

Master Drawings

Esteban Lisa: A Diary in Oil and Pastels

Author(s): Mario H. Gradowczyk

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Esteban Lisa: A Diary in Oil and Pastels

MARIO H. GRADOWCZYK

Now seems an appropriate time to introduce readers of this journal to the still little-known work of Esteban Lisa (1895–1983), who, with Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949) and Juan del Prete (1896–1987), was one of the first abstract artists in Latin America. Interest in the art of Lisa—fifty of whose works were recently on view in the exhibition *Diálogos con Esteban Lisa: Colección Jorge Virgili* at the Fundación Antonio Pérez, Cuenca (7 March–4 May 2008)¹—is part of a growing appreciation of modern and contemporary Latin American art, a trend also demonstrated by the recent exhibition at New York’s MoMA, *New Perspectives in Latin American Art, 1930–2006: Selections from a Decade of Acquisitions* (21 November 2007–25 February 2008).²

Born in Hinojosa de San Vicente, a village in the mountainous areas of Castilla-La Mancha,³ Esteban Lisa emigrated from Spain to Argentina at the age of twelve—like many others, in search of a better future. He went to live with an aunt and uncle who owned a bar in Buenos Aires, working as a dishwasher at night during his primary school years. Largely self-taught as an artist, he was later employed as a drawing professor at an adult continuing education school, supporting himself with a daytime job as a mailman and eventually as head librarian for the Argentine postal service. When he retired from the postal service in 1955, the committed art teacher founded the Escuela de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires. In 1980 he trav-

eled back to Spain to visit relatives and the region of his birth. Strangely, while there, he introduced himself as a writer rather than as an artist. He died in Buenos Aires three years later.

Lisa bequeathed his entire estate, including all his art (none of which had been offered for sale during his lifetime), to two of his pupils and followers, Horacio Bestani (b. 1918) and Isaac Zylberberg (b. 1928). Unseen and carefully wrapped, the works were kept in a non-descript dark oak cabinet in the artist’s house while his heirs looked for an appropriate place to open a center or foundation to carry on their teacher’s mission. Several months went by. One morning they arrived at the house, only to find it sacked and stripped empty by thieves. All that remained, in a heap on the floor, were the packages of art works, intact if unseen. It was an undeniable sign that fate had assured the survival of Lisa’s message.

Because of the supports he used, by today’s curatorial criteria, Lisa’s entire oeuvre would be classified as “works on paper.”⁴ He created small-format paintings and drawings in oil and pastels on cardboard, paper, the backs of ravioli boxes, the covers of notebooks, as well as pages torn out of newspapers and magazines. His shapes are unrecognizable: very few of the works contain figurative elements. One early group consists of very thin pieces of cardboard, which he tacked onto a wooden board and painted in oil on both sides; they measure only 300 x 230 mm (e.g., Fig. 1).⁵

Figure 1

ESTEBAN LISA

Composition,
c. 1938–40

Madrid, Private
Collection



Few pieces made between 1935 and 1944 are signed or dated, but those that are enable us to construct a chronological framework for his early production.⁶ The exercise becomes easier later, since almost all works after 1944 are signed and dated.

Lisa was always more committed to his teaching and the intellectual development of his students than to the advancement of his own artistic career. He shunned the art market and refused to show his own work publicly or to engage with art critics, though he did encourage his pupils to exhibit.⁷ He even seems to have been wary of sharing his work privately (except with his closest students), as I myself learned during a visit to his house and studio, after attending some lectures at his recently founded Escuela de Arte Moderno. I asked to see his paintings; all he showed me was one piece of cardboard painted on both sides, the work here illustrated as Figure 1. I noticed that this construction of planes in muted greens, grays, blacks, and whites—which Lisa had painted c. 1938–40—featured the same color range adopted by Nicolas de Staël (1914–1955) in his abstract paintings of the late 1940s—works that had only just been exhibited in his first posthumous retrospective in 1956.⁸

Lisa's teachings went beyond the merely pictorial: his aim was not to train artists, but rather to educate thoughtful human beings. He valued philosophy, poetry, and ethics as much as drawing and painting, and he conveyed this to his students. Zylberberg, for instance, recalls that when Lisa criticized their work, one felt the imaginary presence of a philosopher, such as Kant, Schiller, or Husserl, or of an Eastern master, or of a poet such as Walt Whitman.⁹ The importance of philosophy in Lisa's intellectual life, as well as his interest in the theory of relativity and space technology, was clear from his extensive library, as has been noted by José E. Burucúa.¹⁰

I remember Lisa's enthusiasm when, in a French journal, he came across the question "Do Einstein and Picasso have anything in common?"¹¹ In fact, he had been contemplating this question for some time, as is evident from his small book of the following year entitled *Kant, Einstein y Picasso*

(Buenos Aires, 1956). That publication, as Rafael Cippolini pointed out, served as a kind of founding document or manifesto for Lisa's school, a statement of its vision.¹² It also contains reproductions of two of Lisa's oil paintings, *Juegos con líneas y colores* ("Playing with Lines and Colors") from 1956, and a drawing from 1954 entitled *Acto espacial* ("Spatial Act"), the only works of his to be reproduced in his lifetime.¹³

