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Holland Cotter, "North and South Connected, An Abstraction of The Americas"

Organized by the artist and historian Cesar Paternosto, this compact show traces a line - or rather several lines - between pre-Columbian art and 20th-century American modernism, with some eye-opening results. A few of the modernist choices, like two works by the Uruguayan painter Joaquin Torres-García, are obvious. Others, like a hermetic little Alfred Jensen painting with dots and dashes referring to Mayan calendars, are more off-beat. Jensen's work, with its lathered impasto, suggests a piece of weaving. And the show's most spectacular entries are examples of the real thing: three Peruvian wool tunics, dated between A.D. 500 and 800. With their emphatic patterns and bold, simple colors (red, gold, black), they're irresistible and certain modern artists clearly thought so. Josef and Anni Albers made 19 working trips to Mexico to look at similar material, and the results are reflected in their work here: paintings by him, paintings and wall hangings by her. Their influence, in turn, passed on to Lenore Tawney, who studied at the Chicago Bauhaus and is represented by an openwork piece from 1961. And, finally, the show dips south again with a recent work - a miniature tunic hung with thumbnail size shells - by the Chilean artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña. Not everything is on this level: the selection of sculpture doesn't have much presence. But the central theme is a vital one, much in need of study and evaluation; several of the compare-and-contrast demonstrations of it here really click. And the Peruvian tunics, along with pieces by Anni Albers and Ms. Tawney, are alone worth a visit.

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