FANNY SANÍN: GEOMETRIC EQUATIONS

AMERICAS SOCIETY

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Fanny Sanin y Fernando Gamboa

Media coverage, with Fernando Gamboa, museum director and curator, *El Universal*, Mexico City.

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Sanín's retrospective exhibition at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá, 1987. From left to right: Mayer Sasson, the artist, Carmen Rada, Édgar Negret, Gloria Zea, and Mauricio Obregón.

Latin American Women Artists 1915–1995 exhibition. Sanín in front of her paintings included in the exhibition at the Phoenix Museum of Art.

From left to right: Edward Chang, Anastassia Perfilieva, Megan Kincaid, Fanny Sanín, Edward J. Sullivan, and Mayer Sasson at the opening of *Fanny Sanín's New York: The Critical Decade, 1971–1981* as part of the Duke House Exhibition series at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, February 18, 2020.

Left to right: Carlos Rojas, Rosa Sanín, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, Fanny Sanín, Pilar Caballero, Prudence Alfaro, Adela Ramírez, Germán Rubiano, Luis Fonseca, and Mayer Sasson at Ramírez Villamizar's home in La Vega, near Bogotá, 1994.

FOREWORD

Americas Society is pleased to present *Fanny Sanín: Geometric Equations*, the artist's first institutional survey presentation in New York. Given the Colombian-born artist's prolific international career with over three hundred group and fifty-five solo exhibitions across the United States, Latin America, and Europe, it is an honor to host Sanín's first solo career survey in New York, where she has lived and worked for the past fifty-four years. Working in various mediums—including painting, drawing, and printmaking—the artist has dedicated her career to the thoughtful interrogation of geometric abstraction. Curated by Dr. Edward J. Sullivan, the exhibition at Americas Society will feature several free-form abstract compositions which elucidate how the artist's formal rigor traces to her early work and ultimately led to her distinguished geometry-based production. Twenty-one paintings and two dozen smaller

studies will be installed in loose chronological order to guide visitors through the subtle changes in Sanín's use of color and form to explore geometry's possibilities. The artist's diligent process will be documented in the show through the display of preparatory sketches and a film by Eric Marciano, *The Critic's Eye* about Sanín's career, which features important archival images.

I extend my deepest thanks and sincere gratitude to Fanny Sanín, Mayer Sasson, and Dr. Edward J. Sullivan for organizing this remarkable and historic exhibition and for working with our team to bring it to our galleries. I also express my thanks to the Art at Americas Society curatorial team: Director and Chief Curator Aimé Iglesias Lukin for her leadership; to Assistant Curators Sarah Lopez, Carla Lucini, and Tatiana Marcel, who worked together on the presentation of this exhibition; to Karen Marta for her editorial support of Americas Society's publications; to Todd Bradway for his project management; and to Garrick Gott for designing this series.

Fanny Sanín: Geometric Equations is made possible by generous support from the Diane and Bruce Halle Foundation, Terra Foundation for American Art, Wyeth Foundation for American Art, Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, Erica Roberts, Karla Harwich, Lilly Scarpetta, and Ana Sokoloff. In-kind support is provided by Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino.

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SUSAN SEGAL
PRESIDENT AND CEO, AS/COA

EQUATIONS OF PLACE

Aimé Iglesias Lukin

When Edward Sullivan proposed to curate Fanny Sanín's first-ever institutional survey in New York, I immediately said yes. I have admired Sanín's captivating geometric compositions for many years. I have enjoyed the many conversations Sanín and I have shared when attending New York's art world activities, like openings and conferences. Importantly, this exhibition addresses many of our institutional programming goals.

Our annual women artists exhibition aims to introduce New York audiences to the work of intergenerational, female-identifying, and overlooked artists. The Sanín exhibition fits this aim perfectly. Sanín joins an illustrious group being assembled since the series began in 2022 with the first solo show of Geles Cabrera—the then-95-year-old Mexican sculptor whose role in Mexican modernism had been lost to history. The series also included Sylvia Palacios Whitman—born in Chile but a New York resident since 1960—a pioneer of performance art in the neo-avant-garde downtown circles of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Significantly, it is the archives of Cabrera and Palacios Whitman that allow us to showcase the stories of these artists, by reviewing, collecting, and digitizing work and oral testimonies. The series also presents mid-career surveys, such as the one in 2023 for Alejandra Seeber. Through a chronological narrative, it explored the themes of domestic interiors in Seeber's paintings—a theme present since the late 1990s—while in dialogue with a site-specific installation where the artist created a playable mini-golf course made with her rugs and ceramics. In all these projects, and no less so with Sanín's, we aim to present these artists' unique stories by including their voices and input. Current audiences and future generations alike will have access to publications—in many instances the only published book available on that artist. This project also aligns with Americas Society's interest to serve as a historiographical tool and a key shaper of art histories. For example, recently with *Beatriz Cortez x rafa esparza: Earth and Cosmos*, we inaugurated a series in which we invited two artists who are also friends to curate

each other's works, bringing the dynamics of their close conversations into the museum.

On a similar note, although *Fanny Sanín: Geometric Equations* is a solo show, it is also born and fed from a decades-long friendship between curator and artist. Professor Sullivan is a first-hand witness to the evolution of Sanín's work. He is a renowned scholar and curator of many Latin American artists, and he is a friend who can illuminate Sanín as a person.

Colombian artist Carlos Motta has also joined the project as exhibition designer. He counts Sanín as a mentor and as adopted family. Again, due to the personal and professional relationship they share, he brings an intimate element to the display of her works. Sullivan and Motta are both members of the Fanny Sanín Legacy Project, a group formed to promote her work and make sure it is readily available for future generations. We are proud at Americas Society to contribute towards that goal with the hopes that this exhibition is the first of many solo shows exploring the richness of Sanín's expansive career.

AN ALTERNATE FORM OF VISION: FANNY SANÍN IN NEW YORK

Edward J. Sullivan

Although the list of exhibitions in which Fanny Sanín was included in the 1970s and 80s is extensive, this exhibition of her work, which I have had the privilege of curating, is the artist's first one-woman survey show in New York.

Working with the expert curatorial team at Americas Society, we have endeavored to create a pathway for the visitor to discover many of the key moments in the development of her career with all of its subtle (or at times overt) changes and permutations. The works on view—from preliminary small studies to final, often monumental, finished products—trace her evolution from gesture to hard-edged nonobjectivity while providing a window into the nature of her complex process. Sanín began her public career in the 1960s as a gestural abstractionist, a facet of her career that has received new attention through recent exhibitions in London and Arles, along with an important representation at the 2024 Biennale de Venezia curated by Adriano Pedrosa. However, it is for her seemingly infinite experiments with hard-edged lines, combined

with sometimes surprising and even shocking color groupings, that she has become best known.[1] Over the course of many years, I have become intimately familiar with much of the writing about Fanny Sanín's art. While most of it (including my own essays) stress affinities with geometric abstract artists from Latin America, it is crucial to understand her intense affinities with—and departures from—the work of artists in Europe (the heirs of the tradition of Piet Mondrian) and North America (from the US—Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly—to the Canadians—Agnes Martin and Guido Molinari) who employed straight and orthogonal lines to imbue their paintings with geometric and in some cases (including that of Sanín) quasi-architectural suggestions.

