The Emperor of All Calamities

2012

El emperador de todos los cataclismos

Paul Krugman ▶ A Chinese Curse / Maldición china
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The ongoing dialog surrounding abstraction...

The Animated Forms

Graciela Hasper

› Images Courtesy of Sicardi Gallery
The ongoing dialog surrounding abstraction in painting has kept up with, if not surpassed, the equal-ly never-ending polemics about the end of painting it-
self. Graciela Hasper’s prolific and engaging art debunks both of these contentions gracefully. Her paintings of colorful, animated, geometric forms are descended from the abstract painting tradition of the early twenti-

teenth century and also avant-garde painting in Argentina following the Second World War.

Hasper studied painting and theory in several universities in Argentina, apprenticed with Guilermo Kuitca, and has been awarded various prizes and grants ranging from the Chihui Foundation in Marfa, Texas to a Fulbright scholarship through Apes Art in New York. From the time of her first exhibition in 1990 she has exhibited internationally in solo and group shows and is currently preparing for an exhibition at Scardai Gallery in Houston, Texas in the fall of 2011.

As artists maturing in the nineties in Argentina, Hasper and her generation were forced to ask them-

selves what they could contribute aesthetically to a country grappling with social and historical issues such as economic upheaval and the oppression of a military dictatorship. The political situation resulted in the loss of artists important to Argentine modernism who were forced to emigrate rather than face censorship and even punishment. This meant not only the loss of artistic tal-
ent but also the loss of teachers for subsequent genera-
tions. Hasper responded with art in different media, but painting decidedly became her medium of choice, and it is through the lens of painting that she has extended her work conceptually into mixed media and installation art.

She has been loosely compared to other abstract painters like her former teacher Kuitca or even Pablo Si-

quer, her contemporary, but unlike their work, Hasper’s paintings are completely abstract, meaning that no rec-
ognizable forms can be found in the images. The paint-
ings are sometimes constructed out of shapes formed into patterns that cover the surface or reveal a definite ground with intertwining shapes reminiscent of Mobius strips or DNA helices.

For example, in Untitled, 90cm X 190cm, 2010 an abstract painting using multiple colors, Hasper assigns one color to each shape, some of which are sectioned by the perimeter of the canvas, while others remain whole. The shapes both join like puzzle pieces and at times keep a safe distance from surrounding shapes either separated by a white ground or possibly hovering above it. On a formal level, Hasper is interested in the viewer’s experience of her process in arranging the place-
ment of shapes and colors, and the enjoyment the act of looking offers as a reward to contemplation. She devises

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 Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas, 2011 (close up)
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s, and the enjoyment of the act 
ude realism. It could be argued that Esper’s work oper-
ates on a counter register as an ironic critique of twen-
teenth century myths of progress. In the case of Untitled 
(2010), the shapes could represent a topographical map 
of city blocks or buildings, but instead of the clean mod-
erist designs used for city planning starting in the nine-
teenth century, we see a chaotic disruption of a failed 
paradigm. Major cities in Europe and America were de-
signated, ostensibly, for the ease of traffic flow and com-
merce. This also meant that they were easily defensible 
against the civil unrest associated with revolution and 
ultimately susceptible to control. In the dialectical aspect 
at work in modernism, the drive for order brought about 
resultant phenomena with opposing tendencies. In this 
case, Esper’s targets are the devolution of urban space 
into slums, the rise of poverty, and the consolidation of 
power by right-wing authoritarian governments.

This notion that the work engages a social critique 
leveled at urban architectural planning becomes visible 
upon a consideration of a series of mixed media pieces, 
from 2001 such as Comientes y 9 de Julio. In this piece 
what appears to be a satellite photograph of the cen-
ter of Buenos Aires forms the basis for an image driven 
by line and geometry. The city blocks and major streets 
are clearly visible with the intersection of Comientes 
and July 9th streets highlighted by Esper in a vibrant 
aqua shade that forms an x shape that dominates the 
otherwise monochrome image of the city plan. These 
two thoroughfares come together at the Plaza de la Re-
publica and the grand Obelisk national monument com-
memorating the fourth centenary of the first foundation