convergences

divergences

Primitive Sources of the Modern
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Primitive Sources of the Modern

Curated by Ariel Jiménez
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In 2016 the Juan Carlos Maldonado Art Collection, JCMAC, began a new chapter for our organization when we opened an exhibition space in Miami. Since its beginnings in 2005, the driving force behind the Juan Carlos Maldonado Art Collection has been a recognition of the contribution that Geometric Abstraction has made to art history in the twentieth century.

The collection has historically focused on Latin American Geometric Abstraction (1940-1970), a well-known movement in the history of this style in the postwar period. But the collection has since expanded to include artists working in Europe and North America.

Strengthening our collection of modern and contemporary art, JCMAC acquires the most comprehensive to date set of indigenous Ye’Kwana pieces, collected through decades of arduous work and research by the Venezuelan anthropologist Charles Brewer-Carías since the 1960’s. From the beginning, we connected spontaneously with the geometry reflected in the Ye’kwana pieces ensuing a series of conversations between us the anthropologist-researcher and the collector of geometric art, leading me towards a transformative experience that would take me beyond my current self and engaging us both into a dialogue that still continues to date.

The acquisition generated a collision; the encounter between two universes of meaning, two symbolic, formal and technical repertoires that demand an approach, an attempt to understand what happens when this two worlds converge. How is the dialogue between this collection of "primitive" works and the manifestations of modern and contemporary art is established? Where do their differences reside and what do they reveal to us? Why, in short, should it be a problem that these works (strictly contemporary from the chronological point of view), coincide in the same collection?
It is to these and other questions that the exhibition proposed by the Juan Carlos Maldonado Art Collection intends to answer, not in a definitive way, of course, but as an attempt to share some concrete clues. The exhibition aims to explore some points of contact between the artistic production of the Ye’Kwana tribe that inhabits the Guyana-Amazon region, south of the Venezuelan territory and north of Brazil, and some of the iconic pieces of Western geometric abstraction in the collection.

Some of these points are detected through similar forms of functioning as symbolic devices between the Ye’kwana objects and the works of some modern artists such as Joaquín Torres-García, Mathias Goeritz, Jesus Soto, and, to a lesser extent, Mira Schendel; or as in the works by Joseph Albers, Carmen Herrera, or Gonzalo Fonseca, where the indigenous and modern productions coincide in their language strategies, specifically in the clear economy of means that characterize them.

Whenever the artists consciously assumed a certain influence of the indigenous artistic traditions; either in the ranges they used, or in the collaborative actions excerpted in the creative processes, the fundamental questions of origin, influence or parallel asymptotic co-existence arise. This exhibit attempts to further the research on the parallels between modern art and the mythical symbolisms of ancient cultures, bringing to light a comprehensive group of objects of the amazon basin community of the Ye’Kwana tribe and some of the most iconic and representative pieces from the JCMAC.

Juan Carlos Maldonado
JCMAC Founding President

Ariel Jiménez
Curator
Convergences / Divergences
Primitive Sources of the Modern

by Ariel Jiménez, Curator
A sort of double appetite governs modern art from its beginnings: the inventive power, on the one hand, and, on the other, the categorical vital need to anchor the artist’s sensitive experience to the primordial sources of the human. On the one side, then, both formal and hyper-valued language innovation; the enthusiasm for the transforming capacities of science and technology; the unshakable faith in a humanity oriented towards the possible, that seemed to be creating an absolutely new life, liberated—at last—from the limitations that bind the species to its animal origin. On the other, a certain “return” to the origins, the intuitive conviction that in art only is worth what emerges from the depths of our biological being, from that immemorial domain that is confounded with the very beginnings of the universe and that are barely alive among today’s tribal communities. Seurat and Gauguin could illustrate this double tension during the last century, provided, of course, that accepting the invention of new expressive means is a common feature among them but not their thirst for the archaic, infinitely superior in Gauguin. Thus, we could contrast throughout the 20th century up to the present, the Futurists to the Fauves, the Cubists to the Surrealists, and also the personalities of Sol LeWitt and Georg Baselitz, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Jean Dubuffet, a confrontation that can even be found in a single artist in whose work distinct sensibilities are confronted, as in the white and sepia period of the Venezuelan Armando Reverón.

And since the art of our time maintains for that reason a relationship of intimacy with the artistic production of the “primitive” or “tribal” cultures of Africa, Asia, America or Oceania, and in general with all the Western aesthetic traditions—occidental or otherwise—that have privileged the emotional strength of color and form over the visual appearance of the world, it is normal, and so to speak natural, that the collections dedicated to contemporary and modern art include diverse manifestations of primitive practices, as the Juan Carlos Maldonado Art Collection (JCMAC) does in the case of the ye’kwana.

By doing so, the different tensions that go through the modern are reactivated, making it impossible to address them in a single exhibition, in a unique book, and thus opening the fruitful field of research that has marked the development of other collections. Hence, the intention of this curatorship is not to write a history, even partial, on the relations
between the modern and its “primitive” sources, but, to the contrary, to take these objects (which are mostly strictly contemporary) and compare them one by one in terms of their techniques and materials, their processes, and their semantic functioning, and see what this encounter can tell us about them and us.

With this objective in mind, and considering the limits imposed on us by the moderate size of the JCMAC and the spaces we are working with, we sought to define three significant dialogues in order to compare the work of some occidental artists, mostly abstract-geometric, to the symbolic and aesthetic creations of the ye’kwana indigenous people in southern Venezuela. They are not, however, absolute stagnant categories, it is clear that the economy of means is common to all, and that the presence of operational models pre-existent in the realization of the works in the dialogue entitled Generative Forms, is detectable in pieces that were not included there. But it is also perfectly clear that when attempting to confront the performance of the ye’kwana signs with that of their European or American counterparts, it is more efficient to try it before a Torres-García than before a Josef Albers, as it is more forceful to study the coincidence between both with respect to the restriction of the means employed and their effects, confronting the indigenous baskets to the radical formal economy of a Max Bill.

Bearing in mind these and other methodological concerns, it is therefore plausible to attempt the comparative study of such dissimilar aesthetic realms with the hope of finding new ideas, or some faint guiding threads that may illuminate our approach to the beautiful collision of meanings that is produced when one compares works from civilizations that appear to be in near-total opposition.

**Technical functionality and symbolic value**

The first thing that is imposed on us when we want to compare the production of the ye’kwana communities with art, as it is conceived among cultures of Greco-Roman heritage, is that what we admire above all, is the inventive power in every artist, this being their greater or lesser capacity to create an order of meaning of their own, recognizing that in the case of the tribes of the Venezuelan Amazon, we are facing a completely different situation. Among the ye’kwana, at least in their traditional production, an object is appreciated based on two fundamental characteristics. The first is the efficiency and confidence with which a *rallo* ², *sebucán* ³, *manare* ⁴, or a *waja* ⁵ respond to the task they must fulfill: grating the yucca to turn it into a paste; squeeze the cassava paste to extract the poison it contains; sift the yucca mass already dry before cooking; and plating the final dish for a meal. And the second, is its ability to materialize images that serve as support when it comes to transmitting the mythological-religious stories that make up the *Watunna* ⁶ and structure of the ye’kwana’s metaphysical universe: in a few words, its symbolic value.
Within this framework of demands, the innovative capacity of the ye’kwana artist is reduced to its most elementary dimension—the formal variables that he is able to contribute—since he is not expected to invent new expressive forms, but to produce the tools that him and his family need, whose forms and uses are known by all, and which gives visible shape to the ideological architecture that precedes him and his community. The ye’kwana artist is therefore not a creator of forms, but an individual—one among others—capable of keeping alive the presence and action of the supra human character that has ruled their universe from the beginning. To step away from such task would be to abandon their role, to be unfaithful to the order that makes them a human being. While if there is something that defines our societies, it is undoubtedly its radical orientation towards the possible, a sense of achievement that is built day by day in the work of each artist, each thinker, each engineer or scientist, and that is not beforehand divinely granted, because it is of a strictly human invention.

