RGR

# CÉSAR PATERNOSTO

## Piedra abstracta

Curated by Gabriela Rangel

September 3 to October 24, 2026

Galería RGR

# Piedra abstracta

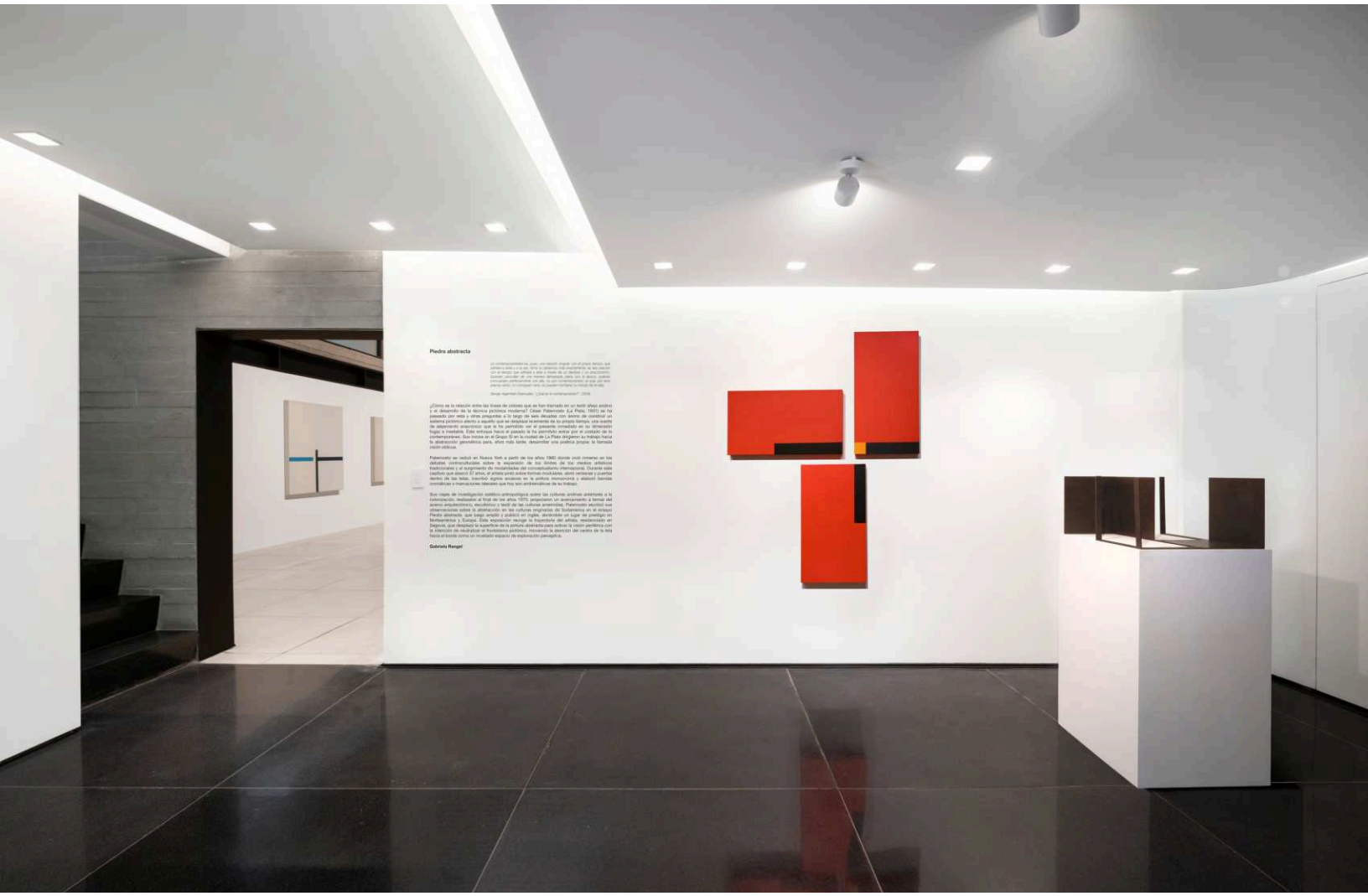
> Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it.
>
> Giorgio Agamben, "What Is the Contemporary?", 2009, in *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*

What is the relationship between the color threads of an old Andean textile and the development of a modern pictorial technique? For six decades César Paternosto (La Plata, 1931) has posited this and many other questions with the aim of building a pictorial system to shift slightly out of step with its own time. This path procures a kind of anachronistic distance that has allowed him to see the immediate present in its fleeting, unstable dimension. The turn toward the past has also let him enter the contemporary from the rear side. Paternosto's beginnings in Grupo Sí, in the city of La Plata, Argentina, directed his work toward geometric abstraction and, years later, toward a poetics of his own: the oblique vision.

Paternosto settled in New York in the 1960s, where he became immersed in the countercultural debates on expanding the limits of the traditional artistic media and in the emergence of international modes of conceptualism. Over this chapter of thirty-seven years, the artist painted on modular forms, opened windows and doors within the canvas, inscribed archaic signs on monochrome paint, and worked the chromatic bands and lateral markings that are emblematic of his work.

His aesthetic and anthropological research trips to the region of the Andean cultures that preceded colonization, undertaken at the end of the 1970s, brought him close to the architectural, sculptural, and textile heritage of the Amerindian cultures. Paternosto came to terms with his observations on abstraction in the original cultures of South America in the essay Piedra abstracta, which he later expanded and published as a book in English as The Stone and the Thread, opening a place of recognition for him in North America and Europe. This exhibition gathers a scope of the trajectory of the artist, now based in Segovia, Spain, who displaced the surface of abstract painting in order to activate peripheral vision, with the intention of neutralizing pictorial frontality, moving the attention from the center of the canvas toward the edge as an unexpected space of perceptual exploration.

**Gabriela Rangel**




Installation view, *Piedra abstracta*, Galería RGR, 2026

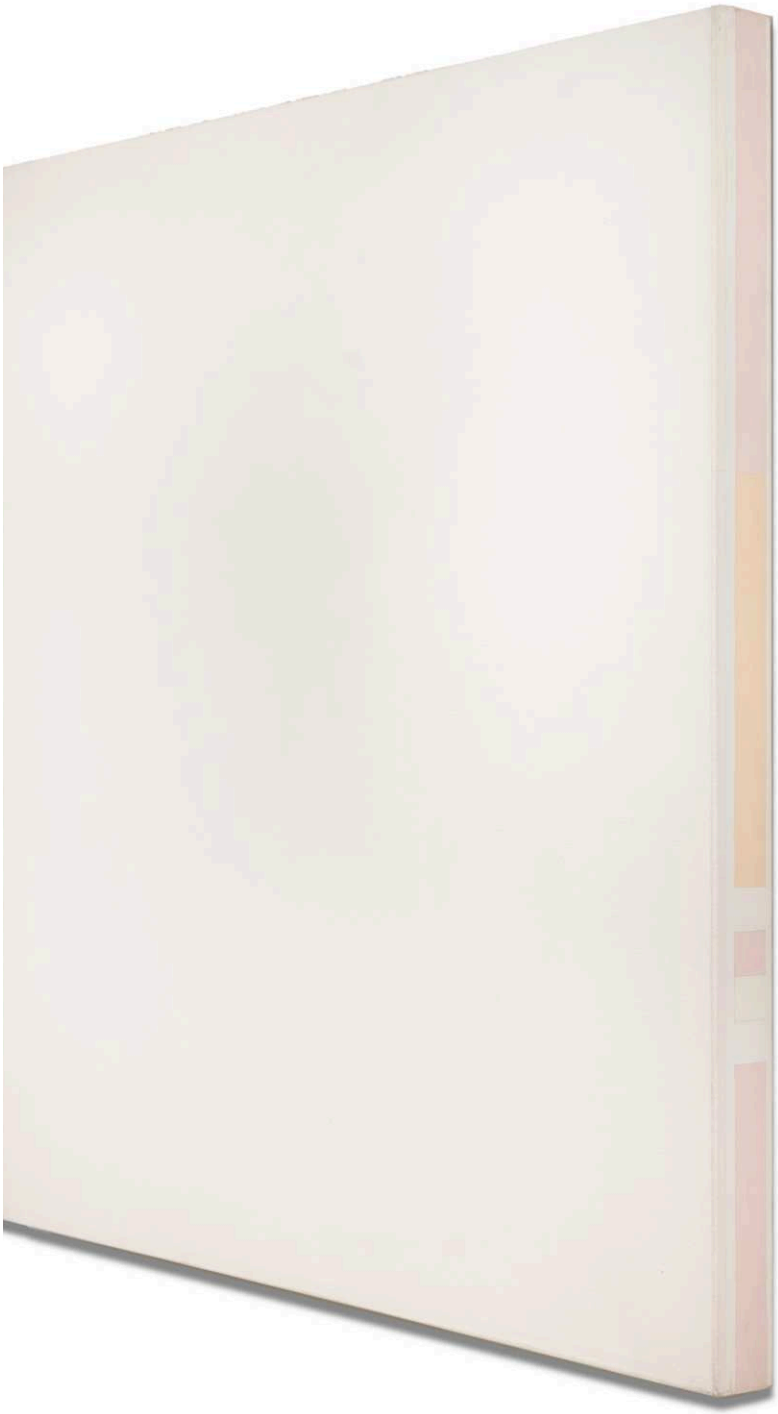
## THE OBLIQUE VISION

In February 1969, not quite two years after settling in New York, Paternosto has an idea: to leave the front surface of his canvases blank and paint the edges alone, the fabric stretched around the frame. The proposal engages with minimalism, then dominant on the New York scene.

