

BODE

Nice time to start painting

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Stacey Gillian Abe, Maxwell Alexandre, Cristina Canale, Flavio Garciandía, Luis E. López-Chávez, Miguel A. Machado, José Yaque, Agnes Waruguru

Despite being part of the genetic information of painting, which means it has been and always will be there, it was not until the irruption of the avant-garde in the twentieth century that abstraction began to self-identify as a fundamental dimension within the Western pictorial language. It was, we might say, a repositioning of the focal point of art, committed to generating a world of its own based on the mastery of medial specificities. Clement Greenberg asserted that it was on the path of the absolute that the avant-garde arrived at abstract art and poetry attempting "in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms", i.e., an art whose meaning was encoded in its form or aesthetic values and that it did not refer to another reality outside itself.

The abstract endeavor very quickly demonstrated that its essentialist and universal will was only one of the many ways of understanding the object of art. However, from the point of view of pictorial language and canonical modes of representation, abstraction considerably widened the spectrum of compositional law and the relationship between background and figure. On the one hand, abstraction would untie painting from the imperative of figuration and the illusion of realism by flattening the elements within the canvas and breaking with the very idea of "a scene". On the other hand, it would heighten the importance of motifs presented while simultaneously generating a sort of "atomization" and "decentralization" effect within the work. This change in the discipline triggered its expressive potentialities.

Nowadays, after the avant-gardes and their great absolutes, painting is moving towards an intersectional, hybrid, mestizo territory. A territory that relies on axioms and historical canons to reinvent, often in a very personal manner, the medium. If not to invent anything, to exist under its own rules that cannot be generalized to all art. The artists gathered in this exhibition renounce the temptation to lay down a path to follow, knowing that each region, country, school, and individualized history has non-transferable questions and concerns. Recognizing this aspect is the key to the emergence of productions that detach themselves from a specific duty to be and are nourished by referents more related to their time and circumstances than to the times of the discipline.

The insistence on painting, then, operates as an exercise of resistance that moves against the grain not only of the old abstraction-figuration dichotomy but also of the elegiac discourses that sentence, from time to time, the death of painting. These painters are heirs to Julian Schnabel's already iconic maxim about the recurrent idea of the exhaustion of the medium: "I thought that if painting is dead, then it's a nice time to start painting".

– Daleysi Moya

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Stacey Gillian Abe (b. 1990, UG) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice includes photography, sculpture, installation, performance, and painting. Her concepts highlight the strengths and fragilities of the female mind while attempting to critique stereotypical depictions of black women. By materializing imagined spaces and incorporating the metaphorical, her work refers to themes of identity, gender, spirituality, and cultural mysticism.

Maxwell Alexandre (b. 1990, BR) is a Brazilian artist whose urban poetics consists of the construction of narratives and scenes structured from his daily experiences in the city and in Rocinha, where he lives and works. On different supports like canvases of Capri pools, doors, and iron frames, anonymous personages emerge in situations recurrent at the favela. Through his immense political compositions, the legacy of European classical painting meets one of muralism and art from the streets– both references that he remixes to the irregular rhythms of hip hop which resonate with present-day Brazil under tension.

Cristina Canale (b. 1961, BR) is a Brazilian contemporary painter whose works evoke a calm exploration of everyday life. Using an array of materials like oil, acrylic, and fabric, her paintings present a reduction of elements; a duality between figuration and abstraction, and a unique language in which both techniques evoke each other. With volumes of paint and masses of color, Canale's paintings reference a pictorial history along with a natural intuition for composition and spatiality that suggest depth.

Flavio Garciandía (b. 1954, CU) is a Cuban artist regarded as a leading and influential figure within Cuba. He is regarded as one of the fathers of Central and South American conceptual art scene of the late 1970s and 1980s. His works unite a range of postmodern styles, which indirectly adapt and reflect Cuban culture as a fusion of diverse influences and terms of references. The resulting artistic signature is one that the artist himself describes, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as New Tropical Abstraction – playing on the meteorological term Tropical Depression, which refers to a group of thunderstorms under a closed cloud cover.

Luis Enrique López-Chávez (b. 1988, CU) is a contemporary Cuban painter exploring the visual dimensions of sculptural form and logical space. Based on the frictions between geometrical forms of representation with the socio-historical context, he proposes a visuality contained between a conceptual methodology and an unconscious pulse, between arithmetical and philosophical image.

Miguel Alejandro Machado (b. 1990, CU) is a Cuban artist who approaches his work with antiquarian thoroughness and mixes motions and pictorial styles by using dark and contrasting oil colors. His works vary greatly - from a kind of neo-baroque and expressionism to a mixture of hyperrealism and postimpressionism. Employing oil painting as his main medium, the artist includes other disciplines ranging from drawing and sculpture to animated film. His stories resemble temporal and stylistic journeys, intertwined in the artist's head until they find their form on the canvas.

José Yaque (b. 1985, CU) is a Cuban contemporary artist working across several mediums including painting, installation, art object, drawing, among other art forms. Through his multidisciplinary practice, he explores the relationship between man and nature. His research process and concerns may depart from personal origins to the circumstantial. The indistinction between material and medium, which characterizes him, marks the strong presence of experimentation within his practice.

Agnes Waruguru (b. 1994, KE) is a Kenyan contemporary artist whose work ranges from painting, drawing, printmaking, needlework, and installation. The materiality of objects in space is at the center of her practice which is intimately rooted in personal identity politics. Her work often references traditional women's practices and cultural identifiers. Often referencing nature and familiar spaces, Waruguru uses traditional and non-traditional materials within her work to represent nature and the domestic.