

MANUEL ESPINOSA

b. 1912, Buenos Aires, Argentina

d. 2006, Buenos Aires, Argentina

"The only realist painting is, for me, the one that searches to affirm its material reality before anything else..."

Although known today for his participation in the Asociación de Arte Concreto-Invencción, Manuel Espinosa (1912-2006) was an established artist in Buenos Aires several years before the group was formed. His first solo exhibition, held in 1940 at the Teatro del Pueblo, included oil paintings and pastels featuring a mélange of surreal symbols and figures such as mannequins, musical instruments, mechanical appliances, and birds. But Espinosa's artistic trajectory changed dramatically in 1943. That year, he visited Montevideo and met Joaquín Torres-García, who inscribed a copy of his book *La ciudad sin nombre* for him. Within a year, Espinosa had moved away from his surrealist compositions, and he began making paintings and works on paper marked by spare outlines of recognizable shapes. Art critic Julio Payró described the works as having a note of "mystery or mocking wit in...fresh and chromatically seductive compositions..."

In the early 1940s, Espinosa befriended artist, designer, and theorist Tomás Maldonado. Tapping into international concrete art movements as well as the non-representational movements centered in Buenos Aires, Espinosa and Maldonado, along with Alfredo Hlito and Raúl Lozza, founded the Asociación de Arte Concreto-Invencción in 1945. Their work broke entirely from figurative traditions, focusing instead upon geometry and color studies. "The artistic era of the representational fiction has reached its end," they proclaimed in a 1946 manifesto. After the group dissolved in 1949, Espinosa traveled often to Europe, where he met members of the De Stijl movement and artists in the Italian groups Movimento di Arte Concreta and Forma. In the 1960s and 1970s, Espinosa arranged squares and circles in serial patterns in his paintings and drawings. These variations investigate subtle effects of space and color, and explore optical sensations of depth and movement. In these works, Espinosa embraced an idea proposed by Swiss architect Max Bill, who believed that the practice of creating variations upon a theme could offer a systematic and precise understanding of a particular form.

Music and literature were important subjects for Espinosa throughout his career, but in the late 1960s and 1970s he titled several of his works in homage to specific composers and writers. Espinosa's painting titled *Gnossionnes III* (1973) takes its title from a series of piano pieces by Erik Satie, who coined the term "gnossionne" to describe a new musical form that broke from established structures such as a piano prelude or sonata. Espinosa was fascinated by the rhythmic simplicity and poetic nature of Satie's work. In other paintings, Espinosa makes more oblique references; for a 1977 exhibition, he titled his paintings after James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. For example, *Dublin, 16 de junio de 1904* (1977) refers to the day the novel takes place. Espinosa was drawn to Joyce's use of

language, which resonated with the artist's method of structuring his complex compositions around seemingly simple pictorial elements. Writing about Espinosa in 1974, art critic Marta Traba described him as "a man who, with no exhibitionism, is capable of making silences have a glowing intensity."

Manuel Espinosa's works are represented in several major collections including Fondo Nacional de los Artes, Buenos Aires; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX, USA; Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas Sofía Imber, Caracas; Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, USA and Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection, New York, NY, USA.