

The names of all the sculptures, in all three rooms, use the French preposition “*dé*”, which is usually placed in front of a noun to establish some sort of relationship to a preceding verb, adjective or noun. But there are no precedents and that leaves us with translation “of,” “from” and “about” in relation to the following noun; in other words a naming that implies derivation. A work named “*Dé escargot*” invokes the snail, as “*Dé hélice*” invokes the propeller it names. But what else is at stake here in otherwise formalist experiments with a supposedly open yet now directed and conditional system? Indeed, what does derived from mean here, for instance, in terms of participation between the form, the forming, and the object named? At the far end of the room hangs the blue on red painting titled “*Orbit’s Trace*” with the parenthetical subtitle “*Primal*,” one used also to name pieces in the other two sculptural series, as if the painting has bequeathed its meaning to the stones. If so, in what sense other than formalism?

Similar arrangements and relationships exist in the other two rooms but with differences in material and distribution. The middle section contains seven smaller squares of black marble (5 7/8 inches/15cm) distributed on a flat, waist-high table top with a more irregular placement. These works and those in the next room are materials taken from Orozco’s home country (Mexico) where he made them with the assistance of mechanical tools. Here too there are paintings, more complex in design, with gold leaf applied to tempera. Their series title of “*icon cell*”, one designated as white, the other as Russian also have an unclear relationship.

In the third section, the four paintings outnumber the three carvings, which are standardized to the same size as those in front but are of Mexican volcanic stone and distributed randomly. The two large colorful paintings are quite beautiful and carry the names of “*Ultraman with Parrots and a Tiger*” and “*Ultraman Hiding in the Jungle*.” Their colors, dynamics, and titles bring what the rest of the exhibition lacked: whimsy. And while I may believe his young son knows of “*Ultraman*” – an early Japanese television science fiction series in which a normal mortal morphs into an alien and slightly robotic superhero as needed – the adults are left to puzzle over what any child takes for granted: what is the meaning and process for clear actions? As Orozco phrased it: “*I don’t know what I am looking for.*”

RICHARD LESLIE

Juan Iribarren Cecilia de Torres

The feeling you experience when you enter Juan Iribarren’s exhibition at Cecilia de Torres Gallery is one of peaceful contemplation. His works are windows to Zen-like atmospheres that are disconnected from the chaos left behind in the streets of New York. You take a big breath and reach an almost meditative state prior to realizing you can’t just stand still and admire the works. You slowly move through the gallery and analyze not only each piece, but also how they are all interconnected.

As the artist recalls, that is exactly what led curator Juan Ledezma to work on this exhibition.¹ While visiting Iribarren’s studio, Ledezma was puzzled by the relationships that exist among his latest paintings (2016-2017), the black and white photographs, and the pencil drawings. He was particularly interested in how one work connects with the other, and in thinking about the unusual dialogue he observed happening between painting, drawing and photography. Three bodies of work inspired the title to the exhibition: “*Walls, Windows, and Nocturnes*.” The monochromatic paintings, mostly white and blue, become the “*walls*,” those divided into four or five fields, look like “*windows*,” finally the

“*nocturnes*” represent the paintings he produces at night, especially in the winter when darkness prevails.

The title also encapsulates the formal elements present in the artist’s creative process: light, color, atmosphere, and time. Iribarren explores the reflection of light using simple lines, grids and colored shades. White planes drawn with expressionistic graphite strokes, grid-based linen canvases painted with sky-like tones, and multilayered black and white photographs of his studio at different times of the day, result from the exploration of what he calls “*circumstantial light*.”

His painting process captures the changing tones and variations of color and light he finds in his studio. As he explains, “*as I go chasing light, the color in my work is an accumulation of daily paintings. When the oil is wet, it gets mixed. When it is dry, it produces a glaze. I paint between ten and twelve layers on each canvas. The result is an opaque accumulation that is barely translucent. That unique atmospheric color I attain in my paintings is formed by the layers of colors that are below.*”²

At the formal level, his highly gestural and layered brushstrokes bring forth the geometric basis of his compositions. Lighter color planes become three-dimensional spaces with the application of simple dripping-like darker lines. At the core of these structures are the artist’s gestures, structural, foundational, and monochromatic lines that reveal subtle underlying frameworks concealed beneath the oil painted surfaces. Through the masterful use of lines and composition, Iribarren manages to create a sort of “*visually perceptive*” abstraction that transcends the parameters of hard-edge geometric abstraction. It is important to note that he does not paint from sketches. His drawings on paper are actually graphic interpretations of his paintings. His works on canvas always come first. He works simultaneously on three or four paintings of different sizes that vary between twelve and seventy inches. As he explains, “*if I am working in a large format and I feel lost, I go to a small one. Using canvases of different dimensions allows me to get away. It is easier than if they were all the same size.*”³ He likes to stimulate dialogues among different formats which is why, as can be seen in the exhibition, he creates diptychs by combining canvases with the same colored tones but different sizes.