The exhibition's location at Americas Society is historically significant, as Sanín has been associated with this venue since 1976, when it was called the Center for Inter-American Relations.[2] Ida E. Rubin directed the organization for many years, curating some of its

most outstanding exhibitions. Rubin became a close friend of the artist and Mayer Sasson, her husband and indefatigable recorder and cataloguer of all aspects of her art. Rubin included Sanín in the exhibition *Imán: New York (Magnet: New York)* in the winter of 1976. This survey of New York-based artists working in principally geometric styles was an ambitious undertaking that included Tony Bechara, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Carlos Osorio, Emilio Sánchez, and Gladys Triana among many others.[3] Fanny Sanín forged another link with Americas Society in 1987 when the gallery's then-director, the Australian art historian John Stringer, curated a retrospective of her work for the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bogotá, which later traveled to Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Medellín.[4]

By that time, the artist had already participated in numerous museum and gallery exhibitions in her native Bogotá and México. After an extensive period of study there (as well as in London), and a period of five years in Monterrey, México where she worked on her art,

the couple settled in Manhattan in 1971. While she never lost close contact with the art scene in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America and Europe, Sanín quickly became an integral part of the New York art world soon after she moved there.

In 1971, Sanín participated in group exhibitions at Columbia University and C.W. Post College on Long Island (now called LIU Post). These early associations with institutions of higher learning are indicative of her long-term interest in pedagogy. While she has not held a formal position at any university, the artist has always been open to showing her art to students at her studio on East Eighty-Sixth Street, where Sanín has worked for most of the decades since coming to New York. In 2020, I had firsthand experience of Sanín's kindness and generosity with students when, in conjunction with the curatorial studies program at the NYU Institute of Fine Arts, a group of three master's students (Edward Chang, Megan Kincaid, and Anastassia Perfilieva) curated the exhibition *Fanny Sanín's*

New York: The Critical Decade, 1971–1981, at the IFA as part of the Duke House Exhibition series. I was the faculty advisor, and we received generous support from ISLAA (the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art). The small but exquisite exhibition included paintings from the artist's first decade in the city, as well as a compelling selection of documentary material. She was deeply gracious with the student curators, opening her studio and archives to them on numerous occasions and receiving them cordially to answer their many questions. Their exhibition press release encapsulates some of the most succinct and accurate descriptions of her art:

> Sanín's style of geometric abstraction paradoxically harnesses mathematical precision and an objective sensibility to constellate deeply spiritual resonances. While she demonstrates a shared sensibility with some of her North American contemporaries such as Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly … [and] Frank Stella … Sanín's is a unique voice within this tradition. Her

> symmetrical compositions are the result of rigid exactitude … her degree of finish rejects traces of the artist's hand. [Her] matte finishes and muted palette stand in contrast to the glossy, high contrast canvases typical of this period [the 1970s], revealing Sanín's remapping of conventional geometric abstraction.[5]

Over time, Sanín came to be associated with several distinguished dealers of Latin American art in Manhattan, including Clara Diament Sujo and Nohra Haime. Haime was a native of Colombia, and for many years her gallery was near the corner of Madison Avenue and Seventy-Eighth Street, later moving into the Fuller Building (a legendary venue for uptown art galleries) on Fifty-Seventh Street and Madison. Sujo ran a successful gallery in Caracas before opening her New York venue at 76 East Seventy-Ninth Street. As I wrote in a 2018 essay, she "has always been what we would now call a Renaissance Woman."[6] One of her principal interests, especially as she moved the

gallery to New York, was to promote the work of the many artists from Latin America who developed a wide variety of geometric tendencies in their work. Sujo included Sanín's art in a 1985 show that put her painting in dialogue with other luminaries such as Alejandro Otero, Emilio Pettoruti, Joaquín Torres-García, and Carlos Mérida.

My own relationship with Sanín's work began in 1993. I had been invited by the curator Geraldine P. Biller to serve (along with Venezuelan scholar Bélgica Rodríguez) as advisor for the exhibition *Latin American Women Artists 1915–1995* that started at the Milwaukee Art Museum in March of 1995 before a national tour. In my catalogue essay, I cited Sanín's "dedication to expressive non-objectivity [making her] one of the major creators of hard-edged abstraction in present day South America."[7] A friendship with this soft-spoken, charismatic painter and Sanín's courtly and gracious partner were the principal gifts I was afforded for my collaboration with the Milwaukee project. This

exhibition, which was also presented in Phoenix, Denver, and Washington, DC, did a great deal to open the eyes of US audiences to the outstanding contributions of Latin American women artists across a broad spectrum of creativity. Afterward, several US museums acquired pieces by Fanny, including the National Museum of Women in the Arts, which held a one-artist show (*Equilibrium: Fanny Sanín*) in the summer and fall of 2017.[8]

I wrote a longer essay about Sanín's work in 2004, for the catalogue of the show *Concrete Realities* held at the latincollector gallery, which had recently been founded in Tribeca by Brazilian entrepreneur and collector Federico Sève. Curated by Colombian artist Carlos Motta, it comprised three individual exhibitions of Sanín, her friend the Cuban artist Carmen Herrera, and the Brazilian Mira Schendel. This exhibition was a welcome opportunity for me to examine in depth the contributions of geometric art by distinguished Latin American women, whose work was both highly individualized but also intriguingly congruent. In his *New York*

Times review, Holland Cotter stated that "[t]he precision-tooled work of Ms. Herrera and Ms. Sanín offer yet another reason … to consider geometric abstraction as one of the great experimental inventions of modern art."[9]

The theoretical and practical basis of Sanín's work is drawing; this has been true since the beginning of her career. Her monumental paintings and midsize compositions have virtually always been the result of a painstakingly deliberate series of pencil, watercolor, and acrylic preliminary studies that, in many instances, are produced in varying sizes until she is satisfied with the proportions of the forms, the intersections of the lines, and the appropriateness of the color relationships. Some of her drawings do not result in larger compositions in acrylic, which she has used since 1970, but stand alone as intimate manifestations of her creativity. Given that drawing has always been so crucial to the artist's mode of working, it seems odd that the first survey of her studies on paper was not held until 2012. This beautiful show, titled *Fanny Sanín:*

Drawings and Studies 1960 to Now, was curated by the art historian and arts administrator Patterson Sims for the latincollector gallery. It was hailed by *Wall Street Journal* critic Peter Plagens as "[a] quiet bravura performance."[10]

I had known and admired Patterson since the late 1990s, when he was Deputy Director for Education at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Therefore, I was very pleased when both he and I were appointed as founding members of the Board of Advisors of the Fanny Sanín Legacy Project in 2011. Other members included José Antonio Camacho Sanín, Clayton C. Kirking, Carlos Motta, Mayer Sasson, and Ana Sokoloff. The Legacy Project has as one of its main goals the distribution, through gifts and sales, of the artist's work to significant museums in the US and beyond. Many of Sanín's important paintings and drawings have reached a wide swath of the American public through their acquisition by institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as well as prestigious college- and

university-based museums, including the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, and the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University. Happily, the philanthropic efforts of the Legacy Project, combined with the publication in 2019 of a major multi-authored monograph titled *Fanny Sanín: The Concrete Language of Color and Structure*, have served to bring deeper knowledge of her work to a broad audience in the US, Latin America, and elsewhere.[11]

The present exhibition at Americas Society furthers this goal, enriching the cultural world of New York and beyond with wider exposure to the work of this pioneering and deeply committed artist who has developed such an original and highly varied visual vocabulary through her constant experimentation with abstraction. Sanín has been a beacon of inspiration, both for me and for many artists, especially those who share her passion for the seemingly limitless possibilities of expression and meaning within the vast parameters of geometric form.

