

Marta Chilindron Graciela Hasper Dialogues

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■ SICARDI GALLERY

Abstraction is a Language

“The thing is, abstraction is a language whose tradition is full of references.”
- Graciela Hasper

Marked by their interest in geometry, their remarkable senses of color, and their sensitivity to the interplay of light with materials, there is much that Marta Chilindron and Graciela Hasper share (including also their city of birth, their gender, and their decades-long investigation of abstraction). Chilindron's brightly colored acrylic sculptures range from 12-inch cubes to almost 6-foot high trapezoids and spirals, each of which can be reconfigured into variations on its original shape. Hasper's untitled acrylic paintings are filled with colorful lines, arcs, squares, half-moons, and polygons, and the canvases can be re-oriented in any direction. Shown together for the first time, Hasper's paintings and Chilindron's sculptures build from a similar visual vocabulary, and yet they are substantively different. “Abstraction is a language,” Hasper notes, and as such, its many nuances and inflections are integral to its meanings. What, then, might a first dialogue between these two artists look like?

In the 1970s, Marta Chilindron studied printmaking with Argentine conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer, known for his strident political critiques and biting use of language. In the 1990s, she took drawing classes with Julio Alpuy, whose use of primary colors and repertory of forms followed the traditions of Joaquín Torres-García, the Uruguayan founder of Constructive Universalism. This unusual combination of artistic influences indicates the complexity of Chilindron's work, with its abiding interest in both geometry and conceptualism, simple forms and strategies of intervention in a space. It also linked her with an expatriate Latin American community: both Camnitzer and Alpuy moved to New York in the 1960s, as did Chilindron.

In her early works, Chilindron demonstrated an interest in everyday life and domestic environments, often using skewed perspective to draw out relationships between the object and the viewer or the artist. She has created several large-scale public works and urban interventions, which also explore the relationship between the human body and its surroundings.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Born in Buenos Aires, **Marta Chilindron** was raised in Montevideo. She relocated to New York in 1969, where she attended the State University of New York, Old Westbury. She studied at the Camnitzer-Porter Studio in Valdottavo, Italy during the summers of 1977 and 1978, and in the early 1990s, she took drawing classes with Julio Alpuy. She is the recipient of numerous grants, including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2013, 1986), Anonymous Was a Woman Grant (2001), The Joan Mitchell Foundation Award (2000), and a residency at PS1 (1985).

Chilindron's first public installations were created for the City University of New York (1986, 1987). She has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), Long Beach, CA (2013); State University of New York, Old Westbury (2006); and El Museo del Barrio, New York (1999). Work by the artist is held in numerous collections including the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, USA; Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, Florida, USA; El Museo del Barrio, New York, New York, USA; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., USA; and Sayago & Pardon Collection, Los Angeles, California, USA.

