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BROOKLYN RAIL

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“Textura y Trama y Abstracción”
Galeria Estrany De La Mota, Barcelona
By David Rhodes



Sara Ramo, left: *Contrato*, 2014; right: *Caledario*, 2012. Courtesy Galeria Estrany de la Mota.

During the months of March and April in both Barcelona and Madrid, the curatorial project *Jugada a Tres Bandas* proposes to galleries that they interrupt their usual schedule and invite independent curators to organize exhibitions that include non-gallery artists. Barcelona-based independent curator Frederic Montornés started from an intuition, spontaneously applied, given the time limits of organizing such an exhibition, about the possibilities of combining works from artists in Latin America and Spain, artists who have moved between countries in either direction or are remaining in the country of their origin. Given the different history of abstraction in Latin America, this also suggested another, more open view of modernity and the avant garde. As part of this other tradition, artists such as Jesus Raphael Soto, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, and Lygia Pape create work that is at once inventive, playful, and socially engaged.

Instead of the serial nature of one movement leading inexorably to the next, *Textura y Trama y Abstracción* traces the threads of an impure and conceptual abstraction, one that is neither idealist nor reductive, but rather, inclusive of recognizable objects and embodied ideas. The works by all the artists relate to lived experience and quotidian detail as found in day-to-day life and the environment through which people pass routinely. In these details, repetition, pattern, and fragment, now isolated and focused upon, become visible. One reference for Montornés's curatorial vision was Michelangelo Antonioni's "*Montagne Incantate*" (*Enchanted Mountains*). Begun in the early 1930s, these miniature watercolors were enlarged from a size of two to three centimeters up to two meters. The unexpected shapes discovered through the change in size were used as sources for composition and color in Antonioni's films.

Since at least the 1980s, painting and any discussion of formalism in Barcelona have been largely proscribed in favor of conceptualism. While it is true that there is a strong publishing, literary, and politically partisan

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tradition here that supports activist and socially engaged work, the rejection of any kind of Formalism—however sensual and intelligent it may be—seems mistaken and reductive. Conceptualism and Formalism are not mutually exclusive, and this exhibition, which would be of interest in any city, without being rhetorical or making rhetoric its purpose, says as much.

On descending the stairs from street level to the gallery's main space, a grid of chewing gum spots—each spot 25 centimeters apart—occupies the whole floor. This piece by Wilfredo Prieto, entitled *Smart Gum* (2014), activates or unsettles the entire space by appearing to hover just above the floor and by echoing the bolts on the white vertical support beams of the gallery. The gum itself, found across many sidewalks, is now an ordered pattern. Rather than the trajectory of abstraction's disengagement with seeing and interpreting a surrounding reality, by using both gum and the grid Prieto grounds abstraction, literally in this case. Meyer Vaisman's *Firma de artista en caos I-IV*, ("*Signature of the artist in chaos 1 – 4*") (2014), are pale plywood panels inkjet-printed with computer-manipulated signatures repeated in positive and negative. The lengths of wood that would normally be on the back of the plywood for support are on the front and make a geometric shape across the inkjet print. Something as basic to identity as a signature is made central and abstracted through repetition and distortion into a meaningless swirl of gestures.

Sara Ramo's *Calendario* (2012) is comprised of 12 collages of cut and reassembled calendars set in three rows of four, the pink and red type shuffling and inverting the dates and days, chronological time mashed and adjusted. Ramo's *Contrato*, ("Contract") (2012), is like a tribal mask made of narrow strips of paper that billow and hang downwards, resulting in a formally intriguing and beautiful totemic shape. In *Prototipos de Diseños de Reproducciones Accidentales de los Azulejos del Metro de Madrid* (*Accidental Prototype Designs, Reproductions of Tiles from the Madrid Subway*), Patricia Esquivias has recreated fragments of the Madrid subway's mosaic tiled walls that have been repaired with non-matching tiles in routine subway maintenance. The results are presented on a low shelf as abstract works, their origin the subject of an accompanying video projected from the floor onto the wall next to and beneath the shelf. Here isolated from their subway context, they exist as apparently independent compositions. Again our attention is brought to that which could easily be passed by—in the representation the life of forms is shown to exist environmentally as much as art historically.

By choosing not to divorce formal means from conceptual ends, the artists included in TEXTURAY TRAMAY ABSTRACCION represent an alternative take on the resources and potential offered by notions of abstraction. The works on view include and acknowledge the personal and social space that lives in the pattern and texture of our everyday surroundings, resulting in an exhibition that is both fresh and expansive.