluate the course of art and society.

The name of the piece reveals a reaction to Kinetic Art by association with Soto's *Penetrable*, icon of the movement, while questioning rationality and praise for material, mass culture and social conventions. *Impenetrable* (1972) would mark a break in the history of cultural production in Venezuela.

Espinoza used a language established by modern art, the grid, to manifest a frontal, conceptual confrontation to kinetic work. In his analysis of the initial stage of Venezuelan modernity, curator and author Ariel Jiménez proposes that the modernist movement that took place in Venezuela during the fifties "set itself the fundamental task of 'figuring' Venezuela –that is to say, of endowing the nation with an iconography within which its inhabitants might recognize themselves."⁹ With the use of the grid, Espinoza employed Venezuelans' shared iconography to effectively deliver his message to society. Like Pop artists did in the United States during the sixties, Espinoza was using society's cultural proxies to deliver his observations on art and society. He was exploring the limits and dimensions of painting itself, the possibilities of materials that are classically used in painting (oil and



Claudio Perna, *La Cosa (Médanos)*, 1972, Video, 7 minutes 14 seconds, 3 of 5 + AP, Private Collection, Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

canvas) and prompting a reflection on society with the direct instrument of (limited) participation.

Between the domination of the traditional kinetic-constructive art and politicization of the new figuration, the seventies burst forth with a different way of art-making: representations of conceptual nature. The worldwide distrust of institutions had echoes in Venezuela, driving artists to seek alternatives and, many times, take their proposals off gallery walls and into the street. A new generation of artists established a direct dialogue with the viewer without the physical space of the traditional showroom, aiming to achieve effective communication between art and the public. Nature became a subject of artistic investigation, rescuing an interest shown by painters of the *Círculos de Bellas Artes* in early twentieth-century landscape-oriented works.

Claudio Perna was a pivotal artist in the analysis of the man-geography connection and an important figure in the development of contemporary art in Venezuela.¹⁰ He arrived in Venezuela from his native Italy in 1955, just days before turning 17. While studying Geography at the *Universidad Central de Venezuela*, Perna started making works on paper, developing his own photography and exploring the possibilities of film. In 1972, he produced

a video at the *Médanos* (dunes) in Coro, *La Cosa* (1972), in which he works with Espinoza to offer a reflection on subjects like gender, society and the role of the artist in it, sensations and the body as art. These topics were being studied at the same time by contemporary artists like Lygia Clark in Paris and Hélio Oiticica in New York.

Some of the artists that joined Perna in the development of a language that would reconsider art, land, culture, politics and society were Diego Barboza, Eugenio Espinoza, Roberto Obregón, Milton Becerra and Antonieta Sosa, among others. At the turn of the decade, through a very wide variety of media, these artists presented their work in alternative non-commercial spaces and developed participatory experiences, outdoor sculptures and installations with proposals that involved public participation.

Exhibitions *Las sensaciones perdidas del hombre* (Sala Mendoza, 1972), *Para contribuir a la confusión general* (Ateneo de Caracas, 1972) and *Piel a piel* (São Paulo, 1972) where a new form of art can be advised, constituted milestones within Venezuelan contemporary art. They announced a new generation of artists who would develop a critical vision of art and individual freedom, search for new support, explore the possibilities

of the artist's body within the creative process, and form new links with the public, now a participant and sometimes co-creator of the artistic experience. The new reason-based artistic movement offered a new set of values based on self-reflection, in order to solve the problems of today. Geometry will leave behind its aspirations of universalism, to become a tool through which the next generation of artists will address local problems of their time. This change of focus marked the beginning of contemporary art in Venezuela. However, geometric abstraction will continue to be present in Venezuela as an indelible cultural seal left by the fifties.

1. Cited by Juan Carlos Palenzuela in *11 Tipos* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 2002) 14.
2. For an in-depth discussion on the reshaping of Venezuela's political and cultural identity during the 1940s-1960s, see: Marguerite Mayhall: "The Dissolution of Utopia: Art, Politics, and the City of Caracas in the 1960s" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001).
3. After 1958 the government tightened immigration controls to favor foreigners with high-level skills. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Venezuela," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/625197/Venezuela> (accessed September 01, 2010).
4. *El Techo de La Ballena* was a group of writers and Informalist painters with the city as their focus. They took as their form of protest the creation of public scandals, as did their Surrealist and Dada forebearers. Their activities included publishing an eponymous journal, establishing a gallery, and sponsoring conferences. See: Juan Calzadilla: *El Techo de la Ballena. Antología 1961-1969*, ed. Israel Ortega Oropeza (Caracas: Monteavila, 2008) xi-xxvi.
5. See Marta Traba, "Finale: Allegro con fuoco: Cinéticos y experimentadores," in *Mirar en Caracas* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1974) 123-33.
6. Alfredo Boulton: *Historia de la Pintura en Venezuela. Tomo III Epoca Contemporanea* (Caracas: Armitano Editores, 1972) 198.
7. Mercedes Pardo's works' spatial capacities are discussed by Gloria Carnevali in "El Espacio en la Pintura de Mercedes Pardo" in *Mercedes Pardo. Moradas del Color*, (Caracas: Fundación Galería de Arte Nacional, 1991).
8. Teresa Alvarenga, "Gego: Vengo de doblar superficies," *El Nacional*, September 23, 1977.
9. Ariel Jimenez: "Figuring Venezuela" in *Alfredo Boulton and his Contemporaries* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008) 76.
10. Julieta González reviews the influence of specific works produced in the 70s, 80s and 90s on more recent artistic production in Venezuela in "A Brief Genealogy of Contemporary Art in Venezuela" in *Contemporary Art of Venezuela* (Caracas: Francisco Villanueva Editores, 2006) 8-13.

Exhibited Artists

Miguel Arroyo

Armando Barrios

Omar Carreño

Carlos Eduardo Cruz-Diez

Narciso Debourg

Eugenio Espinoza

Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO)

Carlos González Bogen

Elsa Gramcko

Gerd Leufert

Luis Guevara Moreno

Mateo Manaure

Alfredo Maraver

Pascual Navarro Velásquez

Mion Ferrario Nedo (NEDO)

Rubén Núñez

Alejandro Otero Rodríguez

Mercedes Pardo

Rafael Pérez

Claudio Perna

Manuel Quintana Castillo

Francisco Salazar

Enrique Sardá

Jesús Rafael Soto

Víctor Valera

Oswaldo Vigas

Miguel Arroyo

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1920-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 2004)

Miguel Arroyo's interest in modern design began during a trip to the United States where he traveled to assist Luis Alfredo López Méndez in the making of a series of murals commissioned by the Venezuelan government for the New York's World Fair pavilion in 1938. During the trip, Arroyo met Gordon Bunshaft who worked on Venezuela's pavilion at the Fair and introduced him to modern design and architecture. In 1946, Arroyo received a government grant to study Fine Arts and Architecture at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

When he returned to Caracas, he joined the group of artists and intellectuals who promoted art education's reforms and the integration of modernity in the country's artistic and intellectual discourse. In April, 1950, he joined the local group that supported *Los Disidentes*.

From 1950 to 1959, Arroyo designed over one hundred pieces of furniture, including a series known as *Muebles Modernos para una Casa Colonial*, designed for Alfredo Boulton's home in Pampatar. In 1954, he wrote about Boulton's modernist approach to traditional architecture in *Revista A*, and explained how he combined colonial architecture with modern art pieces, including a mobile by Alexander Calder and a *Coloritmo* by Alejandro Otero.

Although Arroyo used local woods and native fibers, his designs were highly influenced by modern art and Geometric Abstraction. He was also a ceramist and art professor, but is mostly known for his role as Director of the Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas. Under his leadership, the museum became the first one in the country and in Latin America to gather an important collection of Venezuelan and international modern and contemporary art.



Armando Barrios

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1920-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1999)

Armando Barrios began his studies at the Academia de Bellas Artes de Caracas in 1932. His early portraits were influenced by Flemish and Dutch artists. After graduating in 1937, he developed an interest for Impressionism and Cubism. He pursued musical studies at the Escuela Superior de Música de Caracas and worked several years as a draftsman at an architectural firm.

In 1949, he traveled to Paris where he took courses at the Académie La Grande Chaumière. The human figure began to disappear from his works giving way to abstract compositions characterized by intense colors and clearly defined planes and forms, rhythmically intertwined. Barrios was a member of *Los Disidentes* from April to June, 1950.

He returned to Venezuela in 1952 and worked on several murals commissioned by Carlos Raúl Villanueva for the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, including one for the façade of the Olympic Stadium and one for the Plaza del Rectorado.

He continued to work in an abstract style until 1954 when he began to reincorporate the human figure into his paintings. As opposed to his earlier portraits, his new stylized figures reflected his formal experience with Geometric Abstraction. He represented Venezuela at the Venice Biennale in 1960 and the Galería de Arte Nacional in Caracas presented a retrospective exhibit of his work in 1977. His career included numerous individual and group exhibits in Venezuela and abroad.



Omar Carreño

(b. Porlamar, Venezuela, 1927)

Omar Carreño studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas in Caracas, where he began as a figurative painter and developed an interest for Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin. He participated in the *Taller Libre de Arte*, where he presented his first individual show and became familiar with the works of Mondrian and Kandinsky.

When Carreño arrived in Paris in 1950, he began to work in collages and large format paintings. A year later, he began his series of reliefs and *Transformables* in the style of Geometric Abstraction which became a constant throughout his career. He participated in the group *Los Disidentes* and a year later began his series of *Polípticos*, reliefs painted with lacquer that no longer followed his traditional orthogonal format.

In 1955, he returned to Caracas where he began to work in a series of black and white lacquers. He believed the lack of color favored the tension among the geometric elements of the piece, so he continued to use this combination throughout his career. As per Villanueva's request, he created a mural for the School of Dentistry at the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas.

Between 1961 and 1965, Carreño experimented with *Informalism*. In 1966, he founded in Caracas the *Grupo Expansionista* and focused on including real movement in his work. Between 1967 and 1978 he switched his interest to the use of artificial light. In 1972, he was awarded the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas and he represented Venezuela at the 36th Venice Biennale. In 1983, the Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo presented a retrospective of his works, which was shown the following year at the Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas.



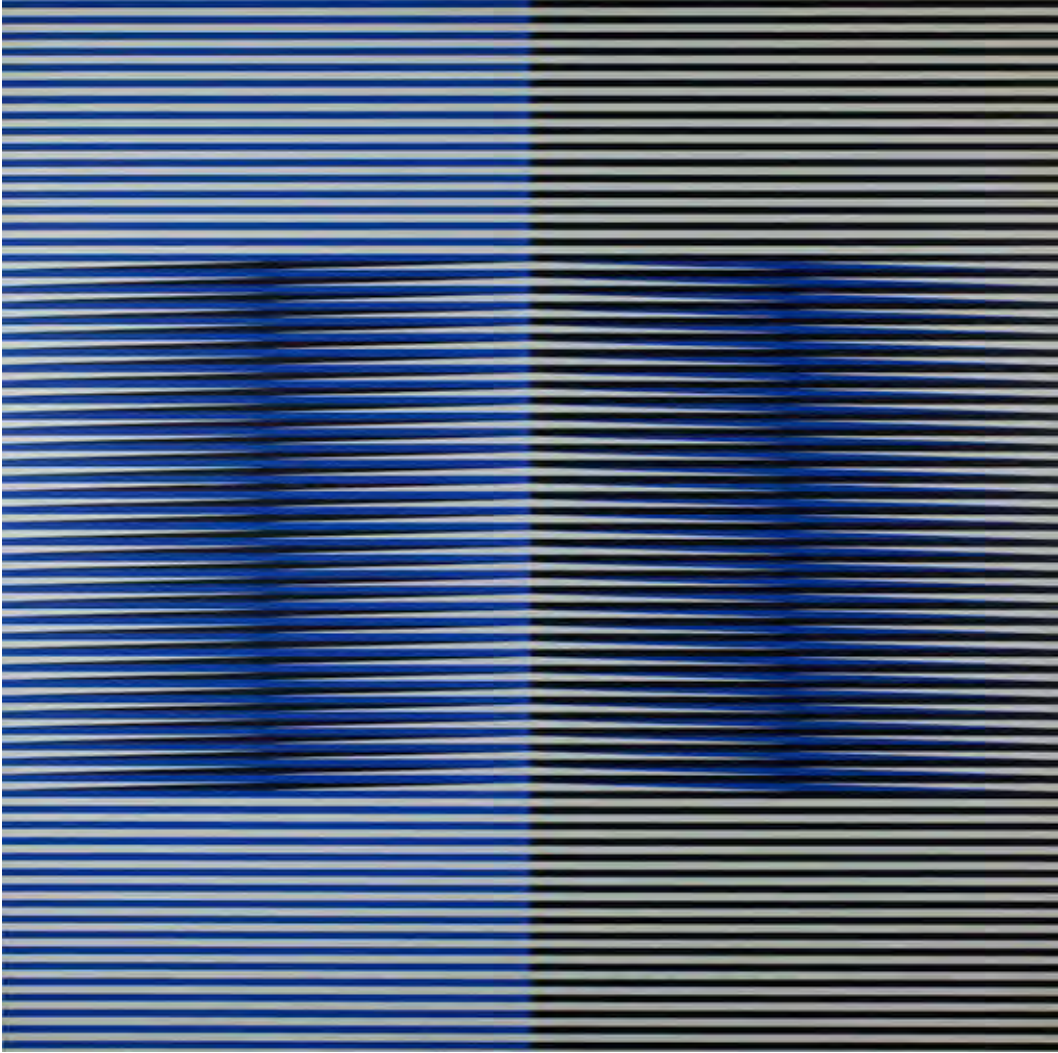
Carlos Cruz-Diez

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1923)

