

PRESSBOOK

Julio LE PARC

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Making fun of contemporary art

The joyful work of Julio Le Parc is celebrated in a show at the Pérez Art Museum Miami.
 By Edwin Heathcote

Artists have always tried to create the illusion of movement in art, from the earliest cave paintings through Vorticism to comic book “whoosh” lines. And some artists cross the line and incorporate actual movement into sculptural works. That line, the boundary between Op and Kinetic art, found its most complete expression in Latin America. Influenced by European modernists such as László Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, Max Bill and, later, Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley, it was Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesús Rafael Soto, Lygia Pape and Julio Le Parc who most fully realised the potential of art to confuse and amuse the senses, with surfaces that seemed to come alive and zoom in and out of focus.

Cruz-Diez, with his urban-scaled interventions, has become the most famous, but Le Parc, despite being the least known, has created the most diverse, most intriguing and most entertaining oeuvre of any of them. Its (almost) full scope is on show at Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) in *Julio Le Parc: Form into Action*, an invigorating, occasionally mesmerising and often surprising show. Machines whirr and buzz, balls clatter around in glass-encased tables and strobe lights flash to illuminate vibrating patterns. Delicate patterns of light are cast on to floors, walls and ceilings, endlessly reforming themselves into complex, shimmering patterns tinged with geometry and disintegrating order.

Born in Argentina in 1928, Le Parc, now 88, has lived in Paris since 1958, where both Soto and Cruz-Diez were living at the time. His production was prodigious; paintings, light installations, machines, Plexiglas dangling things and boded-together bagatelles. His childlike delight in patterns and in the making of curious, often simple mechanisms to create complex, absorbing patterns shines through the



From top: 'La Longue Marche' (1974); Argentine artist Julio Le Parc

Op art, Light art, Pop and so on – his clearest contribution is perhaps public engagement. The works here are not the precious objects of the gallery but gleeful machines from the amusement arcade. There are buttons to push and distorting specs to put on, beds to lie down on and wonky floor tiles to contemplate. Immersive art may now be an established idea, but it was much less so in the mid-1960s when Le Parc was at his most experimental.

If there's a criticism here it's that this show is a rather depoliticised version of Le Parc's contribution. His oeuvre includes more overtly critical works – “Knock Down the Myths” (1969), for instance, a booth with balls to be thrown at riot police and establishment figures like a shooting gallery, is absent from this show. His insistence on physical engagement with the work

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work. There is no irony here, just joy in the creation of effects. The darkened rooms at PAMM veer between 1960s psychedelia – stoner light projections that would have looked at home on the stage behind Pink Floyd – and slightly queasy halls of mirrors.

The means are almost always basic: ribbons of steel, bending to reflect swirls of light, fields of tiny suspended mirrors creating a rippling ceiling or hundreds of Plexiglas rectangles formed into a giant red sphere, always alive, always subtly changing.

Le Parc's graphic work, meanwhile, does something similar. Shapes slowly transform across the canvas and back again, geometric forms designed to evoke swirling clouds or scenes from classic paintings. It all culminates in an epic wraparound painting, “La Longue Marche” (1974), in which ribbons of colour spool, twist and loop into a characteristically 1970s panorama.

If Le Parc was in at the beginning of a number of art moments – Kinetic art,

still seems radical, but visitors to PAMM seemed wary of touching anything, having become acclimatised to the usual gallery rules, and some works that should have been accessible were roped off.

Le Parc believes that the distance between art and audience needs to be dispensed with. His interest is not in the authenticity of the object but in the value of the encounter. The bits of mirror and mechanisms here are almost all new, replaced as the older versions of works have lost their sheen and reflectivity.

“The context of art has changed,” he told me in 2014. “Art used to have to fulfil a different role. Now its value is seen in terms of the market. We should be considering other forms of value.” Colourful, noisy, irreverent and surprising, this is a life-affirming show that combines value with something far rarer in contemporary art: fun.

To March 29, pamm.org