Despite these marked differences, or perhaps thanks to them, there are among the ye’kwanas, characters that are common to many primitive groups, and that have nourished and continue to feed an aesthetic thought among us, and this specifically, is in reference to the two fundamental values that we have just described: its functionality and its symbolic value, as well as the economy of means and the frankness with which they employee resources, which will be covered in the following chapters.

This technical functionality of objects that fulfill both, their symbolic and artistic value, have the characteristics and uses of what we call art among occidental cultures, and can in fact be compared with numerous modern and contemporary productions. The social threading in which they arise is of are evidently much simpler, and less complex in their relationships. The tasks in which they are employed, less varied and specialized (there is no border separating the utilitarian efficiency of a basket during a meal, for example, from its simultaneous use as an instrument of social cohesion for the oral transmission of cultural, religious, or mythological values); and even then, their functions are similar and in every way equivalent, albeit in civilizations of greater complexity those functions are carried out in separate places and occasions, by people who act at the heart of institutions embedded in their very specific vocational or professional practices.

The fact is that the ye’kwana objects in general (wajas, banks, ritual weapons, guayucos) and in particular those that include schematic representations (frogs, monkeys, whirlpools, stars, squares) are repeated from one to another in different form, and are much more than simple ornate utensils. They are the strict equivalent of the images, the stories, the allegories and theories that the arts, science and philosophy elaborate for us: they are that necessary architecture of signs that we invent on a daily basis—which we nightly secret—and with which we wrap things up with a veil of meaning that is as vital to us as the air we breathe. They provide us with an explanation of the origins of the universe and of life on earth, a destiny for us after death, a set of ideas about the structure of the world.
Beyond that, however, there is a multitude of examples of this general and structural parallel in which we could compare both productions, and it is worth noting some points of contact, as well as some irreducible differences between them. On the side of the technical functionality and the use value that we recognize in this basketry, it is evident and well known the number of artists and designers of the West who have sought support in crafts and popular and primitive arts, precisely because they recognize in them a series of qualities that mass and mechanized manufacturing tends to displace, if not to fully dismiss, in the name of profitability. This is what happened at the end of the 19th century, when the enthusiasm for the machine and its impressive power made little mention of the effects it could have on people and the environment, a situation that would arouse the wrath of the Englishman William Morris.

Industrial production, with its massive scale and emphasis on standardization, led to the alienation of workers and was, from the perspective of Morris’s utopian socialism, one of the greatest evils of occidental civilization, responsible for the dehumanization that threatened the stability of the civilized world. And in his eyes, there was no other remedy but to follow the “golden rule that will fit everything, this is it: Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.” And that “nothing should be made by man’s labor which is not worth making”; that is, useful for others and pleasant for its author. Morris found these characteristics in popular and artisanal practices, the very same that we recognize today among the ye’kwana, although they are gradually disappearing, absorbed and diluted by a sad and inevitable acculturation.

Closer to our times, with the German Bauhaus in the 1920s and 1930s, we can observe the opposite tendency, as the school sought to exploit the possibilities of connecting industry and art to satisfy the needs of ever-growing populations without giving up the aesthetic value of tools. And here an interesting peculiarity manifests itself: Production methods and strategies as different as industrial design and the craft practices of Amazonian tribes can nonetheless agree on the transcendence accorded to the functionality of their products and their clear aesthetic dimension, if not symbolic, in the strict sense of the word.

But that intrinsic duality of the modern—its double aspiration to the invention of absolutely new realities, nonetheless mooring its sensitive experience to the “primitive vitality” of our species—offered and offers us multiple meeting points, particularly where geometric or geometrical abstraction (less so concrete abstraction), found native traditions capable of nurturing their production. This is the case of artists who, from the north to the south of the Americas, sought to satisfy that modern thirst for authenticity in the models offered by pre-Columbian cultures. The current configuration of the JCMAC exhibit offers us several opportunities to address the points of contact discovered when ye’kwana artifacts are shown alongside modern art, in terms of their symbolic dimension. This can be seen from different levels and perspectives in the work of the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García, the Brazilian Mira Schendel, and the Mexican Mathias Goeritz, each one parting from different perspectives and levels. Before them, Carlos Cruz-Diez serves as an articulating
example between the less metaphorical tendencies of abstraction (concrete and kinetic), and those that continue to function as references whose components are of transcendental certainty.

Let us hastily say that we do not intend to affirm an ideological closeness between them, nor that the coincidence in certain intuitions about the nature of the universe must necessarily be interpreted as the trace of a direct influence (although the prolonged contact between indigenous people in the Americas and the Spanish allow us to assume so in certain situations) and much less that the value of ye’kwana artistic production can only be measured by those points of convergence that bring them closer to us, without considering what makes them unassimilable. We would only like to highlight the fact that, being all human beings, thinking animals, and otherwise tributaries of what Torres-García called a primitive background common to all humanity, it is not surprising that our metaphysical needs often converge in the ways of expressing them, even if the ideological environment that feeds them is completely different. Neither is it a coincidence when the symbolic tools we develop respond to similar or adjacent structures, if not in their content, then in their objectives and ways of operating.

The case of a Torres-García of the 1930s [Fig.1] provides us with the greatest evidence, because its semantic functioning is parallel to that of the ye’kwanas, in the sense that in both cases, we immediately perceive the presence of figures that evoke known beings and things without discussion [Fig.2]. These signs, represented through simple linear drawings, are found framed within a structure of geometric boxes (inspired by Mondrian and Theo Van Doesburg) and distributed across the canvas according to a dynamic equilibrium that is characteristic of numerous modern artists. For those who know the occidental world (because every sign requires an orb of shared meaning that activates it) each of these figures directs our attention towards a cluster of ideas and / or stories of very different orders. The greater the knowledge of a person, the greater the complexity of meaning that these ideograms can activate, and therefore the connections between them will be greater as well. In any case, the production of linear and closed histories will never be feasible or

fig.1 Joaquín TORRES-GARCÍA (Uruguayan, 1874-1949) Constructif avec Poisson Ocre, 1952

fig.2 Shiríri wája tóratóse (Mono Tití en cesta dividida)
evoked in this context; but rather a series of interconnected and always open-ended stories.

Even though the ye’kwanan signs refer to a radically different sense, it is impossible to deny that they are organized in a similar way and work in equivalent ones as well. They are also made up of linear and schematic ideograms of beings and things immediately recognizable (for most of them in any case), articulated within geometric structures and which, considering the totality of the baskets present in a specific population, it also allows the configuration of different stories, both, interconnected and open. Like in Torres-Garcia’s work, their meanings and connections will be directly proportional to the level of knowledge that an individual possesses. In this sense, not only is their functioning comparable, but also their purpose: to give a visible form to the construct of ideas that orders the cosmos for all of humanity.

There are also more general symbolic strata, such as those observed in the Brazilian Mira Schendel [fig.3] and the Mexican Mathias Goeritz [fig. 4], both of whom admit and even suggest equally interesting meeting points with some ye’kwana objects. Theirs are works in which the reading of signs is much more abstract, less direct and restrictive than in the previous examples. In Schendel’s work, a regular geometric structure composed of three columns with six overlapping rectangles contains a series of letters and numbers, as well as straight lines and circles, all freely distributed, or apparently so. At first glance, we may see in them simple black figures, practically abstract, because even when we know that each element suggests a meaning or a sound (which could then become words if brought together), or a quantity, we cannot join them into words or phrases, nor construct a decipherable sequence. It almost appears as though the artist meticulously chose them to prevent the construction of a word, as if she only wished to awaken the notion of a possibility, of a potentiality: the eventuality of something that could happen if only… but this “if only” is never realized.

There are, incidentally, indications of an implicit order, because the signs in each box are freely distributed in it, in the same way as they do as a whole, as if to imply the presence of a fractal organization like that which contemporary astronomy has trained us to see in the universe. None of the figures cross the borders demarcated by horizontal and vertical lines, and they are never overlapped, nor are they indifferent to the viewer, as they always present themselves to us in a legible position. The work says nothing concrete, and yet, a careful consideration of its arrangement in the available space permits certain readings, always open and variable, of a considerable semantic porosity.
The case of Goeritz is even more abstract, since the pictorial surface does not contain any immediately legible figure. It is simply a sheet of gold metal, where horizontal bands are drawn and repeated in a constant succession of two perforations and one without perforation, followed by two perforations, and so on. These perforations are directed from the interior to the exterior of the artwork, continuously, suggesting a privileged sense for the flow that seems to cross them and that comes from within, from that metaphorical space that painting has been seeding in and for us over millennia.

