

MAGDALENA FERNÁNDEZ ARRIAGA (b. 1964, Venezuela)

“Forms already existent in nature and my historical and geopolitical context pave my way to materialize an idea. I enjoy reshaping a gesture, a structure, a form. On other occasions, those same forms seem to ask for a transformation, a reformulation--one that becomes a new possibility not only through new media, but also through a different use and conception of space.”

Magdalena Fernández’s studies began in the fields of physics and mathematics; in 1982, she enrolled at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas. After two years at the university, she began exploring graphic design, and she traveled to Italy, where she studied with architect and designer A. G. Fronzoni. She worked as an independent graphic designer in Italy from 1990-2000. From this work, she developed a rigorous familiarity with line and structure. She began making stainless steel sculptures in the mid-1990s, setting them into the ground and inviting viewers to move in and around them. Her activation of the audience bears some relationships to the strong history of Venezuelan sculpture, especially to early interventions by Alejandro Otero and Jesús Rafael Soto, and much of her subsequent work considers how to reformulate these histories of modern art.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fernández began using digital media to incorporate moving images into her work. She made a series of *Dibujos móviles* in 1998, followed soon after by a series of video installations called *Pinturas móviles*. In these, she references certain aspects of work by artists Piet Mondrian, Joaquín Torres-García, and Lygia Clark, alongside Soto and Otero, but she reinterprets them, breaking down some of the authority of these canonical images and artists. There is, she argues, a dialectics of abstraction. Curator and writer Luis Perez Oramas writes, “It is therefore possible to verify in them the persistence of structures whose visual functioning still responds to the model of the great patterns of modern abstraction, provided it is also understood that, in a sort of conceptual background, what motivates the work from a poetical viewpoint is the persistence of a corporal or organic spectrum, a reduced or disseminated corporality.”

Indeed, much of Fernández’s abstractions look also to experiences of the natural world. She writes, “In 1998, I made my first video. It was also a gateway to work in space without structure and to address the problem of painting. Convinced that language and content go separate ways, I stepped back on those elements that placed me in the constructive stream in order to highlight what is my most immediate reference: nature.” Using the organic forms of nature, Fernández adds sound and noises to playfully reengage with how we experience these forms and how, by making them unstable, they can be transformed. “I believe instability deals with movement, with fracture, or with a possible transformation. Those thoughts have led to different formal results in my work, both in structural pieces and in videos. In fact, instability in

my work is a physical event--an event that separates me from modernity," she observes.

Magdalena Fernández's work has also been included in numerous important group exhibitions, including *Contingent Beauty: Contemporary Art from Latin America*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Houston, Texas, USA (2015-2016, 2020-2021); *Permission to be Global / Prácticas Globales, Latin American Art from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA (2014); *Beyond the Supersquare*, Bronx Museum of Arts, New York, USA (2014); *Medios y Ambientes*, Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City (2012); X Bienal de Cuenca, Ecuador (2009); 53rd Venice Biennale (2009); and *Drawing Papers*, The Drawing Center, New York (2006), among numerous others.