

Review

THE CRITICAL STATE OF VISUAL ART IN NEW YORK

June 15, 1998

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Four Artists

Constructivist Roots

Cecilia de Torres Ltd. through June 28

BY ROBERT C. MORGAN

THIS GALLERY IS DEVOTED, more or less, to the constructivist tradition in art. Specifically, it focuses on artists who follow in the tradition of the famous Uruguayan painter Joaquin Torres-Garcia. This particular exhibition gives us examples of work by four artists: Marta Chilindron, Caio Fonseca, Sergio Gutman, and Ladd Spiegel.

What is impressive about the exhibition is how divergent these artists appear while still holding to the constructivist aesthetic. Of the four, the most well-known is Caio Fonseca. Rather than showing recent work, Fonseca is represented with three smaller paintings from 1990. The most astonishing of these abstract works is *PARIS, 1990* painted in very dark tones. Fonseca has a considerable vocabulary as a painter, a subtle touch that aspires toward lyricism and memory. He surpasses nostalgia in his rigorous approach to painting, yet never retreats from the emotional content of the work.

Marta Chilindron's large sculptural installation, *UNTITLED #114*, consists of a large folding flat work, constructed of Gator board (similar to foam core), which is taped together at the bottom. One can simply open it up so that in descending from the wall, a table and chair appear as a simple, yet elegant environment. It is a purist work; that is, a highly refined form of constructivism. It carries the lightness of a De Stijl painting, but without all the *sturm und drang*. Chilindron has often been compared to the Brazilian artist Regina Silveira,; but this is only superficial. Silveira is less a constructivist than an artist involved with illusion and *tromp l'oeil* effects. Chilindron, on the other hand, serves us a more stark vision of reality, a Neo-platonic exegesis that circumscribes the everyday world, yet is firmly entrenched within it. Her work distills the everyday hard-edge, domestic environment into a vision of simplicity and ecstatic delight.

Sergio Gutman is a Mexican artist who contributes a large wall relief to the exhibition called *RAKIA, 1997*. It is constructed of iron and encaustic paint on wood. Ladd Spiegel works with the concept of the white grid, but in contrast to Agnes Martin, he makes these relatively small grids into interactive games. For example, one can move wooden pegs around in the grid – a tactile form of interaction.

Having traveled to South America frequently in the past year and a half, I find this Modernist aesthetic an important one. It is a living tradition – one that is unfortunately too easily ignored in the American market. There is a wealth of insight in these artists' works that should be carefully perceived and considered. Hopefully, once the trends and spectacles have worn away, this tradition will be noticed again as a major contribution to the manifestation of visual thought and understanding in our burgeoning transglobal environment.