

FRANCISCO SOBRINO

b. 1932, Guadalajara, Spain

d. 2014, Paris, France

“...using geometrical forms enabled me to understand what I was doing, it helped me to tell things in a clear language. I wanted to create a kind of alphabet of elementary and impersonal forms, with which I could build sentences. I still have the same desire: to be clear.”

Born to a working class family in Guadalajara, Spain, Francisco Sobrino began his studies of painting and sculpture at the School of Arts and Crafts in Madrid, between 1946 and 1948. He moved to Argentina in 1949, and studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires from 1950 to 1957. During this period, he met many of the artists and writers involved with the Arte Concreto-Invención group, and he began working in geometric abstraction. At the Escuela de Bellas Artes he also met Hugo Demarco, Julio Le Parc, and Horacio Garcia Rossi. In 1959, Sobrino moved to Paris with Le Parc, where they co-founded the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV). In 1960, Sobrino began making reliefs and then three-dimensional constructions from transparent, tinted acrylic plastic. These works were the first of his explorations of juxtaposition and superimposition between the viewer and the work of art. In 1965, his work was included in The Responsive Eye exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

In their 1966 manifesto, GRAV's members write, “We are particularly interested in the proliferation of works which permit a variety of situations, whether they engender a strong visual excitement, or demand a move on the part of the spectator, or contain in themselves a principle of transformation, or whether they call for active participation from the spectator.” Light and movement were of special interest to the artists of GRAV, but they were careful to avoid using these as ends in themselves. Instead, light and movement were ways of modifying a particular environment and creating an unexpected situation, to which audience members could respond. The group hoped that such interactive works might lead to a social movement, based around collective experience and viewer participation. After numerous group exhibitions throughout Europe, GRAV separated in 1968.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Sobrino continued his research into light, using solar energy with the help of solar panels. He also developed his work with modular units, which allow the viewer to change the sculpture's form. He continued using Plexiglas, noting, “The use of Plexiglas gives birth to manifold plays of light having to do with transparency and reflects like polished steel, which is an excellent mirror, a kind of very interesting virtual reality.” In 1971, he worked on sets and costumes for the ballet Requiem, by Ligeti, performed at the Theatre contemporain de Grenoble. In

1979, he completed his architectural designs for a bank in Guadalajara, Spain. "The first kinetic architecture in the world," the bank was designed in black and white, with projections on the floors, staircases, and walls; it was later destroyed.

Until his death in 2014, Sobrino continued his consistent creative exploration of the relationships between science and art through kinetic, optical, and geometric projects. In 2008, work on the Francisco Sobrino Museum was begun in Guadalajara, Spain. Sobrino's work has been shown extensively in international museums and collections, and he has completed important architectural commissions in Europe and in Latin America.

Francisco Sobrino's works are represented in several major collections including Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, USA; Beacon Collection, Boston, MA, USA; Centre National d'Art Plastique, Paris, France; Colección del Parlamento Provincial, Guadalajara, Spain; Fondazione Peggy Guggenheim, Venice, Italy; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA; Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Cholet, France; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Bilbao, Spain; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, Spain; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Villafanes, Spain; Museo de Arte Moderno, Alicante, Spain; Museo de Arte Moderno - Fundación Jesús Soto, Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela; Museo de la Escultura Monumental al Aire Libre, Madrid, Spain; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, USA; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Houston, TX, USA; Peter Stuyvesant Foundation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain and the Tel Aviv Museum, Israel.