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Jesús Rafael Soto, *Penetrable BBL Bleu*, 1999/2007 (Edition AVILA 2007; edition 8/8), painted steel and suspended polyvinyl chloride (PVC) tubes, three size configurations (1) 143 11/16 × 177 1/8 × 236 3/16 in.; (2) 143 11/16 × 177 1/8 × 393 11/16 in.; (3) 143 11/16 × 177 1/8 × 551 1/8 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Ronald A. Belkin, Alice and Nahum Lainer, Willow Bay and Bob Iger, Colleen and Brad Bell, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Mary Solomon, C. E. Horton, Hana Kim and Kelvin Davis, Ann Colgin and Joe Wender, Rebecka and Arie Belldegrün, the Louis L. Borick Foundation, Andy and Carlo Brandon-Gordon, Mary and Daniel James, Janet Dreisen Rappaport, Nadine and Fredric D. Rosen, Florence and Harry Sloan, Susan and Eric Smidt, Estrellita and Daniel Brodsky, Wendy Stark Morrissey, and Surpik and Paolo Angelini through the 2020 Collectors Committee, © Jesús Rafael Soto. Installation view of *Penetrable BBL Bleu*, 1999, *Art Contemporain*, La Voie des Arts, Saint-Loubouer, 2009, photo: Archives Soto

LACMA Acquires a Blue "Penetrable" by Kinetic Artist Jesús Rafael Soto

MAY 26, 2020

Ilona Katzew, *Department Head and Curator, Latin American Art
Acquisitions*

When I arranged for the long-term loan of a beautiful yellow *Penetrable* by the artist Jesús Rafael Soto (1923–2005), on view at LACMA from 2011 to 2017, I had no idea it would become one of the most popular works installed on campus. Since then, we made it a mission to bring back a work from the series permanently. With the generous support of LACMA's Collectors Committee and other museum friends, we were just able to acquire this magical blue *Penetrable* by Soto. Conceived in 1999, *Penetrable BBL Bleu* brilliantly captures the artist's lifelong fascination with space, color, and the importance of viewer participation to activate and complete the work of art.

Born in Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela, Soto was a pioneering and internationally renowned figure associated with Op and kinetic art. From 1942 to 1947, he studied fine arts at the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Caracas but became disillusioned with the school's conservative teaching methods.



Jesús Rafael Soto in the *Petit pénétrable*, 1969, solo exhibition *Soto*, Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, June–July 1970, © MSU, Zagreb

Fascinated with cubism and constructivism (Braque, Mondrian, and Malevich, especially), which he knew only through reproductions, in 1950 he relocated to Paris—a hub of artistic experimentation and a mecca for Latin American artists.



Christiane Duparc, "Les sud-américains ont pris Paris," *Le Nouvel Adam*, no. 19 (February 1968): 47

There he met the legendary gallerist Denise René and participated in her historic 1955 kinetic exhibition *Le Mouvement*, which launched his international career.



Yaacov Agam, Jean Tinguely, Denise René, Jesús Rafael Soto, and Pol Bury, *Soto* exhibition, Galerie Denise René, Paris, France, June 17–July 17, 1970, photo: © André Morain, © Jesús Rafael Soto / ADAGP, Paris, 2020, courtesy Archives Soto

Soto created his first signature *Penetrable* around 1966 using simple industrial materials—plastic tubes and metal. (Throughout his career, Soto created numerous *Penetrables*, which have been shown all over the world.) Embodying his interest in the intangible quality of light and the dematerialization of solid matter—what he called the “density of space, its fullness”—the *Penetrables* are a series of optical, kinetic, and tactile environments (some are also sonorous) meant to be traversed physically. In a filmed interview, Soto explained:

"My concept of space is very different from that of the Renaissance, where man was in front of space, he was the viewer, the judge of that space...[With] the Penetrables, I reveal that man...is part of space. And this is the sensation of those who enter them, and the feeling of joy and elation that you witness is similar to getting in the water and being completely liberated from gravity."



Jesús Rafael Soto, *Penetrable BBL Bleu*, 1999/2007 (Edition AVILA; edition 8/8), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Ronald A. Belkin, Alice and Nahum Lainer, Willow Bay and Bob Iger, Colleen and Brad Bell, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Mary Solomon, C. E. Horton, Hana Kim and Kelvin Davis, Ann Colgin and Joe Wender, Rebecka and Arie Beldegrun, the Louis L. Borick Foundation, Andy and Carlo Brandon-Gordon, Mary and Daniel James, Janet Dreisen Rappaport, Nadine and Fredric D. Rosen, Florence and Harry Sloan, Susan and Eric Smidt, Estrellita and Daniel Brodsky, Wendy Stark Morrissey, and Surpik and Paolo Angelini through the 2020 Collectors Committee, © Jesús Rafael Soto. Installation view of edition 3/8, *Soto: Chronochrome*, Perrotin Gallery, Paris, 2015

Soto's immersive installations of precarious dangling nylon tubes absorb viewers in a boundless field of light and color, at once solid and ethereal. Viewers are encouraged to step in and become part of these artworks, rather than contemplate them from a distance. By giving the spectator agency, Soto challenged traditional ways of seeing and promoted a more democratic approach to art. Through this radical and playful form of engagement, he hoped to transform viewers' perceptions, unleash their imaginations, and open a portal to another dimension to "make visible the deeper reality that binds everything together."

View more on Soto's *Penetrables* and the philosophy behind this group of immersive artworks.

Soto's Penetrable BBL Bleu



Penetrable BBL Bleu was among the artworks selected for the 2020 Collectors Committee. Following the cancellation of the event due to COVID-19, *Penetrable BBL Bleu* was purchased by the Collectors Committee group and other museum friends. Stay tuned for updates regarding the piece's upcoming installation.

Special thanks to María Inés Sicardi, director of the Sicardi, Ayers, Bacino Gallery, Houston, Texas, and to Adriana Gutiérrez, director of the Atelier Soto, Paris, for their gracious and tireless support.