Carlos Cruz-Diez began to draw and paint while recovering from a childhood skating accident. He attended the *Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas* from 1940 to 1945. While working as a graphic designer for the Creole Petroleum Corporation, he traveled to New York to study advertising techniques. He later worked as creative director for McCann-Erickson Advertising (1946-1951), taught at the *Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas*, and worked as an illustrator for the newspaper *El Nacional*, before moving to Barcelona in 1955. While on a trip to Paris he was impressed by the work of his friend and former classmate Jesus Soto and other artists included in the famous exhibition *Le Mouvement*, which inspired him to continue studying the physical properties of color through geometrical forms.

Cruz-Diez returned to Caracas in 1957 and opened the graphic art and industrial design studio *Estudio de Artes Visuales*. He was appointed assistant director of the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in 1958. In 1959, he began to make his series *Fisicromías*, optical works in which panels built with fine laminated sheets painted with different tones change color depending on the movement of the viewer and the intensity of the light. In 1960, he moved to Paris to continue his career and joined the Kinetic Art movement. He was part of New Tendencies, a movement that represented the latest tendencies in contemporary art between 1960 and 1973. In 1968, he presented his first *Cromosaturación*, originally conceived in 1965 as monochromatic plastic booths in which the intensity of the color surrounding the viewer becomes altered by entering into these spaces.

In 1989, Cruz-Diez published *Reflexión sobre el color*, a book that describes and documents his theories about color. He has installed numerous public architectural projects in Venezuela, the United States, Europe and Asia. His work has been featured in major one-person and group exhibitions including *The Responsive Eye* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965); 1967 São Paulo Bienal; 1970 and 1986 Venice Biennale; *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, 1988); *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1989) and *Inverted Utopias Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, will present the first large-scale Cruz-Diez retrospective in February, 2011.



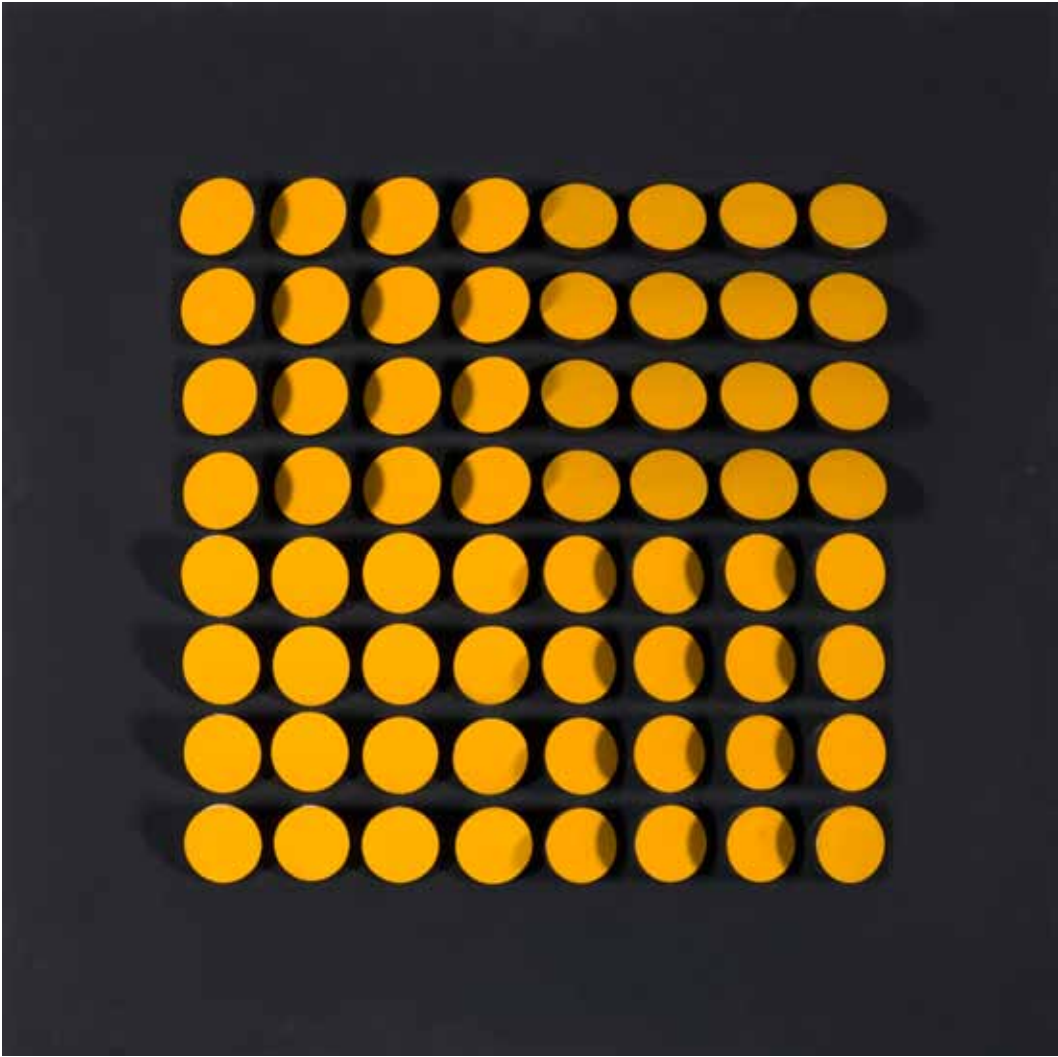
Narciso Debourg

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1925)

Narciso Debourg studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas from 1940 to 1945. Upon finishing his studies he joined the group *La Barraca de Guaicaipuro*, formed by Luis Guevara Moreno, Perán Erminy and Rubén Nuñez. In 1950, they reconnected in Paris and joined other Venezuelan artists and intellectuals in forming *Los Disidentes*. Debourg published several articles in *Los Disidentes* magazine including “Reflexiones sobre la pintura” (Reflections on Painting) (May, 1950) and “En torno a la pintura de hoy” (About Today’s Painting) (May, 1950).

He participated in the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* from 1951 to 1955 and exhibited with the members of the Kinetic movement in the Galérie Denise René in 1954. He began working with flat surfaces in an abstract style, but soon developed an interest for volume and began to produce tridimensional pieces. By 1953 he was already using cubes and cylinders in his reliefs.

Throughout his career, his works continued to represent colored optical structures built with geometric forms arranged on flat surfaces. Debourg has always been interested in the participation of the viewer who perceives movement and optical effects as he moves in front of the cubes, prisms, cylinders, rhombuses and pentagons of his wooden pieces.



Eugenio Espinoza

(b. San Juan de los Morros, Venezuela, 1950)

Eugenio Espinoza studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas (1966-1971) and the Instituto de Diseño Newmann-Ince (1970-1974). His early work was influenced by the conceptual art movement in vogue at the international art scene in the 1970s. He experimented with different media as shown in *Tachón*, wood pieces placed and photographed in different landscapes (1971); *La Trinidad*, a meter long line made out of wide contact paper placed in different landscapes (1971), and *El Hatillo*, placement of a grid painted canvas in different landscapes documented in photographs (1971).

Espinoza worked on a series of experiments with artist Claudio Perna, using photography, films and record tapes. One of the pieces documented by Perna was Espinoza's *Impenetrable* presented at the Ateneo de Caracas in 1972. The installation was conceived as a room filled by a large canvas, painted with Espinoza's characteristic black grid and placed above the floor, blocking the viewer from entering. *Impenetrable* was a direct commentary to Jesús Soto's *Penetrables*.

He performed "Happenings" using the grid canvas. In some instances people displayed them in public places and in some cases he mailed the pieces of canvas to people residing in the United States and Canada and asked them to document its use (1973).

In 1977, Espinoza traveled to New York where he attended Pratt Graphic Arts Center (1977-1979), New York University (1980) and the School of Visual Arts (1981). He received first prize at the III Guayana Biennial (1982) and received an award at the Young Artists Exhibition, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Sofía Imber, Caracas (1989). He represented Venezuela at the XVIII São Paulo Bienal (1985).

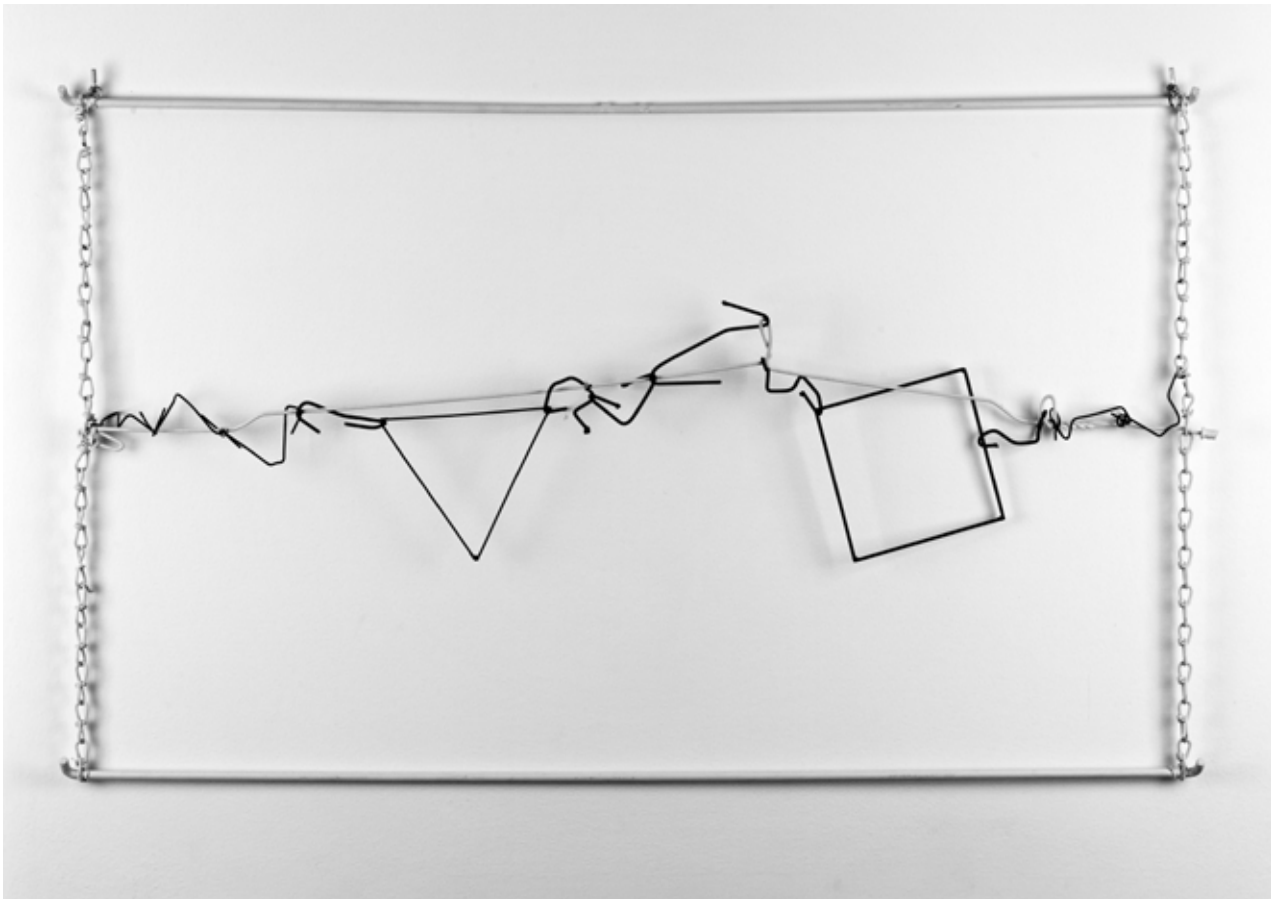


Gertrude Goldschmidt (GEGO)

