

# the geometry of hope

Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection

 **The Blanton**  
Museum of Art

Art is experience  
Blanton Museum of Art | The University of Texas at Austin  
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**EXHIBITION GUIDE**  
**On view February 20–April 22, 2007**

# THE GEOMETRY OF HOPE

**Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection marks more than a major showing of 130 works of art from the acclaimed Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC). The exhibition, catalogue, symposium, and public programs are the culmination of a seven-year collaboration between the CPPC—a program of the Fundación Cisneros—and the Blanton.**

According to Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, curator of Latin American art at the Blanton and project director for the exhibition, the title *The Geometry of Hope* brings together the two threads that epitomize abstract art from Latin America: on the one hand, geometry, precision, clarity, and reason; on the other, a utopian sense of hope. “The title comes in opposition to the ‘geometry of fear,’” he says, “a term coined by British art critic and poet Herbert Read in 1952 to describe the atmosphere of postwar angst in British art and its expression through aggressive and unstable geometrical forms. People often consider Latin America to be associated with poverty, failure, and pessimism, but this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue should remind us that there was a time—particularly in the post World War II period—when Latin America was a place where hope for a progressive future existed in a world devastated by war and destruction. The idea of a positive utopia plays out in the colorful and kinetic works in the exhibition, experimental objects as catalysts for community building, calling for joy and prosperity.”

As you walk through the galleries, you’ll see that *The Geometry of Hope* is organized around key decades in specific cities critical to the development of abstract art in the Americas: Montevideo (1930s), Buenos Aires (1940s), São Paulo (1950s), Rio de Janeiro (1950s–60s), Paris (1960s), and Caracas (1960s–70s). The exhibition features paintings, sculpture, magazines, and manifestos by approximately 40 artists, including Joaquín Torres-García, from Montevideo; Gyula Kosice and Tomás Maldonado, from Buenos Aires; Geraldo de Barros and Waldemar Cordeiro, from São Paulo; Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, from Rio de Janeiro; and Jesús Rafael Soto and Carlos Cruz-Diez, from Paris and Caracas.

In tracing the development of ideas from one socio-geographic context to another, the exhibition challenges the view of Latin American art as a single phenomenon, revealing important differences and tensions among various artistic proposals articulated during the decades being examined. The exhibition also challenges

stereotypes about Latin America as a third-world country bound by folklore. These six cities were extremely cosmopolitan, and although each had its own distinct sophisticated and wordly personality, they all shared a notion of modernity. The exhibition’s inclusion of Paris as a “Latin American” city underscores the cosmopolitan and international nature of Latin American abstraction—characteristics that are often ignored in American and European accounts of the history of modern art.

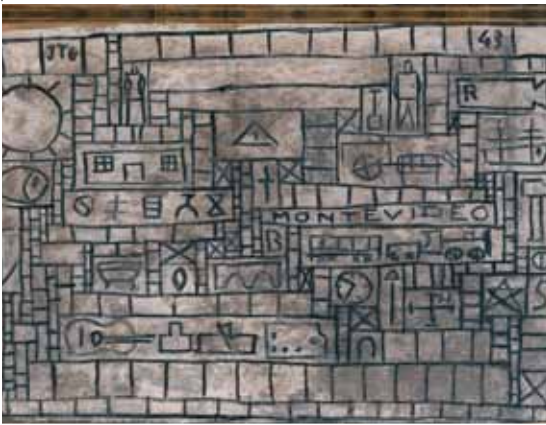
Broadly speaking, says Pérez-Barreiro, there are two tendencies within Latin American geometric abstraction. One is based on a belief in reason—and the other on a belief in the opposite of reason. The artists whose work exhibits a tendency towards reason—Tomás Maldonado, Willys de Castro, Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez—embrace an ideological affiliation with the concept of progress. Those interested in the other tendency—Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica—use the same visual language to undermine the rationalist discourse of modernity in favor of a deep questioning of the role of art in human experience.

