

JESÚS RAFAEL SOTO

[1923, Venezuela - 2005, France]

One of the most important kinetic artists of the 20th century, Jesús Rafael Soto began his artistic career at a very young age, painting posters for movie theaters in his hometown of Ciudad Bolívar. In 1942, he received a scholarship to study art and art history at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Artes Aplicadas de Caracas, where he met fellow students Carlos Cruz-Diez, Mercedes Pardo, Omar Carreño, and Alejandro Otero. During these studies, he began making paintings inflected with Cubism. In Caracas, he regularly attended meetings and discussions at the Taller Libre de Artes, in which intellectuals, critics, and artists debated current avant-garde ideas from Europe and Latin America; his first solo exhibition was held at the Taller in 1949. In 1947, Soto was invited to direct the Escuela de Bellas Artes de Maracaibo, where he remained until 1950. That year, he received a grant to travel to France; he settled in Paris, where he found a dynamic community of artists associated with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and the Galerie Denise René, including Yaacov Agam, Jean Tinguely, and Victor Vasarely. He also rejoined many of his friends from school, including Otero and Pardo. Surrounded by these artists, Soto began to consider ways to move his work from two-dimensions to three, how to engage the viewer in the experience of the work, and how to incorporate the perception of movement into his art.

Influenced by serialism in modern music, Soto embarked upon his “serial works” in 1952. In an interview conducted by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2006, Soto recalled the importance of music to his early production. His interest in music was also as a musician; for more than a decade, Soto earned his living by playing guitar at bars.

Soto was also influenced by the work of artists Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich, especially in their treatment of geometry and abstraction. Wassily Kandinsky’s text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) was an important resource for the young artist as he began making works which suggested movement and instability. In 1947, when László Moholy-Nagy’s book *Vision in Motion* was published, Soto found another resource to support his ideas about movement and the spectator. By the 1960s, he was immersed in projects in which he used almost no color but instead explored the vibrations created by line and its dematerialization through the inclusion of hanging elements. He also began exploring the idea of haptic art: making works to be touched by the viewer. The most widely known example of this phase of his work is the *Penetrables*, interactive metal and plastic structures through which the viewer moves; Soto created his first *Penetrable* in 1967. In an interview of 1970, Soto said, “With penetrables, my most recent creations, this participation becomes tactile, even often auditory. Man interacts with his surroundings. Matter, time and space form a true trinity, and movement is the force which demonstrates the trinity.”

Soto’s works have been shown in many important solo exhibitions, including *Soto dans*

le collection du Musée, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2013); *Peintures Cinétiques de Soto*, Galerie Aujourd'hui, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium (1957); *Soto. The Fourth Dimension*, Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2019); *Jesús Rafael Soto*, Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung, Taiwan (2000); *Soto*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1969); *Soto – une Rétrospective*, Musée Soulages, Rodez, France (2015); *Soto – Cuarenta Años de Creación*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas (MACC), Venezuela (1983); *Jesús Rafael Soto*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (1998); *Visión en Movimiento*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico (2005); *Soto: Houston Penetrable*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Texas, USA (2014); and *Soto: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, New York, USA (1974).

Soto's works are represented in several major collections including Fundación ARCO, Madrid, Spain; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, USA; Kröller-Müller Museum (KMM), Otterlo, The Netherlands; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), California, USA; Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium; Museo de Arte Moderno Jesús Soto, Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), Texas, USA; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York City, New York, USA; National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne, Australia; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), Seoul, South Korea; Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, Purchase, New York, USA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, New York, USA; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The Netherlands; and Tate Modern, London, England, UK.