That these enigmatic pieces, which the author calls Golden Messages, may contain some readable missive, seems improbable. Along with Mira Schendel, however, whoever has some information about Western art, and particularly about its religious manifestations, may immediately associate this metallic plane with the golden backgrounds that characterize a significant part of Medieval European paintings. From there, one may begin to construct certain readings, although these will always be extremely malleable and deeply dependent on what one, as a viewer, projects onto them. If there is something that gives definition to these artworks, it is their silence, the enigma that they awaken in those who face them in search of meaning. And so, although posited in the negative, they evoke a question: Is God not precisely that in innumerable Christian writings? Is he not the being who responds enigmatically with “I am who I am” when Moses asks for his name? Is he not the silent father who directs Christ from the cross, asking him, in his last moments, “why have you abandoned me?”

These levels of abstraction, although rare, are also found among the ye’kwanas, particularly in some baskets, such as the Wajas, present in the JCMAC. Two of them, among the most impressive, are those that the explorer Charles Brewer-Carias identifies with the names of Awídi, amohadóto-yekumédi (Whirlpool with ten swirls), y Fhahádi-fhédi (The face of the armadillo) [Fig. 5 y 6]. In them, as we analyzed in Mira Schendel and especially in Mathias Goeritz (but also in the painters Regina Aprijsaks in Peru and Kenneth Noland in the United States), the signs are less evident and require a greater knowledge of indigenous cosmogony to find a meaning that transcends its simple formal and chromatic order.
Brewer-Carías associates the first of these wajas with whirlpools (those that form on foamy water that are usually deadly and evoke the coral snake, who coils around herself to hide her head), and the second with the scaly head of the armadillo. And yet, what is even more interesting is the constant ambiguity between these signs and the way they are woven together, particularly in the case of the first basket. This constant interpenetration of signs, and their continual transformation from one to another by means of an optical play of figure-background, similar to the optics studied by Gestalt theoreticians, is the sensory manifestation of a fundamental principle of indigenous cosmogony—"the fact that the observable, material manifestation of an object may be an illusion masking yet another more powerful reality." 8

Their gods and spirits, who can be both benign and malevolent, have the ability to acquire distinct forms, because the spiritual and invisible govern material form and the visible in our world.

At this point, while taking the necessary precautions, it is impossible to deny that an affinity exists between this type of weaving and certain aspects of the kineticism seen in the work of Carlos Cruz-Diez. [Fig. 7] In both, one can observe a perceptual ambiguity that denies the solidity of form and the substantiality of the matter, instead imposing on us the constant interpenetration of diverse geometric figures, so that if at first glance we observe with clarity the whirlpools Brewer-Carías identified in the Awidi, amohadóto-yekumédi 9, drawing a large diagonal square, immediately after we will perceive a thick cross, and then a smaller square in its center. Once detected, these figures appear and disappear constantly, like certain works by Cruz-Diez (such as Construcción en cadena, 1957) with which the artist sought to put color into space, activating the pictorial surface in a constant coming and going between the interior and the exterior.

Could we then say that the ye’kwana invented kineticism before the modern kinetics? That Carlos Cruz-Diez was inspired by them when he made his Fisicromías, or that these parallels reveal a shared identity of thought and objects? The formal and functional proximity of these very specific examples is, in any case, undeniable, but their interpretation is less obvious and direct than we may suppose. Kineticism is an aesthetic concept that presupposes a linear development of time, that believes in progress and has faith, in principle, in the technical, scientific,
and industrial capacities of humanity to order our lives. It denies any eventual symbolic or religious dimension in its work. The ye’kwana, on the other hand, along with many other indigenous cultures, believe in the cyclical reality of time, and they do not conceive of form except within the framework of symbolic-religious meaning that structures the cosmos created by their gods. The idea of an autonomous and self-referential object does not have any meaning for them. There is, then, no way of according a kinetic reading (in the strict sense of the word) of the optical ambiguities of their wajas, nor any real need to do so. The similarity between the two—certain and undeniable—is situated on different, more significant planes.

It seems more accurate to say that the proximity between optical-kinetic artists and the ye’kwana, and specifically these two surprising wajas, is the result of a double convergence. First, because they both share a fundamental intuition about the structure of the universe: that the immediately observable material environment is the result of forces that structure it at a deeper level, although for kinetic artists these forces are strictly physical, subatomic, and electromagnetic, while for the religious, animist ye’kwana, they are spirits or supernatural deities.

The second convergence is of physiological order and language; In order to express the intrinsic duality of beings and things, both contemporary kinetic artists and the ye’kwana have detected in the ambiguities of vision (resulting from the physiological configuration of our visual organs) an efficient tool for obtaining instable and ambivalent images. This is the result of intelligent beings working in completely different intellectual environments, almost unknown to one another and in all ways incommensurable different, both attempting to give visible form to their deepest metaphysical intuitions. Beings that observe the world with astonishment and have that rare ability (that which we admire in artists) to share this affective experience through their work.

Generative Models

This second dialogue focuses on a factor common to many artists whose most elemental forms, are also detectable among the ye’kwana. It is about what could be referred as the generative models that precede the realization of an artwork and prescribe from its beginnings its final configuration. For modern and contemporary artists, these are usually processes used with the intention of introducing autonomous, non-voluntary mechanisms into their practice, whose development in time determines the final result. They are, for this reason, self-imposed and more or less systemic restrictions of authorial freedom.
This is the case of *Untitled N° 11*, by Sol LeWitt [Fig. 8], obtained by the overlapping of a series of horizontal undulating lines with two variables: the type of undulation and the color of the lines. In François Morellet’s *10 trames 0, 8, 16, 32, 64…* [Fig. 9], where the artist applies ten white oil weft, each one superimposed on a black background with a double inclination each time. Jesús Soto’s Spiral, created through the simple overlap of two spiral elements, one of which is the negative of the other (a white spiral on transparent plexiglass is superimposed over the first spiral, which is black on a white background), at just a few centimeters’ distance. Lastly, in *Crucigrama con moscas N° 3*, Sigfredo Chacón takes advantage of the crossword puzzles routinely published in newspapers, introducing them into his painting as a citation, both cultural and formal, over which he adds another layer of meaning through the addition of plastic flies [Fig.10].

These works are connected through their use of generative models that precede their creation, emerging from distinct professional fields and that, in their application, generate certain perceptual and semantic effects that are not always controlled or foreseen by their authors.

To compare these processes, all clear tributes to ways of thinking derived from modern technology and science, with the habitual ways of proceeding in human communities that leads us to describe as "primitive", may seem reckless, if not counterproductive. And yet, in this attempt to compare the incommensurable, aesthetic, social, and political, concerns merge that are not at all trivial. If commercial, economic, and communicative globalization has imposed something on us, it is not precisely equivalency in terms of the factors that come into contact, their historic synchrony, and the isomorphism of cultural and political space in which they act, but their incommensurability and with it, the need to consider the eventual interactions between all actors involved. Let us see in this essay a partial and limited example of how distant universes could be articulated in spite of being so far apart, considering them within a framework of convergences and divergences capable of illuminating both factors at once, or at least some of their more significant aspects, within connected historical processes, but not reducible to each other. It is, let us say, an attempt to confront objects that we could call contemporary-asynchronous, in the sense that even if they are all contemporary (because they are nearly all produced in the last fifty years), their historiographic readings respond to disparate chronologies and processes.