Lisa's numerous publications, texts that operate independently of his art, tackle diverse subjects from philosophy and the sensitive being, to astrophysics and adventures in space flight, to transcendental aesthetics.¹⁴ He would have applauded the clearly Kantian words of Robert Motherwell (1915–1991), who, in an interview with David Sylvester, stated that "*the process of painting is a series of moral decisions about the aesthetic,*" since "*the artistry, if you want to put it in that way, is the beauty and completeness with which a moral position is asserted.*"¹⁵

In sum, Lisa was a modernist who sought a theoretical framework for his teachings under the triad of philosophy, science, and art, but one who, by some strange paradox, concealed his most powerful weapon: his own pictorial practice. According to his followers, such humility and secrecy reflects a rarely seen commitment to integrity and ethics. Perhaps by hiding and retaining all of his work, Lisa sought to safeguard it intact, as a unique document or testament of everything he had thought and achieved—a sort of gigantic diary in oil and pastels.

CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY

1935–c. 1940

Lisa openly acknowledged his relentless experiments with cosmic forms. But to conquer the Cosmos, it is necessary to experiment first with elements from the real world—as Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) well understood. In his earliest works, from 1935, Lisa thus painted cylinders and spheres on a background of colored planes (e.g., Fig. 2).¹⁶ These exercises display the object as a basic visual element, and they allowed him to explore the relationship between form and background. From



Figure 2

ESTEBAN LISA

Composition,
10 May 1935

New York, Private
Collection

that point onward, however, Lisa stayed firmly within the tradition of abstraction. He soon abandoned the form-background confrontation and began painting triangular structures worked with vigorous strokes that yielded strips in complementary colors: reds, greens, yellows and blues (e.g., Fig. 3).¹⁷ Next, in keeping with trends in international abstraction from the 1930s, for example, the paintings of Otto Freundlich (1878–1943), he experimented with works made from small, fragmented geometrical shapes (e.g., Fig. 4).¹⁸ Rooted in the Cubist tradition, these works show the artist's intention to create a pictorial language characterized by long brushstrokes and sudden accumulations of pigment in certain areas of the surface so that the planes of color vibrate in various ways. These experiments with monochromatic planes and unlikely textural variations strangely recall the paintings of Russian artists Lyubov' Popova (1889–1924) and Alexei Jawlensky (1864–1941), who, like Freundlich, were practically unknown in the narrow and isolated Buenos Aires milieu in which Lisa was based.

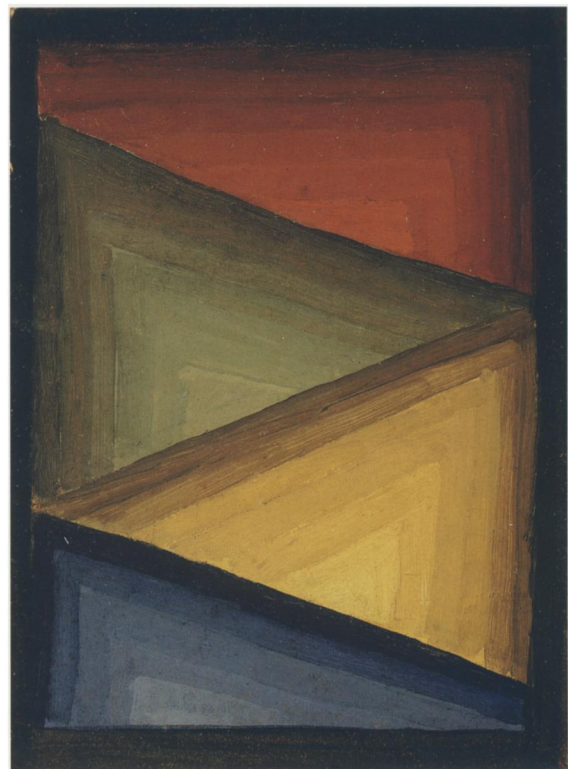


Figure 3

ESTEBAN LISA

Composition,
c. 1935

Buenos Aires,
Private Collection



Figure 4

ESTEBAN LISA

Composition,
c. 1935–40

*The Netherlands,
Private Collection*



Figure 5

ESTEBAN LISA

Composition,
c. 1941–44

Buenos Aires,
Private Collection

1941–44

Lisa was not satisfied with energizing the pictorial plane with the tectonics of his brushstroke, which, as Juan Manuel Bonet pointed out, is what gives these modest paintings their radiance.¹⁹ Starting in 1941, he submitted this group of triangles, trapezoids, and curved shapes to an intense bombardment of continuous or dotted lines, marks, straight lines, curves and counter-curves, and musical notes, all made with generous brushstrokes. In this almost unbridled act, Lisa demolished the few geometrical elements left in his work.

