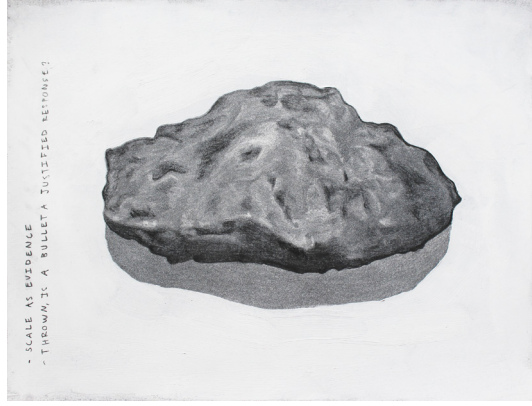


Sicardi Gallery

Linear Imaginations Whistles, Visions, Fields, and Figures of Along the Lines of Gego Curated by Patrik Haggren



Lauren Moya Ford, *Florero 3*, 2014.
Ink and Gouache on paper, 9x12 in



Anna Elise Johnson, *Scale as evidence*,
2014. Graphite, spray paint and Gesso
on paper, 9x12 in

Gabriel Martinez, *Untitled*, 2014.
Silver point on paper, 7x10in



Mikhail Lylov, V. Khllebnikov for *the birds* (detail), 2014.
Digital print on archival paper, 8x5in

1506 W Alabama St
Houston, TX 77006
Tel. 713 529 1313
sicardigallery.com

Anna Elise Johnson
Mikhail Lylov
Gabriel Martinez
Lauren Moya Ford

January 20 to
February 11, 2015

Linear Imaginations
Whistles, Visions, Fields, and Figures
Along the Lines of Gego

Curated by
Patrik Haggren

Linear Imaginations travels with drawings by Gego through the works of four artists that explore sensibilities belonging to the autopoietic entanglements of their materials and forms. From ground brick worked into linen that organizes an irregular surface through its creases without making reference to an external frame or structure, to a barricade whose structure is suggested by memories found between its disparate components, the exhibition seeks to connect these artists to the metamorphic de- and reformations that come out of Gego's application of the line. Gego is known for her line's movements between object and plane, fore- and background, which destabilize the structural hierarchies that distinguish contours from contents, or forms from the matters at hand.¹ Without using Gego's work as a model for comparison, a representational grid or unit of measurement, the works are perspective elaborations of a line's experiential capacities, ways of sensing and feeling.

Art historian Monica Amor has described Gego's works on paper as "diagrams of dispersal that celebrate the margins, interstices, and in-betweenness of the lines, on the one hand undoing the self-sufficiency and semantic transparency of the line, and on the other underscoring the necessarily contextual nature of meaning."² The exhibition starts from these lines of Gego's that do not simply pass through a pre-figured or ideal space but, rather, fold perceiving fields and figures out of and into the texture of a surface. It begins with a line whose

degree of angles, speeds, and densities, as mathematician and gay activist Gilles Chatelet put it, "evades an abstraction that seizes mobility from and grants mobility to beings."³ In the lithograph, *Coordinantes*, this abstraction that fixates and imposes activity is skewed by movements of the very delineation that would otherwise make out a stable frame of reference: a grid describing and calculating trajectories as interchangeable dots, regardless of how or where they are headed. Distributed according to the curves of the axis, the dots in Gego's work instead imply a moving landscape of distances and depths generated by velocities and directions. We see a plane of lived experience or qualitative vision, of a line's movement, or of the fuchsia that Gego chose.

Chatelet was interested in diagrams insofar as they convey the differential intensions of a movement. Opposed to movement's actual extension, intension withholds qualities from spatial expression: perhaps the saturation of a color, or the direction of a line that remains incalculably oblique to any fixed coordinates of perception and desire. One has to sink into or follow trajectories that make out the complexion of matter, indicating that it is among the many determinations and relations that lay coiled in concrete bodies that one finds an abstraction suitable to describe Gego's drawing (a medium whose preliminary she utilized to question the privilege that geometry gives to mass and volume). Perhaps an answer to the question, 'what does a line that makes no distinction between figure and plane allow one to see?' is provided by Gego's untitled lithograph also included in this exhibition. Its familiar figure is nevertheless hard to place, since its sparse articulation sketches a reduced form that does not identify any unity of diverse bodies. Somewhere between a winged creature and a human, the singular animal's mimetic capacity consists rather in the proximity of these different forms brought

about by a shared intension, both outlining and dispersing its appearance.