The first works in the series are shown in January 1970 at the AM Sachs Gallery in New York, among them *Tlön* (1969), whose title comes from Jorge Luis Borges's story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", in which an imagined world ends up spilling over into the real one.

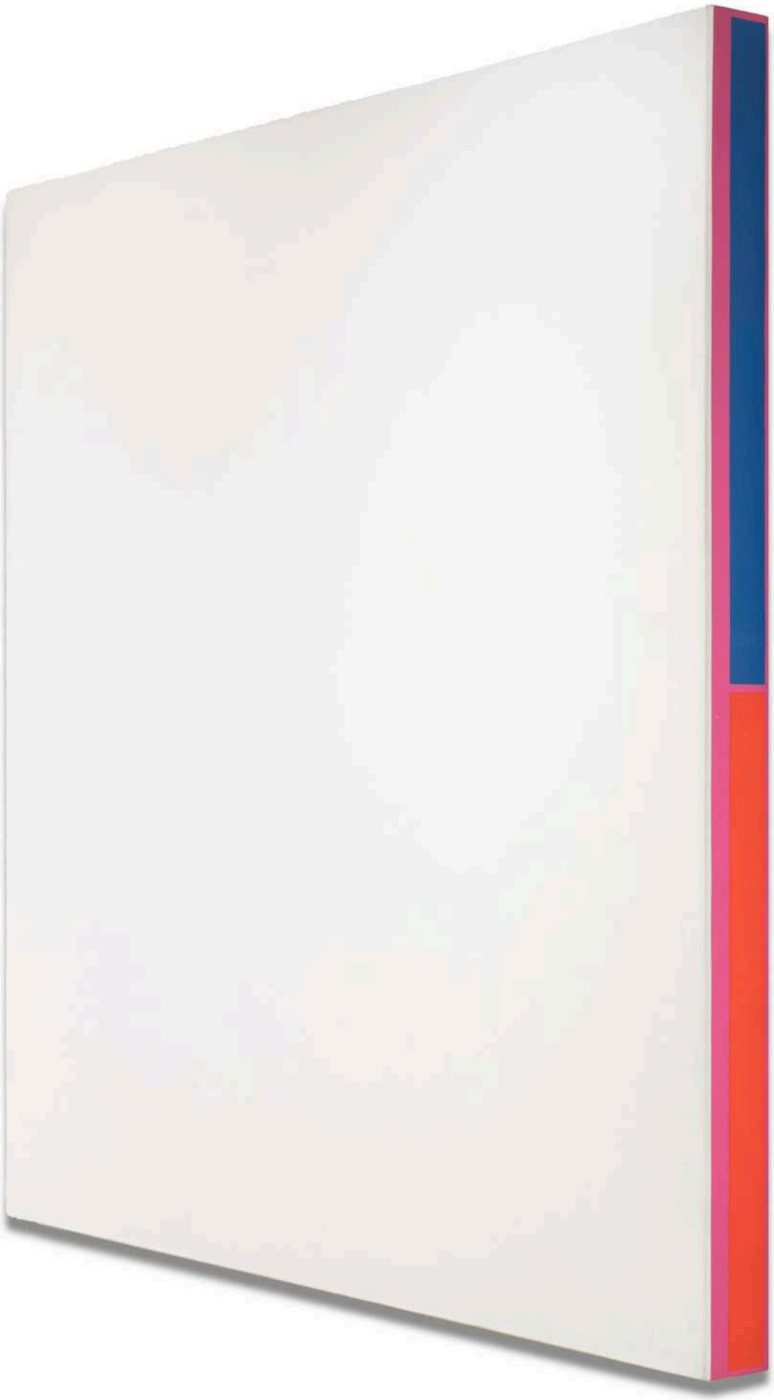
These pieces operate on a similar threshold: the one that separates painting from sculpture.

Detail of *Tlön*, 1969



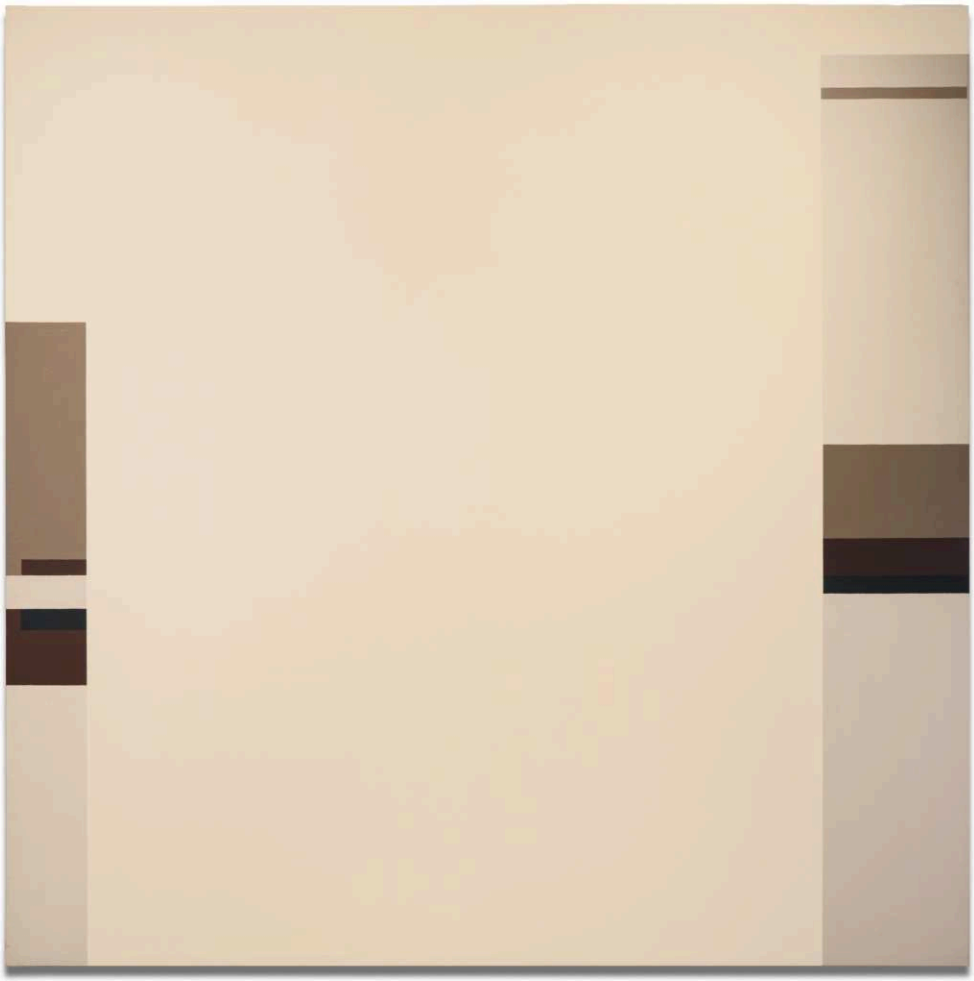
César Paternosto
*Tlön*, 1969
Acrylic emulsion on canvas
121.9 × 121.9 cm | 48 × 48 in