The truth is that indigenous artists also act according to formal and technical patterns that limit their authorial freedom and precede the creation of their work (we are particularly concerned with wajas and petacas 10.-pouches- here) from the interweaving of bands that intersect at angles close to ninety degrees and, additionally, that of not
superimposing the weft on more than three to five elements of the warp. All of the forms that the ye’kwana can produce are the result of this weaving technique. Consequently, their work shares an identifiable tessellating pattern. And of course, the meaning and objectives of these patterns are not the same for everyone, to the extent that divergences are multiple, if not greater, than convergences. It is convenient then to review their spaces of convergence and divergence, in order to better appreciate what their frictions may reveal.

The first divergence that we can observe is that although ye’kwana artists work based on pre-established generative models, in their case we observe an externally imposed limitation, both due to the level of their technical development and for cultural and ritual requirements, as they are not asked to invent new expressive forms, but rather to keep the ancestral, supernatural traditions alive, embodied in their work. It is also a general restriction for all members of the ye’kwana community, since they have no other options in terms of technique or language.

Among modern and contemporary artists, or at least those that resort to these strategies (because is clearly evident that the wide range of options available to them is immeasurably greater), these restrictions have the peculiarity of being, first, voluntary, and then, is not among their intentions to precisely preserve the cultural and metaphysical values of the West but to the contrary, to transcend them with the purpose of accessing new horizons of meaning and, in short, to expand the horizon of what is possible.

Limiting their authorial freedom and restricting themselves to the imperatives of select processes, occidental artists seek, in a certain sense, to deactivate, if not to annihilate, the notion of personal taste, along with the learned rules of the academy (composition and balance of forms, chromatic harmony, etc.) in order to access a different aesthetic, one that is “indifferent and casual,” as Sigfredo Chacón defines it, and related to the characteristic processes of science and technology that govern, for better or worse, our intellectual and material universe. Thus, François Morellet decides to overlap ten woven wefts, rotating each according to an angle that increases exponentially, starting first with zero degrees, then eight, then sixteen, then thirty-two, and so on until ten wefts are laid down, generating a multitude of radial forms that the eye (which is a prospector organ in constant movement) is incapable of reading simultaneously. It is our inability to register the ensemble of these points as a singular whole that provokes the optical sensation of rain falling perpendicularly, and in a syncopated manner, across the pictorial surface. This effect is, strictly speaking, a result, a phenomenon that we
could qualify as “emergent,” as it is the final result of decisions made at the start whose consequences were not necessarily foreseen by the artist. Once the rules were set and modalities and phases of execution laid out, an experience of this sort must evolve with the autonomy of a mechanism producing plastic and visual experiences. There is nothing comparable to this strategy among the Ye’kwana, for although they work based on generative models imposed by technical and aesthetic traditions that are as restrictive as those of Sol LeWitt, they do not consider the artwork’s operational autonomy.

There is also another point of comparison that is worth exploring: the way the operational models considered in this essay are developed over time. Among the most radically programmatic modern and contemporary artists, such as Sol LeWitt, François Morellet or Carlos Cruz-Diez, the works are projected entirely from the start, with the rules of production established in writing in formal instruction manuals, so they can be executed by others in one or several stages. If only one stage of elaboration is involved, the operation is usually carried out according to plan, without any change. But it can also occur in two or more sessions, in each of which the author has the faculty or not to take new measures, including the induction of accidents, a kind of “programmed hazards” that come to complicate even more this quasi-mechanical aesthetic. The artistic action thus becomes an autonomous mechanism delivered to the hazards of the world, reproducing in miniature the forces that we assume act in the universe, blind subject less forces, caused and regulated in their entirety by the laws of physics and chemistry.

Among the ye’kwanas, of course, they do not believe in a self-regulated universe, but in one governed by supernatural forces —gods or spirits endowed with free will— the technical procedures that we have here referred to as generative models are not thought of as autonomous, but instead as the voluntary constructions of an individual who seeks to give visible form to diverse stories that describe the actions of their gods. Nevertheless, the rigor and restrictiveness of their techniques and way of working, in perfect accordance with the imaginary rooted in a reality governed by superior deities, does not fully exclude the acceptance and integration of accidents, even if these baskets are negatively marked by these unexpected occurrences.

This is exactly what happens in the case of the *Fhahádi-fhédi* (*The face of the armadillo*), waja, which Brewer-Carias claims is the product of an error. Effectively, according to the explorer’s affirmation, the artist who was weaving the waja had intended to continue his weaving according to what had already been completed in the lower and central area (where the stairs juxtaposed on both sides of the central axis produce a regular, iridescent surface), when he suddenly realized that he had run out of the natural-colored fiber that had to be interwoven with the black fiber in a perfectly standardized manner. Without pausing, he decided to increase the number of black rows until, in the end, he concluded his work with two black rows interwoven with the natural warp, which at
that point looked like small vertical strips. This error did not make the final product less interesting or less perfect in terms of the interpenetration of forms and signs that we can observe on the most abstract baskets. Over the rhombus that is drawn inside the circle defined by the exterior borders, various transparent, barely suggestive squares were later superimposed that appeared to dissolve from top to bottom, exactly like in typical works of geometric abstraction, where bodies and materiality cede their place to the dynamic and energetic.

Purity and the economy of means

If there is something that defines modern art at its initial stage in the second half of the nineteenth century, when weariness dominates art’s most stereotypical forms, it is the urgency—which in Baudelaire reaches the level of nausea—to revitalize the artistic experience and to revitalize means, in a strict sense, to reconnect oneself with the vital forms; that is, with those that are closest to our biological essence. Hence modern art’s deep attraction to the primitive, and to all those practices that are close to the foundations of language, when the rusticity of the media rhymed with its purity and its emotional potential. This is a conviction that comes from far (and perhaps has always accompanied us as a nostalgia for the origins), but at the end of the nineteenth century took on a sudden relevance, and even an urgency, absolutely unprecedented.

It is not by chance that modernism emerges simultaneous to industrial development in Europe and North America, when a young and therefore arrogant industry, was little aware of its effects on the world. Because at this point, the need to renew contact with the most authentic human experience is activated, in face of the fear (and the most blessed admiration for) that inspired the outcome of an artificial, mechanized, and drastically new existence, in which nothing would remain of our common origin with animals, nor of that paradisiacal flavor that permeates our imaginary since the times of Ovid. And it is without a doubt for that reason that the invention, the new, the other possible, always accompanies modern thinking together with the will to reconnect with the archaic, and is perhaps for the same reasons that its staging in museography always requires an impeccable space: an ethnographic object never seduces us so much, that when we observe it outside its usual environment, in the pristine space of our museums.

The fact is that, at the base of our aesthetic thinking as we conceived it from French post-impressionism, the idea that it is fundamental to revitalize the artist’s resources remains and therefore, it is indispensable to “return” to the purity of means:

When the means of expression have become so refined, so attenuated that their power of expression wears thin, it is necessary to return to the essential principles that made human language. These are the principles that “reemerge”, that restore life, that give us life. 12

And this purity and frankness of color applied directly on a canvas or a board, without gradients, transparencies, or blending; the material resources apparent, with no effort
to hide their vegetal, mineral, or animal essence; the processes of applying gesso or mounting are also visible, without refinement; the entire set of operations, in brief, is rather rustic and spontaneous, something that artists from our cities recognize in their primitive compatriots, who fill their work with a potency that moves us and seduces us to the core, so much so that it is often difficult—if not impossible—to express the experience in coherent, simple phrases. What the work provokes in us comes from the most remote areas of our psyche.

The JCMAC has obvious examples of that voluntarily coarse use of materials in works such as Gonzalo Fonseca’s *Form in Relief* (1948) [Fig. 12]. On a background of cracked wood, which thick nails consolidate awkwardly, we observe a grossly white figure, which we tend to interpret as a highly schematic representation of two characters. Clearly, the wood used as canvas was reclaimed from a previous use, as the paint peels back in certain areas, revealing other layers of a similar grey tone. The supposed figures in the center were built in relief with uneven strips of wood, cut with a hand saw and nailed to the wooden frame with an absolute disdain for detail. The work speaks of old materials and vernacular, or marginal construction systems, or even of the naiveté that we recognize in the work of non-industrialized people, or those with a limited command of their tools. And yet, the profound beauty that emerges in this piece of art is undeniable, from its clumsy finish to its poorly-painted surfaces and near-total irregularity. It is an aesthetic of the simple, of the crude and unfinished that interpolates us with a rare vigor and that, by itself, constitutes a perfect model of that vitality that the moderns sought with renewed hunger among the tribal cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas.