To locate this pictorial act historically, bear in mind that the European movement known as Informalism or *Art informel*, which prioritized the expressive impulses of the artist over form, took off after 1945 as the reaction of a group of artists to the geometric and formalist tendencies that dominated the *Salons de Réalités Nouvelles* in Paris. In New York, at about the same time, Janet Sobel (1894–1968) was making her first “drip paintings,” an approach that Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) would later take to hitherto unfathomable dimensions (see pp. 148–56 of this issue). It could be said that Lisa’s “Informalist” experiments between 1941 and 1943 either anticipated or were a parallel development to the gestural approaches of the Abstract Expressionists, the Tachists, and the COBRA group.

The constellations of motifs in Lisa’s work, those violent, arbitrary and almost uncontrollable impulses, reflect the forces exerting pressure on him. Is this chaos? His works reveal his obsession with capturing those forces, taming them, and making them *visible*, which brings him close in spirit to Paul Klee (1879–1940). In these works, grays, greens, purples, earthen reds, ochres, and browns predominate (Fig. 5; back cover);²⁰ at times, a bright red makes its way in (Fig. 6),²¹ altering that muted tonality so typical of the Rio de la Plata region of Argentina with which the artist César Paternosto (b. 1931) identified Lisa’s painting.²²

This approach stands in stark contrast to the cool rationalism of the geometric abstraction practiced by artists associated with *De Stijl*, such as the Dutchman Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931)



Figure 6
ESTEBAN LISA
Composition,
c. 1941–44
Madrid, Private
Collection



Figure 7
ESTEBAN LISA
Composition,
10 July 1946
Madrid, Private
Collection

and the Belgian Georges Vantongerloo (1886–1965). Although the sensations conveyed in their Concrete art paintings form part of the aesthetic plane of their compositions, the pigment itself was almost devoid of expressiveness; few individual strokes can be picked out and the viewer’s visual process is purely optical. By contrast, in Lisa’s paintings—like those of other gestural artists—the sensations lie not only in the images, but also in the thickness of the paint and other materials added to achieve texture; the visual process

becomes a process of tactile (haptic) apprehension.

Besides their clashing colors, decisive brushstrokes, and motifs, Lisa’s paintings surprise and captivate because of the manner in which he paints and the way he causes the planes to play among themselves. In part, this throbbing dynamism allows the savvy viewer to appreciate the sensory world hidden behind the thickness of Lisa’s brushstrokes; in other words, it makes the viewer hone his visual sensibility, and perhaps reach the cosmic components of his message.

1944–52

Anticipating *Art informel* was not enough for Lisa. However unbridled the action of painting was for him, it did not free him fully from the constraints of the flat shapes covered by marks, lines and dots. As Stéfán Leclercq noted, these are shapes that hold and freeze movement.²³ It was necessary to rupture them, to set them in motion. This was a long and painful process, which began late in 1944, when Lisa abandoned his thick impasto technique in favor of a return to diluted and thinly layered oil pigments in bright or soft shades, painted on a range of supports—from pages torn from books, to cheap acidic papers or used pieces of cardboard. This is a kind of *Arte Povera avant la lettre*, as if, by recycling old materials, he had decided to impose a sort of self-punishment for having achieved such expressive freedom. And if some of his works from between 1944 and 1951 look melancholic due to the continued use of dull tones, in other works from the same period, the prevailing motifs and swirls, painted in bright reds, blues, and yellows, foretell new challenges (e.g., Fig. 7).²⁴

These abrupt changes led Edward J. Sullivan to describe Lisa as a “chameleon-artist. *Just when we think we understand his work, he introduces confounding changes or transformations.*”²⁵ It was then that his interest in drawing increased, and in pastel he found the most fitting medium. From this date onwards, “painting with pastel” or “drawing with oil” on a single support (paper) would be at the core of his artistic work until he stopped producing altogether in 1978.



bright and furious colors materialized as layers of paint applied with brush and spatula, like an *élan vital* (“vital force”). He used different shades of green, red, blue, and yellow, as well as pink; white also began to form part of his palette (e.g., Fig. 9).²⁹ Now the movement of his shapes, torrential and untimely, arises, and his new paintings breathe, throb, echo, and contemplate us. Lisa released himself from the strict geometrical elements that had previously kept him prisoner.

According to Lisa’s book *Kant, Einstein y Picasso*, the words “play” and “act,” which he used to describe his works, suggest an additional reflection, since with that semantic differentiation the artist hinted at the mental processes that led

Figure 8 (left)

ESTEBAN LISA

Juego de líneas y colores, 16 October 1953

Private Collection

Figure 9 (below)

ESTEBAN LISA

Juego de líneas y colores, 29 February 1956

Brussels, Collection of Yves Zurstrassen

1953–60

Lisa noticed that his paintings on thin (very inexpensive and highly acidic) sheets of mechanical fiber paper grew fragile, because of the oil that he added to his pigments. So, in September of 1953 he began to work on larger pieces of white cardboard, purchased at shops. This allowed him to regulate more easily the amount of oil in the paint (e.g., Fig. 8).²⁶ He then returned to the use of acidic papers as the supports for his oil paintings and that fragility decreased considerably, a problem that he did not encounter when he used pastels.