NOTES

1. *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940–1970*, Whitechapel Gallery, February–May 2023. This exhibition traveled to the Fondation Vincent Van Gogh Arles, June–October 2023. See also Adriano Pedrosa, Biennale Arte 2024. *Foreigners Everywhere* (Silvana Editoriale, 2024).
2. José Luis Falconi and Gabriela Rangel (eds.), *A Principality of its Own:. 40 Years of Visual Arts at the Americas Society* (Americas Society, 2006).
3. Mayer Sasson, "Ida Rubin (1924–2008)," *Art Nexus* 70 (2008), https://www.artnexus.com/en/magazines/article-magazine-artnexus/5d633c3190cc21cf7c0a1bd4/70/ida-rubin-1924-2008.
4. John Stringer, "Introducción [Introduction]," in *Fanny Sanín: Obras de 1960 a 1986* (Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, 1987). https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1129410#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=561%2C509%2C913%2C527.
5. Press release "Fanny Sanín's New York: The Critical Decade," https://islaa.org/exhibitions/exhibition_partner-2021-jul-jbd-fanny-sanins-new-york.
6. Edward J. Sullivan, "Clara Diament Sujo: A Life Devoted to Art," https://cdsgallery.com/resources/.
7. See Edward J. Sullivan, "Abstraction in Mexico and Beyond," in *Latin American Women Artists 1915–95*, guest curator Geraldine P. Biller, (Milwaukee Art Museum, 1995), 65.
8. Virginia Treanor, *Equilibrium: Fanny Sanín*, (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2017).
9. Fanny Sanín, *The Concrete Language of Color and Structure* (Lucia / Marquand, 2019), 251.
10. Sanín, *Concrete Language*, 253.
11. Ibid. The contributors to this volume were Beverly Adams, Clayton C. Kirking, James Oles, Germán Rubiano Caballero, Patterson Sims, Ana Sokoloff, and Edward J. Sullivan.

FANNY SANÍN AND THE PURSUIT OF SPIRITUAL HARMONY

Ana María Reyes

A plastic vision should provoke in us
the forces and the desires to enhance life,
assert it and assist its further development.

—Naum Gabo, 1949[1]

The concrete paintings by Fanny Sanín (b. 1938, Bogotá, Colombia) are beginning to receive the scholarly attention they deserve. While the art world has made strides in recognizing women artists, it comes much later than their contributions. This is especially true for women artists working in the male-dominated genre of geometric abstraction and Latin American / Latinx women working in New York, including Sanín and her dear friends Carmen Herrera and Raquel Rabinovich.[2] I am honored to contribute to the ongoing efforts of institutions and scholars in reevaluating her significant place in art history. As a social art historian, my initial impulse was to contextualize Sanín's works historically and geographically. This is a difficult task given that she has lived and worked in many different urban centers (Bogotá, Monterrey, Champaign–Urbana, IL, London, and, for the last fifty-four years, New York City) and has committed to an unwavering concrete vocabulary for over sixty years. As Carla Gottlieb wrote, Sanín "has the strength to walk a straight road, even if it

is less popular, because it is the right one for her."[3] Leading scholars have contextualized the aesthetic development of her practice, more recently in the monograph *Fanny Sanín: The Concrete Language of Color and Structure* (2019).[4] For this short essay, I draw from my experience of her paintings and focus on their affective power. That is, Sanín's paintings inspire spiritual and emotional respite during these times of uncertainty, destruction, and moral crisis. Her carefully constructed compositions provide a meditative experience, reinforcing the timeless human pursuit of order and harmony. This aligns her with a lineage of artists who, across different cultures and periods, have sought to create spaces of cohesion and transcendence in their work.

Sanín's paintings do not represent anything outside of themselves; there is no abstracting reality, visual narration, or symbolic code. Instead, they exist as visual experiences unto themselves, inviting contemplation and emotional responses. As Sanín eloquently stated,

"I am seeking order in my work, harmony in the elements, and purity in the colors."[5] She strives for pictorial harmony and what Wassily Kandinsky called "spiritual vibrations."[6] Indeed, she has been deeply influenced by two texts: Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and Herbert Read's *A Letter to a Young Artist*.[7] Sanín's engagement with color echoes Kandinsky's ideas about the spiritual potential of painting. For Kandinsky, an artistic composition can create a spiritual atmosphere that can "key up" the viewer's soul.[8] That is, just as music can move an audience without requiring knowledge of musical notation or historical context, her paintings achieve an affective impact through form, color, and composition. Take for instance, *Acrylic No. 12, 1970*, in which Sanín paints a dominant golden-yellow band at the center—occupying almost half the picture-plane—and flanks it with various other warm tones to unexpectedly contrast them with a thin but striking blue stripe. This careful interplay of colors creates a composition that is both structured

and emotionally evocative, a warm but melodic adagio or bolero. In *Acrylic No. 5, 1973*, Sanín narrows the color bands and contrasts the warm orange, red, and creamy colors with bands of cool greys and blues, creating a lively symphony akin to Caribbean rhythms. The verticality of the bands guides our gaze upward, a consistent characteristic throughout Sanín's oeuvre.[9] In later works, such as *Composition No. 2, 2009* and *Acrylic No. 1, 2021*, diagonal lines and red tones dominate, reinforcing an aspiration toward transcendence and spiritual elevation. Sanín juxtaposes dark colors with vibrant tones in order to generate energy. This recalls the black paintings of Mark Rothko in the Rothko Chapel in Houston, where upon closer observation deep hues reveal a profound luminosity. In Sanín's case, her compositions emanate a similar meditative quality, serving as beacons of hope and affirmation.

The dynamism of these works should not be confused with spontaneity; Sanín does not experiment directly on canvas. Rather, she

meticulously works through numerous sketches on paper before committing to her final compositions. As Herbert Read prescribed, "form must be wrestled from chaos."[10] Sanín wrestles on paper and insists that only designs she truly loves are subsequently painted on canvas, reflecting a deep dedication to achieving perfect balance and harmony. The preliminary sketches displayed in this exhibition offer valuable insights into her creative process, which blends intellectual rigor with intuitive refinement.