(b. Hamburg, Germany, 1912-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1994)

Gertrude Goldschmidt, known as GEGO, was born in Hamburg, Germany, and studied architecture and engineering at Stuttgart University where she graduated in 1938. Due to the rise of Nazism, she migrated to Venezuela in 1939. During the 1940s, she worked as an architect and industrial designer. After becoming a Venezuelan citizen in 1952, she moved to the town of Tarma with Gerd Leufert, where she created watercolors, drawings and monotypes in an expressionist style. In 1956, she returned to Caracas where she began exploring the sculptural space inspired by Constructivism. Her first exercises on paper focusing on planes and parallel lines evolved into curved sculptural forms. In 1958, she began working with volumes using iron, aluminum and steel. A year later, she visited Iowa in the United States, where she produced sculptures and prints. During her stay, Iowa State University edited a short film about her sculptures made by Carlos Cruz-Diez titled *Movement and vibration in space, Sculpture by GEGO*.

During the 1960s, she taught at the Universidad Central de Venezuela and the Escuela de Artes Visuales Cristóbal Rojas. In 1969, she collaborated with Leufert on the facades of the Instituto de Cooperación Educativa (INCE), where she taught at the Design Institute (1964-1977), and began her series *Reticuláreas*, in which she wove delicate stainless steel rods into web-like patterns, creating room-size environments. Beginning in the 1970s, she worked on several series of sculptural environments inspired by nature including *Chorros* (Streams, 1970), aluminum rods; *Cuerdas* (Cords, 1972) suspended strips of nylon and stainless steel; *Troncos* (Trunks, 1974) and *Esferas* (Spheres), featuring geometrical shapes. She continued developing works in series including *Dibujos sin papel* (Drawings without paper, 1976), delicate structures of wire and iron that explored the properties of the line in a three dimensional form; *Bichos* (Creatures, 1980s), sculptures made out wire; and *Tejeduras* (Weaves, 1980s), fields of orthogonal lines woven from pieces of paper. Her late works were made of nets and grid-like materials which created negative spaces, revealing the integral connection between the sculpture and the room occupied through the reflected shadows. GEGO played with the duality existing between the stable and unstable elements of the work of art, the stable elements being the sculpture itself and the unstable the changing shadows and the slight movements of the work's design resulting from the fragility of the materials.



Carlos González Bogen

(b. Upata, Venezuela, 1920-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1992)

Carlos González Bogen studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas. Upon graduating in 1948, he was awarded the *Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas* and traveled to Paris where he resided until 1950. He was a founding member of *Los Disidentes*. Back in Caracas, he partnered with Mateo Manaure in the founding of the modern art gallery specializing in Geometric Abstraction, Cuatro Muros (1952), and designed a mural for Carlos Raúl Villanueva's project: the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. In 1955, he returned to Europe, where he remained until 1959.

In the 1960s he taught design at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the Universidad Central de Venezuela. In 1966, he resumed figurative painting and designed murals with social content for several buildings. The figurative style allowed him to depict political themes that showed his sympathy for the communist discourse. González Bogen presented solo exhibits at the Ateneo de Valencia (1953), the Centro Profesional del Este (1956), Galería Botto (1968) and the Galería Universitaria de Arte, in Caracas (1970).



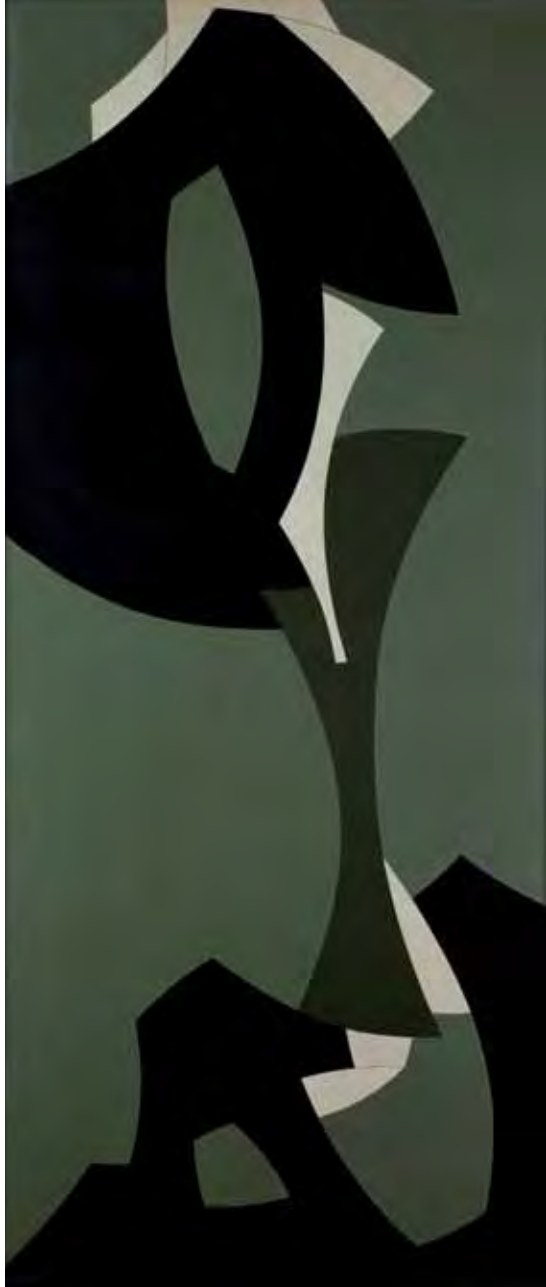
Elsa Gramcko

(b. Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, 1925-d. 1994)

Elsa Gramcko took some courses at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, but she is considered a self-taught artist. From the beginning of her career until the end of the 1950s, she created works inspired by Geometric Abstraction that were dense and rich in meaning.

As per Alejandro Otero's suggestion, she participated at the first *Salón de Arte Abstracto* organized by the Galería Don Hatch, in Caracas. She continued to work in the style of Geometric Abstraction until the mid-1950s, when she turned to *Art informel* and began working on aesthetic interpretations based on the exploration of different materials.

Gramcko represented Venezuela in the São Paulo Bienal in 1959, and participated in the Venice Biennale in 1964. In 1968, she was awarded the *Premio Nacional de Escultura* at the 29th *Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano*. In addition, she took part in numerous group exhibitions in Venezuela. An important anthological exhibit of her work was organized by the Galería de Arte Nacional in Caracas in 1997.



Gerd Leufert

(b. Memel, Germany, 1914-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1998)

Gerd Leufert was born in Memel, Germany, currently Klaipėda, Lithuania. He attended art schools in Hannover and Manguncia and studied with Fritz Helmuth Ehmcke in Munich. In 1951, he travelled to Venezuela where he worked as art director for the magazine *El Farol*. He taught art and graphic design with the Faculty of Architecture of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (1958-1967), the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas and the Instituto de Diseño Neuman. He also taught graphic design at the University of Iowa, Iowa City and the Pratt Institute, New York.

In 1960, he replaced Alejandro Otero as coordinator of activities at the Museo de Bellas Artes. He collaborated with GEGO in projects for the Cediaz and Ince buildings, in Caracas. Leufert worked with Mión Ferrario Nedo (NEDO) in the revival of graphic arts in Venezuela and produced a series of prints in collaboration with NEDO and Alvaro Sotillo. Leufert's best-known works include *Marks*, a fusion of writing and graphic design and large-scale monochromatic works in which he combined sculpture, painting and graphic design.

In 1973, Leufert retired from his position at the Museo de Bellas Artes to work full time as a graphic designer. He had one-person exhibits in Venezuela, Colombia, Germany, Austria and the United States, and participated in numerous group exhibits. In 1989, he experimented with photography and received the *Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas de Venezuela*. He published extensively on his main area of expertise: graphic design.

In 2007, the Sala Mendoza in Caracas presented *Gerd Leufert. Exposición Antológica 1960-1972, Pinturas / Listonados*, an exhibit that presented the artist's contribution to the visual arts.



Luis Guevara Moreno

(b. Valencia, Venezuela, 1926)

Luis Guevara Moreno studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas between 1941 and 1945. After being expelled for demanding academic reforms, he joined the group *Barraca de Maripérez* and worked in ceramics. In 1948, he helped create the *Taller Libre de Arte* and a year later, thanks to a grant, he moved to Paris. Upon his arrival he met André Lothe (1885-1962), Jean Dewasne (1921-1999) and Edgar Pillet (1912-1996). Guevara Moreno was one of the founding members of *Los Disidentes* and the author of two of the articles published in the magazine they produced to share their ideals with artists and intellectuals living in Latin America: “Pintura del siglo XIX en Venezuela” (*Los Disidentes* No. 2 Paris, April, 1950); and “Lo revolucionario en la pintura” (*Los Disidentes* No. 2, Paris, September, 1950).

Looking to reach new levels in the field of abstraction, he joined another avant-garde group, Grupo MADI (Movement, Abstraction, Dimension, Invention), headed by Uruguayan artist Carmelo Arden Quin. His *Painting-objects, Reliefs, and Coplanars, based on the interaction of polygonal forms and the free juxtaposition of planes in space, are clear examples of MADI's principles, including conceiving the work of art as an autonomous object, using strong industrial materials such as metal, wood, and enamel which gave the pieces a shiny finish, and recreating dynamic and irregular forms.*

After studying at the École Supérieure de Beaux Arts in Paris, Guevara Moreno travelled to Italy, where he began to question the disparity between his work and his political ideals. He realized his abstract work was not compatible with his ideological principles and decided to return to figurative art. He participated in the Venice Biennale of 1956 and 1958, and returned to Venezuela where he became a member of the “New Figuration,” which included Jacobo Borges and Régulo Pérez. He worked as a docent, showed extensively and received the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas, at the XXIX Salón Oficial de Arte Venezolano in 1968.