CP015



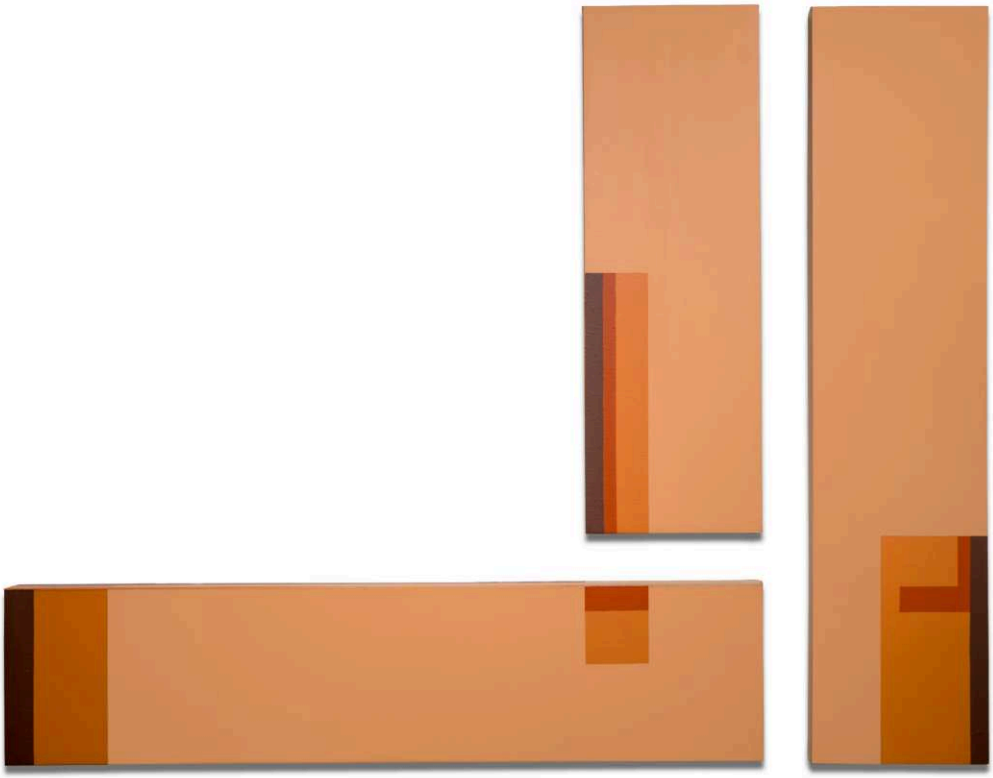
César Paternosto
*Sagittarius*, 1972
Acrylic on canvas
107 × 107 cm | 42 ¼ × 42 ¼ in

CP016



César Paternosto
*Uqbar*, 1975
Acrylic emulsion and marble dust on canvas
147.3 × 147.3 cm | 58 × 58 in

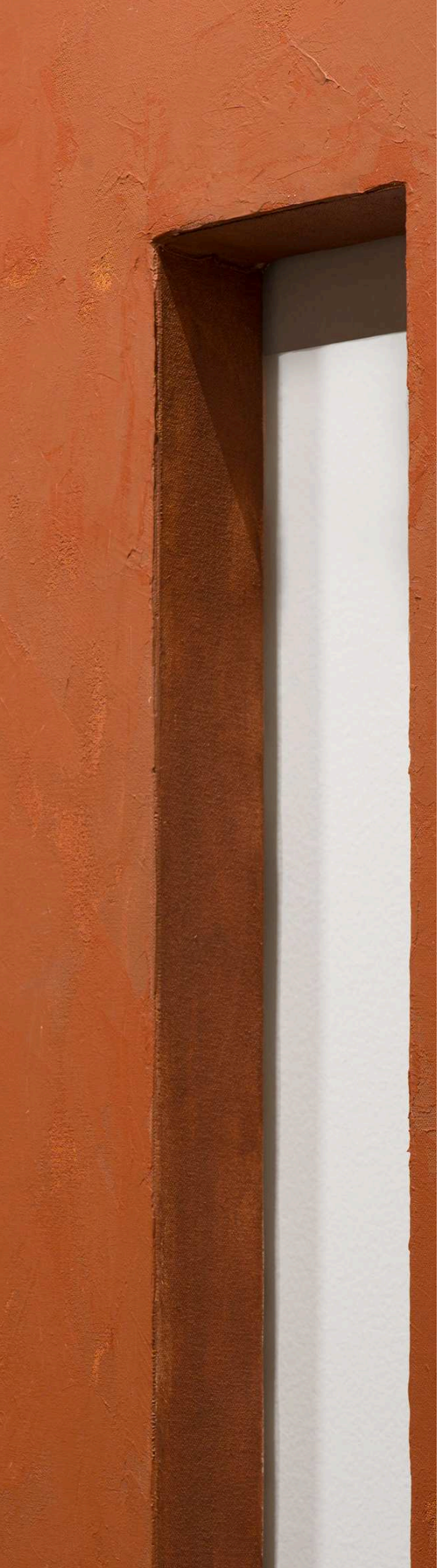
CP017



César Paternosto
*Untitled 3 Panel Piece*, 1975–1976
Acrylic emulsion and marble dust on canvas
150 × 198 cm installed | 59 × 78 in installed

CP018

Installation view, *Piedra abstracta*, Galería RGR,
2026



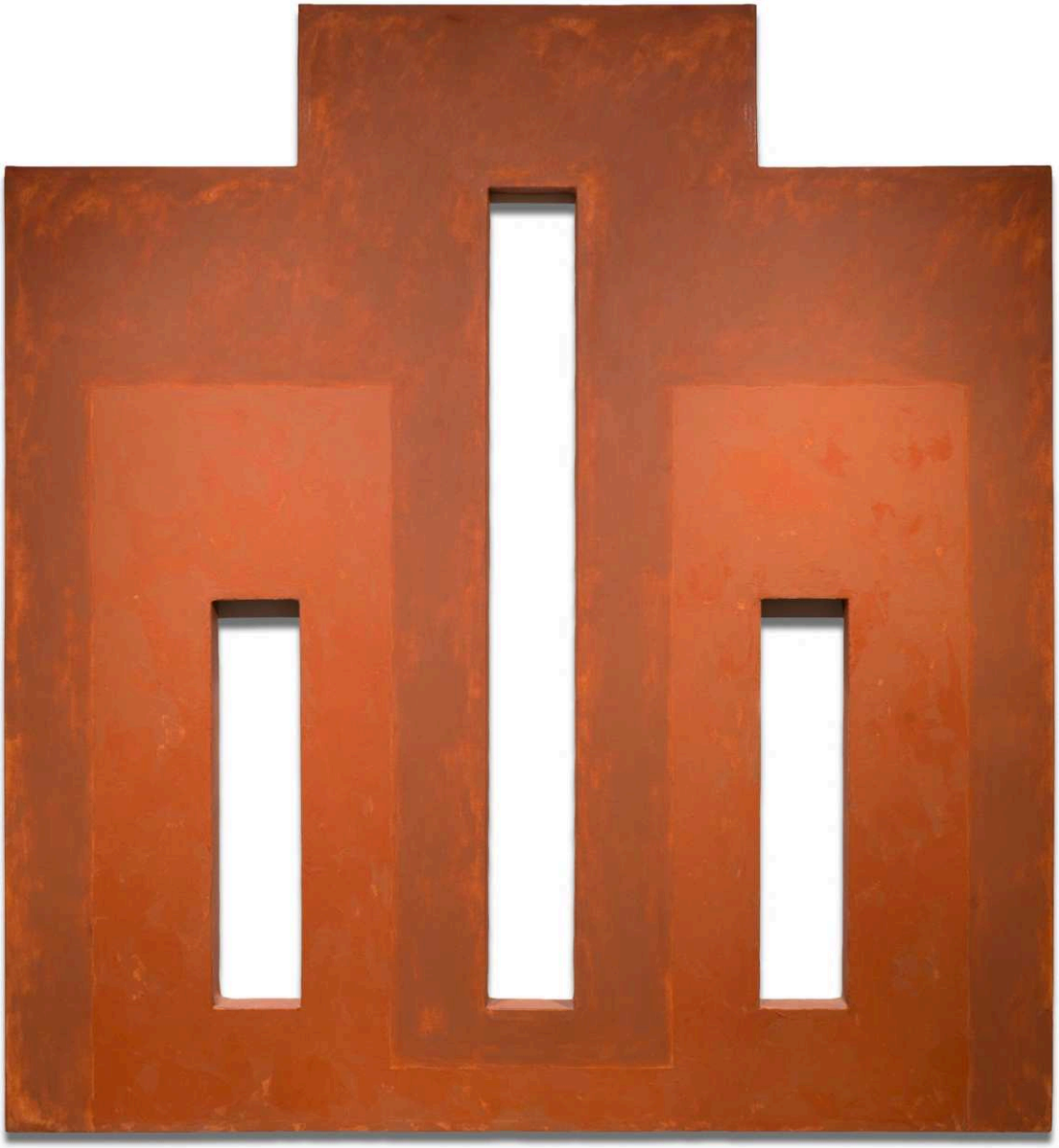
## THE ANDEAN PARADIGM

After almost ten years in New York, Paternosto returns to South America in 1977 and undertakes his first research trip to the archaeological sites of the Andes. From it come works that respond to the abstraction of Andean sculpture and to its ochres, in parallel with the writing of the book that will be published as *Piedra abstracta* (1989).