Now, of course, for those who look carefully and respectfully at the JCMAC basketry here exposed, it is not precisely this rough aesthetic that catches us immediately, but rather the intriguing perfection that characterizes the ye’kwana wajas and petacas, far superior to those found among other Amazonian tribes. To do so, to find that rugged, coarse aesthetic, one should refer to less sacred utensils: their benches, their oars, the cargo baskets and the vases used to serve their daily meals in their kitchen (also present in the JCMAC), where that sense of an object made with the rough vitality we associate with primitive art is palpable, a to which artists such as Fonseca attempt to reach through a calculated renunciation—usually the product of an arduous conquest of the simple.

However, this economy of means in which primitive and modern coincide, like some contemporaries (the fact of working with a very limited number of forms and technical resources), is not the result of an identical attitude, nor of the same expressive shortcomings. For centuries, the artist of Western cultures has had a considerable range of techniques, sometimes highly sophisticated in their processes, and an unlimited formal and chromatic
repertoire, so that when he feels the imperative need to return to the most elementary principles, those closest to the supposed assumptions of language, it is by means of a voluntary effort that they succeed, or, as Matisse would say, thanks to a true renunciation.

The same cannot be said for the Ye'kwana, who always work at the highest level of their potential, without access to a wider range of means than those they habitually employ. Their spontaneity and frankness in the use of color, form, and texture are admirable to us, but they do not have the same significance among the Ye’kwana. Some, the tribal artists, primitive or other terms you could use to describe them, work in conditions of scarcity, because there is little available to them, and with these limitations they achieve a potency that moves us. Some modern and contemporary artists seek to enhance the tools at their disposal, looking, among other channels, to primitive work in order to approach its spontaneity. They renounce the richness and complexity of a tradition they see as exhausted and instead restrict themselves to a limited use of resources and the most basic techniques. A large part of the work produced by Picasso in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as Georges Baselitz’s work today, are examples of this sobriety in terms of the means pursued and conquered by artists.

Another path is that which has been taken by abstract-geometric artists, in whom this simplicity is coupled with geometry and a strict control of resources. For those who closely follow the creative processes of Piet Mondrian, what Matisse meant in affirming that simplicity was the result of a renunciation is clear. The Force Mondrian was capable of generating in figurative painting is clear; the richness of his blending, the finesse of his ranges, the profusion of resources he had at hand, which makes the prolonged and methodic effort he made to break away from that tradition surprising, as he came to concentrate on more elementary forms and colors, until he arrived at a painting method that restricted his palette to the three primary colors, black, and white, his forms to squares and rectangles, and his lines to vertical and horizontal. Yet this strict economy, this sort of painterly asceticism, opened the door towards another wealth, a wealth of the essential, of the strictly necessary (‘less is more’ Mies van der Rohe said), and in this, it is clear that abstract-geometric artists are again in agreement with primitive artists, although they arrive at the same conclusion from the opposite pole: few from an abundance that drowns expressive freedom, the other from such a radical scarcity that he is forced to concentrate his efforts on the bare minimum.

Examples of this restriction among occidental abstract-geometric artists abound at the JCMAC, and their readings also depend on diverse circumstances. One is that of the
artists who conceive their work as a kind of aesthetic, phenomenological experience that is offered to the spectator. This is the case of Josef Albers [Fig. 13] and Carlos Cruz-Diez, who create art objects to confront us with the unexpected optical activity of color, and so they are required to reduce to a minimum the forms in which they display their color ranges if they want to make the work most effective. Surrounded by overly-active interactions between forms, the chromatic phenomena studied by each of these two artists is diluted and becomes imperceptible for the hurried viewers of our cities. Restricting himself to squares, with the rigor of Albers, and to the thinnest possible line, as Cruz-Diez does, it is therefore a requirement of language to demonstrate this secret behavior of color that ends up destroying concepts as deep-rooted as that of substance, that of the identity of beings, of you and of the self.

The moderation in use of mediums is here synonymous with efficiency: minimal formal elements are employed to leverage chromatic tensions, constructing only the minimal structure needed to provoke a greater psychological effect in viewers. But all this is a consequence—and it is important to repeat it—of a voluntary restriction, of a renunciation, because for the western artists the considerable repertoire of language and technical possibilities inherited from their elders, is still present, as an always active and activatable horizon.

Other abstract-geometric artists are governed by a similar will to minimize the elements they use, although without reaching the strict mathematical and geometric organization of their pieces, typical of concrete abstraction. In them, color and shape, even restricted, leave a considerable space for intuition, and do not hesitate to satisfy that modern need for alterity by introducing into their works elements that we immediately recognize as foreign, because they are not characteristic of European-type abstraction. It happens in very diverse cases, in artists from South America and North America, and the JCMAC has unequivocal examples in pieces by Regina Aprijas, Carmen Herrera [Fig. 14], Kenneth Noland [Fig. 15], or Leon Polk Smith [Fig. 16], where chromatic ranges are evidently of Amerindian origin.
Among the Ye’kwanas the situation is completely different, because they do not have an immense technical repertoire and components at their disposal, but a very restricted one: the few vegetal, animal and mineral elements that the jungle, and their own cultural traditions provide. And even so, it is admirable to see the very fine finishes that they are capable of producing in their wajás and petacas (flasks, vases) particularly when we think of the rustic nature of their everyday environment. When a Ye’kwana decides to make a new basket to replace another at the end of its natural lifespan, or due to ritual or commercial imperatives, the first thing he must do is gather the required material firsthand (since there is no industry or commercial framework to provide them), and so he must organize an expedition, which can take an entire day and require him to traverse miles of primary forest, gathering a reed here, a several-meter long vine there, returning at last with just enough to weave four or five baskets. Later, in a slow and laborious process involving the artist and his relatives, they begin to transform the raw materials (cutting, cleaning, drying, and dyeing them) until they have the proper size, width, texture, and tones.

Only after a prolonged labor can the artist begin to create the imagined object, which may take him several days of work and reflection to complete, during which he must also carry out his everyday responsibilities, like hunting and fishing among many, to ensure the sustenance of his family. The economy of means, in such severe circumstances, is not therefore an aesthetic decision, or not only, but rather a nearly biological demand for subsistence that he can only temporarily abandon to pursue a higher order metaphysical calling. It is then, and only then, that art acquires all its mysterious value, its pertinence, something that the artist of our complex urban dwellings -and well despite our abundance of resources- is forced to seek, to conquer, among the multitude of mirages that absorb him.
1 Perhaps it is worth clarifying that when we use the term occidental here, we are not referring to geographical boundaries (the ye’kwana are also occidental from this point of view), but rather to a set of values that characterize the cultures derived from Greco-Roman antiquity.

2 An instrument made of wood, stone, and/or tin, used to grate the yuca before it is pressed in the sebucán.

3 An extendible tubular, woven instrument used to press the grated yuca paste to extract poisonous liquid from it.

4 A flat basket woven to function as a strainer, to sieve and dry the grated yuca before cooking it.

5 A flat, decorative basket used to serve food.

6 Watunna is the Ye’Kwana term with which the corpus of mythical-religious stories that make up what we might call the metaphysical architecture of its culture is qualified.


10 Small container in the shape of a parallelepiped that is used to store a variety of items, such as healing herbs, tobacco or onoto.

11 The weft here would be the series of black bands that draw the figures of a basket, woven into the warp of “white” bands, or, better still, of the bands that conserve the natural color of the cane used.


13 When we refer to the superiority of the Ye’wana manufacture with respect to other tribes of the Amazon, we do it only by comparing its complexity and its finishes, but not because it seems to us to determine an expressive or artistic supremacy, which we are far from thinking.

