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Geographies of Cuban Abstraction

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Review Essay:
Geographies of Cuban Abstraction

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ABIGAIL MCEWEN. *Revolutionary Horizons: Art and Polemics in 1950s Cuba*. Yale UP, 2016, 272 pp.

DANA MILLER, editor. *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight*. Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016, 232 pp.

The connection between *Revolutionary Horizons* and *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* can be said to be orthogonal—orthogonality being a core compositional principle of post-war abstraction. Both stories begin in Havana and come to age in the long 1950s. They are accounts of divergent geographies of Cuban abstraction in the visual arts but with multiple and concurrent tangential points of contact. McEwen's *Revolutionary Horizons* chronicles the pursuit of abstraction in the Cuban visual arts at a time of deep political unrest and ideologically charged aesthetic choices. Under the care of curator Dana Miller, *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* accompanies the eponymous exhibit at the Whitney Museum for American Art with a collection of four texts and 82 color plates, profiling the lifelong oeuvre of the Cuban-born, New York-based abstract artist Carmen Herrera. The most comprehensive retrospective of Herrera's work to date, this is only the latest in an increasingly long list of events and materials—including a documentary—celebrating the rediscovery of her art.

Revolutionary Horizons features the leading figures and debates underpinning the social history of abstraction in the Cuban visual arts of the 1950s. It argues that “while the politics of abstraction may appear superficially coincidental, in other words a mere product of historical circumstance, . . . they were in fact deeply imbricated within a historicist national discourse—*cubanía*—that provided both an idealist order and the grassroots impetus for action” (3). McEwen traces *cubanía* to an inaugural, more militant form of cultural nationalism obversely shaped by active resistance to U.S. economic and military imperialism. In McEwen’s exegesis, this *cubanista* temperament would be nurtured and transformed in the 1940s and 1950s by subsequent polemical engagements with notions like cosmopolitanism, gangsterism, consumerism, and Americanism. This period witnesses the emergence of a second philosophical variant of *cubanía*, associated as a matter of course to Cuban writer José Lezama Lima and to the intellectual group around the journal *Orígenes*. This *origenista* view of culture—the pursuit of a quasi-mystical, transformative aesthetic grounded in teleological ontologies of the national—also runs through the Cuban *abstractos* profiled in the book, argues the author, albeit conceptually and ideologically adapted to these visual artists’ more politically active endeavors. By historicizing *cubanía*, McEwen lays the groundwork for an interpretation of the situated politics of abstraction and outlines a comparative framework for the political engagement of three distinct generations of cultural vanguard. And though the author relies on Antoni Kapcia’s descriptive terms of generational cultural nationalisms, her juxtaposition of these categories with the ideological clout of abstraction is a welcome correction to the otherwise reductive tendencies of Kapcia’s taxonomies.

These claims are advanced mainly through the story of Los Once, a group of painters and sculptors who emerged in the visual arts scene of Havana in the early 1950s. In this sense,

McEwen's pioneer in-depth study of Los Once offers at least two paths for the reader to follow. One of these is the story of how Los Once combined the aesthetics of abstraction with a nationalist ethos and mobilized abstraction as a rebellious practice against the 1952 military coup and the seven-year-long dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista installed in its wake. McEwen's simultaneous contextualization and historicizing of Los Once's discourse of abstraction also tells a second story, ciphered in the understudied cultural activity of the Cuban state under Batista's rule. This frame of reference, in turn, will explain many of the factors surrounding the fate of Cuban abstraction after the 1959 revolution that unseated Batista. By bringing into relief the labor of art schools, exhibition venues, salons, critical fora, and innovative journals and magazines of the period, McEwen's archival diligence adds a largely unexplored layer of complexity to a cultural landscape in the throes of large-scale modernization projects. With this double-barrel approach, *Revolutionary Horizons* tackles two pending issues in Cuban visual arts scholarship. First, it furnishes an understanding of Los Once that does not reduce their practices to the zeitgeist of the Cuban 1950s, which is to say, as just another example of the wholesale and ubiquitous North American influence in the island. Second, it offers a welcome take on the long-overdue revision of Cuban cultural production in the pre-revolutionary period, which has begun to be corrected by robust new studies in various disciplines, such as Yeidy M. Rivero's *Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Commercial Television, 1950-1960* (2015), Tom McEnaney's *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* (2017), and Jennifer Lambe's *Madhouse: Psychiatry and Politics in Cuban History* (2017), to name a few.

