

## **Hander Lara**

### *Nothing is Abstract Anymore*

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Text by Ross Karlan, PhD

Hander Lara's most recent series, *Nothing is Abstract Anymore*, is more than a series of paintings, but a stunning visual essay. Rooted in deep research and first-hand experiences, the artist examines and reckons with the complexities of twentieth-century art at a time when form, function, color, and the very idea of representation were all called into question.

The axis around which Lara's work turns is the Bauhaus, the famed German art and design school founded by architect Walter Gropius in 1919. The school was known for its cutting edge design principles in furniture, architecture, and the fine arts. Figures like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Wassily Kandinsky, Marcel Breuer, and Paul Klee, among many others graced the faculty and had lasting legacies in their fields. The Bauhaus closed its doors in 1933 as Germany saw the rise of Nazi power. However, during its brief existence, it sought to establish a new aesthetic of modern design, prioritizing minimalism, streamlined simplicity, and utility—a principle often attributed to Mies as "less is more."

Lara looks specifically at the Bauhaus staircases, sites that he studied and photographed meticulously during his visits to the school's building in Dessau. The stairways are, in a way, the artist's protagonist on both a historic and symbolic level. Historically, Lara relies on the iconography of the stairways in a precedent established by painter Oskar Schlemmer who painted his own Bauhaus Stairway in 1932. His original version depicts the bustle of students ascending to class, and this work was even recreated years later in 1988 by Roy Lichtenstein.

The stairway also holds deep symbolic value for Lara and his own thought process behind the series. A stairway is inherently a means of transition, movement, and connection between two worlds. Lara reflects this sentiment in his own style, which moves seamlessly between figuration and abstraction, past and present, and even what is hidden and seen.

It can thus be said that stylistically, Lara aligns with the title of his series, employing only a minimal amount of abstraction to depict his scenes. While predominantly figurative, subtle abstractions emerge, referencing Bauhaus styles and palettes. Lara uses a visually strong brushstroke that may evoke the fuzzy brushwork of Paul Klee. Simultaneously, his brushwork possesses a distinct vertical nature, resembling drips

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across the image. Mixed with geometric forms and primary colors constituting the composition, it evokes the subtleties of constructivists like László Moholy-Nagy and Joost Schmidt. Lara even incorporates primary color geometric shapes into the works, subtly hidden in plain sight, contributing to the overall Bauhaus aesthetic

*Nothing is Abstract Anymore* surpasses the sum of its parts, demanding close attention to the details Lara includes for a profound understanding of the philosophical battle projected by the artist. Despite the abstractions at play, the works, when viewed from afar, are not abstract at all, they are the essence of an image composed of the artist's interpretations and interventions. This mirrors the Bauhaus's balancing of the relationship between form and function; exemplifying the "chair-ness" of a chair, for example, involves both reducing it to its most essential minimal form and abstracting it from its historical predecessors.

## **Hander Lara (b. Havana, Cuba, 1984)**

Lara studied at the San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy from 1999 to 2003, graduating with a Gold Diploma. In 2004 he began his studies at the University of Arts of Havana, and as a student, obtained the First Prize of the European Union Art Contest, a Special Mention in the Photography Contest organized by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Cuba and the Antonio Grediaga Creation Scholarship. In 2008, he obtained a Study Grant of the Royal University of Fine Arts (Kungl Konsthögskolan) in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2009, he finished his studies at the University of Arts of Havana, graduating with a Gold Diploma, and for his excellent academic results and professional development, he was proposed to remain as a professor at the Visual Arts Faculty of this institution, work he carried out until 2020. In 2010 he began a Master's Degree in Symbolic Production at the University of the Arts of Havana, which culminated in 2011 as a Postgraduate study because it was not officialized due to its experimental nature. From 2012 until 2016, he was head of the Sculpture Department of that institution. His work moves between sculpture, installation, photography, painting and drawing.

He has participated in more than seventy collective exhibitions and fourteen solo shows, and his works have been exhibited in countries such as: Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, Antigua & Barbuda, Belgium, Spain, England, the United States, Austria, Sweden and Iceland - in museums, salons, art fairs and international festivals, biennials, galleries, foundations and cultural centers. He is a National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) member. He has imparted workshops and talks at the Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule in Halle, Germany, at the Royal University of Fine Arts (Kungl Konsthögskolan), in Stockholm, Sweden, at the Jönköping Museum in Sweden, at the Teoloyucan Museum in Mexico, at the Development Center of the Visual Arts (CDAV) of Cuba, at the University of Arts of Havana and the Lucio - Angela Art Space, in Tultepec, Mexico. Currently he lives and works in Miami, United States.



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