

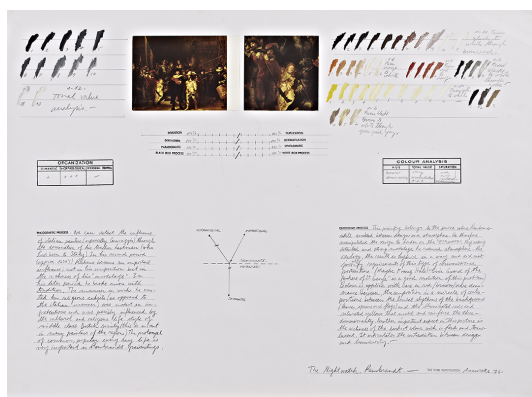
Imagining Spaces: Constructions in Color and Text

Curated by Alexandra Schoolman

Opening Reception: Thursday June 23, 6-9 pm / Exhibition runs through September 9, 2016

Summer Hours: Monday to Friday 11-6 pm

Henrique Faria Fine Art is pleased to present *Imagining Spaces: Constructions in Color and Text*, a group exhibition focused on the formal and thematic elements of color and text in Latin American art of the last sixty years. The exhibition framework is based on the premise that color and text are two major building blocks of creative expression, and can therefore be seen as architectural components of a given composition. As Hans Hofmann writes in *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, "In fact, the whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color. [...] In symphonic painting, color is the real building medium. 'When color is richest, form is fullest.'"¹ This concept can be taken further and extended to text, which is the building block of written communication. And while color can be given a form or applied to a certain shape, text—letters themselves—is already architectural in form and can be easily manipulated and improvised. The featured artworks demonstrate the production of a diverse survey of artists who, throughout their practices, have been actively investigating and challenging chromatic and typographic qualities. By employing a range of mediums, expanding spatial capabilities, and experimenting with abstraction and structure, the artists of this exhibition explore the visual information—the light, color, tones and shapes—we encounter from moment to moment, offering new translations of these optic experiences.



Osvaldo Romberg, *Analysis of "The Nightwatch" (Rembrandt)*, 1976.
Collage, acrylic, and graphite on paper. 21 5/8 x 29 1/8 in. (54.9 x 74 cm)

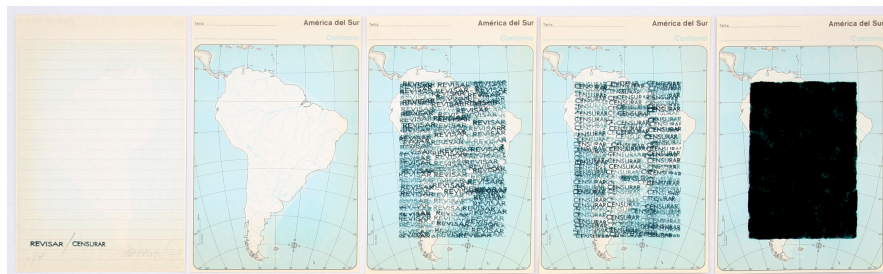
Within Western art history, the intent to use color as the sole means of expression within an artwork can be considered a modern idea. The concept gained momentum in the mid-to-late-1800s when Impressionist and Pointillist works were first being hung on the walls of galleries and salons. By rejecting the line and embracing new research being conducted on color theory, these works posited the primacy of color in art making over previously held ideals of perspective and realism. The exhibition is inspired by the work of Osvaldo Romberg, especially his 1970s' *Art History* series, where the colors of iconic historic paintings are presented, coded and analyzed to such an extent that they replace figuration as the overall content of

the work. In these pieces, Romberg would single out each color, determine the dominant hues, and research not only how these

colors were used in the various paintings but how the colors evolved and were used by previous artists. Emilio Chapela, whose research-based practice examines the ways in which information is visualized and presented, reduces corporate logos down to their foundations: the colors which comprise them. Chapela's *Logo* etchings (2009) take their form according to the percentage a certain color appears within the logo and, as a result, raise questions as to how color can be used and manipulated for corporate use and identity. Alejandro Puente similarly mines color, but for its underlying scientific characteristics rather than its social uses. Puente's works resemble a system in that they configure a whole through various working parts. *Pintura* (1970) employs key patterning, checkered blocks of color and line, so that the whole and its contributing parts—the relationships and tensions between primary and secondary colors—can be seen simultaneously.

