

# LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

## Carmen Herrera, The 1970s: Part 2

April 15 – June 10, 2023

1037 N. Sycamore Avenue, Los Angeles

Lisson Gallery debuts in Los Angeles with a special exhibition of Carmen Herrera consisting of her *Days of the Week* series, seven paintings that evoke the distinctive character of each day. The exhibition is the second part of a presentation focused on her work from the 1970s, following Part 1 that was on view in New York in May 2022. Herrera participated in the planning of the two-part exhibition before she passed away at the age of 106 in February 2022. The *Days of the Week* paintings were last exhibited together in Herrera's solo touring museum show, *Lines of Sight*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; and K20 Museum, Dusseldorf, Germany (2016-2018). *Carmen Herrera, The 1970s: Part 2* – also the first solo exhibition in Los Angeles for Herrera – marks a parallel with Lisson Gallery's opening in New York in 2016, which was inaugurated by a selection of recent paintings and sculptures by the artist. To celebrate the opening of the Los Angeles gallery, a monumental *Estructura* by Herrera is also installed in the front courtyard.

Carmen Herrera's work in the 1970s, one of the least-explored decades of the artist's career, can be characterized by her reluctance to follow any principal art movements of the time, such as the prevalent, male-dominated Minimalism of the era. Moreover, despite her stylistic links to Latin American and European Constructivism and Concrete Art, Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism and the Abstraction-Création movement, Herrera never considered herself part of any specific art historical category. Herrera focused instead on sharpening the geometric lyricism and vibrant abstractions for which she is now known, affiliating herself with pure Modernism, which more closely reflects the principles and fundamentals of the International Style of architecture.

Herrera worked in relative obscurity amongst the US art world during this era, while her early fascination with architecture grew as her shapes became harder and more formal. The artist's bold colors are articulated by her structure, allowing the color and linear forms to pop from the surface of the canvas. Herrera's utilization of the side of the canvas, which she viewed as equally crucial as the frontal plane, strengthens the architectural sensibility within her painting. The surfaces reach beyond the edges of the canvas and meld into the wall. Herrera meticulously planned each shape on the canvas, their respective lengths and density, according to the relationship between each coupling of colors. The strict exchange between color and form emphasized in Herrera's painting is on full display in her *Days of the Week* series.

The *Days of the Week* paintings, a rare series within her oeuvre, began with the completion of *Blue Monday* in 1972. It is the only work out of the seven to include color in the title as well as the only canvas positioned with a horizontal orientation. The title of the work alludes to the common feeling with which the start of the work week is recognized. Moving forward through the week, deep hues of green, yellow, orange and red are pressed tightly against the black. The series pivots between recurring motifs within her compositions – such as the chevron in *Wednesday*, *Friday* and *Sunday* (all 1978) and what can be classified as a lightning bolt in *Saturday* (1978). While the works in the exhibition highlight the tenacity of Herrera's sharp edges, the location of black on the canvases complicates what may be the foreground and what may be behind. Offering the impression of three-dimensional structure, *Thursday* (1975) features yellow across two full edges of the canvas that may provide a forefront for the black shape, while in *Sunday* red seemingly relegates the black to the top and bottom of the surface. Art historian Briony Fer writes: “The diagonal cuts in the compositions create jagged shapes or triangles, depending on which colour is perceived as the more dominant. For example, the yellow appears to dominate the black in *Tuesday*, whereas the black trumps the green in *Wednesday*.”

Situated outside the gallery, *Angulo Amarillo* (2017) was selected by Herrera with a surrounding setting in mind. Based on paintings “really crying out to become sculpture”, Herrera's *Estructuras* represent a rare break from the rectangular container of the artist's paintings and place her work in conversation with the natural environment. Moving from

painting to sculpture, the physical manifestation of her forms conveys movement and rhythm through a careful geometric balance of lines and color. Works from this series have previously been exhibited in City Hall Park, New York, NY; Buffalo Bayou Park, Houston, TX; Poydras Corridor Sculpture Exhibition, New Orleans, LO and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA. A forthcoming solo exhibition of these sculptures will open at Cheekwood Estate & Gardens in Nashville, TN in May of this year.

The second of two new essays by Briony Fer accompanies the exhibition. The full discourse will be included in Carmen Herrera's forthcoming *Catalogue Raisonné*. Fer has written extensively on modern and contemporary art. Her research interests have consistently moved between the history of the avant-gardes and the work of contemporary artists, including Zoe Leonard, Gabriel Orozco, Roni Horn, Vija Celmins and Tacita Dean. She is Professor of History of Art at University College London and a Fellow of the British Academy.