In these canvases the paint is mixed with marble dust, in reference to the craft of the ancient stonecutters who polished the stones until they fit together without mortar, the distinctive trait of Andean architecture. The titles come from archaeological sites, ceremonial buildings and words in Quechua.

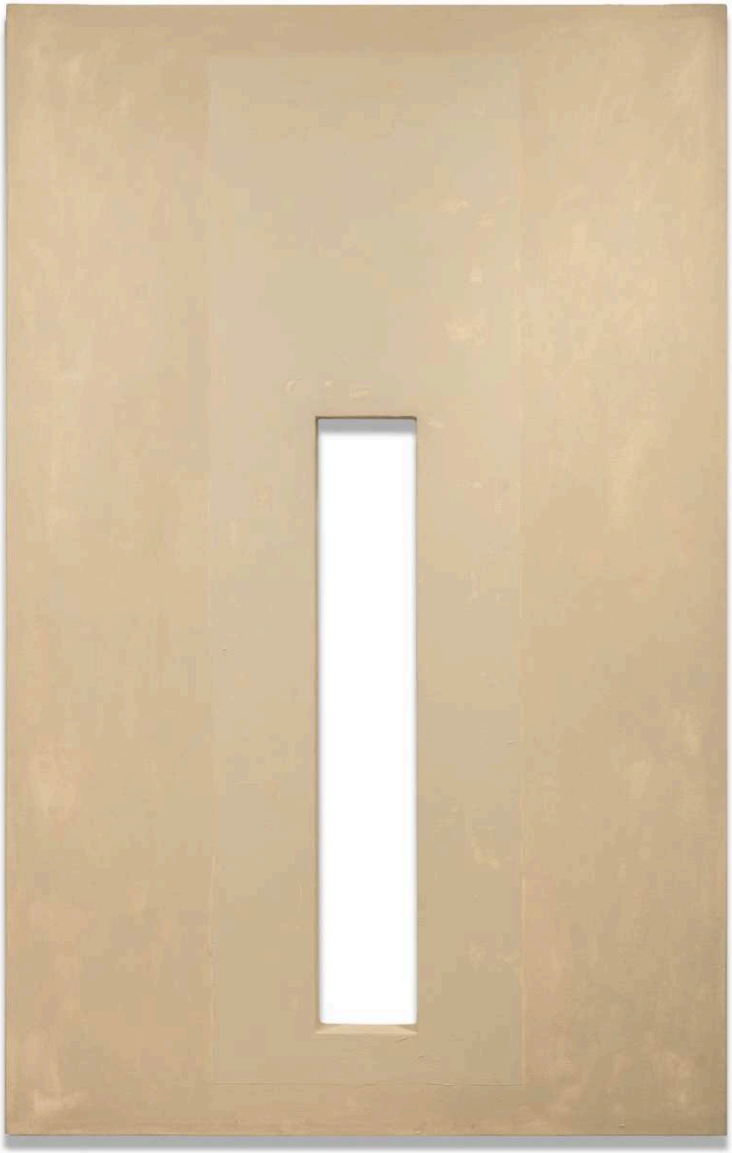
In 1983 the research extends to textiles, and the canvases begin to cite forms from ancient Andean weavings.

Detail of *Tambo Colorado II*, 1991



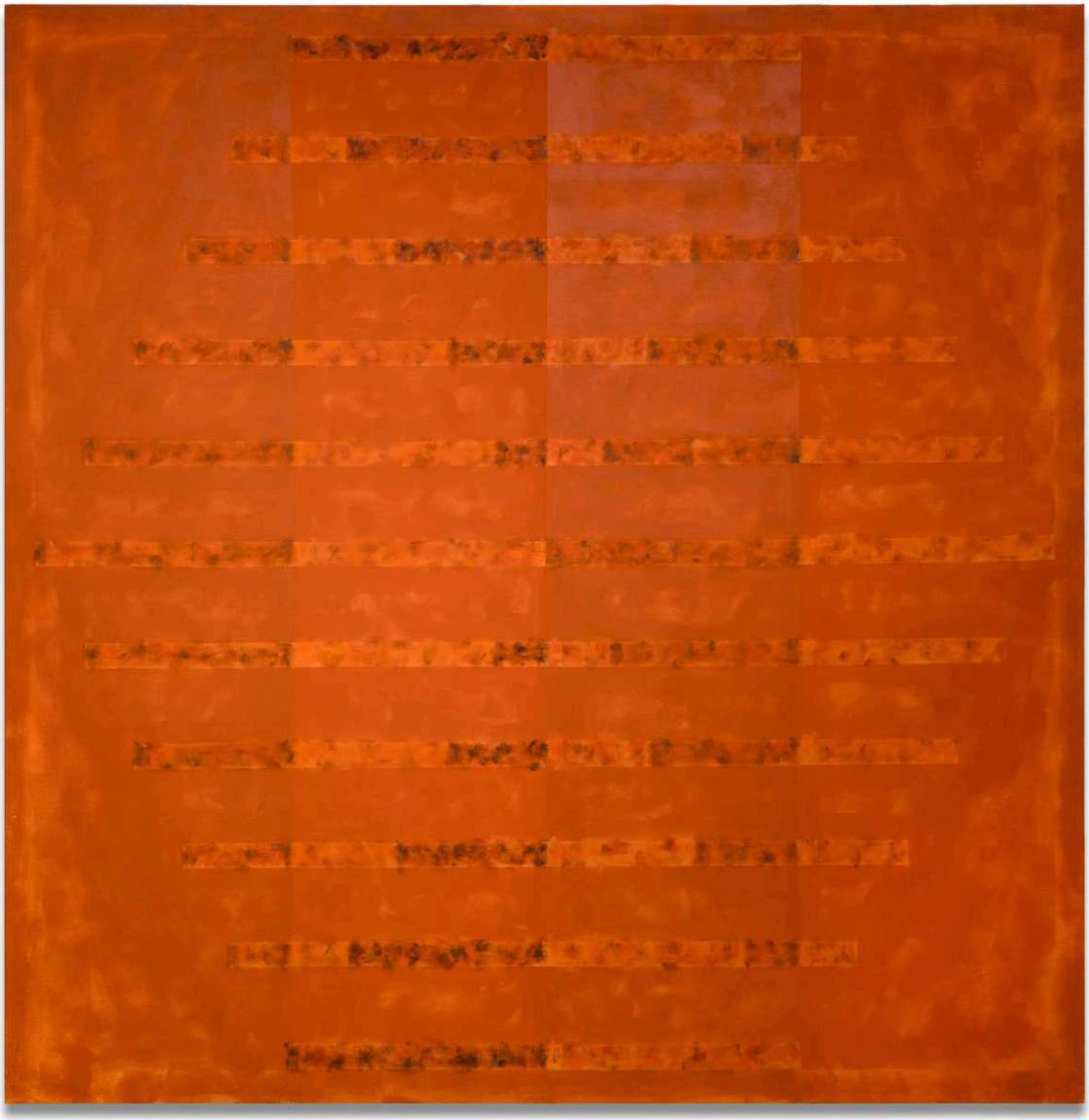
César Paternosto
*Tambo Colorado II*, 1991
Acrylic emulsion and marble dust on canvas
177.8 × 165.1 cm | 70 × 65 in