Beyond context, beyond intent, and beyond theory, the works presented in this exhibition also have value from a very physical and visual standpoint: each is a remarkable aesthetic experience in and of itself, and exemplary of the CPPC as a whole. “The Cisneros Collection, and the depth and range of Latin American Geometric Abstraction that it contains, is without equal,” says Pérez-Barreiro. “Indeed, it is a veritable encyclopedia of all the major artists and movements in Latin America from the 1920s to the present day, and there is no collection like it in the world in public or private hands.”

*The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art. Generous funding for the exhibition is provided by the Eugene McDermott Foundation and Mr. and Mrs. Richard W. Moncrief. The accompanying catalogue and symposium are made possible by the support of the Fundación Cisneros.

Previous Page (detail)  
**Willys de Castro**  
Uberlândia, Brazil, 1926–São Paulo, Brazil, 1988  
*Objeto ativo-amarelo [Active Object-Yellow]*, 1959–1960  
Oil on canvas mounted on hardboard  
35 x 70 x 0.5 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros





**Joaquín Torres-García**  
Montevideo, Uruguay, 1874–1949  
*Composición constructiva 16*  
[Constructive Composition 16], 1943  
Oil on cardboard, 43.2 x 64.5 x .3 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros  
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**Montevideo**  
Avenue, June 18, 1940



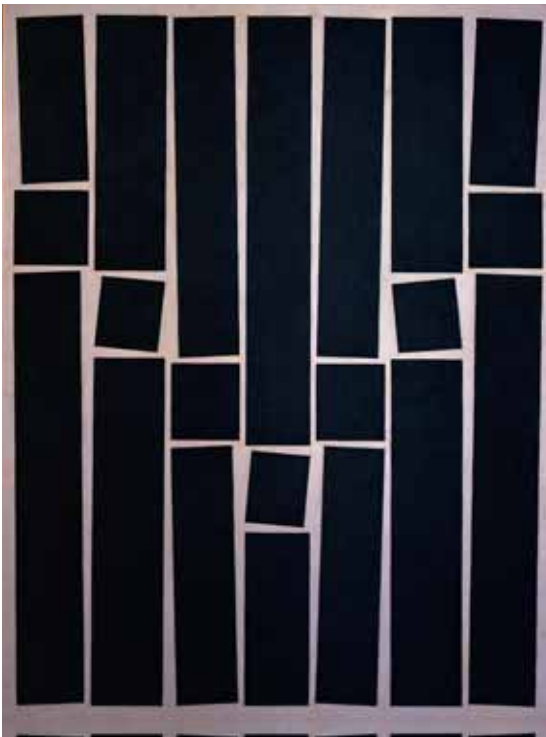
**Raúl Lozza**  
Buenos Aires, Argentina, b. 1911  
*Invencción n.º 150*  
[Invention No. 150], 1948  
Enamel on wood, 94.0 x 111.1 x 3.5 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

**Buenos Aires**  
Downtown Buenos Aires, showing Calle Corrientes and Avenida Sáenz Peña  
Photograph by Horacio Coppola, 1936