In a new series of works, which Lisa called *Juego con líneas y colores* (“Playing with Lines and Colors”), one can imagine how the forces of chaos erupted in his mind when he confronted the blank support—just as it had done for artists as diverse as Cézanne²⁷ and Philip Guston (1913–1980).²⁸ In these paintings, the compositional plane displays a kaleidoscope of shapes, broken lines with discontinuous folds, spirals and signs, and quick and dense brushstrokes of oil paint in



him to construct a universe in oil and pastels; as Paul Klee warned, the visual “play” of a mature artist should not be confused with that of children. Lisa’s admiration for the experimental nature and visual play of the work of Picasso (1881–1973) knew no bounds.³⁰ His pupils remember how he urged them to practice drawing themes from nature, especially animals at the zoo, because a simple and pure line—along with an idea of one object—suffices to capture and render visible the Cosmos. Hence, it should come as no surprise that, within the multiplicity of shapes that appear in Lisa’s paintings and drawings, some bear recognizable subjects: rectangles, the ying-yang sign, a guitar, a sailboat, a female figure (e.g., Fig. 10).³¹

The other key word, “act,” refers to the writings of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, who spoke of objectifying and non-objectifying acts. Lisa used these words, “Acts are the result of the content of life, despite oneself, beyond one’s consciousness.”³² That is why he often used the phrase “these are objectifying acts that intend to...”³³ This “to” marks the never-ending striving for life. Lisa also insisted on two basic concepts: *internal states* and *external states*.³⁴ The *internal state* is what allows for unconscious repetition of something that is within us, something that has been internalized: it is the case of the juggler, who tosses balls into the air and catches them continuously. If, for an instant, he thinks about which ball he is going to grab, they will all, irremediably, fall to the ground. In this seamless practice, the juggler and his balls become one: they are indivisible. Lisa’s exercises aimed to achieve this internal state. The *external state*, by contrast, involves more than just the world around us. It lies in the exercise of contemplating and seeing oneness, the whole. Only oneness can give things meaning. For example, Klee took archetypical elements from the external world and put them into his inner world. Playing with the two worlds, he reached a synthesis of sensibility and harmony in space. According to Lisa, in the end, the act of creating involves a play on pre-existing conditions basically upheld by ethics.

Lisa alternated oil painting with *Actos espaciales* (“Spatial Acts”), the term he applied to pastel

drawings on supports like those he used for his oil paintings: thin, mechanical fiber papers, which, over time, discolor to a yellow tone (e.g., Fig. 11);³⁵ sometime he used a bluish paper. His drawings are schematic and, to quote the words of Jasper Johns (b. 1930), “more naked, closer to thought, closer to the force from which they arise.”³⁶ Lisa never allowed the smooth and sensual surfaces of Fabriano or Schöller type drawing paper, with irregular edges and dazzling whiteness, to influence his acts. That is a measure of the extent of his asceticism.

In his analysis of the drawings of Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) in a previous issue of this journal, Associate Editor Richard Shiff drew the following distinction between drawing and painting, “drawing is essentially a vector or lineal system and painting is essentially a raster, pixel, or tonal system.”³⁷ As a result of the gesture implied, paintings in which the directional presence of the vector is felt resemble drawings, whereas drawings whose lines cover almost the entire field, according to Shiff, can be compared to paintings. If one accepts that the artist’s ultimate aim is *to paint forces*,³⁸ it could be thought that these forces can be derived from a potential function, as the study of mechanics suggests.

Let us imagine that all of these creative forces—another way of conceiving the vectors Shiff suggests—are, in fact, the gradients (force vectors) of a potential function that simulates the chaotic activity in the artist’s brain when he faces the blank canvas or paper.³⁹ In the midst of a state of chaos, that function (according to this model) takes on shifting and random shapes in space and time. As a result, the spatial and temporal path of the force-vector projected onto the compositional plane, that is, its trace or mark, would be the abstract line that defines Jackson Pollock’s work: “multidirectional, with neither inside nor outside, form nor background, delimiting nothing, describing no contour, passing between spots or points, stirring up a close-lying haptic visual matter.”⁴⁰ This might explain why there is no formal continuity between consecutive pieces from Lisa’s series of oil paintings and pastels, not even those made on the same day. Due to its random nature,



Figure 10

ESTEBAN LISA

Acto espacial,
23 October 1955

Private Collection



Figure 11

ESTEBAN LISA

Acto espacial,
24 September 1954

Buenos Aires,
Private Collection

Figure 12

ESTEBAN LISA

Acto espacial,
23 January 1954

Madrid, Fundación
Ortega y Gasset



chaos generates situations that are not repeated over time. Playfulness, for Lisa, is a play of forces.