In Lauren Moya Ford's watercolor that plays on domesticated "still life," the chromatic, floating qualities of the line are not the same as the vase or plant. And in her ink paintings referencing the cross-cut stones described in sociologist and essayist Roger Caillois's book *The Writings of Stones*, the surface that cuts through the rock composite *septaria's* asymmetrical development in three dimensions is necessary for encountering the lines, revealing an always contingent landscape or animal among the totality of movements accumulated by the rock. Caillois was sensitive to the relation between irregularity and figuration in the linear development of rocks, stating that the movements they record lay claim to and mobilize the imagination, creating an experience of recognizable, yet never seen, landscapes and animals that are unique to the rock. While Moya Ford has painted a *septaria* of chaotic developments, the exhibition includes one of these rocks, out of which a strange similarity appears, without reference to any force but its own intentions, its layering conglomerations, pressures, and chemical reactions.

To follow the line into marginal zones, in which there is no structural totality or established utility, is both an artistic privilege and a necessary strategy for science. Deleuze and Guattari speak of partial observers in science, functions and concepts whose role "is to *perceive* and to *experience*, although these perceptions and affections are not those of a man, in the currently accepted sense, but belong to the thing studied."⁴ Interdisciplinary interests and sensibilities are reflected in Gabriel Martinez's silver point drawings, in which values such as shading and darkening are abstracted from their modeling functions and distributed across the plane. The different tonal variations of the drawings

undergo changes in hue when the silver markings oxidize, producing a chromatic effect that Martinez says “draws attention to the chaotic processes at work.” These “sculptural fields of chemical activity” are durational rather than spatial, potential more than actual, applied with intention and skill but without control over their uncertain process. The drawings’ different value systems, or ways of estimating bodies and corresponding them to a surface, might be unified in a more representational work. In Martinez’s series, however, they follow independent trajectories that are difficult to extract from their messy materiality. Meanwhile, his use of silver point—a material that was privileged for crafting perspective works before graphite became so widely available—alludes to the entwined histories of economic abstraction and the ideal geometry used to represent dimensional bodies in distinction from their milieu. The increased extraction of graphite from the earth supplied the material for increasingly gestural styles of drawing.

In the work of Anna Elise Johnson, we find similar concerns. In *Scale as evidence*, her drawing of a rock thrown at guards along the US-Mexico border, Johnson’s minute attention to detail shows the incompatibility of micro and macro scales, lived experience and the order of things. Asking if shooting is a justified response to the measurements taken of thrown rocks collected by government and vigilante border patrols, Johnson points rhetorically to the arbitrariness of rulers that ignore the rough quality of a rock’s surface, as well how the act of measurement, first of all, has ignored the inequality of the situation. In *Remembering how to build a barricade*, Johnson’s sculptural collage, the accumulation of disparate materials provides a “memory” of how to build the structure. Cobblestones taken from images of spring in Cairo 2011 and May in Paris 1968, among others, are layered in resin.

Partially outlined shapes with their pink volumes floating like undelineated planes of shape above, produce kinetic alterations between the dimensional forms of lines and the potential formations indicated by the flatness of their mass rendered in color alone. Both sets of works combine acts of resistance with a sympathy for different material textures and idiosyncrasies, whether depicting a rock that fits in the hand, or a piece of refuse brought to the barricade.

If Gego’s line plays along a continuum from the contours of figures to abstract fields of movement, Mikhail Lylov’s installation *V. Khlebnikov for the Birds* similarly elaborates how Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov sees a mountain line in the letters A and V. Lylov makes imperceptible the differences between mouth and beak in the territory opened up by the artist’s whistling address to a robin. As queer theorist Elisabeth Grosz writes: “each species ‘speaks’ as it can, elaborating a line of movement that brings sound, movement, resonance into being. ... Language is a tendency, residing within the voice and other organs capable of resonating sounds, to articulate, to express, to vibrate, and thus in some way to affect bodies.”⁵ In the second film of the installation, the camera goes along a rock’s texture with such close curiosity that one loses sight of the rock in the sense of a shape, as it is laid out on a continuous plane: a rock of perception and experience uninterrupted by estimations of what the rock is, where it begins and ends. For Lylov, this is not a question of liberating excess from the constraint of mental ideals so much as implicating the act of recording. In a process that echoes Gego’s association of drawing with the coiled richness of real space, Lylov transposes onto paper the crevices of rocks, alongside the lines of their figures, and again folds the surfaces into geometric objects. The three-dimensional symmetry discontinues and connects patterns while past demarcations

run like paths across the sculptures’ rhombuses and triangles. The provisional result, presented on the surface of a photograph, is a version of totality not predicated on seamlessness between material and form. It is, rather, a question of abstraction as recomposition, movement, and projection, as opposed to fixation.