Mateo Manaure

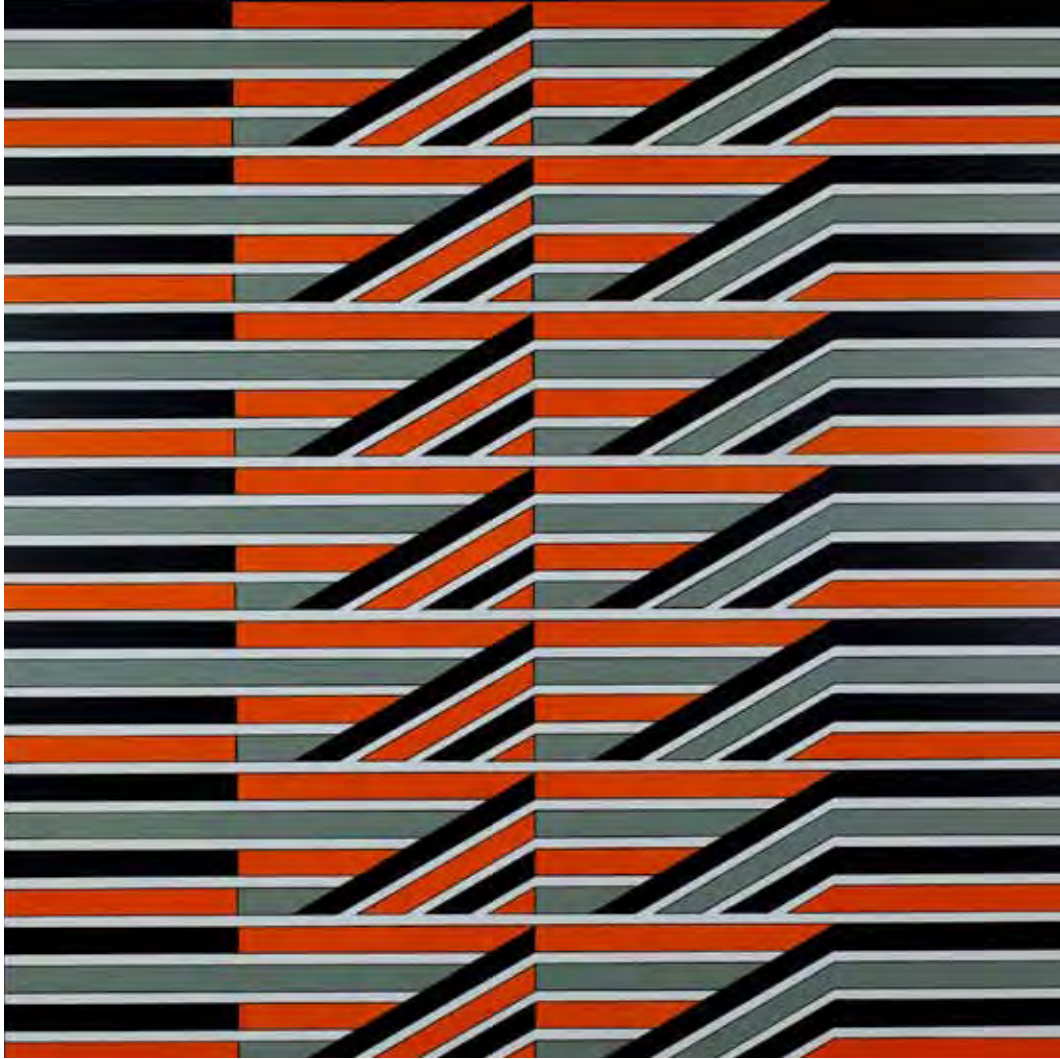
(b. Uracoa, Venezuela, 1926)

Mateo Manaure studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas with its director Antonio Edmundo Monsanto (1941-1946). In 1947, he received the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas and travelled to Paris. He returned to Caracas in 1948 to become involved with the creation of the *Taller Libre de Arte*, and later went back to Paris where he joined *Los Disidentes* as a founding member.

During his stay in Paris he adopted Geometric Abstraction, a style that was represented in the murals, policromías and stained glass windows he produced for Villanueva's project at the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. He partnered with Carlos González Bogen and founded the modern art gallery Cuatro Muros specializing in abstraction (1952). He was a pioneer of graphic design in Venezuela and was a founding member of the group *Sardio* formed by artists and intellectuals. He devoted himself to painting, journalism, design and illustration of magazines and books and taught at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Aplicadas.

Mateo Manaure's work went through several stages. First he represented classical themes including nudes, landscapes and still lifes. While in Paris he adopted geometric abstraction which later developed into lyrical abstraction. He went back and forth between representation and abstraction working in series, including *Pinturas Sobremontaje*, *Los Suelos de mi Tierra*, *Cuvisiones*, *Columnas Policromadas*, *Mirar a América*, *Orinoquía*, and *Ofrenda a mi raza*.

He was elected president of the Asociación Venezolana de Artes Plásticas in 1984 and was awarded several prizes including the Premio Armando Reverón. His work has been featured in numerous one-man shows and group exhibits at the Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas (1947 and 1956), Galería Cuatro Muros (1952), Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación Mendoza, (1960, 1962, 1965, 1967, 1970), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas (1977), Galería Durban (1994) and Galería Muci (1996).

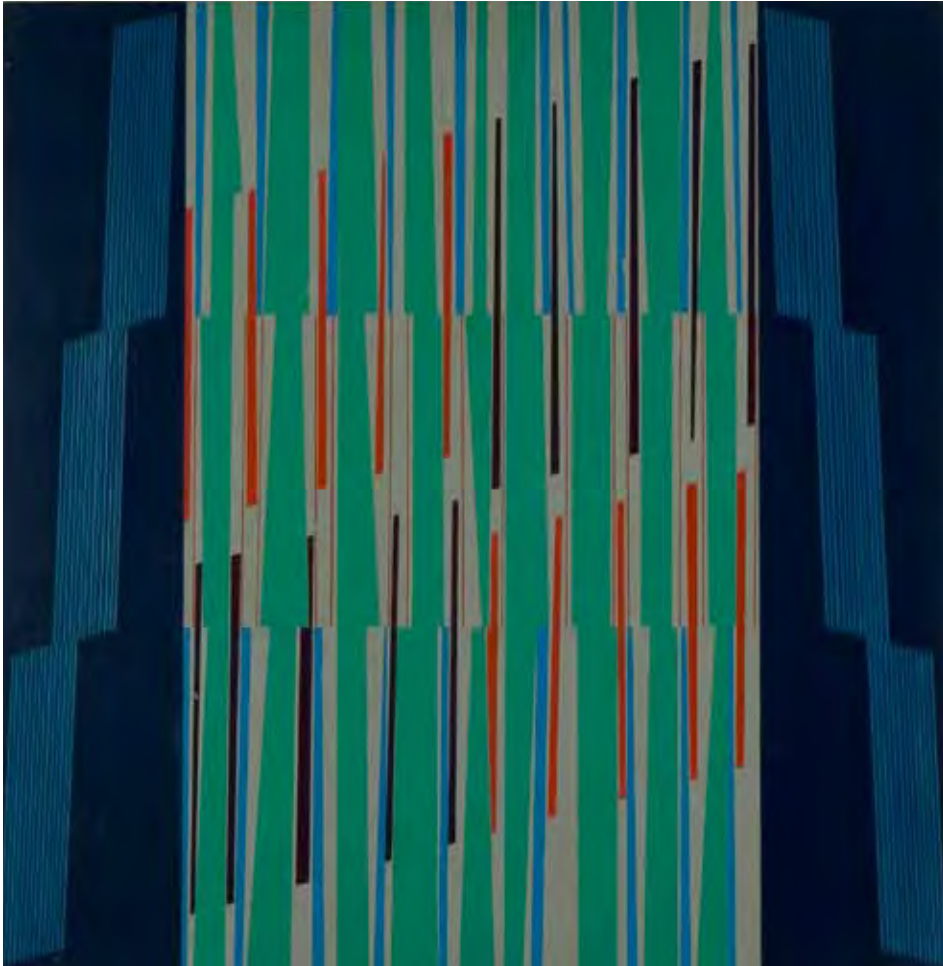


Alfredo Maraver

(b. 1929, Maturín, Venezuela)

Alfredo Maraver studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Caracas. He traveled to Paris in 1950, where he registered at the Académie d'Art Abstrait de Dewasne et Pillet and became involved with Geometric Abstraction. Maraver was particularly influenced by Victor Vasarely's optical art and the Kinetic movement. His personal approach to Geometric Abstraction can be seen in the series "Persistencia de una idea" (Persistence of an idea), monochromatic works in which the organization of the composition follows a radial or parallel relationship with the center or the axis of the piece.

In 1954, Maraver returned to Caracas where he continued to work in an abstract style. In 1969, he presented a series of kinetic works titled *Persistencia de una Idea*, monochromatic works in which the organization of the piece follows a radial relationship or a parallel to a center or an axis. He was the director of the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Cabello, and director of the *Taller de Artes Aplicadas de la Casa de la Cultura Mariano Picón Salas*, in Caracas. The Galería de Arte Nacional de Caracas presented a retrospective of his work in 1977.



Pascual Navarro Velásquez

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1923-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1986)

Pascual Navarro began auditing classes at the Academia de Bellas Artes de Caracas in 1934, and later registered to pursue his formal studies in what became the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas under the direction of Antonio Edmundo Monsanto. Navarro attended the Salón Oficial and upon graduating in 1947 and receiving the first edition of the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas, he traveled to Europe to continue his studies. He moved to Paris where he lived until 1968. Despite his early interest in Expressionism, he joined *Los Disidentes* and broke aesthetically with his previous style. He adopted Geometric Abstraction influenced, like many of his contemporaries, by Jean Dewasne (1921-1999) and Edgar Pillet (1912-1996). In 1953, he showed at the Galérie Arnaud and, in 1954, at the *Salón des Réalités Nouvelles*, in Paris.

Despite living abroad, he remained in touch with Venezuela's artistic scene. At architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva's request, he worked on the sketches for three murals for the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, and he was involved with *Taller Libre de Arte*. Navarro began switching styles, abandoning geometric painting in favor of a more suggestive kind of abstraction, one that earned him the *Gran Premio para Pintores Venezolanos* at the *Exposición Internacional de Valencia* in Venezuela in 1955.

His work was featured in individual and group exhibits and he received several distinctions, including the Segundo Premio de Pintura at the XI Salón Anual Oficial de Arte Venezolano, organized by the Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, in 1950; the drawing prize Emilio Boggio at the IX Salón Arturo Michelena, in 1953; the Condecoración Orden Andrés Bello, in 1982; and the first edition of the Armando Reverón Prize, awarded by the Asociación Venezolana de Artistas Plásticos, in 1984.



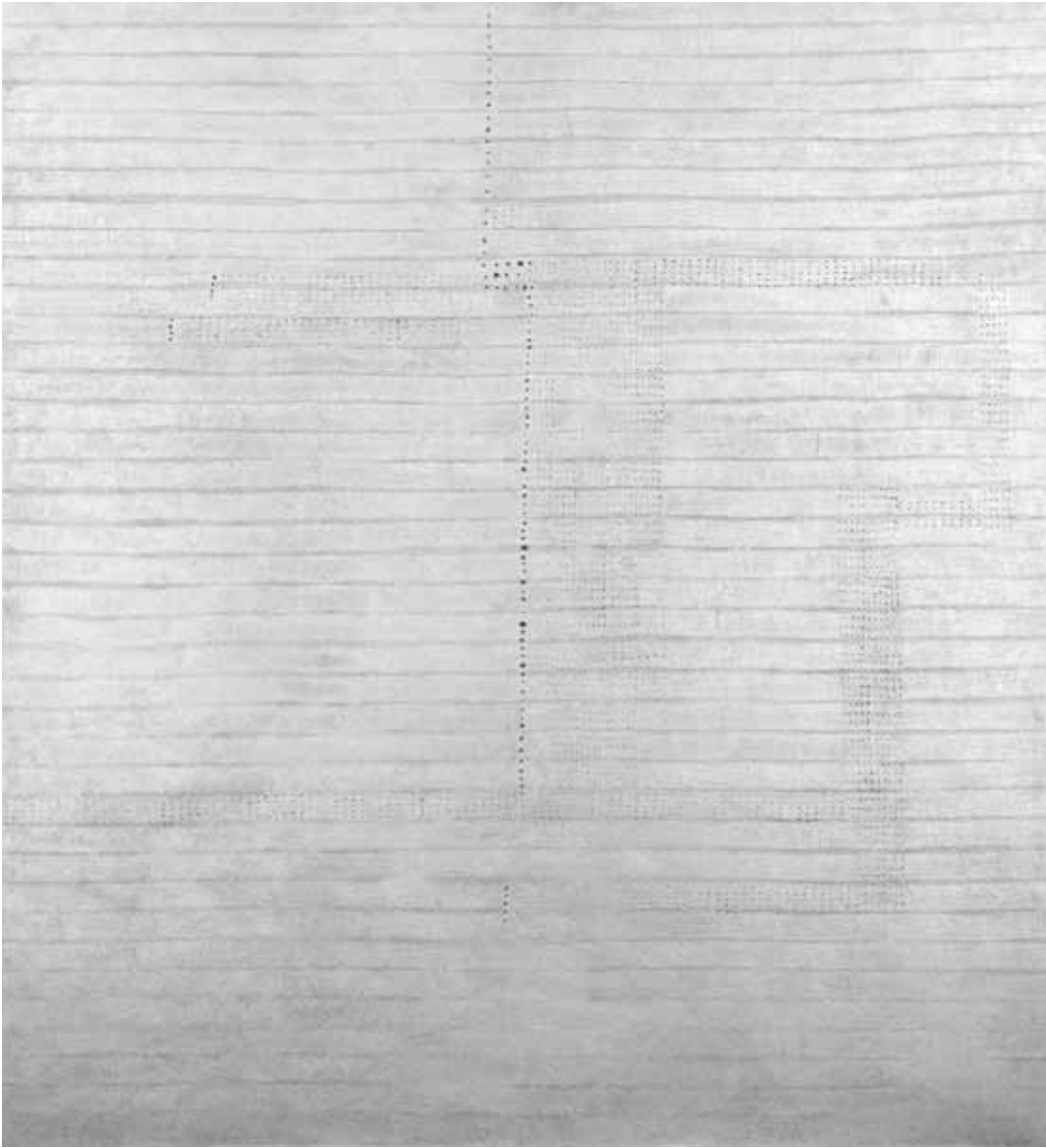
Mion Ferrario Nedo (NEDO)

(b. Milan, Italy, 1926-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 2001)

Mion Ferrario Nedo, known as NEDO, studied at the Commercial and Technical Institute (1936-1940), and at the Fine Arts Academy in Milan. At the end of the Second World War, he traveled with his father, Emilio Mion Vianello, a well known wood carver, to Venezuela.

