

Phoenix Art Museum to Celebrate Major Gift of Contemporary Latin American Art with Groundbreaking Exhibition in May 2020

Stories of Abstraction Presents Rarely Seen Examples of Latin American Abstraction from the Past Three Decades

Phoenix, AZ – February 6, 2020 – A new exhibition at **Phoenix Art Museum** will present for the first time more than 40 recently acquired works of contemporary Latin American art to explore how the visual language of abstraction has generated profound insights into Latin American culture and politics and how Latin American artists have drawn on abstraction's history within the region as well as the United States and Europe. ***Stories of Abstraction: Contemporary Latin American Art*** celebrates the contemporary artworks gifted to the Museum in 2018 by Nicholas Pardon, co-founder of the former SPACE collection—the largest collection of post-1990s abstract Latin American art in the United States. Featuring work by 25 artists from eight countries, the exhibition opens a window onto this important genre of contemporary art and explores how abstraction is used to visualize the social philosophies of the present. *Stories of Abstraction* will be on view at Phoenix Art Museum from **May 2 through September 20, 2020**.

"*Stories of Abstraction* seeks to uncover the ways in which Latin American artists have used abstraction as both a vehicle to explore key issues relating to society and a tool to recast sometimes radical civic discourse," said **Gilbert Vicario, the Museum's Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs and the Selig Family Chief Curator** who curated the exhibition. "The title of the exhibition intends to make clear that there are complex narratives within these abstract works. The exhibition also furthers the Museum's dedication to preserving and presenting significant works by Latin American artists, as well as its commitment to developing original scholarship that examines the meaning and underpinnings of abstract Latin American art. As our Phoenix community is more than 40% Latinx, *Stories of Abstraction* offers a timely examination of the visual language of Latin American abstraction, one that we believe our visitors can relate to and find inspiring and exciting."

The recent acquisition of 112 works of art from Pardon, including paintings, sculptures, installations, and works on paper, represents a nearly 300% increase in the Museum's holdings of contemporary Latin American art. Featuring artwork from the most innovative artists working in Latin America in recent years and today, including seven women artists, *Stories of Abstraction* makes accessible a wide range of compelling artwork from Venezuela, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, and Guatemala. *Stories of Abstraction* will historically contextualize the exhibition's contemporary works by placing them alongside key artworks from earlier decades to clarify Latin American abstraction's relationship to other abstract movements. Historical works by Alexander Calder, Pedro Friedeberg, Carlos Mérida, Frank Stella, Bridget Riley, and Jesús Rafael Soto, among others, will complement more contemporary works from the Museum's collection.

Key highlights from the exhibition include:

- Honduran artist Adán Vallecillo's *Pantones* (2013), in which six hanging banners made of moto-taxi covers are placed in dialogue with each other. The work highlights the use of nontraditional

materials in Latin American abstraction and encourages viewers to engage with and walk along its stratified banners to examine the visual continuities and obscurities between each layer.

- Venezuelan artist Emilia Azcárate's *La mar de letras* (2013), a five-paneled work exploring language and written communication, features illegible strings of letters from an old typewriter in a radiant green ink. By visualizing mechanical, repetitive, and obsessive forms of mark-making on paper, Azcárate creates an indecipherable sea of letters to prompt reflection on the complications and fallibility of language and to turn a coherent system of writing into a complex abstraction.
- Colombian artist Gabriel Sierra's *Sin título (siete conejos)* (2001-2013), a sculptural installation consisting of glue and straw bricks arranged in descending scale, continues the artist's exploration of the languages of design and architecture. Sierra uses straw as a vernacular material for construction to signify humans' modification of nature and adaptation to the environment. Engaging ideas of community, habitat, and urbanism, Sierra manipulates architectural dynamics to examine the forces governing human interaction with built environments.
- Argentinian artist Sergio Vega's *Shanty Nucleus After Derrida 2* (2011-2013), which presents yellow monochrome planes suspended in space, creates an array of configurations and walkways that enable an interactive viewing experience. These various planes constitute the color ground on which photographs of "shanty" homes have been mounted to create fragmented sculptural formations inspired by Derrida's theory of deconstruction.

As an exploration of how abstraction is employed in contemporary Latin American art to convey specific emotions, stories, and ideas stemming from the cultural and political zeitgeist, *Stories of Abstraction* introduces new narratives within the work of Latin American artists. Providing an overview of post-1990s abstraction from various geographies in Latin America, the exhibition seeks to address the multitude of ways in which artwork lacking figuration or recognizable characters can generate insightful commentary and even political change.

"*Stories of Abstraction* places the Museum at the forefront of conversations surrounding scholarship, exhibition practices, and the global significance of contemporary Latin American art," said Vicario. "The exhibition will foster new dialogues in the Phoenix community and beyond and provide the opportunity to learn about the significant achievements of Latin America's foremost abstract artists."

About the Exhibition

Stories of Abstraction: Contemporary Latin American Art will be on view from May 2 through September 20, 2020 in Steele Gallery. It is organized by Phoenix Art Museum and made possible through the generosity of the Museum's Circles of Support and Museum Members. The exhibition features objects donated to the Phoenix Art Museum collection by Nicholas Pardon.

Phoenix Art Museum

Since 1959, Phoenix Art Museum has provided millions of guests with access to world-class art and experiences in an effort to ignite imaginations, create meaningful connections, and serve as a brave space for all people who wish to experience the transformative power of art. Located in Phoenix's Central



Corridor, the Museum is a vibrant destination for the visual arts and the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Each year, more than 300,000 guests engage with critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions and the Museum's collection of more than 20,000 works of American and Western American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed for visitors of all ages, along with vibrant photography exhibitions made possible through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

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