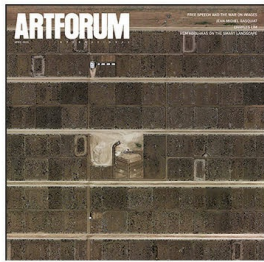


PRESSBOOK

Jesús Rafael SOTO

Artforum

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Daniel Quiles

PARIS

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GALERIE PERROTIN

Jesús Rafael Soto's late works stage elaborate visual puzzles. Take *Sans titre (Aléatoire 2)* (Untitled [Random 2]), 1996, as an example. More than six feet high and thirteen across, this mural-scale construction features ultrathin white vertical stripes on a black ground. Superimposed on this surface is a grid of sixteen by thirty-two tiny squares, some raised off the plane and some lying flat. The majority of the squares have the same pattern of stripes set horizontally, so that these clash painfully with the verticals behind them, producing the signature "vibration" effect of Op art. Twenty-four of the squares are various solid colors, including black and white; like the striped ones, some are raised and some lie flush. The rigidly organized accents of color recall an icon of the persistence of geometric abstraction in postwar Paris: Ellsworth Kelly's *Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951. But unlike Kelly's squares, Soto's stripes dazzle the eye and utterly confuse the quite literal figure-ground relationships, so that it is hard to see what is flat and what is in relief, even as there is always a sense that the object has literal depth. The only way to make sense of things is to move forward and backward, checking and rechecking, in a rather straightforward, even cold, revisitation of the 1960s-era "open work."

"Chronochrome" was curated by Matthieu Poirier, previously the organizer, along with Serge Lemoine, behind "Dynamo: A Century of Light and Motion in Art, 1913–2013" at Paris's Réunion des Musées Nationaux Grand Palais in 2013. Split between Perrotin's spaces in Paris and New York, the show joined a larger reconsideration of kinetic art both in France (where the Venezuelan artist moved in 1950) and abroad, most notably in the US, with the recent "ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s" at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Unlike both "ZERO" and Estrellita Brodsky's comparative view of Soto at New York University's Grey Art Gallery in 2012, however, Poirier did not emphasize the artist's personal and formal links with Nouveau Réalisme or other neo-Dada tendencies in an internationalized Paris circa 1960. Rather, by juxtaposing selected early optical experiments such as *Première vibration*, 1957, and *Untitled (Pour Maguy et Moamer)*, 1958, with the artist's work from the 1970s through 2003 (he died in 2005), Poirier made the convincing case that it was kinetic art's clean, polished machine aesthetic—and its didactic inheritance of Concrete art—that won out in the latter half of Soto's career.

The artist's expansion of his investigations into sculptural hybrids in this period produced mixed results. Wall-based works such as *Escritura metálica* (Metallic Writing), 1975, feature hanging elements that function as small mobiles, suspended within recessed boxes. Both their slight motion and the viewer's own movements activate the works' optical effects. Sculptures such as the stalactite- and stalagmite-like painted metal rods of *Doble progresión azul y negra* (Double Progression Blue and Black), 1975, effectively block off gallery space in order to manipulate the eye. The accessible, physically immersive works for which the artist is best known, such as *Pénétrable BBL bleu*, 1999/2007, literally welcome viewers' bodies, only to surround them in PVC and metal. These behemoths throw into relief the delicate, playful touches in certain of Soto's early works, such as *Sans titre (La ficelle)* (Untitled [String]), 1961, which offered something of a respite from the quasi-rationality on display elsewhere in the show.

In her recent assessment of Soto's peers and fellow kinetic artists in GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel), art historian Lily Woodruff contends that despite their work's embrace of industrial production

and a quasi-scientific approach, such artists ultimately positioned themselves "against the technocrats" who ran Fifth Republic France by committee during the '60s. For Woodruff, participatory triggers such as optical vibration were designed to destabilize and democratize the viewer's everyday, administered experience. In the fraught Paris of early January 2015, "Chronochrome" was a welcome reminder that in addition to probing the limits of free speech and societal tensions, *liberté* might also take radically inclusive, abstract form.

—Daniel Quiles



Jesús Rafael Soto,
Doble progresión azul y negra (Double Progression Blue and Black), 1975, paint, metal, 10' × 11' × 11' 3".