McEwen's account of Los Once as a discrete group unfolds over the first three chapters of *Revolutionary Horizons*. Together they amount to the most systematic and detailed study of Los Once's artistic activity to date. The broader scene of Cuban modern painting and the

mounting political resistance against Batista's government serve as a dramatic backdrop. The first chapter, "The Horizon of Vanguardists," expands in depth and breadth the arguments foreshadowed in the introductory remarks, detailing how an emerging generation of artists was shaped in equal measure by Batista's coup, an emphatic championing of modernist aesthetics, and an expanding media and institutional apparatus nurturing their endeavors. Here McEwen rekindles a generational account of three different national artistic vanguards, to situate Los Once's work as part of its third iteration.

Los Once, the author explains, would burst in the cultural field by restaging notions of vanguardism that had been brewing among Cuban cultural producers and intellectuals since the 1920s, even as their exhibitions, texts, and interactions stressed the group's political iconoclasm and aesthetic rupture with respect to previous generations of Cuban artists. To illuminate these connections, McEwen uncovers the debt of Los Once's to their forerunners, the group of 23 artists and a critic that initiated its members in the cultural politics of modernism and the national debates of the moment: "The cohort of 'los 23 y medio' thus inherited a double legacy from the elder vanguardias: from the Generation of 1927, a model of commitment to political freedom; and from the Orígenes group, a vision of Cuban universalism drawn from broadly americanista roots" (14). (For scholars of Hispanic culture, it is worth noting that *Revolutionary Horizons* uses the term "Generation of 1927" indistinguishably to refer to Cuba's cultural vanguard of the late 1920s, "los nuevos," and to the Spanish intellectual constellation more often associated to the name—some of whom traveled to and from Cuba during those years, or lived in exile in Havana and elsewhere in Latin America after the Spanish Civil War.)

Chapters 2 and 3 sketch a fuller group portrait of Los Once, from their founding in "Los Once and the Polemics of Abstraction," to their disbandment in "Anti-Bienal, Bienal, and the

Dissolution of Los Once.” An opening discussion of select works and figures of the first and second vanguard prefigures the crucible in which Los Once, and the metacritical legacy of abstraction in Cuba, would later be forged. The likes of Enrique Riverón, Amelia Peláez, Roberto Diago, Wifredo Lam, and Marcelo Pogolotti grace this section. It also features the behind-the-scenes maneuverings of the National Salons of 1950, 1951, and 1953 where the leadership of the renowned Havana School of the 1940s, and the local reception of abstraction, were negotiated and challenged. McEwen’s apt emphasis on the political uses of abstraction by Los Once tends to eclipse more specialized aesthetic debates, frequently relegating the particularities of the artist’s individual crafts to a second plane. As a consequence, the critical treatment of abstraction echoes that of Los Once’s own: “As a tabula rasa, the medium of abstraction appeared ripe for the taking, and its interpretive elasticity enabled it to be profitably instrumentalized by the onceños and others” (51). Even so, graduate students, curators, and scholars of various interests—in Latin American and Cuban art, post-World War II abstraction, and/or Cuban cultural politics for example—will find very useful scoops in these pages.

In a felicitous move, McEwen ties the founding of Los Once to the national climate of political unrest set off by the 1953 Moncada assault, a failed but symbolically powerful attack of a government military barrack by the revolutionary rebels led by Fidel Castro. Other highlights of these sections include the critical reception of the 1953 exhibition from whose title the group of Los Once takes its name, *Once pintores y escultores*; a comprehensive coverage of the polemical II Bienal Hispanoamericana traveling from Franco’s Spain, and of the concurrent Anti-Bienal of 1954 denouncing it; a revision of the historical significance of painter and later Artistic Director of the National Institute of Culture, Mario Carreño; and the reconsidered role of organizations such as the Sociedad Cultural de Nuestro Tiempo and the Lyceum Lawn Tennis

Club, whose pivotal support for modern art scaffolded the activities of Los Once and facilitated their irruption into the public sphere. The group's deliberate but until now secretive dissolution is then unveiled by McEwen with a good sense of dramatic narrative arc, as she details the fluctuating number of its members over several exhibitions and unpacks the factors behind the growing dissensus within the group. This thoroughly documented narrative covers not only Los Once's core members—artists like Hugo Consuegra, Guido Llinás, Agustín Cárdenas, Antonio Vidal, and Raúl Martínez—but also includes understudied figures whose bold visual poetics still await wider recognition, such as Zilia Sánchez and the early Roberto Estopiñán.