Figure 12, a drawing made in 1954 on a 300 x 230 mm sheet of paper,⁴¹ is representative of Lisa's works from this period. It is possible to reconstruct the way his hand moved when it grasped the dark green pastel bar by its side and, with a quick movement, lashed it from the upper left-hand corner to the opposite, lower right corner. To balance the field, he repeated the process: he began at the upper right-hand corner and the quick stroke moved downward, bucked up, and then gently descended towards the middle of the bottom of the page, similar to the movement when drawing the figure "9." Through this non-conventional use of pastel bars (the friable medium not completely covering the paper), Lisa

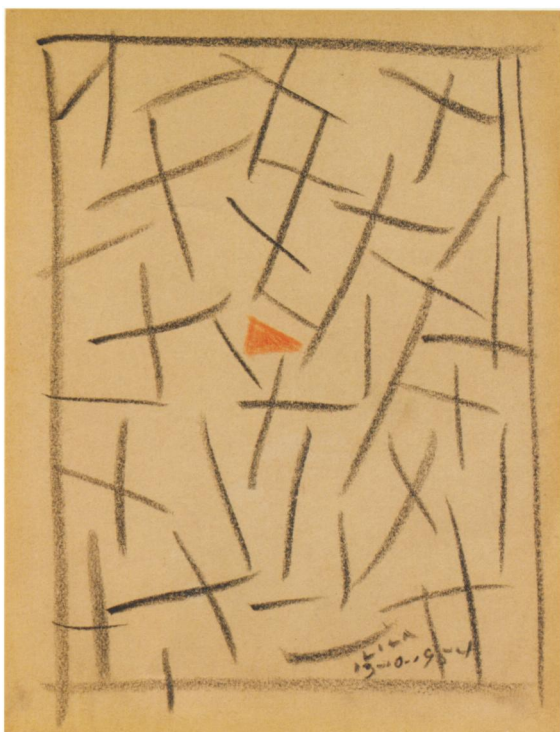


Figure 13

ESTEBAN LISA

Acto espacial,
13 October 1954

Buenos Aires,
Private Collection

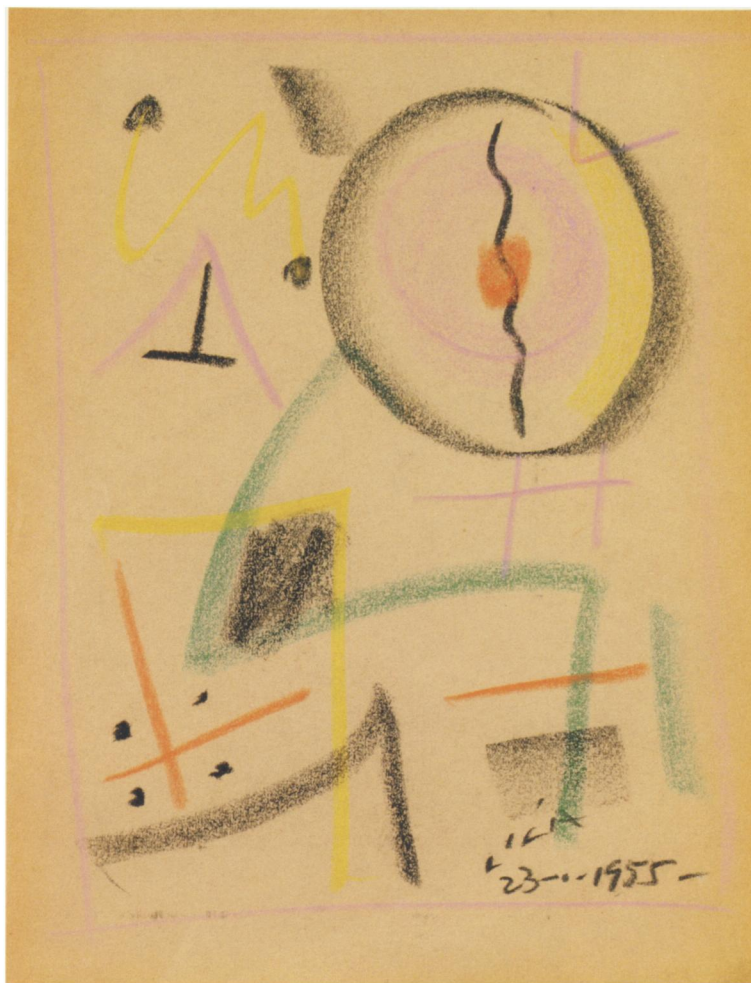


Figure 14

ESTEBAN LISA

Acto espacial,
23 January 1955

Buenos Aires,
Private Collection

turned the line into an iridescent field, a strip, or a band (zip) that entails violent ruptures and thrusts. All that was left to do was balance the spaces between the bands, and he did so with sharp marks: dark corkscrews and bright red dots. The contrast between those playful strokes and the pulsating, zigzag bands makes the viewer's visual field experience a sort of fluttering.

In another drawing (Fig. 13),⁴² he opted for constructing the space through thick, straight black lines that intersect randomly; at the middle, he placed a small red triangle that breaks the uniformity of the field. In every instance, Lisa framed his motifs with horizontal and vertical lines, sometimes black, sometimes picking up another color in the drawing (e.g., Fig. 14),⁴³ as he had done in his early paintings.