Other artists in this exhibition have utilized geometry and sculpture as a means to imbue color with three-dimensional form. Waldo Balart and Regina Aprijaskis both make use of saturated color and staunch shapes to fill their large-scale canvases, while Diana de Solares, Elizabeth Jobim and Eduardo Costa blur the distinction between painting and sculpture through their use of materials: painted MDF, canvas applied to wooden armatures and solid acrylic paint, respectively. And harkening back to the Impressionists' use of color as a way to portray light, Ana Sacerdote's video *Essai de Couleur Animée* (1959/1965) and Karina Peisajovich's *Color Picker* (2014) use electric light as the medium by which color is carried and infused into the gallery space. In working to isolate color, these artists have not only been able to better understand its creative applications but have given it materiality, transforming it into a medium in itself.

In the 1960s – 1980s, language came under attack in Latin America and Europe, but for two very different reasons. While during that time period many countries in Latin America were ruled by right-wing, totalitarian governments with strict censorship laws, in Europe, France in particular, theorists like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Claude Lévi-Strauss, were developing arguments on semiotics, the nature and interpretation of signs, and structuralism, which in linguistics focused on the underlying systems on which language is based. Mirtha Dermisache’s conceptual body of work, dealing with themes of communication, expression and exchange of information, offer readers not messages or contingent forms, but rather the idea—the essence—of the act of writing. Her graphisms broke written forms down to their most essential states, stylized calligraphy, and when they were reintroduced through familiar text media—books, letters, newspapers, etc.—the pen strokes revealed no information more than the movement of the artist’s hand across the paper—a challenge to the traditional ways in which meaning is conjured and spread in the modern world. Censorship posed a formidable creative challenge for the avant-garde artists living in Latin America, but it also forced these artists to think about the power of language, the systems that guided and governed it, and what made it so ‘dangerous’. Horacio Zabala compared the power structures of censorship with the delineation of domestic borders in *Revisar/Censurar* (1974) by using stamps of the verbs ‘revisar’ and ‘censurar’, which translate as ‘to revise’ and ‘to censor’, to completely obscure a political map of South America. Artists Paulo Bruscky, Clemente Padín and Guillermo Deisler were all on the forefront of the Visual Poetry and Mail Art movements, movements that were inspired by poetry’s freedom from rigid structure and sense of play and that appropriated the postal service for the dissemination of artworks. Padín’s *Texto III* (1968) and Deisler’s *Foto Collage* (1980) both use traditional methods of woodcut and photo collage, respectively, to create their works, but focus on the sculptural qualities of Roman lettering: the curves in a lowercase ‘g’, the gestalt effect of letters and background. Emilia Azcárate’s on-going *Mail Art* series honors the history from which it came, but has been adapted as a way to materialize her Buddhist spiritual practice. Her postcards bear not only mandalas and sutras, but also the marks of travel— bar codes, stamps, seals—as the postcards make their journey from origin to destination.



Horacio Zabala, *Revisar/Censurar*, 1974. 5 Ink and pencil on printed maps. 14 1/4 x 39 1/8 in. (36.2 x 99 cm)

Other artists have looked to alphabets as a whole, using their pre-existing formats as a base from which to construct their own. Leandro Katz developed an alphabet based on the phases of the moon and created a series of works, including *Lunar Sentence #2* (1979), where lines of poetry are translated into his naturalistic typography, whereas Luis Roldán used medical symbols for different kinds of breaths and created a different type of diary, in which time is described according to the breaths taken during that period. Eduardo Santieri looked to musical notation in creating his *Sinfonías*. Utilizing the paper as if it were a sheet of music, Santieri plays with the placement of “notes”, or dots of color defined by a scratched edge, around the paper: he proposes new chords and progressions that suggest a richly textured sound and play with the musical and visual term of the “chromatic”. As political theorist Andrew Robinson affirms, “Human freedom can be asserted against the nature of language in two ways. Firstly, by calling language into question. This is done by literature and semiotics. Secondly, by opening texts to new readings, and preventing them from being finalized.”² By inserting themselves into formally established social, cultural and political modes, these artists have been able to create new spaces within them, allowing for continued growth and challenges of the status quo.