CP026



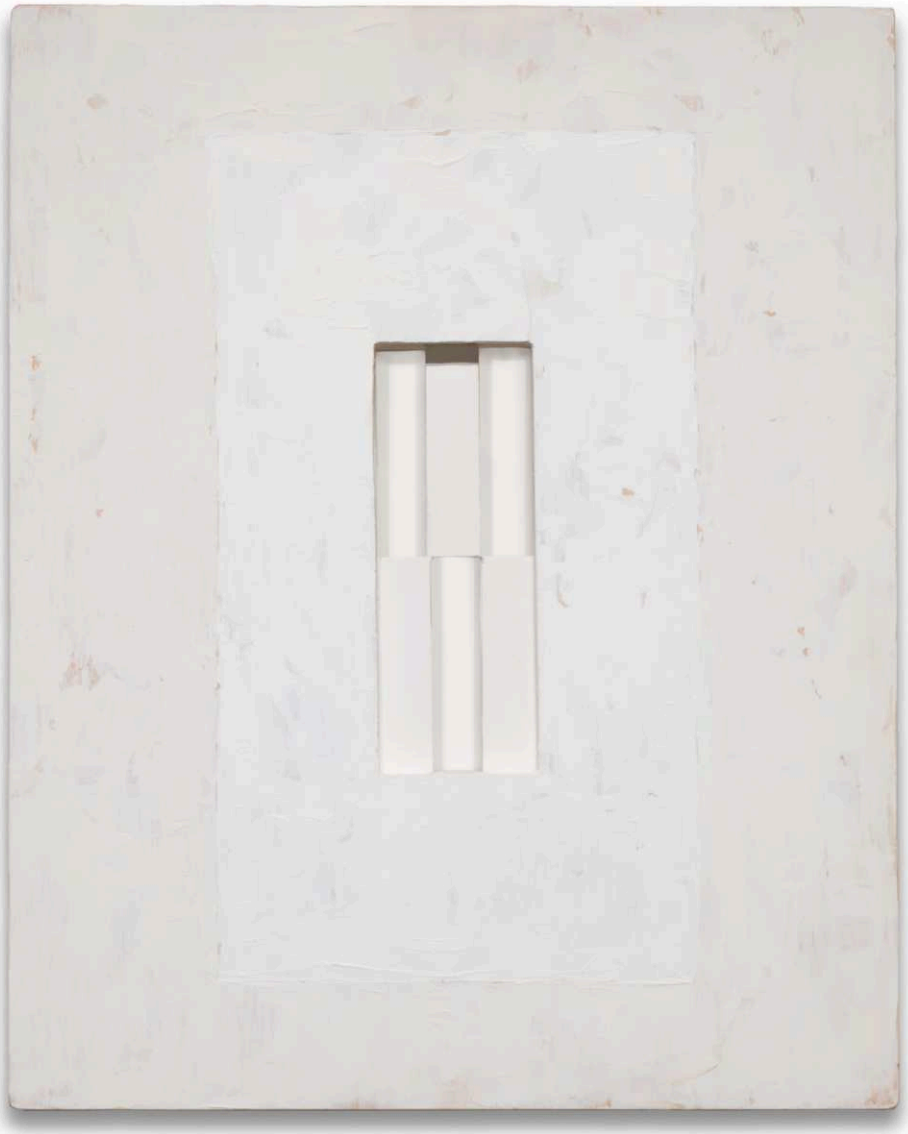
César Paternosto
*Sumpu Punku*, 1992
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas
167.5 × 106.5 cm | 66 × 42 in

CP028



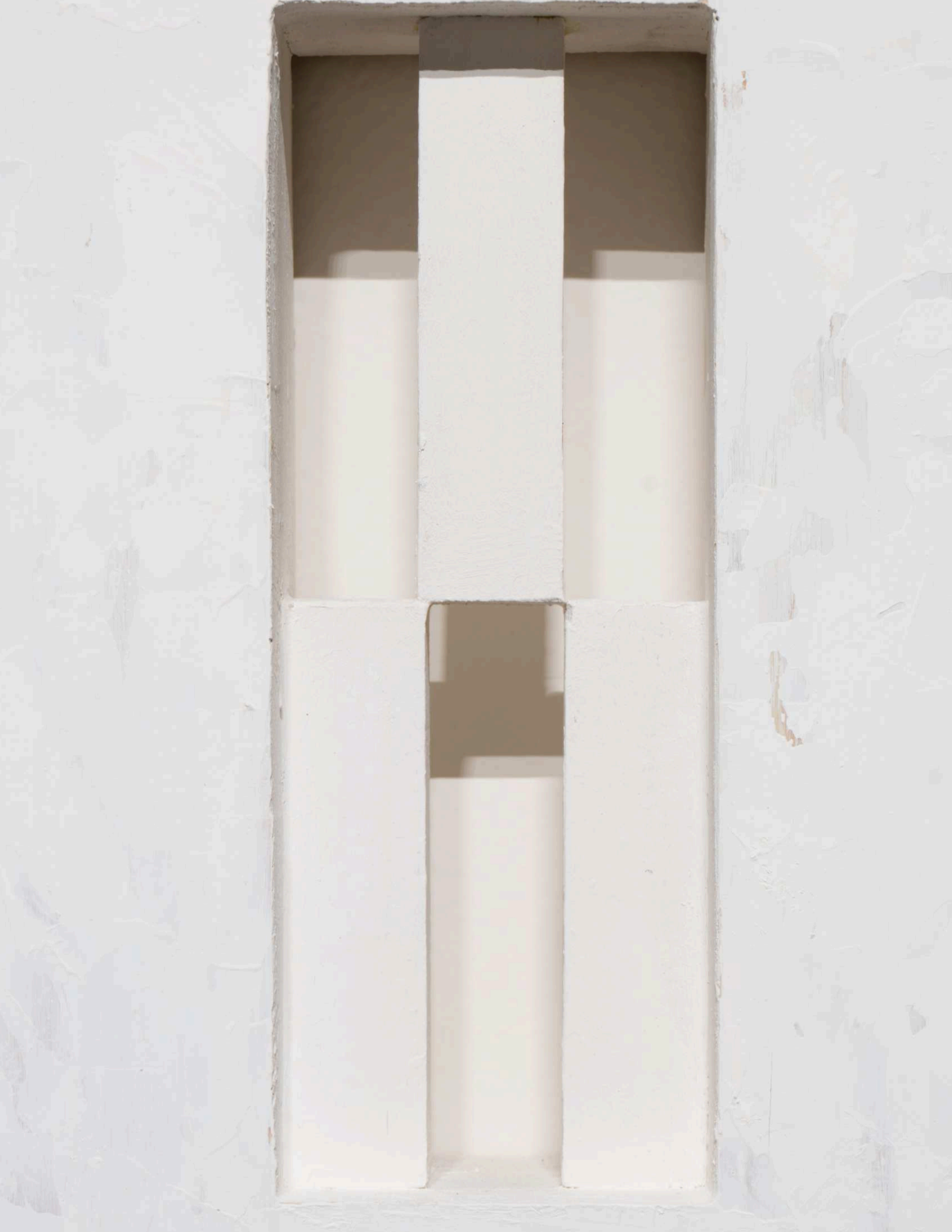
César Paternosto
*Archetypal*, from the series *Archetypal Geometric Forms*, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
167.6 × 157.4 cm | 66 × 62 in

CP033

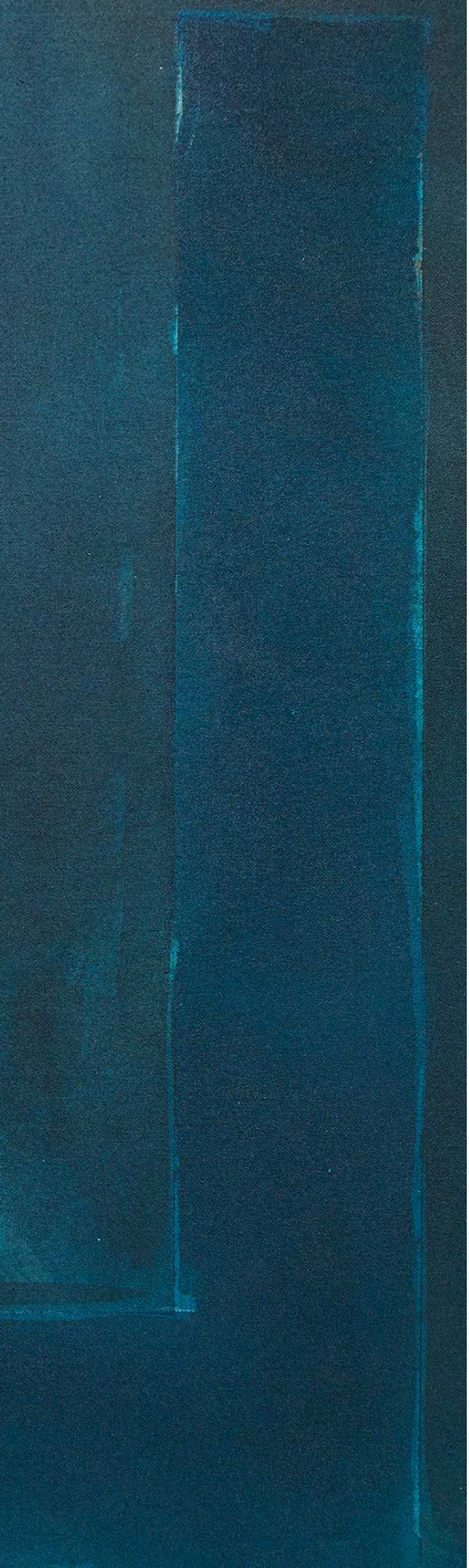


César Paternosto
*Wood Construction #8 "Delphi"*, 1996
Mixed media on plywood
54.6 × 42.5 cm | 21 ½ × 16 ¾ in

CP046



Installation view, *Piedra abstracta*, Galería RGR, 2026



## THE BOTTOM OF THE WATER

In 1992, Paternosto travels to Bolivia. He returns to Tiwanaku and then sets out on a journey across Lake Titicaca, visiting the remains of the Inca settlements, Pilco-Kayma, the Isla del Sol and the Isla Koatí and the Throne of the Inca.

