

Gego: rediscovering an extraordinary artist

By Adrian Locke

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As a new exhibition of her work opens at the Henry Moore Institute, 'Radical Geometry' co-curator Adrian Locke discusses the work of Gertrude Goldschmidt.

Gertrude Goldschmidt (1912-1994), known from childhood as Gego, was born in Hamburg, trained as an architect in Stuttgart and fled Europe for Caracas in 1939 in her late twenties, where she became an artist. She emerged in the 1950s alongside Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero and Jesús Rafael Soto. Until recently she remained little known outside her adopted homeland, Venezuela. Gego worked outside of the artistic mainstream in Caracas eschewing the engagement with colour and optical illusion favoured by her compatriots. Instead she created intricate sculptures with complex geometric forms, often of ambitious scale, using industrial and found materials that she painstakingly constructed by hand.



The results are ethereal forms that hang from the ceiling and wall, casting shadows that add to their complexity. Often they move gently giving them an energy and life that stands in contrast to their material construction. Seeing these sculptures in the thrilling *Gego: Line as Object* at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, the first major exhibition of this extraordinary artist in the UK, one cannot help feel that her work has strong affinities to the woven baskets, fish nets and traps made by Venezuela's indigenous Indian populations.

Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), *Reticulárea (ambientación)*, 1969.

Dimensions variable. Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas. Exposición Reticulárea Paolo Gasparini / Archivo Fundación Gego



Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), *Tejedura 89/13*, 1989.

Her intricate 'Drawings without Paper' series are small sculptures whose shadows create secondary 'drawings' on the wall on sculptures whose shadows create secondary 'drawings' on the wall on which they are hung. The larger suspended works not only seduce with their form but leave unanswered questions about whether one should look at the lines that create the work or the empty spaces they define. The only question left hanging in the air, like one of her exquisite works, is why has it taken so long for Gego to receive the recognition she so richly deserves.

Gego. *Line as Object* is at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds until 19 October 2014.

Dr Adrian Locke is the co-curator of Radical Geometry: Modern Art of South America from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection at the RA.

Here, then, is an artist coming from a depressed war-torn Europe, arriving in oil-rich Venezuela with its diverse cultures, dazzling equatorial light, modern architecture and lush environment and responding to it with extraordinary vigour and sensitivity.

Paradoxically Gego never saw herself as a sculptor, rather as an artist working with line, a process one can trace through her numerous drawings. As the exhibition amply demonstrates she moved between two and three-dimensional work, often blurring the distinction, with ease.



Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), *Untitled*, 1980.