Figure 15

ESTEBAN LISA

Juego de líneas
y colores, 24
February 1964

New York, Private
Collection



1961–78

Let us rethink the situation in which the artist finds himself when he confronts the empty plane. If it were possible to define a thermodynamic variable that expressed the level of chaotic activity in the artist's brain, the maximum level would be that experienced by artists such as Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Jackson Pollock—and Lisa. The other extreme would be when the artist is in a state of absolute sublimation and the forces of chaos disappear, that is, this thermodynamic variable becomes a minimum.⁴⁴ This minimal value could be compared to Lord Kelvin's absolute zero (the temperature at which the movement of electrons ceases), and it might be equivalent to the phrase "zero of form" used by the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935) to describe his painting *Black Square* (1915; St. Petersburg, State Russian Museum).⁴⁵ In this limiting case, the lines of force disappear and a uniform color fills the plane, as in the work of both Malevich and Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956), for example, the latter's three untraced monochrome panels in primary colors, *Last Painting*, painted in 1921.

As Picasso grew older, his paintings became more frenetic, his shapes more strained, his tones sharper; the level of chaotic activity increased as his energy flowed almost out of control in his attempt to defeat an implacable rival. When Lisa was in his sixties, his work underwent the opposite process. Starting in 1960, in his oils his shapes blur, his strong tones dim, his color stains are vaguer, the traces of the pictorial act are weaker; white patches tend to dominate the field (e.g., Fig. 15).⁴⁶ In his drawings, the stripes disappear, the pastel tones dim, the sharp lines grow softer, and there is more empty space. All of this suggests that his energies relaxed due to a silent sublimation that tends to increase over time and that disconnects sharp tones. It is like a piece of music played with a mute. This process continued in the 1970s (e.g., Fig. 16),⁴⁷ until he gave up painting and drawing entirely in 1978; there was nothing more to add to the blank page. His last work was, in fact, that very thing: an empty sheet. Stéfan Leclercq offered an explanation of this tendency:



Figure 16

ESTEBAN LISA

Juego de líneas
y colores, 10
February 1975

Madrid, Private
Collection

“the strokes, still visible if on their way to disappearing, underline the trace of a lost movement. In this, Lisa seems near Malevich. No longer shape or movement, but rather the trace of that shape or of that movement.”⁴⁸ This assessment corresponds with Lisa’s own statement: “painting is not an object, but the trace of a fact.”⁴⁹

LISA’S WORK AS SERIES

Seen in its totality, Lisa’s work—with its combination of certainties and hesitations—constitutes a visual diary, built up step by step, in which brush marks and pastel strokes replace writing.⁵⁰ This would explain his refusal to show it in fragments: no matter how long a story is, it is only consummated on the last page. Here, too, he concurs with Pollock, whose work, according to Allan Kaprow, expresses “a kind of diaristic gesture.”⁵¹

In the current context, Lisa’s formulation offers the viewer not only pictorial work rich in nuances and formal variations over the course of more than forty years; it also offers an example of unbending ethics and strict morality. It was not enough for Lisa to have his art captivate the audience because of what it extolled or aroused, or because of its strict ethical sense; he set out to connect the viewer with his own sensibility and inner feelings, to guide him into a state of continuous moral, intellectual, and spiritual wakefulness.

Nicolás Guagnini has suggested that Lisa was not interested in making masterpieces.⁵² In fact, his art culminates only with his last painting. At that point, it becomes an integral body of work, one hard to fully grasp if conceived as a set of unconnected elements. Each one of the stages described in previous sections is like a single volume of an enormous saga, a volume that consists of paintings and drawings that could be considered a series. It could be said, then, that his corpus entails a process of serialization that is reflected in his different stylistic variations and pictorial practices. Series entail the concepts of infinitude, of repetition, and of difference and are characterized by the use of similar supports, sizes, and media. The series of works, *Homage to the Square*, by Josef Albers (1888–1976) is an excellent exam-

ple of serial paintings, characterized by the reiteration of a single motif with differences involving the visual perception of color. In these series, time is the independent variable that governs the process. This narrative is recognized through the differences between repetitions, which Lisa practiced almost every day. But its material characteristics and temporal processes are not the only variables that give Lisa’s work the idea of a series; it is also felt in the insistence with which he repeats pictorial operations, which, nonetheless, show considerable formal variations and reflect his changing moods.

One might wonder why Lisa insisted on making small works when, starting in the late 1940s, the use of large formats had become *lingua franca* for modern artists. Economic reasons, perhaps? Or to avoid being exhibited in a conventional way? On the one hand, his work required a support on which he could rapidly vent the almost inexhaustible impulses that he experienced daily. On the other, as a good reader of Kant, Lisa explained to his disciples that the entire universe could fit in a space of 10 x 10 cm. “Size is not what makes the universe what it is,” he said, “It’s not the things outside, but rather the inner state that gives things their immensity.”⁵³ This phrase, which was something of a mantra, is a simple way of explaining Kant’s concept of the mathematical sublime, since any small thing, compared with other even smaller things, can be enlarged in our imagination until it becomes incommensurable.