The diptych *Deep Down and Deeper Down*, from the cycle *The Bottom of the Water,* is one of the few references to an experience of nature in his work: the crossing of the immense Lake Titicaca, in the heart of the Bolivian Andes, and the recollection of the blue of its deep waters.

Detail of Deep Down and Deeper Down (diptych), from the cycle The Bottom of the Water

César Paternosto
*Deep Down and Deeper Down (diptych)*, 1996
Acrylic on canvas
Dimensions variable | 165 × 165 cm | 65 × 65 in each

CP031

## THREADS OF WATER

In 1996, Paternosto takes up again a technique he had developed in 1971: he draws lines of color on white canvases or papers with watercolor pencils and goes over them with a wet brush.

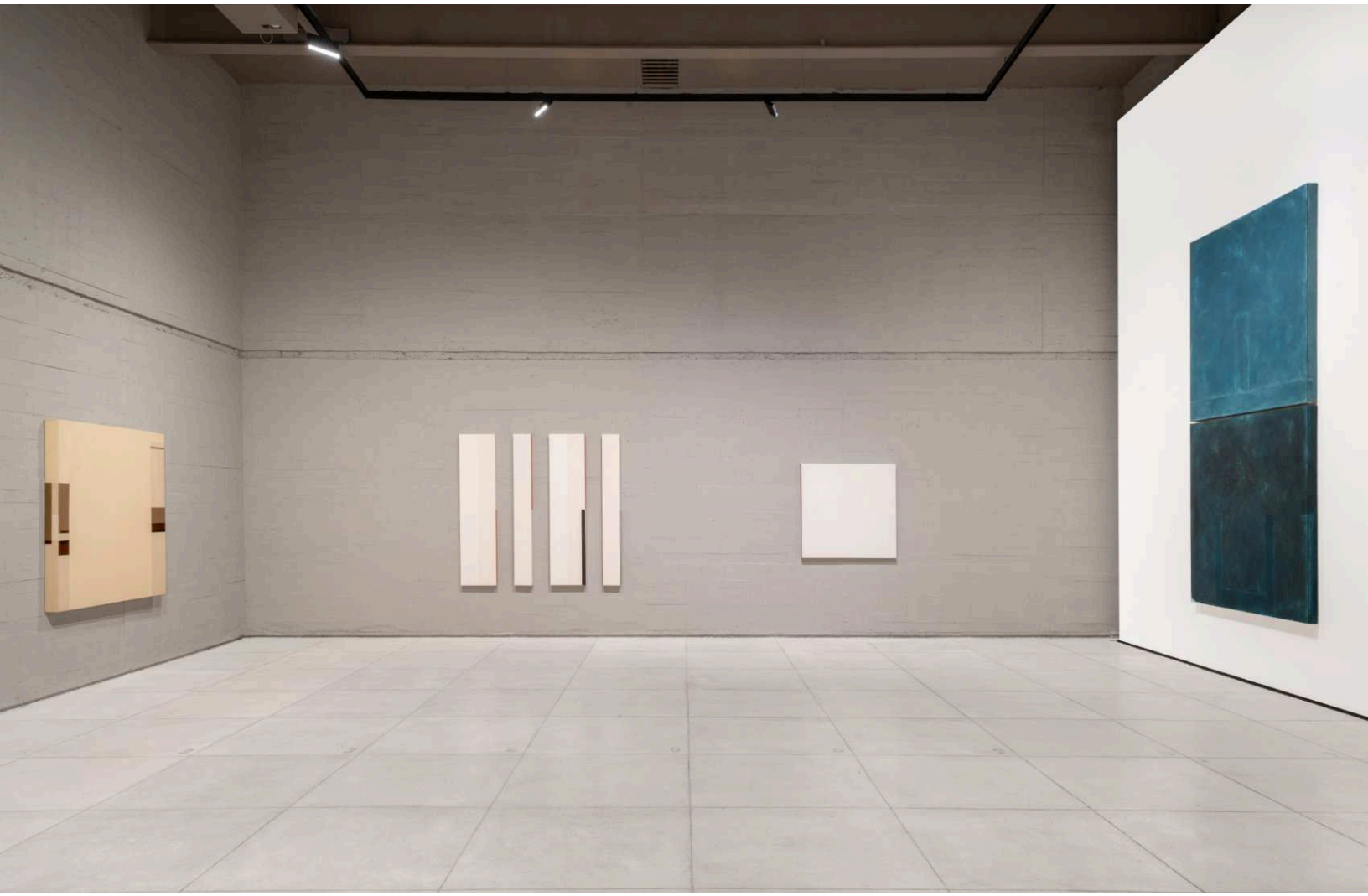
The series, which in the 1990s he titled metaphorically *Hilos de agua*, is a poetic definition of a resignification of the textile: *the threads* rework the reception of the textile grid as another degree zero of abstraction and mark, at the same time, the return to the chromaticism of his early work.

The lines also evoke scores of modern music, and the artist begins to distribute them across the canvas with a cadence that alludes to musical notation.

Detail of Hilos de Agua, Vertical III

César Paternosto
*Hilos de Agua, Vertical III*, 1997
Watercolor pencil on canvas
122 × 122 cm | 48 × 48 in

CP034



Installation view, *Piedra abstracta*, Galería RGR,
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## MARGIN AND DISPLACEMENT

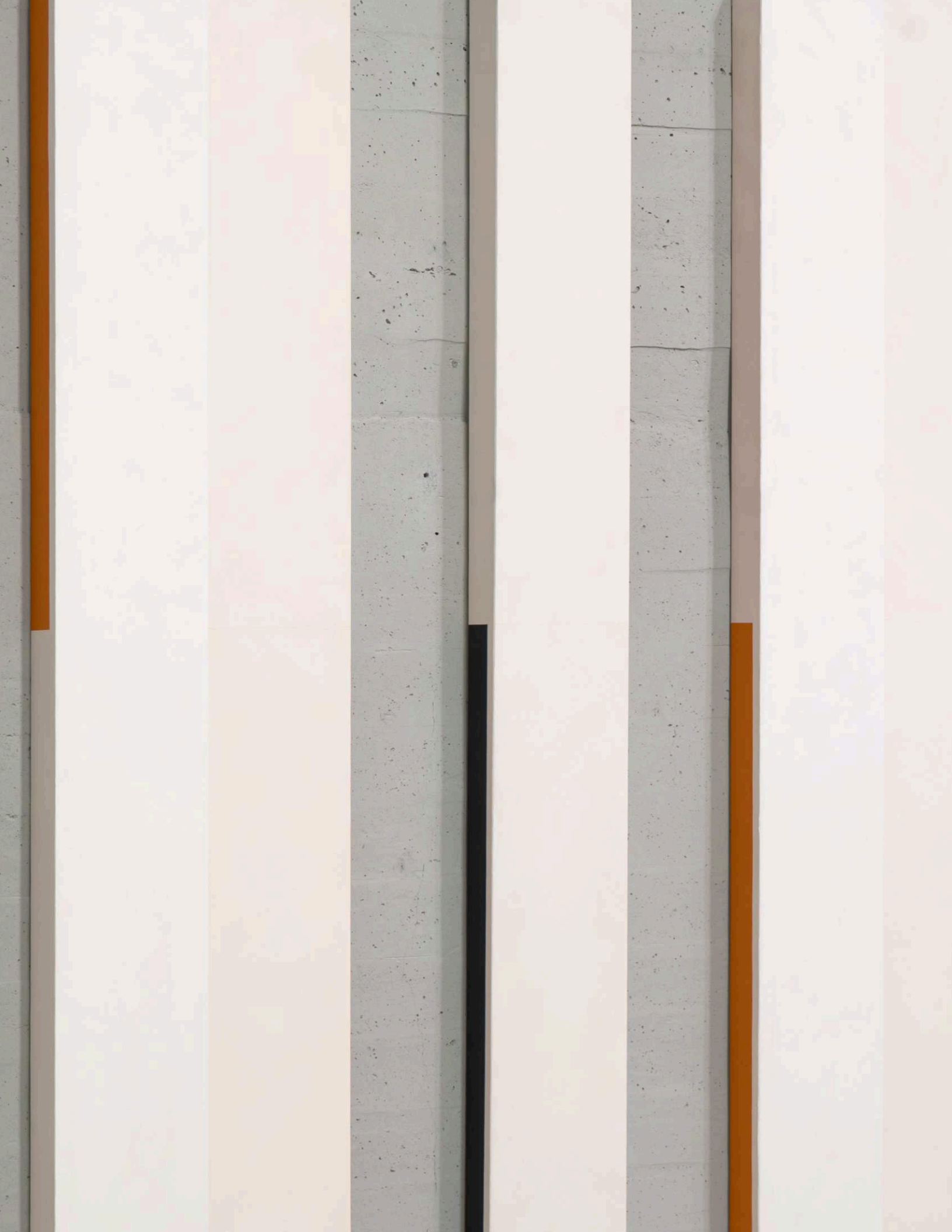
From 2001 onward, *Marginalidades* y *Desplazamientos* return to the edges of the canvas, now understood as perimeters that can be drawn again.

