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### Toeing the Lines: Rafael Bogarin's *Jupiter 6*

*Jupiter 6* is a 1981 geometric, abstract serigraph by Venezuelan artist Rafael Bogarin. This print evolved out of a rich plastic art scene in Venezuela and defies clear categorization even within its regional context; it is a geometric rather than lyrically or figuratively abstract print, it is architectural but not kinetic, it defies the institutional norms of the time without denying the mission of the plastic art which preceded it. Rather than the enclosed avant-garde of the late 1970s and early '80s, the print medium allows for broad distribution and contact with a wider public. The main question driving my research into Bogarin, and *Jupiter 6* in particular, was: "where exactly does this piece fit into the print and plastic arts of Venezuela in the late 1970s and early '80s?" While *Jupiter 6* doesn't fit cleanly into any one category, it does clearly evolve from a rich, multi-faceted art scene in postwar Venezuela.

Rafael Bogarin self-identifies as a plastic artist, working first in engravings and printmaking, then painting and sculpture. He worked under engravers like Luis Guevara Moreno and Luis Chacón, who both had printing presses in their studios (Bogarin 'Biographie' trans. mine<sup>1</sup>, Palacios 67). Printmaking at the time was dominated by figural and lyrical abstractionists, Luisa Palacios, Moreno, and Chacón among them. Rather than following in the style of his teachers, Bogarin tended toward geometric abstraction as time went on, but didn't fall strictly into the kinetic movement which dominated geometric abstraction in Venezuela at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rafaelbogarin.blogspot.com/p/biografia.html>

Circles appear repeatedly throughout his prints and his color palette is restricted to primary colors and green, often applied in flat planes and lines. The most significant piece that precedes *Jupiter 6* is an untitled intaglio print from 1971. His sculptural works are in the same vein as his prints, highly geometric with a primary color palette, often with lines of white and black breaking up flat planes of color (Bogarin 'Works'<sup>2</sup>).

While there is no existing scholarship on this particular piece, there is some on Venezuelan plastic arts in the postwar and mid-century. The most significant pieces I found were Juan Calzadilla's "Miradas a la evolución de las artes plásticas en Venezuela" which specifically tracked the plastic arts in Venezuela, and Marta Traba's posthumous book, *Art of Latin America 1900-1980*, which gives a broader perspective on how Venezuelan art in this period fit into the rest of Latin America. In terms of specific artists, the scholarship centered on Jesús Rafael Soto, a prolific kinetic artist often synonymous with Venezuelan art in the 1960s-80s, John J. Corso analyzed the political aspect of his *penetrables* in "Jesus Rafael Soto's Entry into Political Art." Other artists frequently mentioned were Luisa Palacios (a lyrical-abstractionist who mainly worked in prints), Luis Guevara Moreno (a figurative artist), and Carlos Cruz-Diez (also a kinetic artist.) Palacios did an interview with Andrew Stasik for *Print Review* no. 18 in 1984, namely discussing her printmaking organization, Taller de artistas Graficos Asociados (TAGA).

Bogarin is referenced in passing in a few pieces, namely his large-scale public works like *Road Museum* from 1982 and *Speedway Museum*, but there is no existing scholarship that looks into how Bogarin's plastic prints fit into the broader plastic art movement in Venezuela during the '70s and early '80s. Perhaps one reason why Bogarin has been excluded from scholarship on

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rafaelbogarin.blogspot.com/p/obras-de-diferentes-etapas.html>

Venezuelan plastic arts of this era is not a lack of significance, but a lack of clear categorization. *Jupiter 6* is geometric abstraction rather than the lyrical or figural common in print, but it also isn't kinetic; it contradicts the style of kineticism, but works toward the same goal of blending art and architecture. The avant-garde at the time was highly critical of kineticism, which had been enshrined in institutions by the 1970s, but worked in different mediums and often eluded the public.

It is important to understand the broad strokes of Venezuelan history during the early years of Bogarin's life, and how they impacted the art scene there. The artist was born in 1946 during a short period between the 1945 revolution and the 1948 military junta that led to the Jiménez dictatorship in 1952 (Bogarin 'biographie,' Corso 125). The fall of Jiménez in 1958 heralded a period of "political mobility [which] stimulated an important social change, astutely noted by the French historian Pierre Riado: the rise of the middle classes to political power" (Traba 87). This meant that the generation of artists preceding Bogarin in the 1950s traveled to Europe, namely Paris, and found patrons among the middle class until the return of democracy, when "kinetic art became 'the country's clearest symbolic manifestation, de facto if not in principle, of democratic development policy from 1959 to 1976" (Corso quoting Pérez-Oramas 129). The 1970s was then an era of contraction in the art world, as artists "confronted the dilemma of choosing between freedom and fear, between democracy and dictatorship" and the private sector became decreasingly disinterested in purchasing art (Traba 87). While Bogarin was working in America starting in 1970, he frequently returned to Venezuela and worked with Venezuelan artists in New York City, meaning while he was somewhat removed from these later developments, he was not completely divorced from them.