Some scholars have characterized Latin American geometric abstraction as a European import, and some elites have instrumentalized it as evidence of industrial development and progress. Gabriel Pérez Barreiro challenges this account in *The Geometry of Hope* and argues that these artists operated with a "utopian sense of hope;" their practices were affirmative experiments in shaping a new cultural future.[11] Many geometric abstract artists believed in science and technology's potential to transform society, but many others tapped into rich

Indigenous aesthetic languages, a thread that disputes any accusation of derivation. These artists sought to restore a spiritual connection with their environment. Since the 1920s, artists such as Vicente do Rego Monteiro and Elena Izcue studied Indigenous geometric abstraction in ceramics and textiles to express a Latin American aesthetic that was both modern and authentic. Even the European "pioneers" of abstraction searched for spiritual redemption through the so-called "primitive" arts.

Sanín is far from an Indigenist artist. Nonetheless, her pursuit of harmony shares affinities with Indigenous American cultures. César Paternosto, in his book *The Stone and the Thread*, demonstrates how the tectonic and numinous character of Indigenous aesthetics serves as a common heritage for artists from Joaquín Torres-García in Uruguay to Josef Albers, Barnett Newman, and Leon Golub in the United States.[12] He placed special emphasis on the plectogenic aesthetic of the Ancient Andean cultures, especially the Incan Empire's "Age of Textiles."

Although Sanín's paintings do not depict textiles, they convey a common spiritual impulse—a search for order, stability, and transcendence. In *Acrylic No. 3, 1974*, Sanín interweaves vertical bands of black and creamy ivory with horizontal warm reds, yellows, and maroon that evoke the structural warp and weft. The central lavender band divides the composition symmetrically, enhancing its sense of balance and structural soundness. In *Acrylic No. 6, 1979*, Sanín inverts the color relations by painting a broad, deep plum band in the center flanked by narrow grey stripes, which interlocks with warm colors such as maroon, brown, yellow, and ivory. Both canvases generate productive tensions between order and dynamism, recalling none other than the Sapa Inca's legendary *unku*, or tunic, housed at Dumbarton Oaks. The virtuoso *acllas* wove a grid of complex *tocapus* that together constitute a visual metaphor for the emperor's embodiment of sacred rule. That is, the tunic materializes the structuring principles of Tawantinsuyu and the Sapa Inca's role

in ordering a diverse collective into a cohesive whole. I am not claiming that we should understand Sanín's practice as an Inca revival. Far from that. What I do emphasize is that Sanín's work, as well as Andean textiles, underscore the enduring human desire for order and harmony.

Certainly, the emergence of geometric abstraction in the twentieth century was a turn to reason and order amidst the turmoil and despair of modern life, warfare, and revolution. Closer to Sanín is the New York-based Dominican-born artist Freddy Rodríguez, who credits geometric painting as a survival mechanism in acclimation to New York. His practice provided him the structure and mental outlet to overcome the trauma of Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1930–61) and the challenges of displacement.[13] In Colombia, Sanín's early years transpired during the civil war known as La Violencia (1946–66). This dark period steered her compatriots Edgar Negret and Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, equally pursuing order out of chaos, towards geometric abstraction through the study of international

constructivism, pre-Columbian, and Indigenous arts.[14]

As Read observed, art serves to enhance our experience of existence, providing the means through which we can navigate the complexities of life. In a world marked by alienation and instability, Sanín's paintings reaffirm a sense of equilibrium and coherence. Like Kandinsky, she views painting as a means of refining the human spirit, creating compositions that resonate on an emotional and spiritual level. Her meticulous approach ensures that each piece serves as a sanctuary of structure and beauty, a testament to the power of abstraction as a vehicle for inner peace. As we continue to reassess her legacy, it becomes clear that her contributions extend far beyond geometric precision—they embody a deeply felt spiritual quest, offering viewers a moment of respite and affirmation in an uncertain world.

NOTES

1 Naum Gabo, "On Constructive Realism," *Three Letters on Modern Art*, (philosophical Library), 1949.

2 Sanín recalls how she did not experience discrimination as an artist in either Latin America or Europe but when she arrived in New York City women artists were struggling for recognition and were protesting against the male-dominated museum collections. Sanín left her denunciations out of her canvases and instead has held steady in her affirmative and constructive approach to art making. Interview with the author, February 24, 2025.

3 Carla Gottlieb, "Structuring Color," *Fanny Sanín*, Phoenix Gallery, New York, 1977.

4 See various essays by Edward J. Sullivan, James Oles, Beverly Adams, Clayton C. Kirking, Patterson Sims, and Germán Rubiano Caballero in *Fanny Sanín: The Concrete Language of Color and Structure*, Seattle: Lucia Marquand, 2019. For a discussion of Sanín's artistic development, especially her journey from lyrical or "organic" abstraction to hard-edge geometry see John Stringer, *Fanny Sanín: Obras 1960-1986*, Retrospective Exhibition, Bogotá: Museo de Arte Moderno, 1987.

5 "Fanny Sanín on Her Life and Art," *Fanny Sanín Drawings and Studies 1960 to Now* (Frederico Seve Gallery, 2012).

6 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Dover Publications, 1977), 24. The first English translation was published as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (1914), a title that applies to Sanín's oeuvre and that I borrow for this essay.

7 Herbert Read, *A Letter to a Young Painter* (Horizon Press, 1962).

8 Kandinsky, 2.

9 Fanny Sanín, interview with the author in her studio, New York, 24 February, 2005.

10 Read, *Letter*, 18.

11 Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, *The Geometry of Hope: Latin American Abstract Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection*, Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, 2007.

12 César Paternosto, *The Stone and the Thread: Andean Roots of Abstract Art*, University of Texas Press, 1996.

13 E. Carmen Ramos, "Freddy Rodríguez: The Geometry of Freedom" George Levitine Lecture, University of Maryland, February 28, 2025.

14 Ana M. Franco, *Neoclásicos: Edgar Negret y Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar entre París, Nueva York y Bogotá, 1944–1964*, Ediciones Uniandes, 2019.