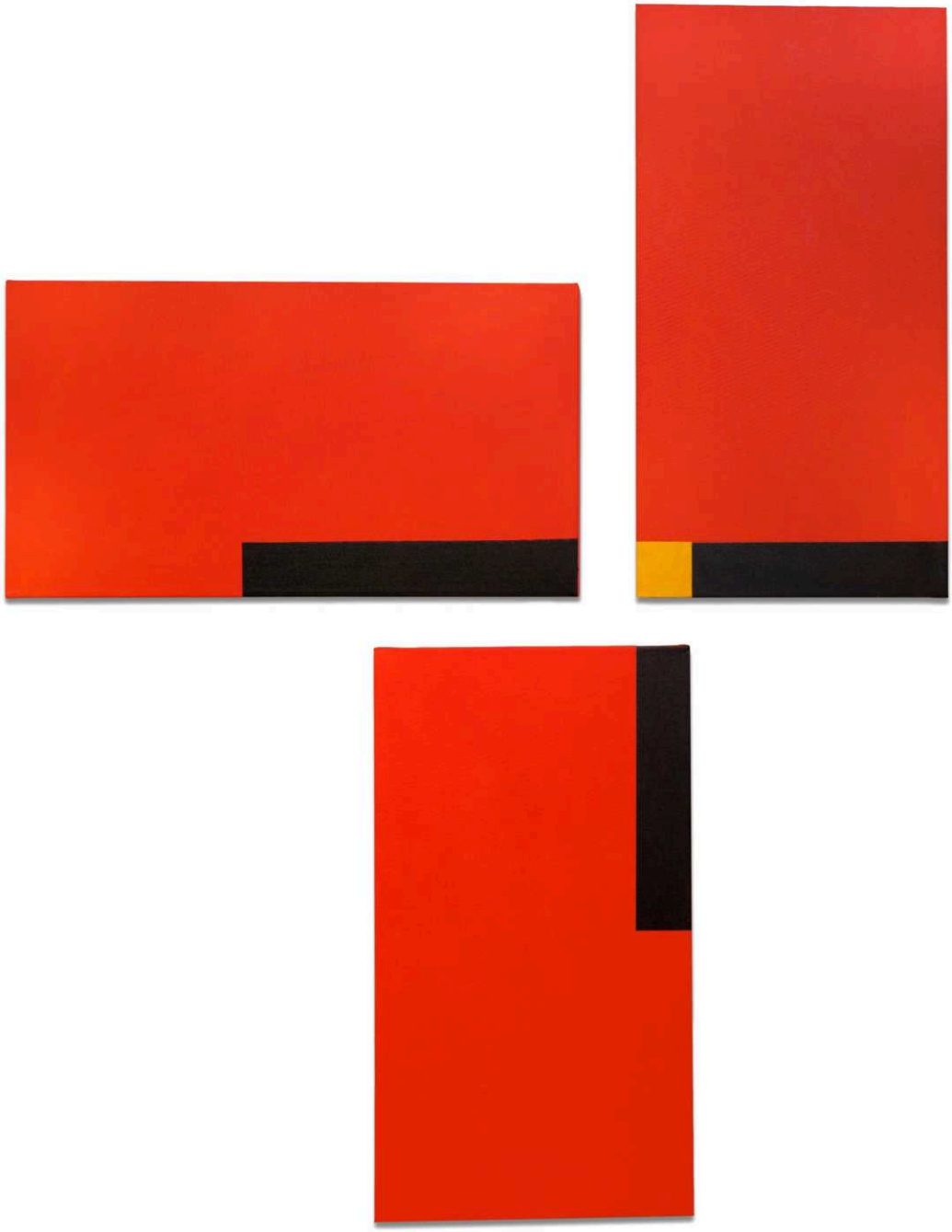
In this group of pieces the artist paints the edge with a band of color and lays it over the front surface, so that the border extends toward the center through a pictorial operation. Thus the marginal is displaced.

Detail of *Cuarteto*, 2006

César Paternosto
*Cuarteto*, 2006
Oil on canvas
170 × 200 cm installed | 67 × 78 ¾ in installed