Featuring McEwen's most compelling readings, the fourth chapter, "The Offices of Abstraction," delivers a rejoinder to David Craven's "A Legacy for the Latin American Left: Abstract Expressionism as Anti-Imperialist Art" and works well as a companion to Timothy Hyde's indispensable *Constitutional Modernism: Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933-1959* (2012). A change of pace and scale, this chapter examines the cultural work of the third generation vanguard from a dual domestic and international perspective. It shows how the strident politics of Los Once raised the public profile of abstraction, even if the group's ideological neutralization was paid for with the mainstream embrace of abstraction in the modernizing architectural fever that took Havana by storm in the 1950s. The synergy of this modernist discourse between the visual arts on one hand and the nation-building public projects under Batista on the other is informed by well-documented discussions of the new National Culture Institute's activities, the consolidation of the national museum, the closing gap between Cuban abstraction and the US sphere of influence in the arts, and the stratagems of Mario Carreño and José Gómez Sicre in the multiple stages of the modern art world. Additionally, McEwen's examination of the *abstractos*'s excursions into the city landscape joins a growing

catalogue of urban and cultural studies about Havana, such as Eduardo Luis Rodríguez's *The Havana Guide: Modern Architecture 1925-1965* (2000) and *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* (2002), currently shaping emergent debates about future conservation and reconstruction projects in Cuba's capital city.

The last two chapters, "Cuba's Concretos and the Constructivist Turn" and "The Endgame of Abstraction," complete the tableau of abstraction in the Cuban visual arts of the mid-twentieth century and offer a final balance of its impact after the Cuban Revolution, respectively. Comparatively less visible than their counterparts in Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil, Cuba's concrete artists come into view here as part of a broader aesthetic movement that included acoustic and technological experimentation beyond the visual arts. Cuban concrete artists, offering a different path to abstraction from that of Los Once, relied on the promises of an epistemological transformation to be achieved through the visual creation of the real anew, rather than through the shock gesture of abstraction as a value in itself. This leads McEwen to argue that "[c]oncrete art, which arrived at once too early and too late in Cuba, was inevitably a failed project," and to pit the collective of Los Diez Pintores Concretos against Los Once, the group at the core of the author's own *Revolutionary Horizons* (175). A counter-narrative of the concrete finds more fertile ground in another recent work, Rachel Price's *The Object of the Atlantic: Concrete Aesthetics in Cuba, Brazil, and Spain, 1868-1968* (2014), which unearths the economic subtexts, unexpected genealogies, and political wagers of the Spanish, Cuban, and Brazilian *concretos*.

With this comprehensive portrait of the Cuban *abstractos*, McEwen brings to life the links between aesthetic abstraction, the ethos of insurgency, and national politics in the eve of revolution. The book's final assessment of their legacies does not reject the standard definitions

and periodizations of Cuban art history, which the author addresses explicitly in the introductory remarks: “the book takes the impassioned terms of the decade . . . largely at face value” (7). A direct implication of this decision is that more seasoned scholars of Cuban culture will greatly benefit from unique archival finds but will find less challenging McEwen’s takes on the notion of cultural vanguard or on the cultural debates of the early revolutionary period: “Although abstract art was censured for its alleged lack of social commitment, the more damning charge was its persistent identification with *cubanía rebelde*, the ideology of dissent radicalized during the 1950s, and its reluctance to embrace the Marxist socialism of the new *cubanía revolucionaria*” (214). In this vein, McEwen’s brief analysis of the former onceño Raúl Martínez’s turn to pop art with revolutionary themes could be profitably read in conjunction with Gerardo Mosquera’s now classic *El diseño se definió en octubre* (1989). Dwelling further on the links between earlier philosophies of abstraction and composition on one hand and the revolutionary mediascape and its newly privileged platforms of expression—such as the poster—on the other would have bolstered McEwen’s commendable emphasis on pioneer art publications like *Inventario* and *Noticias de Arte* earlier in the text. And because the study does not upend accepted periodizations of the Cuban cultural vanguard of the first half of the twentieth century, it irons out the break between the *minoristas*, a faction active from 1923 to 1927, and the group formed in its wake, which orbited the *Revista de Avance* from 1927 onward. Since the rupture was partly the result of an intestine disagreement regarding the meaning and politics of vanguardism, this absence undercuts one of the book’s more inspired readings, namely, that the third generation vanguard to which Los Once belong embraced the more radical politics of a first generation vanguardism coming of age in the 1920s. In no way does this detract from the