## About the artist

Core to Carmen Herrera's (1915 - 2022) painting is a drive for formal simplicity and a striking sense of colour: "My quest", she said, "is for the simplest of pictorial resolutions" (2012). A master of crisp lines and contrasting chromatic planes, Herrera created symmetry, asymmetry and an infinite variety of movement, rhythm and spatial tension across the canvas with the most unobtrusive application of paint. As she moved towards pure, geometric abstraction in the post-war years in Paris, she exhibited alongside Theo van Doesburg, Max Bill and Piet Mondrian and a younger generation of Latin American artists, such as members of the Venezuelan *Los Disidentes*, Brazilian *Concretists* and the Argentinian *Grupo Madi*. Her work also chimes with her peers from the U.S. school such as Barnett Newman and Leon Polk Smith. Reflecting on this period, she said, "I began a lifelong process of purification, a process of taking away what isn't essential" (2005). While allied with Latin American non-representational concrete painting, Herrera's body of work established, quietly but steadily, a cross-cultural dialogue within the international history of modernist abstraction.

Carmen Herrera was born in Havana, Cuba in 1915. She moved frequently between France and Cuba throughout the 1930s and 1940s; having started studying architecture at the *Universidad de La Habana*, Havana, Cuba (1938–39), she trained at the *Art Students League*, New York, NY, USA (1942–43), before exhibiting five times at the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris*, France (1949–53). She settled in New York in 1954, where she lived and worked until her death in 2022. Herrera's work was the subject of a large-scale survey at the *Whitney Museum of American Art* in New York (2017), which traveled to the *Wexner Center for the Arts* in Columbus, Ohio (2017) and *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20)* in Düsseldorf, Germany (2017–2018). A selection of Herrera's recent paintings and *Estructuras* inaugurated *Lisson Gallery* New York's 24th Street exhibition space in May 2016. The last two years were marked by two major mural commissions for the *Blanton Museum of Art* in Austin, TX and the *Publicolor Community Museum* for the *Manhattan East School of Arts* in Harlem, NY. Herrera has also had significant solo exhibitions at the *Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern*, Kaiserslautern, Germany (2010); *Ikon Gallery*, Birmingham, UK (2009); and *Museo del Barrio*, New York, NY, USA (1998). She has been included in the group shows at *Centre Pompidou*, Paris, France (2021); *Mori Art Museum*, Tokyo, Japan (2021); *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia*, Madrid, Spain (2019); *Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain*, Paris, France (2018); *The Underground Museum*, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2017); *Haus der Kunst*, Munich, Germany (2016); *Phoenix Museum of Art*, AZ, USA (2013); and *Sheldon Museum of Art*, NE, USA (2012), among others. Her work was recently featured in the exhibition *Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera* at *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York (17 December 2018 – 4 February 2020). In the past year, two major solo presentations were exhibited in Houston, Texas — *Carmen Herrera: Structuring Surfaces* at *The Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston (21 October 2020 – 25 April 2021) and *Estructuras Monumentales* at *Buffalo Bayou Park* (22 October 2020 – 23 April 2021). Herrera premiered her *Estructuras Monumentales*, massive aluminium structures largely conceived in the 1960s and 1970s, at *City Hall Park* in New York City in 2019, organised by the *Public Art Fund* (11 July – 8 November 2019).

Herrera was awarded two fellowships from the *Cintas Foundation*, New York, NY, USA (1966–68) and a grant by the *Creative Artists Public Service*, New York, NY, USA (1977). Her work is in numerous public and private collections including the *National Gallery of Art*, Washington DC, USA; the *Museum of Modern Art*, New York, NY, USA; the *Whitney Museum of American Art*, New York, USA; the *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, NY, USA; *El Museo del Barrio*, New York, NY, USA; the *Hirshhorn Museum*, Washington DC, USA; *The Smithsonian American Art Museum*, Washington DC, USA; the *Walker Art Center*, Minneapolis, MN, USA; the *Pérez Art Museum*, Miami, FL, USA; the *Museum of Fine Arts Boston*, MA, USA; *Crystal Bridges Museum of Art*, Bentonville, AR, USA; the *Tate Collection*, London, UK; *Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern*, Kaiserslautern, Germany; *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (K20)*, Düsseldorf, Germany; and the *Guggenheim Abu Dhabi*, United Arab Emirates.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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