The paintings are also the basis of an interesting series resulting from photographing his canvases at different times of the day. In 2000, he began to notice the shadows created by the rays of light that traversed the windows of his studio. He became interested in the new abstract compositions resulting from the dialogue between the artwork and the shadows so he decided to photograph what he calls “*light circumstances*.” What began as a documentation process evolved into a new

Juan Iribarren. *Walls, Windows and Nocturnes*, 2018. Installation view at Cecilia de Torres, Ltd. Variable dimensions. Photo: Arturo Sanchez. Courtesy: Cecilia de Torres.



and exciting way to explore abstraction. The photographs included in this exhibition explore not only the effect of light on the paintings and their transformation into new works due to the lines and areas drawn by the shadows, but also the blurring effect that blends the borders of the canvases with the wall's surface.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue that includes a prologue by the gallery's director, Cecilia de Torres, and essays by the exhibition's curator, Juan Ledezma, and by the Professor of Philosophy, Sandra Pinardi.

NOTES

1. Interview with the author, October 16, 2018.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

FRANCINE BIRBRAGHER

PANAMA / PANAMA

Graciela Iturbide

Centro Cultural de España Casa del Soldado

The fact that a photograph is a moment frozen in time implies, among other things, a creator who is inevitably also frozen with it, bound forever to the series of decisions that resulted in that image. For some artists, revisiting their works entails, on each occasion, revisiting also earlier versions of themselves, attempting to recognize their presence in the work of someone from the past, across a wide distance in years and experiences.

Orbiting around *Fotoseptiembre* (a photography event that MAC Panamá coordinates every year), Centro Cultural de España presented *Panamá en la mirada de Graciela Iturbide* (Panama in Graciela Iturbide's Eyes), an exhibition co-curated by Mónica Kupfer and Walo Araújo that revisits the artist's travels in the Central American country early on in her career. Before her images in Frida Kahlo's home or her show at the Pompidou; before Juchitán or the development of her poetic obsession

Graciela Iturbide. *Untitled.* Panama City, 1975. Photography in silver on gelatin. 7 7/8 x 7 7/8 in. (20 x 20 cm). Courtesy: Centro Cultural de España-Casa del Soldado.



with death; before even her bird series, and definitely before she was acknowledged one of the titans of Twentieth-Century Latin American photography, Graciela Iturbide (Mexico City, 1942) was in Panama.

It was the beginning of the 1970s, and Iturbide's connections in the Communist Party made several trips possible to Omar Torrijos' Panama. The resulting documents are what Iturbide herself described as the early steps in her career. Nevertheless, in her prejudice-free gaze one can clearly detect the latent presence of the artist she already was, before the world, or perhaps even herself, had noticed. "*Panamá en la mirada...*" functions like a two-way mirror where viewers can glimpse fragments of those years and, by means of her reflection, read between the lines the presence of the young photographer, understanding her future motifs and her concerns. Of all the certainties offered by this exhibition, the most relevant is, to my mind, the access it grants to a Graciela Iturbide still unencumbered by the weight of her own myth, fully in the process of discovering the language she would be able to articulate with her camera.

"*Panamá en la mirada...*" makes it possible for us to encounter Iturbide's earliest engagement of subject matter that would later repeat in her work, like the strength of those semi-divine women she began to discover in images like *Esperando al General Torrijos: Mujer guaimí* (Waiting for General Torrijos: *Guaimí* Woman, 1974), and whom we will encounter years later in her *Mujer ángel* (Angel Woman, 1979) or in the emblematic *Nuestra señora de las iguanas* (Our Lady of the Iguanas, 1979). There is also the persistence of everyday life, the search for national essences in common characters or in indigenous peoples, a leitmotiv of Iturbide's later series (like the inhabitants of the sands or Juchitán) that can already be felt in works like *Mujer "cuna"* ("Cradle" Woman, 1974) or *Barrio El Marañón* (El Marañón Neighborhood, 1975).

Another key element in the exhibition is the figure of Omar Torrijos and his imprint of society during those years. Most of the time we see a uniform-clad General, cigar perpetually in mouth, which on occasion brings to mind the work of such photographers as Raúl Corrales and Alberto Korda and how they dealt, in the case of Cuba, with the peculiar dialectic between a leader and his people. Torrijos' presence is felt as one more element like any other, fluid between billboards and posters with his image, or even in the very propaganda writing that decorates every corner, almost ubiquitous. It must be noted that one feels the curators demystifying intent, staking out a distinct territory from *Torrijos: The man and the myth* (Americas Society Council of the Americas, New York, 2008), an exhibition that also explored Graciela Iturbide's relationship with the Panamanian general, but with very different purpose and approach.

On the other hand, the most exquisite element in "*Panamá en la mirada...*" is the way in which Iturbide engages the universe of childhood, taking maximum advantage of every sign not only in its discursive dimension, but also in the aesthetic one. Iturbide's ability to track the ironies that subtly take shape around childhood play, or in the interactions between children, produces astoundingly powerful images. Works like *Juegos prohibidos* (Forbidden Games, 1974), *Niños jugando* (Children at Play, 1974), and *En cada pecho una trinchera* (In Every Chest, a Rampart, 1974) illustrate the true magnitude and weight that the young artist's gaze already possessed.

"*Panamá en la mirada...*" traces an arch that tangentially speaks of the country, of its indigenous peoples, its peasants, its government leaders, its women, its youth, and its neighborhoods. It courses through an entire era in forty images expertly arranged in the exhibition space, images that at times function as a series of portals into the past, and at times as living remnants of time. They are tributes to memory, capable of vibrating and speaking to us from the eyes of their creator. To contemplate the Graciela Iturbide of those years is to see someone who, while