

MAMCO
GENEVE

VERENA LOEWENSBERG
GERALDO DE BARROS
JO BAER
JACKIE WINSOR

SPRING SEQUENCE 2022
23.02. → 19.06.2022

COMMUNIQUÉ
DE PRESSE

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INTRODUCTION

Now that an ambitious renovation plan has been selected, MAMCO is moving on to the next stage in its development. We want to take advantage of this transformation to reaffirm MAMCO as a museum of contemporary *and* modern art. For us, it is no longer a question of showing what contemporary art owes to modernism so much as what modernism can teach us *about* contemporary art.

History has two enemies: amnesia (along with its politically weaponized form, populism) and fetishization of the past. After all, the study of history can reveal narratives that make market simplifications and the establishment of a canon untenable. Those are precisely the types of narratives to which we intend to contribute. This season's contributions spring from two different starting points but converge upon a formative modernist motif, as identified by Rosalind Krauss in 1979—the grid.

First, the Verena Loewensberg retrospective and Geraldo de Barros exhibition reveal how a modern vocabulary established in the early 20th century postulated the creation of a universal language akin to science and music that could be applied to all forms of creation.

Second, exhibitions of post-Minimalist works from the 1960s by Jackie Winsor and Joe Baer show how, like many other women artists, they worked with geometric forms and repetition to develop their own practice by making use of a "rectilinear framework primarily to contradict it," as Lucy Lippard observed.

This convergence upon a system of geometric coordinates originating in the rational principles central to Western thought would prove to be a launchpad for radical shifts, liberations, ruptures, and deviations—all in all, a fairly good definition of the artistic practices of today. By exploring and challenging the grid, these artists invite us to do the same in all disciplines where it appears, be it in the form of graphs, tables, or programs that are taken to be undisputable facts when they should be seen as interpretive frameworks.

VERENA LOEWENSBERG

Concrete art, the final modernist movement in Switzerland, dominated the country's art scene until the end of the 1960s. After this, other international influences began to appear—Pop art and Conceptual art—followed by Fluxus and the return of figurative painting.

The Concrete art movement, which emerged during the interwar period in Europe, called for an objective, autonomous visual idiom free from any exterior referentiality. Situating itself in opposition to figurative art as well as to real or expressive abstraction, Concrete art constructed a vocabulary through the use of purely visual elements (shapes, surfaces, colors) designed to embody clear geometric principles.

In 1930, the Concrete Art group, with Theo Van Doesburg at its center, offered a reference point around which artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Jean Arp could define their art. However, it was Max Bill who gave the movement real impetus, first in 1936 in Switzerland, then internationally through a number of exhibitions and publications.

It was not until the movement had already peaked that Verena Loewensberg (1912–1986), the only female member of the “Zurich Concretes,” finally enjoyed the same recognition as her peers (who included Bill, Camille Graeser and Richard Paul Lohse). The full extent of her oeuvre only became known in 1981 at her Kunsthaus Zürich retrospective (the museum's first such exhibition of a woman artist), five years before her death.

Loewensberg, who rarely discussed her work and was little-known in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, created concise, structured compositions that showed considerable freedom in terms of shape and color. Her first works date back to 1936, and the first painting recorded in her catalogue raisonné (nearly 630 paintings, as well as gouaches, drawings, engravings and sculptures) dates from 1944.

After finishing the Kunstgewerbeschule Basel (a school of applied arts), where she trained in drawing, textiles and color theory, she studied dance in Zurich. Through her association with Max Bill, she came into contact with the Paris-based *Abstraction-Création* group, led by Georges Vantongerloo, which first exhibited her work in 1936.

In the ensuing decades, Loewensberg, who was married to designer Hans Coray until 1949, developed her pictorial practice while working in the local textile industry and accepting commissions for applied art. A jazz enthusiast, she opened City Discount, a record store, in Zurich in the 1960s. From this point on her work focused on shapes and series that broke from the strictures of Concrete art and moved closer to the ideas of colorfield painting, Pop art and Minimal Art.

The MAMCO exhibition is structured around the artist's progression. Taking as its starting point her entire generation's relationship to the grid system as a rational organizing principle, the exhibition shows the proliferation of this movement starting in the 1950s and emphasizes the importance of music and the applied arts in Loewensberg's early pieces. It also reveals the artist's freer use of shape and color that culminated in her series from the 1970s and 1980s, works that reflect the influence of two contemporaneous movements, serial art and radical abstraction.

