

Sebastián Gordín and His Abstraction Machine

... Artists often forget that their work possesses the secret of true time: not hollow eternity but the liveliness of the instant...

Octavio Paz, *El uso y la contemplación* (Use and Contemplation), 1973

Gordín hasn't made paintings for at least three decades, and he isn't now, either, strictly speaking. In his recent abstract compositions, not very common for him, however, he returns to the painting format with its most conspicuous attributes: mainly two-dimensional, mounted on stretchers and with perimeter framing. However, his starting point continues to be objects, as much as his first boxes from the early 1990s, which he expanded shortly afterwards into models, drawers with peepholes, showcases, sculptures and reduced-scale installations, that offer, in all these forms, concise scenes of extraordinary narratives that inspire the imagination of all those who see them.

A spin-off from a huge series of marquetry works that Sebastián began creating in 2006, in which he recreates the covers of popular illustrated publications, also known as pulp magazines, specialized in fantasy (a genre that combines science fiction, horror and suspense), his current work benefits from his experience with the qualities and ways of working with wood veneers, such as enriching their chromatic variety with the use of dyes. This has been a long journey of technical experimentation for Gordín who enjoys finding ways to illustrate stories that obsess him but which, in this case, are presented not only as a medium but also as a generator of unexpected images. As he put it, the processes and tests carried out in this series created "this abstraction machine," with gears designed, built, and set in motion by his own hands, benefiting from a dialectic between the properties of the materials, the capacities of the tools, the contingencies of the work and the contemplation of the constantly transforming results.

The works made with marquetry have characteristics in common with these new pieces, such as being set on a surface and with more chromatic range (having found new colors on a trip to Italy). Over time, Gordín began to make his own dyes, incorporating brighter ones, especially pink and magenta, never used by him before but central to this series.

Between 2016 and 2017, his method of laser cutouts for the representations of the magazines was a return to the customary creation of objects he had made for decades, gluing wooden laminas into blocks that, when cut on a lathe, resulted in a series of characters, anonymous in their concise features and with unusual bodies adorned by thin, colored lines. His first abstract "paintings" made using this technique are from that period, and were initially given the generic name of Spatial *Leñoutopia* Chromatics, which refers to their material reality fused with the ideals that inspired the geometric avant-gardes of the 20th century. The work possesses a variety of tones and thicknesses which, however thin they may be, constitute the solid material for the

reliefs, incisions, the superficial models and blurred passages, cutting, superimposing, filing and sanding.

Although it may seem like there is, in fact there is not a drop of paint in these works other than the substances with which he has previously dyed the laminates and then glued them together, alternating and sequencing colors. These works contain a bright, saturated "palette," unusual for an artist who from the beginning employed light tones contrasted by theatrical lighting, a nocturnal darkness currently exchanged for the luminosity of colors which expand in the reflections projected by the polished copper frames. These qualities, together with the patterns made from small, thin lines arranged in grids or crossed by vertical strips whose polychromatic nature glides from one tone to another, evoke ancient South American textiles produced by artisans who maintain their traditions. A source of regional identity for local abstractionists, such as those belonging to the so-called *Escuela del Sur*, for Gordín, on the other hand, the designs are the consequence of a technical development that finds its cultural relevance in the appearance of the image.

Geometric art has notable examples in Argentina, especially in the Concrete Movement, preceded by pioneers of abstraction such as Juan Del Prete and Yente. Gordín's work *May 1, 7:15 AM* takes up motifs from these artists, such as the circle and the thick twine applied as line, referenced by the narrow and winding bas-relief that ends in an anthropomorphic arabesque. Another feature of the Argentine Constructivist tradition appears in the irregular perimeter of *October 22, 3 AM*, a "softened" version of the trimmed frame with which the Madí and Concreto groups experimented. In this way, the reference to the work of Jorge Gumier Maier (who in the 1990s created a neo-baroque version of this style) is a tribute to the curator of the Rojas Gallery, a space where many young people like Gordín had important exhibitions.

For most of these works, the artist chooses an hour, a day and a month as a title. This continues the tradition of geometric art that uses numbers in series to avoid thematic references and subjectivism, but above all makes one wonder about the event that occurred at that precise moment, thus concentrating "the liveliness of the moment" and allowing for the invention of possible fictions in the interpretation of the works.

Beyond the optical effects and the distortions of chromatic registers typical of digital images (from glitches to psychedelia) that these compositions invoke, their relationship with the abstract tradition becomes more rarefied, at times, with the introduction of a character whose monstrous head is split by designed scars or by the presence of ghostly silhouettes that emerge in the background. Although his taste for narration seems to have given way to a play of shapes and colors in this body of work, from time to time fissures are revealed through which the hypothesis of an imposture filters through. We suspect that, despite appearances, stories and their ghosts continue to haunt Gordín's work.

Adriana Lauria, April 2022