

WOMEN GEOMETERS

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Loló Soldevilla (Cuba, 1901-1971), Gego (Germany, 1912- Venezuela 1994), María Freire (Uruguay, 1917-2015), Mira Schendel (Switzerland, 1919- Brazil, 1988), Regina Aprijaskis (France, 1919- Perú 2013), Lygia Clark (Brazil, 1920), Lygia Pape (Brazil, 1927-2004), Zilia Sánchez (Cuba, 1926), Mercedes Pardo (Venezuela, 1921-2005), Lía Bermúdez (Caracas, 1930), Fanny Sanín (Colombia, 1938) and Lydia Okumura (Brazil, 1948).

The exhibition *Women Geometers*, organized by the Atchugarry Art Center in association with Piero Atchugarry Gallery summons and celebrates the creations of a significant group of twelve Latin American women pioneers proposing a dialogue that is unique in its genre. From different visions and multiple inquiries, all these pioneers extended the confines of geometric abstraction both in the aesthetic field and in territories of the intersection with realms of knowledge, ranging from mathematics to the philosophy of being and the very connection with the body and the erotic sensitivity.

One of the challenges of *Women Geometers* is precisely to bring together works within a period that spans from the fifties to the present decade, while exploring a dissimilar nature in geometric abstraction. This comprehensive exploration involves discovering the proximity between apparently opposites. The curatorial perspective does not respond to the identification of each of these artists with feminism or with Latin America as a concept, but it does validate the recognition of gender and cultural identity in the analysis and comprehension of art history narratives. On the other hand, it also honors the unique and often counter-flowing path of these pioneers who, against all odds, reasserted decade by decade their need to build a language of their own.

Some, like Loló Soldevilla, gave way to the avant-garde of early geometric abstraction in their countries. Her reliefs participated in the Salon des Realités Nouvelles (Paris, 1955), and in 1957 she founded, in Havana with Pedro de Oráa, the Color-Luz gallery; where the works of *Diez pintores concretos*, of which she was the only woman, were shown. But the frictions between aesthetics and abstract experimentation; and revolutionary ideology sparked the closure of the gallery and the gradual extinction of her practice. We include one of the extraordinary reliefs in white with those platonic, geometric shapes wherewith Loló playfully approached the harmony of mathematics. In *Constructing Her Universe: Loló Soldevilla*, Rafael Diaz Casas alludes to the inclusion of eight reliefs in her exhibition at Galerie Arnaud in 1953, highlighting that they synthesized “one of the highest personal expression of Concretism’s ideals,” but encompassing also that other way of knowledge, which is playfulness. She joyfully constructed chromatic equivalences between formal sciences and musical compositions. Each small leaf or piece of wood with dancing lines, circles or colored signs also contains its own key to the universe.

There might be a parallel between Lygia Clark's rupture with Brazilian modernist abstraction, from which she gradually drifted apart in order to pour her vital organicity in her Neo-Concrete work, and the inquiries with which Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt), away from the predominant *Cinetismo*, deconstructed the grid, animating it and reassembling it as networks suggesting the potential of growth. Articulated in aluminum plates joined by hinges, the "bodies" of Clark's iconic *Bichos* series—such as the *Carangarejo*, 1984—were made up not as objects but rather as "organic entities," open to be reassembled by the spectator. An operation carried out only mentally today, but keeping alive its disrespect toward pure geometric rationality. This capacity to suggest vitality also animates Gego's works, such as the awesome *Escultura sin título*, made with wire strands, or the small but powerful tridimensional drawings without paper—but with shadings—endowing the minimal metallic lines with a cosmic potential.

In the work by, also Venezuelan, Lía Bermúdez there is a return to the referential linkage with nature which had been quasi-forbidden in the manifestos and practices established by geometric abstraction in the Nineteen Forties in the south of the continent. Moving away from the *cinético* precepts of the Dissidents, she used iron to sculpt an "inventory" that points out anything from the names of natural phenomena in indigenous languages to her hallucinating representations of "animals" turned into abstractions without ever losing their character of metallic creatures.

The exercise of freedom distanced from the initial models of geometric abstraction and led to fields of gestural, poetic and/or philosophical experimentation is also present in the works in paper of Brazilian artists Mira Schendel, Lygia Pape and Lydia Okumura. The 1964 three *Monotipias* in rice paper displayed in *Women Geometers* belong to Schendel's iconic series with visual poetics equivalent to the outburst of a supernova. The fragile, semitransparent material substratum, perfect for the projections of shadows, was a gift from the astrophysicist and geometry-lover Mario Schenberg. Instead of the control of the hand drawing directly, porous paper absorbs ink from the surface of an acrylic or glass sheet that covers it, at the time when a pressure point is exercised to print the asymmetric forms. The imperfection of the circle, the intervals of interrupted rectangles that never close, or the random succession of horizontal and vertical lines disposed in open forms are "attempts to activate the void"¹ and analogous spaces of freedom.

In Pape's case, as curator Francesco Stocchi wrote, within her "continuous experimentation there is a coexistence of the full and the empty, the interior and the exterior, the presence and the absence." In the 1959 *Desenhos*, drawn by this cofounder of Neo-concretism with Indian ink on Japanese paper, the subtle geometric shapes emerge from the interposition of diagonals and the conjugation of voids and/or small changes of level in a plot of straight lines. A sort of "eclipse" or representation of the intersection between fields of lines unveils a moon built

¹ "The Experimental Exercise of Freedom"
Museum of Contemporary Art MoCA Los Angeles Oct 1999- January 2000

with the void in one of these drawings, and in another one, two rising circles are only revealed when the eye attentively scans the succession of lines drawn almost as an exercise in meditation. These works were included in the retrospective show *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, 2011, among others.

