

Remains – Tomorrow

Themes in
Contemporary
Latin American
Abstraction

Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Editor



HATJE
CANTZ

Cecilia Fajardo-Hill

Introduction



Adriana Varejão, Poivo Color Wheels, 2015, with Poivo oil colours, 2013

The impulse behind *Remains-Tomorrow: Themes in Contemporary Latin American Abstraction* is an epistemological and aesthetic inquiry into the nature of abstraction and contemporary art. This publication consolidates an investigation that started in 2010 with the aim of producing an exhibition titled *Abstraction in Action*, whose objective was to dispel stereotypical notions about abstract art and to show that contemporary abstraction is complex, ever-growing, experimental, not easily definable, and circumscribed neither by modernist notions of abstraction nor by geometric abstraction. This exhibition never took place: the body of work assembled during the course of our investigation was so rich, diverse, and exciting that it required the creation of a broader platform. So in 2011 we founded what is now the Sammy Sayago Collection, focused on post-1990s abstraction in Latin America. We also launched *Abstraction in Action*, an arts initiative of the collection that includes the interactive database abstractioninaction.com, publications, exhibitions, and special projects. The Sammy Sayago Collection is supporting and funding this publication.

Remains-Tomorrow attests to the aesthetic and conceptual potential of abstraction as a key language of contemporary art. It also acknowledges the importance and long-lasting legacy of abstract

art and modernism in Latin America between 1940 and the 1980s, both in the expansion of inherited traditions and in the deconstruction of canonical ideas related to these traditions. Celebrating contemporary abstract art from Latin America, this publication is rooted in the artists represented in the Sammy Sayago Collection and *Abstraction in Action*, although it expands well beyond both platforms. By creating frameworks for examining how contemporary Latin American abstraction, its richness, complexity, and surprising breadth may be interpreted today, it proposes to be a reference in contemporary abstraction for the art world and academia. The title *Remains-Tomorrow* suggests the past, present, and future of abstraction in Latin America, as well as the history of the Sammy Sayago Collection itself.

At the core of *Remains-Tomorrow* are a multitude of questions addressed in the publication's thematic structure, the essays, and the images of works by 289 artists. These are: What is abstraction? What is contemporary abstraction? When does modern abstraction become contemporary, and when does a modern artist become a contemporary one? What constitutes a will to abstract? Can abstraction be one of the languages in the multidisciplinary vocabulary of an artist, as opposed to a defining label? What is the boundary between abstraction and figuration? What is the materiality of abstraction? How can we understand

abstraction as a realm of contemporary art? How does it contribute to the idea of contemporary art? Does abstraction have disadvantages in comparison to figuration? Can we talk about subject matter in abstraction? Can abstraction be political? What issues can be addressed through abstraction? What types of conceptual, symbolic, and aesthetic freedoms can be exercised through abstraction? What type of agency can be achieved through abstraction in tackling contextual issues such as gender, the body, violence, social issues, daily life, and more? Can contemporary abstraction address, mediate, and negotiate the failures of the utopianism associated with modernism and modern abstraction? Is the market defining what abstraction is, and if so how may artists counter this perception?

It is my position as the editor of *Remains-Tomorrow* that abstraction constitutes one of the most powerful and interesting forms of contemporary art, and of the contemporary. Abstraction is not defined in terms of the old-fashioned opposition to reality/figuration. It cannot be pinned down to a generic or uniform idea of an artistic language devoid of context, agency, and content. To point to the many possible avenues of interpretation in contemporary Latin American abstraction, *Remains-Tomorrow* is structured by theme. Because of the elusive and multiple nature of abstraction, none of these themes is easily definable, which may seem paradoxical, contradictory, and perhaps even counter-productive. Nevertheless, the themes identified in this publication are not intended to circumscribe or flatten the works represented. Instead, they point to the fact that there may be multiple conceptual frames of reference for viewing and understanding contemporary abstraction. They affirm that abstraction is not a generic field that it is forever modern.

