

SOTO

IN THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSÉE NATIONAL D'ART MODERNE

27 FEBRUARY-20 MAY 2013

Jesús Rafael Soto (1923-2005) was one of the main protagonists in the revival of kinetic art in Europe during the Fifties and Sixties. His explorations are typical of an art based on participation, inviting the viewer to confront a work that brings movement, time and space into question. Today, the addition to the Centre Pompidou collection of twenty key works from between 1955 and 2004, given to the French State in lieu of inheritance tax by the artist's family, fills a major gap and sheds considerable light on his development. This remarkable contribution ranges from the Plexiglas paintings of the Fifties and the Vibrations with suspended iron wires or rods of the

Sixties and Seventies to the Ambivalences of the Eighties and the Cube pénétrable of 1996. It is presented here for the first time. The Venezuelan-born Soto made France his permanent base. He would have been 90 this year. In this era of globalised art, he liked to emphasise the universal nature of his investigations, which he saw as parallel to the work of scientists. This exhibition is a tribute to his playful and sensitive work, which engendered virtual forms with subtle chromaticism. Today, a number of artists have brought the exploration of abstract kinetics back into the limelight, finding vast potential in it for formal freedom.

**Centre
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BEGINNINGS

Jesús Rafael Soto was born in a small town of inner Venezuela, the eldest son of a humble family of five children. Nothing predisposed him to take part in the aesthetic revolutions that marked modern art in Europe during the Fifties and Sixties. In group photos showcasing him in Paris during these decades, Soto often comes across as a reserved person among the other artists, yielding centre stage to more demonstrative comrades.

And yet this man, who only seemed to become expansive with a guitar in his hands, crossed paths with some of the most important protagonists of the new art scene in Europe. Soto arrived in France in 1950. He joined the circles of abstract art, where he found other Latin American artists who had also made Paris their home. He took part in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, and featured in the famous 'Movement' exhibition in 1955 at Denise René, a gallery that soon became a focal point for artists in his aesthetic family, and where he later held numerous exhibitions. In this way, Soto became one of the leading proponents of kinetic art. In addition, he was involved in some of the most influential exhibitions of the time, including 'Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision' in Antwerp in 1959, and 'Bewogen Beweging' in Amsterdam in 1961.

IDÉE FIXE

An open admirer of Mondrian and Malevich, Soto considered the two masters as models throughout his life, but believed that this allegiance in itself involved drawing all possible logical conclusions from their aesthetic intuitions. This was because he had a deep-rooted conviction: that great art was built up from one generation to the next, and that every artist was only one link in the long chain of history. While he considered the abstractions of Mondrian and Malevich as successful achievements, these, again, were only links, which it was vital not to copy if one wanted to be truly faithful to them. Hence his interest in the new forms of geometrical abstraction he encountered in Paris when he first arrived. Hence, too, his enthusiasm for artists like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and

Yves Klein, who projected their art into the future, unafraid of jettisoning outmoded approaches. He would say again and again that it was important for art to remain a means of achieving 'sensitive knowledge' of the universe.

IMPERMANENCE OF THE REAL

What is so astonishing in Soto's path is the strictness of an approach focused on the interpretation of a truth: that of a world that could no longer identify with the fixedness imbued in it by classical art through realistic representation. And therein lies the whole paradox of Soto: how to render the fluidity of time and space through the fundamentals of painting: formal structure and play with colours. He devoted his whole life as an artist to resolving this question: because the 'sensitive reality' of the universe is not necessarily visible. Waves travel through it; a radiance emanates from it; an energy is expressed in it that is sometimes imperceptible to the eye.

Soto decided to create 'traps' designed to capture the absolute impermanence of the real -meaning its pulsation - by channelling it, appeasing it and transforming it into pure vibration. He later developed its infinite potential with his

Writings and **Vibrations**, where metal rods floated in suspension before panels painted with dense networks of vertical lines. His work also deployed itself in space through numerous interventions in architecture, and above all through his **Penetrables**, defined by the artist as 'revelations of sensitive space'.

In the context of the history of abstraction, Soto was thus not only inspired by a distrust of realistic form and representation, but also, very importantly, by the desire to liberate lines and colours from their fixedness and interdependency. This liberation was achieved step by step in a patient process of development, which this exhibition is designed to illustrate.