NEDO produced numerous drawings, paintings, reliefs and architectural drafts. He began painting in a realistic-surrealist style and later developed an interest for geometric abstraction. Elaborate figures and geometric optical illusions were characteristic of his later work.

NEDO spent most of his life teaching and working on graphic design. Several Venezuelan generations learned design, typographic and drawing knowledge from NEDO's contributions to the field. In 2008, the Sala Mendoza in Caracas dedicated a show to NEDO's work *El otro Nedo. Más allá de su diseño gráfico*, in order to review the artist's contributions beyond the limits of graphic design.



Rubén Núñez

(b. Valencia, Venezuela, 1930)

Rubén Núñez became familiar with the teachings of the Bauhaus through the writings of László Moholy-Nagy. He corresponded with some of the artists living in Paris including Perán Erminy, Alejandro Otero, and Narciso Debourg, who introduced him to Jean Dewasne and Edgard Pillet's abstraction before he traveled to Europe in 1949. In 1950, he joined the group *Los Disidentes*. Influenced by Mondrian and Geometric Abstraction, he participated in the Kinetic movement and produced works such as *Punto-contrapunto* and *Isla de San Luis*, in which the participation of the spectator produced a virtual movement.

He became interested in MADI's ideas, including the theory of the irregularly shaped frame and joined Carmelo Arden Quin along with those working with him, including Volf Roitman and Luis Guevara Moreno. Towards the end of the 1950s, Núñez began to experiment with molded and polished crystal shapes and their prismatic effects. His research led him to Nancy, France, and Venice, Italy, where he learned glass making in order to construct the glass blocks and balls. His works in glass were awarded the Premio Nacional de Artes Aplicadas, in 1959.

Núñez continued to develop works which played with optical illusions and gave the viewer the impression of seeing colors and forms where there were none. In the 1970s, he became interested in the use of laser and researched the holograph technique. He coined the term *Holokinetics*. He explored holography's creative possibilities with Maurice Françon at the Institute de l'Optique de Paris and with Jean Sagaut. In 1975, he moved to New York to study at the New York School of Holography and inspired some of his teachers to follow the path of abstraction. *Cristal del planeta arco iris* (Planet Rainbow's Cristal) (1974) and *Anillos de energía* (Energy Rings) (1978) are some of his holographic works.

A few years ago he returned to his hometown in Venezuela where he started the Fundación Espacio-Luz (Space-Light Foundation) and continued to work on and to promote holographic art.



Alejandro Otero Rodríguez

(b. El Manteco, Venezuela, 1921-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 1990)

Alejandro Otero began his studies at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Caracas in 1939. His early works, which included landscapes inspired by Paul Cézanne's Post-Impressionistic style, earned him a scholarship that allowed him to travel to Paris in 1945. Influenced by Cubism, he painted the series *Cafeteras* (1946-47) which he showed at the Museo de Bellas Artes, the *Taller Libre de Arte* and the Instituto Pedagógico de Caracas, in 1949. The works' non-realistic style marked the arrival of Geometric Abstraction in Venezuela.

Otero returned to Paris where he studied the work of Piet Mondrian and became interested in Neo-Plasticism. In 1950, he became a founding member of *Los Disidentes*. After a trip to Spain, he made the series *Líneas Inclinadas* (1950-1951), consisting of colored lines painted over white backgrounds with no figurative references. He worked in Carlos Raúl Villanueva's project at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, designing murals and stained glass windows (1952-1954).

He taught at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas (1954-1956) and the Taller Libre de Arte. He developed his series *Horizontales Activas* and *Coloritmos*. He represented his country at the Venice Biennale, in 1956; he received the Premio Nacional de Pintura in Venezuela in 1958; and he was awarded an honorable mention at the São Paulo Bienal in 1959. In 1964, he worked on the series *Papeles Coloreados*, which showed geometric rigor and informal expression on dyed newspapers glued as lines and planes. A year later he participated at the Venice Biennale. In 1967, he began his *Estructuras Espaciales*, over-sized kinetic sculptures designed for open public spaces. With a grant awarded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1971-1972) as a visiting artist.

In the 1970s and 1980s Otero introduced new structural ideas into his work and designed large scale projects for open urban spaces, including *Delta Solar* (1976), in Washington D.C., and *Abra Solar* (1982), presented at the Venice Biennale. In 1987, he participated as a guest researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones IBM de Venezuela, where he experimented with computer generated designs. Two years later he published the results of his research in *Alejandro Otero: Saludo al siglo XXI*.

As a posthumous homage, the Venezuelan government changed the name of the former Museo de Arte La Rinconada to Fundación Museo de Artes Visuales Alejandro Otero.



Mercedes Pardo

(b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1921-d. Caracas, Venezuela, 2005)

Mercedes Pardo attended the Academia de Bellas Artes de Caracas (1934), the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Aplicadas de Caracas (1941-4), and the Academia de Bellas Artes de Santiago de Chile (1945), before traveling to Paris where she studied at the École du Louvre and worked as an assistant in André Lhote's studio in the 1950s. She made her first collages and abstract works between 1950 and 1951. During the 1950s and 1960s, she pursued a thorough exploration of color.

An original phase of abstract lyricism was followed by an interest in *Art informel* (1956-1961). After returning to Paris in 1960, she experimented with different media including watercolor, enamel on metal, printmaking (1961-3) and collage on wood (1964-6). In 1969, she executed her first screen-prints. Beginning in the late 1960s, her work adopted a Geometric Abstract style in which color and space played a principal role. Her pictorial work transmitted a personal interpretation of Geometric Abstraction's great principles and evolved towards a more lyrical style in a sort of polychrome game. Her paintings represented harmonious volumes with an organic feeling dominated by color. In 1978, she was awarded the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Caracas.

She was married to Alejandro Otero with whom she had three children.



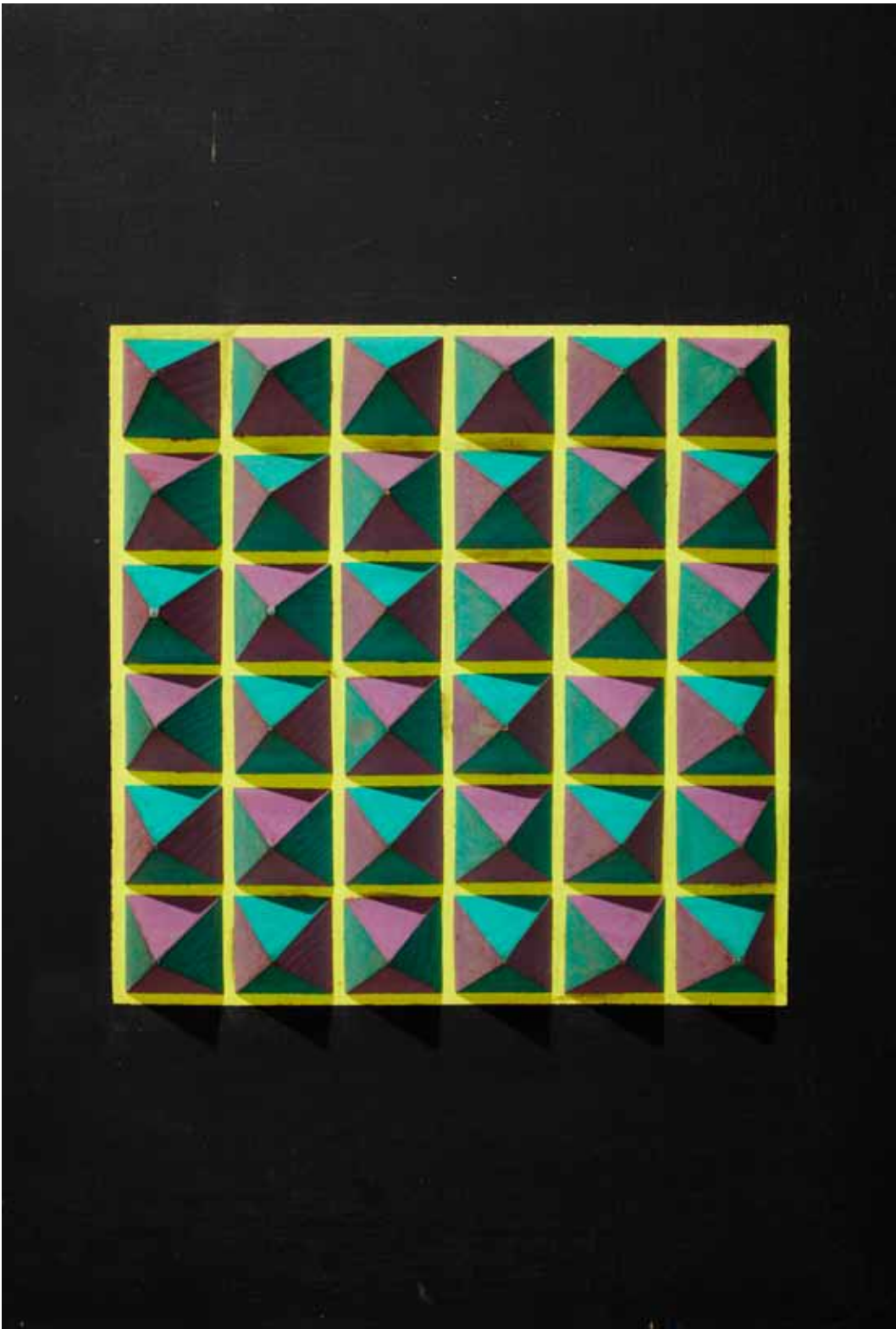
Rafael Pérez

(b. Montalbán, Carabobo, Venezuela, 1938)

Rafael Pérez studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Arturo Michelena in Valencia, Venezuela. In 1958, he participated in the XVI Salón “Arturo Michelena” at the Ateneo de Valencia and was awarded the Premio Club de Leones de Valencia. He founded and directed the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Rafael Monasterio in Maracay. In 1965, Concejo Municipal de Valencia awarded him a grant to study in Spain.

In 1967, he was invited to Paris to participate in a Latin American art exhibit at the Maison de l’Amérique Latine. In 1968, he produced his *Cromotransparencias*, inspired by Geometric Abstraction and Kinetic Art and participated at the XXIX Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano, Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas. In 1969, he presented *Objets Cinétiques* at the Galerie Historial in Nyon, and *Chromatische Fragmentationen* at the Galerie Suzanne Bollag in Zürich, Switzerland. He participated for the first time in the *X Salon Grands et jeunes d’aujourd’hui* in Paris in 1969 and was invited again in 1970, 1971 and 1976.