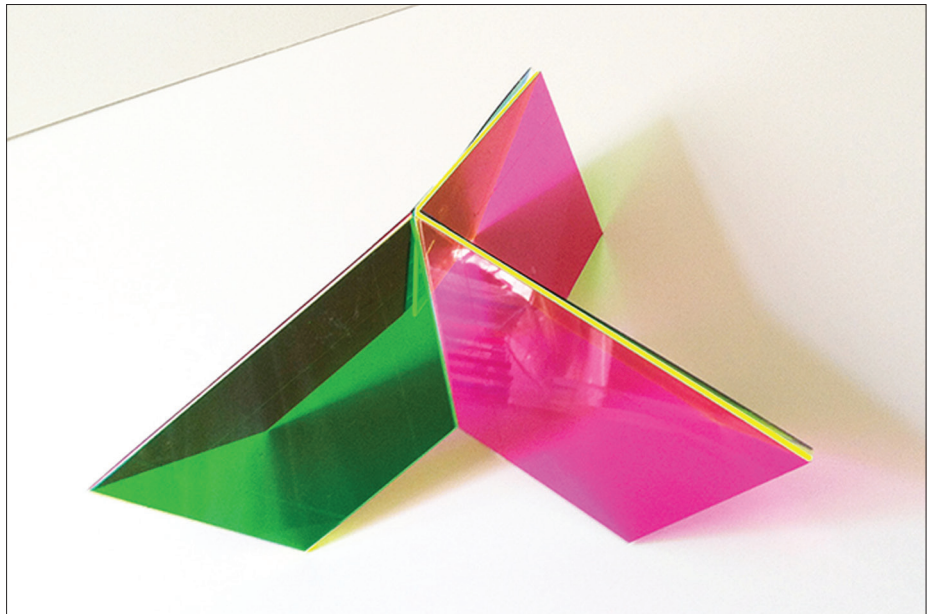
Born in Buenos Aires, **Graciela Hasper** studied with artist Diana Aisenberg between 1987 and 1991. In 1993, she participated in an important exhibition curated by Jorge Gumier Maier, Nicolás Guagnini, and Pablo Siquier, held at the Centro Cultural Rojas de Buenos Aires. Titled *Crimen y Ornamento*, the exhibition was one of the first to explicitly link the generation of 1990s artists in Buenos Aires with mid-century abstraction. In 2000, Hasper received a Fulbright/FNA Grant for a residency at Apex Art in New York. In 2002, she participated in the Chinati Foundation residency. For her 2013 public project for the city of Buenos Aires at Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA), *Nudo de Autopista*, Hasper painted the columns of several intersecting “knots” of highways in Buenos Aires.

Hasper has had solo shows at the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, Buenos Aires (1991), Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Buenos Aires (1992), Alianza Francesa, Buenos Aires (1999), the Locker Plant, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (2002), the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (2013), and the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (2013-2014). She is represented in the Bill Gates Foundation Collection, Diane & Bruce Halle Collection, Museo de Arte de Latinoamérica de Buenos Aires (MALBA) Fundación Costantini, Buenos Aires, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, Museo Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires, Museo Arte Contemporáneo de Bahía Blanca, and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid.



Graciela Hasper, *Sin Título*, 2013.
Acrylic on canvas, 46.85 in. x 70.47 in.

Chilindron's transformable sculptures, almost anthropomorphic in their movability, suggestively allude to types of movement and systems that can be found in nature (some writers have compared them to Lygia Clark's *bichos*). Primary among these types of movement is play: before she constructs each of her pieces, Chilindron models them in small-scale versions, from pliable plastic sheets. The maquettes function like children's puzzles, offering almost endless variations and folds. Each iteration changes how we view and understand the shapes and colors. "It has to do with perception," she says, and how "we all have a different idea of what reality is."



Marta Chilindron, *9 Trapezoids*, 2014. Acrylic, 30 in. x 72 in. x 72 in.

Made from transparent acrylic, Chilindron's objects invite different ways of seeing. The viewer can look through and around the piece from one or multiple vantage points, taking in its folds and lines, its overlapping colors, and its relationship to light. The sculptures can be performative, or they can be static; that is, the viewer can move around them, engage with them, or stand beside them, and each option is a viable way of seeing. Each object's movability also connects to the artist's philosophy about instability; despite the precision of the shapes, change is inevitable, is even built into the object. "I'm always changing how I think about the work," the artist says. "And, the work itself is based on change."

These structures are also time-based works—their many permutations can only be fully seen as they are reconfigured, as light passes over and through them, and as they expand and collapse. They comprise small systems: the connection of their individual components yields a more complex, intricate whole. Chilindron compares their systemic nature to the workings of the brain, with its ions and neurons functioning together to create a labyrinthine circuitry.