THREE WORKS

Soto created his first work on Plexiglas in 1953. He followed it with thirty-seven others. By superimposing two painted screens, one on a wood background, the other on Plexiglas, Soto blurred the painted forms and caused virtual shapes to appear, which vibrated under the effect of light and shadow created by the Plexiglas. In his own view, **Spiral**, 1955, one of Soto's iconic works, represented his definitive changeover from optical to kinetic art. As the critic Jean Clay wrote, 'Soto solved three basic problems in one go: the integration of real time into his language, because **Spiral** can only be experienced over time; the intervention of the viewer, whose role becomes decisive in the decomposition process of the form, and the accentuation of the random nature of the work, because the predetermined part of the artistic message is now totally conditioned by the presence and situation of the person looking at it.'

At a solo exhibition in the Denise René Gallery in April 1967, Soto showed a 'work in space' for the first time. It consisted of a collection of aluminium rods attached to the ceiling, going right down to the floor, forming what the artist called a 'Suspended volume'. This work introduced a system of immersion into the development of the Penetrable principle, inviting the visitor to walk through it. This movement towards the **Penetrable** is very obvious in the **Suspended Volume** of 1968, which consisted of three elements: a volume of blue rods, another of black rods, and a striated background fixed to the wall. This work marked a transition between the series of **Vibrations** with striated backgrounds and that of the **Penetrables**, by associating two kinds of vibrations: those perceived from the outside, and those the viewer discovers when entering it.

In the Eighties, Soto developed a new series of works which he called **Ambivalences: Senegalés** is one of these. In studying the series by Mondrian entitled **Boogie Woogie**, Soto had observed that the interaction of coloured bands produced a kind of optical vibration. Abandoning the constraints of two-dimensionality, he used colour to create an optical effect involving the constant advancing or retreating movement of the squares, by placing them in the same plane in front of a striped or plain surface. When the work is seen head on, these coloured squares launch themselves, as Soto put it, into an 'unpredictable dance of retractions or projections'. For the first time, movement was no longer created through the displacement of the viewer, but through the optical illusion brought about by the play of coloured elements.

EXHIBITION

CURATOR

Jean-Paul Ameline

ASSISTANT CURATOR

Nathalie Ernoult

ARCHITECT/STAGE DESIGNER

Laurence Fontaine

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Bastien Morin

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Aurélie Gavelle

CATALOGUE

Soto

Directed by Jean-Paul Ameline

Essays by Jean-Paul Ameline

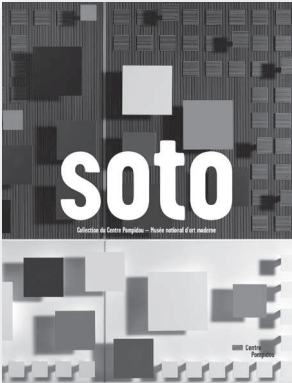
and Ariel Jiménez

Chronology drawn up

by Nathalie Ernoult

128 pp, 120 colour ill.

Price: €34.90



AROUND THE EXHIBITION

UN DIMANCHE, UNE ŒUVRE

Jesús Rafael Soto, *Spiral*, 1955

By Arnaud Pierre, lecturer in Contemporary Art History at Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris IV)
3 March, 11.30 a.m., Petite Salle
€4.50; reduced rate: €3.50
Free with the Pass

PAROLE AUX EXPOSITIONS

Jesús Rafael Soto

Wednesday 15 May, 7.00 p.m.,
Petite Salle, level -1
Free admission subject to seat availability

INFORMATIONS

01 44 78 12 33

www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

27 February to 20 May 2013
Musée, Galerie du Musée, level 4
Every day except Tuesdays and
1 May, from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

PRICES

Admission with the "Museum & exhibitions" ticket

Valid the same day for the Museum, for all exhibitions and the Panorama: one admission for each area

€13; reduced rate: €10

Free with the annual Pass and for those under 18

Online purchase and printing (full price tickets only)

www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie

TWITTER

You can find information and news about the exhibition via Twitter with the hashtag #Soto, or by logging onto: <http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou>

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