Remains-Tomorrow was going to be published in 2019, nevertheless due to unforeseen circumstances as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed by three years. I would like to honor three artists that sadly passed away during this period: Jaime Ávila (1966–2020), Alf González (1962–2021), and Carmen Herrera (1915–2022). This book includes a historical essay on modern abstraction in Latin America by Juan Ledezma, an essay on contemporary abstraction by myself, and introductions to the following eight themes, also by myself: From Modern to Contemporary; Critiques of Modernism; Dialogues with Perceptual Modernism; Intercultural Abstraction; Abstraction/Gender/Body; Abstraction and the Everyday; Contingent Abstraction; and Abstraction as a Language. In addition, it includes twenty-eight short essays by artists. We hope that this multiplicity of voices illustrates how expansive and ever-growing this field of contemporary art is. Each one of the 289 artists included is represented by two works and a biography. Despite the large number of artists, many more are missing. I wish it was possible to include more artists at this stage such as: Augusto Bayardo, Ángela Gurría, Alicia Hemero, Luciana Lamothe, Paulo Monteiro, and Tiago Tebet. Given the historical moment of human loss and social upheaval, much of it revolving around class, gender, and race, Adriana Varejao is especially poignant—and thus her absence the more noticeable—therefore we include her work with this introduction.

In this sense, *Remains-Tomorrow* represents the beginning of a new era of research and exploration.

Remains-Tomorrow

Essays

Raquel Rabinovich

- ▲ River Library Scrolls, 2002-14 (with detail)
- ▼ Thresholds 1, 2014-17



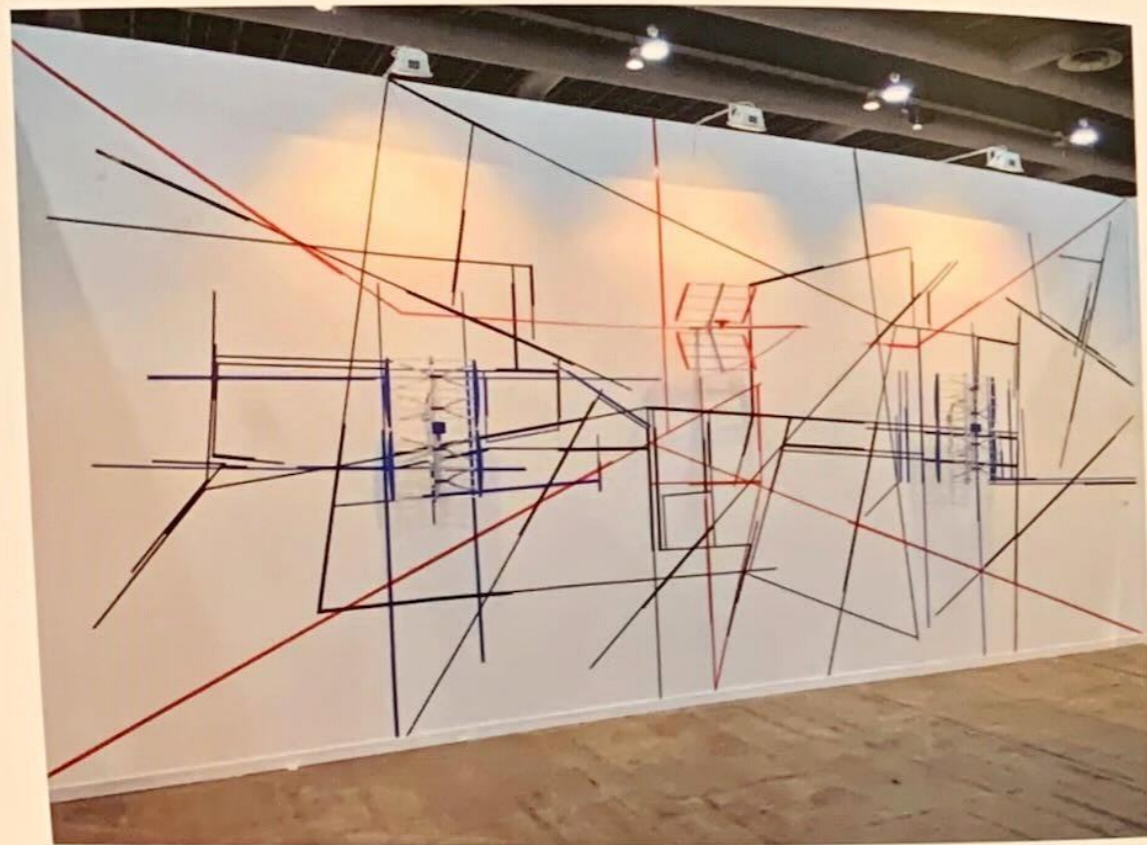
Carlos Rojas

- ▶ Papeles (Papers), 1996
- ▼ Cenicienta (Cinderella), ca. 1992



Vargas-Suárez Universal

- ▲ *Terra Vectors Diptych*, 2011
- ▼ *Interkosmos*, 2015



Héctor Zamora

- ▲ *Protogeometrias (Proto geometries)*, 2013
- ▼ 6, de la serie *Potencialidades* (6, from the *Potentialities* series), 2013