"My work could be considered pastiche," Graciela Hasper writes, "because I saturate each project with a multiplicity of meanings derived from historical quotations and allusions to other Latin American modernisms." Among other historical precedents, her paintings engage with Argentine abstraction of the 1940s, and she finds a historical community of sorts among Argentine precursors such as Gyula Kosice, Carmelo Arden Quin, and Tomás Maldonado. Historically, abstraction is both a political gesture and a utopian challenge to the artistic convention of making representational windows onto the world. Since the 1980s, abstraction in Argentina has also taken on other significances, providing a way for artists to explore ideas and histories more complex than those the national political narrative allowed. In her close study of Argentine abstraction, Hasper has also looked to the artists with whom they were in dialogue: she takes the Modernist precepts of Mondrian and Malevich, the Neo-Concretism of Helio Oiticica, and the Minimalism of Judd as referents from which she playfully diverts. "I maintain a dialogue in my own little universe," she says, adding that the dialogue is also with her own work, past and present.

Just as she constructs a gentle historical revision, Hasper takes ideas of movement, instability, and change off the canvas, revising how her paintings function in three-dimensions. Last year, she completed a commission for the city of Buenos Aires, in which she painted configurations of color along the intertwined "knots" of highways encircling the city. Seen from above, the paintings make the city a massive canvas. At ground level, they invoke a dialogue with everyday life, morphing from painting to something else. As drivers and pedestrians move in and around the work, "people see the street change," she says.

Movement is also the sense one gets in her most recent paintings on canvas, where we find Hasper's interest in chromatic variation, color systems, and the limits of color's transparency. "I'm looking for your eye not to rest," she says. "The painting will not let you be quiet, will move your eye... I'm looking for the movement." In these canvases, Hasper

paints hard-edged rectangles and triangles, rounded curves and ovoid forms that seem to hinge together in overlapping configurations. The shapes are never quite what they seem. Although the eye perceives the curving haloes, for example, the artist hasn't exactly outlined them. Instead, she merely suggests that they exist by placing multi-colored, sloping polygonal shapes against one another. The result is a carnivalesque puzzle of overlaid geometries, and the viewer's eye is forced to make the connections that articulate the larger shapes.

Each of Hasper's paintings has its own internal logic. When looking at her untitled painting of overlapping squares, the viewer's eye recognizes certain patterns, a layering of colors and shapes that is repeated from each of the four corners, into the center of the canvas. Each shape (as in all of Hasper's large-format paintings) is painstakingly created with layers upon layers of acrylic paint, until all trace of the brush stroke is eliminated. She refuses to use straight-edges, rulers, or masking tape to make clean lines. Instead, there is an insistence in her work on the hand-made line. When you look at early Mondrian paintings in real life, she observes, you see the imperfections of the hand-painted lines and squares. Seen in reproductions, those lines tend to sharpen into seemingly perfect edges, but the object itself tells the tale of its creation, the inherent fragility of the brushstroke. Even when she makes the rules for her paintings, Hasper also revels in breaking them. Look closely, and you'll see one square in particular that denies the logic she has set for the painting as a whole.

If abstraction is a language, its different dialects, its changing contexts, its grammatical fluctuations are worth being specific about. Which is to say: not all abstraction is the same. Here, geometry, color, movement, and transparency are key terms in two investigations that speak to one another. That the works bear so many formal connections is what, in many ways, makes their differences so splendidly nuanced. Seen in the context of each other, the works also take on new suggestive qualities. Chilindron and Hasper share their interest in perception and its many variants and they share an openness to change and revision. There is a shared humanism to their geometry.



Graciela Hasper, *Sin Título* (detail), 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 54.92 in. x 78.54 in.

To communicate with someone requires a shared language – or at least an agreement about certain signals and what they might mean. How, then, might we describe a visual dialogue between two abstract artists? Would their thoughts bubble up in circles and lines, polygons, chevrons, and tetrahedrons, appearing as shapes that riff off of one another? In this dialogue, might an impression move from the wall to the floor, from the two-dimensional to the three? Or perhaps, an observation might appear as the hint of a curved line, and its answer might be refracted in a glowing arc of acrylic.

Laura A. L. Wellen, PhD
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