The exhibition is curated by Lionel Bovier. With the support of the Stanley Johnson Foundation, the Ernst Göhner Foundation, and the Georg and Josi Guggenheim Stiftung

GERALDO DE BARROS

Geraldo de Barros (1923–1998) was a Brazilian painter, photographer, and designer, and a founding member of the Brazilian Concrete art movement. De Barros initially trained as an economist, but in the mid-1940s, while still employed at Banco do Brasil, he began studying art. He first made a name for himself as a photographer with the abstract series entitled *Fotoforma*, which he showed in 1951 at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art. The unconventional nature of this work won him a scholarship that enabled him to study and travel in Europe. There he met Max Bill and François Morellet, with whom he maintained close ties. De Barros was particularly interested in Gestalt theory and the geometry of Concrete art. When he returned to Brazil he founded the Grupo Ruptura, along with Waldemar Cordeiro and Luis Sacilotto, among others. The group's aim was to align Brazilian art with the modernization movement then sweeping the country. In 1956 de Barros took part in the first *International Exhibition of Concrete Art* in Sao Paulo, and in 1960 his work was included in the international *Konkrete Kunst* exhibition organized in Zurich by Max Bill. Meanwhile, in 1954, his interest in the applied arts led him to found Unilabor, a utopian cooperative devoted to the construction of modern furniture.

The MAMCO exhibition retraces this trajectory, taking as its point of departure de Barros' return to Concrete art at the end of the 1970s when, abandoning the use of brushes and canvas, he took up new materials such as Formica. De Barros explains this transition in a manifesto entitled *On Reprising Some Form-Objects of Concrete Art*, published in conjunction with an exhibition of five of his paintings at the São Paulo Biennial in 1979. He writes about his search for a "form-object" that refers to nothing but itself and how this led him to recreate his first Concrete art paintings from 1953 using modern industrial materials. De Barros wanted to reinvent the relation between art and industry so that art could be produced on a large scale. To that end, he also used the manifesto to divulge the compositional schemata behind his paintings so that anyone could reproduce them. His goal was to make concrete art accessible to everyone and strip it of any originality. This manifesto-cum-user manual recalls some of the protocols that emerged under Conceptual art and also underscores the social foundations of abstraction as envisioned by de Barros.

The exhibition is organized by Paul Bernard, in collaboration with Fabiana de Barros and Michel Favre, and has received the generous support of Heitor Martins

|JO|BAER|

This exhibition focuses on the first two decades of Jo Baer's intense and diverse artistic career. The works on display, created between 1960 and 1981, trace Baer's development of pictorial Minimalism, culminating in a figurative painting that references both the body and archeological landscape.

Born in 1929, Baer did not seek to belong to any art movement, yet managed to be a part of the most exciting artistic episodes of the 1960s and 1970s. Following her university studies in Seattle and at the New School for Social Research, she frequented the Ferus Gallery before returning to New York. In 1966, Lawrence Alloway invited her to exhibit together with Donald Judd, Robert Ryman, and Frank Stella in a show devoted to "systemic painting." Mel Bochner also included her in one of Conceptual art's seminal exhibitions : *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art*. The following year, Baer was part of the 10 show at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, together with Carl Andre, Agnes Martin, and Robert Smithson.

The exhibition opens with *Wink, 'The Risen'*, a work from the early 1960s which is right in step with the new directions in Californian art at the time. The painting's title, at once biblical and flirtatious, sets the tone for how the motif oscillates between abstraction and the vernacular, between heraldry and adornment.

Between 1966 and 1974, Baer disagreed with the Minimalists, instead advocating for the vitality of painting freed from the constraints of perspective and arguing that abstract art could be non-illusionary. The paintings she produced at that time consist of shapes with negative space, black frames painted on white backgrounds. The addition of color establishes a relation within and between the paintings, but also an optical one with the viewer.

H.Arcuata produced in 1971 is a work whose title is based on the conventions of botanical Latin names. "H." refers to the painting's horizontal format and "Arcuata" to the composition's curved shapes. The painting, which was designed to be hung very low, almost at ground level, is part of a series the artist prosaically dubbed her "Radiator paintings." The dimensions and the hanging lend the painting sculptural qualities, enhanced by the curvaceous motif that streaks across the field of the canvas.

