
abraham palatnik: seismograph of color

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Abraham Palatnik, *Untitled*, acrylic paint on canvas, 1991.

Nara Roesler is pleased to inaugurate its 2022 exhibition calendar with the first retrospective of Brazilian artist Abraham Palatnik (1928-2020) in New York. Curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas, *Abraham Palatnik: Seismograph of Color* presents a selection of works that reveal Palatnik's fundamental role in Brazilian art in the second half of the twentieth century. It also highlights the relevance and pioneer character of his production in conceptualizing works of visual art as force fields, mediums of energy, and vectors of chromatic dynamism. The show is on view from January 13 to March 1, 2022.

Abraham Palatnik is a monumental figure in Latin American art. Author of the earliest mechanical experiments with movement and color, the artist was a pioneer among practitioners of Op Art in the Americas. Over the course of seventy years of production, he established himself as a complex creator who expanded the possibilities of visual art by bridging, within his work, technology and art, energy and color, function and ornament, and nature and movement.

His work can be found in several collections around the world including The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; the Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH); the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), among others.

Born in 1928 in the Brazilian city of Natal, in his early childhood Palatnik moved with his family to Tel-Aviv, where he remained until 1948. Trained as an artist and engineer there, he began to work influenced by both the School of Paris and Modern Bauhaus-like ideas. Upon returning to Brazil at age 19, Palatnik lived in Rio de Janeiro and joined the artistic and intellectual circle established around critic Mário Pedrosa, a key figure in Brazilian art in the twentieth century. In this context, he became friends with artists of his generation, exhibiting with *Grupo Frente* (Frente Group), which brought together figures such as Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Aluísio Carvão.

One determining factor in his artistic development was his involvement with the National Center of Psychiatry in Rio de Janeiro, directed by the psychiatrist Nise da Silveira who, influenced by the ideas of Carl Jung, was an early advocate and fierce defender of art's potential in the treatment of psychiatric patients. Palatnik coordinated painting and arts workshops alongside artists Ivan Serpa and Almir Mavignier. The impact of this experience with the psychiatric patients and the images they produced was so intense that it led Palatnik to abandon painting altogether.

It was during the first São Paulo Biennial, in 1951, that Palatnik emerged on the art scene in a decisive way. This year his first *Kinechromatic Device* (1949) was rejected for not fitting into the existing categories. The piece would subsequently be accepted and awarded a special mention from the international jury. The work is pioneer in its use of artificial light sources, and over seven editions of the Biennial, between 1951 and 1963, several other *Kinechromatic Devices* were exhibited. In 1964, the artist gained international renown when these works were also exhibited at the Venice Biennale.

Palatnik continued to investigate and innovate in the artistic field until the end of his life, creating works capable of fascinating viewers due to the elegance of their composition—whether by using mechanisms that choreograph a dance of colors and forms or by painting and molding materials such as wood, metal, plaster, and cardboard to create abstract images full of rhythm and movement.

Although generally associated with kinetic art movements, Palatnik's work seems to transcend categories. For curator Luis Pérez-Oramas, this “perhaps means that the central question of his work is not movement directly, and consequently his production transcends the trivial categories art history and criticism attribute to Op Art and even to Concrete Art...It is not, of course, about representing something in Palatnik's work; on the contrary, it is precisely about presenting, for example, the clues, marks, and traces of movement and therefore what the work makes visible.” The essence of the artist's work is movement and its vertigo, the transforming force that has one of its most powerful metaphors in nature.

We see in his work a harmonic combination of these two universes: that of mechanical regularity, linked to human rationality and the desire to build things, and that of the organic character of the natural world, evoking the universe of sensations renewed by the constant transformation of the landscape.

In addition to pieces from emblematic series, such as *Kinechromatic Devices* and *Kinetic Objects*, *Abraham Palatnik: Seismograph of Color* presents figurative paintings from the beginning of the artist's career, including a self-portrait, sketches, drawings, and projects that allow us to enter into his creative process.

On the occasion of the exhibition, Nara Roesler Books, the gallery's editorial branch, will launch *Abraham Palatnik: Encantamento/Experimentação*, the most extensive monograph ever published on the artist. Organized by Luiz Camillo Osorio, it will be available in two editions: English and Portuguese. In addition to a prolific notebook with archival images and works by the artist, the book features historical and unpublished texts by renowned art writers such as Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Mário Pedrosa, Luis Pérez-Oramas, Abigail Winograd, Kayra Cabanas, and Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro.

Abraham Palatnik is an iconic figure in the optical and kinetic art movements of Brazil—a pioneer in his long-standing interest for exploring the creative possibilities embedded in crossings of art and technology. Having studied engineering, the artist became interested in investigating mechanical uses of light and movement. In 1949, he rose to prominence with the creation of his first *Aparelho Cinecromático* [Kinechromatic Device] effectively reinventing the idea of a painting by using different voltage bulbs moving at different speeds and directions to create kaleidoscopic images. The piece was shown at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo (1951) and received an Honorable Mention from the International Jury for its originality.

Abraham Palatnik subsequently initiated his work with reliefs, coined Progressive reliefs, which he made out of various materials (such as wood, duplex cardboard and acrylic), manually cut and intercalated to create a sense of rhythmic undulation. Apart from the series *W*, which has come to incorporate the use of laser-cutting, Palatnik continued to construct and paint every piece by hand, making each work a token of his craftsmanship, until the end of his life.

Nara Roesler is a leading Brazilian contemporary art gallery, representing seminal Brazilian and international artists who emerged in the 1950s as well as preeminent mid-career and emerging artists who dialogue with the currents put forth by these historical figures. Founded by Nara Roesler in 1989, the gallery has consistently fomented curatorial practice while upholding the utmost quality in art production. This has actively been put into practice through a select and rigorous exhibitions program created in close collaboration with its artists; the implementation and fostering of the Roesler Curatorial Project, a platform for curatorial projects; and continued support to artists beyond the gallery space, working with institutions and curators in offsite shows. In 2012, the gallery doubled its São Paulo exhibition space, in 2014 it expanded to Rio, and in 2015 it opened in New York City, continuing its mission to provide the best platform for its artists to show their work.

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