14 It is important to note that modern and contemporary artists have sought to escape the weight of their heritage in various ways. Primitivism is one of them, as is the use of non-voluntary methods: chance, processes predetermined by strict rules, generally derived from technology or science.
1. Yadákadu (*El Mono Capuchino*).
Dimensions: 24.4 in. diameter
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

2. Yadákadu yohimádi (*Mono Capuchino caminando)*
Dimensions: 21 in. diameter
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

3. Warishíri menúdu (*Dibujo de la Marimonda*)
Dimensions: 22 in. diameter
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

4. Shiríri wája töratóse (*Mono Tití en cesta dividida*)
Dimensions 24.4 in. diameter
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
5. Shiríri ahísha-háde (*El Mono Tití y Garzas*)

- **Dimensions:** 21 in. diameter (54 cm.)
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)
- **Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduráa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year:** 1980
- **Location:** Kakurí, Ventuari river.

6. Kúshi-Yonkúru-kómo (*Cuchi-cuchi trepando*)

- **Dimensions:** 27 in. diameter (69 cm.)
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)
- **Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduráa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

7. Kúshi-Yonkúru-kómo (*Cuchi-cuchis trepando*)

- **Dimensions:** 16.5 in. diameter (42 cm.)
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)
- **Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduráa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

8. Kúshi yedenáha (*Cuchi-cuchi detenido*)

- **Dimensions:** 21.5 in. diameter (55 cm)
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto).
- **Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduráa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
9. Ák-Wísha-ähötakato (*Dos Monos Viudita re ejados*)
   Dimensions: 29.5 in. diameter (75 cm.)
   Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
   Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (o Edudúwa)
   Year: 1961
   Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

10. Yadákadu yohimádi (*El Mono Capuchino caminando*) y Wanádi hiñámo-hídi yahamúdö (*La que fue esposa de Dios saltando*)
    Dimensions: 17 in. diameter (43 cm.)
    Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
    Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (o Edudúwa)
    Year: 1963
    Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

11. Yadákadu yedenájä (*El Mono Capuchino detenido*) y Wanádi hiñámo-hídi iñekídi (*La que fue esposa de Dios descansando*)
    Dimensions: 14.5 in. diameter (37 cm.)
    Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
    Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (o Edudúwa)
    Year: 1963
    Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

12. Wanádi hiñámo-hídi yahamúdö (*La que fue esposa de Dios saltando*)
    Dimensions: 10.2 in. diameter (26 cm.)
    Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
    Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (o Edudúwa)
    Year: 1961
    Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
13. Khíto yahamúdö *(La rana Khítö saltando)*
Dimensions: 19.3 in. diameter (49 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáta)*.
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

14. Khíto yahamúdö *(La rana Khítö saltando)*
Dimensions: 18.5 in diameter (47 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáta)*.
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

15. Khíto yahamúdö ohokómo *(Rana Khítö saltando)*
Dimensions: 18 in. diameter (46 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáta)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

16. Khíto yahamúdö *(Seis Ranas Khítö saltando)*
Dimensions: 26.4 in. diameter (67 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáta)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
17. Khíto yahamūdö *(La rana Khíto saltando)*
Dimensions: 9.5 in. diameter (24 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáto)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

18. Khíto yahamūdö ohokómo *(Khíto roja saltando)*
Dimensions: 18 in. diameter (46 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáto)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1963
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

19. Khíto yahamūdö *(La rana Khíto saltando, seis)*
Dimensions: 9 in. diameter (23 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáto)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1963
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

20. Kékue *(La Rana rescatada por Wanaditonoro)*
Dimensions: 9 in. diameter (23 cm.)
Basket: *(Wája tomennáto)*
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

**Dimensions:** 16 in. diameter (41 cm.)

**Basket:** (Waja tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1961

**Location:** Jiuwihtíña, Erebato river.

22. Wayámu-kádi anéha *(Escama del Morrocoy otra)*

**Dimensions:** 9 in. diameter (23 cm.)

**Basket:** (Waja tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1961

**Location:** Jiuwihtíña, Erebato river.

23. Wayámu-kádi *(La escama del Morrocoy)*

**Dimensions:** 14.5 in. diameter (37 cm.)

**Basket:** (Waja tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1963

**Location:** Jiuwihtíña, Erebato river.

24. Odoma *(Lapa)*

**Dimensions:** 17.3 in. diameter (44 cm.)

**Basket:** (Waja tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1974

**Location:** Jiuwihtíña, Erebato river.
25. Déde húha (Cabeza de Murciélago)
Dimensions: 19.2 in. diameter (49 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

26. Déde (Cabezas y cuerpos de Murciélago)
Dimensions: 31.5 in. diameter (80 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

27. Wesekihána-menúdu (Juego de dibujos)
Dimensions: 27 in. diameter (69 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

28. Wanádi tonóro mátai (La Espalda del Pájaro Dios)
Dimensions: 15.7 in. diameter (40 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
29. **Wanádi tonóro mótai (La espalda del Pájaro Dios)**

- **Dimensions**: 22.4 in. diameter (57 cm.)
- **Basket**: (Wája tomennátá)
- **Material**: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year**: 1961
- **Location**: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

30. **Mawádi-esádi (Mawádi vista por dentro)**

- **Dimensions**: 18 in. diameter (46 cm.)
- **Basket**: (Wája tomennátá) con barniz y hollín.
- **Material**: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year**: 1974
- **Location**: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

31. **Mawádi esádi (Mawádi vista por dentro)**

- **Dimensions**: 23 in. diameter (58 cm.)
- **Basket**: (Wája tomennátá)
- **Material**: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year**: 1974
- **Location**: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

32. **Mawádi esádi (Mawádi vista por dentro)**

- **Dimensions**: 21.6 in. diameter (55 cm.)
- **Basket**: (Wája tomennátá).
- **Material**: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year**: 1974
- **Location**: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
33. Mawádi esádi *(Mawádi vista por dentro)*

Dimensions: 22.8 in. diameter (58 cm.)

Basket: (Wája tomennáto)

Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

Year: 1974

Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

34. Mádo fédi *(La cara del Jaguar)*

Dimensions: 18 in. diameter (46 cm.)

Basket: (Wája tomennáto)

Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

Year: 1963

Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

35. Mádo fádi ohokómo *(Cara del Jaguar trazo grueso)*

Dimensions: 19.7 in. diameter (50 cm.)

Basket: (Wája tomennáto)

Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

Year: 1974

Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

36. Túna-fheróni *(Espuma del Agua)*

Dimensions: 31 in. diameter (79 cm.)

Basket: (Wája tomennáto)

Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

Year: 1963

Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
37. Kángwa-menúdu, Boróto-sakídi, Túna-fheróni

Dimensions: 13.3 in. diameter (34 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

38. Túna-fheróni (Espuma del agua)

Dimensions: 9.8 in diameter (25 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1961
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

39. Boróto-sakídi ohokómo (Cara de Marimonda gruesa)

Dimensions: 16 in. diameter (41 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

40. Mádo-táhā (La Huella del Jaguar)

Dimensions: 20.5 in. diameter (52 cm.)
Basket: (Wája tomennáto)
Material: Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
Year: 1974
Location: Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
41. **Awídi tataincháto (Remolino de 5 vueltas y apoyo)**

**Dimensions:** 21.6 in. diameter (55 cm.)

**Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1961

**Location:** Jiuwehtiña, Erebato river.

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42. **Awídi wohunakádi (Remolino Atravesado)**

**Dimensions:** 14.5 in. diameter (37 cm.)

**Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1974

**Location:** Jiuwehtiña, Erebato river.

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43. **Awídi, amohadóto-yekumédi (Remolino de 10 vueltas)**

**Dimensions:** 22.8 in. diameter (58 cm.)

**Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 2010

**Location:** Kakurí, Ventuari river.

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44. **Kásu-nehodídi (La Idea de Kásu)**

**Dimensions:** 19.7 in. diameter (50 cm.)

**Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)

**Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)

**Year:** 1961

**Location:** Jiuwehtiña, Erebato river.
45. **So’to menúdu (Dibujo del Hombre)**

- **Dimensions:** 24.4 in. diameter (62 cm.)
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)
- **Material:** Strips of a Bamboo Eduróa long knot (or Edudúwa)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

46. **Fhahádi-fhédi (La Cara del Cachicamo)**

- **Dimensions:** 22.8 in. diameter (58 cm.) diámetro
- **Basket:** (Wája tomennáto)
- **Material:** Strips of a Marantacea (Kána) (Ischnosiphon arouma)
- **Year:** 1963
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

47. **Wája yomótóho, o Tingkuiáto (Wája para el Sebucán)**

- **Dimensions:** 28.7 in. diameter (73 cm.)
- **Basket:** Tight knit to hold the Sebucán
- **Material:** Strips of a Marantacea (Kána) (Ischnosiphon arouma)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.

