

**MANUEL ESPINOSA**

[1912 - 2006, Argentina]

Although known today for his participation in the Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención (AACI), 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.

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 Arte Concreto-Invención (AACI) 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 investigated subtle effects of space and color and explored 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 *Gnossiennes III* (1973) takes its title from a series of piano pieces by Erik Satie, who coined the term "gnossienne" 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.

Espinosa's works have been displayed in numerous important exhibitions, including: *Surface and Subtext: Latin American Geometric Abstraction*, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA (2002); *Argentine Abstract Art*, Fundación PROA,

Buenos Aires, Argentina and Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo (GAMeC), Italy (2002); *Projection and Dynamism: Six Argentine Painters*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1973); *Form and Space*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), Santiago, Chile (1962); *Manuel Espinosa: Geometría en Movimiento*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires (MACBA), Argentina (2013); *Latinoamérica: volver al future*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires (MACBA), Argentina (2019); *Manuel Espinosa, Luz, Color y Movimiento*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Salta (MAC), Argentina and Museo Emilio Caraffa (MEC), Córdoba, Argentina (2015); *Geo-metries, Latin American Geometric Abstraction in the Cisneros Collection*, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Argentina (2003); *Contemporary Argentine Art*, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico (1974); *When Geometry...2. Tribute to Piet Mondrian*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA), Argentina (1989); *Manuel Espinosa: Anthology on Paper*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA), Argentina (2003); *The Illusive Eye*, El Museo del Barrio, New York City, New York, USA (2016); *Eight Constructive Artists*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1963); *24 Argentine Artists*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1970); *Current Argentine Painting, Two Trends: Geometry – Surrealism*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1976); *Real/Virtual, Arte Cinético argentino de los años sesenta*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2012); *Art from Argentina 1920/1994*, Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), Oxford, England, UK (1994); and *Contemporary Argentine Art: The 13<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, Tokyo Biennale '80*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Japan and Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan (1980).

Espinosa's works are represented in several major collections including the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA; Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA; Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC), Caracas, Venezuela and New York City, New York, USA; Fondo Nacional de las Artes (FNA), Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires (MACBA), Argentina; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas (MACC), Venezuela; Museo Moderno, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina; The Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design (RISD Museum), Providence, Rhode Island, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA), Illinois, USA; and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Texas, USA.