With the explosion of Pop and Conceptual Art in the 1960s and 70s, new techniques were incorporated into the creative arsenal of the avant-garde, allowing for the role of art in society and the way viewers interacted with it to change. Conceptual Art’s emphasis on the preeminence of the idea, rather than the material work that ensued from it, encouraged text-based works as the most simple and effective means of presentation. Pop Art, on the other hand, borrowing from methods long used by advertisers to set trends and sell products, preferred the flashy and slick. Luis Benedit created architecturally accurate blueprints of mazes for animals, while artist-

designer Delia Cancela worked to fuse her professional spheres through her vibrant studies, bringing together color, fashion and the body in motion. Claudio Perna uses his body as a canvas for the Venezuelan tricolor, yellow, blue and red, in his video work *Amarillo, azul y rojo (Bigotes)* (1974), by painting his moustache each of those colors in succession, whereas poetry was an important aspect of Federico Peralta Ramos' performances. The television also held an important role within Pop culture and Jaime Davidovich was one of the first artists to use it as a Fine Art material. In *Blue/Red/Yellow* (1974), Davidovich uses the television and its primary color scheme as a way to bring his physical Tape Projects into virtual reality. With im-personalization and mass-production as regarded features of a commercialized world, other artists took a documentary-like approach to demonstrating specific relationships between art and site. Anna Bella Geiger, in *O espaço social da arte* (1977), superimposes the names of cultural currents over the oceans of a world map, challenging the ideas of cultural dominance and periphery and questioning where 'the social space of art' is truly found. Carlos Ginzburg's *Off-sight Marker - On-sight Marker (du marche de La Merced)* (1980) juxtaposes two tourist sites with excerpts from a guidebook written about those very places, as Mercedes Elena González in *Integral* (2013) muses on Venezuela's architectural and geometric monuments to Modernism's failed movement in the country by using the cover of the modernist magazine *Integral* from September 1950 as a background for dark, slinking vines which creep out from beyond the image frame, penetrating into the interlocking shapes of the magazine's design and subtly destroying their delicate harmony. Marshal MacLuhan's coined phrase, "the medium is the message", accurately describes the symbiotic relationships seen in these works, in which the media used to create an artwork are as important in conveying meaning as the work's content itself.



Mercedes Elena González, *Integral*, 2011. India ink on digital impression. 8 7/16 x 11 in. (21.5 x 28 cm)

With each new generation comes the opportunity to look anew on the historical events and movements that preceded it and lay down new layers of meaning that reflect current realities. It is with color and text, the most elemental forms of vision and written communication, that the distances between past and present can be bridged: that the vibrant clash of complementary colors still has the power to evoke tension and movement, that we have the ability today to read and contemplate words written thousands of years ago, that we have the ability to make and store memories. Hofmann writes, "The possibility of the medium is as unlimited as the possibilities of the human capacity for comprehension. It is the aim of every cultural pursuit to enrich and to give deeper content to life."³ As he maintains, the work of the artist is not to emulate the natural world but to create work that translates and, in turn, vitalizes these environments. By choosing to focus on color and text, the artists featured in this exhibition demonstrate not only their capacity for creative renewal but also the ways in which these elements form and inform how we construe the world around us.

Alexandra Schoolman

Participating Artists:

Regina Aprijaskis
Emilia Azcárate
Waldo Balart
Luis Bénédict
Paulo Bruscky
Delia Cancela
Emilio Chapela
Eduardo Costa
Jaime Davidovich

Diana de Solares
Guillermo Deisler
Mirtha Dermisache
Anna Bella Geiger
Carlos Ginzburg
Mercedes Elena González
Elizabeth Jobim
Leandro Katz
Clemente Padín

Karina Peisajovich
Federico Peralta Ramos
Claudio Perna
Alejandro Puente
Luis Roldán
Osvaldo Romberg
Ana Sacerdote
Eduardo Santiere
Horacio Zabala

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¹ Hans Hofmann, *Search for the Real in the Visual Arts*. MIT Press: 1967, pp. 45, 67

² Andrew Robinson, "Barthes and Semiotics" in *Ceasefire Magazine*, September 23, 2011. www.ceasefiremagazine.co.uk

³ Hofmann, Op. cit. pg. 55