

PRESSBOOK

Jesús Rafael SOTO

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JESÚS RAFAEL SOTO'S 'Double Blue and Black Progression' (1975), part of an exhibition in Paris.

ON THE MOVE: Kinetic Artist Soto Bridges the Atlantic

BY RUTH BENDER

IN A SMALL STUDIO in Paris, the works of kinetic artist Jesús Rafael Soto continue to create art-world vibrations a decade after his death.

Galerie Perrotin, the gallery that represents his estate, has dug deep into the massive basement archive under the artist's longtime Paris studio for the works in a show opening this week in the French capital and New York.

"The idea was to create an exhibition that reflects his entire career," said Matthieu Poirier, a French art historian and curator of the show, as he walked through the studio in a quiet street on Paris's Right Bank.

Soto is known for multidimensional geometric constructions that play with optical effects. He used basic materials like wood and metal and recurrent forms such as squares and lines, creating "painted" or "sculpted" works that come to life with the viewer's movement.

"It's the experience that matters in his art," said Mr. Poirier, who met Soto and devoted much of his doctoral thesis to the artist. "The painting is the generator of an effect."

As the exhibition "Chronochrome" nears its debuts Saturday in Paris and Thursday in New York, it's almost as though the artist were still at work in the small ground-floor studio where he created some of his best-known works over more than 40 years. He died in 2005 at the age of 81.

Venezuelan artist René Ugarte, Soto's longtime assistant, still repairs Soto's works three days a week in the studio. The workplace reflects Soto's approach to art. "Nothing is accidental, everything is carefully constructed," said Mr. Poirier. Hundreds of pots of paint are lined up on the shelves, some color mixes left untouched since Soto created them.

The studio also stores the hundreds of spare pieces, mostly painted squares and metal strings, that Soto prepared in tandem with his original

creations to repair his pieces in case of damage.

The Perrotin galleries will together show a little more than 50 pieces, including a massive "penetrable" in Paris. This set of objects count among Soto's most famous installations: Visitors wander among plastic tubular strands hanging from the ceiling. Around half of the works of the double exhibition will be available to buy, with an original piece starting at around \$237,000. Some museums and the estate, managed by Soto's four children, lent the other half.

The son of a violin player, Soto grew up in Venezuela, where he painted posters for local movie theaters and studied art on a scholarship. His real artistic discovery began when his fascination with Impressionism and cubism drew him to Paris.

Soto arrived on an Italian cargo ship in 1950, and he played the guitar in Parisian bars at night to earn a living. Soto drew his early inspiration from artists such as Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, who had become famous for his abstract work. Quickly after his arrival in Paris, Soto, too, became a household name in the thriving market for abstract art. Eventually, he found his voice to become one of the pioneers of kinetic art, or art that has moving parts.

In Paris, Soto was first featured in big shows next to artists such as the U.S. painter and sculptor Alexander Calder. Exhibitions took place at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (a retrospective in 1974) and other major venues.

Though kinetic art lost some of its appeal in the art market of the 1980s and '90s, the Perrotin gallery is surfing a new wave of enthusiasm for abstract and kinetic art. In 2013, Paris's Centre Pompidou held a large retrospective of Soto's work, and Mr. Poirier curated "Dynamo" at the Grand Palais, a massive exhibition about the major kinetic and optical artists of the past century.

► See more images from the installation at WSJ.com/review.

Visitors wander among tubular strands.