

ELSA GRAMCKO

[1925-1994/Venezuela]

Elsa Gramcko was born in Puerto Cabello, the largest port in Venezuela. Raised by a polyglot family passionate about the arts and supportive of her intellectual development, Gramcko moved to Caracas with her parents and her sister Ida, a close interlocutor who would herself become an important poet. Of German descent, Gramcko was a largely self-taught artist apart from a few free courses she enrolled in at the Facultad de Humanidades at the UCV in Caracas (1946) and her auditing of a class taught by Alejandro Otero at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Aplicadas (1955). Gramcko's first works are marked by experimental tendencies and an interest in abstract art, which she later developed into geometric pieces.

Throughout the artist's lifetime, her work was exhibited within Latin America, as well as in the United States and Europe, including group shows at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and a solo show at the Pan-American Union in Washington, D.C. More specifically, she was a part of the Gulf-Caribbean Art Exhibition at the MFAH; I Salón de Arte Abstracto (I Abstract Art Salon) (Galería Don Hatch, 1957); Brussels World's Fair (1958); and more recently, *Elsa Gramcko: The Invisible Plot of Things* at Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino in Houston (2022), the KONKRET GLOBAL! exhibition at Museum im Kulturspeicher Würzburg in Germany (2022), and *Elsa Gramcko: The Invisible Plot of Things* at James Cohan Gallery in New York City (2023).

Gramcko participated in the 1959 São Paulo Art Biennial and in 1960 she began to explore texture in her works as well as a darker palette, resulting in works that have been described as lunar landscapes. This interest was further developed using oxidized metals during the 1960s in works that are considered her first experiments with informalism. By 1964 she began to incorporate doors and pieces of wood into her work. That same year she represented Venezuela alongside Jesús Rafael Soto, Luisa Palacios, and others at the XXXII Venice Biennale. Additionally, in 1964 she was awarded the Premio John Boulton at the XXV Salón Oficial with *El portal (The Portal)* (1963) and second prize at the Salón D'Empaire with *La puerta azul (The Blue Door)*. In 1966 she became the first woman to obtain the first prize at Salón D'Empaire held in Maracaibo (Zulia State), Venezuela. In the late 1960s she turned toward sculpture, and in 1968 she received the National Sculpture Award at the Official Salon of Venezuelan Art. In 1997, the Galería de Arte Nacional (GAN) held her first major retrospective in Caracas.

Gramcko's work is represented in private and public collections in Latin America and worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), TX; The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota; The Art Museum of the Americas (AMA), Washington, D.C.; Museum of Art,

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Providence, RI; The Denver Art Museum, CO; Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS; Galería de Arte Nacional (GAN), Caracas, Venezuela; Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (MAMBO), Colombia; and Museo de Bellas Artes (MBA), Caracas, Venezuela; among others.