The print culture that arose in the Latin America throughout the 1960's and '70s "brought about a return to communal activity in collective workshops, where artists supported one another in moments of doubt and international crisis," and one such workshop in Venezuela was Taller de artistas Graficos Asociados (TAGA) headed by Luisa Palacios (Traba 136, Stasik and Palacios 67). Artists who participated in the workshop Palacios began in 1961 (which would later become TAGA) included many lyrical-abstractionists and figurative artists, including herself, Alirio Palacios, Luis Guevara Moreno, and Luis Chacón. Even by the time Palacios was interviewed by Andrew Stasik in 1984, after TAGA became an official organization, she says that abstract artists were in the minority when it came to Venezuelan printmaking. According to Calzadilla, lyrical-abstraction was an "autonomous world in which the architectural function of the work as an art object counts little" (143). This might be one motivation for Bogarin's turn to geometry, as his works still maintain an architectural aspect, despite deviating from his kinetic contemporaries.

The Venezuelan artists working in geometric abstraction during the 1960s were highly influenced by their time in Paris, where abstraction was at the forefront of the avant-garde. Neogeometrists and kinetic artists imported purely formal aspects, which were then regionalized as many Latin American artists were "willfully marginal in character, purposely antispectacular, and stubbornly devoted to conveying meaning" (Traba 86, 146). However, they also dealt in the concepts of Dutch neo-plasticism and Russian constructivism, which Calzadilla says "proposed an art stripped of any expressive incident, of an organic nature, from a project of rationalization that should lead to the creation of pure geometric forms" (Calzadilla 143). A tension thus emerged, between the European anti-expressive sentiment and the desire of Latin American artists to specify their work in context of the their environment.

Visually, art of this period is exemplified by Soto's sculptures *Vibration* (1965) and *Untitled (Tiratura 7)* (1966) as well as Otero's colorrhythms, evolutions on work like *lineas coloreadas sobre fondo blanco* (1951). Carlos Cruz-Diez and his *Induction Chromatique 39* (1971) is, like Otero's, an evolution on more minimal, linear geometries from earlier work like *Coleur additive* (1959). All of these works deal solely in hard lines and slashes, primary color palettes with green, and a sense of subtle movement through rhythm. These works seek "the ideal of integration, the fusion of the arts under the spirit of constructivism... Integrating painting and architecture with the purpose of making them a mass art was a utopia" (Calzadilla 140-41). As time progressed, however, cracks began to show in the foundation of kinetic art in Venezuela.

By the time Bogarin made *Untitled* in 1971, kinetic art was the institutional norm in Venezuela, Traba even compares it to Mexican muralism in the interwar period: "it was the aesthetic image of the country that the ruling classes wished to impart" (Traba 108). *Untitled* is the predecessor of *Jupiter 6* in many ways: limited color palette, unconventional use of the printing process, rigid rectangular geometries entrapping circular ones, and an incorporation of architectural elements without being kinetic. *Untitled* is an intaglio print with the only inked shapes being the target-like concentric circles in the lower left register, surrounded by a rectangular, almost maze-like shape around it. The more rigid shape is impressed on the paper where the plate was engraved but not filled with ink, which isn't the typical way to use intaglio. The emphasis on the semi-visible, 3-dimensional aspect of the print eventually evolved into the architectural elements in *Jupiter 6*, namely the sense of layering and depth, but using white ink to create visual impressions without actually changing the flat surface of the paper. *Jupiter 6* has rhythm in its grid, but that same grid keeps the piece still, especially compared to the tightly

vibrating lines of Soto and Cruz-Diez. The print merges architecture and print, like the intention of the Venezuelan plastic artists before him, but without creating a kinetic work.

To say that these works are avant-garde, however, is a stretch. The Venezuelan avant-garde was plainly critical of the internationally-derived kinetic formalists and traditional mediums, instead turning to film and sensory installations. Another deviation between Bogarin's work and the Venezuelan avant-garde, was their audiences. According to Traba, "[the avant-garde] had no critical impact, since it had lost all contact with the public whose feelings it was supposed to arouse. Understanding of its message remained the privilege of a small elite" (157). Print, and its privileging of sight over touch, was much more accessible not only to artists but to the public.

Corso uses Hannah Arendt's political theory to analyze Rafael Soto's *penetrables* as a way to facilitate public, and therefore political, discourse. "In Arendt's schema, art is not political because of its content, subject matter, or socio-economic context: it is political if it publicly communicates to a free plurality. In this sense, public speech acts constitute political action." (Corso 130) In combination with Traba's analysis of print's qualities, namely "multiple prints for those of limited means, the modest production cost of graphic art as compared with painting and sculpture, and the transitory value of posters and wall art" and its "expected impact on the Latin American public," we can read *Jupiter 6* as a politically-charged work not only because of its critical evolution on geometric abstraction in the Venezuelan context, but also because it utilizes the medium of print to communicate across space and class (142).

Bogarin, and *Jupiter 6* in particular, is an exemplar of Greenberg's theory of the modernist who "[uses] characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence"

(Greenberg, 5). The goal of geometric abstraction in its regional context—to merge the arts, namely art and architecture—is not forgone, but the methods of achieving that goal are. Bogarin follows many plastic artists who migrated to the print medium, thereby remaining in the public, political sphere that the eluded the avant-garde of the '70s and '80s. *Jupiter 6* exists between the lines of the Venezuelan art scene of the late '70s and early '80s, defying categorization.

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(trans. mine)

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