CONSTELLATIONS
CONSTRUCTIVISM, INTERNATIONALISM, AND THE INTER-AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE

JUNE 21–OCTOBER 7, 2012
ART MUSEUM of the AMERICAS | ORGANIZATION of AMERICAN STATES
A NOTE FROM AMA

We are pleased to exhibit Constellations, a fresh look to our permanent collection. This exhibit of geometric abstraction exemplifies the timelessness and value of AMA’s iconic works, symbolizing the OAS’s forward-thinking modern values while demonstrating the power of art as a unifying force for the Americas.

Andrés Navia, AMA | Art Museum of the Americas

ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

Drawn from the permanent collection of the Art Museum of the Americas, Constellations surveys the dynamic, inter-American history of geometric abstraction throughout the twentieth century. The universal and timeless structures of geometric forms and colors took on specific local meanings at different junctures, and Constellations suggests the range of values —modern, utopian, collective, transformative— that abstraction embodied across the hemisphere. In line with the broader mission of AMA and the Organization of American States, Constellations recognizes the socially constructive role that the arts have played in fostering democracy and freedoms of expression at times of social and political change.

Taking its cue from the work of Joaquín Torres-García, the Uruguayan constructivist who pioneered abstraction in the Southern Cone, Constellations shows the evolution of the geometric impulse through four complementary movements. These interrelated “constellations” —Constructivist Americas, Figuring Geometry, Constructive Geometries, and Geometry in Motion— explore the visual and ideological versatility of abstraction and its rich cultural history. The galleries resist linear chronologies and national paradigms, instead describing a history of synergies and encounters across time and space. The AMA’s foundational holdings in this area provide an essential touchstone for scholars and artists alike, and Constellations recognizes the surging interest in abstraction from Latin America and, no less, the vitality of geometry as a structural and social metaphor.

Curated by Abigail McEwen
In 1943, the year in which he painted Constructivist Composition, Torres-García founded a teaching workshop in Montevideo. A creative nexus of abstraction, the Taller Torres-García promoted his theory of Universal Constructivism, which called for the integration of pre-Hispanic (“universal”) motifs within the structuring form of the grid. This gallery traces constructivism through the Taller (Manuel Pailós, José Gurvich), the Grupo de Arte No Figurativo (Maria Freire, José Pedro Costigliolo), and a North American contemporary (Carlos Mérida).
Abstraction and figuration were not always mutually exclusive practices, and the artists in this constellation engage a figural presence vis-à-vis geometric forms. Elder-generation artists such as Mario Carreño and René Portocarrero found their way to abstraction through a gradual distillation of representational imagery. Others, including Agustín Fernández, Miguel Ocampo and Tomie Ohtake, were more apt to take the precepts of geometry as a point of departure for subtle intimations of the body, landscape, and architecture.

FIGURING GEOMETRY

René Portocarrero, *Figures In Yellow*, 1952
Gift of Joseph Cantor
Co-founded by Gyula Kosice, Argentina’s groundbreaking Madí movement ranks among Latin America’s most innovative, interdisciplinary and international expressions of geometric abstraction. The utopian dynamism of the Madí movement, seen in works by Kosice and the Cuban artist Sandú Darié, is here contrasted with the spartan sobriety of constructivism in Colombia. Fanny Sanín, Edgar Negret, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar and Omar Rayo deployed elemental, planar geometries in works that explore striking contrasts of color and spatial relief.

CONSTRUCTIVE GEOMETRIES

Edgar Negret, *Aparato Mágico*, 1959
Gift of the International Petroleum Company
Among the treasures of AMA’s collection are classic examples of geometric and optical art from Venezuela and Argentina. Works by Alejandro Otero, Jesús Soto, and Carlos Cruz-Diez invite sensorial experience through essences of color, space, and light. This gallery suggests a dialogue with the American Alexander Calder and the Arte Generativo group (Eduardo Mac Entyre, Miguel Angel Vidal, Ary Brizzi), which contemplated the cosmic energies and visual dynamism of lines and color in motion.
VISIT US

Location 201 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006
Hours TUE-SUN | 10AM-5PM
Closed Mondays, Federal Holidays, and Good Friday.
Phone 202.458.6016
Admission Free
Group Tours TUE-FRI | 10AM-4PM, please call 202.458.3362.
Parking Limited, metered street parking in the area.
Metro Take the 18th street exit on Farragut West Metro Station, walk towards Constitution Avenue for 6 blocks. We are on the corner of 18th and Virginia Avenue, just past C Street.

EVENTS

Family Workshop September 15th | 10AM-12PM
Roundtable Conversation September 18th | 6:30PM

AMA
museum.org

SPECIAL THANKS TO Cernuda Arte (Miami), TRESART (Miami), Arévalo Gallery (Miami), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.)