WORKS

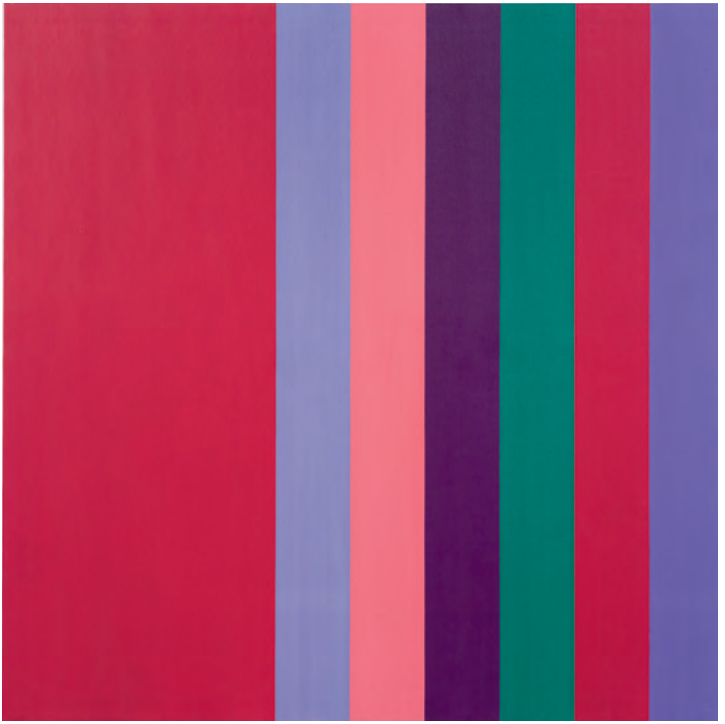
Oil No. 1, 1965, 1965. Oil on canvas, 47⅝ × 47⅝ inches (121 × 121 cm). Collection of the Artist

Oil No. 4, 1967, 1967. Oil on canvas, 70 × 60¼ inches (178 × 153 cm). Collection of the Artist

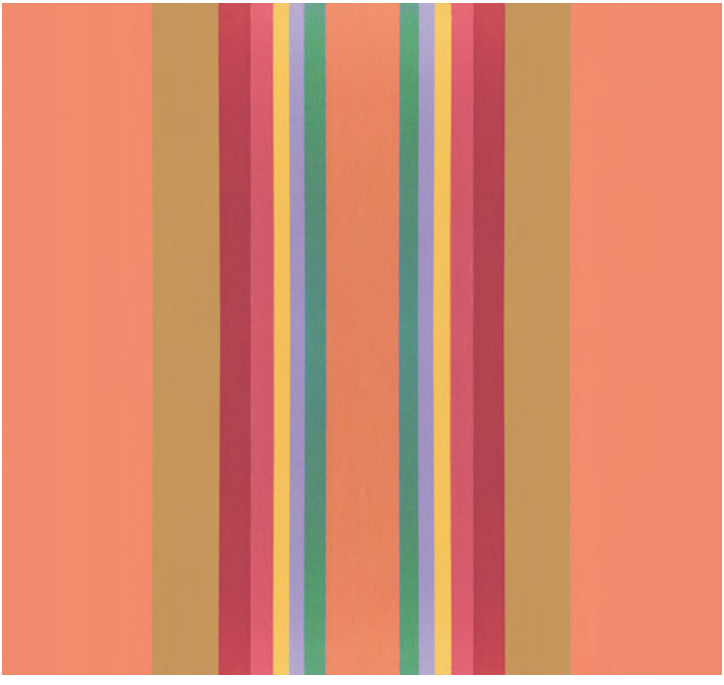
***Oil No. 7, 1968*, 1968. Oil on canvas, 48 × 66 inches (122 × 168 cm). Collection of Diane and Bruce Halle**

Oil No. 4, 1969, 1969. Oil on canvas, 63 × 69 inches (160 × 175 cm). Collection of the Artist

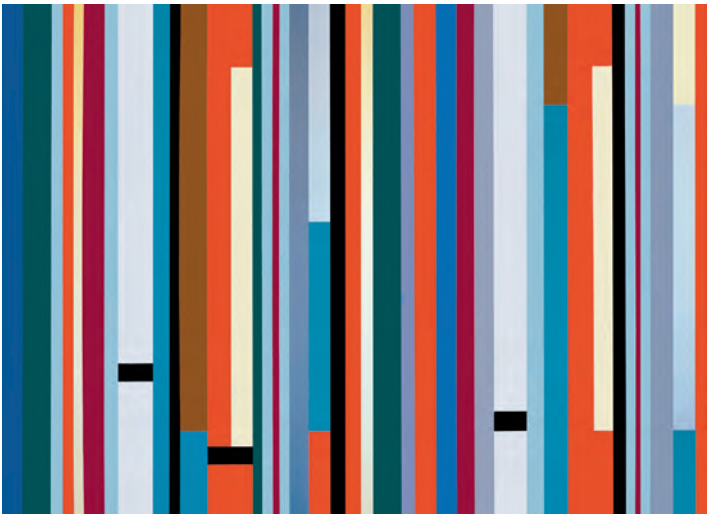
Acrylic No. 12, 1970, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 83 × 68⅞ inches (211 × 175 cm). Collection of the Artist



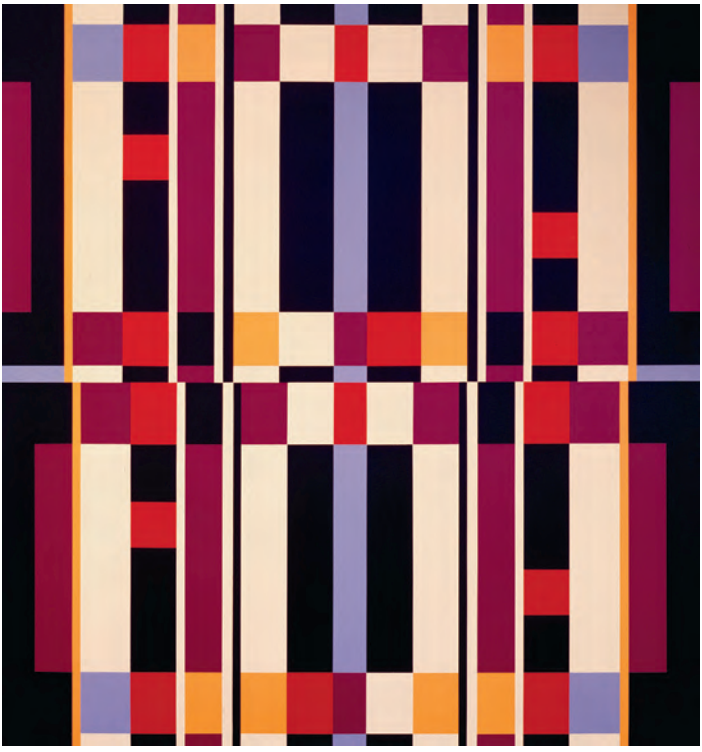
Acrylic No. 9, 1970, 1970. Acrylic on canvas, 68⅞ × 68⅞ inches (175 × 175 cm). Private Collection