48. **Wája yomótóho o Tingkuiáto (Wája para el Sebucán)**

- **Dimensions:** 31 in. diameter (79 cm.)
- **Basket:** Tight knit to hold the Sebucán
- **Material:** Strips of a Marantacea (Kána) (Ischnosiphon arouma)
- **Year:** 1961
- **Location:** Jiuwihtiña, Erebato river.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality/Years</th>
<th>Work Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Josef ALBERS</strong></td>
<td>American/German, 1888-1976</td>
<td>Homage to the Square: Amber Setting</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>48 x 48 in.</td>
<td>Oil on masonite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gonzalo FONSECA</strong></td>
<td>Uruguayan, 1922-1997</td>
<td>Form in Relief</td>
<td>c. 1948</td>
<td>20 3/4 x 15 1/4 in.</td>
<td>Painted wood construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathias GOERITZ</strong></td>
<td>Polish/Mexican 1915-1990</td>
<td>Mensaje dorado</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>31 1/2 x 31 1/2 in.</td>
<td>Thin perforated gold metal on wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carmen HERRERA</strong></td>
<td>Cuban, b. 1915</td>
<td>Sin Titulo</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>39 3/4 x 39 3/4 in.</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas laid on board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sol LEWITT</strong></td>
<td>American, 1928-2007</td>
<td>Untitled Nº 11</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>24 x 48 in.</td>
<td>Print on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>François MORELLET</strong></td>
<td>French, 1926-2016</td>
<td>10 Trames 0,8,16,32,64...</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.</td>
<td>Colored paper strips on oil painted wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kenneth NOLAND</strong></td>
<td>American, 1924-2010</td>
<td>Rainbow’s Blanket</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>56 1/2 x 75 1/2 in.</td>
<td>Wool Tapestry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leon POLK SMITH</strong></td>
<td>American, 1906-1996</td>
<td>Correspondence Black Yellow</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>76 1/4 x 51 in.</td>
<td>Acrylic on Canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mira SCHENDEL</strong></td>
<td>Brazilian, 1919-1988</td>
<td>Letras</td>
<td>1960’s</td>
<td>12 5/8 x 12 5/8 in.</td>
<td>Transfer type on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesús Rafel SOTO</strong></td>
<td>Venezuelan, 1923-2005</td>
<td>Spirale Nº 13</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>20 x 20 x 10.43 in.</td>
<td>Printed plexi and acrylic on wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
biographies

Josef ALBERS
(German/American, 1888-1976)
Alber’s interest in geometric abstraction began as a student at the Bauhaus in the early 1920s. He later became a professor at the Bauhaus, and would continue to be an educator throughout his life. Albers migrated to the United States in 1933, and developed work that explored volumes, planes, chromatic variations, and the possibilities of color interaction in different disciplines. In his series Homage to the Square, begun in 1949, Albers demonstrated that colors and shades alter their intensities depending on the colors that surround them. His achievements in exploring these significant optical effects with great economy of means positioned him as one of the founders of Op art and a precursor of Minimalism.

Regina APRIJASKIS
(Peruvian, 1919-2013)
Born Regina Alcabes Avdala, Aprijaskis belonged to a family of Jewish-Bulgarian origin that settled in Peru. She received her artistic training in Lima, and worked with indigenous themes in traditional styles, until she encountered abstract art in New York during the 1950s. While attending the Art Student League in the 1960s, she immersed herself in the practice of abstractionism. Upon her return to Lima, Aprijaskis continued to explore geometric abstraction in the pursuit of linear synthesis, and explorations of space and depth. The rigorous and simplified geometry that characterizes Aprijaskis’ work has led critics to credit her for introducing Minimalism to Peruvian art.

Max BILL
(Swiss, 1908-1994)
Initially trained as a silversmith in Zurich, Bill subsequently studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau under Josef Albers, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. An inexhaustible creator, he worked as an architect, sculptor, and painter as well as an industrial and graphic designer. His paintings of the 1950s relied on mathematics and geometry. He was a member of the Parisian artistic group Abstraction-Création, and positioned himself as one of the founders of the Concrete Art movement by expanding on the theories of Theo van Doesburg. His artistic work was characterized by the use of vibrant colors in geometric forms that became increasingly dynamic color-field compositions. Bill was also a dedicated educator, and firmly advocated for the integration of art and architecture.

Sigfredo CHACÓN
(Venezuelan, b. 1950)
He studied at the School of Plastic Arts and Applied Arts Cristóbal Rojas, Caracas and at the Newman Design Institute, Caracas, graduating in graphic design. Traveling to England, postgraduate at the Chelsea School of Art and Design and The London College of Printing, he obtains the Certificate, Advanced Typographic Design, CATD. He was curator and head of the departments of graphic design, photography and publications of the Museum of Fine Arts of Caracas. Professor and teacher coordinator at the Newman Design Institute, Caracas, coordinating professor with the teacher Nedo M. F. of the Graphic Design Workshop of the School of Visual Arts, Cristóbal Rojas, Caracas. Since the end of the 60s he has developed and participated with unconventional art proposals, being a pioneer in the manifestations of Conceptual Art in Venezuela.
Carlos CRUZ-DIEZ  
(Venezuelan, b. 1923)  
Cruz-Diez trained as a graphic designer and, when he delved into fine arts, painted in a social realist style. By the mid-1950s, he travelled to Spain and France and took up abstraction. In Paris, he was made aware of kinetic art and worked on understanding the relationship between form and color and the animation of the picture plane. Over his long career Cruz-Diez has made major contributions to optical and kinetic art. He began his Physichromie series in 1959, which he continues to develop today. These works appear to transform in response to changes in lighting and the position of the viewer. Its title is a combination of the words “physical” and “chromatic,” a reflection of Cruz-Diez’s lifelong ambition to create situations in which viewers could experience color, not only visually, but also physically.

Gonzalo FONSECA  
(Uruguayan, 1922-1997)  
Fonseca joined the Taller Torres-García in 1942, and fully embraced Joaquín Torres-García’s Constructive Universalism in both its humanistic theory and aesthetic application. His painting was dominated by structure, symbolic shapes and color fields. During his time at the Taller he also produced abstract wood reliefs. His interest in archeology drove him to travel to Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Fonseca’s work thereafter reflected a mysterious architecture and symbolism inspired by the archeological monuments he had encountered. He eventually settled in New York and opened a studio in Italy where he produced sculptures made of stone, his material of choice after the late 1960s.

Mathias GOERITZ  
(Polish-born Mexican 1915-1990)  
Goeritz arrived in Mexico after studying art history, philosophy and archaeology in Berlin. Since the early 1950s, Goeritz held a strong belief in the need to inspire “real emotion” in the public through a total aesthetic experience. He advocated for an integration of art and architecture in service of this goal. The series Mensajes, later Mensajes dorados, began in 1957. Goeritz covered paintings and murals with metallic foil or gold leaf, giving them a luminescent nature and evoking a deep sense of spirituality highlighted by the absence of representation. In the following decades, he continued to uphold a kind of metaphysical art in opposition to contemporary movements he considered lacking in spiritual value.