This vision of Lisa’s work as a gigantic personal diary means that, whenever possible, it should be exhibited as a whole or in subgroups, like meta-paintings (or meta-drawings). To continue thinking along Kantian lines, if these series were displayed together they would cover such a vast exhibition space that their mere presence would dazzle the viewer. When the sum of the small quantum of energy that Lisa invests in each element of the series becomes so intense that it exceeds the viewer’s receptive imagination, the totality would seem so vast that Lisa’s entire work would have the overwhelming power of the Kantian absolute: the dynamic sublime.

Mario H. Gradowczyk, an independent art historian in Argentina, works on the history of modernism and contemporary Latin American art; among his books are monographs on Joaquín Torres-García (1985, 2007), Xul Solar (1994), and Esteban Lisa (1997), the latter coauthored with Nelly Perazzo.

EDITORS' NOTE

Translated from Spanish by Jane Brodie.

NOTES

1. See Jesús Marchamalo, *Diálogos con Esteban Lisa: Colección Jorge Vingili*, exh. cat., Cuenca, Fundación Antonio Pérez, 2008. Published simultaneously by the foundation is a new book by Lisa's pupil Isaac Zylberberg, *Esteban Lisa: Mi Maestro*, Cuadernos del Hocinoco, 23, Cuenca, 2008. For earlier literature on the artist, see Nelly Perazzo and Mario H. Gradowczyk, *Esteban Lisa*, Buenos Aires, 1997; Juan M. Bonet, *Esteban Lisa*, exh. cat., Madrid, Guillermo de Osma Galería, 1998; Helena Oliveras et al., *Esteban Lisa en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes*, exh. cat., Buenos Aires, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1999; Barbara J. Bloemink, *The Art of Esteban Lisa*, exh. cat., New York, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 2000; Mario H. Gradowczyk and Nicolás Guagnini, *Esteban Lisa de Arturo al Di Tella*, exh. cat., Buenos Aires, Ruth Benzacar Galería de Arte, 2002; *Esteban Lisa (Toledo 1895–Buenos Aires 1983): Paintings*, exh. cat., Houston, Parkerson Gallery, 2002; and Edward J. Sullivan et al., *Esteban Lisa (Cardiel de los Montes, Spain: 1895–Buenos Aires, Argentina: 1983): Image, Form, Force, Movement*, exh. cat., New York, Galeria Ramis Barquet, 2006–7.
2. The exhibition, curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas, was unfortunately not accompanied by a catalogue. A full checklist of works shown can be downloaded from the MoMA Online Press Office: <http://moma.org/press>.
3. His birthplace was not nearby Cardiel de los Montes, as previously thought.
4. As John Elderfield pointed out (“Master Drawings and Modern Drawings: Introduction to American Drawing in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *Master Drawings*, 40, no. 1, 2002, pp. 5–6), it is difficult to establish clear limits between modernistic drawing and painting, and it has become “customary to use the term ‘works on paper’ instead of or interchangeably with the term ‘drawings’ for the widest possible range of unique *modern* works entrusted to paper conservators.”
5. Oil on cardboard; 302 x 230 mm; see Perazzo and Gradowczyk 1997, no. 20, repr. (in color); Buenos Aires 1999, p. 28, repr. (in color); Houston 2002, p. 7, repr. (in color); New York 2006–7, p. 22, repr. (in color); and Cuenca 2008, p. 30, repr. (in color).
6. See Perazzo and Gradowczyk 1997.
7. He is known to have participated in only one group show of drawing teachers, where he exhibited two portraits (*Exposición de Escuelas de Arte*, Buenos Aires, Escuela D. F. Sarmiento, December 1949).
8. See *Nicolás de Staël (1914–1955)*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1956.
9. See Mario H. Gradowczyk, “Entrevista a Isaac Zylberberg,” in Madrid 1998, pp. 41–48 (esp. p. 48).
10. See José E. Burucúa, “La biblioteca de Esteban Lisa: Los libros y las ideas de un pintor,” in Buenos Aires 1999, pp. 46–56.
11. See *Les Nouvelles Littéraires Artistiques et Scientifiques*, Paris, 1 September 1955.
12. See Rafael Cippolini, “Retrato del venerable artista pluridimensional: Apuntes y variaciones sobre un programa de Esteban Lisa,” *Arte y Parte*, 62, 2006, pp. 28–37 (esp. p. 30).
13. The current location of these works is unknown.
14. See Cippolini 2006, p. 36.
15. See David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, London, 2002, p. 76.
16. Oil on cardboard; 270 x 210 mm; see Perazzo and Gradowczyk 1997, no. 8, repr. (in color); Buenos Aires 1999, p. 18, repr. (in color); and Buenos Aires 2002, p. 8, repr. (in color).
17. Oil on cardboard; 300 x 230 mm; see Buenos Aires 1999, p. 17 repr. (in color); and Buenos Aires 2002, p. 9, repr. (in color).
18. Oil on cardboard; 300 x 230 mm; see Buenos Aires 2002, p. 10, repr. (upside down; in color); and New York 2006–7, p. 16, repr. (upside down; in color).
19. See Juan Manuel Bonet, “A Quest for Lisa,” in Madrid 1998, pp. 7–12 (esp. p. 11).
20. Oil on cardboard; 300 x 230 mm; see Perazzo and Gradowczyk 1997, no. 27, repr. (in color); Buenos Aires 1999, p. 34, repr. (in color); and New York 2006–7, p. 22, repr. (in color).
21. Oil on cardboard; 300 x 230 mm; see *Esteban Lisa (1895–1983): Óleos y pasteles*, exh. cat., Buenos Aires, Galería Palatina, 2007, no. 3, repr. (in color and on front cover); and Cuenca 2008, p. 30, repr. (in color).
22. See César Paternosto, “Mi encuentro con Esteban Lisa,” in Madrid 1998, pp. 13–14 (esp. p. 14).
23. See Stéfán Leclercq, “El problema del movimiento y del