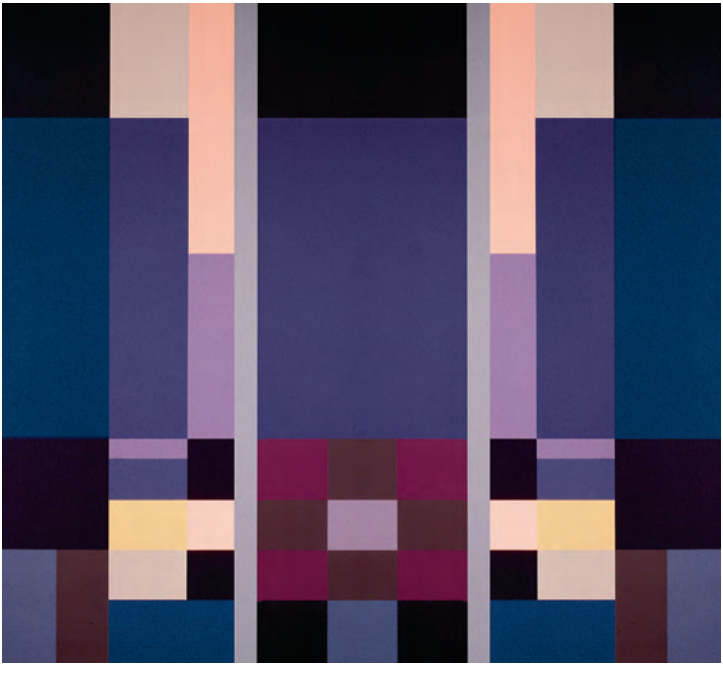
Acrylic No. 1, 1972, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 19 × 19 inches (48.3 × 48.3 cm). Collection of the Artist



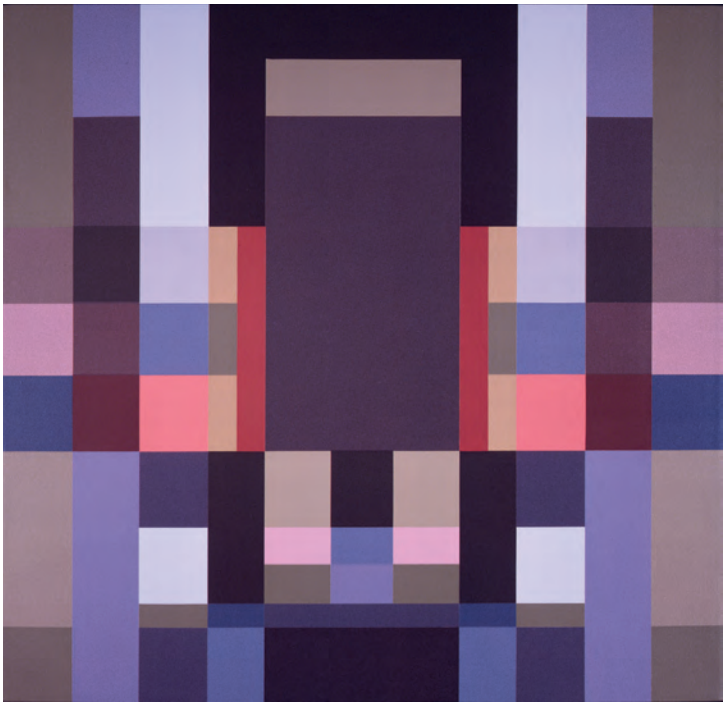
Acrylic No. 5, 1973, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 85 × 116 inches (215 × 295 cm). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase funded by the Caribbean Art Fund and the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment, 2017.112



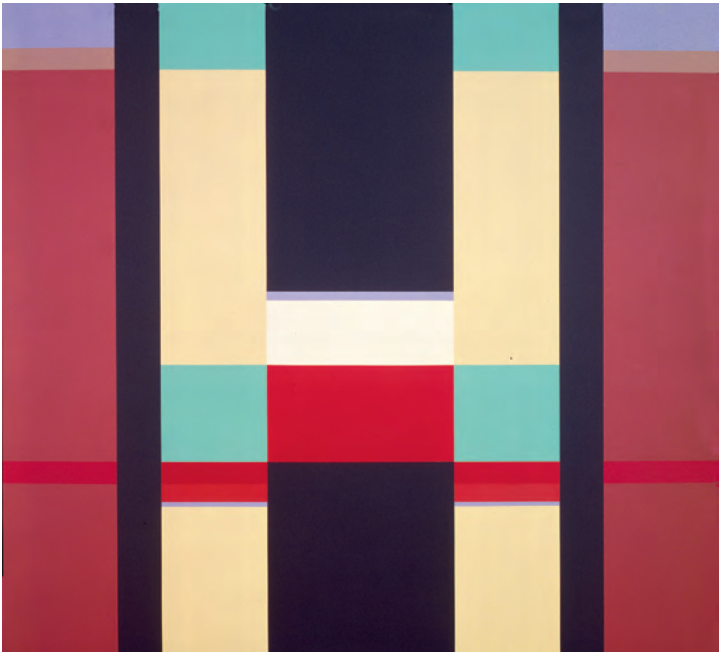
Acrylic No. 3, 1974, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 71 × 66 inches (180 × 168 cm). Collection of the Artist



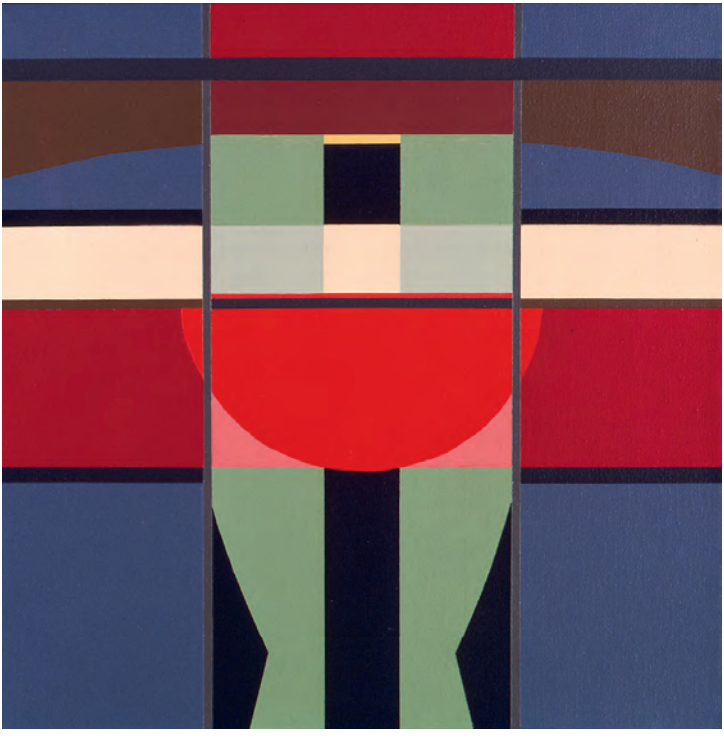
Acrylic No. 6, 1979, 1979. Acrylic on canvas, 56 × 62 inches (142 × 158 cm). Collection OAS Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC



