



No. 6, 1957 Elsa Gramcko. Oil on canvas 2023.46

Look at the perforated white shapes in a world of blackness. Notice the small base. Imagine a sense of movement....teetering back and forth, as if it is a rocking chair you where you are constantly rocking.

BACKGROUND Elsa Gramcko was a Venezuelan artist

- Venezuela's entanglement with oil beginning in 1922—Gramcko born 1925 —Economically, politically, and culturally—would change the country forever.
 - Venezuela is STILL in 2024 a developing country
 - BUT has the world's largest known oil reserves
 - AND is one of the world's leading exporters of oil.
 - Suffers political turmoil and military dictators
- **SIDENOTE: Venezuelans** comprise one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in US—**ESCAPE AUTHORITARIAN RULE and their COUNTRY'S WORST ECONOMIC CRISIS**

“There was a time when I worked with hard lines and planes of color... but I don't consider it to be abstract painting, it is TOO EMOTIONAL AND HAS TOO MANY INNER CONTENTS. I believe I am an expressionist painter”

How can something abstract be emotional?



ABOVE: image from 2018 article: HOW VENEZUELA'S OIL RICHES FUELED A LITERARY EXPLOSION

Look at this image of oil pump and Venezuelan flag— do you see anything in common with our painting?

Imagine the emotions the artist felt to paint this....

1954—art classes School of Plastic and Applied Arts of Caracas taught by Venezuelan artist Alejandro Otero, a pioneer of geometric abstraction. Gramcko —medium-sized series of oil paintings on canvas constructed with **hard lines, irregular machine-like shapes, and flat background colors.**

- Elsa Gramcko's work mid-20th c was a meditation on a country ruled by oil—> At the time called “petro-modernity” — a period of **BOOMING OIL-EXTRACTION in Venezuela + RAPID URBAN DEVELOPMENT** in the capital city of Caracas in 1960s and 70s.
- **She believed: Venezuela's dependency on oil to drive its economy would lead to CATASTROPHE—> AS THE LAST DECADE HAS BORNE OUT.**

- automobile.
- **This painting is more than 65 yrs old —Does it feel outdated or modern to you?**
- Two years later, she went from **geometric abstraction to surrealistic ASSEMBLAGE SCULPTURES —ravaged by time/post-apocalyptic—discarded industrial debris, such as car battery cells and headlights, directly onto masonite—> symbols of dependence on the**
- **Gramcko: “These works are questioning contemporary society..it’s really about trying to defend us against becoming automated machines, becoming the teeth on a gear, and it’s about privileging our individuality.”**

Extra Info not for tour

- Later assemblage work: “magical realism” —>found elements of the fantastical within the mundane and vice versa, expressing a constant duality.
- assemblage invites viewers to enter into a subconscious state and question what it means to look closely.
- Her interests in German existentialist philosophy and Carl Jung’s meditations on memory and consciousness, along with her avid consumption of surrealist poetry--some of which was written by her sister, Ida--all influenced her paintings, assemblages, and sculptures.
- German Father/Venezuelan mother.

References

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