Pérez traveled extensively through Europe and showed his work in numerous galleries and institutional spaces in France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. In the 1980s, his work was featured at the International Impact Art Festival, Municipal Museum of Art, in Kyoto, Japan, and at Contemporary Constructive Art in Europe, Osaka, Japan. His works were exhibited regularly in galleries and events in Schweiz, Switzerland and began to be shown again in Venezuela in 1989, where he presented *Espacios Geométricos* at the Galería Arte Hoy, Caracas, and *Color y Vivencia*, Museo de Arte Maracay, in Maracay. In 1997, his work was featured in a one-man show, *AZUL-AZUL 11*, at the Ateneo, in Valencia, Venezuela.



Claudio Perna

(b. Milan, Italy, 1938–d. Holguín, Cuba, 1997)

Claudio Perna was born in Italy. He spent his childhood and adolescent years in Europe and in 1955 traveled to Venezuela, his mother's country of origin. After finishing high school in 1958, he enrolled at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Universidad Central de Venezuela, where he studied until 1961. He studied geography at the same institution and graduated with honors in 1968.

In the mid-1960s, Perna became interested in *Informalism* and worked with rustic and discarded objects. In 1965, he began a series of *Papeles Arrugados*, white works in paper and fabric, and in 1966 he showed his *Assemblages* with Elsa Gramcko at the Galería Gamma. In 1967, he began to experiment with photography, dealing with the manipulation of laboratory elements and the making of images, and focusing on issues of copyrights and artists' scope.

He continued working with new media including photography and film. In 1969, he finished *Yolanda*, his first film in super 8. From then on, Perna's conceptual proposals combined the disciplines of cartography, geography and photography. In 1972, Perna worked on a collaborative project with his friend Eugenio Espinoza in the dunes of Coro and Tucacas, creating one of the first works of Land Art in Venezuela. The photographic registry of this work called *La cosa* (The thing), was shown at the exhibition *Once tipos* presented at the Fundación Eugenio Mendoza in Caracas in 1973. It was the first of a series of exhibits presented by this institution which provided an alternative space for contemporary art.

During the 1970s, he worked as a conceptual artist using multi-media techniques. In the 1980s, Perna developed his theories of *Arte Pensamiento*, which combined art, science, philosophy and language, and *Arte Sentimiento*, in which form and color were associated to produce effects and atmospheres with a strong psychological burden. He published his theories in a publication called *NOI* (New Informative Order).

He received the Premio Nacional de Fotografía in 1994 and the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas for his contribution to the visual arts in 1995. In 1997, the Biblioteca Nacional honored his memory with a retrospective exhibit titled *Arte Social: Claudio Perna*.



Manuel Quintana Castillo

(b. Caucagua, Venezuela, 1928)

Manuel Quintana Castillo studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas Cristóbal Rojas. He pursued architectural studies at the Universidad Central de Venezuela and the Academia Masana in Barcelona, Spain. His work *Cúpira*, which depicted a dream-like atmosphere represented with geometric shapes, earned him an award at the Salón Oficial de Caracas in 1955 and inscribed him in the Magical Realism movement. He continued to bring totemic figures into his works through a constructivist formulation, as can be seen in *Reina del mar* (1954), *Bailarina nocturna* (1955), *Vendedora de globos* (1955), and *Tejedora de nubes* (1956).

Quintana Castillo participated at the Venice Biennale in 1955 and 1962 and at the São Paulo Bienal in 1956 and 1979. In 1956, he also received the Premio Adquisitivo John Boulton at the XVII Salón Oficial Anual de Arte Venezolano. He lived in Paris and Rome for several years. He presented his first one-man show at the Museo de Bellas Artes in 1961. During the 1970s, he served as Director of the Visual Arts Department at the Instituto de Cultura y Bellas Artes (INCIBA) and taught at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas and the Instituto Pedagógico de Caracas.

He received the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas in 1973; the Premio Arturo Michelena, in 1978, and the Premio Armando Reverón in 1996. His work, associated with a style called *Sensitive Geometry*, has been shown in numerous individual and group shows, including major retrospectives at the Museo Alejandro Otero (1996) and the Galería Nacional de Venezuela, in Caracas (2002).



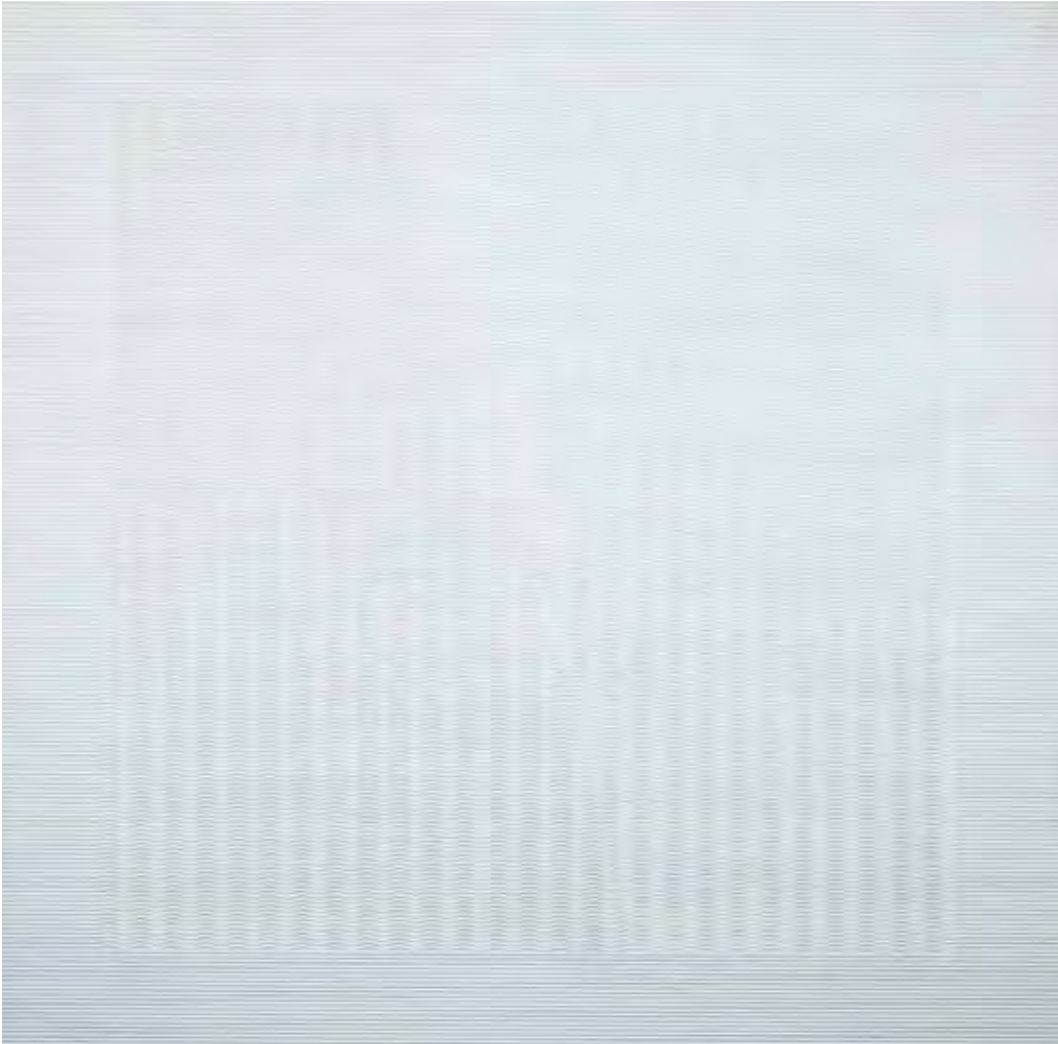
Francisco Salazar

(b. Quinquire, Venezuela, 1937)

In 1954, Francisco Salazar began his studies at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas in Caracas, where Alejandro Otero, Mateo Manaure, and Carlos González Bogen were teaching at the time. In 1959, he began his architectural studies at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, but did not complete them. He held the position of Assistant Director of the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Rafael Monasterios in Maracay, where he taught drawing, painting and stained glass. His early landscapes influenced by European avant-garde movements, earned him an award at the V Bienal de Artistas Jóvenes which allowed him to travel to Paris in 1967.

Upon arriving at the French capital, he became interested in Abstraction, and while working in Jesús Soto's workshop he became interested in Kinetic and Optical Art. He left behind his Informalist style to learn more about issues of light and to work on its reflection on white planes of corrugated paper. Throughout his career he continued working in a kinetic style. He presented a one-man show at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas in 1980 and he participated at the Salón de Réalités Nouvelles, in Paris, from 1992 to 2004.

Salazar's work has been shown in individual and group exhibits in Venezuela and France. He has been awarded prizes in numerous events, including the XXVIII Salón Oficial de Arte Venezolano at the Museo de Bellas Artes in 1967; the Salón Arturo Michelena, Ateneo de Valencia in 1967; the Paris Biennial in 1967; the Bienal de Codex, Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1968, and the Bienal de Coltejer, Medellín, Colombia in 1969. He was also invited to participate in the I MERCOSUR Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brasil in 1997; *Sur Mesure/Art Construit* at the Centre Culturel de Bruxelles, Belgium in 2000 and *Art Paris*, in Paris, France in 2000. On the occasion of his 70th birthday and his 50 years of artistic career, the Museo de Arte Acarigua-Araure presented the anthological exhibition *Francisco Salazar, El juego de la Luz y el Espacio* in 2007. Most recently, the Sala Mendoza in Caracas presented *Francisco Salazar: La persistencia de lo mínimo* (2008).



Enrique Sardá

(b. Puerto Cabello, Carabobo, Venezuela, 1922)

Enrique Sardá began his artistic career in 1945. He attended the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas, became a member of the group *La Barraca de Maripérez*, and he participated at the *Taller Libre de Arte* between 1948 and 1949. He was awarded the *Premio Planchart* in 1955. His early works, which followed a lyrical figuration and were inspired by the works of Paul Klee, made him one of the pioneers of the appropriation of Cubism in Venezuela.

After traveling to Paris in 1955, he stopped depicting thematic scenes and adopted lyrical abstraction. Back in Caracas, he experimented with *Informalism*, using textured paintings, applying color in a graphic way, and working with collage. This period of experimentation was suddenly interrupted with the fabrication of a series of Plexiglas boxes encasing metal elements distributed to create the effect of a metallic ongoing vibration. These works marked the beginning of his career as a Kinetic artist.

His work, which includes sculptures, *Transparencias Refractantes*, *Relieves-Volúmenes*, and bi-dimensional works exploring vibrating rhythms that originate in the superimposition of images and materials, has been shown in galleries and museums in Venezuela, Brasil, France and the United States.



