

Robert C. Morgan, "An Abstraction of The Americas Cecilia de Torres"

Curated by the artist Cesar Paternosto, this delightful exhibition of painting, sculpture, objects, and weavings - all employing some form of geometric abstraction - made by artists from two hemispheres took over four years to assemble. In many ways, North and South Connected has an autobiographical thread that runs through the gallery. The inclusion of Paternosto's sculpture in the exhibition sets the tone by carrying a spiritual resonance atypical of the pragmatic approach as seen, for example, in Minimal art. His own process as an artist is evident in the way he has discovered affinities between the various objects he has chosen. Paintings by Gottlieb and Albers (both Josef and Anni) are positioned in relation to tunic weavings by the Nasca in Peru. A constructivist sculpture in wood by Francisco Matto is seen in relation to Louise Nevelson. Lenore Tawney is compared with Alfred Jensen. The Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García reigns as a kind of chieftain in relation to the aesthetic sensibility that underpins this unique diversity of geometric styles. Gonzalo Fonseca's stone sculpture offers a superb contrast to a small mixed media sculpture by Cecilia Vicuna. What is commendable is the way in which this contrast between the Fonseca (father of Caio) and the Vicuna reveals an implicit structural similarity. In contrast to the Modernist aesthetic of the northern hemisphere, artists from the southern hemisphere tend to be less literal about their mediums and are more given to complex architectonic and symbolic functions in their Works. In most cases, the symbolic function is one of a spiritual equivalence. Perhaps, one could say that the southern hemisphere emphasizes within the material a sense of the immateriality of underlying structure. In this sense, the comparison between the stone sculpture by Fonseca and the delicate construction by Vicuna is not inappropriate. The mediums are, of course, different but the structure is related. There is much to learn from this exhibition, not only about the north and the south, of the two Americas and how they are related or unrelated in terms of their aesthetic predilections, but there is also something to learn about art in general. One may begin to see a more universalist aesthetic coming back into play. This is a term that has been anathema in recent art theory. No one talks any more about art as an Universalist proposition. No one wants to see the subject of art in this way because it may suggest a type of cultural stereotype. In Paternosto's exhibition, the cultural stereotype is clearly not the case. What he seems to be suggesting is that the cultural underpinnings of art need not be sacrificed in the process of allowing a work to signify meaning that may have universal value. This process of signification can, indeed, become a universal one. The structure within this language can define its limits not merely within the geographical limits of a specific culture but within a new trans-cultural terrain. The aesthetic conversations between these works, whether conceived in high or low terms, are both simple and complex. This gives the exhibition a somewhat quiet and reduced aura. There is nothing of the spectacle here. There is the slow stillness of time and space, the hidden pulse of what art is and what it can become when we alleviate the burden of nationalistic preferences.

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