Lylov’s work makes reference to the Levallois technique, a paleolithic method for stone knapping that archeologists claim displays signs of abstract thinking in early man. The theory was proven in part by archeologists, who recreated the technique under shop-floor like conditions. Subjected to Taylorist appreciation, the method held up to industrial systems of production, and the dawn of human innovation could be said to predict the rise of industry, insofar as intelligence was described in extensive, quantifiable terms. Today science operates quite differently. Failures to compute artificial intelligences have led to the use of cellular automata, the artificial *lives* of a body that, as philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers writes, “evolves toward stable forms of behaviour that belongs only to itself, which the maker may acknowledge but about which he harbors no ambition of predicting.”⁶ The process acknowledges that evolutionary processes are not dominated by a selection of any one kind of intelligence, seeking forms of life without reference to the particular examples that have evolved on earth. In coupling elements, “the creator is interested in behaviour that is already qualified, *already endowed* with a relatively robust landscape of possibles ‘emerging’ from that coupling.”

We may recognize in Stengers’s description the performative quality of Gego’s line, or the fields and figures created in-between them, just as the cellular automata included in this exhibition alludes to the style of Gego’s drawings. The focus on “emergence” seems to fit a

search for sociabilities different from the one in which reduction or coding of excesses such as noise, pleasure, and ornament defines elements and individuals in relation to the state of things. To rephrase Chatelet, however, the question is how that which emerges can enjoy itself as the surplus produced in the relations between people and things. By focusing not just on what autopoietic developments bring about, but also exploring the acts of recording that honor them, the artists in this exhibition situate a polemic as they traverse science, politics and aesthetics. They relate fields of practice, while keeping their distance.

Notes

1. See for example Petra Roettig, “Line as object to play with: Gego’s works on paper,” *Gego: Line as Object* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2014) 52-72. Also Bruno Bosteels, “Siting the event: Gego, modernity, and the cartographic turn,” *Gego 1957–1988: Thinking the line*, (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2006) 21–36.
2. Monica Amor, “Another Geometry: Gego’s reticulárea, 1969-1982,” *October* 113 (2005) 106.
4. Gilles Chatelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics, and Physics*, (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1993) 22.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994) 130.
5. Elisabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011) 20.
6. Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) 258.

Anna Elise Johnson

b. 1983, Germany

An artist based in Houston, Texas, Johnson completed her MFA at The University of Chicago, and was a Core Fellow at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) from 2012 to 2014. Her work has been exhibited at The Blaffer Museum's Window into Houston, Artist's Alliance in New York, and Lage Egal in Berlin, and is included in the collection of the MFAH.

Mikhail Lylov

b. 1989, Voronezh/Russia

Lylov is an independent artist and curator living in Berlin, Germany. After completing his MFA at Valand School of Fine Arts in Sweden in 2012, his projects have been supported by Le Pavillon program at Palais De Tokyo in Paris, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, Berlinale Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin, Rotterdam International Film Festival and the Core Program, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH).

Gabriel Martinez

b. 1973, USA

An artist based in Houston, Texas, Martinez completed his MFA at Columbia University, and was a Core Fellow at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) from 2011 to 2012. He is the director of Alabama Song and a Friend of Angela Davis Park.

Lauren Moya Ford

b. 1986, USA

An artist and writer based in Austin, Texas, Moya Ford graduated with a BA in Spanish and a BFA in Studio Art from The University of Texas at Austin. She completed her MFA in Painting at the University of Houston in 2014. Recent awards include the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center Fellowship for Interdisciplinary Art and the Frank Freed Travel Grant for research in Mexico City. She has participated in performances and exhibitions at the Hirsch Library, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Blaffer Art Museum, Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Rice University, Art Reach Chicago, and Star Gallery in Japan.

Patrik Haggren

is a researcher, curator, and collaborator, based in Berlin. He has most recently curated From Here to Afternoon (Laura Lee Blanton Gallery at the Glassell School of Art, 2013), an exhibition on the accumulation and projection of movements within dance, photography, economy, labor struggle and sculpture. Haggren completed the Core Program at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) in 2014. He is at work on projects in several places, including Houston and Stockholm, where he attends CuratorLab, an experimental seminar for curatorial projects.