In 1974, Baer created two printed works that combine geometry and language. This interest in language and symbols gradually led her to abandon abstraction. *Demi-Pirouette (Half Turn on the Haunches)* from 1981 with its choreographic title combines a female body in profile, an amoeba, and mysterious symbols. Paleolithic motifs regularly appear in Baer's work, as well as writing composed of circles evoking a megalithic topography.

The pictorial symbols in Baer's work are not exclusively abstract or figurative, nor are they syntactical or archaeological. Rather they aspire to an expanded phenomenological experience, a vast science of perception embracing abstraction, optics, language, and history.

Exhibition organized by Julien Fronsacq, with the support of PACE Gallery

JACKIE WINSOR

Since the late 1960s, Jackie Winsor (American, born in Canada in 1941) has been making sculpture that expands a Minimalist vocabulary, using unrefined materials and grids to investigate process and labor.

Her work, which developed in the early 1970s as a reaction to Minimal art, has first been characterized as “post-Minimal,” “Anti-form,” and “Process art.” Informed by her own personal history, Winsor’s sculptures from this period indeed sit at the intersection of Minimalism and feminism, maintaining an attention to elementary geometry and symmetrical form, while eschewing Minimalism’s reliance on industrial materials and methods, through the incorporation of hand-crafted, organic materials.

As Lucy Lippard wrote in the 1970s, “her materials are plywood, pine, rope, brick, twine, nails, lathing, and trees. From them she makes compact objects, natural and easy in their physicality; unpretentious, but formally intelligent in their use of a tension between material and process, process and result ... Winsor lists her central concerns as ‘repetition, weightiness, density, and the unaltered natural state of materials.’ I would have added scale, obsessiveness, time, nature, and a visceral body reaction verging on the sensual ... Repetition in Winsor’s work refers not to form, but to process; that is, to the repetition of single-unit materials which finally make up a unified, single form ... The basic order, or geometry, in Winsor’s work is always thwarted by action or by nature, by the materials’ or the process’ inclinations toward their own identities. Many women artists working with geometry and obsessive repetition ... have come into their own by using a rectilinear framework primarily to contradict it.”

Since the 1970s, Winsor also used chance procedures and performative actions to determine the final outcome of her sculptures, exploding and reassembling a cube with 20’000 nails patiently hammered into its surface, or attaching to the back of a car a piece covered with 50 layers of acrylic paint to drag it up and down a sidewalk.

With the series of wall inset pieces, started in the 1990s, she seems to allude to painting, but also explores the creation of a “negative space.” As in the “cuts” in buildings of Gordon Matta-Clark, whom she befriended in the early 1970s, her “windows” open a void into the wall, thus transforming the space within which they are exhibited.

In 1979, a mid-career retrospective of her work opened at MoMA and in 1991 Milwaukee Art Museum organized a touring retrospective. P.S. 1 inaugurated its newly renovated space in Long Island City, Queens with a retrospective of her work in 1997. More recently, her one-person exhibition was held at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT in 2014-2015. MAMCO’s exhibition offer an overview of her practice by gathering works from the 1960s to the 2000s.

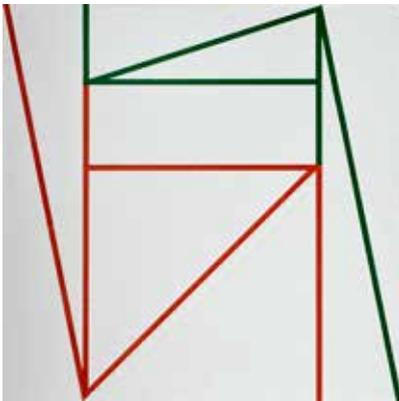
Organized by Lionel Bovier, with the support of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

ICONOGRAPHY

SPRING 2022



Verena Loewensberg, *Sans titre*, 1972
cour. Henriette Coray Loewensberg



Geraldo de Barros, *Objeto Forma Projeto 53*,
1953/1979



Jo Baer, *H. Arcuata*
coll . Daimler Art Collection Stuttgart/Berlin
Photo : Tom Powel, New York



Jackie Winsor, *Small Circle*, 1969
Hemp, 21.60 x 99 x 99 cm
cour. the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

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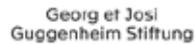
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