Jesús Rafael Soto

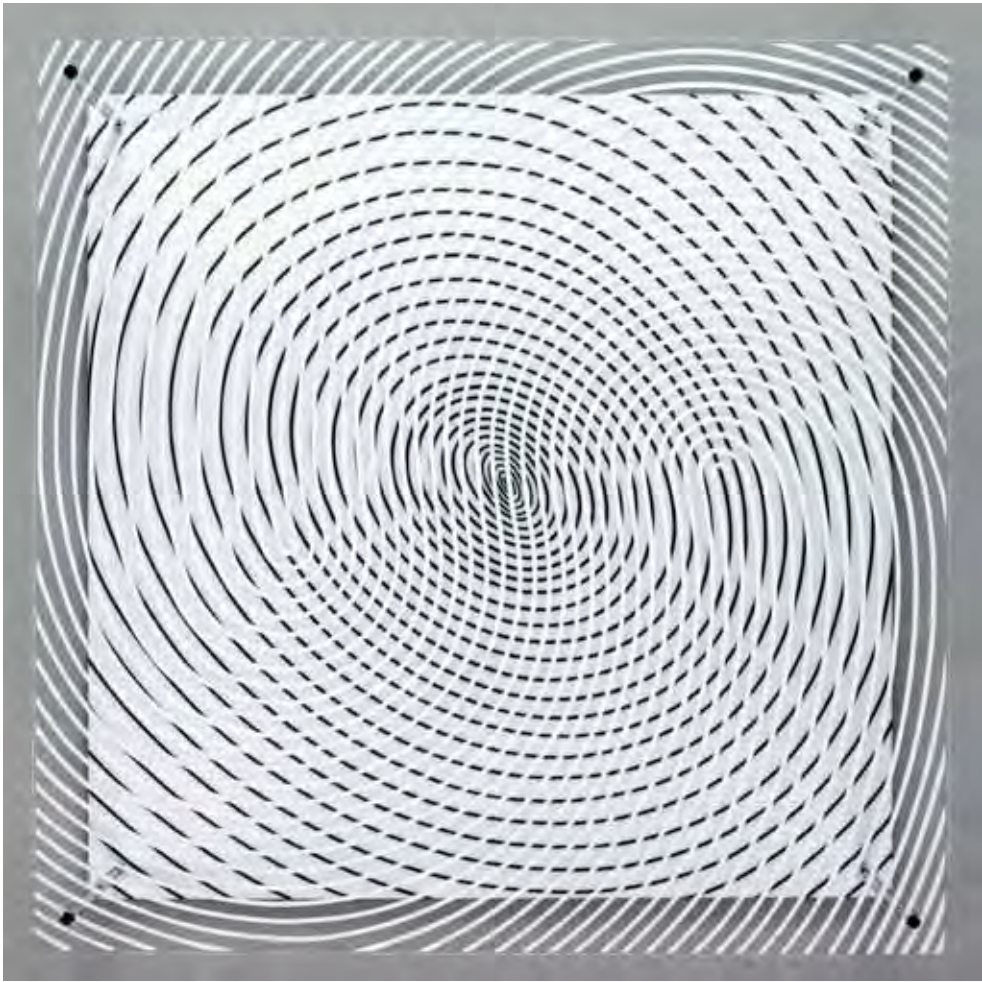
(b. Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela, 1923-d. Paris, France, 2005)

Jesús Rafael Soto began his artistic career at a young age making posters for movie theaters. In 1942, he received a scholarship to attend the Escuela de Bellas Artes y Artes Aplicadas in Caracas, where he developed a strong interest in modern art and produced his early work which was clearly influenced by Paul Cézanne and Cubism. After completing his studies, he was appointed director of the Escuela de Bellas Artes Julio Árraga de Maracaibo, a position he held until 1950.

After exhibiting at the *Taller de Arte Libre* in Caracas, Soto traveled to Paris in September, 1950. He joined the artists known as *Los Disidentes* and became interested in the abstract movement, particularly Piet Mondrian. He began to experiment with repetition, progression, music language, movement, and optical illusion. In 1954, he produced *Metamorphosis*, made out of superimposed regular patterns of dots and boxes in transparent Plexiglass which created an optical illusion as the observer moved in front of them. In 1955, he participated in the exhibition *Le Movement*, organized by Denise René, which marked the birth of the Kinetic movement.

From 1956 to 1957 Soto developed *Estructuras Cinéticas* and *Vibraciones* which introduced the vibration of metal wires over patterned backgrounds. During the 1960s, Soto went back to building works in which he had strict control of the plastic elements and in 1967 he developed one of his most coherent and representative concepts: the *Penetrable*. By allowing the viewer to traverse the piece, Soto reached one of the Kinetic movement's main goals: the public's participation in the work of art. In 1969, the Museum of Modern Art in Paris presented a retrospective of his work, recognizing Soto's contribution to the international art scene. That same year he announced the creation of the Museo de Arte Moderno Jesús Soto in Ciudad Bolívar, a project that became a reality in 1973.

In 1974, Soto was featured in a one-man show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and a year later he produced his first major urban intervention in Boulogne Billancourt, France. He continued working on architectural interventions, including *Volumen Suspendido del Cubo Negro* (Caracas, 1983) and *Volumen Suspendido* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1983). In 1983, he developed his series *Ambivalencias*, in which he analyzed color's ability to distort the perception of space. A major retrospective organized by the Musée Jeu de Paume in Paris traveled to different countries in 1996.



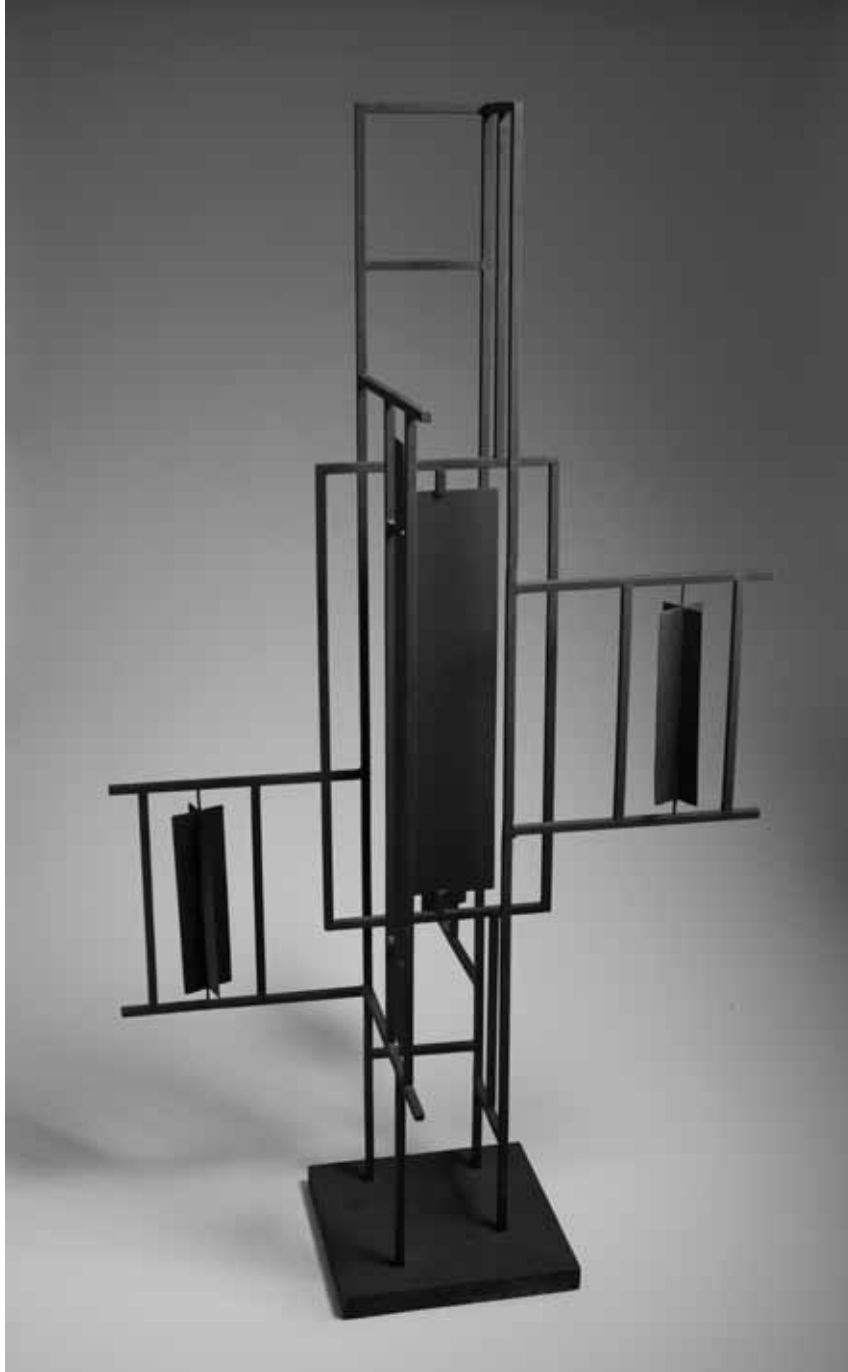
Víctor Valera

(b. Maracaibo, Venezuela, 1927)

Víctor Valera studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Caracas until 1950, when he began to attend the *Taller Libre de Arte*. In 1950, he returned to Maracaibo to work with Jesús Rafael Soto at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas. In 1952, he traveled to Paris where he frequented Victor Vasarely and Jean Dewasne's *Atelier d'Art Abstrait* and began to produce his first abstract works, experimenting with optical forms mixed on planes. He worked as an assistant at Fernand Léger's workshop and met sculptor Robert Jacobsen (1912-1993) and researched issues of form and color in relation with real and virtual space. He participated in the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, in Paris.

He returned to Caracas where he began using iron in his work, becoming one of the first sculptors in the country to use that material. He produced several murals for Carlos Raúl Villanueva's project at the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas and was awarded the *Premio Nacional de Escultura* at the Salón Oficial in 1956. He was one of eight young Venezuelan sculptors chosen to participate at the workshops in Caracas taught by Kenneth Armitage. Valera represented his country at the 1966 Venice Biennale and traveled to the United States before becoming a docent at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas Cristóbal Rojas in 1970.

He developed three-dimensional reliefs in which color and light played a primordial role that was clearly influenced by Constructivism. Valera played with the effects of light on the work's surface in a kinetic way. His work has been included in numerous group shows in France, Belgium, United States, Cuba, Colombia and Venezuela. In 1972, he was awarded the first prize at the Salón Arturo Michelena. The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas presented a major retrospective of his works in 1984.



Oswaldo Vigas

(b. Valencia, Carabobo, Venezuela, 1926)

Oswaldo Vigas began his artistic career at a young age. In 1942, he submitted some works to a poem illustration contest organized by the Ateneo de Valencia and won a prize. A year later, he had his first exhibit at the Ateneo and was awarded the Medal of Honor at the Salón Arturo Michelena. In 1945, Vigas began medical school at the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida and later moved to Caracas where he graduated from the Universidad Central de Venezuela in 1949. He frequented the *Taller Libre de Arte* and followed his artistic path. He received the Premio Nacional de Arte, the Premio John Boulton, and the *Premio Arturo Michelena*, and after his first exhibit at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas, he moved to Paris in 1952.

He attended the École des Beaux Arts and the Sorbonne University. In 1953, he participated at the Salon de Mai, the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, and was invited to produce five murals for Villanueva's project at the Universidad Central de Caracas. A year later, he was included in a group show presented at the Musée d' Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which included Fernand Léger, Juan Arp, Antoine Pevsner, Baltasar Lobo and Victor Vasarely. He represented Venezuela at the Venice Biennale. In 1955, he participated at the São Paulo Bienal.

In 1955, Vigas met Pablo Picasso, an influential figure in the development of his abstract style. He was appointed Cultural Attaché at the Venezuelan Embassy in Paris in 1958 and continued to show his work in Europe, the United States and Latin America. Vigas moved back to Caracas where he lived from 1967 to 1972. In the 1980s, Vigas presented his first individual exhibition of bronze sculptures at the Galería Durban in Caracas and in the early 1990s, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas presented a retrospective of his work which included painting, sculpture, tapestries and drawings, representing his early abstract work and his better known figurative style with surrealist elements. The exhibit was accompanied by a book written by Gaston Diehl.