- conocimiento en la pintura de Esteban Lisa,” *Revista de Occidente*, 300, 2006, pp. 175–88 (esp. p. 185).
24. Oil on paper; 300 x 230 mm; see Buenos Aires 2002, no. 10, repr. (in color); and Cuenca 2008, p. 31, repr. (in color).
 25. See Edward J. Sullivan, “Esteban Lisa: A View from Abroad,” in *Esteban Lisa*, exh. cat., Montevideo, Museo Torres García, 1998, pp. 9–19 (esp. p. 16).
 26. Oil on cardboard; 350 x 250 mm; see Houston 2002, no. 16, repr. (in color on front cover); and New York 2006–7, no. 16, repr. (in color).
 27. See Joachim Gasquet, “Cézanne,” in Michael Doran, ed. *Conversations with Cézanne*, Berkeley, 2001, p. 156. Doran questions the authenticity of Gasquet’s writings, but this quotation is not discredited in Doran’s book.
 28. See Sylvester 2002, p. 87.
 29. Oil on paper; 345 x 245 mm; see Buenos Aires 1999, p. 78, repr. (in color); and New York 2006–7, p. 17, repr. (in color).
 30. See Esteban Lisa, *Kant, Einstein y Picasso*, Buenos Aires, 1956.
 31. Pastel on paper; 300 x 230 mm.
 32. See Zylberberg 2008, p. 36.
 33. See *ibid.*
 34. See *ibid.*
 35. Pastel on paper; 300 x 230 mm.
 36. See Jasper Johns in conversation with Richard Shiff, “Flicker in the Work,” *Master Drawings*, 44, no. 3, 2006, pp. 275–98 (esp. p. 279).
 37. See Richard Shiff, “With Closed Eyes: De Kooning Twist,” *Master Drawings*, 40, no. 1, 2002, pp. 73–88 (esp. pp. 81 and 88, n. 47).
 38. A work by this author develops the theory of abstract art based on the postulates of Gilles Deleuze (see M. H. Gradowczyk, “A Reanalysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s Art Theory,” *Concepts*, Hors Series, 2, 2003, pp. 146–69).
 39. To calculate the gradient of a surface at a given point is to find the direction of the vector tangent to the surface at that point. In classic mechanics, the gradient of a potential function expresses a force.
 40. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 575. This definition was built on the basis of Michael Fried’s analysis of lines in Jackson Pollock in his exhibition catalogue, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella*, Cambridge, MA, Fogg Art Museum, and Pasadena Art Museum, 1965.
 41. Pastel on paper; 300 x 230 mm.
 42. Pastel on paper; 300 x 230 mm.
 43. Pastel on paper; 300 x 230 mm.
 44. See Mario H. Gradowczyk, *Arte abstracto: Cruzando líneas desde el Sur*, Caseros, 2006.
 45. Inv. no. Sch-9484 (oil on canvas; 106 x 106 cm); see Albert Kostenevich and Mikhail Piotrovsky, *From Russia: French and Russian Master Paintings, 1870–1925 from Moscow and St. Petersburg*, exh. cat., London, Royal Academy of Art, 2008, p. 301, repr. (in color).
 46. Oil on paper; 351 x 220 mm; see New York 2006–7, no. 41, repr. (in color).
 47. Oil on paper; 341 x 222 mm; see Buenos Aires 1999, p. 86, repr. (in color); and Cuenca 2008, p. 26, repr. (in color).
 48. See Leclercq 2006, p. 187.
 49. See Zylberberg 2008, p. 35.
 50. See Nicolás Guagnini, “Sustracción del Naufragio,” in Buenos Aires, 2002, pp. 26–31 (esp. p. 30).
 51. See Allan Kaprow, *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, New York, 1999, p. 86.
 52. See Guagnini 2002, p. 29.
 53. As recounted by Isaac Zylberberg; see Gradowczyk 1998, pp. 44–45.