scholarly significance of *Revolutionary Horizons*' welcome historical revision of Los Once's and of Cuban abstraction's place in the complex map of Latin American twentieth-century art.

Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight further complicates the very idea of such a map, and the sustained reflection on the geopolitics of abstraction running through both of these books would be reason enough to read them together. In fact, Herrera began her career in the same milieu of many of the artists featured in McEwen's study and had in common with them several formative and exhibition spaces, like the Lyceum and Galería Luz y Color. Moreover, Herrera had direct contacts and indirect affinities with other Cuban painters of the time, especially with the concrete artists Loló Soldevilla—who spent a time in Paris as well—and Sandú Darie. These two books are linked by several other preoccupations: a nuanced historicizing of the sectarian militances of style; a reconsideration of the processes of signification and resignification abstraction has undergone, and still undergoes, as an aesthetic language; and a sensitivity to the social and multidisciplinary dimensions of abstraction in particular and the visual arts in general.

With a well-thought design and an elegant production value, however, it would be a disservice to describe *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* as just a companion catalogue. As an exquisitely crafted artifact, the book renders tribute to one of Herrera's signatures as an artist: the treatment of the painting as a three-dimensional object. This is why I opened this review with a comment on the book's materiality, a testament to the discerning choices of curator Dana Miller and her design and photography team. And while it is not reasonable to expect that a catalogue recreate the experience of the exhibit, the book more than compensates by reproducing works that are not shown or whose whereabouts are unknown, and by bringing together as many works that belong to the same series as possible. The plates displaying Herrera's artwork provide the multiple photographic angles needed to appreciate how her paintings perform unexpected

transformations according to the position of the observer with respect to the canvas. For students of Herrera's brushwork, moreover, these reproductions offer close-ups of significant textural details, which a nervous museum guard or a slow-moving crowd might not accommodate in a live event.

Four texts of uneven caliber accompany this visual feast. Miller's opening "Carmen Herrera: Sometimes I Win" annotates biographical turning points in the development of Herrera's distinctive visual idiom: her sculpted and multi-paneled canvases and their edges; the consolidation of her dichromatic palette; her play on negative and positive spaces, which destabilizes the very notions of figure and background; her life-long study of straight lines, inspired by a stint as an architecture student at the University of Havana; and the dynamic unities of shape and color that produce, for instance, her characteristically tense triangular compositions. Miller's note also provides an accessible yet learned account of Herrera's influences, underscoring the impact of her late discovery of Russian suprematism and constructivism, and her indebtedness to the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and to Piet Mondrian. The compositional calculus of mystic Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) emerges as an unexpected source of apprenticeship in Herrera's geometric abstraction, which Miller illustrates with well-placed juxtapositions. A focus on the dialogue between Herrera and Barrett Newman (a friend of the artist) enriches Miller's discussion of the artist's unusual place in the New York scene as both a woman and an immigrant. Meanwhile, parallels with other contemporary figures like Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Rauschenberg underscore Herrera's anticipation of what would later be coined Hard-Edge Abstraction (the West coast movement competing with the dominance of the abstract expressionism of the New York School more closely associated to gestural abstraction or action painting). Untimely and unplaceable at once, argues Miller, Herrera was

always reluctant to imprint her work with any of the identities she has inhabited or that have been imposed onto her, as a woman, as Cuban-born, or as a Latin American abstractionist.