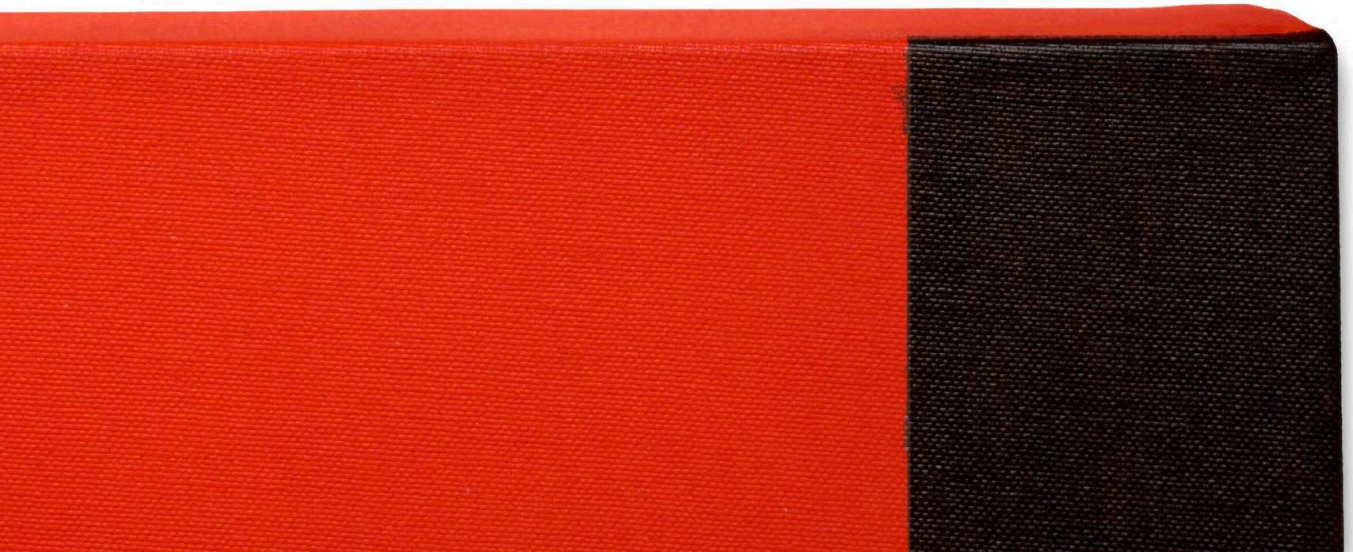
CP008

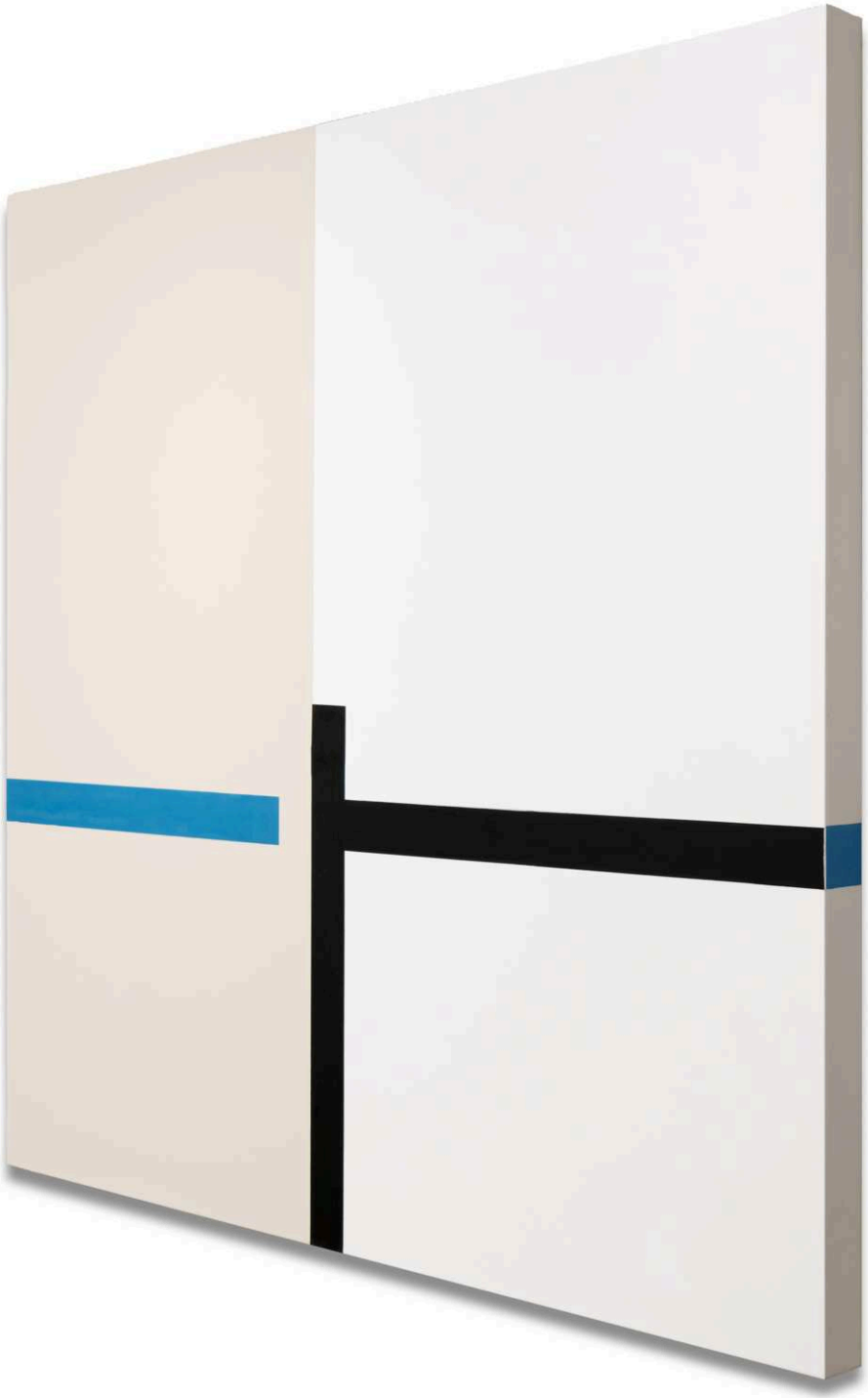




César Paternosto
*Red Trio #8*, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
154 × 116 cm installed | 60 ¾ × 45 ¾ in installed

CP011





César Paternosto
*Los límites del silencio #4*, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
140 × 140 cm | 55 × 55 in

CP014

César Paternosto
*Virtual Cube*, 2008
COR-TEN steel
30 × 60 × 60 cm | 11 ¾ × 23 ½ × 23 ½ in

CP057

César Paternosto in his studio, Segovia

# César Paternosto

La Plata, Argentina, 1931

An essential figure of Latin American abstraction, César Paternosto has built a distinguished trajectory in Europe, the United States and his native country since the 1960s, with New York as his base for almost four decades. Both his work as a painter and his pioneering research into the artistic expressions of the Andean civilizations have earned him wide recognition.

In his painting, Paternosto has devoted himself to testing the picture as a support across multiple series. His early compositions on shaped stretchers marked his Argentine years, crowned in 1966 with the First Prize at the III Bienal Americana de Arte in Córdoba; later, from 1969 onward, the works with large blank surfaces and painted edges gave form to his proposal of an oblique vision, which invites the viewer to fold the movement of the gaze into the experience of the work. That eccentric gaze, together with the economy of the mark, made him a precursor on the New York scene of the 1970s.

Alongside his artistic practice, Paternosto has devoted a large part of his work to the study of the Andean civilizations and their visual expressions, in particular to textiles and to the archaeological remains of the ancient ceremonial centers. This research, gathered in books such as *Piedra abstracta* (1989) and *The Stone and the Thread* (1996), led him to formulate fundamental propositions about Andean abstraction. In his painting, that research is recognizable in the marble-dust canvases with Quechua titles of the 1980s and 1990s, and in series such as *Pórticos*, which evoke the entrances to ancient Andean ceremonial centers.

His work is held in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, among others. In 2026, MoMA returned his work *Duino* (1966) to the galleries of its permanent collection, and his *alma mater*, the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, honored him with a doctorate *honoris causa* and the retrospective exhibition “La imaginación geométrica.”

He lives and works today in Segovia, Spain.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

| | |
|---|---|
| 2026 | *Piedra abstracta*, Galería RGR, Mexico City |
| 2026 | *La imaginación geométrica*, Centro de Arte y Museo de Ciencias Naturales, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina |
| 2019 | *La mirada excéntrica*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires |
| 2017 | *Hacia una pintura objetual*, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid |
| 2006 | *Marginalidades, desplazamientos y ritmos*, Galería Guillermo de Osma, Madrid |
| 2004 | *César Paternosto,* Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia |
| 2001 | *La visión oblicua. Exposición en Carmen Waugh, Buenos Aires 1971/2001.* Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires |
| 1986 | Obras en papel, 1961–1986, Foro de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City |
| 1981 | *Paintings: 1969–1980*, Center for Interamerican Relations, New York |
| 1974 | Galerie Denise René, Paris |
| 1970 | AM Sachs Gallery, New York |

## AWARDS AND HONOURS (SELECTION)

| | |
|---|---|
| 2026 | Doctor *honoris causa*, Universidad Nacional de La Plata |
| 2007 | Premio de Pintura «Francisco de Goya», Villa de Madrid |
| 1972 | Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship |
| 1966 | Primer Premio, III Bienal Americana de Arte, Córdoba |

## PUBLIC WORKS (SELECTION)

| | |
|---|---|
| 2010 | *La llegada*, Estación de Atocha, Madrid, by invitation of the architect Rafael Moneo |

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

| | |
|---|---|
| 2026 | *Hard Edges, Expanded Fields*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York |
| 2023 | *Antes de América.* Fuentes originarias en la cultura moderna, Fundación Juan March, Madrid |
| 2021 | *This Must Be the Place: Latin American Artists in New York*, 1965-75. Americas Society, New York |
| 2019 | *Sur moderno: Journeys of Abstraction*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York |
| 2013 | *La invención concreta.* Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid |
| 2011 | *América fría. La abstracción geométrica en Latinoamérica, 1934-1973*. Fundación Juan March, Madrid |
| 2006 | *High Times, Hard Times: New York painting 1967-1975*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, and touring |
| 1992 | *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, Expo '92, Seville, and touring |
| 1967 | *The 1960's: Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection,* The Museum of Modern Art, New York |

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (SELECTION)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York | Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York | Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D. C. | Los Angeles County Museum of Art | Museum of Fine Arts, Boston | Museum of Fine Arts, Houston | Blanton Museum of Art, UT Austin | Buffalo AKG Art Museum | El Museo del Barrio, New York | CIFO, Miami | Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid | Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid | Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia | Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville | Instituto Cervantes, Alcalá de Henares | Colección Circa XX, Pilar Citoler, Madrid | Kunstmuseum Bern | Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach | ESCALA, University of Essex | Colección FEMSA, Monterrey | Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires | Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires | Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires | Museo Provincial Emilio Pettoruti, La Plata | MACLA, La Plata | Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Franklin Rawson, San Juan | Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Emilio Caraffa, Córdoba | Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Neuquén | Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas | Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas | Fundación Museo de Arte Moderno Jesús Soto, Ciudad Bolívar | Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana

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121.9 × 121.9 cm | 48 × 48 in

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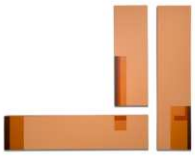

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*Virtual Cube*, 2008
COR-TEN steel
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