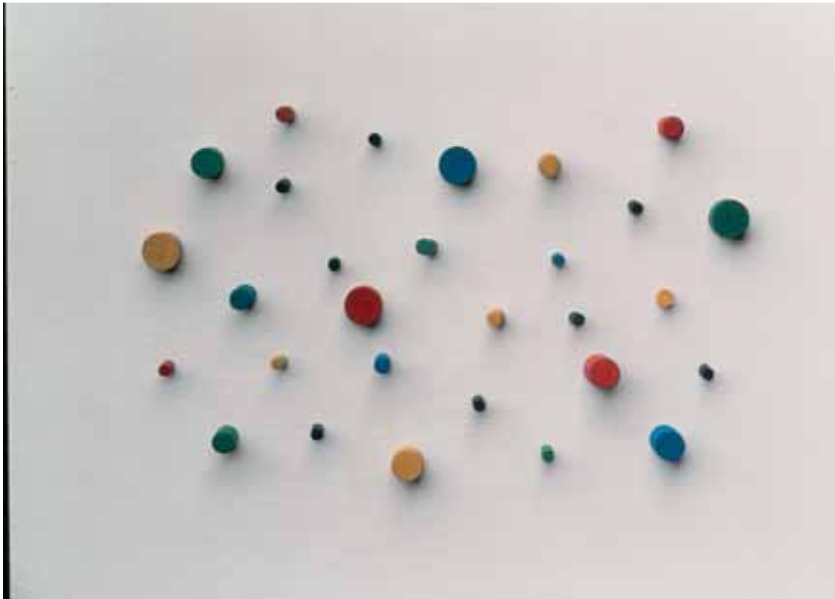
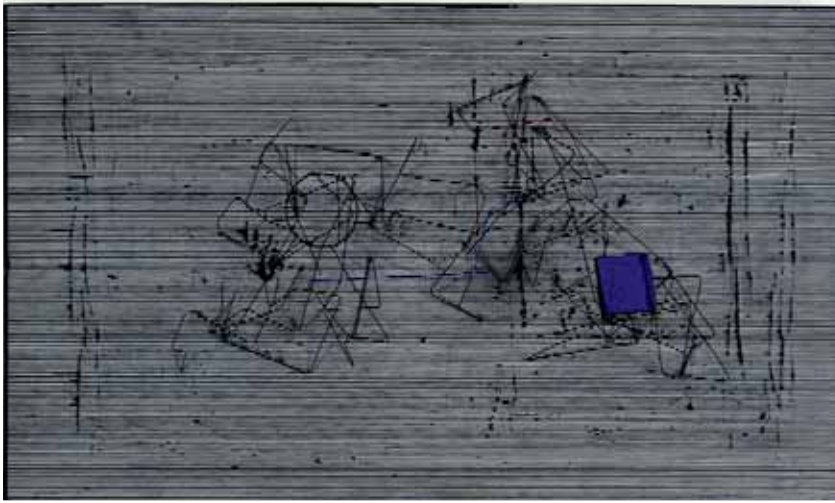
**Waldemar Cordeiro**  
Rome, Italy, 1925–São Paulo, 1973  
*Idéia visível* [Visible Idea], 1956  
Acrylic on masonite, 59.9 x 60 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

**São Paulo**  
Aerial view of São Paulo. Photograph by Pierre Verger, c. 1950



**Hélio Oiticica**  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1937–1980  
*Pintura 9* [Painting 9], 1959  
Oil on canvas, 116.2 x 89.2 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

**Rio de Janeiro**  
Aerial view of Copacabana, Urca, and Botafogo beaches  
Photograph by Marcel Gautherot



**TOP: Jesús Rafael Soto**  
1923, Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela–  
2005, Paris  
*Hommage à Yves Klein*  
[Homage to Yves Klein], 1961  
Steel wires, metal, and industrial  
paint on sheetrock  
55 x 96 x 4 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

**Paris**  
The Arc de Triomphe, the Tuileries, and  
the Champs-Élysée. Photograph by  
Willy Ronis, 1961

**BOTTOM: Carlos Cruz-Diez**  
b. Caracas, Venezuela, 1923  
*Proyecto para un mural*  
[Project for a Mural], 1954  
Industrial paint on wood, 40 x 55.2 cm  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

**Caracas**  
Olympic Stadium, Ciudad Universitaria,  
Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Architect.  
Photograph by Paolo Gasparini,  
c. 1950.

## LEARNING MORE

A richly illustrated, 342-page catalogue (available in the museum shop or online for \$29.95) reveals the stories behind the works, with bilingual (English-Spanish) essays on each of the cities explored in the exhibition, and extended essays presenting new research on 40 individual works of art. In addition to Pérez-Barreiro and other renowned scholars of Latin American art, authors include 13 graduate students who are participating in the Cisneros Seminar from The University of Texas, New York University, and other universities.

In addition, on February 17, 2007, The University of Texas and New York University will present an international symposium on the occasion of the exhibition, bringing international scholars to Austin to discuss the work. In the fall of 2007, a variation of the exhibition will be presented in New York City at the Grey Art Gallery, New York University. The symposium is free and open to the public, but advance registration is required. To register and find out more information on related public programming, email [latinam@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:latinam@blantonmuseum.org) or call (512) 471-8984.