The middle essays, penned by two well-known art critics, deliver the least provocative interventions of the four. Gerardo Mosquera's "Carmen Herrera: Cuba, Inside and Out" adds the necessary Cuban dimension to Herrera's largely invisible presence in her native country but repeats many of the biographical details already teased out in Miller's piece. Through the identification of four distinct styles in Herrera's early works, Mosquera nonetheless succeeds in contextualizing the artist's turn to abstraction within the Cuban modernist frames of references to which she was exposed in Havana before the New York and Paris years, and during her counted visits to Cuba afterward. In fact, the assertion that "Herrera's persona and work are, in themselves, a critique of nationalism in art" might be Mosquera's most pertinent observation here (43). Given the persistent preference for figurative languages in the Cuban visual arts—much in the same way that realism has prevailed in the national literary landscape—Mosquera's reminder that "abstractionism was most significant in the history of Cuban art during the 1950s and early 1960s" (49) indirectly highlights the importance of McEwen's above-cited *Revolutionary Horizons*. It reinforces the pivotal role that the Havana Lyceum and Galería Luz y Color had in the promotion of abstraction in Cuba, as discussed in more detail by McEwen's monograph. It also underscores Amelia Peláez's influence as a model for female artists of the period.

In "Paris est une fête," the third entry of the volume, Serge Lemoine is tasked with the *mise en scène* of Herrera's Paris years, 1948-1954. Lemoine details the unique encounters with experimental visual languages afforded by Paris, whose indisputable centers were the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, and the sway of Auguste Herbin's towering persona. This does not make up

for some missed opportunities. In particular, a focus on tangential individuals and styles leave much unexplored about the material realities of postwar Paris, and, for example, how they might have influenced Herrera's inventive use of burlap and her comparatively early adoption of acrylics over oils. And because Lemoine's cursory judgments of her early works reduce Herrera's pre-Paris creative output to a wandering apprenticeship—directly at odds with the artist's own recollections as well as Miller's, Mosquera's, and Sullivan's neighboring pieces—"Paris est une fête" succeeds only in repeating an uninspired cliché about the magic of Paris.

In contrast, Edward J. Sullivan's "Carmen Herrera: South to North" delivers the last and most compelling contribution of the four essays. If Miller's biography analyzes Herrera's works from the question of her (un)timelines, Sullivan complements the curator's text by mapping the artist's place within the hemispheric and trans-Atlantic spatial networks of abstraction of the mid-twentieth century. This approximation resolves questions that remained intractable in previous texts: the relative positionality of abstraction's politics on one hand, and Herrera's inescapable dialogues with her better-known counterparts in New York and Latin America, even as an outsider, on the other. Framed by what Sullivan terms the "Contact Zones of Fluidity"—after Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones"—hidden connections between Herrera and other Latin American artists are thus read anew. Select works by César Patternosto, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and others provide visual and conceptual support to Sullivan's interpretations.

Careful to avoid putative lineages, this analytic framework unveils the philosophical and stylistic affinities of "a hemisphere-wide utopian sensibility," suggesting "that the utopianism of [Herrera's] turn toward a purer form of abstract art reveals a personal affinity, perhaps elusive or even unconscious, with a social moment of hopefulness that links her work to that of certain Brazilian Concrete and Neo-Concrete artists of this era. Our understanding of Herrera's art

deepens when we see it against the panorama of a (short-lived) postwar utopianism that was, I think, perceived in a particularly palpable way in Latin America” (69, 75). Moreover, Sullivan argues that this utopian undercurrent of geometric abstractionism is brought into public view with the major state-backed architectural projects of mid-twentieth century in México, Venezuela, Brazil, and Cuba, as the expression of “its evil doppelgänger, Developmentalism” (75). In this sense, the social and political realities of Latin America help to retrace and ground the “contact zones of art” in the postwar era and complicate the kind of unified hemispheric narratives that are also targeted by McEwen’s reevaluation of the *abstractos* role in Havana’s public architectural landscapes of the mid-twentieth century. Sullivan does well to remind the reader that the indisputable anchor figure of these shared sensibilities and their transatlantic trajectory is the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García. More than a shared interest in architecture with Herrera, and the common passage through Paris—a historical destination for so many Latin American intellectuals and artists—Sullivan points to Torres-García’s collaborations with Piet Mondrian and De Stijl, which “foreshadow the loose ties and spiritual affinities of later Latin American abstractionists to the Dutch master” (71).