Exhibition Checklist

Miguel Arroyo

Banco listonado (Slat bench), 1956
Wood with ebony lacquer
18 7/8 x 70 7/8 x 14 1/4 inches
Fabricated by Pedro Santana, Carpintería
Colectiva - Caracas, Venezuela
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Armando Barrios

Composición XXVI (Boceto), 1955
Gouache on paper
16 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Omar Carreño

Tableau Objet, 1954
Acrylic on wood
17 x 25 1/8 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Omar Carreño

Étude # 2, 1951
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 22 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Omar Carreño

Corredizo 3 Versión 1974, 1953
Enamel on wood
40 1/8 x 40 1/8 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

Omar Carreño

Transformable 11, 1967
Lacquer on wood
37 3/8 x 37 3/8 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Carlos Cruz-Diez

Movement and Vibration in Space (Sculpture by GEGO), 1959
Video 13 min 13 sec
Edited in Iowa State University
Courtesy of Fundación Gego, Caracas

Carlos Cruz-Diez

Physichromie 549, 1971
Aluminum and acrylic
31 1/2 x 23 5/8 inches
Private Collection

Carlos Cruz-Diez

Physichromie 1024, 1975
Aluminum, PVC, and acrylic
39 3/8 x 78 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

Carlos Cruz-Diez

Inducción Cromática. Serie A. No. 2/4, 1979
Acrylic on wood
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 7/8 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

Narciso Debourg

Jaune sur Noir, 1972
Painted wood
23 5/8 x 23 5/8 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

Eugenio Espinoza

Impenetrable, 1972/2010
Acrylic on unprimed canvas
216 x 168 x 120 inches
Exhibition Copy
Courtesy of the Artist and Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

GEGO (Gertrude Goldschmidt)

Untitled, 1962
Watercolor on Japanese paper
33 5/8 x 24 3/8 inches
Amy Dean and Alan Kluger Collection, Miami

GEGO (Gertrude Goldschmidt)

Untitled (Esfera), 1977
Steel
27 1/8 x 27 1/8 x 27 1/8 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

GEGO (Gertrude Goldschmidt)

Untitled (Dibujo sin papel #14), 1983
Painted iron, wire and metal chains
19 3/4 X 32 1/2 X 3 1/4 inches
Private Collection

GEGO (Gertrude Goldschmidt)

Dibujo sin papel 88/36, 1988
Fabric, metal tube, screws and wire
32 1/4 x 34 1/4 x 1 inches
Private Collection

Carlos González Bogen

Untitled, 1949
Oil on canvas
28 7/8 x 35 1/2 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Elsa Gramcko

No. 10, 1958
Oil on canvas
54 x 16 1/2 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Gerd Leufert

Hattan, 1963
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Gerd Leufert

Untitled, 1980
Ink & wash
11 3/4 x 15 3/8 inches
Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Gerd Leufert

Untitled, 1980
Ink & wash
25 1/2 x 19 3/8 inches
Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Gerd Leufert

Untitled, c. 1980 c.
Ink
19 3/8 x 25 1/2 inches
Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Gerd Leufert

Series Ademán de Vida, c. 1980
Ink
10 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches
Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Gerd Leufert

Series Ganchos, 1980

Ink

17 5/8 x 16 3/4 inches

Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Gerd Leufert

Series Ganchos, c. 1980

Ink

25 x 18 3/4 inches

Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, LTD, New York

Luis Guevara Moreno

Primer Coplanal, 1951

Duco on wood

18 1/8 x 27 1/8 inches

Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Mateo Manaure

Estructura en el espacio # 3, 1970

Acrylic on wood

43 1/4 x 43 1/4 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

Mateo Manaure

Untitled, 1977

Acrylic on wood

56 3/8 x 21 1/4 x 1 1/8 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

Mateo Manaure

Composición No. 2, 1956

Duco on wood

39 3/8 x 19 5/8 inches

Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Alfredo Maraver

Movimiento Oscilatorio, 1956

Acrylic and lacquer on wood

20 x 19 7/8 inches

Private Collection

Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Pascual Navarro

Untitled, 1952

Oil on canvas

18 1/8 x 21 5/8 inches

Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

NEDO (Mion Ferrario Nedo)

Reversión 8, 1967

Ink on paper

17 7/8 x 24 5/8 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

NEDO (Mion Ferrario Nedo)

Reversión 9, 1967

Ink on paper

17 7/8 x 24 5/8 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

NEDO (Mion Ferrario Nedo)

Reversión 16, 1967

Ink on paper

17 7/8 x 24 5/8 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

NEDO (Mion Ferrario Nedo)

Reversión 23, 1967

Ink on paper

17 7/8 x 24 5/8 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

NEDO (Mion Ferrario Nedo)

Untitled, 1960

Oil on canvas

59 x 59 inches

Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Ruben Núñez

Blanco (Puntos Persistentes), 1951

Collage

10 1/2 x 7 7/8 inches

Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Alejandro Otero

Líneas Coloreadas, 1950

Oil on canvas

31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches

Fundación Daniela Chappard

Alejandro Otero

Coloritmo en movimiento 5, 1967

Duco on wood and Plexiglas

52 1/4 x 18 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches

Private Collection

Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Alejandro Otero

Proyecto Escultura Eólica - Park Avenue, New York City, 1977

Collage on paper

9 1/2 x 6 1/4 inches

Private Collection

Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Alejandro Otero

Model- Project for Park Avenue, New York 1982

Mixed media

46 1/2 x 15 x 15 inches

Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami

Alejandro Otero

De Uso Personal, 1965

Mixed media

13 3/4 x 10 5/8 inches

Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami

Alejandro Otero

Héctor, 1975

Papier Collé

19 5/8 x 15 3/4 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

Mercedes Pardo

Un Pequeño Sobresalto, 1973

Oil on panel

47 1/4 x 42 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches

Art&Art, LLC Collection

Rafael Pérez

Obra No. 9, 1967

Acrylic on wood

16 x 16 inches

Private Collection

Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Claudio Perna

La Cosa (Médanos), 1972

Video, 7 minutes 14 seconds

3 of 5 + AP

Private Collection

Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Claudio Perna

La Cosa (Médanos), 1972
Photograph
24 x 23 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Claudio Perna

Impenetrable 2, 1972
Photograph
24 x 23 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Claudio Perna

La Cosa, 1972
Photograph
24 x 23 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Claudio Perna

La Cosa 1972, 1972
Photograph
24 x 23 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Manuel Quintana Castillo

Untitled, 1954
Oil on canvas
28 3/8 x 16 5/8 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Francisco Salazar

Positif – Négatif 182, 1974
Corrugated cardboard on canvas
78 3/4 x 78 3/4 inches
Art&Art, LLC Collection

Enrique Sardá

Untitled, 1958
Pastel on paper
13 3/4 x 9 7/8 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Jesús Rafael Soto

Untitled (Landscape), 1949
Oil on Canvas
23 5/8 x 18 7/8 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Untitled (Leño), 1959
Wood
15 3/4 x 7 1/2 x 9 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Jesús Rafael Soto

Penetrable for Ballet "Génesis", 1978
Surgical tubing strands and aluminum hollow tubes
192 x 288 x 252 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

L'Oeil-de-Boeuf, 1963
Oil, steel, nylon and wood
27 1/2 inches (diam.)
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Jesús Rafael Soto

Escritura, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
11 3/4 x 27 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Espiral Doble, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
15 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 6 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

L'Echelle Bleue, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
19 3/4 x 15 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Paralelas Vibrantes, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
27 1/2 x 11 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Permutación, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
27 1/2 x 11 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Cuadros Vibrantes, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
15 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 5 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Tes Azules y Negras, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
19 3/4 x 19 3/4 x 5 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Cuadrado y Curvas Virtuales, Serie Síntesis
1979
Plexiglas and metal
19 3/4 x 19 3/4 x 6 inches
Private Collection

Jesús Rafael Soto

Ovalo en Rojo, Serie Síntesis, 1979
Plexiglas and metal
15 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 5 3/8 inches
Private Collection

Victor Valera

Factor Petróleo 2, 1956
Calibrated iron painted in black
47 1/4 x 21 1/4 x 26 inches
Private Collection
Courtesy of Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York

Oswaldo Vigas

Proyecto para un mural en la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1953
Oil on board
26 3/8 x 48 inches
Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

Penetrable for Ballet "Génesis" by Jesús Rafael Soto



Jesús Rafael Soto

Penetrable for Ballet "Génesis" (1978)

View of Installation performance,

La Habana, Cuba, 1978

Choreography by Alicia Alonso

Music by Luigi Nono

Ballet *Génesis* premiered on May 21, 1978, at the García Lorca Theater in Havana. Under the direction of Cuban dancer and choreographer Alicia Alonso, music score by Italian composer Luigi Nono and stage design by Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto, the ballet was the combination of three projects that resulted in a successful interdisciplinary collaboration that integrated modern music, dance and art.

The creation of *Génesis* responded to a period of experimentation promoted by the choreographers of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. It was Alonso's idea to put together a modern ballet inspired by the idea of life and death, with the participation of Nono and Soto.

Soto produced the scenario with elements similar to the ones used in some of his earlier works, but it is unique in that it combines the plastic hanging elements of his previous *Penetrables* with a grouping of hollow metal tubes that form a *Penetrable Sonoro* (Sounding Penetrable), adding sound to the piece.

With Soto's *Penetrable*, *Génesis*' scenario became a filled space as opposed to the Renaissance concept of an empty stage. Although it was not the first time Soto was creating a *Penetrable* for a ballet, it was the first time his piece filled the entire stage. By performing inside the *Penetrable*, *Génesis*' dancers took Soto's dream of integrating the human body into the work of art to a new level.

Appendix 1

Manifiesto *Los Disidentes*¹

We did not come to Paris to take classes in diplomacy, nor to acquire “culture” to serve our personal convenience. We came here to confront problems, to struggle with them, and to learn to call things by their real names. For this reason we cannot remain indifferent to the atmosphere of insincerity that constitutes Venezuela’s cultural reality. We intend to contribute to its improvement by ruthlessly attacking its defects, so that the blame may fall upon those truly responsible, or those who support them.

A good deal of the work we have set out for ourselves is none of our business, but given the indifference of the people who should have made it their business, we have not hesitated to make it ours, and we will be as specific and detailed as possible.

We are (and will continue to be) Venezuelan and we have been the first victims of this unfortunate state of things. Today we rebel against them and we speak out loudly because it is necessary.

We go against all that we believe to be regressive or stagnant, against all functions under false pretenses. We have been the product of and witnesses to much nonsense, and we would be in a bad way ourselves if we could not speak our minds, in the way we believe is necessary.

We have wanted to say “NO,” now and after “*Los Disidentes*.” “NO” is the tradition we want to establish. The Venezuelan “NO” that is so hard for us to say.

“NO” to the false *Salones de Arte Oficial*.

“NO” to that anachronistic archive of anachronisms called the *Museo de Bellas Artes*.

“NO” to the Escuela de Bellas Artes Plásticas and its promotion of false Impressionists.

“NO” to the exhibitions of national and foreign merchants who visit the *Museo* every year by the hundreds.

“NO” to the false art critics.

“NO” to the false folk-style musicians.

“NO” to the false page-filling writers and poets.

“NO” to the newspapers that support such absurd, and to the public that walks obediently to the slaughterhouse every day.

We say no once and for all; to the Venezuelan *consumatum est* which will never be anything but a ruin.

1. *Los Disidentes* No.5, Septiembre, 1950, 1-2. Reproduced in Bélgica Rodríguez, *La Pintura Abstracta en Venezuela 1945-1965*. (Caracas, 1980), 243-242. Translated by Francine Birbragher-Rozencaig.

Appendix 2

Manifiesto Cuatro Muros¹

(Mateo Manaure And Carlos González Bogen)

To be history, not its victim. Herein lies the artist's highest destiny.

No one more than the artist has intuited that time is not reversible: "it is not given to us to live back, we can only think back."

This is why in every true artist, as in every creator, there is a destroyer.

To have released art from its figurative content keeping in the plane achieved solely by lines and pure colors, has been the task of Abstract Art.

All true Art is more than optical.

Until now, the *thematic* has dominated the understanding of the uninitiated, and therefore what is truly visual has escaped its *comprehension*. Today the pure values of the visual arts are being restored: Herein lies the educational reach made real: *cuatro muros*.

Cuatro muros is a continuation of the battle initiated in the magazine *Los Disidentes*.

To some degree, the origin of this battle is found in the vision of an Art of such renovating power, that it is a genuine creation of our time.

We advocate the comprehension and integration of this new dimension of the visual arts within any live manifestation in which balanced visual elements of shapes and colors come into play.

Caracas, 21 February 1952

1. Reproduced in Bélgica Rodríguez, *La Pintura Abstracta en Venezuela 1945-1965*. (Caracas, 1980), 268. Translated by Francine Birbragher-Rozenwaig.

Embracing Modernity: Venezuelan Geometric Abstraction

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Back Cover:

Gerd Leufert, *Hattan*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 inches, Colección Ignacio y Valentina Oberto