Lydia Okumura's geometric drawings are conceptual, but instead of showing the voluble borders between verbal and visual representations, she turns them into a language that interrogates the awareness of being and the perception of reality. Through geometry, whose universality appears clear to her—everything is built out of intersections of crisscrossed fields and lines—she explores the limits between appearance and dimensions. The physical space duplicated by her drawings or used as a tridimensional canvas by her installations are mirrors of the vast mental space. In a conversation with curator and researcher Anke Kempkes on the way our perception is altered by minimal gestures and materials—a drawn line, paint on a wall, a metallic thread—Okumura stated: “*Geometry is an intelligent way to express the concept of multi-dimensionality, an aspect of the truth of life.*” Her drawings on multiple media are philosophic. She often creates situations from one or several lines stretching between a wooden floor and a wall. In *Work V*, 1983, she uses acrylic paint, color pencil and black ink to represent a spatial vision with a transcendent quality. Each drawing is a lesson for the inner look.

In Mercedes Pardo's powerful acrylic painting that she made in 1981 with variations in blue and subtle insertions of red and green there is a barely perceptible connection between the landscape and geometric abstraction mediated by perceptual apprehension. Echoes of some panorama resonate in the segment laying out a white horizon across, like in certain late-sixties paintings by Regina Aprijaskis. Pardo's work responds to a pursuit of the calm of the depths rather than to a regard that looks for the spectacular. In Aprijaskis' transition toward the purity of intersected geometric planes, the critics notice the key influence of Barnett Newman's radicalism that refers verticality to the position of the human body. In her compositions from the nineties, segments either in white or in primary colors intersecting or complementing the color planes produce the illusion of spatial bodies acting like fragmentations defined in a perfectly cohesive structure. As Alfonso Castrillón Viscarra points out, for Aprijaskis, verticality possesses “a sense of stubborn affirmation of life, a sequence of persistent rhythms witnessing her living will.” In *Rojos, negro, amarillo*, 1996, a single red horizontal segment breaks through this verticality, intensifying its power. In 2001 she made a series with variations in the colors that give its title to the painting *Blanco, azul, negro, amarillo*, always keeping the proportion in the lower third and altering the order of the segments and the thin blue line where she deposits, now horizontally, the vital drive.

On the other hand, there is a close subjective, personal, untransferable relationship with color shared by Pardo and Fanny Sanín. Away from Mondrian's pure primary colors, their paintings contain mixtures of their own, filled with memory. Hence, Sanín warns that she adheres to no intellectual movement or principle. “My geometry is more sensitive and my work is color painting. But not a color that a computer could recreate, since it comes from combinations nourished by the perception of the world.” For that reason Martha Traba referred to her “organic abstractionism.” There are flesh colors, or inimitable sepias. *Acrylic 2*, 1990, is a painting she

made twice, because she was particularly fond of it and it was impossible to fix it after the damage suffered in an exhibition. Even for her it was hard to achieve identical mixtures. Simultaneously, as it is patent in *Acrylic 2*, 1996, and in her studies for that painting, there is a structure of forms suggesting sacred architectures to the spectator. Critic Carlos M. Luis remarked that the frontal quality of her paintings conveyed the experience of being “in front of an altar or the façade of a temple.”

Since the fifties, as Gabriel Pérez Barreiro points out, María Freire’s work is nurtured by the suprematist legacy, sharing with Madí an interest in the movement, but without incorporating the ideological leaning toward the political left that spurred these inquiries. Freire, says the researcher, “was one of the few artist to fully realize the expressive possibility of working with symbols and ciphers that cross cultural boundaries while not becoming illustrative.” He likewise considers the liberations of her beginnings and the explorations leading to the pivotal works of the *Capricornio* series (1967-1969), stretching at the same time the search for archetypical Latin American forms so valued to the Escuela del Sur. The same year she finishes this series she paints *Córdoba 415*, in the Argentinian city of that name. The gesture and strength of the individual forms—similar to hieroglyphics—are sustained by the vibration of the color blue.

The liberation from geometric rigidity which magnifies it in forms enriched by vitality rather than denying it, reaches a unique expression in the works in which Zilia Sánchez synthesizes the linkage of the feminine body with early suprematism. Black rectangles contain the archetypical, sensual representation of the breasts. We could say that the *Topografía erótica* (Erotic Topography) of her *Serie infinita* (Infinite Series) has managed to use painting to create a tridimensional Venus which somehow recollects mankind’s millenary learnings. Each one of the twelve pioneers gathered in *Women Geometers* challenged the limits of abstraction in Latin America. They extended the field of vision and creation by challenging the rules and the very limits of this powerful current throughout the continent.

About Piero Atchugarry Gallery

GARZÓN, Uruguay

Piero Atchugarry gallery presents a contemporary art program and modern art survey. The gallery opened to the public in September 2013 with a Post-War Italian art exhibition. By January 2014 the gallery moved to a large stable adapted as an exhibition space in Garzón. In this space, the program allowed outdoor and indoor proposal exploration, through the creation of dialogue between architectural features and curatorial practices.

MIAMI, USA

On December 2018, the program expanded to North America with a second location, a 9000 square feet warehouse on 5520 NE 4th Avenue in the Design District neighborhood. The participation of the gallery in what is a boiling art community that connects Europe, Latin America and both coasts of the United States represents the commitment of the program to support and present the work of local and international artists with an institutional approach.

About Atchugarry Art Center

The Center is composed by Fundación Pablo Atchugarry, Piero Atchugarry Gallery, and an outdoor sculpture park (opening winter 2019).

The Atchugarry Art Center joins the collaboration of a commercial program and a non for profit with the goal of nurturing the enhancement of the cultural branches in the City of Miami.