For an Archaeology of Kinetic Art

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Kinesthesia: Latin American Kinetic Art 1954-1969, Palm Springs : Palm Springs Art Museum ; Munich : DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2017. Sous la dir. de Dan Cameron
Julio Le Parc, Paris : Galerie Perrotin, 2017
De l'art cinétique à l'art numérique : hommage à Frank Popper, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2017, (Eidos – Retina). Sous la dir. de Françoise Py
The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Varsovie : Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw ; Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2017, (The Museum Under Construction). Sous la dir. de Marta Dziejanska, Dieter Roelstraete, Abigail Winograd

EDITOR'S NOTE

Every new history book contributes to rewriting previous narratives from the viewpoint of the present. Up until now we have chosen to address these updates through two-way dialogical comparisons: the new narrative versus its predecessors. But the present transforms objects and paradigms, in distinct ways, depending on the available distance. What we offer here is a sort of exquisite corpse of the present's effect on the past, in four stages or four cadaver slices, consisting of 1 to 4 books each.

- 1 “The archaeology of kinetic art still has to be written”,¹ we could read in 1968 in the magazine *Robho*. But the proposal to revise the official history of this tendency, whose epicentre was established in Paris around the Denise René gallery with the mythical exhibition *Le Mouvement* (April 1965), had to wait for several decades before resurfacing today. At a time when Kinetic Art seems to be enjoying a revival of interest, from critics and the market alike, several publications are involved in this review approach. This is

the explicit goal of two books accompanying the international exhibitions *Kinestesia: Latin American Kinetic Art, 1954-1969* and *The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America*.² While the first explores the South American roots of Kinetic Art, addresses on above all American readership and questions why this tendency has been overlooked and excluded by the continent's art critics and institutions, the second book, conversely, responds to the ambitious goal of not only re-organizing the movement's archaeology and redrawing the geographical boundaries of its ramifications, but also, through this gesture, of reviewing its actual definition. In both instances, Kinetic Art appears like a diffuse and moving constellation of practices and theories. This constellation can only be grasped if we shift the focus towards the intersecting chronicle of *histories*, the complex web of artists' and theoreticians' both physical and intellectual itineraries. The essays in fact turn into critical biographies recounting lives that have lost their structure, which we read like so many novels. They describe the kinetic adventure like a quest for identity. At the moment when an extensive map is being re-drawn, the image of a compact movement, with a mainly European matrix, in the line of abstraction and Constructivism, is making way for the layered model of a "diasporic art".³ Coming into being after the Second World War, just when migratory flows between Europe and South America were being established in both directions, Kinetic Art showed, on the one hand, how the interplay of influences—theoretical and formal—followed this two-way movement and, on the other, how the European art "capitals"—starting with Paris, but also Düsseldorf, Zurich, Ulm and Berlin—acted as catalysts. These latter would offer an international visibility to the "different dialogues"⁴ occurring with seemingly peripheral but nevertheless extremely lively art scenes.

- 2 Within this moving constellation, go-betweens took on an essential rôle. This involved artists such as Joaquín Torres García, Jesús-Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Díez, and Julio Le Parc—to whom the Perrotin gallery has devoted a new monograph. With these artists we should associate Tomás Maldonado who, in Buenos Aires in the 1940s, contributed to the sudden rise of Concrete Art. He would then direct the Ulm School before becoming a pioneer in ecological design in Milan. Among these go-betweens, Frank Popper, who was born in Prague under the Austro-Hungarian empire and emigrated first to London and then to Paris, traced, with his pivotal exhibitions and theoretical reference books, a line of continuity between the kinetic experiments of the 1960s and the technological works of the 1990s. This is what is illustrated by the compilation *De l'art cinétique à l'art numérique : hommage à Frank Popper*, which has just been published to mark his centenary.
- 3 Seen by the yardstick of these "migrations", Kinetic Art switches its sights. The drive to experiment and introduce formal renewal appears like an undisciplined leap of freedom with regard to standardizing systems, taking effect in art and politics alike. Because of this utopian dimension which explores the participatory and collective potential of art, and which makes exchange its imperative, the kinetic movements may, according to Marta Dziawańska, become "a tool to address and help solve the political and social problems that afflict both the center and the periphery".⁵ In fact, as Julio Le Parc explains, it is not just important to "bypass ideological authorities" but also to believe "in the confrontation of contemporary art". This also goes for art history: "If movements are presented in an isolated way, there is no reflection".⁶

NOTES

1. "Arden Quin précurseur", anonymous text, *Robho*, no.3, 1968, n.p.
2. The exhibition *Kinesthesia: Latin American Kinetic Art, 1954-1969* was held in the Palm Springs Art Museum (26 August 2017-15 January 2018). *The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, produced by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (17 November 2017-11 February 2018), will be presented in 2018 at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow and at the SESC in São Paulo.
3. Roelstraete, Dieter. Winograd, Abigail. "The Other Trans-Atlantyck: Theorizing Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America", *The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Varsovie : Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw ; Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2017, p. 19, (The Museum Under Construction)
4. Jiménez, Ariel. "Synchronisms and Anachronisms of Modern Art", *The Other Trans-Atlantic*, *Op. cit.*, p. 85
5. Dziwiewska, Marta. "In Praise of Instability: The Exhibition as an Exercise in Historical Imagination", *Ibid.*, p. 29-30. Trans. by the author.
6. Le Parc, Julio. "Politique visuelle", Interview with Jérôme Sans, *Julio Le Parc*, Paris : Galerie Perrotin, 2017, p. 157