

Abstract Stone

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?", *Nudities*, 2009)

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.

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