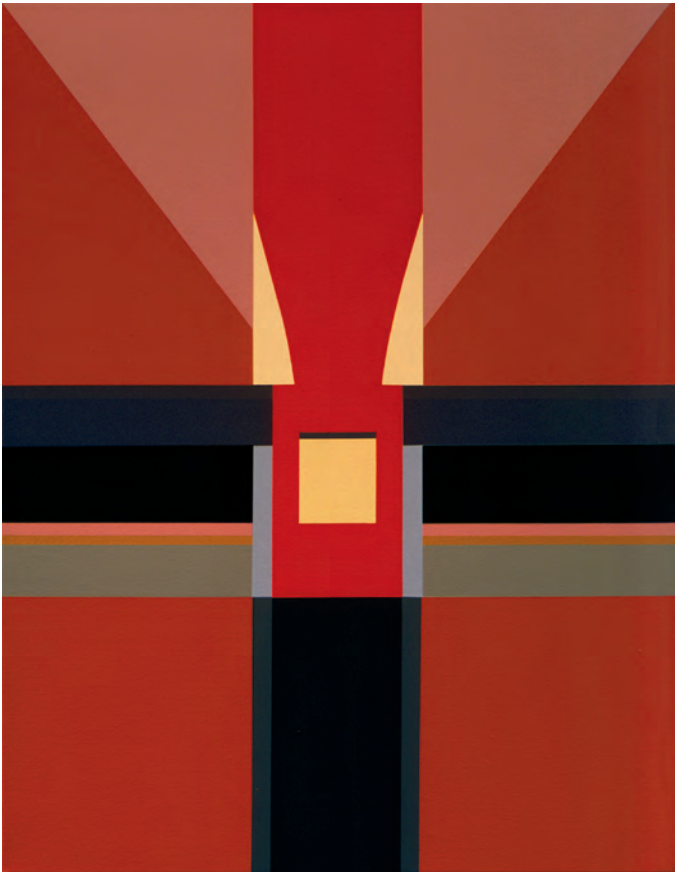
Acrylic No. 10, 1979, 1979. Acrylic on canvas, 58 × 60 inches (147 × 152.5 cm). Private Collection, Houston, Texas. Courtesy of Sicardi Ayers Bacino



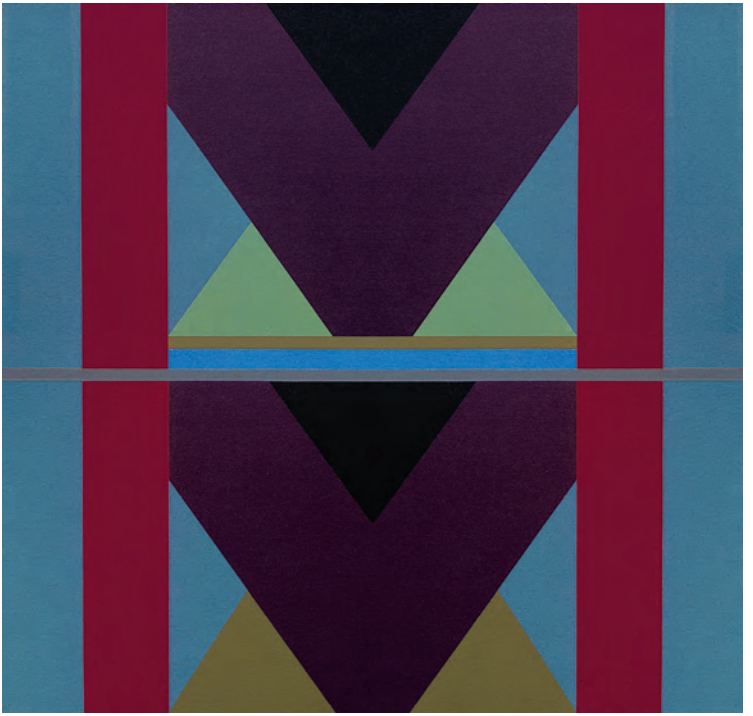
Acrylic No. 1, 1984, 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 58 × 64 inches (147.3 × 162.6 cm). Collection of the Artist



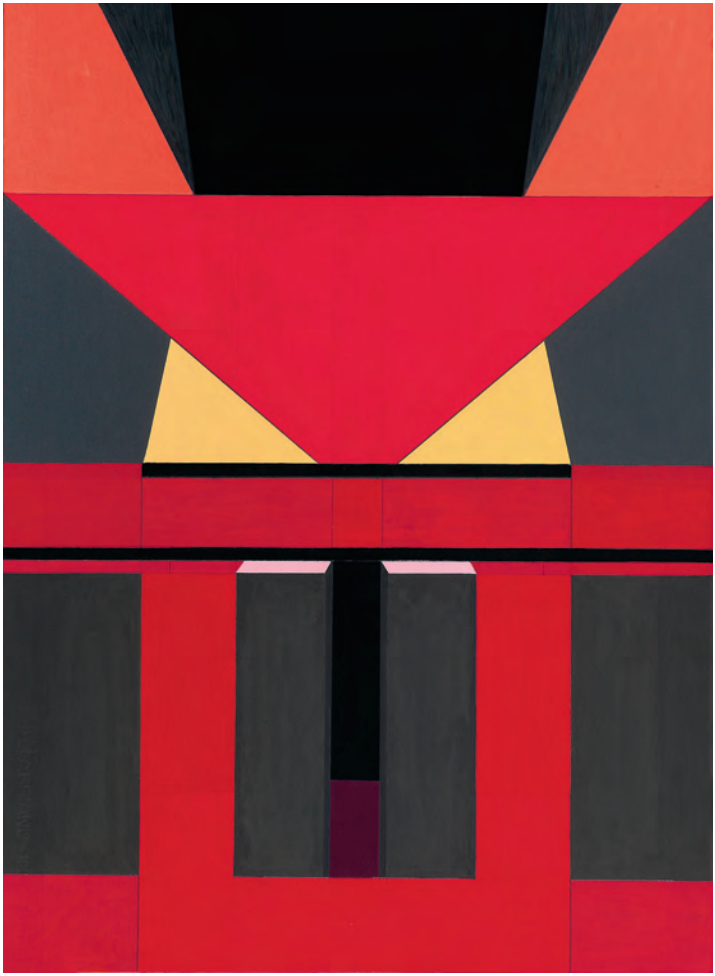
Acrylic No. 12, 1993, 1993. Acrylic on canvas, 20½ × 20¼ inches (52.1 × 51.4 cm). Collection of the Artist