This may be the place to mention three final twists in these two stories, not included in the reviewed texts, that underscore the complex geographies of Cuban abstraction—continental, transatlantic, and national—featured in these two books. First, if the fluid and dynamic geographies of post-war abstraction provide a better understanding of Carmen Herrera’s long overshadowed but manifest significance, it is worth noting that Torres-García’s vital *América Invertida*, which inspires the title of Sullivan’s essay, does not include Cuba or any of the other Caribbean islands, placing the region, by defect, in a limbo between the North and the South. And though the French connection vertebrates many of these newly suggested topographies,

neither the essays on Herrera nor McEwen's *Revolutionary Horizons* stress the enduring influence of the French visual arts in the establishment and development of Havana's academic painting that informed the modernist and abstract rebellion against lingering academicisms and figurative aesthetics. For instance, one of Hispanic America's first institutions for the formal study of visual arts, Havana's Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, was founded in 1818 as the Escuela Gratuita de Dibujo y Pintura and inaugurated under the direction of the French painter Jean-Baptiste Vermay (1786-1833), who sought exile in Cuba after the fall of Napoleon. And last, an enigma, having to do with the (im)possibilities of reading programmatic meanings into geometric abstraction: Herrera has suggested that the title of her *P.M.* (1967), from the Blanco y Verde series begun in 1959, is a reference to Piet Mondrian (28-9). To any scholar of Cuban culture, and to anyone following the cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s, however, the playful initials of title—and even the three-triangle composition of the piece itself—would equally suggest a reference to the short film at the center of the new government's first public incident of censorship, Orlando Jiménez and Sabá Cabrera Infante's *P.M.* (1961). Not only was Sabá Cabrera Infante an abstract painter himself—which McEwen discusses in her book along with the incident—but also Carmen Herrera's family was negatively impacted by the Revolution and no doubt followed closely these developments in the early 1960s (Miller's text recounts how her brother was imprisoned and later released after the intervention of the Catholic church on behalf of her family).

Interestingly, *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight's* “small prints”—the list of benefactors, collectors, auctions, exhibits—also provide a roadmap of sorts to understand the key individuals and institutions promoting the reappraisal of mid-twentieth-century Latin American abstract artists in the global art market and exhibit circuit, a growing demand that includes many of the

Cuban modernist painters that appear on the pages of both books. But is there anything beyond a collector-driven demand for Latin American abstract art and the simultaneous and long-overdue revisionist scholarship of this visual corpus? Is there a contemporary desire for abstraction that fuels the rediscovery of radically reimagined languages for art, of its alternative histories and trajectories? True to the ambiguous and, in its own time, polemical relationship of abstraction to the idea of socially committed art, the persistent allure of abstract art is open to several readings. The reevaluation of abstraction can be dismissed as a farcical repetition—and nostalgic reification—of a marketable utopianism. Or its revived visibility can be taken seriously as a symptom of the collective desires unfulfilled and frustrated by the mass utopias of twentieth-century modernizations that witnessed the emergence of abstraction and that still demand a reinvention of experience and consequently of our modes of thinking critically, aesthetically, about it.

If the appeal of modern abstraction resides in its ability to call forth mutinous imaginaries against the familiarity of the same, perhaps then the fitting title of Herrera's exhibit and catalogue, reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "lines of flight," can be read as a clue. For an observer of Herrera's canvases familiar with *A Thousand Plateaus*—where Mondrian appears as a teacher, too—the painter's study of color and lines highlights the debt of Deleuze and Guattari's terminology for a new mode of philosophical inquiry (planes, lines of becoming, punctual systems, smooth and striated spaces, bodies without organs, *haecceities*, relations of speed and slowness, of being and becoming) to the language of modern abstraction. Herrera's color blocks and lines break the two-dimensional surface by continuing beyond the edge of the painting, wrapping the frame along with the canvas, in flight. The relationship between space, lines, and colors is suspended in permanent tension, that is, the lines resist being

reduced to the perimeters of the geometrical shapes formed by the color blocks. “The abstract line cannot be defined as geometrical and rectilinear. What then should be termed *abstract* in modern art? A line of variable direction that describes no contour and delimits no form” (Deleuze and Guattari 511). Artistic abstraction as an aesthetic language functions both as a rejection of representational thinking and as its own system of representation which, within its limits, furnishes a language to interrogate a crisis of representation, of *being*. If abstractionism was the visual language of a certain utopianism, and the Latin American history of abstraction the scene of its political contradictions, the texts reviewed here allow for a reading of Latin American abstract art as a practice of signification attempting to think through the situated, historically contingent ways in which art engages the politics of *becoming*.