Carmen HERRERA  
(Cuban, b. 1915)  
She began to develop her pictorial work in the 1930s, and in 1939 she moved to New York, where she met the exponents of Abstract Expressionism and practiced a lyrical abstraction infused with surrealism. It was only when she moved to Paris, in 1948, that Herrara discovered a geometric-abstraction as her true métier. In the French capital, she frequented the group that met at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and participated in several of its editions. A precarious economic situation forced Herrara to return to Cuba and then to move to New York. Her abstract-geometric investigation that put her in the vanguard of Cuban art evolved in New York as she was influenced by American Color Field painting by such artists as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella. It was in New York that her painting took on a chromatic intensity. The forms in her paintings were radically simplified and soft-edged and they reached a high degree of purity and minimalist subtlety. This style she has continued to develop.

Sol LEWITT  
(American, 1928-2007)  
Sol LeWitt was important in the creation of the new radical aesthetic of the 1960’s that was a progressive disagreement to the ‘Abstract Expressionism’ current in the 1950′s and 60′s New York school. LeWitt, like no other artist of his generation, had always maintained the importance of the idea or concept and, aside from his original works on paper, the work is executed by others to clear and strict instructions. As one of the first intelligent advocates of conceptual art with his writings, Sentences on Conceptual Art (1969), LeWitt’s work keeps on being respected and alluded to by a younger generation of artists as one of the very important investigations into ‘idea’ and ‘concept’ art.

François MORELLET  
(French, 1926-2016)  
Morellet came across Concrete painting during a trip to Brazil in 1951, when he encountered the work of Max Bill. His work began to show an interest in repeating and varying patterns, and he recurred to objective systematical and methodical processes, sometimes allowing for chance to play a role in their creation. He extended his works beyond the two-dimensional surface plane by creating interactive installations and through interventions in public spaces. Morellet received numerous public commissions well into his late career.
Kenneth Noland
(American, 1924-2010)
While studying art at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, Noland was exposed to the work of the European De Stijl movement and, from Josef Albers, he absorbed the art theories propounded before WWII at the Bauhaus in Germany. Allied with a number of American painters who were engaged in developing a visual vocabulary appropriate to an indigenous abstract style, Noland was a pioneer in the development of Color Field painting. His shaped canvases, at first symmetrical and asymmetrical diamonds, and then completely irregular in shape, were critically understood as works in which the edge was a significant component of the painting itself. To distance the painter from the abstract geometry of the edges and surface of his pictures, Noland detached himself by eliminating brush strokes through staining his canvases with their colors.

Leon Polk Smith
(American, 1906-1996)
One of the often-overlooked giants of geometric abstract painting in America, Smith was strongly influenced by the paintings of Piet Mondrian and the aesthetics of De Stijl. He brought a refined sensibility to Hard-Edge Minimalism while maintaining a strict adherence to the formal and rational in his art. The lasting influence of the art of the Native Americans that Smith grew up amongst in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma is evident in his approach to the use of geometry.

Mira Schendel
(Brazilian, 1919-1988)
Forced to abandon her studies of art and philosophy in Milan, Schendel arrived in Brazil in 1949. Her artistic work of the mid-1950s was consistent with Informalism, as she experimented with textures and different media. By the following decade, Schendel incorporated the written language as a graphic resource in her work. Letras is among the series she produced in the second half of the decade. Described as equivalent to concrete poetry, the series of the late 1960s featured printed or transfer letters and other typesetter signs placed at random on paper to suggest the impossibility of communication.

Jesús Rafael Soto
(Venezuelan, 1923-2005)
Soto studied at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Caracas from 1942 to 1947. Shortly after arriving in Paris in 1950, Soto began experimenting with Geometric Abstraction. In order to realize his concept of abstract art as pure structure and idea, he borrowed from the fields of mathematics and music. He used the mathematical concepts of repetition and progression—which contradicted the intuitive, subjective approach then in vogue and known in Europe as Art Informel. He came to understand the advantages three-dimensionality provided and developed techniques that relied on optical mechanics to produce kinetic artwork.

Joaquín Torres-García
(Uruguayan, 1874-1949)
After receiving his fine art education and working for several years in Barcelona, Torres-García embraced modern painting in 1917 after his “crisis of the 17” when he began to theorize on modern painting’s need to be autonomous and not imitative. He eventually settled in Paris where he joined the avant-garde with artists like Piet Mondrian and Hans Arp, and resolved this tension between nature and abstraction by combining Neoplasticism’s structure with symbols to create a schematic image of reality. He named this style Universalismo Constructivo. After returning to Uruguay in 1934, he consolidated his aesthetic philosophies through his publishing and through the Taller Torres-García, which he founded in 1944. He came to be the principal artistic leader and preeminent art educator in the Río de la Plata region.
Charles Brewer-Carías

Venezuelan explorer sometimes referred to as the Humboldt of the twentieth century. Originally trained as a dentist, he has led nearly 200 expeditions in Venezuela’s backcountry, making discoveries and publishing in an astounding range of fields (botany, zoology, entomology, geology, geography and anthropology) and has worked alongside renowned scientists from all over the world.

Charles Brewer Carías was born into a family of intellectuals in Caracas, his grandfather having moved to Venezuela as a British diplomat. Having graduated as a dentist in 1960 he practised in this field for almost 20 years, during this time travelling to the forests of the Orinoco basin to live with the Ye’kuana tribe and becoming active in the field of dental anthropology. He has published on many aspects of anthropology; speaking both the Ye’kuana language and understanding Yanomamó, he worked with the famous geneticist James V. Neel and anthropologist Napoleon A. Chagnon and was somewhat involved in the controversy surrounding the studies of the latter, publicised by the book The Darkness in El Dorado. Between 1961 and 1964 he had also studied biology.

From his expeditions have come a great number of publications, including many that he has personally authored. His work with the botanist Brian Boom on the Yanomamó in the field of ethnobotany has awarded him the titles Honorary Research Associate at the New York Botanical Garden and Associate Researcher at the Jardín Botánico del Orinoco in Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela. An avid photographer he has hundreds of thousands of photographs portraying the culture, landscapes and biodiversity of Venezuela, displaying them in ten illustrated books and has also filmed documentaries. He has five children from two marriages. In 2003 thieves broke into his family home and he shot and killed one of the intruders, but sustained a bullet wound to his shoulder. His extraordinary stories have awarded him world wide acclaim, including articles published in Venezuelan, British and North American newspapers about his life and travels.
Ariel Jiménez is a historian, museographer and curator of modern and contemporary art. He studied History of Art and Archeology at the University of Paris I, Panthéon Sorbonne (DEA 1983). He has curated numerous exhibitions in public and private institutions in Venezuela, Latin America and the United States. He was director of the Department of Education and Audiovisual Media of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Caracas (1984-1986); general director of the Exhibition Hall of the Eugenio Mendoza Foundation in Caracas, where he created a documentation center on contemporary art and organized seminars with guests such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Sophie Calle, Andrés Serrano and Josef Kosut (1989-1997). He worked as Chief Curator for the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection in Caracas (1997-2011), where he directed an exhibition circuit from the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University to the MALBA in Buenos Aires. He was also general director and curator of the Museum of Modern Art Jesús Soto in Ciudad Bolívar (2004-2006). Currently working as an independent Curator.

He has published, among other titles: The primacy of color (Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1992); I have lived by the eyes. Correspondence Alejandro Otero / Alfredo Boulton 1946-1974 (Caracas: Alberto Vollmer Foundation and Alejandro Otero Museum Foundation, 2001); Conversations with Jesús Soto (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2001); Soto Monographic Essay (Caracas: Jesús Soto Foundation and Banco de Venezuela Foundation, 2007); Alfredo Boulton and his contemporaries. Critical dialogues in Venezuelan art. 1912-1974 (Museum of Modern Art in New York and Fundación Cisneros, 2010) Carlos Cruz-Diez in Conversation with Ariel Jiménez (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2010); Ferreira Gullar in conversation with Ariel Jiménez (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2011); Roberto Obregón in three times (Caracas: C & FE Collection, 2013); A diverse America, the silent language of forms. (Caracas: Ediciones María Gil de Oberto, 2013); Waltercio Caldas in conversation with Ariel Jiménez (Caracas / NY: Fundación Cisneros, 2016); and Cipher Pain, a topological aesthetic or the incomensurabilities, a monographic essay about the artist, currently in the process of editing.
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