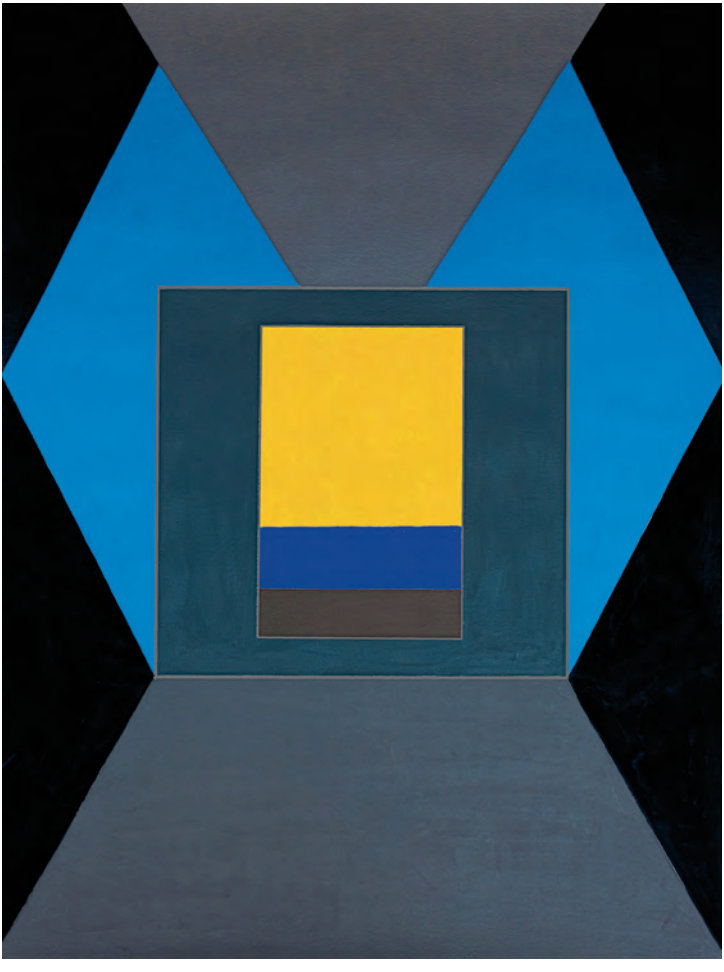
Acrylic No. 2, 1995, 1995. Acrylic on canvas, 26 × 20 inches (66 × 50.8 cm). Private Collection, Houston, Texas. Courtesy of Sicardi Ayers Bacino



***Acrylic No. 1, 2002*, 2002. Acrylic on canvas, 42 × 44 inches (106.7 × 11.8 cm). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC. Gift of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay**

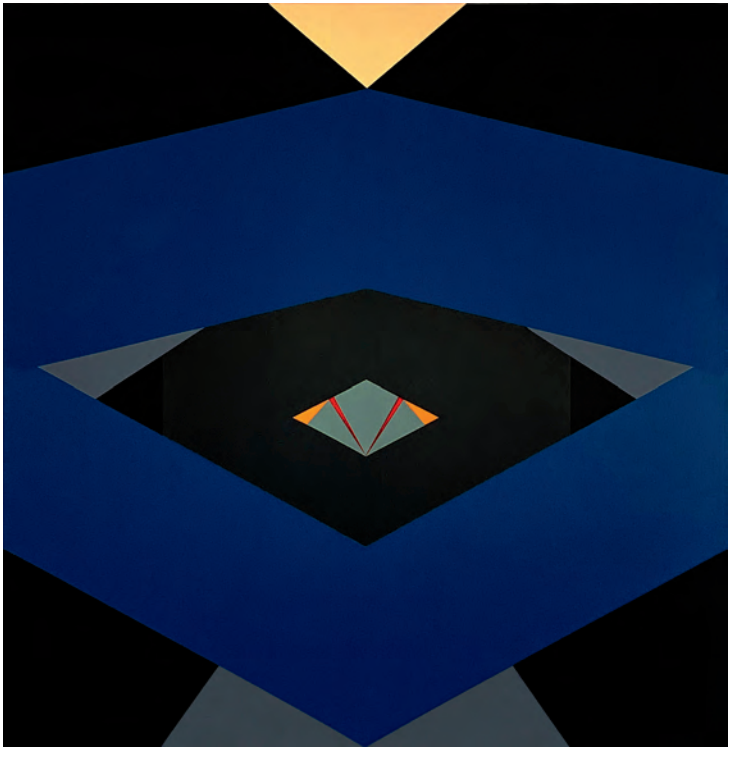


Composition No. 2, 2009, 2009. Acrylic and pencil on paper, 29⅞ × 22⅜ inches (76 × 56.9 cm). Collection of the Artist



Composition No. 4, 2017, 2017. Acrylic and pencil on paper, 29⅞ × 22⅜ inches (76 × 56.9 cm). Collection of the Artist

Acrylic No. 2, 2018, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 48 × 52 inches (121.9 × 132.1 cm). Collection of the Artist



Acrylic No. 2, 2020, 2020. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 58 inches (152.4 × 147.3 cm). Collection of the Artist

Acrylic No. 1, 2021, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 56 inches (152.4 × 142.2 cm). Collection of the Artist

Acrylic No. 1, 2024, 2024. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 56 inches (182.9 × 142.2 cm). Collection of the Artist

Sanín in front of a wall with some of her works on paper
at ArtBO with Leon Tovar Gallery, Bogotá, 2017.

BIOGRAPHIES

Fanny Sanín's more than six-decade professional career—from her native Bogotá to Urbana, Illinois; Monterrey, México; London; and New York—demonstrates the continuous development from the initial expressionistic art to her geometric works. Major museums collect her work, such as, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museos de Arte Moderno of México, of Bogotá and of Medellín, Museo Nacional and Museo de Arte Miguel Urrutia in Bogotá, University of California at Berkeley, Oberlin College, and Wellesley College. The Institute of Fine Arts, NYU featured her work. Recently, paintings entered the collections of the Tate Modern and the Museo Reina Sofía. Key recent exhibitions include the inaugural exhibition of the David Rockefeller Creative Arts Center, the Achi Art Triennial, and the landmark exhibition in England, France, and Germany, *Action-Gesture-Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940–70*. She was invited to the main section of the 2024 Venice Art Biennale. The 2019 monograph *Fanny Sanín: The Concrete Language of Color and Structure* presents a comprehensive review of her oeuvre. Galleries that represent her include Sicardi Ayers Bacino, Houston; Durban Segnini, Miami; Goya Contemporary, Baltimore; and Alonso Garcés, Bogotá. Her Legacy Project, led by prominent scholars, is committed to the placement of works in major museums and collections and later will continue as a trust responsible for the legacy of Fanny Sanín's art.

Edward J. Sullivan is the Helen Gould Shepard Professor in the History of Art at New York University. A long-time scholar and curator of the arts of the Americas from the Early Modern to the contemporary periods, he is the author of some thirty books and exhibition catalogues. Sullivan has written extensively on the art of Fanny Sanín and is privileged to have curated the Americas Society exhibition of her work.

Ana María Reyes (PhD University of Chicago) Associate Professor of Latin American Art History, Boston University. Her books include *The Politics of Taste: Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics* (Duke University Press, 2019), *Simón Bolívar: Travels and Transformations of a Cultural Icon*, co-edited with Maureen Shanahan (University Press of Florida, 2016) and *To Weave and Repair: Symbolic Reparations in Colombia* (in progress). She has worked with the Inter-American Court and Commission of Human Rights, Center for Justice and International Law, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Transitional Justice organizations in Colombia.

CREDITS

All images of works are courtesy of the photographers Whitney Browne, Robert Lorenzson, Eric Politzer, Daniel Quat, Mayer Sasson, Jim Strong, and William H. Titus unless otherwise noted.

pp. 2, 4, 5, 6 (bottom): Photos: Mayer Sasson

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p. 50: Photo: Arturo Sánchez

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p. 64: Photo: National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay. © Fanny Sanín. Photo: Lee Stalsworth

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