

PRESSBOOK

Jesús Rafael SOTO

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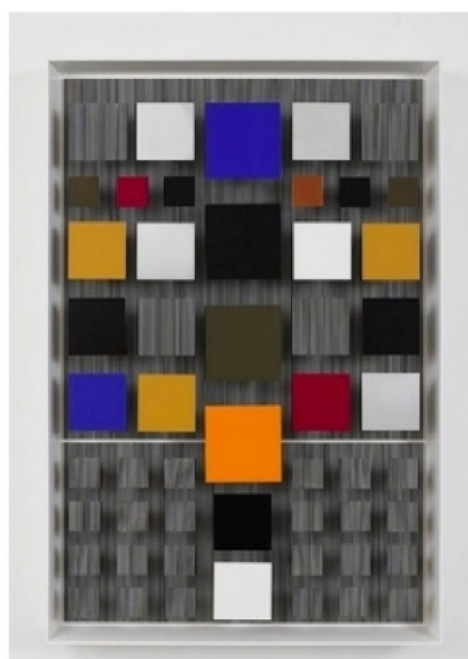
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Of all the postwar tendencies that have been rejuvenated, kinetic art seemed the least likely to return to favor. Yet in recent years, and most notably with the Guggenheim's retrospective of the ZERO group, the genre is getting another eye-twisting look. The work of Jesús Rafael Soto, seen in that exhibition and now the subject of this bracing miniretrospective, refuses the easy pleasures of Op art. His three-dimensional painted grids and immersive environments of painted rods sit more comfortably among sculptures by his Nouveau Réaliste and ZERO contemporaries—and not only because this output questions the importance or even the possibility of stasis. More important is their challenge to rational perception, often expressed through illusions of weightlessness, that makes Soto's art feel not only relevant but still disturbing, a phenomenological spring trap for digital narcissists who still think what you see is what you get.

Born in Venezuela (where there is now a museum devoted to his art), Soto came to Paris in 1950, where his early work made use of rhythmic, syncopated, rectilinear forms in the manner of Mondrian. Later assemblages of panels affixed to painted backgrounds disorient in a trippy sort of way, but the larger sculptures of suspended thin dowels, such as *Ecriture noire*, 1982, do something more important: They unfix positive and negative, artwork and space, and make the viewer's vertigo not just a fun-house effect but a starting point to reassess the very legitimacy of perception. With Soto you feel that the basic laws of the universe have been suspended, especially in his disconcerting "Vibration" series. The large *Vibración amarilla y blanca* (Yellow and White Vibration), 1994, which concludes this show, is an almost immobile mobile of painted rods whose shimmering, eye-straining motions are delightfully un-Instagramable.



Jesús Rafael Soto, *Ambivalencia en el espacio color no. 12*, 1981, paint on wood and metal, 61 1/2 x 41 3/4".

— Jason Farago